

December 7, 2022

To: Jessica Cattelino, Chair, Academic Senate

From: Kathy Bawn, Chair, Undergraduate Council
James Bisley, Chair, Graduate Council

Re: Athletics Conference Realignment (Big Ten)

In a joint session on December 2, 2022, the Undergraduate and Graduate Councils discussed the Executive Board's request for advisement on UCLA's move to the Big Ten Athletic Conference. The issue was previously reviewed by the Councils' joint Committee on Student and Postdoctoral Scholar Well-Being, which invited guests from the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics to its meeting on November 15, 2022 to discuss the impact of the transition on the student-athlete experience.

At the committee's request, Athletics presented the attached report outlining best- and worst-case travel scenarios for Big Ten teams. Projections show that student-athletes across all sports would miss between 3-6 additional days of class per year, with additional travel days likely not spread evenly over the 33 weeks of instruction but largely concentrated in a season (i.e., a single quarter or mostly a single quarter). To mitigate negative effects on student-athlete welfare and academic success, Athletics identified various strategies such as encouraging enrollment in Monday-Wednesday classes when in season, so as to avoid conflicts with Thursday-Sunday travel schedules, and providing additional chartered transportation with increased wi-fi to facilitate study during travel. Other strategies included scheduling games at neutral sites closer to the Los Angeles area, and aligning trip dates across teams and schools (e.g. USC) to increase opportunities for shared travel.

Overall, the Councils worry that the Big Ten conference realignment prioritizes competitive play over the academic component of the student-athlete experience. While acknowledging Athletics' efforts to provide robust academic support for student-athletes, members felt that the proposed strategies may not be effective in the long term, and voiced concerns about unforeseen negative impacts on academic outcomes, should students have difficulty accessing required courses that are offered only once per year or on certain days of the week. Members and student representatives recommend gathering robust input from current student-athletes and alumni, representing a broad spectrum of teams, in order to best understand their experiences and concerns.

Members recommend that the Executive Board invite Athletics leadership to a future meeting to provide further assessment of Big Ten travel factors and academic impacts. Going forward, the Councils underscore the importance of educating faculty about the constraints and nuances of the University's relationship with student-athletes.

Please direct any questions to the Undergraduate Council Analyst, Julia Nelsen (jnelsen@senate.ucla.edu) or the Graduate Council Analyst Emily Le (ele@senate.ucla.edu).

cc: April de Stefano, Executive Director, Academic Senate
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