

On the Cancellation of Men's Track and Field at Clemson

Bryan Denham

In November 2020, Clemson Athletic Director Dan Radakovich announced the discontinuance of the men's track and field program (XCTF) at Clemson effective June 2021.¹ Men's XCTF includes indoor and outdoor track and field as well as cross country, and it has a rich history at the university: 23 combined ACC team championships, four Olympic gold medalists, 22 Olympians and 16 NCAA individual champions.²

Men's XCTF is also a program in which a comparably large number of minority athletes compete, and at a university with an unusually low number of minority students in general, the decision to discontinue the program seems counterproductive to statements about enhancing diversity. The situation has received widespread coverage in outlets such as ESPN, 60 Minutes, *Sports Illustrated*, *Runners World*, and *Sportico*, in addition to regional news media.³

Additionally, activist Russell Dinkins, who has helped reinstate track programs at other universities, has filed a federal complaint with the Civil Rights Division in the U.S. Department of Education.⁴ The complaint alleges that Clemson has engaged in an illegal act of racial discrimination by violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which states that no institution receiving federal monies can discriminate based on race, color, or national origin. State Senator Marlon Kimpson has also encouraged the university to reconsider its decision amid calls for an investigation into the reasons for cutting the program.⁵

In his letter, Radakovich stated: "Clemson Athletics periodically reviews our sport sponsorships as a member of the ACC and NCAA, and makes changes based on several factors including, but not limited to: competitive balance, gender equity and Title IX compliance, financial positioning, impact on diversity among student-athletes and staff, and local and national interest and participation in the sport. In this case, the timing and decision are not a result of any one factor, but a series of considerations." Acknowledging that athletic directors often must make difficult decisions, one nevertheless might consider several factors involved with this one.

¹ <https://clemson.tigers.com/letter-from-dan-radakovich-regarding-mens-track-and-field-and-cross-country/>

² https://www.postandcourier.com/sports/clemson/sapakoff-clemson-cutting-track-cuts-black-enrollment-alumni-bonds-kids-dreams/article_dc54838c-388f-11eb-b658-f3dafb6f69cf.html

³ https://www.espn.com/college-sports/story/_/id/30263520/clemson-ending-men-track-cross-country-teams; <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/college-sports-cuts-gymnastics-swimming-pandemic-60-minutes-2020-12-06/>; <https://www.si.com/olympics/2020/12/02/clemson-mens-track-and-field-cross-country-video-save-programs>; <https://www.runnersworld.com/news/a34619452/mens-college-running-programs-get-the-axe/>; <https://www.sportico.com/leagues/college-sports/2020/clemson-cuts-mens-track-1234616178/>; https://www.foxcarolina.com/news/clemson-ending-mens-track-and-field-and-cross-country-program-after-this-season/article_327ff4fc-1fa0-11eb-8012-8b989da5037b.html; <https://www.thestate.com/sports/college/acc/clemson-university/article246993362.html>; <https://www.wyff4.com/article/clemson-to-discontinue-mens-track-and-field-and-cross-country-program/34589998>.

⁴ https://www.espn.com/college-sports/story/_/id/30655868/complaint-alleges-clemson-removal-mens-track-racial-discrimination; <https://www.wyff4.com/article/clemson-universitys-cutting-of-mens-track-prompts-filing-of-federal-civil-rights-complaint/35386561>

⁵ <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/south-carolina/2021/01/07/clemson-hit-civil-rights-complaint-lawmaker-scrutiny-over-cut-track-team/4125995001/>

State and University Race Demographics

Beginning with the big picture, the following figures are based on the population of South Carolina in 2019 as well as Clemson University in 2019.⁶ Black students account for 6% of the student body in a state in which more than one in four residents is Black. Taking actions that stand to further reduce minority enrollment does not seem consistent with the mission of a land-grant institution whose “primary purpose is educating undergraduate and graduate students to think deeply about and engage in the social, scientific, economic, and professional challenges of our times.”⁷ Eliminating men’s XCTF would seem to reflect the unfortunate times and increase the challenges some students face.

