

UC Davis Athletics Strategic Audit 2011



UC DAVIS ATHLETICS STRATEGIC AUDIT 2011

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Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

After many years as a nationally successful Division II athletics program, UC Davis began the transition to NCAA Division I in 2003-04 and became a full member of the Division I Big West Conference in 2007. Even with the transition to Division I athletics, UC Davis has been able to retain its sense of athletics participation being a co-curricular part of the undergraduate experience. Known for its high level of academic excellence as a top ten public research institution, UC Davis has been ranked by US News and World Report as one of the “most selective” universities. The campus is rightly proud that the student athletes continue to perform at a high level in the classroom even as the level of athletics has risen. However, challenges exist to reestablish the ICA program to the competitive level of excellence of its past and to a level that is consistent with the Vision of Excellence for the campus as a whole.

When the campus made the transition to Division I it worked to maintain the “educational model” of intercollegiate athletes that is more consistent with the lower NCAA divisions. While perhaps admirable, this is not consistent with the realities of competitively successful Division I programs which function on more of a “business model”. This has resulted in a UC Davis Intercollegiate Athletics (ICA) program that is conflicted and which is unsure of its future direction.

This conflict, both within the ICA program and the campus as a whole, must be resolved if the ICA program is to reach the levels of competitive excellence that it experienced in the past and that it aspires to obtain in the future.

In an effort to better understand UC Davis Intercollegiate Athletics, Cedric Dempsey Consulting (CDC) performed a Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis by reviewing departmental data, written material and interviews with approximately sixty individuals listed in the Scope of Work segment of this report. Selected administrators, coaches, faculty, students, alumni and boosters were interviewed in person or on the phone. Their input was invaluable in understanding the culture of the campus and department. The SWOT report thus reflects the collective observations of individuals who have a close attachment to the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics and the observations of CDC.

Many of those interviewed referred to the eight (8) principles that were used to guide the process of moving from NCAA Division II to Division I. These principles are consistent with what are commonly referred to as “The Davis Way” of athletics. Although these are worthy principles for NCAA Division III and Division II programs, they contradict the philosophy of present day NCAA Division I institutions. In the late 1970’s, NCAA Division I institutions established a principle of self-sufficiency for its ICA programs. As a result, the Division I top tier level moved away from the “educational model” of athletics toward the “business model”. At many institutions, especially those at the highest Division I level, athletics programs are treated as auxiliary enterprises within the university. This model has resulted in successful programs placing an emphasis upon potential revenue generating sports by reinvesting their resources to insure those sports that have the potential to generate income receive competitive funding to be successful.

Determining which level of NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics is the best fit for UC Davis at this time and in the future is a challenge. To this end, CDC has divided Division I into three levels of competition. To compare UC Davis with Universities at each of those levels, CDC has selected four conferences that represent each of the levels. The first level comparison is with the Big West and the Big Sky Conferences even though football competition with the Big Sky Conference does not begin until 2012. The next level selected for competitive comparison is the Mountain West Conference; and the final comparison is with the highest level of competition in Division I in the west, the PAC-12 Conference.

As an aside, there is considerable indication that the top level of Division I will consist of five to seven super conferences of 12 to 18 members each at some point in the future. This may lead to another division within the NCAA or a separate association of these conferences. UC Davis must stay abreast of these current and future changes while it seeks to determine which level of Division I intercollegiate program is the best fit now and in the future.

Future Scenarios:

In addressing which level of Division I is the best fit for the UC Davis now and in the future, four different scenarios were explored:

- UC Davis remains at the current level (no change over current spending and sport sponsorship).
- UC Davis seeks to competitively dominate the Big West Conference by increasing spending to 140% of the current Big West average by differentially funding sports or by reinvesting its current budget in fewer sports.

- UC Davis seeks to compete at the Mountain West Conference level by increasing spending to 100% of the Mountain West Conference members' average budgets.
- UC Davis seeks to compete at the PAC-12 Conference spending level by increasing its operating budget to 85% of the Pac-12 institutional average.

As described in the following sections, comparative data were used from universities that represent the conferences cited. All data are snapshots from the most recently available reporting periods. The principal source for institutional financial information is the US Department of Education Equity in Athletics Data Cutting Tool (reporting year 7/1/2009- 6/30/2010). This database consists of athletics data that are submitted annually as required by the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA). Additional sources for data regarding institutional facilities and graphics include institutional websites, Wikipedia, the NCAA dashboard data, and other sources as noted.

Because the Big West does not sponsor football, this study used the Big Sky Conference for all football specific benchmarking in place of the Big West where it was appropriate.

Based upon the data included in this report, materials presented, personal interviews and consultants' observations and experience, the following major points are summarized below:

- UC Davis has a rich history of academic integrity and broad based participation in athletics. Given the current demand for resources, it will take creative vision and execution to maintain UC Davis's longstanding athletic excellence into the future.

- UC Davis is unusual in the high student interest and financial commitment to its ICA program and in its longstanding connections to an educational model. A cultural shift to a Division I model of collegiate athletics needs to be accomplished in such a manner that it does not threaten campus support and the critical financial role of student fees.
- A major departmental cultural shift that accompanied the evolution to Division I is incomplete, leaving a mixture of ICA staff who relishes the history of noble amateurism and those willing to transition to a more contemporary model in the pursuit of greater athletic performance. Differing and sometimes adversarial perspectives are contributing to relatively low and possibly declining departmental morale.
- A comprehensive review of budget information from other institutional sources, the NCAA and the EADA databases show that UC Davis, in terms of total spending, currently operates at or near the top along most financial measures when compared to the rest of the Big West Conference. However, UC Davis has significantly more teams and student athletes, which dilutes the spending per team and student athlete to levels far below the mean of institutions within its competition.
- Compared to the Mountain West institutions, UC Davis is close to the mean in total spending because of the large number of Aggie teams, but lags significantly in every measure of investment in football and basketball. The lag between UC Davis and Pac-12 institutions is tremendous, with the smallest Pac-12 institution nearly doubling total UC Davis expenditures. The Pac-12 spends five times as much on basketball alone.

- In terms of operating expenses, in order to move to the competitive level of the Mountain West Conference, the department would have to find significant additional funds not only for operational expenses but also for capital improvements.
- Although the basketball arena is adequate to dominate the current conference, the deficiency in quality of facilities for football, basketball, student-athlete services, and sports medicine will require an incremental capital investment of millions of dollars to reach higher levels of excellence.

Recommendations related to Division I Aggie Athletics:

- Evaluate and adjust the eight (8) principles to more closely coincide with NCAA Division I, Big West and Big Sky philosophies and practices.
- First, develop facility priorities that will attract outstanding student athletes by providing excellent training, tutoring, medical and fitness facilities.
- Next, provide spectator facility enhancements that will offer an opportunity to significantly increase revenue. Obviously, the football seating and fan services should receive a high priority.
- With increased expectations from coaching staffs, the teacher/coach role needs to be reviewed to determine whether another model might better serve students who want to develop athletic skills and increased fitness levels.
- Consider moving from the current level of competition in Division I to the next level only when the program is competitively dominant in the Big West conference and has the financial capability to increase expenditures to the Mountain West Conference members' average budgets.

- Consider moving to the top tier in Division I only when competitively and financially able to do so. The latter requires that UC Davis have an operating budget that is 85% of the Pac-12 institutional average.