

Something's Missing on Campus

by Carrie Lukas

College students returning to campus find a familiar scene: closet-size dorm rooms, frat parties, and questionable food in the school cafeteria. But on some campuses something is missing this year: men's sports teams.

Students returning to Rutgers University will find that over the summer the university cut six teams: men's heavyweight and lightweight crew, men's and women's fencing, men's swimming and men's tennis. Why did men's athletics take the brunt of what university officials characterize as a necessary cost-cutting exercise? Title IX.

An Associated Press article explained, "Rutgers' commitment to Title IX guidelines forced it to eliminate more men's programs. The current female-to-male ratio at the university is 51 to 49 percent, [Rutgers athletic director, Robert] Mulcahy said, adding that the opportunities for women in sports must be within 2 percent of that ratio to comply with Title IX. "That means almost all the cuts have to be in men's programs."

Title IX was intended to prevent sex discrimination on college campuses, including in athletics. But this well-intentioned law has become a death sentence for many male teams. Colleges and universities see Title IX as a numbers game: The surefire way to avoid costly lawsuits is to have the portion of female athletes mirror female enrollment. Since college women outnumber men, many universities need more female than male athletes.

The problem, of course, is that women generally aren't as interested in sports as men are. This obvious, but somehow controversial, fact is seen in participation in recreational leagues, which are open to all comers, but are predominately male. Men also watch more sports and expressed a greater interest in athletic participation.

Unfortunately, common sense doesn't cut it for litigation-fearing universities. Last year, in an attempt to stop schools from sacrificing men's teams at Title IX's altar, the Department of Education provided guidance on how universities can avoid the numbers game and still comply with Title IX: A thorough survey of student interest can be used to demonstrate that universities are meeting the demand from would-be women athletes.

Gender warriors protested the potential use of surveys. They like the numbers game and don't care about its consequences for male athletes. Universities' perhaps reticent to provoke the ire of the radical feminists that champion Title IX "have hesitated to use surveys and instead try to make the numbers add up.

Universities have two potential strategies: they can try to increase female participation or reduce the number of male athletes. When faced with a tight budget or when unable to turn out more female athletes, universities often eliminate male teams. Rutgers is just the most recent example. Last year, Fresno State eliminated men's wrestling despite a pledge from alumni to completely fund the team. UCLA cut men's swimming and gymnastics, teams which had produced more U.S. Olympians in their respective sports than any other school in the country. In recent years, more than ninety universities have eliminated men's track and field, and more than twenty have cancelled wrestling.

Do men really have such an advantage on campus to justify so many cuts to their programming? A sober review of our educational system reveals that men are struggling. Athletics is one of the few areas in which men are more engaged.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly half of high school senior boys reported participating in an athletic team compared to one in three girls. But twice as many girls contributed to their school's newspaper or yearbook. Nineteen percent of girls compared to 12 percent of boys participated in an academic club. Thirteen percent of girls compared to 8 percent of boys took part in student council. Nearly one third of senior girls participated in a play or musical performance compared to just two percent of boys.

High school girls are more likely than boys to like school, find their work meaningful, and believe their studies will be useful later in life. Not surprisingly, girls are less likely to drop out and more likely to go to college. As of this fall, women account for 57 percent of undergraduate students.

Canceling another five male sports team won't make these statistics about men any worse. But certainly it's a step in the wrong direction, and another sign that university officials are more interested in pacifying the gender police than making higher education appealing to young men.

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