

“Moving on down”: When athletics departments change divisions another way

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Abstract

Many college athletics programs appear to have only one mission when it comes to the NCAA division they are in: the number of schools desiring to “move up”. This research will explore the rare phenomenon of NCAA schools who have made the move down in divisions, primarily from Division I to Division II or III. The decision to transition often stems from financial considerations, a desire to align athletic programs with academic missions, or a need to reduce budgetary pressures. The process often involves a comprehensive self-study by the institution, consultations with relevant stakeholders, and the formal submission of a request to the NCAA and the respective conference. As far back as 1950 when the University of Chicago made the decision to drop its football program for academic reasons, schools dropping appear to have often cited factors such as financial stability, competitive positioning, and academic priorities.

This exploratory study will give more focus on the athletic departments who have moved to a lower division in the past 15 years. The review of literature in the area of organizational management shows that sometimes a contradiction may exist between stated public reasons for an organization making a decision attributed to evolving organizational needs (as opposed to the real reasons they may have made a decision). This research will examine the stated public reasons for leaving for a lower division by the institution, along with the use of a qualitative study. Through contact with employees working at these institutions, there will be an attempt to bring a more in-depth investigation into whether such disparities exist. Furthermore, the emergent themes of finances (university and athletics budgets), alignment, academic reputations, and how much these schools have competed for championships will be explored.