

ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEM  
ACADEMIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
MAY 12, 2004

12. **U. T. El Paso: Authorization to accept invitation from Conference USA and to negotiate and finalize terms of athletic conference membership**

RECOMMENDATION

The Chancellor concurs in the recommendation of the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and President Natalicio that authorization be granted to U. T. El Paso to accept an invitation from Conference USA (C-USA) to become a member in 2005 and that Chancellor Yudof and President Natalicio be authorized to negotiate and finalize terms and conditions for such membership.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

U. T. El Paso joined the Western Athletic Conference (WAC) in 1967, one year after winning the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Championship in men's basketball, and one year after changing its name from Texas Western College to The University of Texas at El Paso.

U. T. El Paso's 37-year tenure as a WAC member has offered many benefits, including enduring relationships with fellow WAC institutions during the first 25 years of its membership. During the past decade, however, the WAC experienced considerable instability, growing from eight member institutions to 16, including four former Southwest Conference institutions (Rice University, Southern Methodist University, Texas Christian University, and the University of Tulsa) as well as California State University, Fresno; San Jose State University; and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas in 1996. In 1999, the WAC returned to an eight-member configuration, when the Mountain West Conference was established by former WAC institutions Brigham Young University; University of Utah; Colorado State University; the University of Wyoming; Air Force Academy; the University of New Mexico; University of Nevada at Las Vegas; and San Diego State University. This instability was exacerbated in 2003, when Rice University, Southern Methodist University, and the University of Tulsa announced they would leave the WAC in 2005 to become members of C-USA.

The pending departure of these three "eastern" members of the WAC was particularly disturbing to U. T. El Paso, because their participation had enabled U. T. El Paso to compete regularly in Texas, especially in the Dallas and Houston areas, where there are large concentrations of U. T. El Paso alumni.

As conference alignments continue to shift, C-USA provides a stable home for U. T. El Paso's 16 athletic teams and significantly enhances the University's potential for additional postseason play and for increased revenue streams for its athletics programs. C-USA has an eight-year agreement (initiated in 2001) with ESPN that incorporates television coverage by ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN Regional Television, ABC Sports, ESPN.com, and ESPN Classic. In addition, the conference has tie-ins with five football bowl games.

By playing in the Central, Mountain and Eastern time zones as part of C-USA, U. T. El Paso will gain more exposure where large segments of the University's recruiting and alumni base reside. Beyond the substantial advantages for alumni membership and recruiting, U. T. El Paso will also benefit from increased exposure in Texas newspapers.

U. T. El Paso's Miners will be grouped in C-USA's Western Division with the University of Houston, Rice University, Southern Methodist University, Tulane University, and the University of Tulsa. The conference sponsors 19 sports and since its inception has fielded 34 NCAA Tournament teams in men's basketball, 34 NCAA Tournament teams in women's basketball, 22 bowl teams in football, and 23 NCAA Tournament teams in volleyball. In addition, 27 men's and women's soccer teams and softball teams have earned NCAA Tournament bids.