

Perceptions by Faculty, Staff, and Administrators of the Role of Intercollegiate Athletics at a Metropolitan University as a NCAA Division II Athletics Program Reclassifies to a NCAA Division I Athletics Program

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Abstract

This article provides empirical findings associated with the perceptions of faculty, staff, and administrators regarding a decision to reclassify a metropolitan university's athletics program from NCAA Division II to NCAA Division I. A survey is developed that asks respondents about their perceptions of the current state of the athletics program, how the reclassification decision affected those perceptions, and about the process and outcomes of the reclassification decision. In general, the results indicate a generally favorable view by these stakeholders with the reclassification decision.

The vision of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) is to be seen as a premier metropolitan university that will be recognized nationally for the excellence of its programs and development of professional and community leaders. SIUE is a publicly funded state university that was founded in 1957, currently has a student body of approximately 14,000, and is located in southwestern Illinois in the St. Louis metropolitan region. In early 2007, as part of the goal to strive for greater national recognition and based on a set of recommendations presented in the Report of the Intercollegiate Athletics Task Force (2006, hereinafter referred to as Task Force Report) that he had commissioned two years earlier, the Chancellor of SIUE made a recommendation to the Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees, which was accepted, to move the eighteen sport (nine women and nine men) athletics program at SIUE from NCAA Division II to NCAA Division I. It should be noted that SIUE does not sponsor football at the intercollegiate level.

SIUE started competing at the NCAA Division I level in the academic year 2008–2009 and is now in its fifth year of Division I competition as a member of the Ohio Valley Conference. SIUE had been a member of NCAA Division II since the late 1960s and at the time of the decision to reclassify its athletics program was a member of Division II's Great Lakes Valley Conference. The move to Division I entailed significant

enhancements in the budget, facilities, and staffing in the athletics department and a much higher profile for intercollegiate athletics within the university and in promotional outreaches for the university regionally, throughout the state of Illinois, and nationwide.

The task force, composed of a diverse group of eighteen members that included students, faculty, staff, community leaders, and alumni, was charged with engaging in a strategic management decision making process in order to identify the costs and benefits to the university overall as a result of reclassification to NCAA Division I. A written report was developed by the task force after two years of studying the issues and after receiving written and verbal feedback from stakeholders within and outside the university community. The Task Force Report identified the major reasons for the decision to seek reclassification to NCAA Division I, which included the following:

- Reclassification was determined to be consistent with SIUE's vision and mission,
- Reclassification provided an opportunity to excel at the highest level of intercollegiate competition,
- Reclassification had the potential for the university to receive greater regional and national recognition, and
- Reclassification can generate a higher level of community interest.

The reclassification of the athletics program is also consistent with a continuing process that began in the early 1990s (with the construction of the first traditional residence hall) to enhance overall student life (both inside and outside the classroom) at the university.

In this study, faculty and staff were surveyed to determine whether perceived measures of satisfaction with the decision to reclassify are consistent with the predicted benefits articulated by the task force. The relatively short time SIUE has been a member of Division I allows for a comparison of relatively recent Division II experience with changes that have occurred with the reclassification to Division I. In short, SIUE's reclassification between NCAA divisions offers an unusual opportunity to assess how the role of intercollegiate athletics is perceived by the much higher profile (including the commitment of resources and as a vehicle to promote the overall university) of a Division I intercollegiate athletics program at a metropolitan university compared to a Division II program.

Review of Literature

There are only a few academic studies that have directly examined the reclassification process for intercollegiate athletics and these studies are the main focus of the literature review. Closest to SIUE's experience, Dwyer, Eddy, Havard, and Braa (2010) examined a university's reclassification from NCAA Division II to NCAA Division I

effective in 2002. The athletics program included a football program that was reclassified to the football championship subdivision in Division I. The public university is located in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States with an enrollment of 12,500 students. The case study compared the predicted benefits of reclassification as determined by the views of representatives of the strategic management process, which made the decision to the perceptions of the decision of key stakeholders (specifically, current students and alumni) eight years subsequent to the reclassification decision. The stakeholders completed a survey that addressed four general areas: (1) perceptions of a Division I athletic program, (2) perceptions of the university's move to Division I membership, (3) perceptions of the relationship between the university's academic programs and its athletic program, and (4) behavioral intentions related to the university's move to Division I membership. Specific empirical findings of the study included the following:

