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Student Affairs Committee

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UMM Student Services Committee
Minutes 03/22/02

Present: Katherine Benson, Ardath Larson, Rita Lambert, Heather Pennie, Gina Westlund, Vivian Heltemes, Sandy Olson-Loy,

Absent: Mike Benson, Sara Haugen, Barbara Burke, Matt Johnson, Andy Grassmann, Trish Welte, Lori Koshork, Clare Strand

Guests: Chancellor Schuman

Heather Pennie, Chair of the Student Services Committee, introduced Chancellor Schuman, present to discuss current developments in the Intercollegiate Athletics program at UMM.

Schuman mentioned that, in discussing athletics at UMM, he firmly believes it is important to keep in mind UMM's primary mission, to provide a liberal arts education of uncompromising rigor and quality. As part of that mission, he believes UMM should provide a quality experience for student athletes. Athletics are important and valued for many reasons, among them:

- a competitive intercollegiate athletics program builds community on campus and encourages good relations between the campus and the external world;
- student athletes are often fine students, and we want to recruit those to be part of our community;
- in a relatively isolated locale like ours, an exciting athletics program adds an important element to campus life and it enriches the community;
- athletic competition is one valuable way to learn about one's own abilities and limits.

Schuman outlined the history of UMM's Intercollegiate Athletic affiliations. In the early 1990's UMM's conference, the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Athletics Conference, decided to switch from the NAIA to the NCAA. At that time, UMM cast its vote to join Div. III of the NCAA, but the remainder of the conference chose Div. II. Since that decision, UMM has struggled in Intercollegiate Athletics. Until three years ago, we gave no athletic scholarships, while our conference opponents developed scholarship programs which now average over a quarter-million dollars each per year. At the same time, the number of sports offered at UMM grew to 18, while the average Division II school offered 12. Our program has been funded at a Division III level, which is under one-half that of a Division II level.

Four years ago, Schuman appointed an "Athletics Task Force" consisting of people from across the spectrum of the campus community: student athletes, faculty members, athletics alumni, coaches, non-athlete students, and staff. The task force concluded that, since there was no viable NCAA Div. III league that UMM could realistically join, UMM needed to move towards an athletics scholarship program which might make us more competitive within the division. Schuman formulated a proposal to create "Special Talent Scholarships", which passed our Campus Assembly by the narrowest of votes. Solicited funds have been split 75% for athletics and 25% to other special talents, with a 50/50 split between men and women's sports.

Since the creation of the "Special Talent Scholarships," shifts have been taking place in regional collegiate conference and divisional affiliations. UMM has been approached by a group of small, mostly private midwestern colleges to assess our interest in joining with them to form a new NCAA Div. III league. This Div III conference is the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC). UMM is already playing some schools from the UMAC conference and is able to be competitive with them. Schuman plans to attend an upcoming UMAC meeting as an interested visitor. The current regional shifting and changes taking place in conference and divisional affiliations have resulted in the need for UMM to make a decision about our divisional and conference affiliation.

Schuman stated that UMM had engaged Dr. Betsy Alden, a leading athletics consultant, to assist in the decision

regarding the future of our athletic program. With the leadership of Athletes Director Mark Fohl and Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Sandy Olson-Loy, UMM asked Dr. Alden to assess our situation and offer her recommendations. In her analysis, Alden recommended that UMM move to Div. III.

Schuman noted that UMM must make the choice to remain in the NSIC and Div. II, or return to the earlier affiliation with Div. III within a relatively short period of time. UMM has been presented with a window of opportunity that will not remain open for long. Also, if a decision would be made to make a change, it would take some time to implement.

Schuman acknowledged that there were strong arguments and partisans on both sides: no decision will make everyone happy. He plans to consult with all the appropriate college governance groups as well as current student athletes and coaches, alumni and others. Schuman would like everyone to have an opportunity to give input in what is an important decision for the campus. He plans to make a decision within the next month, so input would need to be received within the next three weeks.

A committee member asked what reasons had been given for staying in Div. II. Schuman said a part of the desire to remain Div. II was the perception of some athletes and coaches that it would be more "big league." Some coaches may think about their careers and how a move to Div. III might be perceived as a step back. Some student athletes share that feeling, perceiving a greater prestige in playing for a Div. II school. Students receiving athletic scholarships would feel threatened by the potential loss of the scholarship. In reality, most that now have athletic scholarships would keep them through their undergraduate years.

Recruiting challenges were another reason given for staying in Div. II. The transition time would be painful and would potentially cause some recruiting difficulties. Students could potentially be recruited to play in Div. II and later shifted to Div. III, with no athletic scholarships available in Div. III. This would create a challenge for both Admissions and coaches.

Some look at UMAC, the potential Div. III conference UMM may chose to affiliate with, as a conference of mostly strong sectarian institutions with a strong Christian emphasis, where we now compete against mostly public institutions. People concerned about this wonder if these are the types of institutions that UMM wants to be affiliated with. This issue does not bother Schuman, who notes that we currently compete with the very conservative Crown College, for example. Schuman feels that if the conference were a cluster of academically weak institutions, that would be more of a concern.

Schuman noted that no one should assume a change to Div. III would mean decreased funding for athletics with extra dollars to be spent elsewhere on campus. In many important ways, UMM is under funding the athletics program now. UMM needs to continue to move forward in seeking funding for the athletics program. Many of the pressing needs of our athletic program are not related to the division we are in.

Various committee members mentioned that a move to Div III made sense. Having a winning program would increase enthusiasm and be good for the moral of the entire campus. Another member wondered if student athletes would perceive a move to Div. III as giving up on the athletes too quickly. Student athletes that served on the Athletic Task Force saw participation in Div. II as a big issue. It was important to them.

Schuman concluded that the win/loss record of some of the more noticeable sports has been demoralizing for the athletes and for the campus in the past few years. UMM must look at the financial realities. The athletic scholarship program hasn't had sufficient time to develop. The timing of this opportunity was, in some ways, unfortunate. However, the fundraising for the athletic scholarships has not been as expected. Some believe donors may be more likely to give if 100% of the gift is used for athletics.

Schuman reiterated his desire for input in the decision. He welcomed phone calls or email from the committee members.

Meeting adjourned 3:20 p.m.
Submitted by Melody Veenendaal

