UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
OFFICE OF THE FACULTY SENATE

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

WHAT NEXT FOR THE UMASS AMHERST FOOTBALL PROGRAM?

From the 712th Faculty Senate meeting held on December 1, 2011

MODERATOR: W. Brian O'Connor

TIMEKEEPER: Joseph Bartolomeo

Rules:
1) Opening statements of 3 minutes each (for any participant who wishes to make an opening statement) – 15 minutes maximum
2) Questions from panelists to each other (limited to 2 minutes), followed by responses (limited to 2 minutes) – 10 minutes maximum
3) Questions from the floor (limited to 2 minutes), followed by responses (limited to 2 minutes) – 15 minutes maximum

PANELISTS:

MAX PAGE, ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND ART HISTORY, FACULTY SENATOR
MICHAEL SUGERMAN, ANTHROPOLOGY, PROGRAM AND BUDGET COUNCIL
RICHARD BOGARTZ, PSYCHOLOGY, ACADEMIC PRIORITIES COUNCIL CHAIR
CHRISTINA KENNEDY, STUDENT TRUSTEE, AND YEVIN ROH, SGA PRESIDENT

Senator Max Page opened the panel discussion by expressing his lack of tolerance for what he calls “professional college sports,” especially college football, which he describes as a sinkhole for both the University’s finances and its values. He presented two reasons why the move to FBS Football was a mistake, and why the Faculty Senate should attempt to undo the damage that has already been done. The first is that football is, and will continue, draining money from the core mission of the University. Some people call it insanity to continue banging one’s head against a wall expecting different results. Senator Page believes that this sort of head banging is alive and well in Whitmore, as the University claims—against the insistence of nearly every study ever conducted—that it will save money by moving to FBS Football. In a period during which the University has had its state subsidy cut drastically and has increased its tuition to become one of the most expensive public research universities in the nation, the administration has decided that the University needs to dramatically increase its spending on football scholarships, coaching, advertising and everything else that goes along with big-time college football. Senator Page believes it is practically criminal to divert millions of dollars from the desperate needs of students, faculty and staff. Of course, it is a free country, and if the administration wants to believe that football can bring in money, that is fine; but Senator Page would hope that they do it on their own dime. The second reason to resist the transition to FBS Football is that it will corrupt the institution. Senator Page believes this has already happened, as the first casualty of going into the football sinkhole is the truth. The untruths have already begun. Last spring, the Athletic Department presented spreadsheets revealing increased football revenues in the coming years. Those spreadsheets left out millions of dollars that the administration knew full well it was going to spend. Included in this money is the $1 million each year required to pay the debt on the renovations of McGuirk Stadium, $1 million to buy out the current coach’s contract and the many hundred thousands more to pay the new coaching staff—whose contracts will actually guaranteed much more money than their annual salaries. The University will likely be $3 million over the estimates presented last year. Senator Page feels sorry for the deans and administrators in the audience who know better, but must quietly stand in support of this move that is draining their departments’ budgets.

