



Competitive Frameworks and Impacts of SFU Athletics  
Competing in Canada

**FINAL REPORT**

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## Chapter 1: Executive Summary

### 1.1 Introduction

On September 17 2025, Simon Fraser University (SFU) announced that it had retained McLaren Global Sport Solutions (MGSS) and appointed Bob Copeland, Senior Vice-President at MGSS, as an Independent Consultant (IC) to examine the impacts of moving SFU's varsity athletic programs to alternative competitive structures in Canada, namely U SPORTS as the primary national governing body and Canada West (CW) as the regional governing body. The decision to appoint an independent consultant arose from a confluence of factors, explained as follows by a statement issued by the Provost and Vice-President Academic:

"SFU is committed to maintaining a varsity athletics program that supports student-athletes and creates opportunities for them to thrive," says Rassier. "The Athletics and Recreation strategy seeks to build a sustainable interuniversity athletics program that centres the student experience by aligning with SFU's mission to provide an excellent academic experience with opportunities to compete in sport.

A sustainable program at SFU includes considering the impacts on student-athletes, evolving costs and challenges faced by competing in the NCAA.

SFU is proud of our membership within the NCAA. There are many benefits to being Canada's only NCAA team, most importantly for the university's student-athletes. However, the changing nature of the NCAA, changes to the competitive framework varsity athletes participate in, unpredictable shifts in exchange rates, potential impacts for our students in crossing the border, and restrictions on our ability to affect NCAA decision-making, have created a difficult planning model.

As a result, the university is considering a return to competing in a Canadian competitive framework, but first we need to understand impacts on student-athletes before making a decision."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Fraser University, News Release, "SFU launches independent consultation on alternative competitive frameworks." Online: [SFU launches independent consultation on competitive varsity frameworks - Provost and VP Academic - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 26 September 2025].

The SFU statement illustrates the complexity of impacts that the university must factor into its decision as it concerns remaining in the NCAA or returning to Canada. SFU has a fiduciary responsibility and a duty of care to consider all factors and act in the best interests of the university in whatever decision it makes.

The debate over the NCAA versus U SPORTS is divisive and has been understandably difficult for many in the SFU community including student-athletes, the Department of Athletics and Recreation (the Department), faculty, staff, and alumni, among others. It is anticipated that there will be tremendous disappointment with whatever decision SFU makes, as reflected in the following comment:

**"This is a no win situation, and there are so many people's hopes and dreams tied up in this decision. So no matter what we do, it is going to be painful" - SFU Staff Member**

SFU has a rich history of competing in the United States which has underpinned its athletics branding for decades, referred to today as "Canada's NCAA Team." Student-athletes take pride in representing Canada and enjoying the unique combination of studying in Canada and competing in the NCAA Division II (DII). Many believe that leaving the NCAA will damage SFU's brand, reputation, and differentiation that has long been cultivated through athletics participation in the United States. Others believe the contrary — that continuing to compete in the United States will damage SFU's brand irreparably based on a misalignment of values and philosophy. Those who favour a move to U SPORTS hold the position that there is a greater opportunity to compete for national championships and develop local rivalries in Canada that engage the broader SFU community; the Canada West conference has 17 members, including seven in the province of British Columbia.

More than 106 student-athletes provided impassioned feedback about the impact of the decision the university is weighing with a clear preference for the status quo. They are concerned about myriad impacts including scholarships, eligibility, competitive pathways to professional sports careers, and academic progression, among others. These impacts are summarized in Chapter 5, including extensive feedback provided by student-athletes and others in the SFU community.

There are many other important factors that SFU must consider in weighing its decision, including financial considerations. SFU projects a \$20 million deficit in 2025-26 and the Department is facing a \$1 million budget cut over the next five years. Simply put, the Department's current operation is not sustainable. Several coaches told the IC that the Department must cut varsity teams in order to be more competitive — either in the NCAA Division II should SFU remain, or in U SPORTS.

A move to Canada West and U SPORTS would eliminate the SFU's women's softball program along with men's and women's golf as these sports are not offered by U SPORTS. This would impact 39 student-athletes and both coaching staffs, saving \$575,695 in annual operating costs in these sports. This would leave 13 teams remaining in a Canada West and U SPORTS model. Additional annual savings — largely through more efficient travel — would save the Department approximately \$337,090 annually. The combined annual savings to the Department amount to \$858,798<sup>2</sup>, a reduction of approximately 21% from the current budget. It is important to note that these savings include maintaining existing levels of coaching and athlete support services that SFU students have come to enjoy under the NCAA model. This includes positions currently mandated by the NCAA including the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR), among others. It is the Department's intention to maintain these positions and services as a best practice to support student-athletes.

In addition to the \$858,798 in annual savings for the Department, the university would save approximately \$250,000 in annual costs related to the mandatory requirement imposed by the NCAA for SFU to be academically accredited in the United States through the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). **Therefore, it is estimated that total annual cost savings for the university and Department would be \$1,108,798.**

The issue of sustainability is a cloud that hangs over many programs in the NCAA given the most unprecedented changes in the history of the organization including what many refer to as the "end of amateurism." The driving philosophy and operations of NCAA sports is undergoing the most significant change in its history as demonstrated through multiple legal proceedings involving player

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<sup>2</sup> Note: Combined annual savings to the Department include: 1) \$575,695 through program cuts to golf and softball + 2) \$337,090 in operating efficiencies in remaining 13 sports - 3) Increased annual fees to U SPORTS and Canada West of \$53,987.

revenue sharing, Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL), and transfer freedoms. While the impacts of these changes are most noticeable at the Division I (DI) level, they are having trickle down impacts on Division II and the future is unclear as to how this all unfolds, including the transfer portal and NIL described as "the wild west."

As impassioned as student-athletes are about staying in the NCAA, there are others in the SFU community who are equally passionate about leaving the NCAA based on a misalignment of values and philosophy. This includes grave concerns about the treatment of diverse individuals and communities, and the professionalization of college athletics in the U.S.. The U.S. context is discussed in Chapter 3, and the concerns about values and philosophy are discussed in Chapter 5.7.

A decision to leave the NCAA and participate in Canada West and U SPORTS must consider the mission, vision, and values of both SFU and U SPORTS. On this point, the organization's align. The Department's vision is to "Position SFU Athletics and Recreation as an integral contributor to the SFU student experience, academic mission, and community engagement by delivering high-quality varsity and recreation opportunities."<sup>3</sup> Canada West and U SPORTS provide such high-quality opportunities as discussed in Chapter 4. However, some sports offered in the NCAA DII provide a better competitive environment including men's and women's wrestling, and track and field, among others.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the Canadian Context, U SPORTS, and Canada West. U SPORTS' mission is focused to "optimize uniquely Canadian experiences for student-athletes, coaches, and staff to thrive to their full potential." A core value is being student-athlete focused and placing student-athletes at the centre of decision making. U SPORTS is committed to ensuring equitable opportunities across all programs and is performance driven, encouraging excellence on and off the field.

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Fraser University, "SFU Athletics and Recreation launches strategic plan." Online: [SFU Athletics and Recreation launches strategic plan - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 27 October 2025].

