

## Budget Realignment Comments Regarding Athletics

### Please submit your ideas and comments here:

Our primary mission as a university is academic. It is therefore concerning to me that we are focused heavily on the possibility of cutting academics due to a budget shortfall of about \$1M, rather than focusing on Athletics. Athletics could be modified in a way that would absorb our \_entire\_ budget issue without material loss to our students.

Like most athletics programs, ours loses money. At Eastern, Athletics takes nearly \$10 million net per year from our university. One fifth to one quarter of that is in the form of student fees, while the rest is institutional support. Direct institutional support to Athletics is about \$6.6 million per year.

Athletics serves 336 student athletes, which is only 2.9% of our student body. This is fewer than the number of majors in several of our high-enrollment departments, and less than the total number of students served by even many of our small programs. Needless to say, Athletics serves this number of students at vastly higher cost than any academic department, and of course doesn't serve them at all in our core academic mission. It also does little to nothing in the way of job preparation. We must be honest that any academic department that was so costly, served so few students, and had such poor post-graduation employment numbers would be immediately closed.

Athletics will argue that their student athletes have better outcomes, such as higher GPAs, and higher retention and graduation rates. While true, this comes at a cost of \$12,400 per student per year in direct financial aid. Any department provided with such resources for their students could vastly improve retention and graduation.

I am not advocating for eliminating Athletics, certainly not in our current budget situation where our shortfall is only \$1M. Athletics attracts community interest and is enjoyed by many audience members. However, it is by no means a sacred cow that stands apart from our budget cuts. Even my proposal here continues to treat it as a special case - again, if this were an academic department it would be cut immediately - but I think this is a reasonable compromise given the community preference for athletics. (Do note that this preference doesn't translate into money, so we can question how strong the preference really is. The cost of Athletics I quote is net of all donations, ticket sales, and other revenue.)

#### Proposal 1:

We should consider if we truly want football at our university. In recent years, it's become obvious that football players routinely suffer from chronic traumatic encephalopathy, even at the collegiate and high school level of play. This seems to be an unavoidable part of football. We must consider if this is compatible with our goal of providing an education to our student body, and to prepare them for long, successful careers benefiting themselves and our community. Recall that NCAA players are not paid anything for this brain damage, unlike professional players.

The average cost of D-I FCS football is \$3M/year, and the average revenue is \$1M/year [1], so eliminating the football team would more than pay for our budget deficit. Note that while the community spoke up in favor of rebuilding our stadium, ticket sales and donations from the community don't come close to supporting the \_existing\_ football program, let alone paying for costly expansions. Gonzaga is an excellent example of a school that attracts national attention for sports without having a football team.

#### Proposal 2:

Another option is to reconsider our participation in NCAA Division I. D-II schools with football spend considerably less than D-I FCS schools, including over a million dollars less on football alone (\_net\_ of less revenue; [2]). Again, this cost difference is more than Eastern's \_entire budget shortfall\_. It is in fact unusual that Eastern is D-I and not D-II. Our regional comprehensive peers in Washington State, WWU and CWU, are both D-II. Our closest peers by Carnegie classification[3] are Cal State San Bernardino and Saint Cloud State (MN), both of which are D-II as well. I'm sensitive to the financial needs of our students, and therefore am advocating for D-II rather than D-III, as the former continues to allow athletic scholarships.

[1] <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-01-06/college-football-teams-are-risky-and-expensive-and-schools-keep-adding-them>

[2] <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/division-ii-athletics-expenses>

[3] Balanced arts/sciences, some graduate coexistence, very high undergrad, four-year full time, inclusive, high transfer in, large, primarily nonresidential.

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Yesterday in Senate the faculty were informed that the Board of Trustees would not consider real cuts to Athletics (for example, moving to Division II). I think the issue needs to be clearly put for the Trustees: EWU is currently Division I in athletics and Division II in academics. Faced with substantial budget cuts, we have a choice: we can become Division II in athletics and stay D II in academics, or we can stay D I in athletics and become Division III in academics. I would hope the Trustees agree that the primary mission of the university is education, intellectual enrichment of our students, and preparing our students for careers. I hope they would agree that it is a secondary goal of the university to serve as a minor league for various sports, and that a vibrant amateur sports community can continue as D II. It does at all our closest peer schools, including Central and Western - which even in Washington state alone have better reputations as schools than we do, because of academics. The faculty are working hard to change that reputation for the better, and now is not the time to undercut their efforts.

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My understanding is that by switching our athletic department to Division II we could save nearly all the money that Academic Affairs is being asked to cut. Considering that our primary mission is to teach students rather than provide sports, this would be a wise move. We'd still have an athletic department, and we wouldn't be asked to shortchange all our students to provide for it.

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I copy verbatim recommendation 33 from page 96 of the 2002 external review of Eastern. An independent panel of outside experts pointed this out very long ago. If it was true then, in relatively well-funded times, it's vastly more true now.

"Intercollegiate athletics should be evaluated with a commitment to reducing the drag that intercollegiate sports make on the general fund. Dollars freed up there can make a significant difference to academic programs. Moreover, research does not support the notion that strong athletics teams enhance an institution's ability to obtain private funds. And certainly that would be true for Eastern where its teams compete at a NCAA level that is greater than its other regional counterparts. Plans should be developed to reduce the university's financial contribution to intercollegiate athletics and intercollegiate athletics should report to another line area of the university, probably student affairs."

In summary, stop talking about  $\geq 3\%$  cuts as inevitable for Academic Affairs. You've taken this as a given without considering the most obvious alternative.