Senator Page continued by stating that “professional college athletics is a hungry and jealous beast; it demands to be fed and petted and scratched; it expects fealty; it grasps its power and spitefully behaves badly, knowing it has become too big to be put down. It only grows and grows.” Senator Page noted that he would later be putting forth two motions (in addition to the one published in the agenda). Underlying these is the idea that the faculty, and the Faculty Senate, need to take back their self-respect and role in governing the University.
Senator Michael Sugerman noted that he hoped to take part in a panel discussion arguing the pros and cons of the transition to FBS Football, but it was apparently impossible to find a member of the Faculty Senate willing to speak publicly in favor of the secretive decision to shift millions of dollars away from education, research, and student services and into the hands of a small group of sports professionals and organizations who will profit from their affiliation with UMass Amherst. That fact and the fact that the administration kept its decision to move to FBS quiet until after the contracts were signed, is telling in regard to the response the administration expected from the faculty, students and public. The administration, Senator Sugerman believes, wants the faculty to remain silent about the transition and get behind the NCAA-crafted press releases, showing support for what he believes is a reversion to the days of “ZooMass.” The University’s primary concern has become whether or not it can provide the football team a sufficiently modern weight room, and not whether it can provide the student body with a sufficiently critical education. Senator Sugerman noted that many present were aware of his opinions regarding the transition to FBS Football. He encouraged those who were not to reference previous Faculty Senate meeting minutes. He noted that he would not discuss his own opinions at this meeting, but would instead focus on the financial context in which the decision to move to FBS Football was made. Three weeks ago, the Daily Hampshire Gazette reported that University Health Services at UMass Amherst would eliminate 10% of its workforce, losing 21 full-time positions between this time and the end of the academic year in an attempt to save around $1 million in operating costs. UAW, which represents several UMass bargaining units, argues that the University is making enough money to operate UHS at a profit, but that the administration wants to shift funds from health care and into other projects on campus. Along with firing 10% of the UHS staff, the pharmacy and labs will be closed and sub-contracted out; money that could have gone to UMass employees and student health will now go to CVS. Hours will also be cut. UHS will stay open only until 8:00 p.m. during the week and only for a few hours on the weekend. Students pay a mandatory health service fee of $644 this year, and now they have been forced into a new co-insurance plan that will end up costing many students an additional $5,000 if they need healthcare. Given these facts, Senator Sugerman believes it to be stingy to limit the hours during which students can access UHS. Of course, none of the primary decision makers actually make use of UHS, so this is not an issue for them. That is not the case, however, for the ever-increasing number of undergraduates who actually pay to support UHS. Two weeks ago, the Faculty Senate passed a motion that allows departments and programs to levy additional fees on students for taking certain types of classes. That is not the case with football, however. Students that come to UMass to study chemistry or engineering must pay more; students who come to play football will be paid under new NCAA rules. Students have been disturbed about the reorganization of the Residential Life Office. The reorganization will cut many undergraduate student work opportunities, as well as the movement of Residential Advisors from out of residential structures. All this is occurring, again, under the auspices of austerity. The University doesn’t have the money, apparently, to advise or educate its students, but it has plenty of money to build a new press box and weight room for football players.

Senator Richard Bogartz stated that he is a football fan. He watches the Patriots religiously. However, he denounces intercollegiate football as brutal exploitation of student gladiators and as subversion of otherwise honest and decent coaches by an incentive structure that almost demands breaking the rules. FBS Football supposedly advances the University’s aspirations of joining the upper-echelon of national public research universities, as most other such institutions participate in FBS Football, and all flagship institutions in the prestigious AAU play FBS Football. Senator Bogartz wondered, however, how many AAU universities have their football stadiums 100 miles away from campus. At many of these universities, there are outstanding scholars that wear sport coats; Senator Bogartz then put on a sport coat, so that he would appear as they do, “thus improving his scholarship brand and commanding greater respect for his ideas.” He noted that this is the logic behind the University’s move to FBS Football: that UMass will appear more like the kind of university it aspires to be. Supposedly, the move to FBS Football makes financial sense. Based on projected estimates, the administration calculates that after a brief transitional period, campus support for the Athletic Department will be reduced. Senator Bogartz believes that terminating football altogether makes much more sense, and projections are unnecessary. MAC universities are large, state schools with strong academic reputations; they are: Ohio, Temple, Kent State, Bowling Green, Miami of Ohio, Buffalo, Akron, Northern Illinois, Toledo, Western Michigan, Ball State, Eastern Michigan and Central Michigan. Some universities that do not have football programs include MIT, CalTech, UCSD, NYU, UC-Irvine, UC-Santa Barbara, Boston University, George Washington, University of Illinois at Chicago, Northeastern, St. John’s and many more. Which university should UMass Amherst aspire to be more like: Ball State or MIT? Toledo or UCSD? Bowling Green or CalTech? Buffalo or NYU? Supposedly, Gillette Stadium, with its many amenities, provides greater opportunities for the campus to connect with alumni, donors, potential students and influential friends. Senator Bogartz questioned if there could really be a greater place for the campus to connect than on the campus itself. UMass Amherst’s nationally-acclaimed marching band will have a major venue for performance at Gillette Stadium, and it is claimed that school spirit will increase as students board buses headed for Foxborough. Senator Bogartz believes that UMass should create the UMass Invitational Intercollegiate Band Contest if it wants a venue for the marching band, which does not need to be linked to football, but only happens to be.
Student Trustee Christina Kennedy stated that she and SGA President Yevin Roh were asked to join this panel a few weeks prior to the meeting. They were under the assumption that it was going to be somewhat informal. As the discussion neared, they found themselves caught between the faculty and administration. She and President Roh have an invested interest in promoting unity and activism among the students, which could be witnessed in the large student turnout concerning Residential Life reorganization. There has been little concern expressed by students regarding football. She and the SGA generally take on high-profile projects, and they have heard much from the students on the topics such as a new Student Union, changes to Residential Life and the University’s Tobacco-Free policy. Trustee Kennedy believes that national excellence has two components: an enriching community, and academic excellence. Building projects like the Recreation Center and the Marching Band Building promote unity and serve as valuable assets to the University community. Students are excited to see a new stadium. A move to the FBS will hopefully create unity and community spirit. However, Trustee Kennedy cannot support an increase to student fees. She has been told that the money for football will be taken out of the Athletic Department budget, in which case there will be no problem. No concerns have been brought to the SGA about football. There has been much concern, however, over the Residential Life changes. Students want more input on these decisions. Trustee Kennedy noted that President Roh would explain more how student input was garnered concerning the transition to FBS Football.

