

2013

PROGRAM REVIEW

Football & Men's Basketball

UNIVERSITY of WYOMING



COWBOYS

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INTRODUCTION

In September of 2013, University of Wyoming President, Dr. Robert Sternberg, and Director of Athletics, Tom Burman, invited Collegiate Sports Associates (CSA) to conduct a review of the revenue producing football and men's basketball programs with the overall goal of improving program competitive and operational effectiveness.

CSA President, Todd Turner, and his associates, Jim Livengood, Dave Odom, and Tyrone Willingham conducted the review. The Review Team was chosen based upon their significant long-term experience in NCAA Division I Athletics. Mr. Turner and Mr. Livengood together served as Division I Directors of Athletics for over fifty years at eight different institutions. Mr. Willingham (football) and Mr. Odom (basketball) together served as head coaches at six major Division I institutions, earning National Coach-of-the-Year honors in each of their respective sports.

The consulting team visited campus on October 2 and 3, 2013. They toured the facilities and interviewed over forty individuals either in one-on-one sessions or in small groups. Phone calls were arranged with several additional individuals who were not available during the site visit. Among those interviewed were senior University administrators, members of the athletics administrative staff, head coaches, faculty and student-athletes. The review team also met with four University alumni donors.

In advance of the campus visit, the team reviewed dozens of applicable University documents including, but not limited to: Athletics Department Annual Report, athletics policies and procedures manual, University and Athletics Department organizational charts, job descriptions for key positions, performance reviews for senior administrative staff and head coaches, annual budgets and supporting financial documents, Departmental publications, NCAA compliance reports, and summaries of various Athletics Department sponsorship and media contracts. In addition, documents related specifically to the football and men's basketball programs were carefully reviewed. These included academic performance records, job descriptions, employment contracts, media guides and recruiting publications, and current and future schedules.

The initial findings of the review team were reviewed by President Sternberg and Board of Trustees Chairman, David Bostrom via conference call with Mr. Turner and Mr. Livengood on October 11. The initial draft of the report was submitted on November 1, 2013.



OVERVIEW & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to review the operational and structural support systems for the primary revenue producing programs of football and men's basketball with the intent of positioning both programs for sustained competitive success. The review team was carefully selected to include highly experienced coaches and administrators with significant and successful experience in Division I football and basketball.

All four of the consultants toured the athletics facilities and met personally with President Sternberg and Director of Athletics, Tom Burman. Mr. Turner and Mr. Livengood then focused upon the overall administration of the athletics program and institutional culture. Mr. Odom and Mr. Willingham spent the majority of their time interviewing the head football and basketball coaches and key support staff assigned to each program. In addition to the President, Director of Athletics, and head coaches, among those interviewed were senior athletics administrators, members of the faculty, several current and recently graduated student-athletes, and a small group of donors and supporters. Initial findings were then shared with President Sternberg and Board of Trustees Chairman, David Bostrom prior to the submission of the final written report.

Some common themes emerged from the information gathered during these interview sessions. The consultants were able to identify several unifying assets that give strong promise to the future of athletics and specifically, the football and men's basketball programs. Likewise, the consultants believe there are undeniable challenges at play that need to be addressed for Cowboy athletics to reach its full potential.

Among the many strengths identified within the Department, six stand out:

1. The University of Wyoming is somewhat unique in that it is the only NCAA Division I program in the State. Wyomingites love their Cowboys and exhibit an abiding, infectious passion for the University that is embraced throughout the State. Competitively successful football and men's basketball programs can capture the headlines as well as the hearts of the people of the State. This is an undeniable asset that can benefit the entire University.
2. Competitive success begins at the top. The President, supported by the Board of Trustees, has placed a high value on athletics and recognizes the impact that strongly competitive football and men's basketball programs can have on the ability of the University to achieve its goal of being the nation's top land-grant institution. Consequently, the University's key leaders have aspirations for these programs to be highly successful and visible representatives of the University's overall commitment to excellence.
3. The President, being relatively new to the University and unencumbered by previous history, has very high competitive aspirations for the football and men's basketball programs and is personally committed to holding key leaders across the institution to higher standards of performance.
4. The President and Trustees recognize that all of the tools for competitive success are not in place and are actively engaged in trying to assist the Athletics Department in managing its financial, operational, and competitive challenges. Furthermore, they are willing to assist in building a campus culture that fully embraces and supports the Athletics Department.

5. The Athletics Director and head football and basketball coaches are highly competitive veterans that know and understand their respective jobs, have the experience and expertise to carry them out, and are passionate about their programs and University of Wyoming.
6. There is a very exciting master plan in place to continually improve the athletics facilities.

