Report of the Athletics Policy Committee
on the
Request for Elimination of Men's and Women's Tennis

October 29, 2015

Introduction

A proposal to expand or contract UMBC's intercollegiate sports program by increasing or reducing the number of teams representing UMBC shall be initiated by the Athletic Director representing the Department of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation. The approval or rejection of the proposal is the responsibility of the President of UMBC in consultation with the Athletics Director, the Athletics Policy Committee (representing staff, faculty, and students), and Vice President for Student Affairs.

This report is the formal response of the Athletics Policy Committee (APC) to a proposal, dated October 26, 2015 from the Director of Athletics representing the Department of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation, to eliminate UMBC’s men’s and women's intercollegiate tennis programs.

Compliance with the Policy on Adding or Terminating A Varsity Sport

The Policy on Adding or Terminating a Varsity Sport was adopted by the APC on May 19, 2015 and formally approved by the President’s Council in October. The APC received the proposal to eliminate men’s and women’s tennis programs on October 26 and met to review the proposal on October 27. Before its review and discussion of the proposal to eliminate the tennis programs, the APC met with UMBC’s Director of Athletics to discuss the proposal and to clarify any issues APC members may have had.

The APC notes that the proposal addresses each criterion, some more fully than others, identified in the policy. The proposal also makes an explicit commitment to follow all NCAA regulations regarding the rights of student athletes when a sport is eliminated, specifically a student-athlete's right to continue to receive scholarship support through graduation and his/her right to transfer to another institution. Therefore, the APC finds that the proposal is in compliance with the Policy on Adding or Terminating a Varsity Sport.

If UMBC’s president approves the proposal, the APC reminds the Director of Athletics and UMBC administration that the policy calls for notification of the coaches and players before the decision is made public whenever possible. The Director of Athletics informed the APC that this was his intent.

Comment on Criteria and Justification for the Proposed Action

The APC discussed the proposal’s justification for eliminating the tennis programs and examined each criterion. The APC found that criteria of conference support and
finances were most relevant; that the issues of facilities and lack of student, alumni, and community interest and support also might be factors favoring elimination; and that mission and competitive record either favor maintaining the tennis programs or do not justify terminating them. The impact on diversity and gender representation consistent with NCAA regulations is basically neutral.

The APC found the lack of a suitable conference for the men’s tennis program troublesome. The current arrangement with the Missouri Valley Conference for men’s tennis is one of necessity. It makes little sense in terms of geographical alignment, traditional rivalries, institutional missions, or economics. It appears probable that the women’s tennis program will face a similar fate in the near future. Currently, the America East Conference (AEC) does not have a guaranteed place in the NCAA women’s tennis championship tournament due to the failure to meet the minimum number of teams required to qualify.

With regard to finances, the APC found in its inquiries (especially during its January, 2015 retreat) and reporting during the spring of 2015 that the Department of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation is under financial pressure for a number of reasons. This pressure will likely intensify due to several reasons including developments in the external environment (especially with anticipated changes in NCAA policies) and developments within UMBC (specifically, a new events center and other facility related needs). Being the southernmost member of the AEC also imposes a financial burden on the sports program.

The proposal estimates that more than $650,000 will become available for “retirement of debt and new investments over a period of years in both intercollegiate athletics and recreation programming” as a result of eliminating the two tennis programs. The proposal also foresees this reallocation of funds as helping to “minimize future student athletic fees.” While reallocating funds may be necessary, the proposal does not address the question of whether eliminating a sports program other than tennis would help the department’s financial situation even more. Some comparative financial analysis of other options would have been helpful to the APC’s consideration.

UMBC’s facilities are not ideal for supporting a vibrant tennis intercollegiate program. In fact, they apparently do not compare favorably to other Division 1 programs. They require more than normal upkeep because the UMBC community and residents in the surrounding community also heavily use them. UMBC’s tennis courts appear to be more appropriate for recreational usage rather than intercollegiate competition. The lack of practice facilities and/or indoor facilities imposes a financial and time cost to the program and athletes according to the proposal. Nevertheless, UMBC’s tennis facilities have supported its teams over a number of years and we are aware of the facility needs of other UMBC sports programs.

The minimal facilities and accommodations for fans may exacerbate the lack of fan interest. The proposal notes that in addition to the lack of attendance at UMBC’s
intercollegiate matches, the program receives little alumni or donor support compared to other UMBC sports.

With regard to the remaining criteria, the committee viewed them as either not being supportive of elimination or not being relevant. The APC does not view the competitive records of the men’s and women’s teams as a reason to eliminate them. Nor does the Committee believe there will be any long-term impact, positive or negative, on UMBC’s compliance with Title IX regulations. The proposal notes, and the committee agrees, that there is no conflict between the tennis programs and UMBC’s mission.

Conclusion
In sum, the APC has reviewed the proposal to eliminate UMBC’s men’s and women’s intercollegiate tennis programs. It questioned the Director of Athletics about the proposal and fully discussed the proposal. The APC concludes that:

1) UMBC is in compliance with the Policy on Adding or Terminating a Varsity Sport.
2) There is adequate justification for approving the proposal, especially in light of the challenge of finding a suitable conference for the tennis teams and the financial pressures that UMBC’s Department of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation currently faces and those that are likely to emerge in the very near future.
3) In keeping with the Policy on Adding or Terminating a Varsity Sport, the Director of Athletics should notify the tennis coach(es) and players before making public any decision to eliminate tennis.

The APC strongly recommends the following.

1) The APC once again urges the Department of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation and the UMBC administration to engage as soon as possible in a planning process that will identify a vision and strategies to cope with anticipated financial pressures and other challenges so that UMBC will not have to terminate other sports and will be able to field championship teams reflecting the excellence that UMBC proclaims. The need for short term and strategic planning is urgent as evidenced by the present proposed action and the known challenges, present and future, to UMBC’s athletics and recreation programs.
2) There needs to be transparency and accountability in how the saved funds are used. The APC urges representatives of the UMBC administration and the Department of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation to meet with representatives of the Student Government Association and the Graduate Student Government Association to establish a collegial approach to discussion and reporting of how the $650,000 savings will be reallocated to support athletics and recreation and to “minimize future student athletic fees.”