- There is evidence to suggest that there is an inherent value in having a Division I athletic program.
- On average, a Division I athletic program was not an important reason for a student to attend the university (mean response = 3.5 on a five point scale with 1 representing strongly agree and 5 representing strongly disagree).
- Students and alumni appear not to correlate the university's academics with the Division I athletics program.
- Reclassification presents an opportunity to capture on positive publicity associated with the change in NCAA membership from Division II to Division I. From a marketing perspective, the change in membership should be the focus of reclassification rather than athletic success of the program for athletic success in the short term is unlikely.
- Current students and alumni have an apathetic to slightly favorable opinion of the athletic department and its move to Division I.
- A proper evaluation of the move to Division I may be better determined in the future after the university becomes an established Division I member with a better opportunity to compete successfully at that level.

The study of SIUE differs from the Dwyer et al. (2010) in the following ways: (1) SIUE does not have football, (2) the study includes the perceptions of faculty and staff as key stakeholders, (3) the study examines perceptions of faculty and staff to the change in membership closer in time to the reclassification decision, (4) the study relies on a written document (the Task Force Report) identifying the benefits and costs of reclassification, not after-the-fact interviews.

Roy, Graeff, and Harmon (2008) examined the reclassification, in the late 1990s, of a university's football program from NCAA Division I-AA (now called the Football

Championship Subdivision) to the higher level of competition of NCAA Division I-A (now called the Football Bowl Subdivision). All other sports remained at the Division I level. The university has an enrollment of around twenty thousand students and is located in the southeastern region of the United States. Perceptions of the repositioning of the football program were determined by a survey of students, alumni, and the general public. The survey included questions in three general areas: (1) perceptions of Division I-A football generally, (2) perceptions of the university's move to Division I-A football, and (3) behavioral intentions related to the move to Division I-A football. Specific findings of the study included the following:

- Both students and alumni believe that Division I-A football creates a positive image for the university and can attract students to attend the university.
- All three groups agree that the move has had a positive effect on the university. However, alumni do not believe that the move to Division I-A enhanced the value of their degree.
- In terms of increasing game attendance, wearing the university logo, and donating money to the university, the results were less encouraging.

An overall finding of the study indicated that perceptions of Division I-A football generally and the specific move to Division I-A were positive for all three groups of stakeholders. A comparison of the two reclassification studies, each of which employed a similar methodological approach, indicates that the study results were strongly positive regarding the university's move to Division I-A football while the Dwyer et al. (2010) study results were at best negative to lukewarm regarding the university's move to Division I.

Two other academic studies are reviewed that focused on the perceptions of faculty satisfaction with intercollegiate athletics but not in the context of a reclassification decision. Ott (2011) measured the degree to which individual faculty members are personally satisfied with intercollegiate athletics at their respective universities. As well as measuring overall satisfaction in three specific categories, factors that account for variation in the level of satisfaction across faculty were identified. Faculty satisfaction with intercollegiate athletics was divided into three general dimensions: academics, finances, and governance. Decomposing faculty satisfaction into three categories was viewed by the author to be an improvement over an earlier study by Cockley and Roswal (1994), reviewed below that used a single, global measure of faculty satisfaction. The academics dimension included questions on admissions, advising, integrity, and student-athletes' classroom performance. The finances dimension included questions on general fund subsidies, scholarships, and commercialization. The governance dimension included questions on faculty oversight and input as well as institutional control. Notable descriptive findings of the study included the following:

- The highest level of satisfaction for faculty was with academics (mean response was = 3.58 on a scale from one to five with five the highest level of satisfaction). Satisfaction with governance = 2.75 and with finances = 2.89.
- The faculty was satisfied/very satisfied with the academic integrity of student-athletes and their efforts to complete assignments when they missed class.
- One area of dissatisfaction of faculty concerns the range of faculty perspectives that factor into intercollegiate athletic decision-making on campus.
- One common theme across the dimensions of satisfaction was the frequency of the “no opinion” response to many questions. It was the most common response to four of the nine academic items, seven of the eleven governance items, and one of the four finances items.

