# **ATHLETIC BOARD MEETING**



**February 12, 2025 – 2:00pm – *Microsoft Teams***

Present: Courtney Hughes (Chair), Ehsan Asoudegi, Emily Belcher, Wonock Chung, Jacob Finley, Chad Fitz, Aaron Fogleman, Sean Frazier, Alexa Hayes, Jeanna Hunter, Michele Hunt, Paul Kassel, Rob Kerschke, Brian McCormick, Glenn Roby, Laura Sala

Guests: Chris Barker, Sr. Assoc. AD/Development & Revenue Generation; John Cheney, Deputy AD/Executive Assoc. AD/Operations; Lisa DeRango, Executive Assoc. AD/HR & Finance Administration; Matt Gonzalez, Sr. Assoc. AD/Facilities & Events; Randi Napientek, Sr. Assoc. AD/Director of SAASS; Ryan Sedevie, Sr. Assoc. AD/Collegiate Advancement & External Affairs; Courtney Vinson, Executive Assoc. AD/Sports Administration/SWA

1. **Call to Order** – C. Hughes called the virtual meeting to order at 2:00pm.
2. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes** – B. McCormick moved to approve; C. Fitz seconded; motion carried unanimously.
3. **Faculty Athletics Representative**
4. **NCAA Convention Debrief** – C. Hughes started the meeting with a quick debrief on her experience at the recent NCAA Convention in Nashville this past January (PowerPoint in Microsoft Teams folder). There were a few main items that she felt might be of interest to the Board:

* Announcement that women’s basketball teams would be paid for playing games in the NCAA Tournament like the men’s teams.
* House Settlement – if passed this April, collegiate athletics that opt in will shift to revenue share model with student-athletes. With that comes a lot of changes in terms of conducting financial aspects (i.e. back pay and future payments to student-athletes).
* Social media use, gambling and online harassment – C. Hughes spoke about this topic at the last Athletic Board meeting. Student-athletes are seeing more and more of this, especially with the changes in sports gambling and accessibility.
* Knight Commission Presentation (document in Microsoft Teams folder) – the presentation analyzed hot topics happening now in college sports (i.e. equity, finances, etc.). The document that C. Hughes shared showed statistics in a visual representation of where we, as a Group of 5 Institution, stand versus the Power 5, FCS and non-football conferences in terms of revenue sources. She noted that the Power 5 sees much of their funding come from NCAA distributions and media rights, whereas most of the other division I institutional funding comes primarily from institutional/government support and student fees. C. Hughes thought the breakdown was especially significant to note when schools are talking about how to pay student-athletes.

1. **Student-Athlete Missed Classes** – R. Napientek and C. Hughes felt that it would be beneficial to the Board to provide an overview of the enrollment process for student-athletes (document in Microsoft Teams folder). Student-athletes have very demanding schedules between academics, practices, travel/competitions, and while there is a lot of stress on the students, there is also stress on the course instructors. Student-Athlete Academic Success Services (SAASS) puts in a lot of work to prepare both student-athletes and faculty with schedules, policies, and semester check-ins to try to mitigate any issues. Part of this preparation begins with enrollment. Student-athletes are given the opportunity to enroll a couple of days prior to the general student population. Early enrollment provides student-athletes with the opportunity to ensure they are choosing classes that fit best with their travel and practice times. R. Napientek outlined the SAASS Cycle (described briefly below):
2. Student-athletes meet with academic advisors on campus (week 6-9)
3. Student-athletes meet with Athletic Academic Coordinator from SAASS (week 10-11) – during this time, SAASS will look at eligibility and plan schedules based on practice and travel times. If there is a conflict, SAASS may reach back out to the academic advisors to see if there are alternate classes to choose from.
   1. Several factors have made course selections increasingly difficult:
      1. Budget constraints leading to fewer course offerings and staggering course openings (not all options available right away)
      2. Fewer online options available
      3. Courses with restrictions (i.e. seniors only)
   2. R. Napientek noted that student-athletes are not allowed to miss class for practice; university and athletic policy only allows student-athletes to miss class for travel/competition conflicts.
4. Student-athletes enroll for classes – schedules are printed and sent to coaches and sport advisors.
5. Travel letters are sent to each student-athletes instructor(s) during the first week of classes.
6. Progress reports are sent to student-athletes instructor(s) 3 times throughout the semester (at 4 weeks|8 weeks|12 weeks).
7. Grades are posted.

