



SEATING PRIORITY POINTS SYSTEMS

Background

Seating priority points systems (SPPS) are common mechanisms used across the country by athletics programs to determine ticket purchasing and seat location priorities for collegiate athletics events. These systems are designed in a manner that creates incentives for ticket buyers to increase donations to the athletics annual fund or major giving programs in order to get a better seat location. Seats are assigned based on total numbers of points earned and points earned are heavily weighted toward donations. For example, 1 point may be awarded for each \$100 donated to the annual fund or 2 points awarded for each season ticket purchased.

The purposes of a SPPS are three-fold:

1. establish a fair and transparent system underlying all decisions related to seat location;
2. thank and give weight to those who make the greatest contributions to the success of the University and its athletics program; and
3. encourage increased donations to the athletics annual fund that support student-athlete scholarships, salaries that will enable university to attract the finest coaches who are master teachers central to the success of the program and the maintenance of athletics facilities and programs that serve the entire university community.

These systems are in stark contrast to “seat licensing” systems which place a “tax” on top of the price of a season ticket based on the premium location of a seat. Seat licenses are most often used by professional sports franchises that have high market demand. Priority point systems are a better philosophical fit for universities in that they “honor and thank donors that do the most to advance the mission of the department” as opposed to imposing a more commercial, this is “price you pay to get a good seat”.

With a SPPS, there is constant pressure on the spectator to give more money to get more points. Seat licenses on the other hand, like taxes, increase every so often and, again like taxes, taxpayers aren't usually happy about the increases. Because the SPPS never changes, the ticket buyer doesn't get the impression of increased costs. Priority points are accumulated beginning with a time certain that usually corresponds to the year furthest back that the university and the athletics department are confident of the accuracy of giving and ticket purchase records and continues indefinitely into the future, until the account holder (or spouse) dies.

Another characteristic of seating priorities is that seats can change every year. Points are recalculated every year and seat locations are assigned accordingly. In reality however, after the first few years

during which fans figure out the system and their ability to afford a certain point level, seating is relatively stable.

A SPPS is more transparent and fairer than “seat licensing systems”. In a seat license system, everyone in a certain section pays the same license fee, but there are issues of priority within the section. Many times these issues are settled by longevity (years holding the tickets), but this does little to provide incentives for increased giving. Most athletics directors agree that a SPPS is totally transparent and therefore perceived as fair because everyone knows the rules. Of course, the year in which the rules of the seat location game are changed is the most difficult year to deal with.

Critical Steps in Creating a Ticket Priority System

- Create a point system that expresses institutional values and creates incentives for the most valued behavior (i.e., growing annual gifts vs. selling the greatest number of season tickets)
- Address the need to balance the athletics department interest with the greater institutional interest. The larger the expectation of athletics producing increased revenues and carrying its own funding burden, the greater emphasis on points for athletics giving, and the fewer points for non-athletics giving.
- When developing the point system, recognize there will always be people that try to beat the system. Commit to figuring out what the loop holes are and how to eliminate them.
- Examine how the establishment of such a system to exploit an athletics asset, might have an unanticipated impact on non-athletics giving and how that can be minimized. All communications about implementing the system must contain a request that increased giving to athletics not come at the expense of giving to other university departments.
- Prior to instituting the system, take the previous year’s actual season ticket purchasers and apply the system to them to assess the real impact of the system on all stakeholders, adjusting the system on the basis of factual data rather than fears.
- Prior to instituting the system, create a master list of anticipated questions and answers in order to anticipate the problems that will have to be handled and help those who will have to answer those questions. Invariably, this exercise results in the establishment of good policy prior to the roll out of the new program and makes for a less stressful transition.
- Commit to meetings with the most important stakeholders and creating a great communications piece to introduce the system in the most personal way will result in gaining the greatest support for the system.

Remember that a SPPS is not a ticket sales tool. In reality it is a development or fundraising mechanism. Implementing a SPPS presents a valuable opportunity for the development staff to interact via a personal meeting with a season ticket holder, ostensibly to explain the new system, but in reality, a valuable one-on-one meeting to seek increased financial commitment to the institution and its athletics program.

