

RUNNING HEAD: Gender Equity

Gender Equity Tuition Waivers: Examining the
Tensions in Athletics at Four-Year Institutions in the State of Washington

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State Granted Tuition Waivers for Gender Equity in Athletics

Fourteen years ago, the Washington State Legislature authorized the use of tuition waivers for achieving gender equity in athletics and in 1997 extended the use of these waivers indefinitely. This affirmative action policy for Washington's two and four year public institutions is a result of *Blair v. Washington State University*, in which the state court found that funding for women's athletic programs should be based on the percentage of women enrolled as undergraduates. At the time of the ruling all of Washington's four-year institutions except for the Evergreen State College were vulnerable to a similar lawsuit. This resulted in two laws passed by the Washington State legislature in 1989. The first law prohibited discrimination based on gender in student services and support, academic programs, and in athletics. The second law authorized tuition waivers to achieve gender in athletics (<http://www.hecb.wa.gov/eval/gender.html>). As a result, State of Washington higher education institutions have made sweeping and substantial progress in complying with state gender equity laws and the federal statute, Title IX. This unprecedented compliance with athletic gender equity has been achieved chiefly because of the gender equity tuition waiver program. However, at one institution alone, the policy has resulted in almost 12 million dollars in lost tuition revenue since 1991.

This paper builds on a previous evaluation of this policy by examining its application at each of the State's four -year institutions. In this paper we evaluate if the policy effective, adequate, and necessary in the context of each four-year institution in the State. In this presentation, the gender equity tuition waiver program will be described and a profile of each campus and athletic department will be presented. Next, we will surface two main themes that have emerged throughout our research on this policy. Last, we will evaluate each institution and engage participants in a discussion of recommendations for future application of the policy on a campus-by-campus basis. To conclude we will leave participants with the dilemma of the value of intercollegiate sports at six diverse four-year institutions in the State of Washington. Examining each of these institutions and identifying the unique circumstances of how this policy is implemented at each campus are important steps in continuing this policy in a climate of state budget reductions.

Are Gender Equity Tuition Waivers Adequate & Effective?

The gap between undergraduate female enrollment and female athletic participation has significantly closed since the authorization of gender equity tuition waivers (Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2000). "Particularly for reluctant institutions like Central Washington and Eastern Washington, the Higher Educating Coordination Board's steering [of its four year institutions] via evolving performance goals of gender equity has been adequate and effective" (Remick, 2004). At institutions lead by transformational leaders like Barbara Hedges of the University of Washington and of Marcia Sanholtz at Washington State University, "...the threat of not being permitted the continued use of tuition waivers by the HECB was not necessary" (Remick, 2004). In 1996, institutions reported that tuition waivers had been the significant factor in helping make progress toward gender equity in intercollegiate athletics (Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1996). As a result of significant increases in opportunities for female athletes, the Washington State Legislature rewrote the policy in 1997 and extended the authorization of gender equity tuition waivers indefinitely (Remick, 2004 & Stockton, 1997). In this presentation we present evidence of each institutions self- study on gender equity achievements, institutional data, the Federal Educational Athletics Disclosure Act reports, and

National Collegiate Athletics Association data to frame the context of continuing the implementation of this policy indefinitely at each institution.

Is the Gender Equity Policy Necessary?

At Washington State's four-year public institutions that participate in men's football, all athletic departments except for the University of Washington frequently operate in the red. Unlike the University of Washington, the other institutions have to rely on revenue from their general operating fund to operate their athletic departments. "The University of Washington is the only athletic department that [consistently] in large part due to its gate receipts operates in the black" (Olswang, 2004). For all of Washington State's four-year institutions that participate in men's football, a substantial portion of the athletic budget funds football. Men's football has no other female sport peer in terms of expense and number of participants. Simply put, the influence men's football has on how revenues are generated and allocated cannot be ignored. Without the gender equity tuition waiver program it would be very difficult for individual institutions to fulfill the requirements of Title IX and State of Washington Gender Equity Statutes. Except for the University of Washington, this tuition waiver policy has been necessary to achieve and maintain gender equity without reducing operating expense of men's football or eliminating other men's athletic programs (Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1996).

Roundtable Discussion

For Washington State's four-year public institutions the use of tuition waivers for achieving gender equity in athletics has been extremely effective. This policy has not only enabled gender equity to be achieved but it also has minimized the need to eliminate men's sports. It is a unique situation that contrasts the national trend of eliminating men's sports to increase opportunity and proportionality in women's sports (Brand, 2003). Excluding, Evergreen State College (who does not field a football squad), this affirmative action policy has given four-year public institutions a fiscal tool to strive for and maintain gender equity while not having to impinge upon men's football or eliminate other men's sports. If the gender equity tuition waiver program is eliminated or reduced, the costs would be directly passed on to the student in raised activity fees (Zumeta, 2004; and Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2003). However simply reducing or eliminating this policy today, will not address challenges of complying with gender equity in the future. As the lost revenue to tuition waivers steadily increases and state funding is decreased, both the Higher Education Coordinating Board and Washington State's four-year institutions should consider the tensions that exist between offering a balanced, equitable athletic program and declining state funding. The costs of the gender equity tuition waiver program and sources of revenue from football and fundraising capabilities of all sports programs should be evaluated in the context of each institution.

In this roundtable discussion we will present the evidence from each institution and guide the session participants in a conversation that interrogate two competing themes that emerge from this policy: 1) how policy ensures compliance with state gender equity and federal Title IX laws, and 2) how this policy should be evaluated during a time of reduced funding from the state and rising athletic costs. The goal of this session is to highlight these tensions at each institution and help participants wrestle with the unique value placed on football in higher education today.

References

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