Challenges exist that cannot be ignored, however. The cold hard facts are these:

1. The University does not have clearly stated goals for the Athletics program. There is no University strategic plan for athletics. While there are goals and priorities within the Athletics Department, these are not widely known.
2. There is a pervading opinion that “good enough is good enough” in football and basketball. Thus, there is not a sense of urgency and accountability that accompanies programs with high expectations for competitive success.
3. Recruiting and retention of Division I/FBS caliber student-athletes and staff are major challenges. These are the two most critical priorities in improving the competitiveness of both programs.
4. Geography presents some unique challenges not faced by other peer institutions within the Mountain West Conference. Travel costs are high, travel logistics difficult, non-conference scheduling extremely challenging...all in a very small (yet loyal) market. This impacts almost every area of the athletics program operation from student-athlete recruitment, to academic performance, staff recruitment and retention, alumni support, ticket sales, game attendance, etc.
5. Some academic policies may make it difficult for enrolled student-athletes to transfer academic credits between majors which can delay graduation and potentially impact APR scores.
6. Admissions policies for transfers and junior college graduates have the potential to cause a loss of transferrable academic credits that may require these students to take additional courses (summer school, often at their own expense) to gain eligibility, something that may not be required at peer institutions. This is potentially a recruiting disadvantage.
7. The football and men’s basketball programs are under-funded considering the geographic location of the University and the inherent costs of travel for competition and recruiting unique to Wyoming. The funding model is a problem and needs to be re-examined.
8. There needs to be an emphasis on revenue generation and a cohesive plan to market the athletics program and raise private support (donations).
9. The Athletics Director and head coaches should be more visible within the University and local community.

10. Communication with external constituents (donors, sponsors, media, etc.) could be more effective and should be more consistent.

11. Communication within the Athletics Department and throughout the university community needs to improve.

We believe, however, that real and potential liabilities at Wyoming, if addressed properly, can be managed to contribute to the Department's ability to serve its mission effectively and meet its current challenges. For instance, opportunities exist to:

1. Position the Athletics Program as an integral and highly visible part of the University's strategic planning.
2. Raise the level of expectations and accountability within the Department.
3. Recruit and retain top quality student-athletes and staff.
4. Grow resources through more effective fundraising and marketing programs.
5. Strengthen the University "brand" by improving the image and perception of the athletics program both locally and throughout the nation.

This is a very important time in the life of the Wyoming athletics program. The arrival of a new President with high expectations for the athletics program presents an opportunity for unmatched cooperation and support.



OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I. LEADERSHIP & ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL COMMENTS: A new UW President placing great value on being competitive in football and men's basketball brings tremendous opportunity to the Athletics Department. There is potential for this to be a key moment in the history of the Wyoming Cowboys allowing the school to redefine itself regionally and nationally while re-energizing its loyal fan-base across the state. However, a potential critical disconnect exists if expectations are raised by University leadership, but the much-needed resources are not provided to the football and men's basketball programs supporting their respective efforts to be among the elite programs in the conference and, thus, the region. A real or perceived lack of support from University leadership will lead to the belief that leaders in athletics – administrators and coaches – could not be successful.

As expectations rise for the Cowboy football and men's basketball programs - as they should – it must be made clear to all involved that increased support (or plans to gain the support) will help to allow for the growth of the programs. This is going to take an “all in” effort including: University leadership, athletics leadership, coaches, athletics staff, university faculty and staff, donors, season ticket holders, community leaders throughout the state, etc. Consistent and transparent communication about the process will be mandatory. This effort is a process, it is not an event. It must be treated as such from the beginning to manage the expectations of all.

In addition to re-energizing the loyal fan-base, much attention must be focused on UW Athletics' staff at all levels. Those representing UW Athletics must rally behind this effort daily as a united front while complementing the efforts to enhance the school's brand and messaging regionally and nationally. The UW Pride attitude will be as crucial to the success of this effort as the above-mentioned resources. Leadership in the Athletics Department will be the key to the success of this effort as much of this hinges on a critical culture shift.

- A. **OBSERVATION:** It is not a secret that UW has real challenges that influence competitiveness in athletics. However, there appears to be an attitude that UW Athletics' has simply accepted this as the reality of today's world instead of focusing on improvement. In a report prepared by UW Athletics in July 2013, it states: “Wyoming overachieves in the world of ‘big-time’ intercollegiate athletics considering the size of its population, its recruiting pool and its television market... Without question the current collegiate landscape has made it more challenging to remain competitive. The factors that influence competitiveness – ticket sales, corporate revenue, annual giving and television – are all major challenges to a program like Wyoming.” The next sentence then reads: “UW overcomes those challenges every day.” It can be argued that these statements, in context, may be fair and accurate on various levels. Wyoming Athletics can be considered by some to be successful based on its challenges. However, these types of statements may demonstrate “a culture of acceptance and validation.” This culture must evolve into “a culture of progress” to match raised expectations.

RECOMMENDATION I(A)i: The people of Wyoming, who understand the challenges more than anyone, made a decision long ago to compete at the Division-I level. This is not something people are looking to change. Thus, UW Athletics leadership must cease validating its performance

to stakeholders and shift the focus to striving to do better, particularly in the ultracompetitive worlds of football and men's basketball. It's time for the Department and its stakeholders to embrace their built-in challenges and realize that to be competitive at a high level, they must operate with little to no margin of error and with a feverish intensity. Accountability starts with the Athletic Director. The AD and athletics leadership must raise the bar and hold people accountable to a higher level of performance, starting with themselves. Good enough is not good enough.