Creating A Ticket Priority System – Review of Considerations

POSSIBLE CATEGORIES FOR WHICH POINTS WILL BE AWARDED

GENERAL UNIVERSITY

- **Graduate of institution**

- President's Club (highest non-athletics giving levels \$10,000+)
- Voting Faculty, __ point for every year of service
- University Administrators (level to be specified)
- Dues paying alumni association member

ATHLETICS

- Letter winner/former athlete
- Season ticket holder – points for each ticket purchased each year, based on graduated point system by sport, M&W sports treated equally
 - Football
 - Basketball
 - Baseball
 - Volleyball
 - Etc.
- Donations to Athletics Fund (annual giving totally accumulated since____) at __ point per \$_____
- Trusts and endowments received by athletics
- Deferred gifts (unitrusts, etc.), __ points now, ___ points upon receipt
- Years of annual donation to athletics, points per year
- Fundraising event participation (golf tournaments, etc.), points per event
- Value of any GIK accepted by Athletic Department for which acknowledgement of donation is issued
- Corporate donations
- Bonus points for consecutive year support, __ points for each consecutive year beginning with the immediately preceding year, with points forfeited upon lapse but bonuses awarded separately for:
 - Season tickets in any sport, ___ pts. per season ticket
 - Athletics foundation donation, ___ pts. per \$_____ of calculated average over consecutive years
 - Fundraising event participation, ___ pts. per \$_____ or per event
 - ___ points per year for every year over ___ years
- Recruitment of new Athletics Fund donor (only if name is on initial Athletic Fund donation form when check is received or indicated on online donation)

PRIORITY CONSIDERATIONS FOR POINT LEVELS

- Lifetime purchase of seat location (purchase of seat equity via mortgage payments) – no points, outright purchase of seat, transferable to family (big \$)
- Minimum point level for right to choose seat anywhere in arena
- Minimum point level for right to choose seat anywhere in a minimum point section, based on a point total minimum that exceeds the minimum total points for that section
- Minimum point level to receive priority seating in a priority point section

CALCULATION RULES

- Calculation on per account basis (whoever wrote the check/purchased the tickets)
- Non-transferable upon death except to spouse
- Corporate sponsorships, account holder is the corporation and not the individual
- Must meet the minimum point total for any priority point section

- Per game or season tickets outside of priority point sections order the same time as season tickets, have priority over public purchasers according to priority point total
- Pledges must be paid prior to end of fiscal year to have donation counted for points for ticket purchases in subsequent year
- Matching gifts from employers count as if it was from account holder

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Minimum number or percentage of seats for students
- Minimum number or percentage of seats for faculty
- Minimum number of seats for University president/development

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Tie benefits to annual giving rather than season ticket purchases
- Premium season ticket prices for premium locations

Priority Points System Sample

1. Athletics will use the Priority Points System to allocate priority points used to prioritize ticket purchasing privileges prior to the Current Fiscal Year. (The fiscal year begins June 1.) This is the same priority plan used for all season tickets, tournament tickets and away game tickets.
2. **Purpose:**
The purpose of the Priority Points System is to allocate priority points to individuals/corporations that have made the commitment to and investment in INSTITUTION Athletics through the purchase of season tickets, donations and other athletics and institutional financial support.
3. **The Point System:**
Points are calculated on a per account basis. Points are non-transferable, and an existing account will carry accumulated point total into the new plan.
 - 1 point awarded for every \$50 per current active membership of Terriers Club
 - 2 points awarded for each consecutive year of Terrier Club membership, starting June 1 of the current fiscal year, for a gift at the same or greater level
 - 3 bonus points for increasing Terrier Club membership level
 - 5 points awarded for each men's basketball season ticket purchased
 - 5 points awarded for each women's basketball season ticket purchased
 - 3 points awarded for each women's volleyball season ticket purchased

- 3 points for individual entry to any Athletics department golf tournament
- 1 point awarded for every \$100 marketing and promotions cash sponsorship to the Athletics program
- 1 point awarded for every \$200 marketing and promotions trade sponsorship to the Athletics program
- 20 points awarded for every new member brought into the Terrier Club (member's name must appear on pledge card or donor must stipulate by whom they were solicited to participate in the Club) **(Should this be at a certain level?)**
- 1 point awarded per \$100 dollar value of any gift-in-kind donation used by the Athletics program
- 20 points - One-time allocation for being an alumnus per degree at INSTITUTION (ie: if 2 degrees 40 points)
- 20 points – One time allocation for being a Faculty/Staff OR **1 POINT FOR EVERY YEAR OF SERVICE?**