Committee Members Present:

D. Barstow, M. Borkhuis, M. Georgian, R. Goodhue, E. Hajjar, N. Lacey, E. May, J. McCutcheon, A. Moore, E. Ward, P. Vittum, R. Warnick
Co-Chair N. Lacey

Guests: T. McDonald, J. Sarsynski, K. Stefanoni, Phil Buttafuoca

Absent: T. Anderson, S. Hazen, A. Moore, G. Richason, Co-Chair T. Schoenadel, JC Schnabl, L. Skesavage, R. Spencer,

I. Call to Order
Co-Chair Lacey called the February meeting of the Academic Year to order at 11:34 a.m. and welcomed guest speakers to the meeting. Council members and guests introduced themselves to the group.

II. Approval of the Minutes of January 31, 2014
Co-Chair Lacey opened the floor to discussion of the Athletic Council minutes from January 31, 2014. There being none, it was so moved by Bob Goodhue and seconded by Ed Ward to accept the motion. All were in favor of approving the Minutes from the January 31, 2014 meeting.

III. Meet the Coach: Kristi Stefanoni, Interim Head Coach for Softball
Coach Stefanoni provided an overview of her assistant coaches, Danielle Henderson and Staci Ramsey, her team’s roster and the lineup, the spring schedule, and early Classic competition- FAU Kickoff Classic being cancelled due to snow.

The softball team went was 1 and 4 in the NFCA Leadoff Classic with a clinching win against UConn that was great. The next scheduled tournament is the Louisville Tournament with opposing teams – Ohio State, Ohio, and Illinois State.

Coach Stefanoni is looking forward to the first home game vs. Boston College on March 25.

A question and answer period followed with the following topics: outdoor practice on McGuirk turf; the rehab process with 2 medical red-shirts; a discussion about the need for an indoor facility; UMass Softball Facilities leading the way in the A-10 Facilities with other schools improving with UMass as the leading benchmark; and a variety of recruiting question.
Coach Stefanoni also spoke on the smooth transition with her team after Elaine Sortino's passing giving all the credit to our beloved Coach Sortino who helped built the team over the years and how she effectively helped Coach Stefanoni transition over the past year before her death last August 2013.

Co-Chair Lacey let Coach know that all of the Athletic Council is in full support and rooting for the Softball team.

IV. Meet Gillette Representative, Phil Buttafuoco and Todd McDonald, Athletic Marketing

Phil Buttafuoco gave thorough presentation and review of the scope of the partnership between UMass Athletics and the Kraft Family and the use of Gillette Stadium that began through the generosity of the Kraft Family to partner with UMass Football. The Kraft Family sees the partnership with UMass Football as important part of the complex now with entities of Gillette Stadium, the Patriots Football Team, the New England Revolution, Patriots Place and now UMass Football. Gillette is a resource of the Commonwealth has a seating capacity of 69,000 and is the 9th busiest stadium in the world and the second busiest in the US only outdone by Met Life Stadium in NY/NJ that is home to two professional football teams – the Jets and the Giants.

Gillette is very proud to be partners with UMass Athletics and hopes to continue the relationship with UMass. Gillette not only wants to be seen as a place for football but for other activities – including lacrosse and high school games and recognized early on the potential with the Colonial Clash. The initial two games were a very positive force in building the relationship and the opportunity to have a mix of games – 3 at Gillette and 3 at McGuirk appears to be a great mix for the short term future and they want to see Gillette as an extension of the University to the eastern half of the stadium and our strong alumni base in the region.

Phil commented on the difference of staffing and the UMass vs Patriots game days and how this is beginning to evolve over time. He also explained how the typical game day is just not a game but a week of preparation and how the actual day of the event unfolds at the stadium. It is a large undertaking and requires a large number of staff and also involves a large number of our students, not just the players and the band.

He also explained how the preparation for the football season for next year is already beginning now with the two initial big games being our contests with Boston College and Colorado and then later in the season Band Day. He addressed flipping the stadium and making the stadium more fan friendly to UMass and the students and alumni and how it takes time to build awareness and the growth in interest at the larger set of activities at the stadium over the last two seasons. He hopes to continue to strengthen the relationship with the entire campus and the Athletic Department. Phil and Rod Warnick both serve on the campus Football Committee spearheaded by the Student-Affairs Department and the University External Relations planning for the upcoming season that has already started. Comments and questions ended this round of review and the
recognition of the quality of the asset that the campus has in partnering with Gillette.

