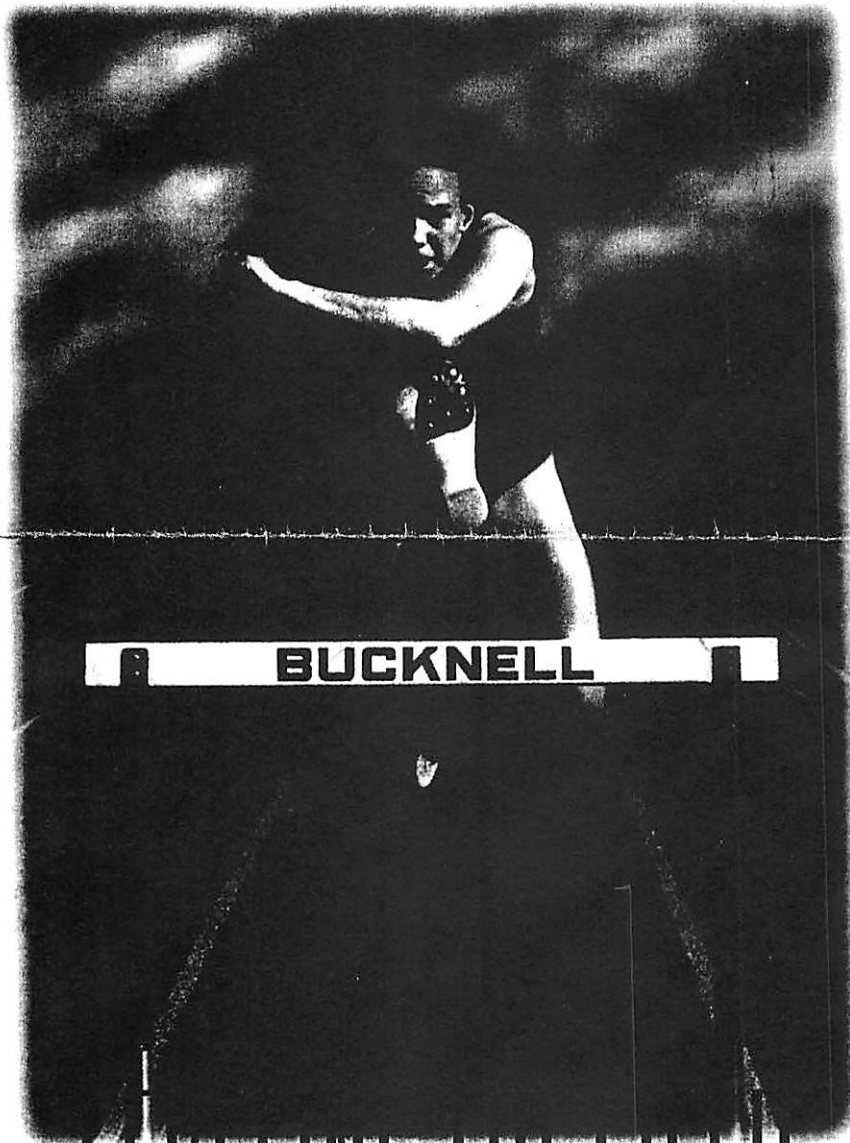


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LEVELING THE FIELD

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Gender equity continues to change the landscape of college athletics.

Terrie Grieb looks out on the Bucknell softball complex these days and sees gender equity at work. Grieb, the Bison's softball coach for 16 years, sees permanent dugouts, a manicured infield and an electronic scoreboard, all features added in the last few years.

Wrestlers at Eastern Illinois, men's gymnasts at UCLA and hundreds of other male athletes also see gender equity at work, though their vision is far bleaker. They see wrestling mats rolled up and stacked like corpses, the carnage of discontinued programs. They see rosters slashed, programs dissolved and careers ended, all in the name of advancement.

Such is the volatile dual nature of gender equity, perhaps the most profound issue facing collegiate athletics in the last 25 years. The gender equity movement, which had been gathering steam over the past decade, has erupted in the past year with ramifications on virtually every campus in the nation, including Bucknell.

It is widely agreed that, in theory, gender equity is an excellent idea. Yet precisely how the law is interpreted and put into practice has been the subject of passionate and, at times, divisive debate.

Supporters of women's athletics insist that increased opportunities for women are long overdue. Yet many schools have taken a dramatically different approach. Saddled with financial restrictions, these schools, instead of increasing women's opportunities, have decreased men's opportunities to comply with the law.

The debate has spread from campuses to courtrooms and recently to Congress. As both sides state their cases, one thing becomes increasingly clear: There are no easy answers.

