

Official Position of the Student Senate with Respect to the Administration's Decision to Eliminate ESPN from the College Cable Network.

Prepared by: D. Koleva, President of the Student Senate.

Reviewed by: Current elected Senators (Sophomore/Junior class), Senators from the Senior class, members of the Executive Board of the Student Senate.

Advisor: T. Mottola, Associate Dean of College Life.

I. Background

- Towards the beginning of August, the President of the Student Senate was contacted by the Student Senate Advisor with regards to IT being placed on the Senate agenda for the first meeting.
- The Executive Board of the Student Senate was approached approximately ten days before the beginning of the academic year by students who were seeking audience at a Senate meeting to express their dissatisfaction and concern over the decision to remove ESPN.
- A meeting took place with representatives from the following organizations: IT, Student Senate, GBTV and the Gettysburgian on Sept 04, 2009. The following clarifications were made:
 1. This decision was made during the second round of cuts required of IT, which happened in the Spring 2009, while the first round was in September of 2008. The cuts were made as part of a joint effort by all departments to ensure the financial health of the institution.
 2. They contacted peers and had internal discussions with regards to the proposed removal of ESPN, however, did not contact students or any student-based focus groups. They relied on the feedback provided by the Chair of the IT Committee for the 2008-2009 Academic Year, who suggested that there is a general trend among the students to watch TV shows and TV in general online, and use YouTube more than before. This evidence was anecdotal rather than based on formal surveying of the student body.
 3. There was a more-than-double increase in the Internet Network Bandwidth. This was not provoked primarily by the decision to encourage watching sports online. The general goal was to accommodate increased YouTube usage and academic requirements.
 4. Additional changes involved the stationary phones in the all residence halls. Their activation now is not automatic and is done by request.

II. Open Student Senate Meeting

In order to provide more clarifications and answer interested students' questions, Rod Tosten, Vice President of IT and Mike Hayden, Director of Infrastructure and Computing attended the first open Student Senate meeting on Sept 7, 2009. Rod Tosten provided a brief background of the college's decision.

- It was established that the cost of providing ESPN as part of the college's cable package is \$34,000 per year and Bravo is \$4,000 per year. The cost of

all the channels combined without ESPN is about equivalent to ESPN by itself.

- There were 163 students present, which is substantially larger than the usual turnout. Other representatives from the Administration included Dean Ramsey, Tom Mottola, Jeff Foster, Morgan Stocker, and Lynn Burke.
- This is a sample list of the questions made at the meeting by students and the answers they were given:
 1. **Q:** Since we are spending a great deal on the Athletic Center why can't we spend money on ESPN? **A:** Budgets are different; ESPN will be in the Athletic Center in HD but these are two different budgets.
 2. **Q:** Why other institutions have other channels such as ESPN and HBO and we pay more tuition and we don't? **A:** Those institutions have a direct account to cable whereas our college does not.
 3. **Q:** What is the school's gain besides economic balance? **A:** Decreased cost of education and a balanced budget.
 4. **Q:** Alternatives as a whole[in terms of other possible cuts with IT]¹? **A:** ESPN represents a small portion (only 6%), so many different things were cut within the department.
 5. **Q:** Can the school cut budget somewhere else [spread the cuts unevenly to meet to goal set by the college]? **A:** IT was given a goal to cut and other divisions were asked as well.
 6. **Q:** Do we still have ESPN 360 online? **A:** We still have that and actually there has been an increase in the Internet Bandwidth to provide the students with faster Internet.
 7. **Q:** Will IT make it easier to watch TV online? **A:** Yes it will be easier to watch TV online but peer-to-peer sharing is still prohibited.
 8. **Q:** Tuitions increase this year and ESPN is gone - this doesn't make any sense (we are paying more for less)? **A:** The college seen increase cost alongside a decrease in revenue.
 9. **Q:** College considering individual communication with an outside cable network [outsourcing our entire network]? **A:** No, the college infrastructure does not permit this.
 10. **Q:** Is this decision going to be reevaluated next year or is it permanent? **A:** Looking at budget cuts in the future but right now college is still trying to get it together economically.
 11. **Q:** We were told that President Riggs will be attending the meeting and that is why we are all here - why is she not here to answer our questions?
 - **DK:** I have not indicated in any of the emails and notifications I sent about this meeting that President Riggs will be attending. However, members of the Exec Board and myself are going to meet with her on Wednesday morning and she will be fully informed of your questions and comments².

¹ Contextual explanation of comment.

² Comments made by President D. Koleva.

