

To whom it may concern:

My name is John Watson and I am unable to attend the senate hearing on March 10th, 2016 regarding senate bill 470, establishing a fund for intercollegiate adaptive sports. I am currently working for the University of Kansas Alumni Association. I feel it is important to note that this is a career I would not have without my experience as an intercollegiate wheelchair basketball player. Unfortunately my work schedule conflicts with Thursday's hearing. Below is a short statement about how competing in wheelchair basketball on the intercollegiate level has benefitted my life.

Playing on an intercollegiate wheelchair basketball team at the University of Texas at Arlington was the most rewarding thing I have ever done. Other than learning to play wheelchair basketball on a highly competitive level, I gained a seemingly infinite wealth of life skills. An incomplete list of the things I learned and use every day which I sharpened as part of the UTA Movin' Mavs program looks like this: Public speaking, teamwork, organization, leadership, dependability, exercise and nutrition, self-discipline/motivation, interpersonal communication, networking, marketing, advertising, listening skills, and cultural understanding.

This is my first year away from my team since I moved to Lawrence, Kansas to be closer to family after graduation. Above all, I miss training with my teammates five mornings each week and Saturday afternoon scrimmages. However, my best experiences at UTA always correlated with the community service events we were involved with as a team. These events were usually wheelchair sports demonstrations for either children in the community or disabled veterans. It was a great feeling to know that I was a part of a movement that proactively changed the way people understood disability culture, particularly the sub-culture of student athletes with disabilities.

I once heard someone say learn what you love and love what you learn. I subscribed to this philosophy for my entire academic career at UTA. Around 90% of my school projects at UTA were somehow related to wheelchair sports or disability culture in general. This includes my capstone project to fulfil one of the final requirements for my undergraduate degree in journalism. Also, for my master's thesis I examined the representation of wheelchair basketball and able-bodied basketball in student news sources. Throughout my academic career at UTA, I found concepts in the classroom easier to grasp and retain when I related them to disability sport and culture. It was also a great way to share my culture with my colleagues and instructors.

As a team of student athletes, we understood that GPA was our key to success on the court because we could not play without meeting minimum requirements. We also understood the grades and graduation rates can help the program administratively. Unfortunately, in our culture, neither academic nor athletic success is generally associated with disability. The UTA Movin' Mavs, along with other intercollegiate adaptive sports programs are slowly helping to overcome some of these attitudinal barriers in order for more people with disabilities to succeed academically and professionally.

John Watson