

Note from Joseph Ballantyne, Professor, Electrical Engineering

I note that there is a resolution on Athletics on the agenda of the Faculty Senate meeting next week. I will be out of town and miss the meeting. However, I attended the presentation of the strategic plan in Call auditorium last month, and am not impressed by the arguments. If I have ever seen an attempted snow job, this was it. I believe the bottom line is that athletics is asking for a \$1M budget increase. \$400K would come out of the budgets of the statutory colleges, and \$600K from Arts and Engineering colleges, or about 8 faculty lines would be transferred to athletics from the rest of the university. Half the budget in athletics goes to varsity sports, which got the lowest satisfaction rating from the Cornell community survey. The highest satisfaction was shown by the community for intramurals, club sports, recreation facilities, etc. which involve an order of magnitude more people than varsity sports and spend less than half of the budget. Yet the focus of the added program would be to improve the win-loss record of varsity athletics by paying coaches higher salaries, better uniforms, better intercession benefits for team athletes, and a request for a modified admissions process that would benefit varsity sports (The major sports -- football and basketball -- already have the lowest academic performance of all varsity teams, but maybe a rolling admissions process would be OK and allow one to compete better for excellent student athletes which get early admission elsewhere), etc. The argument is that if win-loss records improve, so will alumni donations which will more than offset the cost. But no convincing statistics were given to show how much donations might improve. Such statistics ought to be available from other universities that have upgraded their varsity teams. An argument was put forth that Cornell's win record is near the bottom of the Ivy league. I asked a question whether that meant that Cornell's donations were also near the bottom (I believe we are near the top) but no answer was forthcoming. The argument was made that about 35% of donors were members of varsity teams. To me that does not imply that the only reason they give to Cornell is because they were athletes. (Were the other 65% of donors participants in intramurals, recreation and club sports, or couch potatoes?)

An argument was made that the recreational facilities are heavily used and need to be supplemented with a new, super Barton Hall with a 50-meter pool, many basketball courts, etc. I asked for the square feet of roofed athletic facilities per student at Cornell compared to peers (Maybe it should be per member of the community - raising issues for the fringe benefits pool?). No answer. (I believe it would be much higher than average, what with Barton, Teagle, Helen Newman, new field house, Grumman, Schoellkopf, indoor tennis facility, polo facility, Lynah, and who knows what else?) A complaint was that the university needed to pay more of the utilities - so why build more space that uses more utilities? An open question in my mind is whether we are on the threshold of constructing a second major athletic campus on North campus by the new dorms that will be constructed. There was no discussion of this issue. I believe there should be substantial open faculty discussion of the issues before a resolution is acted upon. At the meeting in Call Auditorium only about 15 minutes out of 90 were devoted to discussion, and many people who wanted to speak could not be recognized. I think we need several hours of discussion. Of those who did speak, no convincing answers were given to the issues they raised, although some vague points shown in speaker viewgraphs were clarified. I am not opposed to athletics, but think there are many debatable issues: i.e. the proper role of varsity sports, the relative benefits of high coaching salaries vs. professors' salaries (where we are also at the bottom of the Ivy League), whether PE should be required of all students (especially since many offerings are now recreation, and some are nearly sedentary) (and the swim test?), and how best to deploy any new resources.