WHAT TITLE IX MEANS

The gender equity movement was born in 1972 with Title IX of the Educational Amendments. Specifically, the law states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

Although it applies to all areas of federally-funded education, Title IX has become synonymous with gender equity in athletics. There is a heightened awareness of Title IX on college campuses after a landmark court case in March, which found that Brown University failed to comply with the law.

The watchdog of Title IX is the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, which has devised a controversial three-part test to determine Title IX compliance. If a university satisfies any one of these three "prongs," it is deemed to be complying with the law.

The OCR's first prong is the principle of proportionality. This is the most tangible test of Title IX compliance and is also the source of many of the most sweeping changes in collegiate athletics.

The principle of proportionality states that the number of athletic opportunities available for men and women should be substantially proportional to the enrollment of the student body. For example, if 50 percent of all undergraduate students are female, then 50 percent of all student-athletes should be female (at Brown



in 1993-94, men comprised 48.9 percent of the student body but 61.9 percent of the student-athletes).

At many schools, proportionality could be readily achieved, were it not for football. But with rosters that sometimes top 100 players, and with no equivalent sport for women, football tips the participation scale toward men's athletics.

Schools that sponsor football, therefore, are left with few options. One is to drop the football program, but at some schools football is a major revenue source. Other options include dropping men's sports other than football and adding women's sports.

Yet Title IX doesn't legislate funding for women's sports, it simply calls for equal opportunity. Schools may find themselves in a predicament like that faced by the University of Albany. That school had intended to add women's crew, but determined the costs were prohibitive. Without the funding to add 20-25 opportunities for women by starting a crew program, Albany cut 20-25 opportunities for men by scrapping its wrestling program.

Though the high-profile sports of football and basketball are relatively safe, men's sports such as wrestling and gymnastics are frequently sacrificed.

According to a report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the number of NCAA institutions sponsoring wrestling has dropped in the last 20 years from 401 to 261, despite a 200-member increase in the size of the NCAA. Similarly, the number of NCAA schools sponsoring men's gymnastics has slipped from 133 in 1974-75 to 32 last year (UCLA, a perennial powerhouse, recently dropped the sport). The NCAA nearly eliminated its men's gymnastics championship because of lack of participation.

"At some schools, it's conceivable that one day you will see one men's sport per season with enough women's sports to match the numbers," says Bucknell director of athletics



Cover Story

Rick Hartzell. "Granted, that won't happen at Bucknell, but it could happen at some of the bigger schools. In that case, there would be far, far fewer opportunities for participation, and that is not what Title IX is about at all.

"Opportunity right now is the watchword. We want to maximize opportunities for women. That's what is right."

In some respects, that has been done. Women's soccer has enjoyed enormous growth at the collegiate level. The number of NCAA schools offering women's soccer as a varsity sport jumped from 252 in 1986-87 to 446 in 1993-94 (Bucknell elevated its women's soccer club to varsity in 1990).

That trend is addressed in the second prong of the OCR test. A university has the opportunity to demonstrate that it has, and is continuing to, expand programs for "the underrepresented sex," as the OCR Enforcement Guide defines it.

The third prong of the test examines accommodation. An institution can demonstrate that it has fully accommodated the athletic interests of both sexes. These latter two prongs, however, have been criticized as too vague.



At a Congressional hearing on Title IX in May, Brown University President Vartan Gregorian argued that "these rules and guidelines are so ambiguous, so inconsistent and so imprecise that they leave judges with total discretion and rob institutions of any flexibility in meeting OCR's tests."

Brown, which has appealed its case, argued that it had complied with Title IX based on historical context. "Brown had the first women's hockey team in the country (in 1967) and one of the first women's soccer teams in the country (in 1977)," says sports information director Chris Humm. "But the judge wasn't interested in that. He only wanted to know what we'd done recently. But what more could we do? We already have 17 women's sports at Brown."

Athletic directors nationwide have been struggling with the OCR's language. What does it mean to "fully accommodate the athletic interests?" Does that mean, they wonder, if three women want to start a bowling team at State U. that the school must offer bowling?

The vague nature of the OCR's language, in fact, is currently being addressed by Congress. In an education appropriations bill passed by the House in July, there is a provision that stipulates that the OCR must provide specific criteria for policy guidance in relation to prongs two and three of the Title IX compliance test.

In response, Norma Cantu, the U.S. assistant secretary for civil rights and a central figure of Title IX enforcement, wrote a letter to Congress in which she declared that the OCR "will issue new policy updates in mid- to late-September."

REFORMS AT BUCKNELL

Hartzell does acknowledge that reforms at Bucknell are imminent. A University Committee on Gender Equity in Athletics was formed in April and is scheduled to submit a full report to President William Adams in January. The committee, composed of administrators, faculty, coaches and student-athletes, will review nearly every aspect of the athletic department, including personnel, recruiting, financial aid, operating budgets, facilities, travel and equipment.

