



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WINSTON-SALEM STATE ANNOUNCES
ATHLETIC CONFERENCE DECISION**

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (September 11, 2009) -- Winston-Salem State University (WSSU) today announced that it would inform the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the Mid-Eastern Atlantic Conference (MEAC) that the university intends to remain a Division II institution for intercollegiate athletics. The process to remain in Division II will begin immediately, but the school will continue to compete in the MEAC at the Division I level through the 2009-2010 season.

At a special called meeting, the university's Board of Trustees voted unanimously to support the recommendation of Chancellor Donald J. Reaves to bring to a close the reclassification to Division I process that was begun in 2004. Reaves praised the vision of former WSSU chancellors who had supported the move to Division I, but stated that "in the final analysis the resources to complete the reclassification simply were not available, currently nor prospectively, in sufficient amounts".

"This decision is probably the hardest one I have ever had to make because I believe that WSSU belongs in Division I," said Chancellor Reaves. "If there were any reasonable way to complete this transition without diverting resources from competing academic priorities, I would have recommended that we stay the course.

"Over the past two years, we have continued to be concerned that budgetary constraints would not allow us to successfully complete the transition," Reaves added. "As the athletics deficits continued to mount, there appeared to be no rational way we could continue the process. I believe that this is the right decision for WSSU at this point in time given our resources.

"Our goal now is to complete the move to NCAA Division II and find a conference home for our athletic program before the 2010-2011 season begins. We have been reviewing all of the options in our region and our preference would be to return to the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA). We will, however, have to complete the reclassification process with the NCAA and file a letter of interest with Commission Leon Kerry at the CIAA."

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The spending side of the budget for the WSSU athletics program has grown during the three-year period of 2005-2006 through 2008-2009 from approximately \$2.88 million to \$5.58 million while total revenue grew from \$2.07 million to \$3.77 million. Just for the fiscal year that ended June 30, the athletic program generated a deficit of approximately \$1.8 million. The increase in expenses was directly connected to the transition to Division I, which requires that an institution field a minimum of 14 teams and add substantially more resources such as scholarships, coaches and facilities.

“While our expenses have increased as one would reasonably expect, the budget problem that we have encountered is a revenue-side problem” Reaves added. “Currently, nearly 80% of total revenue comes from a single source, student fees. While the university has the second highest athletic fee in the UNC system, our fee is among the lowest in the MEAC where we are competing. With the size of our student body, it became evident that we were always going to be at a financial disadvantage.”

UNC President Erskine Bowles also expressed support for Chancellor Reaves’ recommendation. “I know that Chancellor Reaves explored every viable option before reaching this difficult decision, but in the end WSSU – like every other UNC campus – must operate its athletic department on a fiscally responsible basis. And it cannot put the burden of doing so all on the backs of its students. Particularly in light of current economic conditions, Chancellor Reaves made the hard – but right – choice to put academic priorities ahead of athletic aspirations.”

“Even though the decision has been made to remain at Division II, we will continue to develop options for increasing revenue for our athletic program,” said Reaves. “We have increased our marketing efforts for the 2009 football season and we hope that will support our efforts to increase ticket sales, sponsorships and other fundraising activities.”

The process of reclassifying the WSSU athletic program to Division II will begin with a letter of intent to the NCAA Division II Membership Services Sub-Committee. The university will also have to reduce the size of its athletic program from the Division I to the Division II level, which includes reducing the number of athletic scholarships. There also may need to be reductions in the size of the athletic staff in order to generate the savings needed to run the program within the parameters of the resources that are available.

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“With regard to our students-athletes, some of whom will be affected by this decision, we will be working with each affected-student to ensure that to the extent possible they are held harmless. Those who may be affected by this move, either through loss of scholarship or the move from Division I athletics, will be given as much guidance and assistance as possible,” Reaves explained. “While our athletic program is very important to the university, our number one short-term priority is the well-being of our student-athletes.”

About Winston-Salem State University

Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina, is a public university founded in 1892 in Winston-Salem, NC. WSSU is a historically black university that today is a recognized regional institution offering baccalaureate and graduate programs to a diverse student population. *U.S. News and World Report* has ranked the university among Top Public Comprehensive Colleges in the South -- Bachelor’s Category for the last nine years (2001-2009). WSSU currently offers more than 40 baccalaureate and 10 master’s degree programs to a student population of more than 6,400. For more information, visit www.wssu.edu.

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