THE ONE TEAM COMMITTEE

A Report to
Dr. Geoff Gamble, President
Montana State University
Bozeman, Montana

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
ONE TEAM COMMITTEE

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INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Montana State University requested that the NCAA review its athletic programs following unacceptable academic progress rates (APR) in the football program and illegal activities involving some current and former student-athletes. The NCAA review committee issued its report (see Appendix A) in February 2007, and in summer 2007, President Geoff Gamble appointed The One Team Committee to make recommendations for the University’s response to this review. President Gamble issued the following charge to the committee: “Determine whether Montana State has the appropriate programs in place to assure that the student-athletes we recruit to play for our teams will succeed academically, socially and athletically.” (See Appendix B for the full text.)

The One Team Committee oriented its work around the NCAA report. The name of the committee comes from the following recommendation in that report: “Create a ‘One Team’ mentality … that will coordinate outreach efforts and produce multi-layered strategy involving:

- Each sport team;
- All campus departments;
- Alumni, fans and boosters; and
- The greater Bozeman community.”

The report cited a number of strengths in MSU’s athletic programs including:

- University leadership’s proactive approach to addressing immediate concerns
- The University’s status, reputation and academic rigor
- Senior leadership’s well-articulated and commonly-shared view of athletics, a vision that is also shared by the majority of coaches and athletic department administrators
- Numerous successes in the University’s athletic programs
- On-going efforts by current coaches to translate high academic, athletic and social expectations into successful performance

The report also identified some areas for enhancement. In particular, the University was urged to:

- Communicate more clearly its expectations to student-athletes
- Integrate the football program more fully into the Athletic Department and the University
- Institute a collaborative process for reviewing of prospective student-athletes
- Develop strategies for addressing APR problems
- Foster strong positive relationships among faculty, administration and the Athletic Department
- Integrate better the various sports, athletics department and the University

The One Team Committee organized its work around four key themes: Recruitment; Academic Support and Mentoring; Program Culture, Orientation and Induction; and Integration of Student-Athletes into the campus and community. We reviewed Department of Athletics'
documents, interviewed student-athletes and coaches, received presentations by Department of Athletics’ staff members, hosted a forum for academic advisors, met with Faculty Senate, and reviewed academic programming and performance for student-athletes and non-athletes. The ideas sparked by this information, and by on-going committee discussions, served as the starting point for developing the formal recommendations contained in this report.

Prior to and since the receipt of the NCAA review, the University’s President and the Director of its Department of Athletics have been proactive in responding to the needs of MSU student-athletes, athletic programs and the University. At the beginning of each section of this report, we note the progress resulting from these efforts along with the principles that guided the Committee’s development of recommendations.

The report contains three types of proposals: recommendations that the Committee believes should be part of University and Department of Athletics policies; suggestions that merit further research and consideration; and, ideas that may have merit and warrant further study.

We thank the President’s Office and the staff in the Department of Athletics for their sustained and invaluable support throughout the Committee’s work. The openness with which key members of the Department of Athletics’ staff worked with the Committee was necessary and commendable.

---The One Team Committee
GUIDING PRINCIPLES, PROGRESS,
RECOMMENDATIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

I. Recruitment

Statement of Guiding Principles

Coaches should recruit student-athletes who have a reasonable chance of attaining academic success at Montana State University. Coaches should consider the academic records and social backgrounds of recruits as well as their athletic abilities. All University personnel should help the Department of Athletics and its coaches to achieve this goal.

It may not be sufficient for student-athletes to meet Montana State’s minimum admission standards; NCAA eligibility requirements (see Appendix C) hold student-athletes to a higher standard of academic performance that is above the minimum for the typical MSU student.

Progress Noted

The current football and men’s basketball coaching staffs are taking concerns expressed by the Academic Coordinator and the Faculty Athletics Representative into account when deciding which athletes to recruit. This is especially noticeable in the recruitment of transfers, who have been the primary contributors to MSU’s academic progress rate (APR) problems in the past.

This recruiting season, a member of MSU’s faculty met with each football prospect on an official visit.

We recommend:

1. Academic faculty be included in screening during a prospective student-athlete’s official visit. Screening includes reviewing official or unofficial transcripts, meeting with recruits and providing a written assessment of the recruit’s chances for academic success at Montana State University in the intended major.

2. Academic faculty understand that their role includes: (1) Promoting academic programs at Montana State including opportunities in the faculty member’s department; (2) Assessing the recruit’s motivation for and level of interest in academics; (3) Providing the Department of Athletics with an assessment of the recruit’s academic promise in a timely fashion so that it can be considered in the final review of the recruit.

