

Developing the Discourse on the Proposed Facility

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It is with interest that I read the article “[Still Looking for Answers](#)” from my colleague and friend Paul LaFollette in the March, 2018 issue of the *Faculty Herald*. Specifically, Paul laments a lack of answers about the university’s proposal. I have a great deal of respect for Paul and his views, and his concern is an invitation for meaningful discourse. I differ, however, with his conclusions.

Contextually, Paul’s article relates to the “Resolution on the Multi-Purpose Facility/Stadium (MPF),” which passed the Faculty Senate on February 21, 2018. Since then, a series of publications and presentations have explored the concerns raised at the February Faculty Senate meeting and in the Faculty Senate resolution co-written by Paul with colleagues Tricia Jones and Steve Newman. Paul’s article rests on the premise that the university has not supplied reasonable responses to inquiries concerning the proposed stadium. In truth, there are a number of items in the resolution that were not fully explored that the campus community should be aware of as well, as many moving parts have resulted in an [ever-changing environment on issues related to the MPF](#). In an effort to contribute to the evolving conversations on, and apprehensions over, the MPF—and to ensure that the campus is well-informed with questions and concerns being properly addressed—I wanted to take a moment to direct attention to several articles and resources that provide [additional context](#).

The university has been working in earnest to respond to and meet [the concerns of the public, including points related to the financial and neighborhood impacts of the stadium](#). Additionally, the pressing financial matters are addressed in a [letter from President Englert](#), who summarized “financially, the costs to stay in Lincoln Financial Field are not sustainable. The economic benefits of having an on-campus facility are overwhelmingly favorable to Temple (to the tune of a minimum of \$2 million per year based on conservative projections).” Retail, advertising, employment, resources, and financial gain have been effectively presented as benefits of the facility, all with tangible advantages for our university.

This article does not simply stop at that inquiry, however, as Paul directly castigates the administration of the football team by noting “we are effectively using our student athletes as experimental subjects, trying to apply protective strategies which may or not be effective. . . . How can this be ethical?” If injury is Paul’s concern, I would advocate that there are several sports that should be of pronounced consideration. For example, men’s wrestling, women’s gymnastics, and men’s ice hockey teams have all resulted in more injuries than football. Indeed, football related injuries may be high, but they are closely followed by other sports, such as men’s basketball. Further, the majority of these injuries are strains, [at almost four times the amount of concussions](#). Concussions are, of course, of great importance in sports. If that is Paul’s concern, however, he may want to note that football related concussions account for less than [one third of the total amount of cases](#). Even still, that number is too high, hence the reason for a proposed concussion research center that will be located in the MPF to address this viable and important concern. Temple is not alone in this effort. The NCAA itself has not only contributed millions of dollars to [research about sports related concussions \(SRC\)](#) but also has specifically crafted [policies concerning the prevention and treatment of SRC](#), guidelines that Temple University must uphold.

Paul also raises concerns about the proliferation of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) among football players. Indeed, he cites the widespread [McKee article](#). Of course, these conclusions have already been critiqued, particularly due to [a biased sample, a fact noted by the lead author](#). But even McKee concludes by noting that “Estimates of prevalence cannot be concluded or implied from this sample” and the findings do not allow for any “estimation of the risk of participation in football and neuropathological outcomes.” Paul’s historical concern is over a “[kind of entertainment \[that\] is unconscionable](#),” prompted by even high school teams’ long-term injuries. His dire prognostication is unlikely as there [has not been any link whatsoever between the playing of high school football and long-term pathology](#). Even more, this facility will include classrooms and facilities that could greatly augment the study of players’ health and sports overall. Indeed, in my college alone we have five media and curricular programs that focus on sports and communication. Having a facility on our campus can only serve to augment CTE treatment and also develop these academic programs.

There is a subtext to Paul’s argument that deserves consideration: the football team has been duped by nefarious coaches to engage in a practice that is ultimately harmful. Paul summarizes his position as: “We who spend our lives teaching students to use their brains well and wisely have no business supporting this ‘sport’ that destroys its athletes in slow motion” and that football players are “[o]perating in ignorance.” I would assert to my colleague that first, research [counters your claim](#) with findings that underscore [the immense personal benefits](#) for football players. Also, [student athletes](#) and Temple’s [football team](#) have demonstrable evidence that they indeed know how to use their brains. I cannot advance a position to remove students’ self-agency by making choices for them about their own bodies. If Paul is worried that the coaches and staff of the football team are not concerned with ethics or the medical needs of Temple’s players, I would advocate first having a dialogue with the people who are most aware of the team’s operation. Having seen the care that is given to players whose physical health is under constant evaluation and supervision, his concerns may be assuaged.

This critique is meant in the spirit of open discourse. It is important for us as a campus community to continue to play an active role in fostering a healthy dialogue with constituents—both internal and external—for the benefit of the institution, our neighbors, and the Philadelphia community at large. Personally, I may not be a fan of watching football games. I do, however, have an ongoing interest in ensuring that the promise of Temple University is upheld for all of our students including football players, and that as members of this university we understand the importance of effective reasoning, critical thought, and civic and campus engagement. I hope that we will continue to uphold that venerable mission.



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