

Minutes of the Meeting of the Faculty Board on Athletics
February 27, 2026
200 Main Building, 2:00-3:30 pm

Members Present: Patricia Bellia (Chair), Pete Bevacqua, Annie Coleman, Ann-Marie Conrado, Brian Coughlin for Rev. Gerry Olinger, C.S.C., Patrick Corrigan, Darren Davis, Bridget Deehan, Ann Firth, Umesh Garg, Patrick Holmes, Mike Niemier, Cara Ocobock, Katie Wowak

Members Excused: Colin Barr

Athletics Liaisons: Missy Conboy (Policy/Legal), Jacob Simonis (Compliance), Heidi Uebelhor (Compliance)

1. Opening Prayer

Professor Bellia called the meeting to order and offered the opening prayer.

2. Minutes of Meeting of December 10, 2025

The Faculty Board on Athletics (Board) approved the minutes of the December 10 meeting.

3. Chair's Announcements

a. Captains

Professor Bellia announced that she had approved captains for men's tennis, fencing, and men's and women's swimming.

b. Schedules

Professor Bellia announced several schedule approvals, covering the period since November 21, 2025.

New schedules: Professor Bellia approved spring schedules for women's lacrosse, cheer, men's lacrosse, men's soccer, and women's soccer. She also approved the softball and baseball schedules, following the full Board's vote on the additional class misses in those schedules.

Schedule changes: Professor Bellia approved numerous schedule changes. Most involved game time changes dictated by the ACC Network and required no adjustments to students' excused absences. Of those involving adjustments to excused absences, three were weather-related, including the rescheduling of a men's tennis match in Louisville ahead of a projected storm on January 24; an earlier departure for women's basketball for their trip to California on January 27; and a partial class miss for women's golf on February 23 due to weather-related flight cancellations. Two adjustments related to other travel disruptions, including the

cancellation of cheer's flight on the way back from the Stanford football game on November 30, resulting in one missed class slot on Monday morning; and flight cancellations necessitating adjustments for the track team's departure for a meet in Boston on December 4, resulting in ten students missing one Thursday afternoon class slot.

Post-Season Travel: In November, Professor Bellia approved excused absences for men's and women's soccer in connection with NCAA competition. Earlier this month, Professor Bellia approved a change to the previously approved schedule for diving for the ACC championships. The change allowed seven divers to depart earlier to accommodate their practice slot at the competition venue. The change resulted from the ACC diving events being slotted ahead of the swimming events, and the need for divers to practice on a 10-meter platform (which Notre Dame does not have) ahead of the event.

Individual Excused Absences: Professor Bellia reminded the Board of their approval a year ago of a new process to accommodate class misses for individual students, separate from the team approval process, in certain circumstances. Under this authority, she approved class misses for three football players (Jeremiyah Love, Leonard Moore, and Jadarian Price) to attend awards ceremonies and represent Notre Dame in media events. Those approvals are in line with prior approvals for representation of Notre Dame at similar events.

In terms of applying the new policy to elite competition, she reminded the Board that the process involves a coach describing the importance of the event for the student's development, as well as an assessment of the impact of the event on students' academic commitments. In this context, she approved absences for two men's soccer student-athletes (Ian Shaul and Blake Kelly) to attend a U.S. U20 Men's National Team camp and for one men's soccer student-athlete (Evan Lim) to attend a U.S. U18 Men's National Team camp. On the women's side, she approved similar absences for U20 and U18 National Team participation for Izzy Engle and Grace Milam respectively. She noted that, unfortunately, the timing of the women's events fell within the semester rather than at the beginning of the semester, necessitating more absences on the women's side than on the men's. She also approved absences for Annabelle Chukwu to participate in an event in Canada as a member of the national team. She approved a request for men's tennis player Sebastian Dominko to compete for the Slovenian Davis Cup team. One request for women's soccer was not approved, because it was submitted late, and Professor Bellia did not feel comfortable sending excused absences retroactively. In another case involving women's soccer, Professor Bellia indicated in advance that she would not approve excused absences for national team competition for a student on academic warning, so the coaching staff did not formally submit a request.

