

University of Minnesota, Crookston Athletic Review Committee Report Summary Points

Background: University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) Chancellor Charles H. Casey appointed an 18-member Athletic Review Committee (composed of community and business leaders and University staff, faculty and students) in June 2006 to examine all facets of athletic operations including student experiences, support systems, policies, facilities, finances, constituencies and competitiveness. The work will help identify the proper balance between academics and athletics on campus so both not only remain viable but continue to grow.

The committee was charged with reviewing how the intercollegiate athletic program currently supports the University's mission of education, research and outreach and examining and evaluating our competitiveness, costs, retention and graduation rates and student-athlete success to ensure that the program can continue to be more effective at all levels.

The committee was asked to analyze the following information and submit their findings to the Chancellor in November 2006. They were not asked to make specific recommendations regarding athletic conferences or program investments. The following items were to be examined:

- Academic success of UMC student athletes, including recruiting, retention and graduation rates
- Competitive success of UMC athletic programs
- Impact of athletics on student enrollment at UMC with special consideration for students of color on campus
- Overall financial support for athletics at UMC compared with peer institutions, including numbers of coaches and support staff, operating expenses, etc.
- Scholarship support for UMC student athletes
- Outside fundraising support for UMC athletic programs
- Pros and cons of alternative divisions or conferences
- Community involvement with UMC athletics
- Compliance with NCAA policies
- Overall visibility of the UMC athletic program and impact on the mission of UMC

What are the issues that brought forth a review?

The University of Minnesota, Crookston athletic program has been a member of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II since 1998 and a member of the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC) since 1999. Membership in the conference has changed over the years; NCAA Division II and NSIC requirements have expanded athletic offerings on campus and budget realities have made it challenging to increase staffing and scholarship opportunities. All of these factors have raised questions regarding our ability to compete effectively in the NSIC, given the size of our campus, budget constraints and academic offerings. Given that our campus commitment to athletics is strong, the Athletic Review Committee was established to evaluate the current athletic program structure and opportunities, examine other conference options and help identify the proper balance between academics and athletics. This work would support efforts to develop a plan to ensure the success of the Crookston campus athletic program in the future.

This review process is a byproduct of UMC's draft Strategic Positioning Task Force report, which recommended in March 2006 that a committee be appointed.

What are the findings of the committee?

The committee report defines the role that athletics plays at the University of Minnesota, Crookston. It examines where the University is currently and presents findings on what we can do in order to be more competitive. It also analyzes three different conference options – including the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC), the NCAA Division III Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC) and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Dakota Athletic Conference (DAC).

- A. **Intercollegiate athletics supports the University's mission** by offering activities that enhance students' personal and cultural development, while providing lifelong skills and team-building techniques that benefit each student athlete. Athletic programs provide opportunities for women and men on an equal basis and have enhanced opportunities for students of color in the region. Over the years, the enrollment of student athletes has increased. Today about 26% of UMC students are involved in athletics on campus (280 out of 1053 full-time students). And currently 42% of students of color on campus are student athletes.

Athletics also provides community awareness and involvement. The University receives statewide publicity, which supports recruitment efforts and provides visibility, both regionally and nationally. Intercollegiate athletics inspires more opportunities and builds a connection for alumni, increasing the potential for future gift giving to the University. The overall competitive success of the athletic programs can only enhance these efforts.

- B. In comparing **support system staffing and services** with other institutions in the Division II NSIC, the committee found that the Crookston campus, one of the smallest universities in the conference, has less staff and receives less funding for athletic programs that assist with retention and competitive success. The UMC Athletic Department budget is currently \$1.7 million, which ranks last in the NSIC, while the NCAA Division II NSIC mean is approximately \$2.6 million*.

Budgets and enrollment are more compatible with NCAA Division III UMAC and NAIA DAC members. The conference mean in Division III UMAC is \$700,000*. The NAIA DAC conference budget mean is \$1 million*. (*Budget numbers as reported for FY 05 Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act*)

Academic offerings at the University of Minnesota, Crookston are limited when compared to other universities regardless of conference. Limited academic offerings affect recruitment and retention efforts on behalf of the athletic program.

- C. The report indicates that **facility upgrades** are needed in order for athletic programs to be more successful, recruit and retain student athletes and provide the needed resources to support individual and program needs. The findings discuss needed improvements for Lysaker Gymnasium, the football field and track complex, baseball diamond, soccer field and hockey arena. Longer-term initiatives also include plans for a wellness center, which are currently being explored. Charts compare the facilities at universities in the three different divisions.
- D. The report indicates that UMC student athletes' **academic records** compare very favorably in most areas including graduation rates for Division II colleges and the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. The latest 6-year graduation rate for student athletes is on par with the general student population at 39%.
- E. The results of the **surveys of faculty and staff, current and former students, alumni athletes, current athletes, businesses, organizations and Teambackers members** indicate that programs must be more competitive and successful in order to attract additional private financial support through outside fundraising efforts and to increase overall participation.

- F. In examining the different **conference affiliation options** the committee gathered data on the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Dakota Athletic Conference (DAC); National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC).

A few of the advantages and challenges for each are listed below:

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) Dakota Athletic Conference (DAC)

ADVANTAGES

1. Possibility of being more competitive – depending on sport; similar size institutions with similar investments in operating budgets; travel distances and expenses are compatible.
2. Staffing seems to be more comparable – although, many DAC schools have education or physical education as a major and part of the coach's salary is allocated from a faculty line and the other part comes from athletics; coaches appear to spend a majority of their time in athletics.
3. Continued ability to offer athletic scholarships; the NAIA has instituted a Champions of Character program.