SGA President Yevin Roh noted that one reason students attend UMass is to receive an education; another reason is to have their voices heard. He stated that democracy is a “living beast,” and the SGA listens to students constantly. The loudest voices were present at the meeting, showing solidarity in regard to Residential Life changes. He stated that there was student input in the transition to FBS Football. The Athletic Council’s seven student representatives voted unanimously for the transition. One member of the Athletic Council is SGA Council member Ben Johnson. President Roh noted that he is not a big football fan, but he believes that community and development are important for the University. He believes UMass holds itself to some interesting standards as a flagship institution. Its law school and medical school are separate, it has a separate honors college on campus (presenting controversies of its own), and its sexual assault policy is not clearly defined. Some of issues have simply fallen on deaf ears. He believes that the University owes the students an opportunity to have their voices heard. Not only when decisions have been made, but at every step of the way. President Roh believes that student leaders can speak on behalf of students, but that the students own voices are plenty strong. Students haven’t expressed concern to the SGA regarding football. Their concerns have been more about the changes to housing. That is the most important issue to the SGA right now. President Roh believes that the only battles worth fighting are those that can be won, and those that are worth fighting. He believes that the University has changed much recently—both with and without student input. He hopes that the University will make decisions in the spirit of democracy. Unlike the transition to FBS Football, the changes in housing programs have not involved any student input. RHA, SGA, and the Peer Mentors were not consulted about the changes in housing programs. President Roh hopes that this will change. He has been told that he needs to communicate better at times, but he holds the administration to the same standard. He is tired of being “adjusted to a sick society, because it is no good measure of the University’s health.” He thanked the students for coming to the meeting and taking democracy into their own hands. He hopes that the administration will be able to see the Venn diagram that unites issues around campus. He asked the students present if they cared more about football or administrative transparency, football or student jobs, football or first-year students “being screwed over.”

Senator Bogartz began the question period by asking Senator Page to comment on the relationship between the economics of football and the economics of the student jobs being removed.

Senator Page stated that they are directly connected. There is not enough money to run the University the way it should be. The state has been steadily cutting back on its commitment to having a public research university. This leaves choices to be made. When the administration chooses to direct millions of dollars immediately to football, it is no accident that then there are cuts to the residential programs, to student jobs, and to UHS. Football is taking millions of dollars now, and it will not get better. This University values facts and evidence, and study after study shows that athletics becomes a sinkhole for money. Senator Page believes that tuition and fees will be raised, jobs will be cut, and departments will be squeezed to fund athletics.

