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Athletic Committee - September 30, 2013

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Minutes of the Faculty Senate Athletics Committee meeting of September 30, 2013.

There are many new members on the Committee. Joe Scogin, new Director of the Thornton Center, and Don Bruce, Faculty Athletic Representative to the NCAA, were asked to talk about their positions.

Joe Scogin discussed the Thornton Center and its role on campus and where he sees his leadership taking it. Since arriving he has spent a majority of his time in assessment and evaluation of all practices in the Center. He has identified a few areas needing improvement and spoken with the Provost about these. One example is that the transfers to UT don't perform as well as others. He is also working hard to build campus relationships, particularly citing Dean's offices and advising offices.

He is paying particular attention to graduation rates and believes that these can be enhanced by 'managing' the numbers better. He cited a recent situation as an example. Student athletes have six years from the time they enter to graduate and count for or against the graduation rates of their entering class and sport. By analyzing data for the class that would go off the clock at the end of summer 2013 he noticed that Brian Williams, a former basketball player, needed very few hours to graduate. Brian was contacted, informed of the situation and encouraged to complete his degree this summer. He did this. This one success significantly improved the graduation rate for basketball and the athletic program.

Joe also described this as creating a positive "brand" for the program and the university. These graduation rates reflect as much on the university as they do the athletic program.

Joe was asked about differences in overall GPA between men and women athletes. Yes the women are better on the average.

Don Bruce described his position and role. Although initially appointed by the Chancellor, he must straddle athletics and academics seeing that both function to the benefit of the student-athlete. As he described it, both sides must coexist and he is not the voice of the administration or the voice of athletics but rather a formal link between the two. Don clarified that faculty who have concerns about athletics can always contact either him as FAR or this committee, through its chair, who sits on the Athletics Board.

As part of his responsibilities he chairs the Athletic Board. The Board is charged with serving as a sounding board for athletic policies and procedures. With the arrival as Dave Hart as the new Athletic Director the Board has become more streamlined in membership and has had useful discussions on a number of issues and in the last 18 months.

Questions followed about the NCAA and its governance of college sports. The concern is that on certain issues the NCAA Board needs better communication and understanding of the issues confronting college sports. An example given was the notion about funding the full cost of attendance. The NCAA Board passed legislation to implement this last year without thinking through the consequences. It was to be applied to all institutions and would impose a significant financial burden on many. If some institutions did not implement it and others did it would tilt the recruiting landscape. It was only to apply to athletes on full scholarship and many sports don't award partial scholarships. For example, within the same institution you might have an Olympic champion track star with only a partial scholarship and a second or third string linebacker with a full scholarship. At the very least this could be seen leading to a real fairness issue among the athletes themselves.

Those in attendance included Don Bruce, Courtney Childers, Chris Clark, Matt Hibbs, John Koontz, Dean Kopsell, Andy Puckett, Joe Scogin, Donna Thomas, Micheline Westfall, Songning Zhang.