Notable regression findings of the study included the following:

- Three significant positive influences in explaining faculty satisfaction with academics (also true for finances) were (1) faculty from professional disciplines, (2) faculty who taught student-athletes, and (3) faculty who held athletics governance positions.
- The causal explanation for the relationship between faculty governance involvement and increased satisfaction with intercollegiate athletics is unclear. It could be that faculty already favorable predisposed to athletics become the ones selected to be members of athletics governance committees.

One general conclusion from the study is that faculty satisfaction with intercollegiate athletics is improved when faculty have more involvement with (1) student-athletes and (2) the decisions that are made by the administration regarding the athletics program.

Cockley and Roswal (1994) measured faculty satisfaction as to perceived knowledge, academic environment, and locus of control as it varied across NCAA Divisions I, II, and III. The research questions of the study examined differences in satisfaction across division level and between faculty members involved in athletics governance versus the general faculty. Specific findings of the study included the following:

- The satisfaction level of Division I faculty was found to be the lowest of all groups.
- Division III faculty exhibited the highest level of satisfaction with athletic department policies and procedures.

The authors summarize the results of the study as follows:

- For faculty, the results indicate a difference in satisfaction and perceived knowledge across division affiliation.

- It appeared that Division I and II faculty members are more disenchanted with the role of athletics since they felt that athletic programs are largely influenced by forces, inside and outside the university, over which they have little control.
- Division III faculty appear to have greater satisfaction with the role of athletics for they perceive that they have more input into the decision-making process regarding athletics, more control over athletics, and have greater personal contact with student-athletes.

It should be noted that this last study was conducted in 1994, which is prior to major reforms at the NCAA involving Division I and II athletic program control and administration. There is now considerably more presidential involvement in NCAA decision-making and there have been significant increases in student-athlete academic requirements.

Development of the Survey Instrument and Survey Administration

The beginning of the reclassification process to NCAA Division I can be traced to Chancellor Vaughn Vandegrift's decision to investigate the possibility of a move of the entire athletics program to Division I, one of three options to be explored, in the fall of 2005. The Chancellor established a task force, which established a set of guiding principles that would be used throughout the transition process. The guiding principles were

- Under no circumstances will we sacrifice academics for athletic success.
- If we use student fees, will not charge SIUE students for regular season games.
- Athletic facilities need to reflect the university's commitment to overall excellence.
- Should only consider a move to enhance the overall university experience, not just fund raising, student engagement, and publicity/image.
- Need to remain totally committed to gender equity.
- Recruitment of student-athletes should continue to reflect the university's commitment to diversity.
- Academic profile of the student-athlete should continue to mirror that of the general student body.
- No move should be done at the expense/sacrifice of the university's overall financial well-being.

- University community should be informed fully of the costs and benefits of any move to Division I and given the opportunity for input into the decision.
- Athletic decisions should continue to be consistent with the university's mission.
- Climate of intercollegiate athletics should continue to reflect the mission, vision, and values of SIUE.

In constructing the survey to examine the decision to reclassify the entire athletics program to Division I, one of the main objectives was to measure how strongly SIUE faculty, staff, and administrators felt that the reclassification process had stayed true to the guiding principles. Survey question development also relied on previous research examining such reclassifications (Dwyer et al. 2010; Roy, Graeff, and Harmon 2008). In developing the instrument, questions were developed to cover three general categories:

1. The current state (as of February 2013) of SIUE athletics and student-athletes.
2. Perceptions of how SIUE athletics and student-athletes were affected by the decision to reclassify the athletics program to NCAA Division I from NCAA Division II.
3. Perceptions of the process and outcomes of the decision to reclassify the athletics program to NCAA Division I.

