

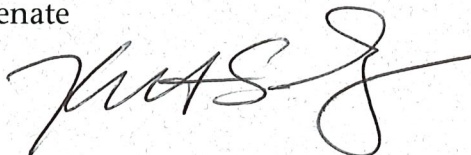
MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Dave Turnbull
Chair, Faculty Senate

FROM: Kirk H. Schulz
President

SUBJECT: Intercollegiate Athletics Concerns

DATE: December 9, 2020



I have had the opportunity to read through the multitude of comments submitted to the Faculty Senate Blog (<https://facsen.wsu.edu/senate-blog/>) under the heading "Athletics Budget Discussion Board of Regents."

I appreciate that many of our colleagues have offered a variety of opinions and viewpoints. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to these thoughtful and candid responses.

In summary, the majority of the comments submitted were not supportive of intercollegiate athletics at WSU. I acknowledge that many of our faculty colleagues feel that spending any University funds on intercollegiate athletics is misplaced, shows a lack of focus on academic excellence and is, in general, a poor decision. I have no issue with this perspective. In fact, my perspective was similar when I was a faculty member focused on teaching and research. However, it is important that faculty colleagues feel that they have been consulted, that they could give contrary opinions without fear, and that we continue to be transparent with our fiscal decisions (even if people disagree).

After reading the comments several times, I feel that the majority of the responses focus on four broad themes:

- *We should not have Division I intercollegiate athletics as this does not contribute to the overall academic mission of the University.*
- *There are serious moral and ethical issues with sponsoring a sport (football) that has been shown to cause brain damage, such as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).*
- *There is little concrete data to demonstrate clear financial benefits to WSU's academic mission through membership in the Pac-12 Conference.*

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- *Any University funds spent in support of intercollegiate athletics could be used much more productively by hiring additional faculty or staff, upgrading outdated facilities, or investing in needed research infrastructure.*

I solicited information from a variety of sources—including individuals in academic affairs, enrollment management, the WSU Athletics Council, and intercollegiate athletics—to provide responses to these themes.

Theme 1: We should not have Division I intercollegiate athletics as this does not contribute to the overall academic mission of the University.

As a land-grant institution, principles of diversity and inclusion have been embedded in the foundation of WSU for more than a century. WSU Athletics recruits some of the most ethnically diverse and talented high school students nationally and internationally to the Pullman campus. Our student-athletes represent 31 states, 31 countries, and one territory. Of our approximately 500 student-athletes, 52% of them have identified as ethnic minorities and/or other underrepresented groups. In addition, 26.2% of our student-athletes are first generation college students. Our student-athletes are studying in 9 academic units with 17 of them in the Honors College.

With graduation the goal for all students, WSU Athletics consistently contributes to the University's overall graduation success rates. In the most recent Federal Graduation Rates data, WSU student-athletes graduated at a 71% rate, compared to all students who graduated at a 60% rate.

Enrollment Management Perspectives

Athletics provides a window into the University that many prospective students gravitate toward—even if they are not student-athletes. This plays an important role in generating awareness of the institution as well as in the recruitment and retention of all students.

UCLA's American Freshman Survey has consistently found that only academic reputation and financial considerations rate higher than social and extracurricular activities as the reasons why students choose the colleges they attend. Thus, universities with large athletic programs also need to have a robust co-curricular environment. Most students want not only a university education—they want a university experience that includes extracurricular and athletics experiences.

The application and admission process for most traditional undergraduate students is an emotional exercise. Further, retention and student success are connected to how engaged and welcome students feel at their university. Athletics provides a

sense of belonging, for both the student-athletes themselves, and for the university community at large.

Theme 2: There are serious moral and ethical issues with sponsoring a sport (football) that has been shown to cause brain damage, such as chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).

The Pac-12 Conference and Washington State University recognize the full spectrum of health and safety concerns associated with all 17 varsity sports we sponsor. Since 2015, the Pac-12 has sponsored the Student-Athlete Health and Well-Being Initiative (SAHWBI). This program has funded more than \$3.5 million annually in research grants including numerous research projects focused on concussions and head and brain trauma. The Pac-12 has also established a Brain Trauma Task Force as a part of its student-athlete health initiative.