Canada West and U SPORTS are committed to a balanced student-athlete experience, not unlike the NCAA Division II, the Great Northwest Athletic Conference (GNAC), and the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC ) which promote "Life in the Balance." A key difference between the NCAA and U SPORTS — raised by many student-athletes — is the compliance regime in the NCAA Division II that codifies certain rules that support the concept of balance; for example, a rule called Countable Athletic Related Activities (CARA) that limits the amount of time that athletes can train and compete during certain times of the year; student-athletes value this rule. U SPORTS does not have a similar set of checks and balances, as its compliance regime simply does not compare to the NCAA — nor should it. The size and complexity of the NCAA with more than 1,100 member institutions and 550,000 student-athletes demands this approach to compliance. By comparison, U SPORTS includes 58 member institutions and nearly 15,000 student-athletes.<sup>4</sup> U SPORTS has a robust set of policies and procedures that its members must comply with, but not to the extent of the NCAA. While the compliance structure in the NCAA has many benefits, including athlete protections as noted, it presents some challenges to SFU, given SFU's position as the only international member.

Chapter 4.3 provides an overview of several U SPORTS' policies in response to questions and concerns raised by SFU student-athletes. These include policies on eligibility, Athletic Financial Awards (AFAs) — more commonly known as athletic scholarships — as well as equity, transgender participation, and a policy against maltreatment in sport. These policies will impact SFU students in different ways depending on their individual circumstances including the amount of eligibility already consumed through NCAA participation. This eligibility would count against the five years of eligibility provided in U SPORTS, with a number of important caveats in U SPORTS' Policy 40 - Eligibility.

Scholarship limits differ between the NCAA Division II and U SPORTS. In DII, student-athletes can receive a "full ride" scholarship including tuition, fees, and living expenses. By comparison, U SPORTS limits AFAs to tuition and fees, not living expenses. Thus, the maximum total amount of scholarship funding that an individual can receive is higher in the NCAA when compared to U SPORTS. However, there are very few SFU student-athletes who receive a "full ride." On the contrary, many SFU

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<sup>4</sup> U SPORTS, "History." Online: [History of U SPORTS - U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 15 November 2025].



programs fall below the allowable scholarship ceiling currently available. For example, women's cross country awarded only 10% of its scholarship equivalencies<sup>5</sup> in 2024 compared with men's soccer at 91% of the scholarship maximum — the highest amongst SFU varsity sports. This underscores the need to interpret impacts on a team-by-team basis (Chapter 5.4). A summary of each team's current scholarship equivalency is provided, as well as a comparison of scholarship equivalencies between U SPORTS and the NCAA. U SPORTS offers higher scholarship equivalencies than the NCAA Division II in men's and women's soccer, women's volleyball, men's and women's swimming, and track and field.

Should SFU proceed with an application to Canada West and U SPORTS, it is required to pay application fees which are determined by sport. One-time application costs for membership in U SPORTS and CW total \$990,000 (\$55,000 U SPORTS; \$935,000 CW). The recurring annual fees to compete in U SPORTS and CW in these 13 sports is \$109,987 compared to approximately \$56,000 (CDN) in current annual fees to the NCAA, GNAC, and RMAC. Additionally, the GNAC imposes costs associated with resignation of membership, which varies between \$32,000 (USD) and \$64,000 (USD), subject to timing criteria. The RMAC also imposes resignation of membership fees, albeit much lower than the GNAC and according to the annual fees paid in two affiliated SFU sports (swimming, wrestling).

While much of this report is focused on impacts to varsity teams, there are additional impacts to selected competitive sport clubs, specifically men's hockey and men's lacrosse. Men's hockey and men's lacrosse operate akin to varsity teams, with significant budgets and travel schedules in the United States. These impacts are discussed in Chapter 5.5.

This report and its findings represent an independent and objective assessment of various impacts of moving SFU's varsity athletics program to Canada, specifically to U SPORTS and Canada West.

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<sup>5</sup> Note: A scholarship equivalency is the total amount of athletic aid for a given sport expressed as a number of full scholarships that can be divided into partial awards among multiple athletes.

## 1.2 Terms of Reference for this Report

The Terms of Reference are as follows:

1. Conduct an operating analysis for each SFU interuniversity team based on potential membership in Canada West and U SPORTS. The operating analysis includes, but is not limited to:
  - Competition format and championship progression
  - Roster Sizes
  - Length of season, number of games, etc.
  - Travel requirements
  - Staffing requirements
  - Scholarship and financial aid rules
  - Eligibility rules
  - Diversity, equity, and inclusion requirements and initiatives
  - Academic standards
  - Compliance requirements
  - Mandatory sport membership fees and other related expenses
  - Other governance requirements as deemed material by the IC
2. Assess the impacts of new competitive structures on selected competitive sport clubs.
3. Assess the impacts of new competitive structures on the SFU student-athlete experience.
4. Examine alternative competitive structures that may be available in Canada for any current SFU interuniversity team whose sport is not sanctioned by Canada West and U SPORTS.
5. Provide an estimate of annual operating costs within the new competitive structures, as well as one-time start-up costs (including, for example, application fees, etc.)
6. Assess the alignment of SFU and its athletics program with the mission, vision, and any strategic planning documents associated with new sport governing bodies being contemplated.
7. Issue an Independent Final Report to Simon Fraser University that shall be made publicly available.

### 1.3 Consultation Process

Consultation included personal interviews by videoconference, survey responses, and other email correspondence received. The IC conducted a total of 41 personal interviews, including SFU coaches, Department staff, administrators, faculty, student representatives (via SAAC and SFSA), and alumni. The IC also interviewed senior representatives of U SPORTS, Canada West, and the GNAC.

Student-athletes were provided with an opportunity to complete an open-ended web survey hosted by SFU. A total of 106 student-athletes completed the survey which represents a response rate of 33%.

**Table 1: SFU Student-Athlete Survey Responses**

Team	# Responses	Response Rate
Basketball, Men	3	19%
Basketball, Women	3	21%
Cross Country, Men	4	25%
Cross Country, Women	1	8%
Golf, Men	5	63%
Golf, Women	7	78%
Soccer, Men	1	4%
Soccer, Women	14	48%
Softball, Women	11	50%
Swimming, Men	2	12%
Swimming, Women	3	15%
Track & Field, Men	9	27%
Track & Field, Women	12	44%
Volleyball, Women	7	39%
Wrestling, Men	12	40%
Wrestling, Women	12	46%
Total	106	33%

Table 2: SFU Student-Athlete Survey Response Distribution by Year

Year	# Responses	% of Total Responses
1'st Year	30	28%
2'nd Year	23	22%
3'rd Year	20	19%
4'th Year	17	16%
5'th Year	16	15%
Total	106	100%

A higher response rate may be correlated with heightened concerns and perceived impacts amongst specific teams and by year of study. For example, the highest response rates by year of study are for first year and second year students who may be impacted more significantly should SFU decide to leave the NCAA for U SPORTS.

SFU also provided an opportunity for others in the university community to share their feedback via email response. Table 3 provides a summary of responses by stakeholder group.

Table 3: Email Response Summary by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	# Responses	% of Total Responses
Alumni* (*27 of 31 responses were SFU Softball alumni)	31	79%
Coaches	3	8%
Students	3	8%
Staff	1	2.5%
Parents	1	2.5%
Total	39	100%

A summary of feedback from the consultation process is provided in Chapter 5.