Professor Bellia separately addressed the topic of individual excused absences for fencing. As the Board likely knows, fencing is an unusual sport in which Notre Dame has a highly competitive team with elite athletes from around the world. Many fencers are members of their national teams and/or aspiring to qualify for Olympic competition. Under the new policy, fencing has submitted several individual excused absences for students to compete in international events. The approval process has allowed Professor Bellia to work closely with the team's counselor in ASSA to assess the impact of these events on students' academic performance. The process resulted in approval for several students in the period since November

21, including World Cup events (4 students), Junior World Cup events (5 students), as well as the European Fencing Championships (1 student), the Pan-American Fencing Championships (1 student), and a Grand Prix event (2 students). For context, Professor Bellia noted that there are 60 fencers on the team roster. Professor Bellia did not approve excused absences for students who qualified for successive World Cup and Junior World Cup events that would have resulted in a string of excused absences over a two-week period.

She believes that the fencing situation will require continued close monitoring, and appreciates the system that the ASSA counselor, Jennifer Pratt, has in place to track academic progress and the cumulative impact of excused absences. Professor Bellia noted that in past years, students typically would take unexcused absences to participate in these events. She believes that the current process allows for better monitoring and control of fencers' schedules.

Finally, she noted an unusual situation involving the women's soccer team's desire to travel to Michigan to visit a teammate who recently completed chemotherapy treatment. The event fell outside of Professor Bellia's approval authority, but, consistent with past precedents, she asked ASSA to send a verification to students' instructors about this team event.

c. Communication with Faculty

Professor Bellia reminded the Board of their request in December that she communicate in advance with instructors when team schedules involve excused absences beyond typical limits. She wrote to 18 faculty members who teach baseball and/or softball student-athletes in Friday classes. Only one faculty member responded, indicating that the absences should not be problematic in the context of his class. Mr. Coughlin mentioned that there were some faculty members, including in the Faculty Senate, concerned about the accumulation of excused absences across different categories (athletics, interviews, illness). Professor Ocobock also expressed concern about the lack of respect shown when some football student-athletes (i.e., those not in degree programs or declaring for the draft), following the CFP snub, did not return to class and complete their coursework.

4. Academic Reports (Pat Holmes, ASSA)

a. Spring 2025 Semester Grade Report

Mr. Holmes shared the grade summaries from the spring of 2025 and indicated that the overall student-athlete semester GPA was very solid—second only to spring 2020 (i.e., the Covid-19 spring semester). Eighty percent of student-athletes had a GPA ≥ 3.000 . Those achieving an annual GPA ≥ 3.000 were named to the ACC All-Academic Team. Approximately 85% of our eligible student-athletes earn that honor each year. Fourteen teams had spring semester GPAs higher than their team's cumulative GPA. All 22 teams had semester and cumulative GPAs above 3.000. (Note: 9% of the student-athletes were named to the Dean's List, and 7% achieved a 4.000.)

Mr. Holmes also shared the semester GPAs for grant-in-aid (GIA) student-athletes. Only one student-athlete was placed on academic warning, and no student-athletes were placed on

probation. Among GIA student-athletes, 14 teams had a spring semester GPA above their cumulative average.

Mr. Holmes cited some additional trends, first sharing that student-athlete numbers were trending much like the numbers of all enrolled students. The percentage changes in spring GPAs for all undergraduate students and all student-athletes across the three quartiles are quite similar.

Professor Bellia asked about grade inflation, including during the Covid-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 and Spring 2021. Mr. Holmes indicated that the inflation that happened during that timeframe never really reverted to pre-Covid levels. For example, a science major currently needs a 3.946 to achieve Dean's List status and a 4.000 to achieve *summa cum laude* status.

Mr. Holmes also shared a graph comparing cumulative GPAs at Division I institutions over a six-year period. The graph compares Notre Dame to schools in various other categories, including FBS institutions, ACC institutions, Power 4 institutions, and Power 4 private institutions. In short, this comparison shows Notre Dame as an academic outlier and suggests that Notre Dame is recruiting more student-athletes who are well prepared for college.

b. 2024-25 Student-Athlete 5th-Year GPA Report

Mr. Holmes also shared an annual summary that broke down the academic performance of graduate student-athletes using athletics eligibility during a fifth academic year.

