

Questions and Answers

Q1: When was the decision made to move back to Division II?

A: We have been discussing the transition for the past 18 months. I made my recommendation to the Board on Friday, September 11, 2009, and the Board supported that decision.

Q2: Where will your teams be playing this season?

A: As we said, we will continue in the MEAC for the 2009-2010 season.

Q3: Do you think you will be able to get into another conference by next year?

A: We are beginning the process of reclassifying as a Division II school immediately with a request to the NCAA. We also will submit a letter of intent to return to the CIAA and work through both processes simultaneously with the goal of all of our teams being eligible to compete in the CIAA for the 2010-2011 season.

Q4: You said this was a hard decision, but hadn't you made up your mind to do this months ago?

A: No. I had attempted to lay some groundwork over the past several months in case this was the final decision. If there were not the financial issues, I would certainly have preferred to complete the transition to Division I.

Q5: Does this mean you won't ever be able to play A&T or NC Central again?

A: No, it does not mean that. In the past, prior to our admission to the MEAC, we played A&T and Central. The decision as to whether that can happen in the future is something that will depend of the schedules and the desire of the chancellors.

Q6: When the reclassification was first announced, the university stated it was attempting to move to Division I as a means of increasing awareness and respect for the university as well as to increase incremental revenues. What do you think will happen to the image of the university now?

A: Obviously we are not the first school to begin the process only to discover that the increased revenues would not be enough to offset the increased expenses. With regard to the question about awareness and respect, I do not subscribe to the notion that we need to define ourselves by our athletic affiliation. The greatest effect will be the disappointment of some of our students, alumni and fans, and that's understandable. But beyond that I believe that we will be better for having made the decision to run our athletic program, all of our programs for that matter, within the parameters of available resources.

Q7: What made the move financially impossible?

A: Our athletic program does not generate enough revenue to be self-sufficient. With the increased costs of added scholarships, coaches and sports to move to Division I, we just could not afford to continue to absorb the financial losses.

Q8: Couldn't you have figured out how to cut the budget and get the costs and revenue more in line?

A: We have trimmed the budget as best we could. The problem, however, is not a spending problem but a revenue problem. We just don't generate enough revenue and our athletic fundraising has never been strong enough to sustain the program. So, not only do we not have enough revenue to keep the program from losing money, we certainly would be at a financial disadvantage trying to compete with the other Division I schools.

Q9: Why can't you generate enough revenue?

A: There are a myriad of reasons not the least of which is that we do not own our own football stadium or basketball arena. Football and basketball are the two revenue-producing sports, and not owning the venues at which these sports teams play places us at a tremendous financial disadvantage. It means that we must forgo a substantial portion of the revenue from gate receipts and parking, and from concessions.

Take basketball for example. When we use the city's facilities, we often have ended up with such a low attendance for that there was no profit to split with the city. In fact, there have been instances when we owed money to the City to cover its operational expenses. And if we move our basketball games to the campus we are constrained by the capacity of our gym. Our gym is so small that students, who should have first priority, can fill it leaving very few if any seats for paying fans. Compounding the problem is the lack of on-campus parking. The result is that our program must depend almost exclusively on student athletic fees. The fact of the matter is that we are too dependent on athletic fees for a school our size and, as I said, athletic fundraising has never been a major revenue producer.

Q10: Couldn't you have just moved some money from somewhere else in the university to help cover the athletic program?

A: First, we certainly could not use state appropriated funds to support athletics since that would not be a legal use of that money. The same is true with regard to tuition revenue. Second, as much as we understand the importance of athletics to the university, our mission, first and foremost, is to educate students. Athletics should never be given priority over academics for resources. Athletics support the academic process, but must never subvert it. Taking funds away from the academic mission would do just that. There is no way that we could short-change academics to support athletics.

Q11: Since you had telegraphed the move back to DII already, is that the reason you're having such a hard time finding a new athletic director?

A: We are really not having a hard time. We are taking whatever time is needed to find the right person for this critically important position. We have, of course, had some candidates who were only interested in the job if we continued our efforts at becoming a DI school. We have also interviewed candidates who thought we should remain a DII school. So, I'm not sure that the division issue has really had a major impact on the AD position.

