

Faculty Senate's Student Affairs and Intercollegiate Activities Committee

Q & A meeting with President Kelly, regarding UWG's transition to NCAA D1 Athletics, 3/7/2024

4:08, meeting begins

(President Kelly began by responding to a list of questions that the committee gave to him in advance of the meeting. Many of his responses refer back to that list of questions. Other comments were prompted by questions asked during this meeting. *These notes are not verbatim quotes. They are close paraphrases of President Kelly's verbal remarks unless another speaker is indicated.)

Student athletes are exceptional people who are passionate about their sport. My daughter played volleyball. College athletes at the D2 level they have people working on their behalf trying to get them on coaches radars. When they achieve this goal after investment they go through signing days and there's a celebration and then they get here and their time is fully committed between their sport and academic achievement. There's a passion for that. I recognize that so I know what student segment we are serving. We'll get into the less attractive part of that too. The demands on any student athlete at any level are the same. There are some questions about what happens in D1 like it is different, but the fundamentals are still in place. The 400 or so athletes that we have (track and field...) we have to make certain we have the right scaffold in place to support their success. Physical wellness and mental health- looking into variables like calorie replacement. We've been in Gulf South for 40 years. The NCAA made us give them a meal, but we didn't take it from an institutional perspective. We wouldn't send them into sculpture or chemistry without supplies.

D1/D2 differences: The requirements for D2 are different from D1. There are fewer regulations on d2 athletes and resource requirements, and they usually come in the form of scholarships. Football- D2 you have 36 scholarships and 100+ people on the team. Five players and give them a 5th of a scholarship with other academic aid, you can do splitting. Once you go to D1 you go up to 63 scholarships. We don't have to fully fund each of them but must hit thresholds. A 36 scholarship football team is a cost center. Generate some revenue. Gulf South we have a contract with Flo sports. It doesn't end up being a significant amount of money.

The cost that D1, when we invest in 63 and fund 90%. We are in FCS, football championship, not bowl. Totally different requirements in FBS- extra funding and insurance. The requirements that exist for UGA or AL will not exist for UWG. We do get a chance to compete against them for guarantee games that generate significant revenue. We could get paid \$1 mil to compete against a team. Right now we don't get paid.

Cons? We can ask that about any activity. There are costs to everything? Do we need a college of business? There are cons? There are costs to everything. The transition now, there are benefits that way outpace the negatives or costs that come with this.

The ASUN conference, all of our teams except football are in this conference. Now we'll be competing in Charlotte, Nashville, Jacksonville, Conway, AR. We are the Atlanta market. We'll be playing on ESPN. We are playing against other schools that are in large media markets. ASUN does not have enough football teams to maintain its own. United Athletic Conference partnership with Western Athletic Conference. We are in UAC for football. We'll be competing in Utah. Utah is coming here next year, then we'll go there. There is also one school in Texas. We would have had to take all our sports in D2 into these areas.

What prompted the D1 change in the first place? Schools left Gulf South. We would just have to expand anyway.

Are we adding teams for D1? We have added back men's track and field. That was a sport with a proud history. We don't have a requirement to add new sports, but it will make business sense from a Title IX perspective. There will be some other women's sports, very low cost women's sports, for instance we have a national cheer program, can add a stunt program for very little cost. They're the same athletes and it puts them into a different schedule. Women's volleyball we can add beach volleyball. Normally for schools like us, athletes from a select group will go and play beach as well.

Revenue? This is not a money making proposition. There are 1000 athletic programs at D1, 21 have revenue over expense. They change from year to year. At USC 121 mil budget athletics, they wanted to talk about the things they didn't have. That's half the budget of UWG. The scale that people are working at and still not coming in revenue over expense... cannot steal from Peter to pay Paul. If we shut down business we wouldn't have money to pay athletics. This is highly regulated. The state government gives a strict framework. Very defined contributions that can come from different sources of money. Caps on athletic spending that don't exist in other states but in USG. D1 puts us in a better position. We'd be \$1 mil in the hole in year five. For D1, 1 mil revenue over expense. I guarantee it will be 0. Costs will go up over 5 years, costs are driven by the market. They have to go and stay in hotels and rent vehicles. Costs go up.

Are we going to raise ticket prices? No. Tickets free for students. Until we have demand where that doesn't make sense, student tickets will always be free. Exceptions are large D1 programs. Might have 1000 student tickets and there is a lottery and you can only go to one. Everyone does it differently. UCLA has attendance problem and are giving away tickets. We do not have that issue. Good steady attendance, and expect that to go up. Prices will go up for those who are not part of the university.