CHALLENGES

1. The DAC sponsors a minimum of six sports which means that UMC would have to reduce the number of sports UMC offered, possibly eliminating women's tennis and soccer, hockey and equestrian. The operation of independent schedules to maintain current sports could increase costs.
2. Overall support provided by the conference in terms of conference staff, sports information positions and student input as well as marketing strategies could reduce visibility of campus athletic programs and UMC image in general, regionally and nationally, and affect recruitment efforts
3. There is limited compliance (e.g. no drug testing policies); grant and enhancement funds are not available; 80% of the members are private institutions that provide more academic offerings.

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC)

ADVANTAGES

1. Possibility of being more competitive – depending on sport; similar size institutions with similar investments in operating budgets and staffing; travel distances and expenses are compatible.
2. Men's hockey will have a long-term solution; equestrian could still be an emerging sport to provide additional opportunities for female athletes; and UMC would have the option to add men's soccer, as there is already a club team; all other sport programs would be viable.
3. The NCAA provides student input opportunities and grants as well as marketing strategies that can increase visibility of campus athletic programs and UMC image in general, regionally and nationally, and support recruitment efforts.

CHALLENGES

1. UMAC has a moratorium on membership at least until 2010-11 and therefore, it is likely that UMAC will not be a viable conference option in the near future.
2. Academic profiles of the UMAC institutions are very different; UMAC institutions are primarily private liberal arts universities
3. UMC's ability to offer athletic scholarships would diminish; in turn, this could result in fewer students athletes and fewer students of color

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC)

ADVANTAGES

1. Membership in the NSIC and the ability to offer scholarships has increased the number of student athletes and students of color; student-athlete enrollment has increased from 180 student athletes in 1997-98 to 280 student athletes today; currently 42% of students of color are student athletes; equestrian, men's and women's golf and women's tennis have been added; all current sport programs would be viable.
2. The NSIC provides conference staff, media relations positions, grants and marketing strategies that can increase visibility of campus athletic programs and image in general, regionally and nationally, and support recruitment efforts where we draw a majority of our students.
3. The NCAA provides a balance between institutional controls and compliance with rules and regulations

CHALLENGES

1. UMC's facilities, funding and scholarship offerings rank in the bottom half of the NSIC and Crookston is one of the only universities that does not offer waivers; this affects our ability to be competitive.
2. UMC has limited academic offerings and a smaller student population when compared to other NSIC schools
3. NCAA Division II does not recognize hockey – there are no national championships; hockey would have to play an independent schedule, revert to club status or be eliminated.

Frequently asked questions regarding the report, findings and next steps:

1. What percentage of the U of M, Crookston campus budget is spent on athletics currently?

Estimated revenues for the FY 06-07 at the University of Minnesota, Crookston are \$24 million. The current Athletic Dept. budget of \$1.7 million makes up about 7% of that figure. Student athletes make up about 26% of the current enrollment. UMC has a higher percent of its student population involved in athletics when compared with other University of Minnesota system campuses.

2. Does the University need to invest more in the athletic program and if so, where should the money come from?

According to the findings, the UMC Athletic Department budget is currently \$1.7 million, which ranks last in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC), while the NCAA Division II mean is approximately \$2.6 million. In order to be more competitive, and successful in the NSIC, it seems likely that more dollars would need to be invested in order bring the Crookston campus in line with funding at competing universities. The need for additional outside private fundraising would be critical to this effort.

Revenues and expenses, when compared with NAIA and Division III institutions, are similar, if not higher. However, these numbers do not take into account endowments that support awards to athletes or tuition and room and board waivers that come out of other department budgets.

3. What are the current levels of private fundraising and how do these compare with other NSIC institutions?

The UMC Teambackers, the athletic fundraising arm, raises an average of \$150,000 annually, including in-kind donations. Just less than 50% of this is available for scholarships. Funds raised by competing NSIC universities ranges from \$113,000 to \$1 million, where data was available. The Crookston campus provides 29 scholarships annually for student athletes, while the NSIC average is 42 scholarships.

4. If more investments were made in the athletic program, where do the findings indicate is the largest need?

The committee findings do not specifically address individual sport program needs or staffing levels. However, the report does compare staffing with competing institutions and other conference options. Records also indicate which sports have had the most and least success, indicating where investments could be made.

5. What are the options for hockey if the Crookston campus remains Division II?

The findings indicate that hockey might not be a viable program in Division II as it is not a recognized sport in the NCAA. UMC currently plays in a Division III conference in hockey. If the University maintains Division II NSIC status, it is likely that hockey would either have to play an independent Division II schedule, move up to Division I, revert to club status or be eliminated.

6. What program is the most costly in regards to overhead, staffing needs, resources, etc.?

The football program requires the most staffing and resources.

7. Has there been an increase in number of student athletes over the last few years?

Student-athlete enrollment has increased from 180 student athletes in 1997-98 to 280 student athletes today; equestrian, men's and women's golf and women's tennis have been added to meet NCAA Division II rules and policies and provide opportunities for both men and women athletes.

8. What are the next steps?

Chancellor Casey will take the next four to six weeks to review the committee findings, secure clarification and additional details as necessary and look to make decisions in early 2007 regarding how best to move forward with the University of Minnesota, Crookston intercollegiate athletic program.