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President Dan Mahony And Board of Trustees Say No to Football

Winthrop University

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Dan Mahony

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA - Winthrop President Dan Mahony emailed this statement to the Winthrop campus on June 10 after the Board of Trustees unanimously voted to support his decision not to pursue football.

Here is his e-mail to faculty and staff:

Today, the Board of Trustees endorsed my recommendation that Winthrop not pursue a football program. I would like to share with you how we came to this decision.

My recommendation was based on the findings of a study conducted by a team of Winthrop faculty, as well as research undertaken by other universities considering football, and an analysis of the impact on colleges and universities that began football programs.

First, it is important to understand that adding a football program is very expensive. Moreover, as we conducted our analysis, it was clear that cost would be even greater than had been discussed in previous years. The federal Office of Civil Rights has standards that universities must meet in order to be in compliance with Title IX. In order to meet those gender equity standards, Winthrop would have to add women's sports to balance the impact of football.

And, due to the size of a football team, this would likely mean adding three or, possibly, four new women's programs. So the total cost of adding football is really the cost of adding four or five more athletic programs.

The costs of adding these programs would start several years before the teams would even begin to play, with total expenses during those years of about \$3 million to \$5 million, depending on the women's sports added. This would all be before earning any revenue from games. These large, upfront costs with no revenue would undermine Winthrop's well-established fiscal stability.

Even after playing begins, the annual operating expenses for football alone would be about \$4.7 million for a scholarship program and closer to \$3.2 million for a non-scholarship program. Again, the ongoing costs of the women's programs would depend on the sports added, but all of the sports examined would have costs that exceed revenues. Along with operating expenses, there would be substantial costs associated with building new facilities. Winthrop would have to spend more than \$11 million on football facilities immediately and likely more over time. The cost of facilities for the women's programs would depend on the sports chosen but could also be expensive.

Direct sources of revenue for football at the Division I FCS level, including ticket sales, fundraising, and away game guarantees would generate less than \$2 million annually for a scholarship program and likely less for a non-scholarship program. Even in a good year with a large away-game guarantee, we would be left with a substantial revenue deficit.

The logical question is how would the university cover that additional cost? Most institutions that have

started football programs have used some combination of increases in student fees, large donations, and general operating funds.

In a survey of Winthrop students, they demonstrated interest in attending football games and support for adding a football program. However, they are not willing to subsidize the extensive costs of a football program. Of the students surveyed, 50% reported they would oppose paying anything and 93% would be willing to add only \$100 or less per year to their student fees for football. By way of comparison, UNC-Charlotte has added fees of \$320 per year to support football, with a much larger student body. Moreover, it is important to point out that adding a student fee would work against our priority in the draft strategic plan to keep education affordable for our students.

In addition to surveying students, we also surveyed alumni and community members. Both indicated support for adding a program and a desire to attend games. This is not surprising. I fully appreciate that football is deeply ingrained in our surrounding community's culture. As the faculty report notes, in 2013 The Sporting News labeled Rock Hill "Football City USA." And I expect a Winthrop football program would be embraced by fans on and off campus. Therefore, in the analysis we projected higher attendance than the average for Division I FCS programs. However, while I would expect attendance to be good, there is no indication that there would be the large donations necessary to cover the substantial gap between expenses and revenues. In fact, it is interesting to note that, although football has been discussed here for the last several years, no one has indicated to me a desire to make a substantial donation to help cover this substantial gap.

So, if the costs of football could not be covered by increases in student fees and/or large donations, we would need to use general operating funds to cover the increased costs. Some have suggested that adding football would lead to increases in enrollment that would help to generate the additional general operating funds necessary. An analysis based on data derived from other colleges and universities suggests that a football program can increase male applications and result in increased full-time freshmen enrollment.

However, the analysis also predicts that retention rates would be reduced and overall undergraduate enrollment would not improve. Therefore, it appears unlikely that adding football would generate the additional tuition revenue necessary to cover the costs of adding football.

The money we would need to take from the general operating funds would mean shifting resources from other priorities to football and the other new sports. This reality is likely why faculty and staff were the least supportive of adding football. They believed that resources directed to football would be better spent elsewhere on campus, and I would agree with them.

In fact, during the last year we have been working on a strategic plan for Winthrop's future. Implementing this plan will require us to thoughtfully focus our resources on initiatives that will most likely help us to achieve the priorities in the plan. Adding multiple sports would not appear to provide the benefits to justify the costs.

This was not an easy decision to make. I thank all who participated in this process and the Board of Trustees for endorsing my recommendation. With football put to rest, we can now focus our energies on implementing a plan that will provide our students with the educational experience for which Winthrop is justifiably renowned.

Sincerely,
Dr. Daniel F. Mahony
President

[Here is the link to the faculty feasibility study.](#)

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