

Gary L. Miller, Chancellor: chancellor@uncw.edu
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RE: Mens and Womens Swim and Dive Program

Dear Chancellor Miller and administrators:

We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned and strongly disagree with the latest recommendations from the Intercollegiate Athletic Review Committee Report to close the UNCW Men's and Women's Swim and Dive Programs. The report suggests that "substantial reinvestment is essential for meeting the goals of competing with national prominence," thus it was surprising that excellence in academic achievement and overall success were not included as important criteria during the evaluation process. This recommendation is especially ironic given the following statement regarding the leadership of the UNCW Athletic Program; "Bass introduced a comprehensive strategic plan during his first year and the Seahawks have embraced it with great success. Under his energetic leadership, the Seahawks won more CAA championships than any other conference member in 2011-12, and have captured eight conference titles over the last two seasons." Over half of these titles are in programs recommended for dissolution. We note, that the UNCW Mens Swim and Dive Team has won 12 straight CAA conference championships between 2002-2013, 9 swimming and diving coaches awards, 3 swimmers of the year, two divers of the year, three freshman standouts, five NCAA qualifiers, 56 NCAA B qualification times (2011-13), and most recently, five Olympic Trials Qualifiers between 2002-2012. The Womens Swim and Dive Team have captured three CAA championships between 1998-2012, finished 2nd in the conference four times between 2002-2013, and has 3 coaching awards, 1 swimmer of the year and 2 freshmen meet standouts since 2002. The program has 2 NCAA and two Olympic Trial Qualifiers since 2002. Both programs have achieved continuous high rankings among mid major institutions.

Academically, both Swim and Dive Teams are consistent CSCAA Scholar All American Teams. Ten swimmers - Steve Hewins (1990-91), Laura Doepp (1991-92), Deb Kresho (1993-94), Brendan Curl (1999-00), Tiago Barreira (2002-03), Michael Kraye (2005-06), Melissa Milstead (2006-07), Bennett Rainey (2009-10), Caitlin Kirsteier (2009-2010) received the Chancellor's Cup, the school's highest academic honor for athletes. Carly Tanner and Anna Munger received the Thomas V. Moseley Awards as UNCW's top student-athletes for 2011-2012 and 2012-13, along with several others in earlier years. Hewins also became the first UNC Wilmington athlete to earn a CAA Post-Graduate Scholarship, while Doepp was named to the GTE-CoSIDA District III Academic All-America team. Two women athletes, Carly Tanner and Caitlin Kirsteier are among the most decorated women athletes in the school history. Since 2002, many swimmers and divers have graduated with honors (33 individuals) or listed on the Dean's list over the past 10 years (>200 individuals), and many have gone on to professional and graduate school. Is there another athletic program in this great University that has similar accomplishments? Will these decisions ensure that all programs have opportunities to achieve national prominence? Truthfully, the committee has no idea whether the redistribution of funds will propel the remaining teams to national prominence. What is true is that several highly successful and prominent programs have been deemed unsatisfactory in a report that provides no scoring criteria or even how some of the metrics could have been determined in an empirical fashion.

Sports at the collegiate level should not only be considered as a commercial opportunity for a university, it should also be embraced for the education provided for the athletes that participate. Athletes are ambassadors that interact and represent the University within the community. It teaches more than just athletic skills, but exemplifies the importance of practice, patience, persistence, and pride. The discipline required for competitive sport translates into disciplined professionals who are invested in taking the time to do a job well. The UNCW Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving

Teams are successful paradigms of the model student-athlete; they are effective ambassadors that build bridges between the University and community. They engage the community via outreach programs like Swim School, they function as swim coaches for local summer league swimming, lifeguards to protect the public, big brothers/sisters for kids, American Heart Association blood drives, Stop Hunger Now, canned food drives, Salvation Army volunteers, Freshman Move-In Day and Breast cancer Awareness, Relay for Life, to name only a few examples of their active and long-term engagement within the community. Take some time to discover the academic and athletic passion these individuals have for this institution.

From the beginning of your tenure, you promised a vision for UNCW built on the University's deepest values. The UNC Board of Governors recently approved a \$1.2 million dollar increase in Student Fees to cover the reoccurring \$1.4 million budget deficit, prior to this student fees traditionally accounted for \$6.18 million of UNCW's ~\$11.4 million athletic department budget. Thus, student fees is the major funding source for UNC athletic programs, not revenue derived by sporting events (~\$600,000), the UNCW Seahawk Club (~\$1.1 million/yr) or other sources. Therefore as stated, it is apparent that the goal of removing several programs is to repurpose the \$800,000+ dollars in savings to other programs, thereby ensuring their prominence at the national level. Ironically, this redistribution of a modest percentage of the overall athletic budget would require the collapse of the University's most successful athletic program in terms of conference championship wins. Designation of how these funds will be repurposed is cryptic at best; there is no clear designation for how these funds will be distributed and used in the future. An explicit assumption by this committee is that more dollars will increase competitive success across the surviving programs. This cannot be further from the truth. An example is Florida Gulf Coast basketball team (FGC), which this year achieved prominent success and had an impressive performance in the NCAA basketball tournament. This was achieved even though total coaching salaries are ~\$175,000/yr, a program supported by a limited number of scholarships, and an Alico Arena that seats only 4,500 fans. Consequently, success does not track with increased expenditures, especially when this amount pales in comparison to the larger Division I NCAA Universities. Rather, the FGC story indicates that the most important components for a program's success are program-wide leadership, coaching expertise, and the ability to inspire, motivate, build confidence and believe. It comes down to a proven culture that draws in athletes that want to be a part of that culture. UNCW Men's and Women's swimming and diving embody this philosophy. It is supported by minimal numbers of scholarships and a recruiting philosophy that targets recruits based on potential, character, commitment and competitive spirit. Importantly, these athletes are then inspired using innovative coaching techniques that promote athletic retention, continued improvement, and the desire to learn and excel. Your statements indicate that "The University has had extraordinary leadership and enormous achievement and one of the things that we definitely want to do and make sure we do is that we build new initiatives on this foundation of strength." Take a closer look, UNCW swimming is a foundation of strength that embodies this ideal. Given your public statements regarding your interests in interacting with students, take the time to talk with the athletes whose aspirations and dreams are being shattered by this decision.