Trustee Kennedy stated that revenue needs to be created because the state will continue to cut its funding to the University. Her understanding is that there will be an increase in spending during the transitional period, but after four or five years football will be generating revenue that will be beneficial to the University.

Senator Bogartz stated that that is not true.

Senator Sugerman noted that the University community likes to think of itself as a community of scholars. Scholars engage in research and generate data to be assessed and interpreted. Over the past 20 years, a series of in-depth investigations have taken place studying institutions with big athletic programs. The NCAA repeatedly tells these institutions that they should join them.
and make more money. It never happens—over and over again. Of the over 100 teams that participate in FBS Football, only a handful make any money. New NCAA regulations will make it even more unlikely that any teams but those at the very top will bring in any money. Of course, it is possible to find the alternative study, which Senator Sugerman compared to the 1% of doctors who claim that smoking does not cause cancer. The NCAA has commissioned a number of studies that attempt to prove that college athletics are profitable. Any competent accountant can reveal how that money is made: generally by taking money away from other programs on campus.

Senator Page asked Senator Bogartz if he thought that the water and the air in Amherst produced a difference in moral calculus that would prevent scandals such as those that occurred at Penn State, Syracuse, Florida A & M, or Miami from taking place at UMass.

Senator Bogartz believes that people work in accordance with incentives. When an incentive structure is introduced that promotes immorality, people will be torn between their moral convictions and their incentives. When their jobs depend on taking certain actions, they will be more likely to justify and rationalize immoral behavior. Senator Bogartz further believes that people behave in accordance “with their gut” and then rationalize their behavior. He is not surprised that immoral behavior takes place in college football. The previous coach of UMass had about a 50/50 record, which was not deemed good enough, so he was fired. Senator Bogartz believes that he was probably not winning enough because he was playing honestly and playing the game straight.

SGA President Roh asked if the lack of morality brought up by Senators Page and Bogartz was a reference to the recent sexual abuse and hazing scandals at some of the mentioned universities.

Senator Page answered by stating that his leading question was to make the point that scandal after scandal takes place surrounding college football. UMass has had its own athletic scandals in the past and Senator Page believes that these endeavors simply breed scandal. Beyond the economic problem of football (spending money that could be spent on teaching and research on football), he believes that the poor behavior that has surrounded big-time college athletics should not be ignored.

SGA President Roh stated that he would never excuse such injustices or atrocities, but he thinks it is problematic to directly correlate sexual abuse and hazing to any certain sporting culture. He believes that these problems are much more prevalent in our society in other ways. An admitted rapist was allowed to live on the UMass campus and graduate. Hazing is a problem in fraternities and sororities as well as in sporting cultures. President Roh believes we would be lying to ourselves if we thought that any one of these organizations had a monopoly on insidious behavior. What is happening at the institutions mentioned and our own is indicative of the rape culture of the United States. Each and every one of us is responsible as members of the community. President Roh admitted to being a “gender studies nerd” and stated that the mentioned poor behavior is prominent in places where hegemonic masculinity is at its peak. The University has many programs to address high-risk behavior. The BASICS program is a model program for reducing high-risk binge drinking. Moreover, the University has great peer-help programs. The University is not immune to rape culture, but it has programs addressing it for what it is: hegemonic behavior, and not something that sports or Greek life has a monopoly on.

Trustee Kennedy asked the panelists if they believed it to be fiscally responsible for the University to remain in FCS, where revenue cannot be generated and no further scholarships would be offered to female athletes.

Senator Bogartz stated that thinking of the University’s options as either staying in FCS or joining FBS is creating the wrong dichotomy. There is also the option to get out of football altogether. Getting out of football altogether will save a lot more money than either of the other options.

Senator Page noted that there were handouts in the back of the room that revealed the millions of extra dollars the transition to FBS would cost that were not part of the initial pro forma. There was never a community conversation about the decision to move to FBS. Maybe the community would have decided that going to big-time college football was the right choice, but most members of the community heard about the move in the newspaper. Schools like Northeastern decided to simply get out of football. The notion that getting big-time football will transform UMass into Berkeley is illogical.

