

Inquiry into Academic Accommodations Provided to Student Athletes **Academic Affairs Committee**

Senators Schaefer (chair), D. Bratton, Castner Post, Castro, Moore, Poole

At the 10/13/09 meeting of the Faculty Senate, Academic Affairs received a charge to “study accommodations provided to student athletes,” including, but not limited to, advanced registration, off-grid classes, non-academic locations for courses, and athlete-only courses; and to “present a report/recommendation on the appropriateness, process, and implementation of these accommodations.” In the course of studying these accommodations, the members of the committee interviewed a number of relevant university personnel: Brad Teague, Athletic Director; Rebekah Rasnick, Coordinator of Athletic Advising; Jayme Millsap Stone, Director of Learning Communities; Tony Sitz, University Registrar; Julia Winden Fey, University College Director; and Doug George, Assistant Professor of Sociology and chair of the Academic Integrity Subcommittee of the university’s Athletics Self-Study Committee for NCAA certification. What follows is a report drawn from those interviews and a reading of pertinent documents on the accommodations listed above, as well as on several other issues that emerged in the process of the study. Because the evidence shows that these accommodations are largely mandated by the NCAA to ensure the academic progress of student athletes, are generally on par with those of other NCAA Division I institutions, and are in most cases officially available to non-athletes as well as athletes, and because Doug George reports that the Athletic Committee finds generally sound academic progress and satisfactory retention and graduation rates in UCA’s athletic programs, Academic Affairs recommends no action by the Faculty Senate at this time regarding the appropriateness, process, or implementation of the accommodations, although the report will note areas of potential concern that the Senate may wish to revisit. (Note: Most of the accommodations reported below, as well as retention and graduation figures, can be found in written form on pp. 25-30 of the Division I Certification Self-Study Instrument produced by the university’s Athletics Self-Study Committee in 2008-09. This document is available under the “Certification” link at www.ucasports.com.)

- *Priority Advance Registration:* In its guidelines for compliance with Division I academic regulations (available at www.NCAA.org), the NCAA recommends that athletes be given priority in registering for classes to ensure that they are able to enroll in classes that are necessary for their academic progress and will not conflict with their athletic travel schedules. A point that came up repeatedly in Academic Affairs’ interviews with those concerned with athletes and academics is that compliance rules mandate that all Division I athletes must make 40% progress toward their degree at the end of their fourth semester, 60% at the end of their sixth semester, and 80% at the end of their eighth semester; priority registration is recommended as one way of helping them meet these goals. Although on September 13, 2005, the UCA Faculty Senate endorsed UCA’s move to Division I, the Senate voted on February 14, 2006, not to recommend priority registration on the grounds that it unfairly privileged a small component of the student body. However, the Student Government Association voted on March 12, 2007, to recommend priority registration, granting athletes two days’ priority, and, acting on this recommendation and the fact that this practice is on par with that of other institutions in UCA’s conference, the university adopted this policy, which went into effect for Fall 2007. Faculty members have raised some questions regarding the possible availability of

priority registration to other student groups with potential conflicts between their academic and university-related-activity schedules, such as SGA representatives, cheerleaders, and musicians; there appears to be no official obstacle to such groups making a request through proper channels, but the Registrar reports that thus far no group has done so.

