

**A Report on Intercollegiate Athletics at Western State College of Colorado
President's Cabinet
November 2010**

Both the *2004-2009 Academic Strategic Plan* and the *2009-2014 Strategic Plan* prescribed a comprehensive study of the role of intercollegiate athletics at Western. An ad hoc committee charged by the president to study the role of intercollegiate athletics at Western began work in November of 2009 and forwarded to the administration their findings, along with a few recommendations, in June of 2010. The ad hoc committee was charged with:

“conducting a comprehensive study of how intercollegiate athletics helps the college fulfill its mission and the mutually supportive relationship of athletics to the academic program. The committee will formulate a statement of institutional purpose and philosophy for the intercollegiate program at Western. The purpose, philosophy, and accompanying recommendations should be developed in the context of the college mission, the 2009-2014 strategic plan, and the parameters of NCAA membership.”

The study was to address, at a minimum:

- The educational expectations of intercollegiate athletic participation;
- The role of intercollegiate athletics in enrollment management;
- The appropriate competitive level of intercollegiate athletic competition;
- The number and mix of athletic programs;
- The extra-curricular value/contribution of intercollegiate athletics to the campus community (including non-student athletes, faculty/staff, alumni, and community); and
- A financial cost/benefit analysis of intercollegiate athletics at Western.

Following is the Cabinet report on intercollegiate athletics largely derived from the research and feedback of the ad hoc committee. This report will serve as a guide for future decisions regarding intercollegiate athletics at Western. The outline used here is that found in the [ad hoc committee findings](#), which is to be considered an addendum to this document.

Educational expectations of intercollegiate athletic participation

Since the introduction of academic eligibility rules for intercollegiate athletes in the late 19th century, debate has stirred as to whether eligibility standards (minimum grade point averages, standardized test scores, credit load and completion) encourage and support academic achievement or simply regulate competition by ensuring that intercollegiate rosters are populated by representative members of college and university student bodies. The Cabinet supports the ad hoc committee's conclusion that both historic purposes of academic eligibility are in play on our campus.

Academic expectations and accountability imbedded in NCAA academic eligibility requirements serve as guidelines that move Western student athletes on a track to successful graduation. Indeed, the graduation rate of 52 percent for the 2002 cohort of student athletes exceeded the campus-wide graduation rate of 36 percent. This success rate has existed for more than a decade

and the difference at Western (between student-athlete graduation rates vs. non-student-athlete rates) ranks among the highest in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC) as well as all NCAA Division II schools. From the standpoint of institutional planning and future directions, two important findings must be underscored:

1. Academic data for Western student athletes supports literature on organizational commitment, which suggests that when students are involved with campus activities they tend to perform better academically.
2. The important influence of coaches and their clear commitment to the academic success of student athletes. This is a credit to Western coaches and the culture of the athletic department as well as reinforcement of the importance of professional staff mentoring in student success.

Due to the importance of effective mentoring, the College will formalize academic assistance training for all coaches and make the existing mentoring program in athletics mandatory for a new coach's orientation to Western. Formalizing this training will ensure continuity of responsible mentoring of student athletes by coaching staff members.

Athletics and enrollment management

There are several ways to consider the impact of intercollegiate athletics on college enrollment. Media exposure for NCAA Division I football and basketball certainly provides national exposure for some institutions that undoubtedly increase enrollment rates. This kind of media exposure is rarer, and more modest, at the NCAA Division II level. In this context, smaller institutions, both private and public, look to intercollegiate athletics in other ways to optimize enrollment. Western athletics plays an important role in recruitment of new students, bringing in nearly 100 new student athletes annually. Recruitment is only one piece of an overall enrollment model. Student engagement in campus life activities greatly enhances retention efforts—a critical element of enrollment growth for Western. Student athletes comprise nearly 15 percent of Western's student body and they persist and graduate at a higher rate than non-student athletes. Successes of student athletes may be attributed to a number of possibilities that include: academic accountability to coaches and athletic administration (driven in part by eligibility standards); scholarship support; and time management and organizational skills often identified in student athletes. Western athletics contributes not only to the size of the incoming class and number of continuing students (retention) but also to the diversity mix of the student body. Student athletes comprised one-third of the population of minority students (179) on campus in 2008-09.

The opportunity to compete in intercollegiate athletics is one factor among many that are part of the college selection process for a prospective student. Academic program offerings and quality, size of institution, other co-curricular opportunities, and campus location must be taken in their entirety when considering recruitment and retention factors. It does seem, however, that engagement in campus life is a significant factor for both recruitment and retention of students. From this perspective, intercollegiate athletics is an important recruitment tool as the College works to achieve its strategic planning goal of increasing enrollment.

There are other means through which intercollegiate athletics may positively impact enrollment at Western. Western athletics host a variety of summer camps for young adults that, in 2009, brought 2,159 college-age students to campus for a range of sport camps. The extent to which this kind of exposure to the college results in matriculation at Western is difficult to quantify, but it is assumed these efforts enhance our recruitment efforts.

Many prospective student athletes first learn about Western through intercollegiate athletic programs. Ultimately many of them choose to attend Western, at least in part, because of the opportunity to compete in athletics. It is also true that many of those students are not successful in their athletic pursuits and, for various reasons, are unable to be a part of an intercollegiate program. Of the nearly 100 new student athletes recruited each year, 25 to 30 end up not competing through their entire time at Western. Western currently has no systematic way to ensure that these matriculated students remain enrolled and continue to pursue academic goals at Western. The college will develop a “bridge program” for students fitting this profile.

