

April 7, 2022

Dear Minnesota Athletic Alliance,

Thank you for your letter regarding Gopher Athletics. We are proud of the success that our student athletes have achieved competitively, in the classroom, and in the community, all together representing our institution's front porch with utmost excellence and character. Particularly, over the last two years, the efforts of our student-athletes have been nothing short of extraordinary as they've navigated the challenging and complex circumstances created by the pandemic, while greatly contributing to each other, campus life, our state and beyond.

The Board of Regents (Board) decision in October 2020 to discontinue three programs was incredibly difficult and heartbreaking. However, as understandably painful and disappointing as this decision was for Gopher Athletics and across our community, the Board's action was not only necessary but also well-considered, resting upon a number of weighty considerations – some financial and some legal, as well as the judgment of the University's Athletic Director as to the best mix of program offerings given their different demands in what is a challenging time for intercollegiate athletics. Our responsibilities required us to assess the implications of an athletics budget smaller than many of our Big Ten peers while also fielding more teams than many of those same Big Ten schools.

That undertaking, in turn, required us to examine our compliance with our equal opportunity obligations under Title IX. Title IX compliance is complex, it involves much more than counting roster spots, and it is often misunderstood and mischaracterized. With the benefit of outside consultation and extensive review, we took care to ensure that our program judgments were shaped to fully comply with this federal mandate requiring meaningful participation as defined by law for all of our student-athletes, and alignment with ongoing demographic changes, specifically the increasing percentage of University students who are women. In fact, had we retained the sports we eliminated, Title IX would have likely found us needing to add women's sports (estimated at between \$5 and \$7 million additionally per year) to our program, an expense that the Athletics Department has neither the funding today to accomplish nor the long-term revenue to sustain. This fact was discussed multiple times during the debate over our decision.

In reaching its decision, the Board of Regents recognized that judgments over the athletic program offerings, business planning and financial decision-making, and a university's obligations under Title IX intertwine and touch upon significant issues that all Minnesotans care about. Decisions with those dimensions are often contentious. Accordingly, the Board of Regents took to heart its duty to weigh the competing points of view and reach what we believe to be the right decision for the right reasons.

Throughout this process we are fortunate to have the experience and judgment of Athletic Director Mark Coyle. Under his leadership numerous Gopher teams, including our top three revenue sports (Men's Football, Hockey, and Basketball) have seen record winning seasons, acclaimed coaches, and

record student athlete academic performance. In fact, academic progress for all of our student athletes has been a hallmark priority for this Board, the administration, and Athletic Director Mark Coyle. The more than 600 Gopher student athletes have a combined 3.3 GPA (first in the nation among public universities) and last academic year over 430 of our student athletes were awarded Academic All Big-10 recognition. We are proud that our student athletes set a high bar for all universities, and under Director Coyle's leadership, they aim to win, but win the right way, through excellence in the classroom as well as through sports participation. We not only trust his judgment, we rely on it.

The Board's discussion and action on this matter was also most transparent. This issue was publicly discussed by the Board, over two board meetings, with full access to all presentations (including video of Board discussions) by all members of the public. The October 2020 decision ensured that all of the impacted student-athletes would have their scholarships honored through the remainder of their time at the University.

In addition to the public meetings before the Board of Regents, and individual meetings that Athletic Director Mark Coyle held with multiple advocacy groups, Gopher Athletics also consulted oversight committees within our University community as to the proposed changes. Those committees include:

- The Intercollegiate Athletics Committee (IAC), which advises and consults with the president, the responsible senior administrators, and the athletics director on policies and major decisions relating to intercollegiate athletics at the University.
- The Faculty Academic Oversight for Intercollegiate Athletics Committee (FAOIAC), which is responsible for academic eligibility, compliance, and other issues relating to the academic integrity of student athletes. The committee works closely with the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost.
- The Intercollegiate Athletics Equity and Diversity Subcommittee, which makes recommendations to the Intercollegiate Athletics Committee regarding gender equity and minority opportunities.

There has been a great deal of conversation about Men's Gymnastics in particular. While we are all proud of our past performance, it is worth noting that in the 1960s there were over 200 Division 1 Men's Gymnastics teams in the United States. Today there are 13. No amount of analysis, over the last 60 years, has reversed this trend, a trend that while unfortunate, is undeniable.

Following our decision, the gymnastics program transitioned to a University of Minnesota student club status which still allows participation and competitive meets against other schools. These student athletes have had access to the same training facilities as previously and ownership of training equipment was transferred from Gopher Athletics to the club. While the nature of the competition has changed, the status of this club team, as with all of our student clubs, affords students a way to engage in their passion for their sport while continuing to excel in their academic studies.

The financial consequences of our decisions, whether with respect to Gopher Athletics or any other aspect of our statewide operations, are directly tied to our Systemwide Strategic Plan, MPact 2025.

As you can appreciate, that plan will find the University making a number of tough choices. We hope that you will respect our decisions and the great care with which we make them, even if they are not agreeable to everyone.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Kendall J. Powell in black ink.

Kendall J. Powell, Chair  
Board of Regents

Handwritten signature of Steven A. Sviggum in black ink.

Steven A. Sviggum, Vice Chair  
Board of Regents

- c. Members of the Board of Regents  
President Gabel