Professor Conrado asked what programs enroll non-degree-seeking students. Professor Bellia explained that non-degree-seeking students are not enrolled in specific programs, but are enrolled in the Graduate School. The Board has specific criteria for their athletics participation. In some cases, student-athletes use their additional coursework to prepare to enter a degree program; in other cases, students do not pursue further graduate education. Students in non-degree-seeking status must enroll in nine credit hours and submit an application outlining their plan of study. The Board also imposes requirements for them to participate in post-season competition.

Professor Conrado asked if the non-degree status is available to others outside the student-athlete population. Professor Bellia confirmed that this opportunity is open to others and noted that the option to be a non-degree-seeking student has been in effect throughout her tenure on the Board. That said, she pointed out that the further we get from Covid-19, the fewer opportunities there are to enroll fifth-year student-athletes (in general). Mr. Holmes acknowledged the difficulty non-degree-seeking students face in putting together a meaningful academic schedule. However, numerous graduate student-athletes enroll in one of Notre Dame's one-year graduate programs. Of the 101 graduate student-athletes enrolled last fall (2024), 87 were enrolled in degree-seeking programs, including 78 in Mendoza. Finally, Professor Bellia mentioned that the NCAA is considering granting five years of eligibility to all student-athletes and expressed hope that this change does not materialize.

Mr. Holmes explained that student-athletes must maintain academic eligibility to compete in a bowl game/playoff. Non-degree-seeking athletes specifically must earn nine credits or a 2.000 GPA. Mr. Holmes shared that at the end of the 2025 fall semester, a number of non-degree-seeking football student-athletes chose not to complete academic requirements after it became clear that Notre Dame would not be participating in a bowl game/playoff, resulting in some failing grades. Professor Bellia emphasized the efforts of ASSA and of the football program to encourage students to complete their coursework. Mr. Bevacqua believes there will be fewer graduate student-athletes in the future, but reminded the group that we will still have undergraduate student-athletes leaving school early to prepare for the draft, some of whom also may not finish strong. Professor Ocobock stated that while she understands that the actual number may be small, the impact is large. Mr. Holmes noted that we have not seen significant problems with undergraduate students-athletes, and we should not in the future. Undergraduates who leave early for the NFL draft will typically complete course requirements because they hope to return to complete their degrees.

Professor Coleman asked if there might be someone who could analyze data on the academic impact of the current transfer portal model. Mr. Bevacqua thinks that we are probably the wrong school to do this analysis, as we had the second-lowest number of undergrad transfers in the country. Our biggest concern is the number of graduate students who “threw the towel” in academically, and we hope we don’t see this type of conduct at the undergraduate level.

c. 2025 NCAA Graduation Rate Report

Mr. Holmes explained the measures of academic success used by the federal government and the NCAA. Initially, the Federal Rate was used until the NCAA introduced the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in the early 2000s to better account for student-athletes who transferred. The GSR includes both first-time GIA student-athletes who enroll in the fall and mid-year student-athletes who enroll in January. In addition, transfer student-athletes are also included in the cohort. If a student-athlete leaves an institution while in good academic standing, the institution removes the student-athlete from the cohort and is no longer accountable for their future academic record. Conversely, the Federal Rate only tracks those who initially enroll in the fall and then tracks that cohort for the next six years. Mr. Holmes showed a chart comparing Notre Dame’s GSR and Federal Rates for reference and noted that most of his references will be to the GSR.