3. Faculty, Dean’s staff and academic advisors who meet with transfer recruits be educated about the Student-Athlete Academic Progress Form, NCAA eligibility
requirements (e.g., progress towards graduation), and how each student-athlete’s progress towards graduation contributes to team-level APR.

4. For transfer recruits, academic faculty provide the Department of Athletics with a preliminary estimate of the percentage of degree requirements already satisfied when the transfer recruit enrolls at MSU. This estimate is based on the recruit’s transcript and courses in progress.

5. Coaches clearly articulate the Department of Athletics’ mission and priorities so that recruits understand what Montana State University and its athletic programs stand for.

6. Coaches receive training to ensure that they have the information needed to effectively promote Montana State as an academic institution. Better understanding of MSU’s academic standards and programs will facilitate more effective initial screening of recruits as well as communication of academic expectations and likely academic experiences at MSU, especially in the first two years.

We suggest:

7. Recruits have an opportunity to explore and define their academic interests early in their academic careers. It should not be assumed that incoming students who have selected majors have made well-informed decisions. Further, students who enter in University Studies should be encouraged to declare a major before the end of their second semester. Existing university advising resources, including University Studies, can be drawn upon to assist student-athletes in making timely and appropriate choices.

8. Faculty and advising personnel in key departments be identified and meet with Department of Athletics personnel prior to each recruitment cycle to review procedures and progress related to recruitment. Alternatively, an existing university committee may assume this role.

II. Academic Support and Mentoring Practices

Statement of Guiding Principles

Supporting all students, including student-athletes, to meet their academic goals is the responsibility of the entire MSU community. Given the special demands placed on student-athletes, an academic support program within the Department of Athletics is an important ingredient of the Athletics program. The goal of academic support provided by the Department of Athletics should be to foster personal responsibility and independence. Academic support should
develop attitudes, skills, and the confidence that will enable student-athletes to succeed in their studies without needing continuing academic support. The mentoring program should contribute by helping the student-athlete to adjust to university life, learn about opportunities that MSU provides, and feel at home in the Bozeman community.

Defining Academic Success

Academic success within the Department of Athletics must be considered at program, team, and individual levels. Specifically, the NCAA places requirements on teams (APR) and individuals (progress toward degree) for which failure to meet standards can result in serious sanctions. Because student-athletes can remain in good academic standing at the university but fail to meet the NCAA requirements, the concept of academic success within athletics must be interpreted differently than for the general student population.

The focus must be on exceeding the minimum threshold of 2.0 GPA for eligibility. All student-athletes should be encouraged to strive for academic excellence just as they strive for athletic excellence.

Progress Noted

The Department of Athletics has hired a second Academic Coordinator.

Graduate students run the Department of Athletics study tables, and tutoring is available at those sessions. Student-athletes can also obtain individual tutors through the Academic Center.

Book scholarships now cover all required materials.

Starting this semester, all student-athletes will complete initial assessments of their academic progress and eligibility status. This should enhance communication among the student-athlete, the official department academic advisor, the academic support staff in the Department of Athletics, and the coaches.

Many academic departments now have one advisor who works with students who are athletes. The Department of Athletics conducts training sessions for such advisors, covering basic NCAA progress towards degree requirements and their implications regarding course selection. The Academic Coordinators monitor the academic programs of student-athletes to ensure that they meet the progress towards degree requirements.

The Department of Athletics has begun to develop a program that will provide academic support and career advice for student-athletes who have exhausted their eligibility. It has also increased the amount of aid available to help such student-athletes complete their studies and graduate.
The Department of Athletics revamped its Mentoring Program this year, based upon input from a campus-wide committee. This year’s program was more structured, with a monthly meeting for student-athletes and their mentors.

We recommend:

9. The University invest in significant improvements to the Department of Athletics’ academic support infrastructure – both staffing and physical facility. The current facility is too small to serve as a center of academic activity for a large athletics program. Aside from limiting programming and services, the small size of the facility potentially sends a negative message about the relative importance of academics. Despite recent additions, current staffing is still inadequate for providing regular advising meetings with all student-athletes or additional support to identify and support students experiencing academic difficulty. A long-term goal could be to have one full-time academic support staff for every 80 student-athletes, which would allow for an average of 30 minutes of contact with each student-athlete during critical periods. This must be in addition to personnel needed to track compliance with NCAA academic requirements. Academic support is a fundamental responsibility of the University and as such, meeting this responsibility through adequate staffing and facilities is an essential function of the university.

10. Greater provision of tools for college success (time management, priority setting, major and career counseling) early in the college experience. This is in addition to what can be accomplished in HDPE 105, and would best be accomplished through increased contact by academic support staff.

11. MSU, as part of its comprehensive retention efforts, increase data collection and analysis to better understand the impediments to success faced by all students. Such analysis, if completed for student-athletes and the general population, would support more strategic decision-making regarding academic support initiatives both within and outside athletics.

