

Athletic Task Force Recommendations

Executive Summary

In October 2009 President Cullinan formed the Athletic Task Force to make recommendations regarding athletics at SOU. The task force was made up of faculty, students and community representation.

This executive summary summarizes the report that has been accepted by President Cullinan and her cabinet:

Recommendations:

It is our overall recommendation SOU work to achieve higher and more equitable funding for its programs before making application to NCAA DII. We believe this can be achieved in the course of 5-7 years. This strategy will also allow for maximum success in the NAIA.

- I.** SOU will commit to be in optimal position to become an NCAA Division II program in the next 5–7 years. The exact time to apply for entry into NCAA DII will be based upon specific criteria, and coincide with a planning process developed by an NCAA DII Task Force appointed by the president.
- II.** SOU will create a plan to equitably and adequately fund its Athletics programs, especially scholarships, at a level above the NAIA median over the next 5 years (>\$800k), and at the NCAA DII median in 7 years (>\$1.3m).
- III.** SOU will commit to a philosophy of excellence with its Athletics programs and facilities. All programs will be evaluated through that lens.
- IV.** SOU is committed to football for the 2010 season. Evaluation of the viability of the program by SOU administration will commence after the 2010 season dependent primarily on opportunities for inclusion in a conference.
- V.** Upon successful implementation of the above goals, SOU will evaluate potential for the addition of programs such as skiing/snowboarding, swimming, baseball, golf, lacrosse, men's soccer, and a campus recreation center.

Excellence in Athletics:

SOU is committed to excellence and the opportunity for success for our Athletics programs. The term “excellence” in this plan is defined by proper funding, adequate facilities, inclusion in a nationally recognized Athletics conference, dependable scheduling of home events, post-season opportunities, proximity of non-conference competition, community and student interest, stable enrollment generation and retention, program integrity, and academic success.

At SOU we do not wish to pursue any direction that does not include excellence as the main driver. Our Athletics department is a prominent manifestation of our commitment to excellence. Athletics at SOU is a reflection of, and complement to, our academic mission.

Building and sustaining the Athletics department to be a point of pride extends a message beyond the campus community into the regional community and beyond. To that end we recognize the way in which the university presents Athletics makes a major statement to students, prospective students, their parents and the community in general. It is the objective of SOU to produce the highest quality athletic programs possible given the constraints in which we operate.

Football:

We recognize the importance and relevance of football. It is a gathering and spirit building entity unequalled on college campuses. It is a catalyst for ethnic diversity on our campus. It recruits and retains more than one hundred student-athletes. Our football program has a large community, alumni, and booster following; it is very important to them and they are very important to us.

The issue facing our football program, though, is primarily scheduling, secondary to that is funding. Because of our independent status we are at the mercy of external forces for the assurance of home football games against opponents we have a fair chance of beating. This in turn creates dissatisfaction from the students at SOU who feel their student-fee dollars aren't invested in a program that gives them a satisfactory return. We must find a conference for our football program.

Rationale for not applying to NCAA DII at this time:

- Significant increase in travel costs, scholarship needs, and salaries for a full-time compliance officer and additional coaching and/or administrative staff, would put SOU at a huge competitive disadvantage in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference (GNAC). SOU would enter into the GNAC at the bottom in terms of scholarship and operational funding.
- We question whether boosters would contribute at levels necessary to move to DII if our programs were not successful. We feel it better to engage boosters in a campaign to move SOU closer to the NAIA maximum scholarship level, thus creating more opportunities for success, while preparing to move into the NCAA DII realm when conditions are optimal.
- Throughout our investigation we found no proof an increase in general enrollment or an increase in gate sales could be associated with NCAA DII affiliation as has been posited by some proponents of a DII move. To move forward on this assumption would be risky to the university and the Athletics programs.
- The GNAC league schedule of Thursday/Saturday would result in more missed classes for our student-athletes. Compounding this issue is the expense of flights from Medford—it is not a practical option for our student-athletes to bus to Portland or Sacramento and miss more school.

Conclusion:

Including athletics into the strategic plan of the university at this time is a sign of commitment and progress. These recommendations and plans must be initiated practically, though, and as corollary to the maintenance of the university's financial stability and overall mission as an academic institution. To that end, the president will appoint two committees to chart the progress of our athletics programs. The first will be an on-campus group charged with reviewing general issues related to athletic procedures, policies, and planning. The second (NCAA DII task force) will include a mix of on and off-campus constituents, charged largely with the mapping out the financial benchmarks contained within a recommended timeline. The culmination of this second group's charge is to put SOU Athletics in a prime position to change affiliation if conditions warrant in the near future. A reasonable time-line for this goal, and for the financial benchmarks needed to accomplish it, will be created after careful review by the committee and the administration at SOU.