For each of the preceding categories, respondents were presented with a series of questions and asked to respond based on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, with the center point being Neither Agree or Disagree.

In addition to the three general categories of statements, information also was collected regarding certain demographic data (gender, age, employment classification, and years of employment at SIUE) which allows comparisons across groups. In addition, respondents were asked whether they had served on the task force or were employed by the SIUE athletics department. Finally, to examine whether those with an athletic background may have different perceptions of the reclassification, respondents were asked whether they had participated in college-level athletics.

The survey was distributed electronically via the SIUE campus email list. One advantage of the email list is that faculty, staff, and administrators do not have the option of removing their names from the list. Surveys were distributed to approximately 2,109 faculty, staff, and administrators. The distribution of the population of subscribers to the email list is as follows: 716 faculty (34%), 444 administrators (21%), and 1,046 staff (55%).

The survey invitation was issued to the population of all faculty, staff, and administrators during February 2013. Although not every respondent answered every question, most people completed most or all of the survey. The exception is that about

half of respondents were not present prior to the reclassification; in general, these respondents (appropriately) did not try to answer the questions about the process nor the effects of reclassification decision. Respondents were evenly split between male and female. Respondents tended to be older, with 31 percent in their fifties and 29 percent in their forties; only 6 percent were in their twenties. About 47 percent of respondents were staff, and 44 percent were faculty (with the remainder being administrators). About 6 percent of the respondents work in the university's athletics department. About 3 percent were members of the task force that recommended that the university make the transition to Division I. About 20 percent of respondents had participated in college athletics when they were college students.

Survey Findings

Each major finding of the data analysis is set in bold print which is then followed by an explanation for the finding. **As seen in Table 1, respondents in the aggregate have a generally favorable view of the current state of SIUE athletics and student-athletes.** Each of the six statements within this category presents a positive view of student-athletes or athletics. For all but one statement, a majority of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement (as opposed to being neutral or disagreeing). Agreement with the statement was the modal response for each statement. For every question, the number of respondents who agreed with the statement outnumbered those disagreeing. Using non-parametric sign tests, this difference is statistically significant (at the 5% level) for all six questions.

Table 1: State of student-athletes and athletics as of February 2013.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	n
<i>The academic profile of student-athletes mirrors that of the general student body.</i>	16%	39%	26%	15%	3%	383
<i>Recruitment of student-athletes reflects the university's commitment to diversity.</i>	18%	34%	32%	10%	6%	383
<i>Intercollegiate athletics maintains a commitment to gender equity.</i>	24%	42%	26%	6%	3%	383
<i>Athletic facilities reflect the university's commitment to overall excellence.</i>	24%	41%	18%	10%	7%	383
<i>Athletic decisions are consistent with the university's mission.</i>	18%	30%	30%	14%	8%	380

<i>The climate of intercollegiate athletics reflects the mission, vision and values of the university.</i>	21%	33%	26%	10%	10%	383
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Note: Some rows do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As seen in Table 2, respondents in the aggregate have a slightly more mixed view of how the reclassification affected the state of SIUE athletics and student-athletes. Note that these results only include respondents who have been with the university for more than six years (which means that they were at the university for at least one year prior to the reclassification). For the question regarding the academic profile of student-athletes and the questions regarding diversity and gender equity, the majority of respondents' view is that the reclassification had no effect. In all three cases, the respondents who believe the reclassification had a positive effect outnumber those who believe it had a negative effect. (Using a non-parametric sign test, this difference is statistically significant, using a significance level of 5%.) The most positive responses came on the question regarding facilities. A majority of respondents agreed that the facilities' reflection of the university's commitment to excellence was more (or much more) true following the reclassification. (Again, this is statistically significant at the 5% level.) For the questions regarding the university's athletic decisions and the climate of athletics, the responses were more balanced. For both questions, respondents believing that the statements were more (or much more) true outnumbered those who believed the statements were less (or much less) true. However, the difference was statistically insignificant (at the 5% level).

Table 2: Change in state of student-athletes and athletics due to reclassification.