12. MSU improve coordination and communications regarding university, college and department academic support services for students. This should begin with an inventory of existing academic support services to be publicized to the entire MSU community. An analysis of the inventory might suggest efficiencies that would benefit all students. With this information, coaches, assistant coaches, and academic support staff in the Department of Athletics would be better positioned to direct student-athletes to available support across the campus.

13. Student-athletes connect directly with each of their professors. With the additional academic challenges posed by participation in NCAA athletics, we view such
connections as critical. Specifically, we offer two suggested mechanisms: (1) Prior to
the first class meeting or soon thereafter, student-athletes should meet with each of
their professors to share their athletic participation status, competition schedule that
will create absences from class, and any other information concerning athletic issues
that may impact the student’s participation in the class. This meeting should be
during regularly scheduled office hours and not by catching the professor after class.
(2) Student-athletes should meet personally with faculty to get progress reports.

14. The Department of Athletics emphasize academic commitment/success among
student-athletes in all public communications (public addresses, news releases, web
pages, programs, etc.). Academic major or academic distinctions should be
presented as equally important as athletic statistics or awards. This should begin
with an audit of current practices including on-line player biographies.

15. Coaches incorporate class attendance policy and study group participation
requirements into the written rules for their sports to clarify expectations and
maximize academic success.

16. The University review its class scheduling and registration policies and practices in
light of its obligation to accommodate the scheduling constraints of students who
make significant time commitments to university-related activities. Colleges and
departments should be asked to review current practices with consideration of the
following guidelines:

- Required courses for which only one section is offered should conclude
  before 4:00 p.m.
- Mandatory additional class meetings (common hour examinations, for
  example) between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. should be eliminated unless
  alternatives are offered.
- A small percentage of morning and early afternoon slots in courses with
  multiple sections should be reserved for student-athletes who have
documented conflicts between available section times and such
commitments.

In cases where conflicts still arise, student-athletes and academic coordinators in the
Department of Athletics should work with assistant/associate deans and department
heads to resolve them.

Ongoing education of academic departments to emphasize the importance of
meeting this commitment will be crucial in securing appropriate cooperation. The
University must continue to monitor scheduling issues to ensure that student-
athletes are able to meet the dual demands of representing the University in their
chosen sports and making progress in their academic studies. Should significant
problems be documented and the above solutions prove to be insufficient, the
University must consider implementing priority registration for student-athletes.
17. The Director of Athletics, with input from coaches, staff, and student-athletes, deliver an annual “State of Athletics” address to the campus community.

III. Program Culture, Orientation and Induction Processes

Statement of Guiding Principles

The University should ensure that each recruit who enrolls has a thorough introduction to the academic side of the institution and has access to training that develops skills required for academic success at the university level.

Progress Noted

Student-athletes initially enrolling in MSU are now required to attend one of the university’s regular orientation sessions, and practice schedules have been altered to eliminate conflicts. The academic support staff in the Department of Athletics is also working closely with the individuals who provide the orientation.

The NCAA requires each football student-athlete to complete a six-hour academic orientation during their first five days of practice. This orientation is conducted by a faculty member.

The life skills class for entering student-athletes (HDPE 105) is now taught by a faculty member in the Department of Health and Human Development.

The Department of Athletics

Statement of Guiding Principles

Paraphrasing President Gamble, the ordered priorities for the Department of Athletics are:

1. student-athlete academic success and well-being;
2. adherence to NCAA and Big Sky Conference rules;
3. fiscal responsibility;
4. athletic achievement.

The Director of Athletics is responsible for adopting policies and creating an atmosphere that supports the above priorities. All Department of Athletics personnel are expected to support the Director of Athletics in this effort.

Progress Noted
The four head coaches most recently hired support the ordered priorities listed above. Now, all of MSU’s head coaches support the principles.

Currently, head coach contracts establish expectations in each of the four areas listed, and contain incentives related to academic achievement as well as to athletic achievement and championships.

The Department of Athletics has established the CATS program, which provides counseling and support for student-athletes who are academically at-risk. The CATS program includes mandatory attendance at study table.

The Department of Athletics sponsors the Academic, Life Skills, and Leadership Program (ALL), which emphasizes academic performance and community service. The department recognizes teams and individuals who excel in both areas.

The Department of Athletics hosts a dinner for student-athletes who earned 4.00 GPAs the preceding semester. It also sponsors a social for student-athletes who earned a GPA of 3.00 or above and their professors.

Each semester, the Department of Athletics has a mandatory student-athlete meeting at which a guest speaker addresses critical social issues such as gender violence and substance abuse.