R. Napientek also provided the group with the number of hours of Academic Services that were provided to student-athletes in the fall. SAASS held just over 2,300 total meetings, with over 230 students for an average of 37 meetings per academic coordinator per week. SAASS also conducted just over 360 in-house tutoring sessions, and 84 “high-need” academic coaching sessions. To conclude, R. Napientek wanted to provide the Board with insight on the process and the time/effort that goes in to preparing both the student-athletes and instructors each semester. B. McCormick added that it might be beneficial to disseminate the university policies to faculty if there seems to be persistent issues between student-athletes and faculty on attendance requirements, much like they do for the Disability Resource Center.

1. **Athletics Director Update** – S. Frazier provided an update on winter and spring sports (document in Microsoft Teams folder). Men and women’s basketball are in the midst of their seasons, fighting hard despite some tough loses. Wrestling is having a great season, and gymnastics is plugging away. S. Frazier mentioned the success and engagement of both the Beauty and the Beast meet (gymnastics/wrestling combo event) as well as the National Girls and Women in Sports Day, which boasted a well-attended clinic and panel followed by the women’s basketball game. Coming up is the basketball double header “Cram-the-Convo”, which is set for February 22nd. Spring sports (track & field/baseball/softball/men and women’s tennis/men and women’s golf) have also gotten started.

A large portion of S. Frazier’s update was spent discussing the decision to move the football program to the Mountain West conference. NIU has left the MAC before, but the current administration has never really gone through the discovery in reviewing the process before. The college athletics landscape is changing rapidly, particularly in four (4) main areas: 1. House Settlement; 2. Transfer Portal; 3. Expansion of College Football Playoffs; 4. Name, Image and Likeness (NIL). S. Frazier connected with several of the former Athletic Directors from NIU, discussing the current landscape and what the future could look like. He noted that the first domino fell back in 2022, when USC and UCLA changed from Pac-12 to Big Ten, marking a watershed moment in college athletics. This, and subsequent movement amongst conferences in the years to follow, led NIU to look at the stability of the MAC. NIU reviewed several scenarios and models amongst other institutions and felt that the Army/Navy model fit best in where they envisioned the institution moving towards. Based on conference realignments and ongoing changes in college athletics, the invitation to join the Mountain West as a football only program was an opportunity to increase resources for the program in a way the MAC was unable to match. S. Frazier remarked that they are in the final stages of finding a conference for the remaining sports, which should be finalized by the end of this month. A. Fogleman had questions about the advantages of moving football to the Mountain West. S. Frazier responded that there would not be a significant increase in travel, and that the cost associated with flying more frequently would be more than covered by the new conference distributions. Additionally, there would no longer be any mid-week “MAC-tion” games, which will improve attendance numbers as well as provide a benefit to student-athlete schedules. S. Frazier also added that the alignment of the remaining sport programs to more regional based partners would save time and money.C. Fitz asked if the remaining sports had to leave the MAC, to which S. Frazier answered that it is outlined in the MAC by-laws that all member institutions must include FBS football so we would no longer be eligible. A. Hayes asked if this move would impact scholarships or aid for smaller sports. S. Frazier responded that it would not, noting that no programs would be cut and would, in fact, likely see healthy savings from more region-based travel, which could then be reinvested in their programs. The conference changes will not go into effect until fall 2026.

Additional updates included:

* Huskies Ascend – a campaign to support the sport teams which will kick off on February 19th (more details to come).
* Huskie Summer Circuit – tentative dates set for June 3-5.
* Huskie Royale – set for June 6. C. Barker expanded that Huskie Royale is the rebrand of the former Victor E. Bash, NIU Athletics premiere fundraising event. They are in the process of fine tuning a theme and location, but there will be a charitable gaming component to the event again this year. C. Barker noted if anyone was interested in attending to reach out soon as they expect tickets to sell quickly.
* Fall Academic Outcomes – the student-athletes posted a fall term GPA of 3.357, the highest in department history! This fall also saw 8 teams with record breaking semesters.

