January 16, 2019

In the spring of 2017, the Arts and Sciences Council (ASC) voted “to create an ad hoc committee of the ASC to review the existing evidence of traumatic brain damage to college players of contact sports[[1]](#footnote-1) and, in the light of that evidence, to report to the ASC on the ethical and moral implications of the University’s running programs in contact sports that involves students in the College.”

A committee was convened consisting of Daniel Barth (Psychology and Neuroscience), David Boonin (Philosophy), Heidi Bustamante (Integrative Physiology), Claire Dunne (IRB Program Director), Teresa Foley (Integrative Physiology), David Grant (Mathematics, Chair), Joseph Jupille (Political Science and Faculty Athletics Representative), Matthew McQueen (Integrative Physiology), Mark Meaney (Executive Director of Leeds School’s Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility), Alastair Norcross (Philosophy), and Hillary Potter (Ethnic Studies)[[2]](#footnote-2).

The committee met monthly throughout the 2017-18 academic year during which time Barth, Grant, and McQueen were ASC members (Boonin came on in 2018-19 as Barth came off). After consulting the literature and various experts[[3]](#footnote-3), the committee unanimously agreed to the following:

1) We learned from our ethicists that when sufficient data exists, evaluating the morality of contact sports requires doing a risk/benefit analysis.

2) We learned from our scientists that while the health benefits of being a NCAA Division 1 athlete are manifold, too much is currently unknown to quantify its risks, so no such analysis can be done at this time.

3) That being said, the full committee recommends proceeding with caution in the face of uncertain information. In that light, we recommend the following:

a) That the campus should continue to support research on the risks of participating in NCAA Division 1 athletics, and a committee convened in the future to consider the issue again when more scientific evidence is available. We envision a committee representing the Athletics Department, student athletes, the community, and faculty, including those with expertise in medicine, science, and ethics, and the Faculty Athletics Representative. Indeed, our ethicists point out that as professionals, faculty have a particular responsibility to look out for the well-being of students.

b) In the meantime, that we protect our student-athletes with state-of-the-art equipment (where applicable) and provide them with the highest possible quality of medical care.

c) That the University employ due diligence to reach out to former student-athletes to make sure they’re getting the support they need, and to help identify other former student athletes in need of help.

d) The NCAA currently has a Concussion Fact Sheet that gets presented to all student athletes when they arrive on campus as part of its informed consent on the risks of participating in college athletics. Our committee recommends that prospective student athletes be presented with the fact sheet at the earliest point in time consistent with NCAA recruitment rules and regulation. We do not know when that time is, so we recommend that an expert on NCAA compliance perform an investigation to determine when that time would be.

1. The original mandate referred only to college football players. The committee determined that traumatic brain damage is a concern for players of all contact sports, and asked for and received permission from the ASC to expand the scope of its mandate. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As of July 1, 2018, Dean Potter joined the Arts and Sciences Administration, so by ASC rules could no longer serve on the ad-hoc committee and is not a signatory of this document. We thank her for all her contributions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The committee would like to thank Kathryn Hardin (Clinical Lead at the Marcus Institute for Brain Health, Anschutz), Miguel Rueda (Senior Associate Athletic Director for Health and Performance), Sourav Poddar, MD (Head Medical Physician for the football team and the Athletic Department’s Medical Director), Russell Bauer (Department of Clinical and Health Psychology, University of Florida) and Michael Jaffee, MD (Neurology, University of Florida) for helpful conversations. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)