Question	Much More True	More True	Not Affected	Less True	Much Less True	n
<i>The academic profile of student-athletes mirrors that of the general student body.</i>	7%	22%	55%	10%	6%	215
<i>Recruitment of student-athletes reflects the university's commitment to diversity.</i>	7%	20%	64%	4%	5%	215
<i>Intercollegiate athletics maintains a commitment to gender equity.</i>	8%	20%	64%	5%	3%	215

<i>Athletic facilities reflect the university's commitment to overall excellence.</i>	18%	39%	29%	5%	9%	216
<i>Athletic decisions are consistent with the university's mission.</i>	9%	19%	49%	11%	13%	215
<i>The climate of intercollegiate athletics reflects the mission, vision and values of the university.</i>	10%	24%	42%	10%	14%	216

Note: Some rows do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As seen in Table 3, respondents in the aggregate have a generally positive view toward the process and outcomes due to reclassification. Again, these results only include respondents who have been with the university for more than six years (which means that they were at the university for at least one year prior to the reclassification). A majority of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that the reclassification had enhanced the university's overall image, and prestige. Respondents agreeing (or strongly agreeing) outnumber those disagreeing (or strongly disagreeing). (Non-parametric sign tests indicate that these are significant at the 5% level.) A majority of respondents also agreed (or strongly agreed) that faculty and staff were kept informed during the process and given the opportunity to provide input. Respondents agreeing (or strongly agreeing) outnumber those disagreeing (or strongly disagreeing). (This is significant at the 5% level.)

Sentiments were more mixed regarding the reclassification's effect on the financial well-being of the university and the sense of community at the university. While the respondents agreeing (or strongly agreeing) that the reclassification didn't sacrifice the university's financial well-being outnumbered those disagreeing (or strongly disagreeing), a hypothesis test (using a significance level of 5%) indicates that these numbers are equal in the population. Similarly, respondents agreeing (or strongly agreeing) that the reclassification enhanced the sense of community within the university outnumber those disagreeing (or strongly disagreeing), a hypothesis test (using a significance level of 5%) indicates that these numbers are equal in the population.

Table 3: Process and outcomes of reclassification.

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	n
<i>The reclassification was accomplished without sacrificing the university's overall financial well-being.</i>	13%	29%	21%	20%	17%	223

<i>Faculty and staff were informed of and given the opportunity to provide input into the reclassification decision.</i>	18%	35%	19%	18%	10%	222
<i>The reclassification of the athletics program has enhanced the overall image of the university.</i>	29%	34%	12%	13%	13%	223
<i>The reclassification has enhanced the prestige of and created a more favorable perception of SIUE.</i>	28%	27%	20%	13%	13%	223
<i>Reclassification has enhanced the sense of community within the university.</i>	22%	19%	26%	16%	17%	223

Note: Some rows do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

We next examined whether there were relationships between the respondents' characteristics and their evaluations of the current state of student-athletes and athletics, the effects of reclassification, and the process. We focus on the respondents' gender, job classification, task force membership, athletics department employment, and history as collegiate athletes. In no subcategory did the percentage of negative responses ever exceed the percentage of positive responses. However, there were cases in which the responses were "more positive" in one subcategory than another. Note that because the responses are ordinal rather than quantitative, it is inappropriate to examine means (Stevens 1946). Thus, we focus on tests of medians and location (Kruskal and Wallis 1952).

There were interesting differences based upon the gender of the respondent. Female respondents gave higher marks for virtually every question. Using a Kruskal-Wallis test (and a significance level of 5%), female respondents gave statistically significantly more favorable assessments of the university's facilities, athletic decisions' consistency with the university's mission and the climate of athletics. Among respondents who have been at the university throughout the transition, females gave statistically significantly more favorable assessments of the reclassification's effect on facilities, athletic decisions' consistency with the university's mission and the effect on university finances. The one exception was gender equity: female respondents gave statistically significantly lower assessments than male respondents of athletics' commitment to gender equity. While not statistically significant, among respondents who have been at the university throughout the transition, females were more likely to hold the view that the commitment to gender equity had diminished as a result of the reclassification.

