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Professor starts fund to benefit UIS athletes

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Barbara Hayler didn't attend many University of Illinois Springfield women's basketball games prior to the 2009-10 season, but following the team this season has compelled her to help student-athletes who have lost their athletic scholarships for the 2010-11 academic year.

Hayler, a Professor Emerita of Criminal Justice at UIS, has established the Help Honor Our Promises for Education Fund. Hayler is seeking donations to the Help HOPE fund, which would provide financial assistance to junior athletes who have had their scholarships terminated, regardless of sport, and help with academic costs.

"I was very surprised and distressed when the athletic department decided to cut so many players from the women's basketball team and also terminated their athletic scholarships," Hayler said.

"I attended games this season. I saw them playing hurt. I saw them playing as hard as they could under extremely difficult circumstances. They started the season with 10 players and ended with nine. I thought if they are trying that hard to do everything they can to be the best players they can under difficult, trying conditions that the least I can do is help them. If the university won't do anything, we'll see if some faculty can do something and make a difference."

Hayler said the UIS athletic department also has not renewed the scholarships of several volleyball players. Athletic scholarships cover a one-year period, and NCAA bylaws permit the non-renewal of aid for "any reason" once the period has concluded.

UIS athletic director Rodger Jehlicka refused to comment about Help HOPE or to give the number of student-athletes who did not have their scholarships renewed.

The State Journal-Register has filed a written request under the Freedom of Information Act to obtain the number of student-athletes in the 10 sports that UIS offers who have received Athletic Aid Non Renewal Notification Letters from the school's Office of Financial Assistance since August.

Grateful for offer

The Help HOPE fund would aid players like Susan Coryell, a UIS junior from Yorkville. Coryell and five other women's basketball players, including UIS' second-leading scorer Kelly Thompson, were cut from the nine-player team at the end of a 3-24 season and informed their scholarships would not be renewed after the conclusion of the spring term.

"If money is raised I would be honored and very grateful to accept their donations," Coryell wrote in an e-mail. "This fund is much more than just scholarship money, it is certain members of the faculty of UIS showing support to its students when others have not. It truly is amazing what they are doing."

Hayler estimates the fund needs to raise \$20,000 to cover the cost of the aid lost by junior athletes. She started her campaign last week and raised a "few hundred dollars" in the first couple days.

"This fund will provide support to the athletes who have been cut from team and therefore lost assistance," Hayler said. "This fund would not get them back on team and give them the opportunity to play their senior year like they thought they would, but that's something we don't have any control over. What we do have is the ability to help them have a successful senior year. They won't have to take on that extra part-time job to help them pay for their senior year."

UIS professor James Veselenak lent his name to the letter to the editor Hayler submitted to The State Journal-Register to show support for athletes who have lost their scholarships and bring awareness to the matter, but he's not directly involved with the Help HOPE Fund.

"I think this is very unfair," said the Associate Professor Emeritus of Clinical Laboratory Science. "I think it was wrong. I have not talked to anybody that doesn't say this is not right."

"I would not like to see this happen again. I'm an educator. These are student-athletes. They are students first. I hate to see their education disrupted. A number have transferred and that's disrupted their education. They planned to be here four years and now they're not. A couple that are juniors and are going to be seniors have no option to transfer because it will add another year to their education."

If the fund receives more money than she estimated, Hayler said the leftover money would be offered to current sophomore student-athletes who've lost their athletic scholarships.

Hayler stressed donations to the Help HOPE fund are not tax deductible. For information about the fund, contact Hayler at 206-7586 or hayler@uis.edu.

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