RECOMMENDATION I(A)ii: Athletic administrators could benefit from more professional development opportunities in leadership and interpersonal communications and should be held to a high standard of performance in these areas. Job performance expectations should be written to include specific, measurable benchmarks for achievement. Evaluations of coaches and staff should occur regularly. Job performance reviews should validate the ability of key employees to be effective in the workplace. All employees should be held accountable for their performance in this regard.

- B. **OBSERVATION:** The existing culture does not expect championships for UW football and men's basketball.

RECOMMENDATION I(B)i: It is difficult to win in college athletics. Conference championships are hard to come by. However, we are all products of our expectations. The current "culture of acceptance" does not position UW football or men's basketball for conference titles. The first step to winning a championship is expecting to win it. Championships for football and men's basketball must become a priority in the UW culture.

The President and Athletics Director must take the lead in changing this culture. Their visible commitment to championship performance is essential. Good enough is not acceptable. This shift in culture will not occur overnight. It must be powered by strategic efforts to position UW's football and men's basketball programs to compete for league titles and national relevance. The resulting strategic initiatives must be viewed by all stakeholders as relevant, measurable, and sustainable.

RECOMMENDATION I(B)ii: The University should develop, implement and publicize a UW Strategic Plan for Athletics (with a focus on football and men's basketball) featuring measurable goals and objectives, strategies and action plans to achieve these goals, assigned accountability for carrying out these strategies, timelines for implementation, and metrics to continually measure progress. This plan must be seen as the *University's* Strategic Plan for Athletics as opposed to simply an Athletics' Strategic Plan and must be managed accordingly.

The process for developing the strategic plan is as important as the plan itself. To encourage broad-based ownership in the Plan, it is recommended that the process be inclusive and transparent inviting input and participation from a wide range of stakeholders.

The plan should be grounded in a clearly articulated set of core values that are in alignment with the University's stated values. It should clearly articulate a vision for the Department focusing on football and men's basketball. Its strength is in its practical identification of specific goals with initiatives that will be undertaken to achieve them. The success of the Strategic Plan will be

determined by how the entire University community accepts and responds to its commitments and responsibilities.

It will take disciplined leadership to manage the Department using a Strategic Plan and its professed core values as a road map. The big decisions...where to allocate resources and personnel decisions...will be made easier if leadership consistently relies upon a universally acknowledged Plan and core values to guide them.

RECOMMENDATION I(B)iii: In advance of the Strategic Planning process, the President should consider establishing a “Championship Task Force” to identify the critical areas at the University which impact athletics success. This Task Force will develop plans for improving critical processes and policies that could be incorporated into a strategic plan.

- C. **OBSERVATION:** Success for UW football and men’s basketball will positively impact the University and all of the Athletics Department’s programs. And, because of the unique importance of UW to the entire state, success in football and men’s basketball will positively impact the reputation of the entire state of Wyoming.

RECOMMENDATION I(C): Consistent messaging and education to all University stakeholders about the importance of the focus on UW football and men’s basketball should continue. The President has laid a strong foundation for these communication efforts in recent months. More voices including the AD, University Trustees, community leaders, donors, etc., should be heard discussing the importance of this effort to the entire State, University, and all of its athletics programs. The potential positive impacts must be clearly defined to those who may assume this process will not benefit them.

1. Goals and expectations for UW Athletics should be discussed with the Board of Trustees. Their input, public endorsement and ultimate investment in a unified vision is needed.
2. A clear message to the University community regarding the value of the athletics program to the University would go a long way to explaining why, even in times of economic stress, athletics (particularly football and men’s basketball) is worthy of investment and continued support. This is especially true for the faculty. This message needs to be clear, concise, and repeatable. It should consistently be part of the President and Athletics Director’s public statements about athletics at Wyoming.
3. The President and Athletics Director should regularly discuss these goals and expectations with the President’s Cabinet, senior staff, faculty leadership, and student leaders, engaging them in constant, open and honest dialogue on how to achieve them.
4. The President’s stated goals for UW football and men’s basketball should be included and addressed in the Strategic Plan.



II. RECRUITING

GENERAL COMMENTS: People win championships. You are only as good as the coaches and athletes who wear your colors. That is why recruiting and retaining high quality athletes, coaches and staff are so very critical. As long as the basic tools are in place (facilities, equipment, budgets, etc) the difference maker is the people. Consistent, effective recruiting is the most fundamental key to competitive success.

Recruiting and retaining talented coaches and staff have been challenges for Wyoming. It is essential that the tools for success be in place. The best investment you can make is to assemble the best coaches and staff and give them the basic tools and support they need to succeed. If they can successfully pursue their professional goals at Wyoming, the University will also benefit.

Recruiting and retaining high quality Division I football and basketball players are highly competitive challenges and not for the faint-hearted. It takes a commitment of time, talent, and persistence supported by an exciting message and vision. It isn't always about the things we have to offer, although facilities, uniform designs, travel, and opportunities for exposure are important. Rather, it's about where we are going and who will be there to lead the way.