## 1.4 Key Findings

1. There is a lack of consensus amongst SFU stakeholders (students, staff, faculty, senior leadership, alumni) about a preference for the NCAA Division II or U SPORTS.
2. Student-athletes are almost unanimous in their preference to remain in the NCAA Division II, citing it as a unique, more competitive experience, and one that codifies balance between academics and athletics.
3. SFU student-athletes raised many questions about a potential move to U SPORTS. Key topics include scholarships, eligibility, and academic and athletic support services. Several staff and SFU senior administrators stressed the critical importance of supporting student-athletes through any potential transition from the NCAA to U SPORTS, including the suggestion to create a university-led transition committee.
4. Senior administrators, staff, and faculty expressed strong concerns about a misalignment of values between SFU/Canada and the NCAA/United States, including the treatment of diverse individuals and communities, and the professionalization of college athletics in the United States which creates operational uncertainty for SFU.
5. SFU's participation in the NCAA has created systemic budget pressures and structural budget deficits over several years. According to a 2022 report by Deloitte, the financial challenges faced by the Department have created, "a strong sense of urgency in financial viability."<sup>6</sup>
6. SFU expects an operating shortfall for 2025-26 of roughly \$20 million and has implemented institution-wide budget reductions. These cuts will impact the Department of Athletics and Recreation which is expected to face up to \$1 million in cuts over the next five years. This portends program cuts in the Department, whether they be under an NCAA Division II or U SPORTS governance model; a number of current SFU coaches interviewed by the IC expressed the need for selected team cuts to ensure greater competitiveness, including "We are probably too heavy in the NCAA as it is."
7. U SPORTS offers national championships in 23 sports (11-M, 12-W), including 13 of SFU's current 16 sports that are sponsored in the NCAA Division II. However, U SPORTS does not offer softball or men's and women's golf which would mean the elimination of these sports at SFU under a U SPORTS governance model. U SPORTS also does not sponsor outdoor track and field.
8. The elimination of SFU's softball and men's and women's golf programs would impact approximately 39 student-athletes (31-W, 9-M), as well as the coaching staff. The total number of SFU varsity student-athletes would change from 326 (178-W, 148-M) to 287 (147-W, 140-M), a reduction of 12 percent.

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<sup>6</sup> Deloitte Development LLC, "Simon Fraser University Athletics Benchmark and Scan Report," September 2022.

9. **Membership in U SPORTS could potentially save \$858,798 in annual operating costs for the Department, a reduction of 21%.** This includes the discontinuation of men's and women's golf and softball which together accounts for \$575,695 of this total.
10. **The total annual savings across the operating budgets of the 13 sports that would transition from the NCAA to U SPORTS is estimated to be \$337,090, a reduction of 10%.** This amount includes no reductions in coaching or student-athlete support services currently provided in these sports.
11. Membership in U SPORTS would eliminate the mandatory requirement imposed by the NCAA for SFU to be academically accredited in the United States through the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). This would save up to \$250,000 annually for SFU, and reduce administrative complexity and duplication; SFU also is accredited through the British Columbia Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills' Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB), as well as additional accreditation from national and international bodies. **Total annual savings to the university are projected to be \$1,108,798 which combines Department savings and U.S. academic accreditation savings.**
12. **One-time application costs for membership in U SPORTS and CW total \$990,000 (\$55,000 U SPORTS; \$935,000 CW).** The recurring annual fees to compete in U SPORTS and CW in these 13 sports are \$109,987 compared to approximately \$56,000 (CDN) in current annual fees to the NCAA, GNAC, and RMAC.
13. The GNAC imposes costs associated with resignation of membership, which varies between \$32,000 (USD) and \$64,000 (USD), subject to timing criteria. The RMAC also imposes resignation fees, albeit much lower than the GNAC and is based on the annual fees paid according to two affiliated SFU sports.
14. The issue of sustainability is a cloud that hangs over many programs in the NCAA given the most unprecedented changes in the history of the organization including what many refer to as the "end of amateurism." The driving philosophy and operations of NCAA sports is undergoing the most significant change in its history as demonstrated through multiple legal proceedings and policy changes involving player revenue sharing (DI), Name, Image, and Likeness, and transfer freedoms. While the impacts of these changes are most noticeable at the Division I level, they are having trickle down impacts on Division II and the future is unclear as to how this all unfolds, including the transfer portal and NIL described as "the wild west."
15. The mission, vision, and values of both U SPORTS and Canada West are aligned with the Department's purpose, values, and vision — including the provision of "high-quality" varsity opportunities articulated in the Department's recent strategic plan.
16. Universities in British Columbia comprise 41% of Canada West members, and the addition of SFU would bring this to 44%. Based on the membership of the GNAC versus Canada West, the average travel distance is approximately 12% shorter in Canada West vs. the GNAC.

17. Most sport clubs would not be impacted by leaving the NCAA, with the exception of some highly competitive sport clubs including men's hockey and men's lacrosse.
18. U SPORTS offers national championships in some sports in which SFU currently competes through its competitive sport clubs model — including men's hockey and women's rugby. This may provide future opportunities for SFU to expand its varsity sports offering, providing national championship opportunities currently unavailable to SFU student-athletes in the GNAC. However, given current financial deficits, this is likely not a near term opportunity.
19. Canada West offers a men's and women's golf championship, which suggests these programs could be offered by the Department, but likely within a self-funded competitive sport clubs structure rather than a varsity program that progresses to a national championship.
20. The men's hockey club is a highly sophisticated, successful, well-funded operation with significant SFU alumni support — both operationally and financially. It has been actively lobbying to become an NCAA Division I hockey program, despite no existing NCAA membership structure that would allow it to do so. An interpretation from the NCAA confirms that SFU "does not meet the general eligibility requirements for Division I."<sup>7</sup> The men's hockey club could continue with its team in the BCIHL, leaving their non-conference team that plays in NCAA exhibitions in limbo.
21. The IC reviewed correspondence from alumni representatives of SFU football and field hockey about the potential for SFU varsity status within U SPORTS. SFU has been clear about the finality of its decision regarding the football program, however, a move to U SPORTS may ignite the debate about football at SFU. Such a possibility is remote — and contemplating the addition of any new teams is ill-advised in the next five years at minimum — given the current financial challenges at SFU. Transitioning an entire athletics program from the NCAA to U SPORTS would be a complex, multi-year process and energy should be focused on supporting current student-athletes through this process if this is the chosen path.
22. The terms of reference for the IC's work did not include consultation with the non-athlete student community at SFU who are less directly impacted than student-athletes and who may hold diverse opinions. The two likely impacts on SFU students broadly include financial impacts and campus culture. As SFU students fund the Department of Athletics through student fees, a decision to remain in the NCAA would likely have financial impacts through higher fees and greater financial uncertainty. Competing in Canada West and U SPORTS would provide greater opportunities for home fan engagement which can impact campus culture.

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<sup>7</sup> NCAA Requests/Self-Reports Online System, "Interpretive Request for SFU Men's Hockey Club (printed excerpt)", 15 March 2024.

## Chapter 2: SFU Department of Athletics and Recreation

### 2.1 Introduction

The Department of Athletics and Recreation (the Department) reports to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President Academic. The combination of varsity athletics and campus recreation programming is a typical operating structure in Canada, but is less common in the U.S. where it is more typical to have separate operating units for varsity athletics and campus recreation. According to Deloitte, "SFU currently maintains an athletic and campus recreation reporting structures that is more akin to U Sport institutions, where the programs maintain some shared reporting lines and resources."<sup>8</sup> This provides operating efficiencies and a shared focus on serving SFU students as the Department's primary constituency, recognized in its strategic plan as being "our most important stakeholder on campus."<sup>9</sup> The Department's 2025 strategic plan reaffirmed this integrated model which is funded through a single combined student fee for varsity athletics and campus recreation.

