Athletics and Academics Subcommittee (AASC)
Status Report
May 15, 2006

The Athletics and Academics Subcommittee (AASC) has a first draft of a rather long report and a list of specific proposals and recommendations. All this material is undergoing further review, editing, and discussion within the committee and with our outside consultant, Gene Corrigan. Early in the fall semester, the AASC will present our full report along with a set of recommendations and specific proposals requiring action by the Faculty. This report will come to the faculty and the Board of Trustees, as required in the AASC charge. The status report submitted here provides an overview of AASC activities along with a general summary of the key areas where proposals will be forthcoming.

I. Formation of AASC

The University Faculty voted on May 5, 2003 to forward a resolution for a study of the University athletic program, with a particular focus on the impact of athletics on the University’s academic goals and aspirations. On December 11, 2003, the Executive Committee responded to the resolution. The Board suggested that the review occur in the context of a curriculum review that was currently underway; that a Trustee liaison (Susan Quisenberry) be a member of the committee; that the subcommittee report findings and recommendations to the Trustee Academic Program Committee; that one or two outside evaluators be engaged with the subcommittee; and the subcommittee should have access to the information gathered in the prior year for the Trustee Athletic Task Force that studied football and the stadium issue. Formation of the Athletics and Academics Subcommittee (AASC) of the Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience (TFUGE) took place on February 25, 2004.

II. AASC Charge

The Provost worked with the Task Force on Undergraduate Education (TFUGE) to define the scope of work and membership of the AASC. The composition of the committee appears in Appendix I. The AASC received its charge on February 15, 2004 and began its work toward collecting and analyzing relevant data. The specific charge presented to the AASC appears below:

Articulate the extent to which the athletic program’s organization and goals are/are not congruent with the institution’s values, goals, and aspirations. Evaluate the impact of athletics on student and faculty experience at Richmond. Consider especially the student-athlete’s experience in relation to the experience of other students. Make concrete recommendations for ways to bring academic and athletic goals into optimal alignment.

III. Start-Up Questions

As a first step, the committee reviewed relevant materials on the overall topic of athletics and academics. The Committee used a number of current books, studies, and articles to gain perspective on the congruence of athletics and academics. The overall issue of integrating athletics and academics is complex. An emphasis was placed on potential improvements in the integration of academics and athletics to the extent possible. Given our discussions and issues raised in many of our readings, the committee drafted a list of possible questions to address. These questions fall into three broad areas:
strategic plan and resources, campus engagement of student athletes, and academic performance of student athletes. The committee sought answers to the questions below as part of the research process.

1.) **Strategic Plan and Resources**  
   a.) Are athletic values at odds with the values of the academic institution?  
   b.) Do the budget allocations to sports threaten university programs?  
   c.) Are athletic programs a net financial drain when all direct and indirect factors are considered?

2.) **Campus Engagement of Student-Athletes**  
   a.) Is the quality of life for athletes on campus comparable to the quality of life of other students? Are athletes separated from a normal student life in ways that should be changed?  
   b.) Does athletics improve socioeconomic composition or diversity?  
   c.) How can student-athletes have wider participation in extracurricular activities, fraternities, and other student programs?  
   d.) What accommodations would allow all freshman athletes to participate in first-year orientation like all other students?

3.) **Academic Performance of Student-Athletes**  
   a.) Is the gap in academic qualifications between athletes and non-athletes too large?  
   b.) Do our athletes take less demanding curricula than the overall student body? Are there significant differences in the academic experience of athletes and non-athletes?  
   c.) Athletic special admissions exceed other categories of special admissions – Is the admission advantage given to athletes through “special admissions” too high relative to non-athletes? (We believe we have about 80 special athletic admits per year and with admission decisions resulting from negotiations between the Athletic department and the Provost.)  
   d.) Do athletes graduate with the same life-skills and opportunities for successful life after college as do non-athlete students?  
   e.) What is the optimal course scheduling system for student-athletes that will allow them to be like other students while still meeting the demands of their sport?  
   f.) What scheduling changes would allow student-athletes to minimize missed classes?  
   g.) What are the special advising demands for student-athletes?