- *Off-grid Classes:* Brad Teague reports that over the past year Rebekah Rasnick and Jayme Millsap Stone have worked together to schedule clustered General-Education classes for MW 8:00-9:15 and MW 9:25-10:40 in order to enable athletes to travel on Fridays (the most common travel day) without missing class. In Fall 2009, this cluster consisted of Music Appreciation, taught by Jeff Jarvis, and American Nations II, taught by Jayme Millsap Stone; in Spring 2010, the cluster is Music Appreciation, taught by Kondwani Phwandaphwanda, and Basic Oral Communication, taught by Melissa Crawford. Jayme Millsap Stone reports that this scheduling has served athletes in some sports, such as football, well, but that travel schedules for other sports differ—the soccer team, for instance, often travels on Mondays, and the golf team travels on various days—and so some athletes are still missing classes.
- *Non-academic Locations for Courses:* Brad Teague and Jayme Millsap Stone report that the above-mentioned clusters are being taught in rooms in Estes Stadium because no other classrooms on campus were available for them. Both Teague and Stone report that once the decision was made to hold classes in these locations, the rooms were equipped with Smart Sympodium monitors and projectors to bring them into line with other classrooms, with the Athletic Department paying for this equipment.
- *Athlete-only Courses:* Brad Teague, Jayme Millsap Stone, Julia Winden Fey, and Rebekah Rasnick all report that the athlete-oriented classes noted above are open to all other students if the courses' enrollments are not filled by athletes, in line with the policy followed in courses offered in residential colleges and certain courses in some academic programs, such as Nursing. Stone reports non-athlete enrollees in the current Music Appreciation/Basic Oral Communication cluster and says that, as the Director of Learning Communities, she has the authority to increase the percentage of non-athletes in these courses, which she intends to do for Fall 2010. Regarding the Fall 2009 First-Year Experience Seminar that was listed in the class schedule as "An Introduction to Higher Learning For Athletes Only," Stone reports that the class was, in fact, open to non-athletes as well and that the title was "badly worded" and will be revised before the course is offered again.
- *Athlete-only Tutorial Resources:* UCA's Division I Self-Study Instrument notes that "all first-year and incoming transfer student-athletes are required to attend a study hall in the Academic Success Center for four hours a week during their first semester. After their first semester and once they achieve a 2.5 cumulative GPA, they are no longer required to attend, although some coaches might require a higher GPA for nonattendance. The study hall meets in the Academic Success Center, which affords the athletes a place to study, access to tutors, and a computer lab" (25-26). Despite rumors that, in line with these requirements, some tutors and computer resources have been reserved for athletes only,

Rebekah Rasnick reports and Center Coordinator Vickie Wyeth confirms that all resources in Academic Success are available to all UCA students.

- *Advising of Athletes*: Some faculty members have asked for clarification regarding the resources devoted to the advising of athletes—specifically, whether athletes and their advisors were privileged over other students and advisors in any way, and where the salaries for athletic advisors come from. From 2006 through Spring semester 2009, Rebekah Rasnick advised all athletes who had not yet declared majors, while those who have majors were—and still are—advised with their peers in the appropriate departments. Ms. Rasnick reports that she ordinarily advised approximately 400 athletes each semester, a task that entails meeting a number of NCAA-mandated requirements: overseeing class attendance, completing detailed progress reports, holding probation meetings, and setting up study groups. By comparison, the usual load for full-time advisors in the Advising Center is approximately 300 students. To lighten Ms. Rasnick’s advising load, a second athletic advisor, Jeremy Carson, was hired in August 2009. Ms. Rasnick’s salary is paid under the university’s academic budget, while Mr. Carson is paid under the administrative budget (overseen by Jack Gillean). Brad Teague reports that if UCA passes all NCAA requirements during the current certification process (this decision will be announced in April 2010), UCA may follow the lead of some comparable Division I schools, such as Arkansas State, and hire a third athletic advisor, but his or her salary would be paid with money received from the NCAA earmarked for academics; thus, this additional position would not impose a new burden on the university’s academic budget. In response to questions about reporting lines and oversight within the university’s organizational chart, Ms. Rasnick states that she sits in on Athletic Department meetings but reports to the Provost, not to the Athletic Director.
- *Coaches Teaching Classes*: Rumors have circulated on campus that some athlete-only courses were being taught by coaches who lacked appropriate credentials for those classes. However, as the discussion of off-grid classes presented earlier in this report demonstrates, all such classes are being taught by members of the appropriate departments or by Undergraduate Studies faculty. Brad Teague reports that NCAA rules require that when coaches do teach they may do so only in areas in which they hold credentials and that their classes must be monitored by the university’s NCAA Compliance Directors (currently Darrell Walsh and Natalie Shock) and the university’s Athletic Committee.