- A. **OBSERVATION:** The current “culture of acceptance and validation” has a major influence on the bloodline of football and men’s basketball at Wyoming – recruiting. Recruiting to UW can be challenging, due to unique factors; however, this is exacerbated if those involved choose to focus on this daily.

RECOMMENDATION II(A)i: Create “a culture of recruiting” within the UW family making recruiting a priority for *everyone* involved in the Athletics Department and for additional members of the University. Wyoming’s recruiting process and messaging must be recognized as an industry leader for their creativity and consistency.

RECOMMENDATION II(A)ii: Clearly define the responsibilities of each person in the Department and of other individuals within the University who will support the recruiting efforts of the coaches. These roles may be direct and/or indirect. Ownership of recruiting must not fall solely on the coaching staffs. It must be shared throughout the Department and the University. It is critical the coaching staffs must be engaged with others throughout the Department and across campus to create this culture.

RECOMMENDATION II(A)iii: Develop and/or refine UW Athletics’ key recruiting messages featuring its unique selling proposition. While some messages may vary slightly between programs, the core messages must be consistently communicated to those in the Athletic Department and the University. This messaging must be consistently shared by all involved in the recruiting process, whether directly or indirectly. The on-boarding process of new employees within the Athletic Department and the University must include these key recruiting messages for UW Athletics.

This messaging must become a focal point of the Department’s branding efforts. (This is addressed in detail later in this review.)

RECOMMENDATION II(A)iv: Develop a recruiting-based professional development process for all coaches and key Department staff.

1. Best practices for recruiting to UW will be developed and shared with input from those involved with all programs. Coaches from all programs and key Department staff should meet quarterly to review best practices and messaging.
2. Additional professional development opportunities should be scheduled for this group (sales training, customer service training, etc.).
3. Coach-to-Coach mentor program should be developed, focusing on recruiting tactics. Veteran UW coaches should be paired with coaches, representing different programs, who are newer to UW Athletics.

B. **OBSERVATION:** Travel to and from Laramie for recruiting is an obvious challenge when transporting recruits. However, with limited options, creativity and consistency becomes crucial.

RECOMMENDATION II(B): Create a repeatable experience for recruits' transportation from Denver airport to Laramie. Use this experience to establish "common language" and a "common experience" for all recruits. This "common language" and "common experience" will allow others involved in the recruiting process to effectively communicate with the recruits while enforcing key messages.

1. Develop creative options for ground travel that will leave a memorable impression with recruits; style, comfort, amenities, etc. Work with donors to identify options and elicit their support. This will allow donors to feel as though they have a direct impact on recruiting.
2. Brand the travel from Denver to Laramie with a name. This name will be used by all with UW recruiting. The consistency in the use of this name is crucial to its success.
3. Develop a message based on UW's commitment to its student-athletes to be associated with the drive.
4. Those involved in the on-campus recruiting process should be familiar with and reference as often as possible the chosen name of the branded drive as well as the associated message to the recruit during the visit.
5. Have all recruits view video presentations with newly developed key messaging regarding UW during the drive from Denver. The entire drive must be scripted, making sure the student-athletes are entertained and engaged. (This may include popular video games and other interactive electronic entertainment, specially selected TV programs, University produced videos, etc.) Keep the prospective student-athletes engaged the entire trip. They can't just stare out the window.

- C. **OBSERVATION:** Limited or no access to private aircraft for coaches' recruiting efforts has a drastic impact on the effectiveness of coaches throughout the season. Coaching and recruiting both suffer as the unique travel demands throughout the season wear too heavily on the football and basketball coaching staffs, both of whom recruit primarily out-of-state.

RECOMMENDATION II(C): Create a donor task force designed to address the issue of access to private aircraft for coaches' recruiting efforts. Develop a plan that gives support to coaches and educate those who may be in a position to assist. Solutions may include donated services, donated resources, drastically discounted services, etc.

- D. **OBSERVATION:** Creating "a culture of recruiting" must include staying up-to-date with the top practices of using technology for recruiting purposes.

RECOMMENDATION II(D): Take advantage of technology for recruiting to minimize the physical distance between UW's coaches and recruits. Consistent training opportunities should be made available for coaches on the use of social media, technology trends in recruiting, etc.

- E. **OBSERVATION:** Recruiting materials must speak directly to their target audience, 15-to-20-year-old men. Traditional marketing materials for football and men's basketball must also speak to this young audience. Unfortunately, this fact is often overlooked in the traditional marketing of college athletics. Many times, schools focus their traditional marketing efforts primarily on history and tradition. However, these messages barely resonate with potential student-athletes and, in fact, can make the programs seem dated and unattractive.

RECOMMENDATION II(E): UW Athletics' newly defined key recruiting messages must be the basis of newly created recruiting materials. The look, feel, and messaging must speak to the target audience, have a national feel, and be distinctive. These efforts should also lead the Department's updated marketing efforts with a strong focus on short video.

These efforts may involve the assistance of a professional agency for initial development. (See more below in BRANDING/MESSAGING section of review.)

- F. **OBSERVATION:** Uniforms have become a major recruiting tool for football and men's basketball programs. Professionals in the industry have begun to understand more the power of uniforms on the University's brand and a program's attractiveness to recruits. While UW's color scheme could be seen by some as a hindrance, it offers a unique opportunity to make a statement nationally and be distinctive.

