

Faculty Council End of the Year Report

Committee: Athletics

Chair of Committee: Carol Putman (BUS)

Committee Members: Joongseo Kim (BUS), Ian Michalski (HSS), Molly Monahan Lang (HSS), Mike Naber (SCI), Steven Nozaki (ENG), Blair Tuttle (SCI), Andrew Yu (ENG)

Ex officio: Brian Streeter (AD), Chuck Brown (Athletics rep to NCAA)

SAAC President: Hali Hartley

Charges for 20-21 School Year:

1. Consult and report on action taken or to be taken with respect to athletic standards related to the educational function of the college and University. (Standing – UPDATE: Draft report summarized by Chuck Brown; overall average gpa of 3.22; Behrend received top AMCC academic award and 54 athletes received academic honors).
2. Approve athletic schedules and eligibility for intercollegiate athletics. (UPDATE: Due to pandemic, no conference schedules to approve. Ad hoc spring schedules were created for all sports except wrestling and indoor track.)
3. Build awareness around how Covid-19 has disrupted "normal" operations for faculty, students, and staff. [Campus may want to know how much athletics has been impacted!] (COMPLETE: Refer to attachment for summary and detailed responses)

Meetings:

Detailed meeting minutes are included as separate documents. Below are the highlights.

10/7/20 – Topics of discussion included an update on the Erie Hall reconstruction project, review of charges for the academic year, update from the SAAC representative, and suggested use of Starfish to enable coaches to check for signals of concern for athletes.

2/22/21 – Due to the pandemic, normal updates for the first two standing charges was not necessary because there are no conference schedules. The fall draft report indicates an overall average gpa of 3.22 for men and women athletes. For the 3rd charge, a collaborative document was posted on Microsoft Teams to collect student-athlete responses (refer to attachment). Some committee members agreed to explore formalizing charge 3 as a research topic.

4/23/21 – The committee discussed an update on the research topic related to charge 3, which resulted in an IRB approved survey that used a recent NCAA wellness survey as a template. That survey is underway at the end of this semester, and work will continue through the summer.

Suggested Charge(s) For Next Year:

Increase interaction between faculty and athletes via opportunities such as guest coach and faculty/athlete mentorship programs

ATTACHMENT: Report for Charge #3

ATHLETE RESPONSES TO COVID IMPACT

Objective: Build awareness around how Covid-19 has disrupted "normal" operations for faculty, students, and staff. [Campus may want to know how much athletics has been impacted!]

SUMMARY:

Charge #3 in the 2020-21 academic year for the Behrend Faculty Athletics Committee was to build awareness around how Covid-19 has disrupted "normal" operations for faculty, students, and staff. For this committee, the focus was on the impact on student athletes in comparison to other students. Input was solicited by emailing athletes in committee members' classes and through SAAC leadership. Details of the seven responses received are included below the summary. A more extensive survey based on the NCAA's national wellness survey was developed by a research team of committee members. It has recently been IRB approved and distributed to our student athletes to explore the topic of this charge in more detail. Analysis and findings will be forthcoming in the next year.

Athlete response to the impact of Covid-19 was both positive and negative. Sports provided an outlet to interact with teammates and continue to improve skills. Appreciation was expressed for coaches providing a positive influence in and out of practice. Restrictions made it necessary for some teams to practice in pods instead of together with limited or condensed schedules, which challenged the athletes to stay motivated. This added stress and fatigue for some while providing an outlet to reduce stress for others.

In comparison to other students, athletes recognized the benefit of more social interaction compared to their peers. One respondent pointed out that athletes learn to deal with uncertainty through competition, which in general may make them better prepared to respond to life's challenges. Despite the disappointment of lacking a normal season, athletes indicated sports made it easier for them to maintain a positive attitude than their non-athlete counterparts.

Responses:

Being a swimmer, the only real difference was not being able to practice with the whole team together like before. I have to say that only having 3 practices a week helped me with my classes. My class load was heavier this semester and gave me more time to focus on my studies. Comparing my life to those who aren't athletes, I have to say that I enjoyed getting out of the apartment to practice. For the most part, nothing changed for me, and it was still swim and school as per usual. I adapted pretty quick and didn't think much of it, it's just the situation at hand.

- Men's Swim

My experience as a student-athlete at Behrend has been both challenging and rewarding during the pandemic. Here are a few of my positive/negative thoughts on the matter.

1.) It was definitely challenging to stay motivated for practices without any scrimmages/games against other teams. The games throughout the season really break up a long week of practice and offer a good bonding experience for the team to come together. Without that, the practices seemed repetitive after a while, especially since we practiced in three separate "pods".

2.) Next, it was also challenging having to wear masks and having the rules change. D1 programs, as well as high schools, didn't require masks which made it frustrating when the Behrend soccer team enforced it. Furthermore, I feel like the rules for contact tracing changed every other day which made it uncertain for those worried about getting Covid/having to quarantine.

3.) Now that I've complained enough (haha!), I'll talk about some of the positives. Being a student-athlete allowed me to meet a lot of the freshmen soccer players, whereas I would imagine normal students are struggling to meet new faces during these times and get out of their dorms/apartments.

4.) The practices/scrimmages were limited in number but really fun, and it was nice to be able to still play. Coach Perritano maintained a great attitude and made the sessions competitive which really helped since it stunk not being able to have a normal senior season.

Overall, my love for soccer and the optimism of a spring season have allowed me to have a great experience still despite the circumstances. Hope this gives you a little insight!

