September 16, 2011

TO: Deans, Associate Deans, Department Chairs, Faculty

FROM: Warwick M. Bayly
Provost and Executive Vice President

SUBJECT: GradesFirst and WSU Student Athletes

The classroom performance of WSU student-athletes is something about which we can all be very proud – as a group they maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.95; as a group they graduate at comparable rates to all university students. Such performance, however, does not just happen. Rather, the progress of our student-athletes is closely monitored and the coaches are regularly informed of any issues that exist.

One of the mechanisms that we employ to monitor the academic performance of our student-athletes is a web-based program titled “GradesFirst.” This program allows us to collect academic progress reports from faculty in the fifth, eighth, and thirteenth week of each semester. During the fifth, eighth, and thirteenth weeks the Department of Athletics requests information on the classroom performance of a selected sub-group of student-athletes. This direct input from faculty members is vital to our attempts to ensure that all student-athletes are succeeding in the classroom. It is an “early warning” system that allows us to intervene in a timely manner and to remind the athlete of the consequences of their failure to uphold their academic responsibilities. Let me assure you that coaches at WSU take these reports very seriously and will initiate individual meetings with student-athletes who are not performing to the expectations of the instructor. But this system only works if faculty respond to the inquiry and provide the Department of Athletics with feedback.

Last semester during the fifth and thirteenth weeks of the semester, 928 faculty were contacted regarding this matter; 650 (or 70%) completed the reports and provided the Department of Athletics with the information that allowed them to determine if an intervention was needed. This was a marked improvement from the previous term (46% response rate) and the Athletics Department is greatly appreciative of your support. To maintain this level of support and success, I ask that you strongly encourage your faculty to respond to this reasonable request when they are contacted by the Department of Athletics this semester. They will be contacted via an e-mail with a link to GradesFirst.

Please know that all student-athletes sign an annual consent waiver for faculty to provide academic performance data to representatives of the Department of Athletics, and that GradesFirst has been approved by the university as a secure site for grade information. Thanks for your support of our students’ success.