Q12: What are you going to do about the student athletes who will lose out when you reduce scholarships to the DII level?

A: We will be working with all of our athletes, those who are on scholarship and those who are not. We will be doing everything we can to protect these commitments to our students.

Q13: What are you going to do about student athletes who came to WSSU because it was playing in Division I? What if they want to leave?

A: While we certainly would like to keep all of our athletes in place, we have to understand that these students and their parents have to make the decisions they believe are in their best interest. That means if a student athlete wants to leave WSSU to go to a Division I school, we will work with them in every way possible to help with that transition. Again, our main concern is and will always be our students – whether they are athletes or not.

Q14: When can you re-apply to be Division I and will you ever consider making that move again?

A: I am assuming that if we are not prepared at the moment to make this move that it will be some years before we are. Would I ever consider applying again? The answer is yes, but only when we are prepared to make that move.

Q15: You talk about revenue being the problem, but aren't you going to have even less revenue when you play Division II schools instead of A&T and NC Central?

A: Of course the A&T and NC Central games are usually our two biggest sporting events. Again, however, we only get a portion of the proceeds of the gate and parking since the stadium belongs to the city and they also get 100 percent of the concession revenue. So, even with these two sell-out games, the revenue is still not what it should be. Additionally, these are only home games every-other year so they do not generate annual revenue. So, revenue should be about the same, but the expenses will be less.

Q16: Isn't there some other conference besides the CIAA that you could play in?

A: We looked at all the regional conferences and returning to the CIAA was our best alternative. In addition to being our "home" for many years, it includes the major sports and the other members are certainly within a reasonable travel distance for us. We have to calculate the cost of road games for all of our sports as part of the decision. Since that would also be an issue for schools in other conferences, it could hinder anyone else being willing to accept us. Additionally, many of our students see the CIAA schools as our rivals because they come from the Charlotte, Raleigh and Fayetteville areas.

Q17: What other regional conferences did you look at and why didn't you select one of them?

A: We looked at: the Peach Belt Conference which includes 13 schools spread through North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Florida, but the conference does not sponsor football or bowling; Conference Carolinas has 12 schools from North and South Carolina, but again does not sponsor football or bowling; the South Atlantic Conference was not even considered since it is for small, independent schools.

Q18: If not owning the football stadium is a major economic issue, why doesn't the university work with the City and take ownership of it?

A: Even if we were to own the stadium we still would have an expense problem since the debt load would be approximately \$500,000 each year.

Q19: Aren't there other revenue-generating actions the university could take that would allow it to continue the transition?

A: We have gone through due diligence on so many ideas and cannot get to the dollars we need. The best we can come up with through marketing and fundraising is an approximately \$1 million increase and that still leaves us \$2 million short of what we need to meet our budget.

Q20: Other schools operate athletics at a deficit and the schools subsidize them. Why can't WSSU?

A: With the budget reductions and resources we currently have, we cannot afford to do that since it would have a negative impact on our mission to educate students. We need to be spending any additional dollars we have on our efforts to improve our student retention and graduation rates.

Q21: Isn't being a Division II school going to hurt the reputation of the university?

A: I don't think we need to define ourselves by our athletic affiliation. The best thing we can do for our students and our alumni is to increase the value of a Winston-Salem State University education.

Q22: What sports are you going to drop to be in Division II?

A: We do not have to drop any sports. We will certainly look at our budget at a Division II level and determine what direction we will take.

Q23: How are you going to save money by being Division II?

A: We will be required to reduce the number of athletic scholarships and then there is a possible reduction in coaches as well as a reduction in transportation costs for teams playing away games.

Q24: Why are you making this announcement now since football season just started?

A: There is no good time to make this decision. The Commissioner of MEAC has been pressing us for a decision because he needs his schools to be working on their schedules for next year. Plus, we need to begin the reclassification process immediately in an effort to have a home for our athletic program for the 2010-2011 season.