The Department includes a total of 19 full-time administrative and support staff, led by an Executive Director of Athletics and Recreation. This represents a decline of 17% of the full-time employees (four positions), since 2023. More discussion about what led to these cutbacks is provided in section 2.4 (Funding Pressures). A total of four positions have been eliminated since 2023, however, SFU hired back a position in sports information as it is mandatory for compliance with NCAA Division II membership obligations. Other NCAA mandated positions include athletics compliance and designation of a senior women's sport position which are combined into one position at SFU.

Another non-salaried position mandated by the NCAA is a Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR), who provides various support services for SFU student-athletes. This position receives a modest honorarium and professional development opportunities to support their work. Student-athletes value the services of the FAR and are concerned with its removal — as well as other NCAA mandated

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<sup>8</sup> Deloitte Development LLC, "Simon Fraser University Athletics Benchmark and Scan Report," September 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Fraser University, "SFU Athletics and Recreation launches strategic plan." Online: [SFU Athletics and Recreation launches strategic plan - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 2 November 2025].



positions — should SFU return to Canada. However, there is consensus from interviews with Department staff to retain these positions, although they are not specifically mandated by U SPORTS. These are considered mission critical services, whether participation is in the NCAA or U SPORTS and many U SPORTS institutions employ similar positions in their athletics programs to support student-athletes.

In addition to administrative and support staff, the Department employs 11 full-time coaches (across 16 teams) and an equivalent number of FTEs for assistant coaches, for a total of 22 full-time coaches. Some combined (men's and women's) teams are led by one head coach, including swimming, track and field, and golf.

The operating structure of wrestling and track and field in U SPORTS could have coaching implications for SFU. For example, in the NCAA Division II, men's and women's wrestling compete as separate programs due to different wrestling styles — thus requiring two head coaches. However, in U SPORTS the men's and women's wrestling programs are integrated with the same style of wrestling, which may not require two full-time head coaches. This approach would be similar to how SFU employs one full-time coach for each of men's and women's swimming, track and field, and golf. These teams travel and compete together at similar meets, which is not the case in wrestling.

Similarly, U SPORTS only sponsors indoor track and field which nullifies the more expansive outdoor track and field disciplines that SFU student-athletes enjoy in the NCAA DII. This would mean a reduction in the number of events and meets funded by the Department. The various impacts are discussed in more depth in Chapter 5, but it is important to recognize that these impacts could include additional reductions in coaching in some SFU sports currently offered.

Given the recent staffing reductions in the Department and the necessity of existing positions that are mandated by the NCAA, it is not expected that there will be additional cuts to centralized administrative positions in the Department. However, because U SPORTS does not operate a national championship in softball or men's and women's golf, it is expected that these two sports

would be eliminated from the SFU sport model as varsity teams. This would impact 39 student-athletes (31-W, 8-M) and the coaching staff of both programs.

SFU provides extensive athlete support services, including a variety of medical services. Since the elimination of football in 2023, there has been less pressure on many athlete support services, including athletic therapy, where student-to-therapist ratios are now at acceptable levels<sup>10</sup> and commensurate with best practices. The sports medicine function in the Department employs four full-time staff members including a Manager of Sports Medicine. One staff member in SFU sports medicine commented about the need to hire "outside (part-time) therapists to travel to with our teams, to go on these road trips, just so we (full time medical staff) can maintain our clinical hours and treat the athletes that are here."

The IC heard accounts of lengthy road trips that led to the need to hire additional therapists for road trips to free up time for the full-time staff to perform their clinical duties. The deployment of athletic therapists may be one area where efficiencies can be examined in a U SPORTS travel model. The medical services for SFU athletics are described as a "closed ecosystem" where SFU medical services are not typically outsourced; current staff recommend continuing with this model should SFU join U SPORTS as it has been an effective approach in supporting integrated student-athlete wellness. This does raise questions about the structure of medical services, including outsourced services, for competitive sport clubs that are competing akin to a varsity sport. What are the processes and protocols for medical support services provided to SFU students who compete under the competitive clubs umbrella?

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<sup>10</sup> The current ratio of SFU athletes per therapist is 50:1, an approximate estimate provided by SFU therapy staff.

## 2.2 History of SFU Competition in the United States

SFU athletics has a complex history deeply rooted in the United States, including its first 36 years of participation in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) from 1965 to 2001. This provided SFU with a strong differentiator versus peer institutions in Canada and a unique way to recruit students to pursue their academic and athletic pursuits. This differentiation — today in the NCAA — remains important for many individuals associated with SFU athletics, and is expressed most strongly by student-athletes, coaches and alumni. However, there appears to be less support for this as an argument to continue participation in the NCAA Division II amongst SFU faculty and staff consulted by the IC, among others in the SFU community who signed a petition against continued participation in the NCAA.

Following a failed application to join the NCAA in the late 1990s, SFU found itself at a crossroads. As U.S. members of the NAIA departed for the NCAA, SFU struggled with travel, operational and competitive difficulties, making continued NAIA membership untenable. In 2000, SFU agreed to a gradual integration with the Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union (CIAU), transitioning most sports by 2002 as the organization rebranded to Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS, now U SPORTS).<sup>11</sup>

In January 2008, the NCAA Division II changed their bylaws to allow international membership, which created a path for SFU to become the first international member — and the only one since. SFU formed a university committee which recommended membership in the NCAA DII. SFU left Canada for the NCAA DII in 2010-11.<sup>12</sup> It represented a return to SFU's roots in collegiate sport in the United States and became a fundamental part of SFU's athletics brand as "Canada's NCAA Team." The Great Northwest Athletic Conference serves as the home conference for SFU and offers competition in 16 sports. Because the GNAC does not sponsor wrestling or swimming, SFU is an affiliate member of the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference in these sports.

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<sup>11</sup> MacLean's, "Simon Fraser's NCAA entry is much ado about nothing." Online: [Simon Fraser's NCAA entry is much ado about nothing - Macleans.ca](#) [Last Accessed: 25 October 2025].

<sup>12</sup> Note: Effective membership start date in the 2010-11 academic year.

The move to the NCAA Division II made national headlines in Canada, including a statement in MacLean's that described SFU's brief tenure in the CIS as a "temporary visitor."

"SFU was never anything more than a temporary visitor to the CIS. When SFU was founded in 1965, it intended to always play against American schools, and they immediately joined the small-college National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), a smaller rival of the NCAA. When most of SFU's rivals left for the NCAA in the mid 90's, they were caught in a bind—the NCAA didn't allow for international members. Ergo, SFU joined the CIS in 2002. But after the NCAA opened up a 10-year pilot program in 2007, SFU made clear where they were headed."<sup>13</sup>

Many Canada West and U SPORTS members were offended by SFU's decision and the institution's lack of commitment to their Canadian peer institutions who essentially bailed them out when SFU's NAIA membership became unworkable. Although these sentiments have largely subsided in the years that have passed, representatives of both Canada West and U SPORTS are seeking assurances of a permanent commitment by SFU.

Joining the NCAA provided a unique branding opportunity that SFU leveraged. The phrase "Canada's NCAA Team" has become a foundational component of the Department and university's current athletics brand and heritage. The Department's sponsorship brochure characterizes SFU's NCAA affiliation as follows:

"SFU Athletics is Canada's only NCAA member. Athletes from across Canada and the globe come to SFU for a world-class education and the chance to #RepTheLeaf while competing in the largest collegiate sports organization on the planet."<sup>14</sup>

However, the dramatically altered U.S. political landscape and unprecedented changes in the governance of the NCAA have led some in the SFU community to openly question and criticize SFU's continued participation in the United States. To these individuals, promoting SFU as "Canada's NCAA Team" represents an albatross around SFU's neck rather than a badge of honour.

