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OU athletic director defends use of university funds

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For the Post



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Ohio University's athletic department stands behind a controversial study touting its \$21.3 million contribution to the local economy, despite withering criticism from local economists.

The department released the study last month, offering the figure as further proof of its value amid criticism from faculty angry that Ohio has spent more money on athletics while cutting academic funding.

The report combined the department's spending with dollars spent by out-of-county fans and teams to reach the \$21.3 million total.

Two economics professors, Dr. Richard Vedder and Dr. Roy Boyd, called the report "illegitimate" and said it shows a "shameful lack of professionalism." They blasted the study for failing to consider other uses of the department's budget.

"We didn't do the study. We didn't have anything to do with it," Athletic Director Jim Schaus said. "Naturally, at the time we received this, we thought it was a credible source. It's information we discovered and thought would be helpful to share."

Graduate students produced the

study in May for a Research and Methodology class, under the direction of Dr. Ming Li, director of the School of Recreation and Sports Sciences.

The department held the report until September to garner more media attention, said Dan Hauser, associate athletic director of External Operations. He also supervised more research over the summer, studying events like June's American Legion baseball tournament.

OU posted the study on the front page of its Web site, as did the athletic department.

As students returned to Athens in the fall, professors began to question why top administrators gave athletics more money while insisting academic

departments cut their budgets.

"We can't use this as justification to pump money into athletics," said Dr. David Ridpath, an assistant professor of Sports Administration. "We're spending a lot of other people's money. We shouldn't be using an economic impact report when resources are being drained away from the university and the department is running a deficit."

The athletic department plans to spend \$700,000 more than its \$18.7 million budget this fiscal year. The Board of Trustees approved a measure in June to set aside another \$1.1 million of OU's \$684 million budget to fix the deficit.

The department's spending on

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salaries, equipment and other items accounts for half its \$21.3 million "economic significance." Boyd called that accounting dishonest.

Athletics is funded by student fees, which also pay for services like Hudson Health Center. The report does not consider other uses for the money.

"The way this report is put together, a way where costs are made to seem to be benefits, is really disingenuous," Boyd said. "No one really disputes that the athletic department would generate some kind of funds for Athens County."

Studies on the economic impact of the Final Four, the Super Bowl and the Olympics used similar methods, Li said. The report also

includes an estimated \$8 million spent by out-of-county teams and fans.

That money wouldn't flow into Athens without the athletic department, Li said.

Schaus agreed.

"To me, there's nothing about this story that's not positive," he said. "I just think it's interesting to note that there is value that athletics has to the community."

"If somebody thinks (the study's methodology) is important, that's great. That's their opinion. It's information that could substantiate thoughts about how athletics benefit the community."

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