

**University of Minnesota, Crookston
Intercollegiate Athletic Commitment
Chancellor Charles H. Casey
January 10, 2007 – 11 a.m. Bede Ballroom**

Thank you for joining us this morning and for your interest and support of the intercollegiate athletic programs here on campus.

I am pleased to announce that the University of Minnesota, Crookston will continue to compete at the NCAA Division II level as a member of the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC). Today I am reaffirming our commitment to the conference and to investing in our competitive success.

I am also committed to finding a solution to keep our intercollegiate Golden Eagle hockey program on campus.

I have made this decision after reviewing the comprehensive findings of the Athletic Review Committee, attending six campus and community forums, listening to many people and considering the best interests of the University of Minnesota, Crookston and ALL of our students. Division II is an exceptional model for academics and athletics nationally and we look forward to continuing to build excellence in this arena.

Before I address reasons behind this decision, what it means for the intercollegiate athletic program and how we will move forward, I want to thank those who dedicated the last six months to putting together a thoughtful, comprehensive report on our Golden Eagle programs. Thank you to chair Dr. Glenn Olsen and the other 17 members of the committee for gathering a large amount of information in a very short time frame. The information and comparative data provided a detailed look at our situation and a clearer direction. Without this data, it would be very challenging to determine what we need in order to work toward a more competitive situation. I believe good data leads to a more informed decision. The committee has provided a valuable service for the University of Minnesota, Crookston.

Now for some background on my decision.

Why Division II and the NSIC? There are several reasons.

1. Enrollment of student athletes has increased during the last ten years while we have been a part of the conference. Student athletes represent about 26 percent of our total enrollment and more than 40 percent of students of color at the Crookston campus. We believe this is an important contribution to the University and want to continue this momentum.
2. We will be able to maintain our current competitive sports programs and continue to provide a broad range of participation opportunities both for our students and our fans. These opportunities also support efforts to recruit both men and women to campus.
3. Visibility for the campus is high in the areas where we recruit students. The NSIC provides both conference staff and programming that support marketing efforts of its members.

4. NCAA Division II provides a unique balance between academics and athletics, emphasizing academic excellence, graduation and the development of student athletes as leaders. This unique balance is in line with our University mission.
5. The NCAA has a strong commitment to institutional control and compliance rules and regulations.
6. This conference is a good fit regionally for our campus and travel expenses are favorable in the NSIC.

This is a decision that balances the interests of both academics and athletics – a complementary relationship that serves all the students of the University of Minnesota, Crookston. Supporting the overall mission of the campus is my primary objective.

During the past year we have made significant investments in our academic programs, staffing and recruitment and retention efforts that have helped us achieve important accomplishments. These include increased enrollment numbers both on campus and online. Student satisfaction is high and faculty commitment is well documented.

Over that same time period, I've only been able to make small increases in the athletic budget. The next phase for the Crookston campus, I believe, is to strengthen our intercollegiate athletic program, which means additional investments and resources. Obviously this is our greatest challenge.

Over the next several months, I will work with University officials to identify additional resources and outside fundraising opportunities to invest over a 3-year period in athletic staff, scholarships and operations and academic programs. This phased investment strategy will provide a concrete plan for moving us forward while building more competitive programs. In the interim, I will immediately devote some internal campus resources to start the process. While investments will not immediately bring us up to the NSIC athletic budget average, it will provide forward momentum and an investment goal to meet our short-term needs and our long-term strategy.

The initial allocation of resources will be directed to those programs with the greatest need as determined by the athletic director in consultation with my office. From discussions to date, it is anticipated that resources will be directed to strengthen staff, scholarships and operations in the Golden Eagle football program. Scholarship enhancements in other areas will be looked at as well. Coaches and staff will be asked to set objectives and establish goals, and they will be held accountable for results. Evaluation of program investments will be ongoing and consistent.

In addition, plans are being made to resurface the floor in Lysaker Gymnasium, to add a concession stand and restroom facility to our football field and to resurface the track. We are exploring options for bringing a wellness center to campus that would also address many facilities issues. Some upgrades to the baseball and softball fields will be considered as part of routine campus maintenance.

Hockey and equestrian are two important athletic programs at UMC. Hockey, of course, is a very visible program in northwest Minnesota and equestrian is an emerging sport, which is very popular with our students. Each bring 35-40 students to the Crookston campus and we would likely lose a number of those students if either program was eliminated.

I believe it's in our best interest to continue to support these programs. Hockey is a special challenge given we currently are a Division II program competing in a Division III conference. We will work hard to remain a member of the Midwest Collegiate Hockey Association. If that option isn't available to us, we will pursue the possibility of playing as an independent.

Our membership in the NCAA will ensure the continuation of our successful equestrian team, which complements our academic programs well.

Again, I believe that maintaining our membership in the NSIC is in the best long-term interest of the University of Minnesota, Crookston. I know all will not agree with my assessment. Numerous challenges are ahead as a number of institutions have applied for membership in the NSIC affecting the future of the conference. However, if expansion occurs, new opportunities may present themselves, and I want UMC to be in a position to be proactive rather than having to react to change.

Most athletic programs of public institutions in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota have been affected by the numerous conference changes that have occurred over the past 3 years. I anticipate changes will continue over the next 2-3 years as well.

That is why it's important to move ahead in a strategic, intentional manner – keeping a campus-wide perspective, while still remaining flexible.

The Athletic Review Committee report also noted that expanding our academic offerings would benefit our current situation. Also we must be competitive in order to increase private fundraising and participation across the board. I believe all students at the University of Minnesota, Crookston will benefit from additional majors and fundraising dollars. The campus will grow stronger with increased retention and graduation rates, enhanced advising programs and expanded activities for more student involvement.

Out-of-classroom learning is a strength of the student experience at UMC. All students have opportunities for service learning, internships and campus clubs and organizations. Student-athletes have the additional experience of athletic competition.

I carefully studied the findings of the review committee regarding the three conference alternatives. Although each conference alternative offered benefits for the University, the challenges presented by the other options outweighed the advantages. I again recognize the work of the committee in providing the detailed comparisons. I also want to acknowledge the willingness of other institutions and conferences to provide information to committee members.

I want to especially thank the members of the Dakota Athletic Conference for their effort in providing information about their conference. A delegation traveled to UMC to meet with athletic staff, the review committee and me. They acted in a most professional way and always spoke about how they wanted UMC to be a member of their conference without ever detracting from other alternatives.

Also, I would be remiss if I did not thank our athletic department staff and coaches for the time and energy they devoted to this review process. Thank you to Athletic Director

Stephanie Helgeson and assistant athletic directors Jason Tangquist and Cathleen Behr for leading these efforts.

Again, let me state that a competitive, viable athletic program is an important part of a successful campus experience for ALL students at the University of Minnesota, Crookston. By continuing to compete at the NCAA Division II level as a member of the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC) and investing additional resources in our programs, athletics will enhance our mission of education, research and outreach in northwest Minnesota and beyond and help students continue to aim higher, reach further and dream bigger dreams.