Do attendance levels change in ASUN? They change because you have better athletes. Why in football? One- D2 program has been good but hasn't been really strong for a long time, but if you take it over time, we had a couple of good blimps but a midrange program. When we get better athletes, or with a story, when you have a great QB people will know your name. When we hired coach Taylor, ranked in top 10 in FCS schools. See athletes who are better than what we had before, and people will come to see that. Higher performing students from local high schools were being recruited by other D1 programs, will come to UWG, and they already have a following that will transfer from Fri to Sat. We haven't recruited in high schools in this area.

Where are student athletes coming from? We have students from 35 states. Student athletes represent a portion of that. If you take any team, more geographic diversity on athletic teams than in a conventional class for any particular program.

Committee member's question: Some students are on teams now. Do they continue on the team?

Pres: Tough reality of our lives is we live in a performance culture, if you are performing at the level you need to, you stay, if you don't, you don't. UWG has had less of a history in our sports that have not achieved a lot of high level competition. Tuesday night we had 1000 people in men's basketball. Composition of that team three years ago, student who is going to medical school, point guard, is only

person in that room who is still in that room. Two years ago, about half of the starters, if not more, wouldn't have been there. Four actually. Last year to this year, different composition. Teams performing well, that team will change year to year. As we've been onboarding new coaches, with different expectations, different team composition. Students who find themselves not on the team they came to UWG for, we have an off ramp process. In the last 60 days, a lot of students sat down with coach and had parting of ways. Support mechanisms, which might include continued scholarship support. We honor that. It's different for every individual. We don't guarantee anyone anything. Everyone's situation different, caught up with financial aid. Getting them involved in other experiential learning activities might be related to athletics or their area of study. Will see student athletes who came to play sports but didn't make the team. That's okay that's going to be true at work, for the rest of their life

Committee member's question: It is going to be different going from being a D2 athlete to a D1 athlete? What do we build in for transition?

Pres: It's not that different. The difference between D1 and D2 is one inch and one second. See more athleticism and more size. That's the type of change. We have athletes who are successfully making that transition. They are going to do great. And some are not. Their experience won't change dramatically. Their support systems ... still not where they are supposed to be. You'll see different athletes.

Regarding the transfer portal? NIL? One, the only students at UWG before NIL who were not eligible for professional endorsements, were student athletes. Other students can and did. Miss GA competition students are getting endorsements. Nothing illegal about that, but it was in athletics. Case law changed that, so if the local plumber wants to endorse a baseball player and pay them to sit outside plumbing shop there is no limitation on that. That's a good thing. Why? At Samba Loca a couple years ago. Had player out for birthday, and I picked up tab, and that was a violation. File paperwork that he would do that for any student. As an official of the university that is one thing, but if someone else wanted to do the same favor, why should that be a crime. Student athletes at major universities dealing with budgets who were walking away hungry because they couldn't get access to food because it wasn't part of their package. NCAA getting rid of that is good for us. We won't see at UWG here the same kind of thing at other big universities, i.e. QB making a quarter million dollars. TCU alumni put together a group and gave every player 25k for example. The transfer portal is creating a situation where you don't have developmental teams. A team is together for a year, and sometimes you win the championship and they still leave. They used to not be able to transfer unless university gave them permission, and couldn't go to a competitor school and couldn't compete next season without exemption. Any other student can go and study where they like. There still are some limitations. Coaches frustrated. Invest in people and then they leave.

Coaches will have a mix. A developmental program. Recruit from high school and plan on being here four years. Develop as players. Go from worst to first. To be competitive have to transfer some players in too. We do not control everything at UWG for athletics, it is regulated. And, laws and regulations are always changing. For instance, should student athletes be employees? If they were their scholarships would be taxed, meals taxable income, benefits taxed. It will cost them money to come and play at a university. That issue will be caught up in court for some time. We have a lot of lawsuits that will change these regulations.

I wish as a faculty member I would have known the details of how athletics worked. As a student I wished faculty members understood about travel and demands on time. (on debate team). I love this conversation because it gives us the ability to see how we're doing.

Committee Chair Question: Anything you are aware of that as faculty we could be doing better to support our student athletes?

Pres: I will tie in a question. We hear that faculty members get pressure. There are regulations that prevent that from happening. If that occurred somebody would be out of a job real fast. It would threaten accreditation. We have had faculty report that, but when we look into it, it doesn't turn out to be true.

