Dear Bob,

We would like to submit a year-end report on the activities of the Faculty Athletics Task Force of the Vanderbilt Faculty Senate Student Life Committee.

After our committee was formed, we identified specific concerns related to athletics in the Vanderbilt community. These included:

   a. Academic advising
   b. Admission standards
   c. Student athlete majors (distribution should mirror overall student body)
   d. Student-athlete academic progress and graduation

We also identified areas in which faculty can may be able to assist in ongoing athletic programs. These included:

   a. Participation in faculty fellows program
   b. Assist in recruiting - attend dinners, meet with recruits, academic program advice, etc.
   c. Meeting regularly with coaches
   d. Assist in academic advising
   e. Serve on search committees for AD, coaches
   f. Involvement in setting admissions standards

After these faculty concerns and opportunities for involvement were identified, we met with Chancellor Gee and Vice-Chancellor David Williams to discuss these points and also how faculty might be involved in participating in the new athletic structure that he has proposed for Vanderbilt. In this meeting, we emphasized the importance of the formation of an active and empowered Intercollegiate Athletic Committee at Vanderbilt. Chancellor Gee has since named a new University Athletics Oversight Committee that will serve as the principal internal advisory group for Vanderbilt's sports programs. The Committee will report to the Chancellor through the Vice Chancellor for Student Life and University Affairs, and will include faculty, staff, students and alumni. This committee will be chaired by Virginia Shepherd, Ph.D., a member of our Task Force. Although this committee has not yet met, we hope that this committee will specifically address the issues listed above as well as concerns about disparities between men and women’s teams in regard to facilities.

On behalf of our committee, Ginny Shepherd proposed that the Faculty Senate adopt a Faculty Athletic Fellows Program. The Faculty Athletic Fellows Program is designed to select representatives from the faculty to serve as fellows for each athletic team at Vanderbilt
University. The primary goals of this program are to promote increased faculty involvement in and support of our athletic programs, to have faculty members serve as mentors and advisors for our coaches and student-athletes, and to assist the University in continuing its mission of integrating athletics into the life of the university. Faculty Athletic Fellows (FAFs) will have the responsibility of attending all home games, traveling with the team to selected away games, and serving as the liaison for that sport to the Faculty Athletic Representative and the Intercollegiate Athletic Committee. This program received overwhelming support by vote at the Faculty Senate meeting of April 15.

In the early spring, we focused our agenda for the remainder of the academic year to include:

a. Communicate with each of the intercollegiate team coaches to inform them about our Task Force and agenda and offer to meet with them in groups of one or two to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as:
   - academic advising for both recruits and current student-athletes
   - how faculty can help in recruiting student athletes
   - scheduling of courses, labs, practice, games and travel to avoid conflicts
b. Meet with Brock Williams, Assistant Vice-Chancellor in the Office of Student Athletics, Recreation, and Wellness to understand his vision of faculty involvement in athletics
c. Meet with the undergraduate admissions dean and staff to discuss appropriate admissions standards and advising of recruits regarding majors

At present, we have met with three varsity head coaches individually and have plans to meet with two more before the end of May, with the goal of meeting with all by the end of the next academic year. So far, these meetings with coaches have been very productive and have been welcomed by the coaching staff and an outline of our findings is listed below.

Genuinely want more interaction with faculty.
   1. Coaches feel isolated from the rest of the university community
   2. One of the attractive aspects of being at Vanderbilt as a coach is that it has a strong academic reputation, but the coaches do not interact with the academic side of the university
   3. Want to know professors in departments so that they can more effectively communicate about student-athletes when situations arise (easier to talk to someone about a problem when they already have a relationship with that person outside of a crisis situation)

Concerns
   1. Class selection for upperclassmen is difficult as pre-requisite courses are offered in the morning, while advanced classes in certain majors are only offered in the afternoon, thus conflicting with practice schedules
   2. There is summer school budget only for football and basketball student-athletes, not for scholarship athletes from other sports. Lack of summer school courses puts the Vanderbilt teams at a competitive disadvantage because other SEC schools offer summer courses, allowing for additional conditioning and also allowing student-athletes the opportunity to “get ahead” so that they might only have to take 12 hours of course work
in season. Currently, all student-athletes must take full 15 hour course loads in season to be on track for graduation.

3. In some individual cases, both faculty advisors and academic advisors within the athletic department have dissuaded student-athletes from more time consuming majors, thus steering these students from educational and career opportunities in which they might be interested.

4. There is a lack of career counseling for all students. Freshmen and sophomores are not receiving sound advice in majors, while upperclassmen are not receiving guidance in summer job and service opportunities to improve their CVs. There is very little planning for the careers of student-athletes after Vanderbilt even given the fact that few Vanderbilt student-athletes progress to professional athletic careers. The emphasis is on their athletic career here, but not on preparation for life after Vanderbilt.

We believe that faculty dialogue with the coaches will only enhance the student-athletes’ academic and social life at Vanderbilt as well as the coaches’ ability to succeed at an academically competitive university.

As you can see, we recognize that the state of athletics at Vanderbilt is in a period of change and that faculty should be an integral positive force in the development of the athletic policies. Our goal is to help Vanderbilt student-athletes reach their potential in the classroom, as well as on the intercollegiate competitive surfaces, to prepare themselves for successful lives after graduation.

Sincerely,

Bruce Oppenheimer
Stokes Peebles, chair
Doug Perkins
Virginia Shepherd
Sharon Shields
Marshall Summar