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<sup>13</sup> MacLean's, "Simon Fraser's NCAA entry is much ado about nothing." Online: [Simon Fraser's NCAA entry is much ado about nothing - Macleans.ca](https://www.macleans.ca/sports/sfuu-ncaa/) [Last Accessed: 25 October 2025].

<sup>14</sup> SFU Department of Athletics and Recreation, "2022-23 Simon Fraser University Athletics Sponsorship Tiers," undated.

The IC interviewed two individuals with knowledge of the internal university committee that recommended SFU proceed with a membership application to the NCAA Division II. This includes one faculty member who served on the committee. According to this individual, if faced with the decision again, "I would not have supported it, and I would have voted differently in hindsight." The reasons cited for this change of heart include the "scale of professionalization of university sport in the United States" and "I like the idea of not being a part of that."

## 2.3 Interuniversity Athletics

SFU currently offers a total of 16 varsity sports for men and women as noted in Table 4.

Table 4: SFU Varsity Sports

Men's Sports	Women's Sports	Co-ed Sports
Basketball	Basketball	Cross Country
Golf	Golf	Swimming
Soccer	Soccer	Track & Field
Wrestling	Wrestling	
	Softball	
	Volleyball	

Table 5: SFU Varsity Roster Summaries 2024

Team	#Players	#International(U.S.)
M - Basketball	16	1
W - Basketball	14	1
M - Golf	8	1
W - Golf	9	1
M - Soccer	28	3
W - Soccer	29	0
M - Wrestling	30	5
W - Wrestling	26	5
W - Softball	22	0

W - Volleyball	18	2
Cross Country	13 W 16 M	0 1
Swimming	20 W 17 M	1 1
Track & Field	27 W 33 M	0 1
Total	148 M 178 W	13 10

In 2024, SFU had a total of 326 student-athletes (55% women's sports; 44% men's sports). International student-athletes comprise 7% of SFU student-athletes. Wrestling enjoys the highest percentage of international student-athletes amongst all teams, at 18%. An operating matrix is provided for each SFU sport in a discussion of impacts in Chapter 5.4 (Impacts by Varsity Team).

## 2.4 Competitive Sport Clubs

In addition to supporting varsity sport opportunities that progress to a national championship hosted by the NCAA, the Department provides structures to support 13 sport clubs. These clubs are described as follows:

"Sport clubs are organized and **led by SFU students** motivated by a common interest to participate in a specific sport or activity. Different sport clubs have different focuses, such as league or tournament play, socialization, instruction and skill development. Clubs are responsible for their own internal organization and conduct, while following policies and procedures established by the SFU Recreation and Athletics department."<sup>15</sup> (emphasis added)

Emphasis has been added to "led by SFU students", because some competitive sport clubs also include and are led and influenced by SFU alumni and other adults as coaches, organizers, and fundraisers. These sport clubs report under the Department's Recreation umbrella, with ultimate accountability to the Executive Director, Athletics and Recreation. Sport clubs range from

<sup>15</sup> Simon Fraser University Recreation, "Sports Clubs." Online: [Sports Clubs - Recreation - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 9 November 2025].

cheerleading and dance to (weight) lifting and men's hockey, each with distinctive focuses, operating structures, and levels of competitiveness. Most of these clubs would not be impacted by leaving the NCAA for Canada, however, some highly competitive clubs could be impacted including the men's hockey club, and men's lacrosse club (further discussed in Chapter 5.5). These teams operate akin to varsity teams, but they are not governed by the rigour of the NCAA and they do not proceed to an NCAA National Championship.

The IC has identified risks related to the current operating structure for some competitive clubs that operate akin to varsity sport teams but without the same governance accountabilities in areas including coaching, student-athlete support services, academic compliance, and education and training requirements, among myriad other rules mandated by the NCAA. The intention with the NCAA compliance structure is to support student-athletes and ensure their safety and wellness; however, SFU competitive clubs are not subject to NCAA compliance. Yet, some of these clubs, are competing in non-conference exhibition games against NCAA opponents without these protections and guardrails. Staff in the Department have raised concerns about the current operating structure and accountabilities, including "these competitive clubs are not held to the same standards of our varsity teams."

The men's hockey club operates two teams: one that competes locally in the British Columbia Intercollegiate Hockey League (BCIHL), and another non-conference travel team that competes in a schedule of exhibition games against NCAA DI opponents. The men's hockey club is a highly sophisticated, successful, well-funded operation with significant SFU alumni support — both operationally and financially. It has been actively lobbying to become an NCAA Division I hockey program, despite no existing NCAA membership structure that would allow it to do so. To have clarity on this issue, the Department filed what is known as an 'Interpretive Request' to the NCAA, as follows:

"Simon Fraser University is exploring the possibility of adding hockey as a varsity sport. SFU is a division II international (Canada) institution and as there is no championship at the division II level, would need to compete in the Division I

championship. If allowed, what provisions would SFU need to adhere to in Division I to start this process?"<sup>16</sup>

In response to the Department's Interpretive Request, the NCAA issued the following response:

"Interpretation: Based on the information provided, Division II institutions are prohibited from competing in the NCAA Division I men's ice hockey championship, as the institution does not meet general eligibility requirements for Division I (i.e. the requirement that institutions must be located in the United States, its territories or possessions)."<sup>17</sup>

Membership rules vary between the three NCAA divisions. Each division publishes its own operating manual, with unique provisions related to membership eligibility according to the respective bylaws. Of the three NCAA Divisions, only Division II, permits membership from international schools. Article 7.1 of the NCAA Division II bylaws states the following as it concerns membership eligibility.

"7.1 Eligibility for Division II Membership. (Adopted: 1/31/22, Revised: 7/19/22 effective 8/1/22) 7.1.1 General. Membership is available to colleges, universities, and athletics conferences; that have acceptable academic standards (as defined in Bylaw 7.1.4.1.2, and for international institutions see Bylaw 7.1.4.1.2.1); and that are **located in Canada**, Mexico and the United States, its territories or possessions. Such institutions or organizations must accept and observe the principles set forth in the constitution and bylaws of the Association. (Adopted: 1/31/22, Revised: 7/19/22 effective 8/1/22)" (emphasis added)

In comparison, Article 20.1 of the NCAA Division I bylaws states the following as it concerns membership eligibility.

"20.1 Eligibility for Membership. 20.1.1 General. Membership is available to four-year colleges and universities that are accredited by one of the regional accrediting agencies and are located in the United States, its territories or possessions, and athletics conferences. Such institutions or organizations must accept and observe the principles set forth in the bylaws. (Revised: 8/9/07, 11/1/07, 1/15/11 effective 8/1/11, 6/26/19 effective 8/1/19, 1/20/22)"<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> NCAA Requests/Self-Reports Online System, "Interpretive Request for SFU Men's Hockey Club (printed excerpt)", 15 March 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> NCAA, "Division I 2023-24 Manual (p.382)." Online: [90008 \(ncaa.org\)](https://www.ncaa.org) [Last Accessed: July 9 2024].



The NCAA interpretation is unambiguous; NCAA Division I bylaws do not permit international members. This analysis is material, as it affects how the current men's ice hockey club might be impacted by exiting the NCAA, including opportunities in U SPORTS or continuing according to its current operating structures (see Chapter 5).

## 2.5 Funding Pressures

SFU's participation in the NCAA has created systemic budget pressures and structural budget deficits over several years, as documented in a 2023 report (MGSS SFU Report) on the discontinuation of its football program. These budget pressures continued after the cancellation of football. In February 2023, the SFU Department of Athletics and Recreation eliminated four full-time positions, including three in communications and sports information and one in marketing, which "created uncertainty about the future of varsity programs at the school,"<sup>19</sup> as speculated by several local media outlets.