Additional research and discovery need to be done on CTE. Causation solely from concussion or brain trauma from participation in football or any intercollegiate sport has not been proven. Studies have shown that sports other than football have higher rates of concussion or brain trauma-related issues:

- Cumulative incidence of concussion (number of cumulative incident concussion diagnoses divided by the total number of participants) was highest for women's basketball (15.3%), women's lacrosse (13.9%), men's soccer (13.6%), women's skiing (11.1), women's soccer (10.7%), and football (8.9%).
- Gender and previous concussions were the most consistent estimators of concussion risk across all concussion settings (Concussion Assessment, Research and Education [CARE] consortium data).

Understanding the natural history and long-term effects of a concussion is still a work in progress. The Pac-12 Conference and WSU Athletics have established concussion protocol standards higher than those mandated by the NCAA. These protocols are managed by our Athletics Chief Medical Officer and WSU Sports Medicine staff empowered with independent and unchallengeable authority. The conference is also a leader in limiting full-contact practices throughout the season.

Theme 3: The benefits of Pac-12 membership as addressed in my memo (KHS) were the same ones that are always used—past, present, and future. There is little concrete data that demonstrate clear financial benefits to the academic mission of WSU through membership in the Pac-12.

As of the end of 2020, no school competing at the "Power 5" level in the ACC, Big 10, Big 12, Pac-12, or SEC has opted to leave one of those conferences and compete at a lower level since the University of Chicago left the Big 10 Conference in 1946. Thus, there is not substantial data on the positive or negative effects of such a decision on a university to use for comparison.

Intercollegiate athletics generates significant impacts in terms of marketing the WSU brand. The following data points illustrate some of the positive impacts of Cougar Athletics:

- **WSU Athletics' social media platforms** generate significantly **more exposure and interaction** than the University's institutional accounts. The WSU Athletics social media properties outperform in terms of followers, organic impressions, and social media engagement:
 - **WSU Athletics has 395,337 social media followers** versus **238,449 followers** for **WSU's institutional accounts**.
 - WSU Athletics garnered **6,291,441 organic social media impressions** in Nov. 2020 versus **3,761,503 organic social media impressions** for WSU's institutional accounts.
 - WSU Athletics saw **451,465 social media engagements** in Nov. 2020 versus **185,249 engagements** for the University's institutional social media accounts.

- The **Cougar flag, Ol' Crimson**, has been featured on **every episode of ESPN College GameDay for the past 16 years**. This exposure each week is **valued at between \$250,000 and \$300,000 annually**, based on 2018 ad rates:
 - **ESPN College GameDay's** visit to the WSU Pullman campus in 2018 generated more than **441,129,579 impressions** for the University across broadcast and social media outlets. The advertising equivalency for that exposure was **valued at \$4,963,635** by an independent entertainment and sports market research firm.
 - According to the media tracking company Cision, **3.5 million people read or saw news articles** that contained the words "Pullman," "GameDay," and "ESPN" in the time period surrounding the GameDay visit. Cision estimated the **print publicity value** of that exposure to be **\$865,504**.
 - The WSU homepage (wsu.edu) saw a **13% increase in traffic** in the week leading up to the ESPN College GameDay visit compared to the week before. On the day of the broadcast, traffic on the site **increased by 115.7%** compared to the prior week.
 - WSU's **main admissions page** received the most traffic—**up 23.33%** for the week and **up 64.71%** on the day of the broadcast.

Theme 4: Any University funds spent to support intercollegiate athletics could be used much more productively by hiring additional faculty or staff, upgrading outdated facilities, or investing in needed research infrastructure.

We need additional funds in virtually all areas of the University—and clearly—decisions by the administration to fund one area often mean that we cannot fund another area.

Our current proposal is to include the annual Pac-12 membership dues in the University's membership budget to be paid from non-appropriated or one-time funds starting in the 2022-23 academic year (July 1, 2022). This was standard practice at WSU prior to 2011.

In conclusion, it is my belief that membership in the Pac-12 and affiliation with the world-class academic institutions in this conference are worth the proposed investment moving forward.