The report is incomplete and artfully circumvents the true problems behind the athletic department's budget woes. A critical examination of the Intercollegiate Athletic Review Committee's Report clearly indicates massive reductions in donations to the UNCW Seahawk Club, coupled with the repurposing of student fees to facility renovation. This facility renovation is a capital improvement and should not be considered to be a liability to the Athletic budget's bottom line. The university consistently has to maintain and renovate their building as that is a normal part of any operating budget. Revenue from basketball has also dropped significantly and most games see attendance numbers below 50% seating capacity. Not surprisingly, UNCW is last in total revenues, athletic expenses, expenses/sport, and expenses/participant. Since 2009, donations to UNCW athletic programs have experienced massive declines and attendance at revenue generating sports has decreased dramatically. It is surprising that

the committee never addressed these two critical failures that are so essential for program-wide success and budgetary stability. The Swim and Dive team is categorized as a nonrevenue sport. However, the Aqua Hawks were originally asked to provide \$20,000 each year to the athletic dept. to help cover scholarships. Back around 2008 the number was increased to \$25,000 per year, which occurred during the sports specific donation time in the Seahawk Club. Aquahawks always made this commitment, and oftentimes donated between the 25,000 and \$30,000 each year. In the absence of this sports specific donation period, we still donated \$10,000 to the athletic dept in 2012-13.

The report notes a booster program that is in disarray with inconsistent policies, lack of attention to constituents' desires and details, compromised relationships, poor outreach to the community and a critical need to rebuild fundraising relationships that are sensitive to constituent expectations. At one time, donations to the UNCW Seahawk Club could be targeted to specific programs, yet this option is no longer available to prospective donors. Has this decision contributed to the decline in donations? Alumni and parents are more inclined to donate to a program where they feel they have some sort of connection. Have recent changes in athletic club and program leadership disillusioned donors? Most of these losses have occurred since 2009. While the economic downturn clearly influenced donations in 2009 and 2010, a failing economy cannot explain the shortfalls in 2011-13. Who is responsible? Why has this committee ignored key facts showing that other schools are successfully fundraising over this same time period? How much time must pass before the current leadership becomes responsible for the current problems? Key leadership roles that are critical for Athletic fund raising include the Chancellor, Athletic Director, Head of the UNCW Seahawk Club, Head Basketball Coach, and then followed other head coaches and a variety of other key personnel in the Athletic department. A clear failure of this report is the lack of accountability in the current administration. If UNCW athletic program and administrative leadership is afraid to state and address critical failures, then the program is doomed to repeated failures.

Drilling down to the facts of the report, it is clear that the leadership in the Athletic Department firmly believes that additional funds are needed to increase the competitiveness of the flagship sports program, the men's basketball program. Anyone familiar with college sports is also intimately aware that the fate of the AD and Head Basketball coach are intimately intertwined. The athletes on the Swim and Dive team exemplify everything that is right with college athletics. They excel in the pool, in the community and in the classroom. Mr. Miller, you stated you have a 3 pronged vision for UNCW, a commitment *to the journey of learning*, a love *of place* and an unshakable conviction *in the power of ideas* and innovation. If you decide to cut these teams, you betray the passion, dreams and aspirations of the young men and women who have dedicated their collegiate experience to UNCW, perhaps for the ambition of a few who are clearly not meeting the obligations of their position.

We the undersigned are strong supporters of UNCW. We are passionate about the University and have donated monies, time and effort to UNCW sports. We love the University, its history, goals and values. We firmly believe that the swimming coaches have made an important contribution to the education, lives and character of our children, and are paradigms of University excellence. We know UNCW has challenges and we stand poised to assist UNCW in its time of need. Your statements indicate that you strive to be a leader who can articulate a compelling vision, and one who empowers people to work together to achieve that vision. This is an opportunity to reward excellence, character, and preserve a program that empowers people to achieve *visions of excellence*.

Sincerely,

The UNCW Swim and Dive Parent Organization
Lead Parent Representatives: Toni and Ralph Baric