

DROPPING MEN'S SPORTS – EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN IN SPORT WITHOUT ELIMINATING MEN'S SPORTS

The Women's Sports Foundation is often asked whether it has a position on the elimination of sports opportunities for men as a method of complying with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the federal law that prohibits sex discrimination in educational programs or activities at schools and colleges that receive federal funds. This question usually stems from situations in which schools cite insufficient finances to add more sports opportunities for women, cut a men's non-revenue sport and use these funds to start a new women's team. When alumni and students complain about the decision, the institution blames the law (Title IX requires no such reduction in opportunities for men) and female athletes. The Foundation is not in favor of reducing athletic opportunities for men as the preferred method of achieving Title IX compliance.

The real problem can be simply described. Your first two children are boys. You give them everything. Their rooms are palaces of athletics privilege - full of every sport gift imaginable - gloves, balls, bats, hockey sticks, football helmets, etc. They go to two or three sport camps every summer. They play Little League Baseball, soccer and Pop Warner football. One becomes an outstanding football player and the other excels in tennis. Then, you have another child, a girl, and your income doesn't change. She comes to you one day and says, "Mom, Dad – I want to play sports." What are your options?

OPTION A: Tell your last born son (i.e., drop the men's tennis team) he can't play sports any more so you still have only two children to provide for.

OPTION B: Tell your daughter she can't have the same privileges as her brothers. If she wants a glove she has to go to work and save up to buy it. Tell her she can't go to a summer sports camp unless she earns her own money and pays for it herself.

Suggest that she sell cookies or get together with her girlfriends to have a bake sale (this is the way it was before Title IX) to scrape up enough money for equipment to play.

OPTION C: You gather the family around the kitchen table and explain to your children that your daughter is just as important as your sons and you don't have the dollars to provide the same privileges for your daughter as you did for your sons...but that you are going to try your best to give all of your children every opportunity to participate in sports. You tell your sons that it is important to share their equipment and all you have provided for them. You probably come up with a system where each child gets to choose one summer sports camp instead of each attending several. The family gives up spring vacation in Disney World and tightens its belt. Everyone sacrifices and each child makes do with a smaller piece of the pie because now there are three (the Title IX situation).

The solution is Option C. Institutions that are dropping men's teams are choosing Option A not because of Title IX, but because they are being terrible parents (educational leaders). The answer to Title IX is very simple: If revenues don't increase, then everyone must make do with a smaller piece of the budget pie. The NCAA and its athletic conferences are simply refusing to legislate lower costs and a lower standard of living for men's sports in order to free up money for new women's teams.

Men's revenue sports are issuing threats regarding their own demise if their budgets are reduced in any way. First, tightening a sport's budget will not cause this sport business to fail. Commercial entities initiate such cost cuts every day to eliminate fat, increase profit margins and satisfy stock holders.

Second, and more important, there can never be an economic justification for discrimination. No one should ever be permitted to say that I can't comply with the law because I can't afford it. It is the same as saying, "I should be allowed to practice racism (or sexism) if I can't afford to initiate a change in the way I live or do business."

Using an employment discrimination example, the analogy would be that reducing the salaries of all employees is the preferred method of generating funds in an effort to increase salaries for the group that has historically experienced discrimination. This never happens. Rather, the salaries of the disadvantaged gender or individuals are always raised to the level of the advantaged group. As in the area of salary discrimination, the goal should be to bring the treatment of the group experiencing discrimination up to the level of the group that has received fair treatment, not to bring male athletes in minor sports down to the level of female athletes who simply were not provided with opportunities to play.

Even worse, when an institution eliminates a men's team in the name of Title IX, such action usually results in the development of destructive acrimony, pitting the men's non-revenue sports against women's sports. Alumni of the dropped men's sport get upset. An unnecessary domino effect results in the development of attitudes antithetical to solving discrimination in the long run. Gains for the underrepresented group come grudgingly and at a high cost to the previously advantaged group.

The last alternative should be cutting opportunities for students to participate in an educational activity. Other solutions, in order of preference, that should be considered are:

1. Raising new revenues. Gender equity can be used as an opportunity to raise new funds in much the same way as the need for a new building is used to initiate a capital campaign. However, it is essential that there be a positive spin on alumni solicitations for this purpose like adding one or two dollars to the current price of all sport tickets "so our daughters will have an equal chance to play" and other similarly creative revenue solutions. "Providing an equal opportunity for women to participate in varsity athletics" is also an excellent theme for an annual giving campaign targeted to female alumnae and supporters.

The demographic shift in higher education toward increasing percentages of women in undergraduate and graduate schools must also be noted. These are future generations of alumnae. Any position which antagonizes a group of future donors to the institution is short-sighted.

Presidential or school principal leadership is essential. The institution has the choice of "taking the high ground" and calling upon alumni and supporters of men's sports to "dig deeper" so our daughters are given the same chances to play as our sons, or pitting the have-nots against the have-nots by cutting men's sports teams. At many institutions, the resentment against Title IX has prevented athletic directors from "seeing the forest for the trees." The result has been the adoption of less than exemplary solutions to a very difficult problem.

2. Reducing excess expenditures on the most expensive men's sports and using the savings to expand opportunities and treatment for the underrepresented gender. There are many expenditures in the budgets of well-funded sports which can be eliminated without having a negative impact on either competitiveness vis-a-vis other institutions or the quality of the athletics experience. Such reductions include: provision of hotel rooms the night before home contests, ordering new uniforms less frequently, reducing the distance traveled for non-conference competition by selecting others as competitive opponents in closer geographic proximity, etc.

3. **Athletic Conference Cost-Saving.** The conference can adopt across-the-board mandated cost reductions that will assist all schools in saving funds while ensuring that the competitive playing field remains level (i.e., travel squad limits, adding the same sports for the underrepresented gender at the same time in order to ensure competition within a reasonable geographic area, etc.).
4. **Internal Across-the-Board Budget Reductions.** All sports can be asked to cut their budgets by a fixed percentage, thereby allowing each sport to choose the way it might least be affected, to free up funds for expanded opportunities for women. This method is preferred in that it does not have a disproportionate impact on low-budget sports.
5. **Moving to a Lower Competitive Division.** At the college level, Division I programs can move to Division I-AA or Division II competition, thereby reducing scholarship and other expenses.
6. **Using Tuition Waiver Savings to Fund Gender Equity.** States can initiate legislation which provides for waiver of higher education tuition for athletic scholarships to members of the underrepresented gender, similar to the law adopted by the State of Washington. This legislation mandates the use of these scholarship savings to expand opportunities for the underrepresented gender. Such initiatives recognize that correcting gender inequities is an institutional obligation, not just an athletic department issue. There are other precedents for states to enact laws which confer financial relief in an effort to remedy widespread discrimination. The states of Washington, Florida and Minnesota have all enacted state laws to provide funding to achieve gender equity in athletics.

Unfortunately, at most institutions, it is easier for a college president to cut wrestling or men's gymnastics than to deal with the politics of reducing the football or men's basketball budgets. Simply put, educational leaders need to demonstrate better leadership and do the right thing.

There are several examples of legislative initiatives made by states in order to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Read State Title IX Laws and see a state legislation template that can be used as a model tuition waiver.