Randall Phillis, President of the Massachusetts Society of Professors, thanked the present students for voting with their feet and for their great spirit of politeness. He was very proud of the turnout. Concerning the recent sporting scandals, President Phillis was most concerned by the idea that the cover-ups surrounding those scandals were completely about “protecting the brand” of the universities. At Penn State and Syracuse, you cannot speak ill of “the brand.” This problem has been at UMass in the past,
when you were not allowed to speak ill of the UMass basketball brand, which had to forfeit an entire season due to misbehavior. President Phillis believes that there are many other ways in which the community is admonished for speaking against University policies. If the community thinks that policies at the University are ill-advised, community members should have the right and privilege and intent—and should, in fact, be obliged—to speak out against them. He wonders how the truth can be protected if building the brand is the foremost goal of the University.

Senator Bogartz confessed that he is ashamed of himself for not “hootling and hollering and booing and yelling” the first time he heard someone talk about branding the University, which appears to be pure public relations positing and is antithetical to his conception of what a university should be.

An anonymous student asked if increased research could increase revenue in a similar way to moving from FCS to FBS.

Senator Page said that research might increase revenue, but believes that, as a public research university, UMass should be funded by public dollars—as it once was. There is a reason that the nation chose to have public services such as schools. There is something valuable about removing institutions from the market. While research can garner revenue, Senator Page believes it is dangerous to focus too much on making money. It is more important to argue that public universities should be publicly funded.

Senator Tobias Baskin agreed that this is an important discussion that he wishes would have taken place earlier. He believes that the problem of the fan needs to be kept in mind, because being a fan does something to an individual’s objectivity, as any member of the Red Sox Nation can testify to. The Athletic Council should be specifically mandated to have 50% fans and 50% non-fans as a way of increasing objectivity. Senator Baskin further believes that football will not be the dominant sport in the U.S. by the end of the 21st century. There are many reasons to think that soccer will become a more and more dominant sport, and Senator Baskin believes that UMass could become one of the best soccer schools in the nation for a fraction of the cost of moving up to FBS Football. The University could derive much prestige from soccer right in Amherst. Finally, Senator Baskin stated that football is inherently discriminatory. Women do not play football. At an earlier meeting, Senator Baskin brought up this same issue, and Athletic Director John McCutcheon said that it was not true because, by Title IX mandate, for every dollar spent on football, a dollar is spent on women’s sports. Senator Baskin believes this is exactly the doctrine of “separate but equal.” The history of the Civil Rights Movement clearly shows that this doctrine does not work. He does not want to derive prestige from a sport that half of the student body does not play.

Senator Page noted that he was a seven-letter athlete and he sometimes plays squash with Provost Staros. The faculty are not, by and large, against the idea of sports or even the idea that sports are a part of college life. What he and many of the faculty are against is professionalized college sports that time and again lead to economic and moral problems at universities.

Annie McNeal, Student and Peer Mentor, shared her UMass story. When she entered the University as a freshman, she was lost and suffering from depression. Her Peer Mentor saved her life. Because her Peer Mentor cared, helped Ms. McNeal pick classes, and talked to her when no one else would, Ms. McNeal is now graduating with highest honors and going to seminary to become a pastor. It is also because of her Peer Mentor that Ms. McNeal chose to become a Peer Mentor herself. She has helped countless residents, some of whom are concerned they will not have a Peer Mentor after she graduates. Ms. McNeal has assured them that they would have a Peer Mentor in the future. She believes that the cuts that will remove Peer Mentors from residential education are appalling.

Presiding Officer O’Connor asked that, during the Committee of the Whole portion of the meeting, questions and comments be restricted to those concerning football, the topic of the Committee.

Senator Sugerman noted that Ms. McNeal’s comments were, in fact, related to football. The fiscal cuts taking place across the University—at UHS, Res life—and the new fees being considered are, in part, to balance the additional costs to sports on campus. Money moves from one part of campus to another. The cuts are a part of football, and Senator Sugerman believes that the University is beginning to experience what has been seen across the country at institutions attempting to become a sports brand: they become a shell of academia wrapped around a heart of athletics. The rest of the institution becomes cannibalized to feed the football monster or the basketball monster. Senator Sugerman hopes that all present keep that connectedness in mind as they make their voices heard around campus.