Race	State of SC	Clemson
White:	68.6%	76%
Black or African American:	27.0%	6%
American Indian and Alaska native:	0.5%	< 1%
Asian:	1.8%	2%
Native Hawaiian Other Pacific Islander:	0.1%	< 1%
Two or more races:	2.0%	3%
Hispanic or Latino:	6.0%	5%
Non-resident Alien		6%

Title IX

According to the report at the back of this document, equity numbers at Clemson look good at the present time. Clemson has a 50/50 split between males and females in the student body, and the totals in the table reflect that split among sports participants. The form shows that 312 (49.5%) of 630 (total) participants are male, along with 265 (51.6%) of 514 unduplicated cases. Eliminating 47 male XCTF athletes takes 265 down to 218 (46.7%) of 467 unduplicated cases.

With random variation in mind, Clemson does not appear to have a problem with Title IX. Unless the university changes its admissions standards to move away from a 50/50 split, a problem likely will not arise. The university just set a record for applications, and it continues to admit more students. But if the school wanted to reduce concerns about Title IX, one approach would be to add more players to its new softball team. It currently has 16, and it would not be unreasonable to expect the university to field 26 softball players. North Carolina has 27⁸; Georgia Tech 23; Virginia Tech 24; Virginia 25; Florida State 25; and Syracuse 24. Women’s sports would gain 10 unduplicated spots, and judging from current fundraising efforts, it would not be fiscally irresponsible.

⁶ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/SC>; <https://www.clemson.edu/institutional-effectiveness/documents/2019/factsheet19.pdf>. Census data does not equal exactly 100% based on measurement approach.

⁷ <https://www.clemson.edu/brand/positioning/mission-vision.html>

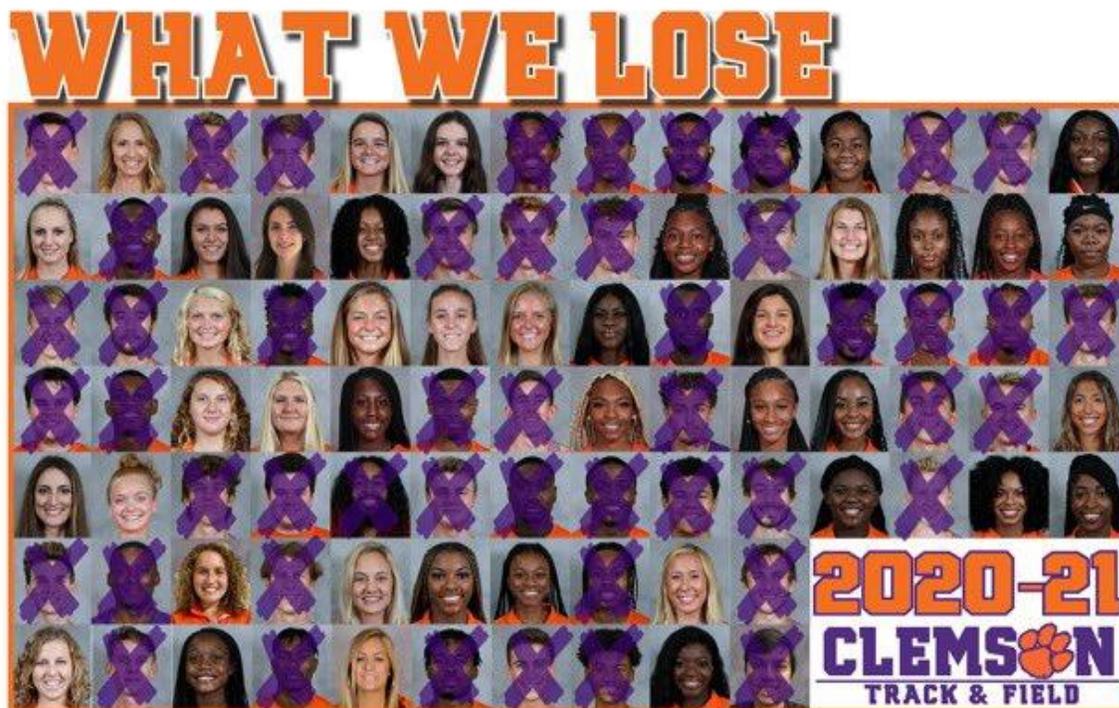
⁸ Information from <https://ope.ed.gov/athletics/#/institution/details>

Financial positioning – Record year for IPTAY

IPTAY set a record in 2020, raising \$73 million in spite of the pandemic.⁹ At its recent quarterly meeting, the Clemson Board of Trustees (BOT) approved new contracts for 17 football coaches, which included \$825,000 in raises. One salary raise gave Clemson two of the three highest-paid assistant football coaches in the country. His salary had been \$1.7 million per year (coincidentally, the amount of money it takes to run the entire men's XCTF program per year, according to a report in *Sportico*¹⁰), and his raise took him to \$2 million per year.¹¹ The raise for one assistant coach, \$300,000, constituted nearly 18% of what it costs to run the entire men's XCTF program in a year. Like Title IX, money is not an issue.

