



Established 1920

Augsburg College

Bethel University

Carleton College

Concordia College

Gustavus Adolphus College

Hamline University

Macalester College

College of Saint Benedict

College of St. Catherine

Saint John's University

Saint Mary's University

St. Olaf College

University of St. Thomas

October 1, 2007

To the Members of the NCAA Executive Committee Working Group and the Division III Working Group on Membership Issues:

The thirteen members of the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletics Conference present this letter to you with significant concerns about the proposed restructuring of Division III. While we recognize the challenges of a burgeoning division, we find the actions of the working groups premature and the rationale that drives those actions quite troubling. In this spirit, we write asking that you reconsider your charge, particularly in light of the issues below.

First, various sources have attributed the discussion of a restructured Division III to issues of philosophical difference amongst the division membership. We certainly recognize the diversity of thought in our division, yet see this as a sign of strength, individualism and campus and conference autonomy. To suggest that a philosophical divide drives us to the possibility of restructuring is to ignore the fantastic work of the membership during the “reform movement” of the past few years. We believe this work has illuminated a core of agreements between members and enhanced the identity of Division III. There will be a minority of individuals who continue to take issue with these central agreements, yet even they will likely agree with the majority of that core. And if they do not, certainly the opportunity to move to another division is available. In the end, the disagreements of a few should not be driving the restructuring of an entire division. More to the point, we do not believe the membership has been asked if restructuring is desired by the majority of institutions.

Second, recent work by the Division III Working Group has suggested both sports sponsorship and participatory philosophy (in the form of a “restriction index”) as guiding principles for this split. Yet we might argue that schools with large sport offerings as well as those with smaller sport offerings might very likely have similar participatory positions based on the context and mission of a particular institution. Moreover, a “restriction index” presents merely a snapshot of institutional opinion based upon the independent conversations about a particular issue; to blend these independent conversations into something representative of an institution is misleading at best, dangerous at worst. We find this index less an illumination of institutional philosophy and more a simplified methodology of division that would serve to separate those that “have” from those that “have not.”

Third, we believe that the conference structure rather than the divisional structure is the appropriate place for shared athletics philosophy. It is in the conference that institutions can expand those core philosophical agreements, particularly in that competitions between these institutions fill the majority of schedules.

This suggests to us that the divisional restructuring question is less about philosophy and more about access to national championships competition. We recognize that as our Division III membership grows beyond 450 institutions, it becomes more difficult to maintain the current championships ratio. Certainly a restructured Division III protects and perhaps enhances that ratio, yet at no point in the recent restructuring debate has the membership been asked to consider an alternative championships ratio. In essence, we would argue that there is no clear consensus from the membership to prioritize ratio over restructuring and that this line of questioning is crucial to the conversation.

Fourth, we believe the costs of restructuring are quite high and fraught with potentially damaging implications. Conferences may disband and travel costs for conference and divisional competitions may increase. Other institutions may be forced into an alternative Division IV and there are concerns that this may have some negative effect on enrollment numbers. Moreover, it is unclear how a new division (or subdivision) might save administrative costs at the national level; in fact, it seems that any new grouping would cost more dollars to the NCAA. And with the upcoming renegotiations of television contracts (which seem to be the heart of revenue to the membership), enhanced national office costs would seem to be problematic.

In conclusion, we believe your questions on association membership issues are relevant, but your focus upon Division III is misdirected. More specifically, we believe that membership issues are association-wide and that Division III is shouldering the burden of association growth (though we would note the recent moratorium on membership for Division I and Division II's continuing conversation on divisional identity). To that end, we are asking your group to consider the following:

- 1) To engage the Division III membership in a dialogue that asks not which model an institution might prefer, but whether restructuring under certain conditions (i.e. – championships access ratios) is desirable;
- 2) To focus the association-wide conversation on broad issues of institutional movement within all divisions.
- 3) To further highlight this association-wide conversation as a broad exercise to position the entire association for future growth.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,

The MIAC