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By: Alex Pistole

After two weeks of confusion, President Penelope Kyle and Athletic Director Robert Lineburg finally addressed the SGA on the athletic cuts, and answered questions last Monday. Students have also offered an overwhelmingly negative response to the dissolution of three varsity sports programs.

After a Board of Visitors meeting Feb. 3, the decision was made to eliminate field hockey, swimming and diving, and men's indoor and outdoor track and field from the athletic department in order to allow the creation of a women's lacrosse team in 2016. The SGA had also met with the B.O.V. at this time, and were kept completely out of the loop on the cuts, until they were made public to the rest of the student body.

At the weekly SGA meeting Monday, Feb. 17, the group had the opportunity to discuss the changes with Kyle and Lineburg for the first time.

"It was a very productive discussion," remarked At-Large Senator Lee Hicks. While the SGA understands that any effort they could have made prior to the cuts probably would not have changed the B.O.V.'s final verdict, they were disappointed not to have the opportunity to set up support for the 64 athletes who lost their teams.

"Students will be able to maintain their scholarships," added Hicks. He wanted to point out that the SGA understands the anger and angst felt by many over this decision, and plans to do anything they can to help the athletes adjust.

"As long as their contracts permit, they still have access to the Dedmon Center and academic

assistance,” explained Off-Campus Senator Benjamin Brightman. This means that some student athletes who only had short-term contracts will eventually outstay their benefits. Some of these students, who had chosen Radford University primarily to continue their athletic careers, will want to transfer to a school which offers them that opportunity.

The explanations given by Kyle and Lineburg for the cuts made it clear that the decision was necessary. These particular teams were not competing in the Big South Conference, and issues with funding so many teams led to the tough call. Women’s Field Hockey is a rapidly growing collegiate sport, and RU’s new team will be participating in Big South games after formation and practice.

“President Kyle did say that prior to the cuts, we had an above average number of teams for a non-football school,” stated Brightman. The changes drop the number of teams from 19 to 16, which is the standard for schools like RU.

When the announcement was made a few weeks ago, many students voiced their opinions very loudly on social media and around campus. Some tweets were even picked up in local news articles at the time. The overall reaction of the student body was not in support of the B.O.V.’s decision, and a petition has been created by former RU distance runner Nathan Turner, via MoveOn.org.

While the petition’s goal is to have all three teams reinstated, it does not address the addition of women’s lacrosse. At the time of writing this article, the number of signatures was very near the desired 5,000 mark. This number represents more than 50 percent of the total student population.

“This is a disgrace and the AD should rethink why he took his job. He has done more to harm athletics than help,” commented one petition signer on the MoveOn webpage.

It is unclear whether the petition will make any difference, regardless of the number of signatures it receives. RU has already made the call and began preparations for incorporating the new field hockey team in to the spring 2016 lineup. Despite public outcry, it appears that the changes are final, and all who have been affected will have to find a way to deal with the reorganization. The SGA has vowed to help.