This uncertainty about the future of varsity programs remains, given ongoing budget pressures faced by SFU with an operating shortfall expected for 2025–26. Leadership anticipates a roughly \$20 million deficit for the coming year and is implementing institution-wide budget reductions to produce a consolidated, balanced budget.<sup>20</sup> These institution-wide budget cuts will impact the Department of Athletics and Recreation which is expected to face up to \$1M in cuts over the next five years. It is likely that budgetary pressures will likely continue for some time given a cloud of financial uncertainty that hangs over the university and college sector in Canada, suggesting the need for structural changes across the university, including the Department.

In 2022, SFU retained Deloitte Development LLC (Deloitte) for a benchmarking comparison study focused on SFU's NCAA participation. The Benchmarking Report relied on an NCAA Comparator Group of eight institutions and also included a comparison of five peer institutions utilizing financial reports and interviews. A strong theme that emerged from these interviews included concerns

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<sup>19</sup> Daily Hive, "SFU varsity sports could be in trouble after latest move," 7 February 2023. Online: [SFU varsity sports could be in trouble after latest move | Offside \(dailyhive.com\)](https://www.dailyhive.com/sfu-varsity-sports-could-be-in-trouble-after-latest-move/) [Last Accessed: 19 September 2024].

<sup>20</sup> Simon Fraser University, "Budget Reduction - Frequently Asked Questions." Online: [Budget Reduction FAQ - People Strategies - Simon Fraser University](https://www.sfu.ca/budget-reduction-faq/) [Last Accessed: 1 November 2025]

about higher athletic expenses than their peer group in areas including travel and recruiting expenses, among others. SFU spent about 22% more than its peer group on team travel expenses between 2016 and 2020 and SFU's recruiting expenses are approximately 25% more than the GNAC and NCAA Division II during the same period.<sup>21</sup> According to Deloitte, the financial challenges faced by the Department of Athletics and Recreation have created, "a strong sense of urgency in financial viability."<sup>22</sup>

These funding pressures continue to be felt according to varsity coaches interviewed by the IC, several of whom believe that SFU should be cutting the number of sports offered to ensure greater competitive success amongst those that remain, "whether it's my team or another program," according to one coach. These observations were made irrespective of participation in the NCAA or U SPORTS; should SFU remain in the NCAA, some teams need to be cut and a move to U SPORTS would involve some 'automatic' cuts in sports that do not progress to a U SPORTS national championship.

The difficult budget environment in the Department and its impact on varsity teams was expressed by many coaches. For example, teams have historically raised money (camps, clinics, donations, etc.) to fund special team trips, exhibitions, and other program extras that are not provided in the base operating budget. However, as part of a recent budget realignment process undertaken by the Department, these team budget reserves were moved to each team's operating budget to offset some of the budget deficits. This illustrates the very difficult budget environment faced by SFU and the Department. Several SFU alumni indicated they would stop donating to the university should it leave the NCAA, further exacerbating these budget pressures.

## 2.6 Strategic Plan

On January 15 2025, the Department launched a new strategic plan that establishes a five-year framework to align varsity athletics, recreation services, facilities, policies, and resources with SFU's

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<sup>21</sup> Deloitte Development LLC, "Simon Fraser University Athletics Benchmark and Scan Report," September 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

institutional priorities and long-term sustainability. The plan was developed under the guidance of an external consultant and a newly hired Executive Director of Athletics and Recreation. The plan "proposes guiding principles, core strategies and relevant key performance indicators to create alignment with the university's institutional goals and commitment to academic excellence."<sup>23</sup>

The vision and purpose articulated in the strategic plan are as follows:<sup>24</sup>

**Vision:** Position SFU Athletics and Recreation as an integral contributor to the SFU student experience, academic mission, and community engagement by delivering **high-quality** varsity and recreation opportunities. (emphasis added)

**Purpose:** Ensure the athletic department advances student-athlete success, broad student participation in recreation, and institutional reputation while maintaining fiscal and programmatic sustainability.

The vision and purpose place value on the student experience provided through both varsity athletics and campus recreation, including a commitment to "high-quality" opportunities. The purpose identifies the need to maintain fiscal and programmatic sustainability as a foundational operating principle. The purpose also alludes to the Department's contribution to SFU's institutional reputation, which currently is heavily invested in being "Canada's NCAA Team." A large majority of those who provided feedback cited the unique benefits of being the only Canadian NCAA member, as well as concerns about how a move to U SPORTS would impact its brand and reputation. Citing the NCAA's differentiation for SFU, critics believe that leaving the NCAA will negatively impact the SFU brand. Others argue that SFU can enjoy greater competitive success in U SPORTS that would positively contribute to SFU's institutional reputation. Concerns were also expressed by some who believe that continued participation in the NCAA under U.S. government's attack on the rights of diverse individuals will do irreparable harm to SFU's reputation — counter to the Department's purpose.

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<sup>23</sup> Simon Fraser University, "SFU Athletics and Recreation launches strategic plan." Online: [SFU Athletics and Recreation launches strategic plan - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 27 October 2025].

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

The announcement of the new plan reaffirmed that SFU "remains proud of being Canada's only NCAA team. We are committed to excelling in the NCAA Division II and the GNAC (Great Northwest Athletic Conference) and RMAC (Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference) in 16 varsity sports, with more than 300 student-athletes."<sup>25</sup> However, in the months following the release of the plan, SFU's continued participation in the NCAA became a lightning rod of discussion, fueled by geopolitical tensions with the United States, and concerns about the ability to maintain fiscal and programmatic sustainability associated with the costs of participating in the NCAA. The growing professionalization of college athletics in the NCAA introduced uncertainty about how this might impact the sustainability of DII programs — further exacerbated by structural budget deficits and existing resource constraints when measured against NCAA peer institutions.

While the impacts of professionalization (revenue sharing, NIL, transfer portal) are most significant at the DI level, some impacts have trickled down to DII programs (further expanded upon in Chapter 3.3). SFU men's basketball, for example, recently lost two players to NIL offers — from a DII and a DI institution. The long term impacts of these nascent changes on amateurism in NCAA DII remain unknown, but many believe the net impact on amateurism is negative. This includes the need to be more financial competitive to attract and retain student-athletes, where SFU already trails its peer group, both in terms of higher travel expenses and low athletic aid per student-athlete where Deloitte found that "SFU is reporting 110% less on average each year (2016-2020) than its NCAA Comparator Groups."<sup>26</sup>

Goal 1.3 of the Department's strategic plan involves aligning the scope of programs with Department goals, membership requirements/resources, and budget allocation. Department leaders acknowledge that a lot of work remains to be done concerning this goal, including the need for the Department to develop a sport model that outlines its operating philosophy, positioning, and criteria for support. The Operational Framework seeks to have a "Stabilized sport and recreation

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<sup>25</sup> Simon Fraser University, "SFU Athletics and Recreation launches strategic plan." Online: [SFU Athletics and Recreation launches strategic plan - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 27 October 2025].

<sup>26</sup> Deloitte Development LLC, "Simon Fraser University Athletics Benchmark and Scan Report," September 2022.

model in place with guiding principles & clear eligibility criteria (varsity/competitive/recreation club streams)."<sup>27</sup>

A significant factor that has contributed to the debate over SFU's NCAA participation is the impact of U.S. policy decisions and executive orders that have eroded opportunities for individuals based on gender identity and ethnicity. The debate over whether SFU should continue its affiliation with the NCAA included an on-campus petition and an opinion editorial by two SFU employees in the *Globe and Mail*.