- Men's Soccer

This didn't affect us much more than others, but that's mostly because it sucks for everyone. The hardest/most different part for us I guess would be that while some kids play video games as a hobby we run and workout. So not only did it make our college and work lives harder, it put a damper on our hobbies and put restrictions on how we could and could not workout together. That simply just added stress in a place where usually there's no stress and is our "happy place." We've powered through and got good work in, but especially for distance runners where the key to good performance is a lot of repetition and keeping things constant it's very hard to pull out good work when so many things change all at once. Thanks for asking for the input, and I really do believe that the situation is being handled as well as it could be.

- Men's XC

1) The impact of the pandemic on your experience as a student-athlete at Behrend

As you may already know, I am a senior this year. Unfortunately, the pandemic has taken away my last full season of volleyball. Luckily, Mr. Streeter and Penn State in general has been working hard to get all student-athletes some sort of "season". In the fall, women's volleyball season was cancelled but we could practice. As a team, I think we were all thrilled to have some time in the gym, however there were some challenges. Our coach and the players decided to practice within "pods" to limit the contact tracing if someone on our team were to contract covid. With volleyball being such a team dependent sport, it was hard for all our players to connect. Although, many other teams within our conference did not get any opportunities in the fall, so we were thankful to be able to practice. We are being granted a season in the Spring, however again it is nothing normal to a regular season. We can begin in March with practices and begin games in April. The issue at this moment is acquiring teams to play. Many schools have opted out of playing volleyball this year, so it makes it difficult to schedule matches. This spring we currently have four matches scheduled. We are disappointed that these games do not count toward any stats and records as well as we will not be able to compete for a conference championship. Although I am a senior and wish I could have finished with a full season, I am thankful to get some sort of finish to my career. I truly feel remorse for the freshmen who have not been able

to get the full student-athlete experience yet. Hopefully soon, things will improve in all areas and I can come back to watch my teammates compete for another championship.

2) The impact of being a student-athlete on your college experience during the pandemic compared to your peers who are not athletes

In my opinion, I believe our experience has been more awarding. With the pandemic, a lot of people have experienced stress and pressure. Changing to online learning has been challenging for a lot of students. Many students do not have an outlet to destress. I think being able to practice or being part of a team has helped a lot of student-athletes. Of course, many athletes wish they could have competed fully this fall or spring, but I think our school has done more for student athletes than many others.

- Women's Volleyball

I would say that it has been frustrating not being able to compete for championships this season. Our practices have not been affected much, but the scarcity and uncertainty of games has been a challenge. Overall, I am grateful for Penn State allowing us to have some semblance of a season moving forward.

- Men's Soccer

Due to the Covid pandemic, I decided to commute to Behrend for my last year as there were many uncertainties at the time. This decision made my availability to drive an hour to campus multiple days of the week to practice difficult. Thankfully, my coach was very understanding and was more relaxed on the number of mandatory weekly practices. As a bowler, it was uncertain if we would have a conference season since we usually begin to play in October and end early April. The conference and Behrend decided to push our five to six-month season into four weeks. This change was very time-consuming and exhausting. We were used to bowling about 2-4 times a week max with breaks in between weeks. Instead, we bowled about 3-4 times a week with no breaks and caused lots of fatigue on top of the mental fatigue many athletes and students feel with the overwhelming amount of course work we are given. Since we only have enough players to compete, it made it harder for us to pace ourselves to ensure we were not over-playing ourselves to avoid any injuries.

When it comes to being a student during the Covid pandemic, I feel like I am being stretched thin. I only have one in-person class that is as close to a standard class setting as it can be right now. But with the four other courses being online with mandatory zooms, I have become very unmotivated to participate in any extracurriculars besides bowling. I am currently the president of two student organizations and have noticed other students are as unmotivated as me. When you finally are released from your zoom class meetings, the student then has more homework or discussion boards to work on than it feels like we would during a regular school year. Thus, many students, myself included, do not want to participate in other clubs and organizations, making many of these organizations set up for failure for the next semester.

- Women's Bowling

From my perspective, COVID-19 introduced student athletes to an unexpected yet critical turning point in our college careers. As athletes, sports are more to us than just a game; they represent a subset of life with challenges to overcome, goals to achieve, and teammates who will help you through it all. The timing of the COVID pandemic started the week after my sophomore basketball season already concluded, so I did not miss much from that year athletically. However, I never imagined that the pandemic would extend this long as my junior season has been limited through the cancellation of conference play. My team is still fortunate to compete in exhibition games against local teams;

moreover, we see it as an opportunity to improve for next year. However, I think the greatest difference in how athletes have been affected by COVID compared to other students is that many athletes, including myself, had to search for new ways to label our life's successes without the structure of organized competition. Athletes often rely on sports to build their teamwork, communication, and leadership skills. Additionally, many athletes rely on their sports as an outlet from the stresses of everyday life. When no longer being allowed to compete, it is very easy for athletes to lose their positive mindset, especially with such uncertainty about if/when they will be able to return to the game they love. My coaches always reminded us during the pandemic to find ways to "win the day" knowing that no matter how small or irrelevant these successes appear, you will constantly be building a better version of yourself which is especially important during these difficult times. My personal experience with the pandemic instilled a sense of maturity as I learned to accept things that were out of my control. Athletes are competitive and often like to be in charge, making decisions and controlling the pace of the game. As this pandemic has proven to us all, some things cannot be changed, no matter how hard you try. However, just because something is out of your control doesn't mean it isn't worthwhile; in fact, I've learned that responding to uncertainty is perhaps the most important indication of a true leader, both on and off the court. In comparison to students who are not athletes, I honestly think athletes were more prepared to recognize the importance of making the best of this unprecedented situation. In practices and games, we are constantly adapting to new environments and new expectations by accepting challenges rather than succumbing to them. As unfortunate as this pandemic has been, I think it has also given student athletes a new perspective as our sports have revealed to be a simulation for responding to life's challenges as well.

- Women's Basketball