

Regent report (2/4/21):

In consultation with Chair Howard, President Morgan has canceled the Board of Regents work session scheduled for February 25, 2021. He hopes that the BOR will be able to meet in person for the regular March 25th meeting (likely location: Mt. Sterling campus).

Included toward the bottom of a list of athletic accomplishments outlined in the January 29th email was this notice: “there may be two schools leaving the OVC athletic conference and joining other larger conferences. . . . The OVC board has been asked to not say much due to legality and until the details are worked out and a formal announcement comes out.”

That same day, the ASUN Conference (formerly Atlantic Sun Conference) formally announced the addition of 3 schools to their conference. Two of the schools joining the ASUN are the exiting OVC members (Jacksonville State and ECU). The single conference these OVC schools will be joining is “larger” only because their current 9-institution conference will expand into 12, whereas our current 12-institution conference will contract to 10.

I inquired what effect this contraction will have on our finances, because our 2020-2021 institutional budget had just imported the same athletic figures from our 2019-2020 budget, which had been determined pre-pandemic, and now we have yet another complicating factor. In a February 1st reply, Dr. Morgan noted that the OVC would be meeting mid-February, and “Early estimates are that the departure of the 2 schools will have little effect on the financial formula distribution of the OVC to us – if anything we may get more money since there are 2 less schools to split the formula proceeds with. Both schools were known as football predominate schools, and basketball is what generates the money in the OVC for the formulas.”

I eagerly await more precise figures (and an articulation of the formula), as a larger slice of a smaller pie does not guarantee more pie overall. Whether it does or not, though, the institution should explore “slenderizing” and “right sizing” athletics in much the way we have made adjustments in other facilities. At the very least, we should inquire what function football serves, as we were already in a different league in the OVC before the “football predominate schools” left our basketball focused conference, so now is the time to make adjustments.

The announcement from ASUN should also encourage us to openly discuss what the campus has quite recently been told will now be a priority—branding. The same ECU president who worked out a deal with Barnes & Noble to be the first to provide “free” books as part of standard tuition (tuition that has not been raised in consequence of this deal) is now arguing that his school’s move to ASUN will make ECU’s “brand” known in a new market.

MSU is not in a position to make an analogous move in athletics. Unlike ECU, we do not have a pricey football field we will continue to pay to upkeep, so any fiscally responsible move we make should be down, not up, but we have already moved in a branding direction. The new administrative position announced late last year—the Associate Vice President of Strategic Communication—has been hired, although this “brand ambassador” has not been announced

to campus. It would be nice for the campus as a whole to be introduced to this new person, and to learn what we can expect from this investment, as the base pay alone (\$115,000—an amount that does not include benefits) is a recurring cost that exceeds the entire amount the President's compensation model set aside for compression in all faculty ranks (\$100,000). The institution's commitment of this more substantial recurring cost should already have a net effective rate we can point to, and I for one look forward to hearing (and seeing) the vision we will be provided.