An overarching goal with the new Departmental plan is to "align Athletics and Recreation more closely with the academic mission and overall institutional plan."<sup>28</sup> Several faculty, staff, and university leaders argue that the NCAA's values are not aligned with SFU's values. SFU's "What Next" strategy articulates the following mission and vision:<sup>29</sup>

**Why we exist:** We create and connect knowledge, learning and community for deeper understanding and meaningful impact.

**Who we aspire to be:** We are a leading research university, advancing an inclusive and sustainable future.

Those who argue about a misalignment of values between SFU and the NCAA point to SFU's aspiration to advance an inclusive and sustainable future. The Department is aligned on this through the following guiding principle: "We ensure that the values of equity, diversity, inclusivity, belonging inform all programs, teams, services, facility operations, policies, and resources."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the Department has codified this through Strategy 2.3 of its Operational Framework which states:

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Fraser University, "Athletics and Recreation Strategy." Online: [Athletics \(PDF\) - Simon Fraser University Athletics](#) [Last Accessed: 1 November 2025].

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Simon Fraser University, "What's Next for SFU?" Online: [What's Next: The SFU Strategy - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 27 October 2025].

<sup>30</sup> Simon Fraser University, "Athletics and Recreation Strategy." Online: [Athletics \(PDF\) - Simon Fraser University Athletics](#) [Last Accessed: 27 October 2025].

**"Strategy 2.3** Grow deeper connections and a sense of belonging by focusing on inclusion, health, and well-being through diverse programming and outreach initiatives, particularly among equity-deserving communities."

SFU's continued participation in the NCAA runs counter to these fundamental principles and should be reason enough to support a decision to seek other competitive opportunities in Canada, according to those who support this rationale.

The Department also established Goal #3 "to engage diverse communities through mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations." Many individuals lament the lack of community engagement and support for SFU athletics which gave rise to this planning goal. However, SFU's inability to host playoff games and championships against non-conference schools presents a significant limitation to achieve this goal — including one individual who referred to attendance at SFU varsity games as "abysmal." These limitations would not exist in U SPORTS which presents an opportunity to better engage the broader SFU community through natural rivalry games and playoff events hosted on the Burnaby campus.

Department leaders acknowledge the need to communicate more effectively and intentionally with alumni which is represented in Operational Strategy 3.3, "Expand and streamline alumni and community engagement support." The IC spoke to several alumni who cited infrequent and inconsistent communications from the Department. Leaving the NCAA will alienate many alumni and impact alumni support for athletics and other SFU programs, thus executing on this strategy is critical to re-engage alumni with the refreshed strategic direction of the Department.

## Chapter 3: The U.S. Context and NCAA Division II

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the operating philosophy and governance of the NCAA Division II which differs markedly from that of Division I, including DII's focus on balancing academics and athletics through its "Life in the Balance" approach — which codifies various rules to achieve this objective. An overview of SFU's home conference, the Great Northwest Athletic Conference (GNAC), is provided as well as the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC), in which SFU is an affiliate member. A discussion of the professionalization of the NCAA follows including the impacts on DII. This includes Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL), the transfer portal, and precedent-setting legal cases involving revenue sharing with players (DI) that together have upended the collegiate sport landscape in the United States. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the U.S. academic accreditation process, mandated by the NCAA for all members.

### 3.2 NCAA Division II Philosophy and Governance

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the predominant collegiate athletic governing body in the United States, overseeing competition and policies across three primary divisions: Division I (DI), Division II (DII), and Division III (DIII). It is an expansive organization with more than 1,100 members and 554,000 student-athletes across its three divisions (Table 6).

Table 6: NCAA Members and Student-Athletes by Division <sup>31</sup>

NCAA Division	# Members	# Student-Athletes
Division I	357	202,353
Division II	309	141,067
Division III	446	210,878
Total	1,112	554,298

<sup>31</sup> NCAA, "Research Update", Online: [A record number of NCAA student-athletes participated in 2024-25 - NCAA.org](https://www.ncaa.org/research-update) [Last Accessed: 20 October 2025].

Each division is guided by a unique philosophy that shapes its governance, institutional priorities, resource allocations, and — most crucially — the lived experience of its student-athletes. Among these, DII stands out for its articulated commitment to balancing academics, athletic competition, and personal development — a philosophy often encapsulated by the phrase “Life in the Balance.”

<sup>32</sup> NCAA DII is the intermediate-level division of competition in the NCAA. It offers an alternative to both the larger and better-funded DI and to the scholarship-free environment offered in Division III.

At the core of NCAA Division II is a vision to foster a collegiate athletics environment where students can pursue academic excellence, athletic achievement, and community engagement in equal measure. DII’s vision emphasizes a comprehensive educational experience in which athletics supports, rather than overshadows, the institutional mission. The DII Philosophy Statement includes the following:

"In addition to the purposes and fundamental policy of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, as set forth in Constitution 1, members of Division II believe that a well-conducted intercollegiate athletics program, based on sound educational principles and practices, is a proper part of the educational mission of a university or college and that the educational well-being and academic success of the participating student-athlete is of primary concern.

Higher education has lasting importance on an individual’s future success. As such, Division II supports the educational mission of college athletics by fostering a balanced approach in which student-athletes learn and develop through their desired academic pursuits, in civic engagement with their communities and in athletics competition. Division II athletics programs also are committed to establishing an inclusive culture in which persons of all backgrounds are respected and given the opportunity to provide input and to participate."<sup>33</sup>

Although an inclusive culture underscores DII philosophy, various executive orders and policy changes in the United States threaten this ideal. The IC spoke to several individuals who raised objections to SFU's continued participation in the NCAA based on the erosion of human rights

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<sup>32</sup> NCAA, "Life in the Balance", Online: [Life in the Balance - NCAA.org](https://www.ncaa.org/life-in-the-balance) [Last Accessed: 20 October 2025].

<sup>33</sup> NCAA, "Division II Philosophy Statement", Online: [Division II philosophy statement - NCAA.org](https://www.ncaa.org/division-ii-philosophy-statement) [Last Accessed: 20 October 2025].



protections in the United States, including pressure on universities to bend the knee and acquiesce on policies related diversity and inclusion.

The balanced approach to athletics and academics is operationalized through various policies and translates to tangible support for student-athletes in DII. For example, this includes shorter playing seasons, more rest periods, restrictions on missed class time, and enhanced access to academic and career support services. A foundational principle includes the primacy of academic well-being where athletics program are structured to support — and never undermine — academic achievement and degree completion. Student-athletes are encouraged to play an active role in decision-making through the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), including a voice in governance. SFU students value the support services and opportunities provided through the DII governance model.

### Academic Support Structures

A defining element of DII is its commitment to the holistic development of student-athletes, with the academic mission at the center. DII schools are required to provide broad academic support, including individualized advising, mandatory study halls, priority class registration for athletes, interventions (such as mandatory grade checks and progress reports), and robust tutoring services — though the scale and availability may vary according to institutional resources.<sup>34</sup> DII academic eligibility requirements include:

- Completion of 16 NCAA-approved core academic courses in high school (English, math, science, social science).
- Minimum 2.2 GPA in core courses.
- Registration with the NCAA Eligibility Center for verification.<sup>35</sup>

Further, to maintain eligibility, DII student-athletes must continue to meet annual credit and GPA benchmarks in their academic program, encouraging steady progress toward graduation.