RECOMMENDATION II(F): Updated branding efforts should suggest and complement uniform design opportunities. Assistance from Nike should be requested to look at options to position Wyoming as being distinctive with uniforms.



III. PERSONNEL

- A. **OBSERVATION:** The needed culture shift for the Athletics Department will depend on staff morale. The current “culture of acceptance and validation” can have a significant impact on the staff’s morale, thus, performance. The “good enough” attitude of some can destine others in all areas of the Department to underperform. The Department can fall into the trap of portraying itself as a victim of circumstances that it cannot change. Cumulatively, this can be exceedingly demoralizing for all who work in the Athletics Department and can negatively impact the quality of the experience for the student-athletes.

RECOMMENDATION III(A): Improved communication throughout the Department will go a long way toward improving morale. Celebration of team and individual success should be built into the regular activities of the Department. Consider establishing a monthly Departmental function where all staff can gather to hear the AD (and others as may be appropriate...possibly guests such as the President, a former student-athlete, visiting member of the media, faculty member, etc.) speak briefly and where staff are recognized for good work and coaches can each speak briefly about their team.

- B. **OBSERVATION:** Many coaches and additional critical staff who come to UW from other Athletics Departments hear constantly from peers in the industry about the challenges that working and living in Laramie may bring. This consistent external messaging is obviously counterproductive to building and maintaining morale, which leads to high rates of turnover adversely impacting football and men’s basketball.

RECOMMENDATION III(B): A culture of recruiting and retention must be established for critical staff to avoid the disabling turnover. The experience to serve at UW should include:

1. Premier professional development opportunities helping to grow the individual personally and professionally.
2. A tight-knit, family atmosphere amongst the Department’s staff and various supporters.
3. Strategic entry points to allow engagement in the local community using the unique and powerful platform UW Athletics has in the area.

- C. **OBSERVATION:** Compensation levels for assistant coaches in football may lead to a higher rate of turnover and/or the ability to attract quality candidates. While the head coach is compensated near the top level in the Mountain West, the critical assistant coach positions, starting below the coordinator positions, are all compensated below average in the league, sometimes drastically below. (Based on most recent MWC Budget & Salary Surveys, July 2011-June 2012.). Since 2009, there have been 21 coaches for 10 coaching spots per season, thus, 11 staff changes. By comparison, another MWC program, with several similarities to UW but more success on the field, has had just four staff changes during that time.

RECOMMENDATION III(C): Coaching compensation levels for the football staff should be reviewed using benchmark levels with the MWC. Changes on coaching staffs are to be expected for many reasons in this profession. However, consistent turnover of a large number of staff members is a competitive disadvantage. In addition, because of the unique recruiting challenges Wyoming faces, attracting and retaining talented assistant coaches is crucial to sustainable success for Cowboy football.

- D. **OBSERVATION:** Much like in football, men's basketball compensates its head coach and its first assistant coach competitively. However, there is a significant falloff for the second and third assistant when compared to MWC averages.

RECOMMENDATION III(D): Coaching compensation levels for the second and third assistants with men's basketball should be reviewed using benchmark levels with the MWC. Recruiting success is often driven by strong assistant coaches in basketball. Top-flight recruiters are a must at Wyoming and attracting and retaining top-tier assistant coaches will involve higher compensation opportunities.

- E. **OBSERVATION:** Men's basketball does not have a secretary/administrative assistant position in the office.

RECOMMENDATION III(E): The addition of a secretary/administrative assistant position to the men's basketball offices will allow coaches to greater maximize their time and potential with the current student-athletes and with recruiting. Expecting coaches to handle the large amount of administrative duties that comes with working inside the NCAA and an institution of higher education puts UW men's basketball at a competitive disadvantage. As these staffing levels are addressed, new job descriptions should be developed.



IV. ACADEMICS & STUDENT-ATHLETE WELL-BEING

- A. **OBSERVATION:** A limited number of majors offered by the University puts UW at a disadvantage when it comes to recruiting student-athletes.

RECOMMENDATION IV(A): Explore the addition of majors in areas of interest to many student-athletes, including, but not limited to: sports administration, parks and recreation, coaching, fitness and sports sciences, sports marketing, sports journalism and leadership. The addition of these types of programs will also lead to a culture at the University of valuing the athletics industry.

- B. **OBSERVATION:** The University's system also creates difficulties for incoming transfer students. Although the University may accept classes as transferrable, many times the classes (hours) are not degree-applicable. It is not uncommon to see transfer students in a "120 hour degree program" need 140+ hours to meet actual graduation requirements. For student-athletes, several of these classes may not court towards progress-towards-degree parameters. This greatly reduces the pool of transfer prospective student-athletes, including from junior colleges.

RECOMMENDATION IV(B): This is an issue that also impacts non-student-athletes. Any decisions made about this will be at the University level. However, it is important for decision-makers to note that the current policies are having a negative impact on the competitiveness of UW's athletic teams.

