

New sports management major in development

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SMU wants new head coach June Jones to succeed, and he will soon have a helpful tool to make that happen. The school is putting together a sports-fitness management and promotion major in the School of Education and Human Development that could be offered as soon as fall 2009.

The major would be the biggest undergraduate program in the School of Education, which is primarily geared toward graduate level and certificate programs. The program will also be offered as a minor, mostly likely combined with another major like business.

"Student athletes may find this of interest," said David Chard, the dean of the school. Chard estimated 20 percent of those who would take the major could be student athletes.

Jones said he didn't know much about the sports-fitness major, but thought the idea was a good one.

"It gives you more options," Jones said.

The lack of sports-friendly majors and academic restrictions has been a big issue for SMU as it tries to revive its football program. After the school received the death penalty in 1987, the school imposed academic standards on itself much tougher than the other schools in its conference. Coaches since then have complained they were unable to recruit the type of players they wanted.

Former head coach Phil Bennett didn't mince words at the press conference announcing his firing about the issues he had with the standards.

"This is a tough job, let's not lie about it," he said. "To say we're on equal footing with our competitors in a lot of areas would be a lie."

Bennett says the school needs to ease the restrictions on the hours of transfers into the program and diversify the types of academic options available. SMU, for both athletes and normal student transfers, restricts the number and type of outside hours transferred in because it requires a majority of hours toward a major be taken at SMU.

"Steve [Orsini, athletic director] knows it, Gerald [Turner, SMU's President] knows it, that to get this thing where it needs to be there's got to be some concessions made in a lot of different areas," Bennett said. "Both academic and financial. From start to finish - the commitment."

SMU seems to be taking action.

The school received between \$10 and \$12 million from boosters to hire a new head coach. Jones is reportedly receiving \$1.7 million per year, easily making him the highest paid coach in SMU history.

The creation of the new sports-fitness major is another way to try and change the results on the field; it is also a sign of a commitment from those in charge.

"That may be one sign," said athletic director Steve Orsini.

He said the facility's ability to raise and pay market value for a head coach is just one of many ways of showing a commitment.

"Looking at our processes here, whether they be admissions or transfers or broadening the curriculum - that's trying to be nationally competitive, not just for athletics though," Orsini said.

"It's going to appeal to more athletes than non-athletes and I don't want to lose sight of that. The trustees want this university to grow and that's why they're doing that, at least in my opinion."

Chard, like Orsini, emphasized the major isn't solely for athletes. He said other potential students could include dancers who want to own their own studio and those interested in working with senior citizens.

Chard said the school is currently developing the curriculum for the major with faculty that would teach some of the courses. Then the curriculum would be submitted to the Academic Affairs Council of the Faculty Senate. If the council signed off on it then the major needs approval from the entire Faculty Senate.

Next, the curriculum is sent to Provost Paul Ludden's office for approval by a committee appointed by him. Eventually, Ludden would sign off on the program. Final approval rests with a vote of the Board of Trustees.

"By offering another school, range in the curriculum to go, that helps broaden the attraction to student athletes," Orsini said. "And they get the education they want."

Orsini said the athletic department is talking with the provost's office and the leaders of the different colleges to keep track of possible changes to transfer hours.

"There's been progress. Is the job done yet? No," Orsini said.

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