Look at the GPA for the teams that we have at the university. Remarkable academic support. Generally speaking faculty are really supportive. Exceptions come from wrong mindset or don't understand what the student is tasked with. What can we do better? Grace. I've said that since emerging from COVID. We have a whole bunch of people who present themselves as being just fine and they are not fine. Need a lot of support and grace. We all experience that in different ways. Do not lose grace, for student athletes especially. Mental and physical health scaffolding. Understanding how to work with them on absences. For some teams being in D1 is better. Women's and men's basketball travel and have double headers. That won't happen anymore so there will be more spread schedules. Move conferences to put students back in classes they were missing. Moving into ASUN, absences should stay about the same. The biggest thing a faculty member can do for athlete, artist, debate, etc. is be a fan. That makes all the difference. We see it when they honor faculty at appreciation games. It is inspiring. Being a fan, showing up just once and watching them play. Being at a softball game and having a faculty member cheering for a particular student, that student hears every time you yell their name. What you notice is, especially in team sports, there are not always a lot of fans who know your name. We haven't been on ESPN. The other piece is this. You might be exposed to somebody who is in distress in a way they might not see it in the team and training, so you might be the place where you see an athlete who needs something else. I hope you're an advocate. Report it in the CARE team so people who are tasked with subject matter experts three times a week follow up on those cases. If you've identified a student athlete, and you know what team they're on, you can pass it on to a coach or athletic director. That's why we have the care team in place and have subject matter experts from all areas and go over every case when there is a student in distress.

Committee member's question: Now that we have more emphasis on student success activities, would you consider we shouldn't have to pay to work, to go to games, have free access to games to support our students?

P: I will run that. For most sports they are free. Football is the only one. No basketball. I'll address this.

Committee member's question: you plus one?

P: We can do this. I think we can do this. Until we get to the point where we have a capacity issue, or if we had people trying to buy every ticket that is available, I love this, I love that we can tie to D1.

Committee member's question: If we're in the stands our students will hear us cheering for them.

P: I go to a lot of games. I go to support faculty and the products of their work. Students notice. I want to make sure everybody is encouraged. I expect you to be present on campus. You need to show up in spaces where people have access to you and you can represent and be a fan. Women's basketball, Valdosta, came down to last 7 seconds. We need more people to support them.

Committee member's question: Because we're faculty we have faculty interests, but mindful of staff?

P: Wouldn't do it for just faculty, can do for staff as well.

Committee member's question: Absences: outside the classroom we don't encounter any of the other problems athletes might have. I encounter them when they miss class because of a game and they have to make up what they missed. That is what seems to cause them the most trouble, making up work they miss. The athletic department tells me so we can plan in advance when they are going to miss. I hope that continues. Absences don't seem to be equal among the sports. Last spring 4 girls on softball and they missed a lot because they had so many road games on weekdays. Guy in baseball never had to miss a class, because their games are scheduled differently. On weekends or end of the day. Might have been random, but different sports, different athletes, bigger problem for some than others?

P: Let me tell you how schedules are made. The coaches will get together. They have administrators from every conference. You will see softball and baseball playing on similar days, as a cost saving method, so they travel together. UWG, we might not advocate for that. The coaches will align with conference and propose a schedule. The AD's look at it and amend before approval. We have to align with experience of students. Presidents will bless each of these. ASUN will work differently. Won't be alignment on double headers. Softball will start earlier in the day. We do try to go for optimization. What is the least amount of travel. For instance, Tuesday game at FLGC, they'd make it so your Thursday game is at home and optimize around the time of day. ASUN has more resources to do this. Invariably this is going to happen. One year, by sport, it is particularly bad and one year it isn't. There are more class options at most universities in the first four days. Golf... traveling alone. The AD is going through the schedule now.

Committee member's question: Sometimes it is a major burden. Same number of games?

P: Yes. A tiny amount of variability, but generally yes for seasons being the same. We're in some new sports spaces where I don't know the exact degree. For instance in football we have one more home game than we would have otherwise had. Based on game contracts. We are working on contracts for 2031 now. It shouldn't be more intense. We have optimized travel. ASUN keeps us in a bus league. Only team that is on a plane is football for one or two contests. We are getting those costs covered. If you see us go to an exotic location with 100 players, don't think the sky is falling, they are paying us. It is cost neutral. We are playing in Texas, which is cost neutral.

We can keep talking about it. I'm going to look into schedule. I love the ticket idea.

Committee member's question: D1 starts this fall?

P: July 1. First is against Samford. Women's basketball against Auburn. It's a new day. It creates a lot of opportunities. When is the last time you saw a UWG commercial featuring a faculty member that was on ESPN. That's what will happen. A U that did the same transition a few years ago. Same position in men's basketball. Won championship in men's basketball. That's a much smaller institution. They had 6 million

social media hits. Two years later won the conference championship. Not eligible for first four years for playoffs. We'll see a lot of churning with athletes who want to compete for a championship. They were not invited to March Madness, where 96% of NCAA comes from. 3.6 billion hits on social media. The visibility of our work will be remarkably different. We are one of the 10 largest colleges of education. We will be well known. Richards will be well known. We'll have platform.