- C. **OBSERVATION:** Our review could not determine whether the process and timing for certifying initial and continuing eligibility was effective. There were anecdotes shared by some that indicated that certification of eligibility was not a high priority among academic officials who do not work with the same time restrictions and sense of urgency that sometimes characterizes the athletics certification process. Certification of eligibility is a critical process that could present a NCAA compliance problem if not handled properly.

RECOMMENDATION IV(C): The Provost, Registrar, Faculty Representative, and Director of NCAA Compliance should meet to resolve any questions about the certification process.

- D. **OBSERVATION:** Basketball student-athletes academic performance may be negatively impacted by missed classes due to extensive in-season travel.

RECOMMENDATION IV(D): Every effort should be made to reduce in-week travel for competition. This can be achieved by using more charter flights or by working with the MWC Office to schedule conference games to minimize missed class time.

- E. **OBSERVATION:** Student-athletes do not have regular access to a sports medicine specialist. While a very competent and generous local physician(s) visits the training room regularly, the essential health needs of all student-athletes could be addressed more effectively.

RECOMMENDATION IV(E): Student-athletes would benefit from having regular access to a team physician(s) in the training room, but also someone designated in Student Health Service to see

those who may not feel comfortable meeting them in the training room. The University should consider appointing a general practitioner with training in sports medicine to see student-athletes both in the training room and in Student Health Service. This team physician should also be responsible for coordinating the medical care for all student athletes.

- F. **OBSERVATION:** There does not appear to be regular access for student-athletes to see trained specialists in sports psychology and nutrition.

RECOMMENDATION IV(F): Many Universities utilize the talents of specialists in areas of sports psychology and nutrition. In addition to the obvious competitive benefits, having specialists available to regularly work with teams and student-athletes is important in recruiting. We recommend that the University explore ways to regularly provide these types of services to its teams and student-athletes.

- G. **OBSERVATION:** Access to quality on campus housing for upper classmen is very limited. Additionally, there are few high quality on-campus housing options for first year student-athletes. These facts were well recognized by key University leaders and plans are underway to address them over time. However, it would be helpful to have some interim options available for recruited student-athletes.

RECOMMENDATION IV(G): It was suggested by some that it would benefit recruiting to allow first year students to live off campus during the interim time before higher quality on-campus housing is available. The consultants do not debate the value of high quality housing to the recruitment of student-athletes. However, other factors should be considered in making this decision including student safety and assimilation of first year students into the student body. Improving the quality of on-campus housing is an urgent need that should be addressed for all students in addition to student-athletes.



V. BRANDING & MESSAGING

- A. **OBSERVATION:** The current branding and messaging used for marketing efforts of UW football and men's basketball is very traditional for the college athletics industry. While the efforts are respectable and projects are done with quality, the approach should be updated and refined to enhance the "culture of recruiting" and re-energize the brand.

RECOMMENDATION V(A): Today's marketing efforts for college athletics must be designed to elicit excitement from recruits. This starts with messaging. Recruits should be a primary target audience when communicating the brand messaging. Unfortunately, we usually fall short in this industry and focus purely on those already emotionally connected to the institution – our fans. This does not provide a wide-ranging and strong return on investment. However, if we can excite an 18-year-old with no tie to our institution about our brand, that is a victory. That same message will almost always excite a fan already invested. However, the same message that will get a positive response from an emotionally tied-in fan will not always elicit excitement from a recruit.

Many schools tend to have a primary focus with their marketing efforts on tradition and history (i.e., 120 years of Cowboy Tough) or using literal references and imagery (i.e., "Cowboy" themed music in videos.) This does not always talk to our primary audience of potential student-athletes or to students whom we want to attend games. Speaking to non-student athletes is crucial as well because a student section sets the tone for the game day environment. Communication efforts and messaging must be current.

Schools also tend to overuse words in marketing like "Integrity, Honor, Loyalty, Dedication, etc." While these words are obviously important when truly valued, they should be saved to be used in real conversations with recruits, not as part of branding. These words do not separate the brand from any other program in the nation as nearly all programs claim the same thing.

- B. **OBSERVATION:** The competition in the area of branding and messaging is not last year's UW campaign or another school in the conference. The competition is the campaigns produced by the likes of Nike, Gatorade and ESPN. This is the quality of branding and messaging our recruits and fans are seeing, hearing and, most importantly, feeling on a daily basis. Our brand messaging must be alive, smart, keen, and relevant to today. These young student-athletes know quality when they see it, and they want to be a part of that.

RECOMMENDATION V(B): The University should first consider utilizing existing campus resources to develop and deliver a rebrand campaign, centered on key messaging for recruits. If this is not a viable option, it should consider hiring a professional firm with a track record in this area to assist in the re-branding and re-messaging effort. In most cases, the firm will develop the initial branding and messaging concepts as well as the guidelines for implementation prior to providing the assets to the Department to implement throughout the seasons. This helps to control the cost of these services.

This is NOT a discussion on logos, mascots, colors, etc. The goal is to take the great tradition of a school like UW, its current assets and give it swagger for the younger generation of potential

student-athletes and younger fans while re-energizing the current fan base. This is done through: 1) power of messaging and common language, 2) quality of production, and 3) consistency of deliverables.