We recommend:

18. The Department of Athletics hold head coaches responsible for maintaining the environment for a healthy team culture. This can be accomplished through a combination of the search and hiring processes and annual performance reviews. Contractual incentives must continue to match the established mission of the Department of Athletics and the University. The annual performance review can assess whether the coach’s performance is consistent with the mission of the University and Department of Athletics.

19. Coaches and staff regularly reference the team missions and the Department of Athletics mission and vision in its written and verbal communications with student-athletes, faculty and staff, media, boosters and the Bozeman community.

We suggest the following marketing and community relations initiatives:

20. The Department of Athletics and the University identify ways in which alumni and boosters can be encouraged to recognize, highlight and value the academic success of student-athletes as highly as athletic success.
21. The University further publicize on campus and in the community the Department of Athletics’ programs, including the ALL Program, and other initiatives to recognize student-athletes for the academic success and community activities.

We propose the following for consideration:

22. The Department of Athletics, with support from the rest of the University, educate boosters, alumni and other fans about how supporters of Montana State Athletics can best contribute to the academic, social and athletic success of its athletes.

23. Investigate methods for the University and Department of Athletics to respond more rapidly to controversial issues and events that arise.

24. Work, over time, to position the various sports’ offices in closer proximity to one another.

The Team

Statement of Guiding Principles

The head coach of each athletics program is responsible for establishing and maintaining an atmosphere that:

1. values academic achievement at least as highly as competitive success;
2. establishes an expectation of honesty, ethical conduct, and good behavior, both on and off the field or court;
3. promotes acceptance of personal responsibility and leadership.

Progress Noted

The current head coaches in football, men’s basketball, and volleyball have instituted mandatory study tables.

All teams establish team rules and expectations regarding academics and behavior. Football publishes a handbook containing this information and the coaches frequently review the rules and expectations with the student-athletes. Football also emphasizes the development of leadership skills.

APR improvement plans have been developed for the football and men’s basketball teams. Football now requires its student-athletes to enroll in at least 15 credits each spring semester, and has increased the number of scholarships available for summer school.
We recommend:

25. Every team establish written rules developed with student-athlete input.

26. Coaches regularly incorporate attention to character-building that reflects the desired culture and reinforces the team rules and student-athlete code of conduct. All student-athletes are expected to participate in these activities. Coaches should participate in the investigation and possible selection of a program such as the Winning With Character program endorsed by the American Football Coaches Association.

27. Student-athletes continue the current practice of reading, discussing, demonstrating understanding of and signing the student-athlete code of conduct.

28. All University and Department of Athletics personnel emphasize definition of our athletic programs as successful when we (1) educate and graduate student-athletes, (2) follow NCAA and other applicable rules, (3) operate fiscally responsible programs, and (4) field competitive teams. A winning program requires more than a winning team.

IV. Integration of Student-Athletes

Statement of Guiding Principles

All University personnel should help to ensure that student-athletes are fully integrated into the academic fabric of the institution. Student-athletes should take advantage of all academic support programs and social opportunities available to MSU students as a whole. The University should provide programs that help minority student-athletes adjust to the university and the surrounding community.

Progress Noted

The Department of Athletics employs a graduate student who is a former athlete and belongs to a minority. Part of this half-time employee’s responsibility is to help minority student-athletes adjust to the University and the Bozeman community.

We recommend that:

29. Student-athletes engage in community service activities, especially when those activities allow student-athletes to work along with Montana State’s general student body.
We suggest that:

30. Coaches act as models of the well-rounded person by pursuing activities outside of athletics and having a presence in the broader campus and Bozeman community.

We propose the following for consideration:

31. The University and Department of Athletics identify ways to involve a larger proportion of Montana State’s general student body in athletics (e.g., as spectators, as volunteers, as participants) as a way of lessening the distance between athletics and the broader campus community.

32. The Department of Athletics continues to explore models for connecting student-athletes to all MSU constituencies who can help student-athletes explore career options.

33. The Department of Athletics employee who is assigned the responsibility for helping minority student-athletes acclimate to the University and the Bozeman community should be full-time rather than the current part-time.

Closing Comments

The events and conditions that led to the formation of the One Team Committee resulted in the academic and social failure of some current and former Montana State University student-athletes. The University has demonstrated its recognition of the significance of these circumstances through its commitment to program review and reform at the university and department levels. To the degree allowed by law and policy, the steps taken were initiated with a high degree of transparency. Such transparency must continue. Our final recommendation is that through the Communications and Public Affairs office and other appropriate avenues, the University should regularly update the campus and community on progress made in responding to the One Team Committee recommendations.
APPENDIX A
The original NCAA report

APPENDIX B
The President’s charge

APPENDIX C
The NCAA eligibility requirements and APR summary page