Diversity

Much of the controversy surrounding the discontinuance of men's XCTF involves the removal of opportunities for athletes of color. The concern is legitimate, and the removal is not necessary. It is removing opportunities for 3% of Black males on campus and making the university look both callous and myopic. In the age of social media, with high-profile athletes calling out Clemson on Twitter and elsewhere, the decision to eliminate a longstanding program is also unwise from a public relations standpoint. Below is a humanistic representation of who the school stands to lose by discontinuing men's XCTF, courtesy of #SaveClemsonXCTF on Twitter.



⁹ <https://www.independentmail.com/story/news/2021/02/05/clemson-board-trustees-approve-football-contracts-discuss-state-funding/4355431001/>

¹⁰ <https://www.sportico.com/leagues/college-sports/2020/clemson-mens-track-budget-1234616459/>; see also, <https://www.extrapointsmb.com/p/heres-why-clemson-actually-cut-their>

¹¹ <https://www.tigernet.com/story/Clemson-OC-Tony-Elliott-receives-raise-Tigers-now-two-of-top-three-salaried-assistants-19433?fbclid=IwAR3K3m6WeLwAhFnREzBCuSnP5rt5SJpgF3IUQDI-8Vu51bBrWXzcdslaAqY>

As Gene Sapakoff wrote in his January 12, 2021 column for the *Charleston Post and Courier*, “It isn’t Radakovich’s fault that Clemson’s Black enrollment is . . . basically unchanged over the last 30 years. It is Clemson’s fault that the track/cross country announcement didn’t come with a bold, new initiative designed to add Black students. Overt Clemson racism? Not guilty. Incredible lack of awareness? Laziness. Failure to read the room? Guilty on all three counts.”¹²

Further . . .

It should be noted here that the university is doing athletes and non-athletes alike no favors by continuing to operate as a predominantly white institution. The society students will encounter is a diverse one, and that diversity will only increase in the future. Students should be meeting new people and having new experiences. Inviting Magic Johnson to speak at a colloquium is nice,¹³ but if campus numbers do not change from year to year, what exactly is the point?

The athletic department also needs to consider the success of its programs over the long term. At present, it is consolidating its money and investing heavily in football, a sport that leaves some participants with clumps of tau protein on the brain en route to chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). If and when technology reaches the point at which the brains of living people can be examined for CTE,¹⁴ including the brains of young people who play violent sports, the brain damage on display will discourage more people from participating. Where will Clemson sports be when that time comes?

Ultimately, Black athletes have brought a great deal of accomplishment and exposure to the university, and the university needs to pay it forward with continued opportunities. If men’s XCTF does not return, it seems reasonable to request that individuals stop making empty statements about enhancing diversity at the university. This is not a decision a racially conscientious university would make.

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¹² https://www.postandcourier.com/sports/clemson/sapakoff-clemson-cutting-track-cuts-black-enrollment-alumni-bonds-kids-dreams/article_dc54838c-388f-11eb-b658-f3dafb6f69cf.html

¹³ <https://news.clemson.edu/clemsons-men-of-color-national-summit-bringing-magic-to-its-fourth-year/>

¹⁴ <https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMoa1900757>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/27/sports/football/cte-concussions-diagnose-in-living.html>

Benjamin White

Athletics Participation - Men's and Women's Teams

Enter the number of participants as of the day of the first scheduled contest.

Varsity Teams	Men's Teams	Women's Teams
Baseball	41	
Basketball	16	16
Football	122	
Golf	8	7
Rowing		113
Soccer	32	25
Softball		16
Tennis	10	7
Track and Field and Cross Country (combined)	83	117
Track and Field (Indoor)	36	48
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Track and Field (Outdoor)	36	48
Cross Country	11	21
Volleyball		17
Total Participants Men's and Women's Teams	312	318
Unduplicated Count of Participants <small>(This is a head count. If an individual participates on more than one team, count that individual only once on this line.)</small>	265	249

<https://clemsontigers.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Clemson-2020-EADA-Survey.pdf>