12. **Q:** Why wasn't the student body involved with this decision, maybe in the future it will be better to involve students in other decisions instead of being surprised with changes? **A:** Yes, we plan on doing that more often but there wasn't an opportunity to gather the student body for feedback. ESPN will be shown at the bullet hole, Junction, Attic, and online. But currently there is no option for 24-hour viewing of ESPN.
- **DK:** Feedback will get to President Riggs in a timely manner.
13. **Q:** Can ESPN be in each dorm? **A:** In each spot they put ESPN we spend more money when we are trying to actually save money, but this is an idea we are willing to consider.
14. **Q:** Students believe that the college is spending money on events such as a band in the junction and Attic events instead of giving the students who want ESPN and constitute a majority opportunity to view it in the residence halls? **A:** There were budget cuts everywhere on campus. Goals needed to be reached so budget cuts were made.

III. Follow-up discussion of Senators and Senate's Executive Board

- IT and other institutions on campus should seek student feedback and opinion when taking actions that impact the entire Student Body. The students markedly want to be more informed and active in the decisions that impact the school.
- Ask the college to provide the students with open access to the budgets cuts [bigger picture by department rather than specific individual cuts] so that the students see that we aren't the only one being impacted in the process of adjusting to the restrictions posed by the economic downturn.
- Overall, there is general consensus among the Student Senate that we will not take a unqualified Yes or No stance regarding bringing ESPN back on the cable network, but we will relay the opinion of the Student Body to the Administration and make sure that we represent the interests of all of our constituents – those who feel very negatively about the change and those who are neutral [this is how we broadly define the students' positions on the issue].
- Look into having more viewing spaces³ [the Commons is one example] for ESPN or have the spaces that now have ESPN be opened later [extended hours – 24-hour facilities] which will open up more work-study positions on campus. Also, we can encourage cooperation with various clubs who can host events and have fundraisers, while staffing the venue during the proposed extended hours.
- The Administration should take into account the potential for initial negative impact on student athletes in their application decisions in light of the change.

³ It was established in the day after the meeting that IT did the wiring for the TV's [no external cost] and the addition of the two new TV's have a total cost of \$2,000.

- The members of the Student Senate are trying to consider this issue not only from the perspective of the students who are upset and feel very negatively towards the change, but from the perspective of the entire student body.
- We have no means to establish in a statistically sound way what the true distribution of opinions across the student body is.

IV. Summary

After deliberation and careful consideration of our official position, the Student Senate has decided that we support all three statements listed in the attached voting rubric (Please, refer to Appendix 1). For the voting results, please refer to Appendix 2. Our official position is:

1. *If the College decides to maintain the decision not to provide ESPN as part of the College's residential cable TV package:*

Because ESPN is an important aspect of the campus culture for a significant number of students and serves as an attractive feature for incoming students, specifically prospective student athletes;

And the public venues where ESPN is available are all generally closed by midnight and have the potential to become overcrowded especially during peak hours of traffic during the day;

Student Senate strongly recommends that the College explore the possibility of providing late night access to these venues for student viewing of ESPN;

-on a regular basis;

-or, if it is not possible to provide such access on a regular basis, to explore the initial possibility of providing such access on a limited event-based/request basis. Immediate focus should be on the Commons Area in the College Union Building.

2. *Student Senate believes that the College did not engage in a sufficient process of consultation/discussion with students as part of the process of making the decision to cut ESPN from the campus residential cable TV programming package. We believe that College leadership has a responsibility to engage in this form of consultation with students, and we expect that the College will engage in such meaningful consultation/discussion with students (including but not limited to the Student Senate) in the future when making decisions about issues that will have significant impact on student life.*

3. *Student Senate believes that the College has not shared enough information with the student body or with Student Senate about the impact of the national economic issues on the College's budget. With respect to the ESPN decision - the absence of this broader institutional budget context left students unclear about the full reasoning behind the decision and confused by what was perceived as "mixed signals" by the Administration in light of a number of budget cuts accompanied by a substantial tuition increase. In order to provide this broader context and to better inform future Senate consideration of the impact of institutional budget decisions on student life, we ask that:*
 - a. *College leadership meet with Student Senate to explain this broader institutional budget context, including providing some broad examples of areas in which the College has made significant budget cuts in the past year.*
 - b. *College leadership hold these meetings with Senate on a semesterly basis, in order to help Senate maintain a current understanding of broad institutional budget issues.*

Student Senate recognizes that ESPN is an important part of the campus culture for many of the students who attended the Student Senate meeting on 9/7/09, and that there are likely many other students not present at the meeting who share this perspective. We also recognize the need for the College to make budget cuts in response to the institutional budget challenges caused by national economic issues. After discussing the reasoning behind the College's decision to cut ESPN from the campus residential cable package at our 9/7/09 meeting, we have determined that we believe that the institution's decision to eliminate ESPN was a reasonable response to a challenging budget situation.