Mr. Holmes stated that Notre Dame has been in the top GSR spot for 17 of the last 19 years. Notre Dame ranked highest in the percentage of perfect scores achieved by our varsity programs in the most recent ranking. Professor Bellia asked if there is anything coming down the road that we need to be aware of given revenue sharing and other recent industry changes. Mr. Holmes shared that next year, Notre Dame should stay in the 99th percentile in GSR ranking. Professor Coleman asked about the women’s basketball graduation rate next year, given the high number of recent transfers. Mr. Holmes indicated that the Federal Rate will be affected, but there will not be a huge impact on the GSR, because the student-athletes who transferred out were in good academic standing.

d. Incoming Student-Athletes

Mr. Holmes also shared a report with information about incoming student-athletes and their preparation for college. He indicated that Notre Dame performed very well compared to other institutions in terms of high school GPAs. He stated that SAT scores for Notre Dame student-athletes are also higher, but acknowledged that fewer student-athletes are taking the standardized test. Mr. Bevacqua asked if the scores would be lower if more student-athletes submitted tests, and Mr. Holmes indicated that this would likely be the case, but the gap between Notre Dame scores and scores at other institutions would remain the same.

5. Compliance Annual Report (Jacob Simonis, Athletics Compliance)

Given the anticipated length of the report and the time left in the meeting, Professor Bellia and Mr. Simonis elected to delay the Compliance Annual Report until the next meeting.

6. Update on Working Group on Student-Athlete Integration

Professor Bellia shared that the Working Group on Student-Athlete Integration, a committee that she co-chairs with Ann Firth, is reviewing a couple of key integration issues. One timely area of discussion is campus dining, given that Shields Hall is scheduled to open in June. The Working Group is also looking at residence hall living and the experience of the student-athlete population in the halls. The Working Group hoped to engage members of SAAC in this discussion, and Professor Bellia attended a recent meeting, but there wasn't enough time to allow a fulsome discussion. The Working Group gathered additional material through a brief survey and invited some student-athletes to share their experiences at a follow-up meeting. The information shared was helpful. In short, not every student-athlete had similar experiences, and students shared both negative and positive views. As a result of various exchanges (conversations and surveys), the Working Group emphasized the need to:

- Stress the importance of Welcome Weekend among coaches and sport administrators. If student-athletes do not engage with other students early, they often miss out on this opportunity.
- Encourage rectors and other hall staff to find additional ways to engage student-athletes, including by being attentive to student-athlete schedules when setting event times.
- Whenever possible, address legitimate complaints shared by student-athletes (including the size of dorm rooms, cleanliness, laundry and kitchens concerns, etc.) These concerns are not unique to student-athletes, but are key factors prompting students to seek to move off-campus.

Professor Bellia emphasized the need for more connection and conversation between rectors and Athletics, so that rectors have a sense of how they can better support student-athletes. Early in the spring, an event bringing rectors and Athletics staff together had to be canceled due to frigid weather. The hope is to reschedule that event.

Ms. Firth commented from her perspective as co-chair of the Working Group. She noted that when students engage in the residence halls early, it allows them to feel a sense of belonging. She also stressed that hall staff should be more sensitive to making sure student-athletes experience that sense of belonging too. (Note: Ms. Uebelhor had flagged that some halls schedule events that have the effect of excluding student-athletes. For example, student-athletes cannot engage in March Madness activities that involve a monetary risk/reward, given the prohibition on student-athlete gambling. Such events leave student-athletes “on the outside.” Mr. Coughlin confirmed that this type of event should not be taking place in the residence halls and said that he would ask Residence Life to send a reminder to this effect.)

7. NCAA and ACC Updates

Professor Bellia indicated that she would provide NCAA and ACC updates at the next meeting.

8. Other Business

Finally, Professor Bellia addressed some “noise” related to the transfer portal. While Notre Dame was able to enroll seven undergraduate transfers this spring, she emphasized that Notre Dame is not lowering its standards. There have been discussions with our coaches to understand the challenges with the process and their experiences to date. Given that some portal activity takes place over Christmas break, it has been difficult to conduct a timely evaluation of classes taken at previous institutions and determine how they match up with Notre Dame courses. The Enrollment Division has been proactive in figuring out how best to streamline the credit evaluation process. This year, the Enrollment Division worked with the colleges to streamline the academic review, which in turn allowed for expeditious consideration of prospective football and volleyball transfers. There are still some inefficiencies, but there will be a postmortem to see what additional improvements can be made.

9. Adjournment

Professor Bellia adjourned the meeting at 3:31 pm.