The committee set out to gather information pertaining to these questions and to the overall interaction of students and student-athletes on campus.

**IV. Work Groups and Themes**

To allow for data collection and a thorough review of a variety of complicated questions, the committee created three working groups to focus on specific issues in more detail.

1.) **Strategic Plan and Resources.** The first group looked at the university’s strategic plan and resource commitments to athletics. Specific wording of the expected role for the Athletic Department in relation to other goals of the University of Richmond warranted special attention. Part of this group’s work called for a review of how the university presented its Athletic Department to the external community in speeches, articles, and publications. The analysis of both the strategic plan and public texts allowed a big picture of how the University views athletics in relation to its mission. This workgroup also reviewed the athletic department budget to understand the financial resources committed to the Athletic Department in the context of the
strategic plan. The committee viewed the overall financial commitment to athletics relative to stated goals, benefits, and future plans for the University.

2.) **Campus Engagement of Student-athletes.** The second work group concentrated on various forms of campus engagement for student-athletes. The degree of integration of student-athletes with the overall student body was a key area of investigation. The working group looked for differences between the academic and social experience of athletes versus other students. The working group used focus group discussions, surveys, and data collection to address the key concerns in relation to the integration of student-athletes and the overall student population.

3.) **Academic Performance.** The third working group examined academic performance issues for student-athletes relative to the overall student body. NCAA reports and statistics provided by the Athletic Department were very useful in this respect, but the committee gathered additional data from various sources at the university. The committee analyzed data generated through surveys, focus group discussions, and additional data collected with the help of the Registrar and Admissions.

V. **General Direction of Proposals**

The committee’s final report addresses the complexities of balancing high quality academics and a winning Division I NCAA athletic program. We summarize our findings based on an analysis of data from surveys, focus group discussion, university records, athletic department records, and outside readings. From this work, we then present specific proposals for improvement in what is already a strong program. For example, we are working on specific wording for proposals and action items to address the areas below:

- Improved overall integration of academics and athletics.
- A partnering relationship between the faculty and the student support systems of the Athletic Department to monitor and enhance the academic performance of student-athletes.
- Better lines of communication and understanding between the faculty, the Athletic Department, student-athletes, and student non-athletes.
- Achievement of more indirect benefits from athletics by stimulating greater school spirit, interaction of student-athletes and student non-athletes, improved work on common ground for student-athlete minorities, and better relationships with alumni through sports events.
- Improved scheduling and coordination of information to minimize excused absences of student-athletes to the extent possible.
- University-wide policies with respect to excused absences, make-up work, and reporting procedures of student-athlete academic progress.

VI. **Full Report**

The full report of the AASC committee will be available to faculty and Trustees at the start of the fall semester. During the summer, the committee will make revisions based on suggestions from our consultant, Gene Corrigan. Specific action items requiring a vote will be brought forward early in the semester.
Appendix I. AASC Committee Composition

Jerry Stevens (ECRSB, Finance) Chair
Jane Berry (A&S, Psychology)
John Gupton (A&S, Chemistry)*
Valerie Kish (A&S, Biology)*
Kibibi Mack-Shelton (A&S, History)
Louis, Tremaine (A&S, English)
Susan Quisenberry (Trustee liaison and Alumna)
Joe Kent (Provost’s liaison)
David Walsh (Athletic Department liaison, Academic Director, AD)*
Steve Bisese (Fall Semester of 2004-2005, Dean RC)
Dan Fabian (spring semester of 2004-2006, Assoc. Dean RC)
Gene Corrigan (Outside Expert Evaluator)
Brandon Newman, (One Student Athlete)
Chase Rowan (One Student Not an Athlete)
Hugh West (A&S, History, TFUGE Steering Committee contact)
June Aprille (Provost is ex officio)

* Members of the University Athletic Council