**Review of HSU Athletics Planned for Fall Semester**

07-11-2016

The Humboldt State University strategic plan is focused on four key areas: supporting student success, providing a welcoming environment for our diverse community, ensuring that we have the resources needed to fulfill our educational mission, and expanding partnerships, both on- and off-campus.

The HSU athletics program addresses several of these strategic goals. Our intercollegiate athletics program is a great source of pride for our community, and the athletic experience teaches students important life skills that support their success, both on campus and beyond. However, we must also make sure that costs of our intercollegiate athletics program do not exceed resources that we have available for these activities.

Eight years ago, HSU adopted a funding model that eliminated the use of state General Funds for athletics. Student Instructionally-Related Activities (IRA) Fees were increased to provide funding for athletics.  Since then, athletics has been supported by a combination of fees and fundraising.

Costs for athletics continue to increase, including mandatory increases in salaries and benefits for coaches and staff and increased expenses for team travel and athletically related scholarships.  Athletics has been spending its reserve funds to address the increasing costs, and in FY2015-16 expenses exceeded available funds. Athletics has now used nearly all of its reserves, and it has a structural deficit that is projected to grow significantly next year. While HSU athletics does a good job of fundraising to support scholarships and through gifts-in-kind, the overall financial situation surrounding athletics is not sustainable.

 In a larger context, the University’s budget has been operating with a structural deficit for at least six years, and HSU currently has one of the lowest levels of reserves among the 23 campuses in the CSU system. HSU’s budget planning, led by the University Resources and Planning Committee, is addressing this institutional issue through their strategic budgeting initiative.

As we begin to project operating plans and budgets for FY2017-18, it is important to ensure that HSU will operate its athletics program within the limits of available resources. To assess our operations and to offer suggestions and recommendations based on best practices from programs across the country, HSU has contracted with Strategic Edge Athletic Consulting.

Strategic Edge is an athletics consulting firm that assists colleges and universities and athletic conferences with challenging compliance and membership issues and with strategic initiatives. The client service team from Strategic Edge has over 50+ years in NCAA Division II leadership positions.

During the next few months, Strategic Edge will assess the HSU athletics department and offer recommendations regarding national and conference affiliation options, sports sponsorship opportunities, required contests and participation requirements, athletics department staffing, athletically related scholarship models, comparative cost analysis, return-on-investment projections, and other strategic considerations for the athletics program.  The assessment will be intentionally inclusive, transparent, and comprehensive. I have asked Strategic Edge to engage our entire HSU community, including our students and the broader regional community, in their review.

Strategic Edge has started to collect data from the HSU athletics program and is preparing some initial assessments. During one of the first two full weeks in September, the team will visit campus and meet with a variety of groups, which will include representation from both our on-campus and off-campus communities. In addition, we are creating a communication link from the HSU website that will provide an opportunity for comments and suggestions to be delivered directly to the Strategic Edge team.

 I have asked that the final assessment and recommendations be prepared by the end of November 2016. Decisions will be made soon thereafter, in order to start planning for changes and new initiatives for athletics that we will plan to implement in FY2017-18.

I welcome your feedback regarding this campus initiative; additional information will be shared as it becomes available.

Sincerely yours,

Lisa A. Rossbacher, Ph.D.

President

**Source URL:** http://www2.humboldt.edu/pmc/portal/review-hsu-athletics-planned-fall-semester