

## **MSU Student-Athlete Advisory Committee**

by

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Since 1989 Michigan State University has had a student-athlete advisory committee. Originally called Representatives of All Sports Programs (RASP), the committee was created as a forum for idea exchange between student-athletes, athletic department staff, and university administrators. Formation of this MSU student-athlete committee preceded Big Ten Conference interest by five years and NCAA legislation by six years. In 1991, the MSU committee changed its name from RASP to the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC).

### **MSU SAAC**

MSU's student-athlete committee consists of twenty-six representatives, one for each of the 25 varsity teams plus a student athletic trainer. The Athletic Director and the Faculty Athletic Representative coordinate the SAAC group. Meetings are conducted at least six times each academic year and are scheduled for approximately 75 minutes.

SAAC representatives are selected on a team basis through a process determined by each team's head coach. The Chair of SAAC serves as a voting member on MSU's Athletic Council and represents MSU at the Big Ten Conference SAAC meetings. A new rotational plan, beginning this academic year, mandates that the SAAC Chair be promoted from Vice Chair. The MSU student-athlete who attends the most recent NCAA Leadership Conference becomes the next SAAC Vice Chair. Other NCAA Leadership Conference nominees assume SAAC sub-committee chairs for the Academic Sub-Committee, Service Sub-Committee and Varsity S Club Sub-Committee. Recent SAAC Chairs include Leah Nilsson (Cross Country), Tyler Harlton (Ice Hockey), Dean Rugh (Cross Country), Sue Gibson (Soccer), Emilio Collins (Wrestling), and Damon Whitten (Ice Hockey). Current Chairperson is Ann Marie Kersten (Golf).

The purpose of MSU SAAC is to enable and enhance communication among student-athletes, athletic department administration and university administration. Although a primary objective is to enable student-athlete input, a secondary purpose is to promote a positive image of student-athletes to the university and surrounding community. Each meeting sets a forum for the group to discuss, propose and plan implementation of projects, legislation and community service activities. Also, SAAC members are often selected to serve on coaches' search/rating committees and as panelists and discussion leaders for selected topics. SAAC leadership, student-athlete members, the Athletic Director, and the Faculty Athletic Representative develop agenda items for each meeting. In addition, the Director of Life Skills programming and the Director of Student-Athlete Support Services make presentations at each meeting.

### **Big Ten Conference SAAC**

In 1994, the Big Ten initiated a conference wide Student-Athlete Advisory Committee with voice in the governance system of the league. The Committee is comprised of one representative per institution; except an institution with separate men's and women's departments may have a male and a female student-athlete representative. Regardless of the number of representatives, however, each institution has a single institutional vote. The Big Ten SAAC is expected to review and react to legislation and other topics referred to it from Conference constituent groups or committees on issues related to student-athlete welfare or life experiences. The recommendations of the Big Ten SAAC are forwarded to the Big Ten Joint Group Executive Committee. The Big Ten SAAC meets twice per year in person and conducts teleconference meetings on an as needed basis.

There are several Conference principles that relate specifically to student-athlete welfare and experience. These Big Ten principles frame the focus of the conference's SAAC efforts:

- The student-athlete is student first, athlete second.
- Student-athletes have the right to regularly prepare and attend classes and final examinations.
- Each student-athlete is provided the opportunity to earn a baccalaureate degree.
- Student-athletes are to be considered in the governance of the Conference.

Student-athletes and athletics department staffs are to conduct themselves with honesty, integrity, and sportslike behavior.

Each institution shall assure the fair distribution of resources, access to facilities and treatment of student-athletes and personnel.

Each institution shall provide broad-based equitable opportunities for men and women student-athletes, coaches and administrators.

Each institution shall protect and enhance the academic, physical and social development of its student-athletes.

The Big Ten Conference championship represents the culmination of each season's competitive efforts.

Anti-discrimination policies shall be applied to the scheduling and or selection of sites, venues or facilities for athletic practice or competition.

### **NCAA SAAC Requirement**

An NCAA guiding principle states that "...athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational welfare of student-athletes." Prior to 1991, student-athletes were not afforded representation at the NCAA's Annual Legislative Convention. Adopted legislation has since altered this policy so that any member of a NCAA division Student-Athlete Advisory Committee is entitled to attend and address the national convention. Each NCAA division SAAC is composed of conference SAAC representatives. The NCAA Management Council selects conference representatives from a pool of three nominees from each of the qualified conferences. The NCAA's student-athlete advisory committee has been highly effective, as illustrated by the success enjoyed in the adoption of legislation related to student-athlete's right to work, and earn money, during the regular academic year.

An institutional representative serves on the Big Ten SAAC to represent the views of the student-athletes on his/her host campus. Similarly, one conference representative is selected from the Big Ten's SAAC to serve as the conference representative to the NCAA's SAAC. Such representation is the result of a NCAA rule requiring that each member institution establish a student-athlete advisory committee for its student-athletes. The institution determines the composition and duties of each campus committee.

## **NCAA Certification**

The NCAA certification program is designed to ensure integrity in an institution's athletics operations and to assist athletics departments in improving programs. Legislation mandating athletics certification was adopted in 1993 as part of the NCAA reform agenda. The purpose of the athletics certification program is to validate the fundamental integrity of member institutions' athletics programs through a process of self-study and peer review. An external peer review team is responsible for reviewing the institution's self-study report, conducting campus visits and offering evaluative comments to the review team's chair.

A portion of the NCAA Certification process deals with student-athlete welfare and a validation of the campus SAAC. The popularity and success of SAAC groups has been impressive and institutions have fared well with respect to certification evaluation in this area. Many agree that student-athletes should have a voice in legislation that affects their lives and a student-athlete advisory committee provides such opportunity.