

## UAH Reports Progress in Athlete Gender Equity

The federal Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA) requires higher education institutions to report annually certain gender-related data regarding their intercollegiate athletic programs. Specifically, institutions must report the participation rates of men and women in such programs and the institutional resources allocated to men's and women's teams.

Under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, universities have an obligation to operate their athletic programs in a manner that is nondiscriminatory with respect to gender. Regulations issued by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) under Title IX have established various benchmarks for assessing the extent of an institution's compliance with Title IX obligations. The most notable has to do with the issue of whether students of both sexes are being provided with opportunities to participate in athletics on a nondiscriminatory basis. The regulations offer three avenues to demonstrating compliance. Most institutions opt for the avenue of "substantial proportionality" under which the ratio of female to male athletes must be substantially proportional to the ratio of female to male undergraduate students.

UAH developed and began implementing a plan in 1995-96 designed to move its athletic program closer, year by year, to substantial proportionality. In that year, females comprised approximately half of the UAH student body but represented only about 33% of its athletes. The plan, with later revisions, resulted in the addition of a women's soccer team in 1996-97 and a track team in 2000-01. In the latter year, the number of female participants exceeded 100 for the first time, reaching 103. The ratio of female athletes to all athletes also reached a high point that year, at 48.4%. Though the percentage of female students had also increased that year to 52%, OCR's position has been that a small differential in ratios is permissible.

The EADA report for the past year (2001-02) indicates that the number of female athletes has continued to rise (to 109). The number of male athletes also grew slightly, so the female participation rate remained generally level at 48%. The percentage of female undergraduate students dropped slightly to 50.5%, so UAH is now even closer to equivalence in these rates. While many universities, especially those with football programs, are struggling to bring their female athlete ratios into an acceptable range, UAH has made commendable progress in developing expanded opportunities for its female students to compete in intercollegiate athletics.