- C. **OBSERVATION:** Recruiting does not appear to be a major component in the marketing and branding efforts of the Department. Recruiting materials and messaging is sport specific and lacks consistency in appearance and frequency.

RECOMMENDATION V(C): Identify UW Athletics' key recruiting messages, featuring its unique selling proposition, and implement this messaging into traditional marketing efforts immediately.

- D. **OBSERVATION:** Communication within the Department must be enhanced to successfully launch a new branding and messaging campaign and, more importantly, move to a culture valuing progress and urgency.

RECOMMENDATION V(D)i: It is recommended that a disciplined meeting schedule be adopted that is structured, inclusive, and focused on progress. Department members will consistently be introduced to the new branding materials, messaging, etc., so they are aware first-hand of the branding efforts of the Department and, thus, the University.

RECOMMENDATION V(D)ii: Develop a new grassroots communication plan. Consider using a regularly scheduled e-newsletter from the AD's Office to the athletics staff, student-athletes, faculty, University staff, alumni and donors.

- E. **OBSERVATION:** UW's Athletics' unique position within the State and the community of Laramie gives it a powerful platform that must not be taken for granted.

RECOMMENDATION V(E): A re-branding and re-messaging launch for UW Athletics, centered on football and men's basketball, provides an opportunity for the Cowboys to engage people throughout the State and local community. The President, AD, football head coach and men's basketball head coach should be positioned as leaders within the State and community. A year-round community outreach plan that includes the visible involvement of the Head Coaches and AD should be developed and implemented. The re-launch provides a new opportunity to re-engage and re-energize fans as well as lead to new donation solicitations.



VI. RESOURCES

- A. **OBSERVATION:** Simply raising expectations is not enough to grow UW football and men's basketball. While more money is not the solution to every problem, basic financial needs must be met to compete with peers within the MWC, regionally and nationally.

RECOMMENDATION VI(A): Utilize existing data to benchmark budgets. This data will help to lead the discussion for all UW stakeholders on critical areas to support financially.

1. MWC data will help to provide valuable insight on direct competitors and their respective investment in football, men's basketball, and other key components within their respective athletic departments. (Example: Low compensation at the lower ends of coaching staffs for UW football and men's basketball.)
2. Released in Oct. 2013, the Athletics & Academic Spending Database for NCAA Division I (produced by the Knight Commission) reveals UW has been ahead of the competition in regards to growing academic spending. From 2005-2011, UW academic spending is up 28% while the MWC average is 22% and the FBS average is 24%. However, athletics spending paints a different picture over that same time period. Below are a few of the key spending increases:
 - a. Athletics spending increases – UW 22%, MWC avg. 51%, FBS avg. 58%
 - b. Institutional increased spending on athletics (per athlete) – UW 21%, MWC avg. 84%, FBS avg. 73%
 - c. Football expenditure increases – UW 37%, MWC avg. 48%, FBS avg. 75%
 - d. Football coaching salaries (per football player) - UW 20%, MWC avg. 50%, FBS avg. 74%

There are many variables to the above numbers – University support, TV contracts, donor support, etc. – but whatever the factors, the above numbers tell the story that UW Athletics has fallen further behind the competition, including in the MWC, in recent years in regards to investing in athletics. (This data can be accessed at www.KnightCommission.org).

- B. **OBSERVATION:** Revenue increases will be needed to support growing expectations for UW football and men's basketball.

RECOMMENDATION VI(A): This opportunity to enhance UW football and men's basketball and to impact positively the entire University and Athletics Department should be embraced universally. Stakeholders should be educated about the financial implications as well as the current financial situation Wyoming faces. UW athletics is at a disadvantage when financial support is compared to direct competitors.

As this message is shared and discussed, potential revenue opportunities will be recognized and vetted. For example, UW has the lowest student fees revenues in the MWC (\$1,275,147 vs. an average of \$3,433,159). However, the argument can also be made that UW Athletics already receives

significantly more direct institutional support than any other Department in the conference (\$11,982,329 vs. an average of \$5,215,713.)

Finding additional dollars to invest in the growth of UW football and men's basketball will not be simple. However, sharing a plan for progress through a re-branding campaign launch will re-energize those who care about UW and help stimulate revenue growth. These funds can be provided directly or indirectly by the institution and from the Department through enhanced donor giving, increased ticket sales, sponsorships and other traditional sources.

- C. **OBSERVATION:** The existing Facilities Master Plan paints a dynamic vision for the future of Wyoming athletics facilities. The competitive impact of completing the projects outlined in the Master Plan cannot be over stated. The plan is in the process of being implemented with additional funding needed for its completion.

RECOMMENDATION VI(C): It is critical that the planned renovations to the Arena-Auditorium be completed as envisioned in the Facilities Master Plan. Securing State support should be a very high priority. The Director of Athletics, professional fundraisers in the Cowboy Joe Club, and the University's central development staff should make securing private funding to support these facility improvements a top priority.