Trustee Kennedy thanked Ms. McNeal for sharing her story. Trustee Kennedy again noted that students served on the Athletic Council that approved the transition to FBS Football. Students had input. The reason many students were attending the current meeting is because they were not given a say in the Residential Life changes. She agrees that the University must work as a
whole. Trustee Kennedy stated that her role is not to push her agenda or take a personal stance, but to advocate for the students. She believes that the revenues that may be generated from the transition to FBS could mitigate the cuts taking place on campus.

Matthew Sheridan, Resident Librarian, noted that he may be the only person present who has lived in Amherst his entire life. He is a UMass graduate who now works for the University and he has followed the sports programs of the University his entire life. However, he could live without the football team. He referenced Senator Sugerman’s earlier comment about the small number of football programs making money, citing the data that shows that, of the 119 FBS teams, 16 turn a profit. Those are teams such as Texas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, USC—teams with established football programs for well over 50 years. Mr. Sheridan does not believe UMass will be able to be profitable in football. He can recall the days when the UMass football team was actually good. In 1998, UMass beat the powerhouse Georgia Southern. In 2006, UMass lost in the final to Appalachian State, a school Mr. Sheridan challenged anyone present to even find on a map. Even these successes were in a second-tier division. He wonders how UMass will be able to compete against teams that are far better and spend much more on their programs. The costs, as they now stand, are $30 million to renovate McGuirk and $19 million more to operate it—all at a time when the state continues to slash its funding to the University. Considering the cost and potential return, Mr. Sheridan does not think it is at all sensible to move into FBS Football.

Joe Needleman, Undergraduate Student, asked whether or not the students that took part in the decision to transition to FBS Football were indeed representative of the opinions of the student body. He wondered if they knew the costs associated with the move. Furthermore, he wonders if the lack of student opinions being heard surrounding the move to FBS is indicative of support or complacency. Does the student body care about this change? Does it even know about it?

SGA President Roh noted that he does not know all of the members of the Athletic Council personally, although SGA Secretary of Finance Benjamin Johnson serves on the Council. It is clear to President Roh that there are many different stories about many different monetary figures being thrown around about football. He does not like the idea of students being caught in the middle of a UMass civil war in which student voices are continually being used to legitimize whatever agendas there may be. President Roh noted this as an opportunity to become educated and encouraged students to reach out to members of the Athletic Council, including Mr. Johnson, who has an office at Student Union, 420. He noted that many administrators in the crowd were familiar with the issue and, given the circumstances, would likely be transparent about the issues. President Roh stated that you have to trust people to be experts in their own minds. Students are not stupid people. They are empowered individuals. President Roh stated that he does not have power because he is SGA President, but because he is a student and a human being. Students have a way of finding out when things matter to them. He cited the Tobacco-Free policy, the changes to the code of student conduct, and the solicitation policy. If ignorance is to blame for the student inaction surrounding football, President Roh encouraged students to become knowledgeable now. The contracts have already been signed for football. Students cannot fight it, but they can give feedback at every step along the way. He mentioned the online master planning explorer, where the campus community can give live feedback on campus planning. Considering what President Roh calls the “culture of slacktivism” that is so prominent, he believes this might be the best option for making a change. In direct relation to football, President Roh noted that the University does not pay a penny to rent out Gillette Stadium, but splits the sales of tickets past the 35,000 attendance mark 50/50. President Roh keeps hearing people say that the administration is “stupid” and questioning their motivations. He wondered what that made the students, if they were unable to beat the administration. There are intelligent people all over the board. He does not believe that people should be painted with a wide brush. It is paradoxical to complain about the bureaucracy at UMass and also complain about the administration as a homogenous being. He thinks it would take a bunch of tiny brushes to paint the whole bureaucracy.

* Gillette and the University will actually split 100% of ticket sales 50/50, not only those beyond the 35,000 attendance mark.