

Members of Wheaton's women's cross-country team are confused about the dress-code policy.

Julia Snider, a sophomore and athlete for the women's cross country team at Wheaton, has never fully understood the dress code policy. Her knowledge is based on what her teammates wear. In her two years at Wheaton, nothing has been said to her about what specific attire is allowed during practices.

“It's more just about what you see [other athletes wearing] and you follow that,” Snider said. To determine what the actual rules are, Snider had to intentionally bring it up to her captains. However, Snider says that the policy has been more clearly addressed to the men's team.

Every day, the men's team creates a pile of shirts right by the football field leading into the Prairie Path. The pile marks the end of their run on campus. From then on, the men run off campus down the Prairie Path shirtless, often due to the heat. The rules are clear to the athletes that they must wear shirts on campus, but off-campus attire is not mandated.

On the other hand, according to Snider, the women's team does not have this flexibility. “What I've been told is that while we are under coach-led practices and on campus we are not allowed to run in our sports bras,” Snider said. When asked whether she would feel permitted to take her shirt or tank top off as she runs off campus in a similar manner to the men's team, she declined.

“I do find it very interesting that the men can do it and we can't,” Snider said.

For most public schools, both at the high school and college level, running shirtless is normal for female cross country runners, especially in the warmer seasons. Cross country is unique as a

constantly outdoors sport. And when athletes have to run ten miles outdoors in the elements, attire can play a large role in comfortability and performance.

“For me, it's such a culture change,” Snider said.

Growing up running track and field and cross country at public schools, she was always allowed to wear only sports bras without question. “Like I've been doing that since seventh grade,” said Snider. So, Wheaton's firmer policies have been an adjustment. However, this is not the same for other members of the team.

Wheaton has a high population of former private and homeschooled students, and this is reflected among the cross-country team. For some of the female athletes, running strictly in shirts is nothing new. Snider confirms that only a few of her teammates have expressed a desire to take their shirts off on runs.

Essentially, the women's team, including captains, seems to unanimously understand that they cannot run, both on campus and off, without a shirt. This, however, is not the case at all.

Bill Stukes, Associate Director of Athletics at Wheaton, said that the dress code policy requires all athletes to wear shirts while on campus. Of course, in the case of swimming, that looks a little different, but the rules are intended to be universal and consistent throughout, leaving less room for confusion.

In the case of the cross country team, Stukes says that Wheaton cannot enforce the dress code when the runners are off-campus.

“The rules are not meant to be more restrictive on one gender than the other,” Stukes said. So, both the women's and the men's cross country teams should be allowed that pile of shirts by the football field.

In Snider's reaction to the news, she was speechless. “That information could change how we go about this spring,” she said, “you might be seeing us without shirts this spring.”