VII. COMPETITIVE ISSUES

- A. **OBSERVATION:** The need to schedule quality non-conference home opponents in Football is clearly evident and would help season ticket sales and attendance. With careful scheduling, recruiting could be impacted as well as television exposure opportunities. Additionally, the distance some Wyoming fans travel to attend games makes it difficult to schedule a Thursday night home FB game.

RECOMMENDATION VII(A)i: While a tremendous challenge, thought should be given to scheduling an early season Thursday night made-for-TV home game. The ideal time is the Thursday before Labor Day, typically the first game of the year. This could be a huge student promotion that sets the stage to engage the student-body in a tradition of attending every home football game.

RECOMMENDATION VII(A)ii: To enhance the quality of the home schedule, additional game guarantees may be needed. One solution may be to maximize an away game guarantee and earmark a portion of those dollars for paying a competitive guarantee to secure an additional home football game, giving the UW a seven game home season as opposed to six, as has been the past practice. This could have a significant competitive advantage as winning is generally easier at home than on the road.

- B. **OBSERVATION:** The MWC Conference Basketball schedule is very attractive from a fan's standpoint. However, scheduling attractive non-conference opponents in Laramie is a major challenge.

Building an attractive non-conference home schedule when coupled with the strong MWC schedule would improve ticket sales and attendance and potentially strengthen the team's RPI. The inaccessibility of Laramie in the winter months is a definite non-conference scheduling challenge for the University.

RECOMMENDATION VII(B)i: The basketball staff and Athletics Director should continue to participate in one "exempt" basketball event each year. There are over a dozen exempted special events annually which feature 4 to 16 teams in each. With careful negotiation, Wyoming should be able to guarantee a quality home opponent as a condition of participation.

RECOMMENDATION VII(B)ii: Wyoming should explore developing an annual regional two game match-up with quality opponents by partnering with fellow MWC member Colorado State. The concept would involve both universities hosting two opponents from a mid-major conference (Missouri Valley, Horizon League, West Coast Conference, Atlantic 10) on their home courts on successive days (i.e. Saturday and Sunday). As an example, Wyoming would host opponent #1 on Saturday; CSU, opponent #2. UW and CSU would switch opponents on Sunday with the two visiting teams traveling to the second site after the Saturday games. The following year, UW and CSU would return the games to the teams that previously played in Laramie and Fort Collins. Higher quality visiting teams would likely consider this attractive as they would get two quality games on a single trip with the guarantee of receiving two return games in the same two-day format the following year.

- C. **OBSERVATION:** Wyoming's MWC schedule is not constructed so that it minimizes travel time and expenses. UW is impacted more than any other MWC member because of its location at the very northeastern edge of the conference's geographic region. This has the potential to negatively impact the academic performance of the student-athletes (too much missed class time), the overall costs of team travel, and the competitive ability of the team (wear and tear as a result of difficult travel to and from games within the conference).

RECOMMENDATION VII(C): The President and AD should charge the MWC to explore the idea of creating travel partners when putting together the conference basketball schedule(s).* The PAC-12 and other conferences have had success in creating travel partners that allow teams to play two conference games on one trip (i.e. Thursday-Saturday). This saves money and is respectful of the student-athletes' academic schedules.

*This concept could be applied to other conference sports (i.e. women's basketball, soccer, tennis).



SUMMARY COMMENTARY

The consultants' overall assessment is that this is a critical moment in time for the Wyoming athletics program. Changes in the national landscape of NCAA Division I have added to the existing and unique challenges Wyoming faces competing at this level. However, the arrival of a new President with high expectations for athletics presents new opportunities to shift to "a culture of progress."

The ability to sustain success with UW's football and men's basketball programs will have a wide-reaching impact on the Department, the University, and the entire State. Athletics must be positioned as an integral and visible part of the University's strategic plan. This must be an "all in" effort from people on campus and throughout the State who care about UW.

We believe there are four critical areas of focus that, if addressed through collaboration and shared accountability, will lead to higher levels of performance both on and off the fields of play. The points of emphasis, in our opinion, should be:

1. Culture change with higher levels of expectations and accountability.
2. Better integration of athletics into the daily life and strategic planning of the University.
3. Improved recruiting and retention of student-athletes and staff.
4. Development of resources to compare favorably with competitive peers.

While most of our recommendations speak directly to these key areas, it should not go unsaid that providing the student-athletes at Wyoming with a high quality academic and athletic experience is paramount and the core value that should guide every decision related to the athletics program. This should not be lost in the response to these recommendations. Our view is that the student experience will be measurably improved if the listed categories of focus are thoughtfully addressed.

It will take a team effort and sense of urgency from the key leaders on campus to achieve the high levels of performance envisioned by the President. Broad-based understanding of the role of athletics across all areas of the University is vitally important. Alumni and friends will have to do their part as well. It is critical that the level of expectations and accountability within the Department increases as support from the outside increases. Staff must embrace the challenge of thinking differently and working with a feverish intensity to position UW football and men's basketball for future conference championships.

A dynamic, compelling vision and dedicated leadership to craft and carry out the plan to achieve that vision are the ultimate keys to success. The consultants believe that the University of Wyoming is well-positioned to raise its profile among its Division I peers if these elements are in place.