Appendix 1: Voting Rubric

PLEASE VOTE "YES" or "NO" on this statement

If the College decides to maintain the decision not to provide ESPN as part of the College's residential cable TV package:

Because ESPN is an important aspect of the campus culture for a significant number of students and serves as an attractive feature for incoming students, specifically prospective student athletes;

And the public venues where ESPN is available are all generally closed by midnight and have the potential to become overcrowded especially during peak hours of traffic during the day;

Student Senate strongly recommends that the College explore the possibility of providing late night access to these venues for student viewing of ESPN;

-on a regular basis;

-or, if it is not possible to provide such access on a regular basis, to explore the initial possibility of providing such access on a limited event-based/request basis. Immediate focus should be on the Commons Area in the College Union Building.

YES _____ **X** _____

NO _____

PLEASE VOTE "YES" or "NO" on this statement

Student Senate believes that the College did not engage in a sufficient process of consultation/discussion with students as part of the process of making the decision to cut ESPN from the campus residential cable TV programming package. We believe that College leadership has a responsibility to engage in this form of consultation with students, and we expect that the College will engage in such meaningful consultation/discussion with students (including but not limited to the Student Senate) in the future when making decisions about issues that will have significant impact on student life.

YES _____ **X** _____

NO _____

PLEASE VOTE "YES" or "NO" on this statement

We believe that the College has not shared enough information with the student body or with Student Senate about the impact of the national economic issues on the College's budget. With respect to the ESPN decision - the absence of this broader institutional budget context left students unclear about the full reasoning behind the decision and confused by what was perceived as "mixed signals" by the Administration in light of a number budget cuts accompanied by tuition increase. In order to provide this broader context and to better inform future Senate consideration of the impact of institutional budget decisions on student life, we ask that:

College leadership actively meet with Student Senate to explain this broader institutional budget context, including providing some broad examples of areas in which the College has made significant budget cuts in the past year.

College leadership hold these meetings with Senate on a semesterly basis, in order to help Senate maintain a current understanding of broad institutional budget issues.

YES _____ **X** _____

NO _____

PLEASE SELECT ONE OF THESE FOUR OPTIONS: You should select the option that you feel best represents the perspective Senate should take on the ESPN issue

Option 1

Student Senate recognizes the need for the College to make budget cuts in response to the institutional budget challenges caused by national economic issues. We believe, however, that ESPN is an important part of the campus culture for a significant number of Gettysburg students. We therefore ask that the College reinstate the ESPN stations to the campus residential cable system, and identify other areas of the College budget in which to make budget adjustments in order to provide the funds needed to reinstate ESPN.

Option 2

Student Senate recognizes that ESPN is an important part of the campus culture for many of the students who attended the Student Senate meeting on 9/7/09, and for many other students who did not attend the meeting. We ask that College leadership consider this fact seriously in the ongoing evaluation of the question of whether to reinstate ESPN to the campus residential cable TV package.

Option 3

Student Senate recognizes that ESPN is an important part of the campus culture for many of the students who attended the Student Senate meeting on 9/7/09. We do not, however, think that we have enough data to make an informed assessment of broad student opinion on this issue. Senate will therefore engage in a process of doing additional research to help inform our position on the ESPN issue. We will be engaging in some form of survey and some form of focus group discussion, which will be complete by Reading Days. At that point, we will make a determination on our formal position, based on the more extensive information we have gathered on student opinion on this issue.

Option 4

Student Senate recognizes that ESPN is an important part of the campus culture for many of the students who attended the Student Senate meeting on 9/7/09, and that there are likely many other students not present at the meeting who share this perspective. We also recognize the need for the College to make budget cuts in response to the institutional budget challenges caused by national economic issues. After discussing the reasoning behind the College's decision to cut ESPN from the campus residential cable package at our 9/7/09 meeting, we have determined that we believe that the institution's decision to eliminate ESPN was a reasonable response to a challenging budget situation.

SELECT ONLY ONE OF THESE FOUR OPTIONS

Option 1 _____

Option 2 _____

Option 3 _____

Option 4 **X**

Appendix 2: Voting Results**Table 1. Voting Results**

Statements			General Position
1	2	3	1 - 4
NO	YES	YES	4
YES	YES	YES	2
YES	YES	YES	2
YES	YES	YES	3
YES	YES	YES	1
YES	YES	YES	3
YES	YES	YES	4
YES	YES	YES	4
YES	YES	YES	3
YES	YES	NO	1
YES	YES	YES	2
YES	YES	YES	2
YES	NO	NO	4
YES	YES	YES	1
YES	YES	YES	4
YES	YES	YES	4
YES	YES	YES	4
YES	YES	NO	2
YES	YES	YES	4