"The goal is to evaluate right now the level of compliance of the university with respect to Title IX," says Barbara Shailor, vice president for student services, "especially given recent court decisions. We are trying to be up-front and out in front on this issue."

Though reforms at Bucknell are likely, Hartzell stresses that many changes already have been made. "We have improved every single women's sport budget," he says, "and we have tried to make facilities that are exclusively for women equal to those exclusively for men. We also have tried to get coaches' salaries in a position of equity, although obviously length of service and years of experience are factors."

Given the numbers, additional changes are expected. According to 1994-95 figures, men accounted for 51.2 percent of the student enrollment, but 64.6 percent of the student athletes. Clearly, a reduction in men's sports is one of the possibilities Bucknell may have to consider.

"There will be some tough, tough decisions," Hartzell says. "It just isn't as easy as saying we're going to drop sports X, Y and Z. Take wrestling, for example. We have a very impressive Wrestling Hall of Achievement, and we have some very influential alumni who were wrestlers here. Dropping any sport would be painful."

"I don't know of any women's coach who wants to see men's programs eliminated," says Grieb, who is a member of the committee.

Men's rosters may be capped, however, beginning with football. In fact, Bucknell and its fellow Patriot League schools recently implemented a 90-player cap on football rosters.

"I still can't understand why football has to have 100 guys on a team," says Karin Wegener Knisely '79, a three-sport captain at Bucknell. "Some of the money that is spent on football may be able to be spent elsewhere to help other sports."

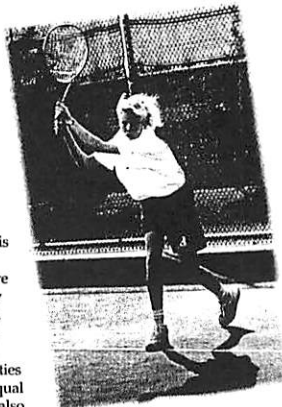
Two other possible remedies are adding women's sports and increasing squad sizes of current women's sports. Water polo and golf, which would not require substantial budgets, are potential additions, says Hartzell.

That may be a more attractive option than increasing current squad sizes. Grieb points out that, even if the interest were there, she would not want to expand her softball roster much further.

"That would only cause more problems," she says. "You'd have more people unhappy about not playing, and you'd have increased costs because of travel, meals and equipment. And if they don't increase the team budget, you're worse off than you were before."

Though softball and baseball are often coupled in the gender-equity equation, the two sports illustrate some of the inherent differences that make the gender-equity dilemma so difficult.

Bucknell's baseball roster last year listed 27 players, eight more than softball. The majority of that difference is



related to pitching; while a softball team often will use just two pitchers over the course of an entire season, a baseball team might need as many as 12.

Men's and women's basketball also have certain differences. When Bucknell's men's basketball team plays a nationally ranked opponent, such as Maryland or Wake Forest, Bucknell receives as much as \$20,000, which covers the team's travel and expenses and still leaves some money for the university coffers. If the women's team plays a similar opponent, the net expense to Bucknell is likely to be far greater, since any payment would not be nearly as lucrative.

Sport-specific alumni giving also has been weighted more toward men's sports, though the reasons may be largely historical; men have been competing at Bucknell for over 100 years in some sports, so vast alumni networks have developed. Since women have been competing officially only since the mid-1970s, the alumni base in women's athletics is much smaller.

These differences in donor "club funds" have, at times, led to discrepancies. For example, a men's team may choose to travel the night before a road game, with its lodging financed through club funds. Without a strong club fund, a women's team traveling to the same site may have to travel the day of the game, if lodging was not budgeted. As more and more female athletes become alumni, however, women's sport-specific club funds may grow larger.

This is not to suggest that all differences between men's and women's athletics at Bucknell can be justified. The mission of the task force is to identify areas of inequity and recommend changes.

Grieb, who has been at Bucknell since 1978, realizes that change doesn't come quickly. "A lot of the younger coaches want these things to happen overnight," she says. "Since I've been here, I'd say we've made great strides. In 10 years, we've come from the basement. We're not quite yet to the top floor, but we're getting there."

"I was so far behind 10 years ago," she adds. "We were playing on a parking lot compared to what (baseball) had. Now, I have the best field in the Patriot League, and one of the top three in the state. I don't even want to think about 10 years ago."

Neither do many other advocates of gender equity. Yet only in looking back 10 years, and looking ahead to the next 10, can the immense ramifications of gender equity be fully understood. **mw**

Bo Smolka is the director of sports information for Bucknell and a frequent contributor to Bucknell World.