

MSU succeeds with its plan to achieve proportionality in men's, women's sports

MSU has achieved its goal of substantial proportionality among its men's and women's sport programs in 2004-2005.

Figures released for the 2004-05 school year reveal that Minnesota State has successfully implemented its roster management program for athletics and has achieved the established goal of substantial proportionality among its men's and women's sport programs.

Final men's participation totals for 2004-05 stand at 298 student-athletes, down from 333 in 2003-2004, while women's participation climbed from 223 in 2003-2004 to 300 in 2004-2005. The ratio of women's participation to men's participation improved 10.1 percent from the previous year, with 50.2 percent of the 598 total student-athletes involved in the 12 women's sports programs, while 49.9 percent competed for the 11 men's teams. Complete Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) data will be submitted by the institution later this fall as required by the federal government.

"Our institutional commitment to Title IX and gender equity is unwavering," MSU President Richard Davenport said. "I'm proud of the turnaround in our participation numbers this first year. We have followed through on every one of the last year's audit recommendations from the system office. We intend to sustain these efforts and to ensure our continued compliance."

The audit was requested by MSU late last spring, after an EADA report filed by MSU was discovered to have erroneous information that incorrectly reported participation data. The audit, performed by the Office of Internal Auditing for the Minnesota State Colleges & Universities, concluded that the errors were not caused by any kind of malicious intent. After the audit MSU resubmitted adjusted counts for 1999 through 2003, and they were certified as accurate, along with 2004 data reported last fall.

The audit recommendations also called for MSU to change its reporting procedures to ensure that similar errors would not happen again, and re-emphasized a need to balance rosters to reflect undergraduate enrollment gender proportions.

President Davenport announced in July 2004 that it would change the internal processes to avoid future errors, and would train coaches and others who provide data for the EADA survey. MSU also pledged to develop a plan to improve athletic gender balance between men's and women's programs.

For men's sports programs, MSU's revised plan called for increasing scholarship resources while containing participation in an effort to focus on quality rather than on quantity. Reductions which resulted in "caps" in men's participation rates were distributed throughout the program, and were established at a roster consistent with the average conference size for similar men's programs.

Additional scholarships were also added on the women's side, to balance increases in the men's programs. In addition, several specific strategies were implemented to bolster participation rates in women's programs. Women's bowling became the 23rd Maverick sport program in the overall portfolio, and the first intercollegiate program of its kind in the state. The program added eight new women to the total, with longer-term goals of as many as 15 women eventually. The retention of the men's swimming program, plus the return of a full-time head coach, prompted women's swimming numbers to climb from 26 to 34. The women's running programs were also targeted for growth. Propelled by an increased operating budget, additional grants-in-aid, and a new full-time assistant coach, a total of 40 athletes were added in cross country, indoor and outdoor track.

"I am encouraged by the progress that was made this first year," said Dean Trauger, Vice-President for Finance & Administration. "The programs where we made an investment and had targeted growth were able to achieve established goals. We also had a very successful year from a competitive standpoint, so it doesn't appear as though the roster management plan was any sort of encumbrance to our sports teams. It looks like we have come up with a solution that can work for everyone."

Despite success in meeting its roster management goals, the department aspires for future improvements, especially in the area of long-term student-athlete retention. Participation counts in all sports are measured on the first date of competition, but the end-of-season roster counts dipped in some sports, particularly on the women's side. For example, softball had a count of 24 student-athletes at the beginning of the fall season. But the roster dwindled to just 13 players at the mid-point of the spring due to a number of factors, including attrition, transfer and injury. Efforts to improve in this area will be the focus of future MSU roster management plans.

"I am quite pleased with these initial results, and it was a total team effort that made this possible," said Kevin Buisman, MSU Director of Athletics. "The coaches and others in the department were absolutely committed to making these goals a reality, and I want to commend everyone for their dedication to this very important purpose. I look forward to our continued progress in this area."

Today's news comes on the heels of a North Central Conference announcement that MSU has captured the 2005 NCC Cup (emblematic of the top athletic department in the seven-team NCAA Division II league in which MSU owns membership), and the 2005 NCC Men's All-Sports title.

"The roster management program implemented last fall, combined with an increase in scholarship budgets and administrative support, appears to be working," said Mark Schuck, who led his men's track and field program to a league outdoor championship earlier this month. "As a coach, all you can ask for is a level playing field, and I believe there are indications that we're on the right track here."