Faculty tended to give lower evaluations regarding the current state of student-athletes and athletics than did staff or administrators. There were statistically significant differences (at the 5% level) among responses by job classification, with faculty tending to give the lowest assessments and staff giving the highest assessments. This was true for all six statements assessing the current state of student-athletes and athletics. Among respondents who were at the university prior to the reclassification, there were no statistically significant differences across job titles in terms of how the reclassification affected the state of student-athletes and athletics or the process or effects of reclassification.

In general, members of the task force tended to give higher evaluations regarding the current state of student-athletes and athletics. There were statistically significant differences (at the 5% level) among responses by task force membership, with members giving higher assessments for all six statements describing the current state of student-athletes and athletics. Regarding how the reclassification has changed the state of student-athletes and athletics, members of the task force gave better assessments than non-members for all six statements. The difference was statistically significant (at the 5% level) for facilities reflecting the university's commitment to excellence and for the climate of athletics reflecting the mission, vision and values of the university. Members of the task force gave better assessments than non-members of the reclassification process and effect on the university. For five of the measures—all but athletics' effect on the university's financial well-being—the difference was statistically significant (at the 5% level).

Without exception, respondents employed by the university's athletics department gave better assessments of the state of student-athletes and athletics as well as the changes and process. There were statistically significant differences (at the 5% level) among respondents, with those employed by athletics giving higher assessments for all six statements describing the current state of student-athletes and athletics, (and, among those employed at the university prior to the reclassification) all six statements regarding how the reclassification has changed the state of student-athletes and athletics, and all six statements regarding the reclassification process and its effect on the university.

In a few cases, respondents who were collegiate athletes themselves gave better assessments than non-athletes of the current state of student-athletes and athletics. In particular, there was a statistically significant difference (at the 5% level) among respondents, with former student-athletes more likely to agree that the academic profile of student-athletes mirrors that of the general student population, more likely to agree that the climate of intercollegiate athletics reflects the mission, vision and values of the university, and more likely to agree that intercollegiate athletics maintains a commitment to gender equity. There were no statistical differences (at the 5% level) in how former student-athletes assessed any of the six statements regarding how the reclassification has changed the state of student-athletes and athletics, or the six statements regarding the reclassification process and its effect on the university.

Conclusion

This article provides an overall view of the results and relates several empirical findings to previous research. Broadly speaking, results seem to indicate a generally favorable view of the current state of student-athletes and athletics at SIUE among faculty, staff, and administrators. Reclassification did not seem to have altered this general overall perception with the exception that the quality of athletic facilities has noticeably improved. Reclassification seems to have been associated with an enhanced view of the overall university's image and prestige to its external audiences. One lingering concern with reclassification involves its financial impact on the university. This is not a surprising finding given the significant cost (although predominantly funded by a large increase in the student athletic fee) for upgrading the program to compete at the Division I level in a time of financial stress in the state of Illinois and the nation.

Earlier reclassification studies (Dwyer et al. 2010; Roy, Graeff, and Harmon 2008) find an inherent value to a NCAA Division I athletics program and this finding is consistent with the results of this study. Dwyer et al. (2010) discussed the opportunity for a university to use the high publicity associated with a reclassification decision to improve especially the external view of the university and this seems to be the case with SIUE's reclassification decision.

The Ott study (2011) indicated that faculty that were knowledgeable of the academic work of student-athletes or who participated in athletic governance committees were more satisfied with the state of athletics on campus. The results of this study are consistent with those findings. The more interaction faculty, staff, and administrators have with student-athletes and the more input they have in athletic decision making, the more satisfied they become with a Division I athletics program.

An area of future study concerns the need for athletic success at the Division I level for faculty, staff, and administrators at SIUE to retain a generally favorable perception of the move to Division I. In the Dwyer et al. study (2010) the lack of success after a relatively brief period of Division I competition had soured many stakeholders in the study on the wisdom of the move from a highly athletically successful Division II program to a relatively mediocre level of athletic success at the Division I level.

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