1. **Liaison Reports:**
2. **Diversity Integration Group (D.I.G.)** – C. Vinson talked about the success of the National Girls and Women in Sports Day. The girls’ clinic grew from 22 participants last year to over 90 this year, and almost every seat was filled for the panel discussion. Female student-athletes were also recognized on the basketball court during half time. C. Vinson also talked about 1-MAC Week, which will take place next week with multiple events (Empathy in Action on Monday, social media affirmation posts all week, and “High Five Friday” at the end of the week).
3. **Finance and Facilities** – M. Gonzalez indicated that their next meeting was not until later in March. He noted that from the Athletics facilities side of things they just finished the tennis locker room renovations as well as minor renovations to the volleyball locker rooms.
4. **External** **Affairs** – B. McCormick noted that their next meeting is scheduled for new week, February 19th.
5. **Athletic Department Reports:**
6. **Title IX Update** – C. Vinson provided a presentation on Title IX (PowerPoint in Microsoft Teams folder). Title IX was established in 1972, and prohibits sex discrimination (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity) in any education, program, or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Title IX also protects faculty and staff, not just students. C. Vinson went over the myths/misconceptions about Title IX and gave an overview of who counts as a participant (see PowerPoint).

To meet Title IX compliance, institutions must offer equal opportunities for male and female students to compete in intercollegiate sports. This is measured through three prongs. The first prong looks at participation numbers. We used to use prong 1 to meet Title IX compliance, however NIU now has more female than male students, so we no longer meet this requirement. Prong 2 looks at the opportunities provided that meet the interests and abilities of the underrepresented sex. The final prong looks at abilities and interests of the underrepresented sex (women for NIU). NIU is looking to meet Title IX compliance with prong 3.

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C. Vinson discussed the equitable distribution of financial aid (must be distributed within 1% of the student-athlete populations – 60.3% men (aid distributed 59.9%) vs. 39.6% women (aid distributed 40.06%). Other ways to achieve compliance with distribution of aid is the equitable distribution of scholarships (235.5 scholarships – number set by NCAA), Cost of Attendance, non-discriminatory practices when it comes to domestic versus international student scholarships, summer school availability open to all, and non-discriminatory practices of awarding 5th year (exhausted eligibility) and medically disqualified aid. C. Vinson also went through the “laundry list” of items that are used to look at prong 3 (see PowerPoint).

NIU Athletics had a Title IX review just a little over a year ago. To ensure we are continuing to provide equity amongst sports, the department has created a system of checks and balances. The Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) collaborates with the Athletics Business Office (ABO) and the Huskie Athletic Fund (HAF) to review the following:

* Purchase requests that are sport specific ​
* Evaluating Transportation (away games)​
* Gift in Kind​
* Facilities ​
* Locker rooms ​

C. Vinson wrapped up her presentation by going over Title IX rules and tracking. She noted changes in the ramifications related to Title IX compliance due to the new Presidential Administration. A. Fogleman asked if there was any impact on federal aid to athletic programs with the new administration. C. Vinson replied that there hasn’t been yet, but they are waiting for congress to make decisions and changes may come in the future.

1. **Volleyball and Football Ticket Prices (Fall 2025**)– C. Barker quickly discussed the ticket prices for volleyball and football in fall 2025 (document in Microsoft Teams folder). The only change this year will be to volleyball season tickets, where the price increased $5 to now match women’s basketball.

C. Barker also mentioned the HAF Town Hall Zoom call that is scheduled for tomorrow at 7pm. He noted that they will explain the new membership structure, tickets, Huskies Ascend, experience enhancements and more. If anyone wants to attend from this group, please reach out to him and he will send the link to join.

1. **Announcements/Adjournment** – A. Fogleman made a motion to adjourn; G. Roby seconded; meeting closed at 3:26pm