September 26, 2014

To UC Berkeley’s Faculty, Students, Staff and Alumni

With today’s release of the report and recommendations compiled by my Task Force on Academics and Athletics, the University of California, Berkeley, is re-affirming the important role of our intercollegiate student-athletes, coaches, and staff in the life of this great university. Our goal in establishing the Task Force, a goal in turn shared by those who served on it, was to guarantee that our student athletes are enabled to take full advantage of the extraordinary educational experiences and preparation provided by our world-renowned programs and comprehensive academic excellence.

I want to express my gratitude to the faculty, staff, students and alumni who worked for nine months to review how Berkeley can best support the academic ambitions of our student-athletes. When I set the goals for the task force’s work, I stated my belief that our university benefits from a robust intercollegiate athletics program. I also insisted on the complementarity of success in athletic and academic arenas. I emphasized the need for Cal Athletics, as an integral part of our identity as a campus community, to be fully integrated into the broader life of this campus. The task force report not only reinforces my belief in these principles, it is an important component of our larger effort to build a stronger educational experience for all of our students, as part of the Berkeley Undergraduate Initiative.

This web page contains all of the documents related to the Task Force’s efforts. It includes a “decision matrix” showing that the administration is endorsing each of the 50-plus recommendations formulated by the task force, as well as the timelines for implementation. As you will see, these proposals incorporate steps which, when aggregated, provide a holistic approach to improving virtually every aspect of our student-athletes’ academic experience.

Here are a few important examples of the actions we are taking that represent a marked departure from the status quo:

- The Athletic Director will report directly to and meet regularly with the Chancellor. The Athletic Director will be a member of the Chancellor’s senior leadership team.
• A full-time Recruitment Coordinator will be hired to develop a new, comprehensive Recruitment and Admissions Program that will, among other things, provide for more faculty involvement. The program will also provide greater emphasis on academic factors in the recruiting process, as well as an on-going evaluation of the job we are doing in terms of academic support for athletes.

• Student-athletes will be incorporated into the revised advising program of the College of Letters and Science, in which all students will have a professional adviser.

• We will engage in new efforts to improve the campus’s climate, to ensure that every member of the Cal Athletics community is fully integrated into the social and cultural life of the broader campus community.

• Academic performance will be a central element of the annual performance evaluation for the Athletic Director and for all of the coaches.

Our Academic Senate, the body with sole authority over Berkeley’s admissions standards, is actively engaged in reviewing and revising our admissions policy, based on principles that we share. After a phase-in period beginning with the 2015-16 admissions cycle, we are together committed to develop a single, comprehensive undergraduate admissions policy. We will use the same process that is already in place for dancers, artists, musicians, and other individuals with special talents who both enliven our community and exemplify Berkeley’s commitment to nourishing the widest possible range of human achievement. This integrated approach to admissions will be linked to our commitment to provide the necessary academic support to all the students who need it. Our Academic Senate has released a detailed statement of the principles informing this effort, and I am committed to ensuring that these principles and the new policy will be implemented.

With the above in mind, I want to note that this report, these recommendations, and all that we do as a result, are directed at all of us, not just at our Intercollegiate Athletics program. While there were some serious deficiencies in the past, our review has confirmed that the vast majority of our student-athletes excel in every aspect of their lives on campus. And yet the report also makes clear that in some instances we, as a university and a community, have not adequately supported all of our student-athletes, nor have we created all the requisite conditions for their academic success. The changes outlined here are designed to provide a concrete commitment to all of our student-athletes. We have already made significant changes. Consider the recent academic accomplishments of the Cal football team – the direct result of changes in culture, climate, focus, and available support resources – as evidence for what we can accomplish.

When students do well in athletic pursuits, they gain a broader level of confidence and competence that translates into success in work and in life. We accordingly applaud the foundational role of athletics in Cal’s history and overall mission. The Task Force report reminds us of the need to provide the necessary resources, support, and oversight so that all of
our student athletes can take full advantage both of our stellar athletic programs and the extraordinary education we offer at UC Berkeley.

As with any complex endeavor, this is not something we can simply fix, forget, and leave behind. And as we go forward, we have a shared responsibility to make this work over the long term. We will not allow our standards to degenerate or our implementation to falter. Our Executive Vice President and Provost will work with me to oversee the detailed implementation of the academic recommendations contained in the report, while our Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance will continue to work with the AD to ensure that the IA program is financially sustainable. I will also work closely with our Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education to make sure that every Berkeley undergraduate, including each of our student-athletes, leaves Berkeley not just with a degree, but with the set of competencies and dispositions necessary for a rewarding, intellectually engaged, and meaningful life, thereby fully equipped to make the world a better place. We can and will achieve these goals, and set new national standards, through the same sort of sustained and meticulous attention to achieving excellence for which UC Berkeley is renowned.

Sincerely,

Nicholas B. Dirks