

The Washington Post

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Maryland commission recommends athletic department cut eight varsity teams

By [Liz Clarke](#), Published: November 14

The commission charged with tackling the multimillion dollar deficit in University of Maryland athletics has recommended that the school drop eight of its 27 varsity teams to remedy the shortfall, according to a [report released by the university](#) Monday evening.

The teams targeted for elimination are all three men's track teams (indoor track and field, outdoor track and field, cross-country); men's swimming and diving; women's swimming and diving; men's tennis; women's water polo; and aerobics and tumbling (formerly known as competitive cheer).

The recommendation would affect 166 Terrapin student-athletes, based on this year's rosters. And it was offered, according to the Nov. 11 cover letter to [Maryland President Wallace D. Loh](#), "reluctantly and regretfully and with great anguish."

The panel also calls for a 10 percent reduction in athletic administration costs and a revamped fundraising effort, noting that since 2006 Maryland's revenue from football, men's basketball and fundraising has steadily declined.

The final decision about whether to pare the number of Maryland varsity teams from 27 to 19 — or to some other number — belongs to Loh, who appointed the [17-member President's Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics](#) in July, concerned that the Terrapins' athletics program has spent more than it generates for several years.

Maryland Athletic Director Kevin Anderson was not a member of the commission. But by Monday evening, he had met with coaches and athletes of all eight teams.

"Besides a relative dying, this has been one of the worst times in my life, having to face these young people and tell them of the possibility of us discontinuing their programs," Anderson said in a telephone interview.

Anderson said he was still studying the document and would have a formal response soon.

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Maryland's deficit spending in sports had been masked by the practice of tapping athletic department reserve funds to cover shortfalls at the end of the fiscal year. But with the fund depleted, the athletics department had to borrow \$1.2 million from the university to cover last year's deficit.

The deficit is projected to reach slightly more than \$4 million this fiscal year, according to the report, and top \$17 million by 2017 unless business practices are radically altered.

Loh directed the 17-member commission to explore ways to create new revenue for the athletic department and cut costs. It's increasingly apparent that the panel was unable to identify any major new revenue stream — certainly not one big enough to spare drastic cost-cutting measures.

According to preliminary figures, the athletics department could pare roughly \$3.5 million to 5 million from its \$57.7 million annual budget by dropping the eight teams, five of them men's and three of them women's.

Loh initially said he would make his decision by Dec. 31, but he's now expected to accelerate that timetable.

All of Maryland's 27 varsity teams will compete through the 2011-12 academic year. Any cuts would take effect July 1, 2012.

Maryland will honor the scholarships of all varsity athletes regardless of whether their teams are phased out and help any athletes whose teams are dropped transfer elsewhere, if that's their preference. All current coaches' contracts will be honored as well.

A decision to drop any sport is sure to touch off protests by students, alumni and supporters. It also could trigger lawsuits, as it did at James Madison University, when that school announced in 2006 that it was dropping 10 sports.

On other hand, cuts could prompt renewed philanthropy, inspiring donors to raise enough private money to save the teams. That's what happened after the University of California-Berkeley announced last year that it was cutting five sports.

But it could take \$5 million to \$10 million to fully fund an endowment capable of generating enough income to cover scholarships, coaching salaries, travel costs and operating expenses for a single varsity team.

Maryland has a poor record of private giving to its sports program, ranking 11th among 12 schools in the ACC.

Maryland ranks dead last in the ACC in spending per athlete (\$67,390, compared to Florida State's \$118,813 per student-athlete). According to the report, that was among the reasons the panel concluded that the best course of action was to reduce the number of sports so more money could be invested for each student-athlete's academic support, athletic training and health services.

If Maryland offered 19 sports, as the panel recommends, its per-athlete spending would jump to \$107,849 — or sixth highest in the soon-to-be expanded 14-team ACC.

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