Western will continue to enhance student recruitment activities to increase overall prospect and applicant pools and matriculation rates and these initiatives will continue to involve the recruitment of student athletes.

Level of competition

Recently much attention has been given nationally to athletic conference and divisional (NCAA Division I, II, or III, NAIA) membership in intercollegiate athletics. Irrespective of size or mission, college and university leaders are necessarily looking to alignments that optimize revenues, contain costs, provide competitive equity for student athletes and programs, and assure affiliation with academically similar and sound institutions. All of these factors, and more, comprise what is clearly a very complex task for individual institutions as well as groups of institutions at the conference level. (Consider the University of Colorado move to the Pacific 10 conference and its impact on the remaining universities in the Big 12 conference).

Western will continue its affiliation with the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC) and NCAA Division II membership because the current RMAC conference affiliation and NCAA Division II level of competition is the best fit and most affordable option for our intercollegiate sport program. Western leadership will consider cost containment and minimizing missed class time as the college’s interests are expressed in RMAC discussions regarding future conference alignments and membership. As a member of the RMAC President’s Council, Western’s president has taken this message to other presidents and to the conference commissioner.

Number and mix of sport programs

Considering cost and revenue data, the role the current athletic programs have in recruiting student athletes, and RMAC and NCAA Division II membership requirements, Western will continue to sponsor all 11 current sports programs (six men’s and five women’s). Considering enrollment needs and the opportunities we may have in recruiting women, the College will explore the addition of one or more sports programs. Critical in this analysis will be to consider

the cost effectiveness and sustainability of increasing the role of intercollegiate athletics in the recruitment and retention of student athletes.

The co-curricular and extra-curricular value of intercollegiate athletics to the campus, local community, and alumni

Intercollegiate athletics on college campuses can contribute to a balanced blend of educational and growth opportunities for participants, can promote institutional pride and interest, can help pull together community members, alumni, and campus citizens, and can be a source of entertainment and service to the community. Conversely, athletic programs can illicit passionate feelings and can be the source of tensions and disassociation among and within these same groups. Western must continue to balance multiple programs and interests on campus and retain intercollegiate athletics in a position to be a positive element of campus life. Overall, the athletic program is of a size that can promote this balance and can coexist with diverse student interests on campus. The athletics coaches and staff are strong supporters of academic success for their student athletes and work well with faculty in promoting academic achievement. This understanding of “academics first” has benefited generations of student athletes and has also led to a generally supportive environment for intercollegiate athletics on campus.

Financial cost/benefit analysis

The college supports intercollegiate athletics through direct expenditures as well as indirectly through the construction and maintenance of athletic facilities. In FY2008-2009, the intercollegiate athletics expenditure budget of \$2.9 million was funded through the E&G fund (57 percent), auxiliary funds (5 percent), student fees (13 percent), and foundation funds (26 percent). In FY2008-2009, this direct support amounts to \$10,000 per student athlete.

Considering the many benefits to student athletes, the campus, community, and alumni, assessing the financial cost/benefit of intercollegiate athletics to the college is, indeed, complex. Undoubtedly, intercollegiate athletics is an expensive extra-curricular activity, in total funding and on a per participant basis, that the college affords students. The benefits, in return, are numerous, and while in many cases these benefits are difficult to quantify, the Cabinet concludes that these benefits justify the financial costs of delivering the athletic program at Western.

With current levels of funding and effective leadership, the athletic department has maintained a remarkably successful program. As pointed out by the ad hoc committee, the overall sport program at Western has the third highest competitive average of all NCAA Division II programs over the past 14 years, as measured by the NCAA-II Director’s Cup Competition. However, it is also noted that this high national ranking is largely due to the success of non-core sport programs.

The RMAC defines football, along with men’s and women’s basketball, and volleyball as core sports. The success of core sport programs over the past decade has been inconsistent, while non-core sports such as cross country, track and field, and wrestling have seen greater conference, regional, and national success. This imbalance between core and non-core sports and the potential negative perceptions this might bring to the athletic program was noted by the ad hoc

committee. What we lack is evidence that this is a situation that substantially impacts enrollment management, student-athlete academic success, or a balanced student body where student athletes are a positive component along with students of diverse interests.

The ad hoc committee did highlight the importance of leadership in the athletic program and how strong coaches and continuity in leadership can greatly assist with fundraising efforts. This highlights the successes the athletic department has had in garnering private donations and also the opportunity and imperative that we continue to pursue private giving. Private funds now amount to over a quarter of the annual budget for athletics. Given the College's current level of funding and the many needs, if we are to enrich the experience of student athletes in all sports, and in particular, increase the competitiveness of the core sports, it will come through continued philanthropic efforts. In the near future, the College will continue investing in improving and developing the facilities, as outlined in the Facilities Master Plan, needed to deliver a quality athletic program at Western.

Conclusion

The Cabinet concurs with the finding of the ad hoc committee that "the intercollegiate athletics program is in step with the overall purpose and mission of Western State College." There are, of course, inherent tensions and divisiveness that surround intercollegiate athletics on most college and university campuses, and Western is not without these issues. Yet despite the opinions individuals or groups may have about the fit of college athletics and the academic mission of the institution, Western must not overlook or dismiss the benefits intercollegiate athletics afford the College.

As an integral part of campus life, the athletic department must continue to be full participants in campus planning and likewise, the campus must be actively involved in athletic program planning and strategic thinking. The administration wishes to thank the members of the committee for the countless hours of thoughtful discussion, research, and analysis that have made this report possible. The well researched and deliberated findings will serve as a basis for future planning and decision making on all issues pertaining to intercollegiate athletics at Western in the near and long term.