Todd McDonald followed up Phil’s presentation with a discussion of the marketing activities and preparation for the 2014 season. Currently the marketing plans are focused on two major activities – seasonal ticket sales and preparation for programming games and games day activities/themes. The program now has four dedicated sales associates helping to sell season tickets for UMass Athletics including football and other sports (ice hockey, lacrosse, softball and basketball). Currently there are already over 1,000 season tickets sold or renewed for 2014 and the renewal rate for Gillette is 37% and McGuirk is at 41% and this compares very favorably to last year when we had no sales at this time. The most season tickets sold at McGuirk was just over 900 total.

Todd also explained that the transition to the new coach or returning coach, Mark Whipple has been extremely positive with over 350 in attendance at some of the Meet and Greets with Coach Whipple. Events are being held in Boston, Lowell, Plymouth, Gillette and here locally at ABC in Amherst.

The marketing plan was also discussed that included the parts of the plan including the budget, a review of the past two (2) years, a focus on more analysis with a greater push from just offering the programs to more transactions, the advertising campaigns that were designed to build awareness and now leading into a push for ticket sales as more now know UMass is playing D1 or FBS football, to now increasing the matching marketing expenditures for the return of football to Western Mass with three games at McGuirk, and to continued focusing on the game day experiences at both Gillette and McGuirk. Other comments shared included a higher emphasis on CRM (customer relationship management) with three direct contacts per season ticketholder a priority now; more outreach and engagement with the coaching staff including Coach Mark Whipple; use of current ambassadors to help in promotion and outreach; a strategic alliance with United Way and other non-profits; incorporating more holidays into the event marketing of games; and community outreach and involvement. Todd indicated that he saw the marketing program as a three-legged stool analogy with one leg being community relations, one being ticket sales and game experiences; and the last leg being media and public relations activities. Other ideas were also reviewed including family friendly activities and pricing and what happens as Gillette since it is a full day of activity. Other items included regular games at Gillette with both BC, UConn and the other New England based schools – UNH, Maine and RI.

V. Annual Report Status Update for the Athletic Council for 2012-2013, Rod Warnick, Secretary to the Council

Rod Warnick has just about completed the Annual Report and update the status of the Gender Equity and Diversity Report prepared by Jaime Seguin. With this addition and the final financial reports for FY 2013 and projected budgets for 2014, the report should be ready for review and approval either by email review or at the next Athletic Council meeting.
VI. Report from the Athletic Department – AD John McCutcheon

John McCutcheon reported the following…..

1. UMass 2014 Football Schedule will be released today at 3PM to the media. The games and opponents are set but the times are not yet final. September 27th will be the first home game at McGuirk and it also will be Homecoming. Two other games will be played at McGuirk including a November 12th game against Ball State on a Wednesday night and a November 28th game against Buffalo. The three games at Gillette including opening day game against Boston College on August 30th and September 6th game against Colorado. The other Gillette game will be on October 18th against Eastern Michigan and this will likely be Band Day. The final three games of the season will be nationally televised on either ESPNU or ESPN2 or ESPN3. The team will play two major away games on September 13th at Vanderbilt and September 20th at Penn State. All of the remaining games after the Penn State game will be MAC Conference games.

2. A10 Tournament will be held in Brooklyn again this year and if the team advances far in the tournament a reception may be held there and if not back here and likely at ABC in Amherst for the seeds in the NCAA Tournament. It appears we will get an invitation if the team finishes strong and the allotment of tickets for the first round is likely to be around 500 – 550 from the NCAA Tournament Committee.

3. Champions Center Update. Steel will begin to be erected on the Champions Center this coming week and it should be taking form soon. It is on schedule for completion by the end of the year with an expected opening perhaps as early as January 2015.

4. McGuirk Support Building and Press Box is still on schedule and there should be an opportunity to do a walk-through hard hat visit in one of the later meetings this spring.

5. Garber Field and Stadium Turf Fields will be replaced and are currently be reviewed for timing of the replacement.

6. Spring teams are off and practicing and play has already begun for some teams including softball, men’s and women’s lacrosse, tennis, and baseball will open soon.

Ed Ward moved to close the meeting. Bob Goodhue seconded the motion. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 12:54 p.m.