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<sup>34</sup> Collegevine, "Academic Support at Division II Colleges", Online: [Academic support at Division II colleges? | CollegeVine](#) [Last Accessed: 21 October 2025].

<sup>35</sup> NCAA Division II, "Division II Academic Standards", Online: [DII\\_ReqsFactSheet.pdf](#) [Last Accessed: 21 October 2025].

In summary, DII positions itself explicitly as a balanced model in which athletics is “a proper part of the educational mission,” not the defining element. DII schools, which are often regional public universities or smaller private colleges, integrate athletics activities with overall campus programming, seeking to enhance the student experience, foster school spirit, and cultivate leadership, without overshadowing core educational goals.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.3 Professionalization of the NCAA

Since its inception over a century ago, the NCAA has operated under the banner of amateurism, positioning collegiate athletics as a domain driven by student opportunity, educational growth, and fair competition. However, as the multi-billion-dollar business of the NCAA has risen over the past several years — with escalating broadcast media deals, sponsorships, and the increasing profile of college athletes — pressure mounted from U.S. courts, lawmakers, fans, and, crucially athletes themselves to modernize the model.

There has been intense debate and legal proceedings in the United States regarding whether or not NCAA student-athletes should be compensated financially. Lawsuits against the NCAA portend a future where student-athletes are paid to play as employees. In fact, on July 11, 2024, the Third Circuit in *Johnson v. NCAA* held that student-athletes are not barred from being considered employees under the Fair Labor Standards Act (‘FLSA’).<sup>37</sup>

Those in favour of compensating student-athletes argue that athletes are employees who generate revenues for their universities and athletics departments. Although NCAA rules forbid schools from paying their athletes, recent court decisions have muddled this landscape, including *Johnson v. NCAA*; applying the economic realities test, the Third Circuit held that “college athletes may be employees under the FLSA when they (a) perform services for another party, (b) ‘necessarily and

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<sup>36</sup> NCAA, "Division II Strategic Positioning Platform", Online: [Division II Strategic Positioning Platform - NCAA.org](https://www.ncaa.org/division-ii-strategic-positioning-platform) [Last Accessed: 21 October 2025].

<sup>37</sup> ReedSmith, “Third Circuit holds that NCAA athletes can be considered employees under FLSA.” Online: [Third Circuit holds that NCAA athletes can be considered employees under FLSA | Perspectives | Reed Smith LLP](https://www.reedsmith.com/en/insights/third-circuit-holds-that-ncaa-athletes-can-be-considered-employees-under-flsa/) [Last Accessed: 26 September 2024].

primarily for the other party's benefit,' (c) under that party's control or right of control, and (d) in return for 'express' or 'implied' compensation or 'in-kind benefits.'”<sup>38</sup>

The driving philosophy and architecture of NCAA sports is undergoing the most significant change in its history as demonstrated through Johnson v. NCAA (2024) and several other precedent setting legal cases including the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in NCAA v. Alston (2021), subsequent policy changes around Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL), transfer freedoms, and culminating most recently in the House v. NCAA (2025) antitrust settlement. The following comments by NCAA President Charlie Baker clearly intimate that the House v. NCAA settlement will have some impact “**across all divisions** for years to come.” (emphasis added)

“The five autonomy conferences and the NCAA agreeing to settlement terms is an important step in the continuing reform of college sports that will provide benefits to student-athletes and provide clarity in college athletics across all divisions for years to come,” NCAA President Charlie Baker and the commissioners of the five conference said. “This settlement is also a road map for college sports leaders and Congress to ensure this **uniquely American institution** can continue to provide unmatched opportunity for millions of students.”<sup>39</sup> (emphasis added)

The long-term impact of this settlement on DII institutions needs to be monitored carefully, as paying athletes to play at NCAA DII schools would have a material impact on operating an NCAA DII program in Canada. It would also likely require a complex legal review and interpretation of relevant Canadian labour laws that do not conform to the “uniquely American institution” and rules of the NCAA. The decision is seen as a step towards treating college athletes more like employees, potentially significantly altering the landscape of college sports. It raises important philosophical questions for SFU as it concerns treating their student-athletes as amateur athletes or paid employees. The settlement also maintains existing NCAA rules prohibiting pay-for-play, ensuring boosters cannot directly pay athletes. However, some advocacy groups, like the National College

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<sup>38</sup> ReedSmith, “Third Circuit holds that NCAA athletes can be considered employees under FLSA.” Online: [Third Circuit holds that NCAA athletes can be considered employees under FLSA | Perspectives | Reed Smith LLP](#) [Last Accessed: 26 September 2024].

<sup>39</sup> Inside Higher Ed, “NCAA, Major College Leagues Reach \$2.7B Settlement on Player Pay.” Online: [NCAA, major college leagues reach \\$2.7B settlement on player pay \(insidehighered.com\)](#) [Last Accessed: 29 August 2024].

Players Association, oppose the settlement, arguing it limits potential earnings and stifles new direct NIL pay markets.<sup>40</sup>

These changes, especially the shift to direct athlete revenue sharing, have introduced a host of new business, legal, and social questions. They have also created operating uncertainty for some members and forever altered the concept of amateurism in the NCAA. While much of the attention, and impacts, are focused on DI 'Power 5' programs, this move to professionalism is affecting the NCAA DII's financial model, athlete experience, and institutional priorities.

The following discussion identifies the impacts of the aforementioned changes on the NCAA DII and its members.

### Revenue Sharing Impacts

The 2025 House v. NCAA antitrust settlement marks the most significant break from amateurism ever enacted in US college sports. However, its impacts are most profound in DI including the mandated revenue sharing capped at \$20.5 million per year per participating DI institution for 2025-26, scaling up to approximately \$32 million by 2035. No such amounts currently apply to Division II.

Similarly, the House v. NCAA settlement includes lifting of annual limits on the number of athletic scholarships for all DI sports. However, there is no change to the lower scholarship limits imposed by DII in support of its "Life in the Balance" philosophy.

While it is clear that the most immediate and visible changes of this settlement apply to DI, particularly "Power 5" programs, the repercussions are extensive. Notably, institutions in DII and DIII are increasingly subject to reduced NCAA revenue distributions as resources may be reallocated

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<sup>40</sup> Yahoo Sports, "National College Players Association says it opposes \$2.8 billion NCAA-House settlement." Online: [National College Players Association says it opposes \\$2.8 billion NCAA-House settlement \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-us/sports/story/ncaa-house-settlement-opposed-by-ncaa-players-association) [Last Accessed: 29 August 2024].

to fund settlement outlines, raising important questions about the future financial stability of lower divisions. This may be an unintended trickle down impact of the House v. NCAA settlement.<sup>41</sup>

### Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL)

The introduction of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) rights in 2021 marked the NCAA's initial departure from its amateur model, allowing college athletes to profit from endorsements, brand partnerships, and social media opportunities. DII athletes are eligible to pursue NIL funding, as noted below.

"The expansion of Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) rights across NCAA divisions has significantly broadened the horizons for collegiate athletes, particularly those in Division II, often referred to as D2 NIL. These athletes, just like their Division I peers, are fully eligible to partake in NIL activities, which opens up a variety of revenue streams previously unavailable to them."<sup>42</sup>

Under the House v. NCAA settlement, the landscape has been further recalibrated. New compliance structures have been established to vet the legitimacy and market value of all significant third-party NIL contracts (those over \$600).<sup>43</sup> This creates additional complexity and workload for campus compliance officers; DII schools and athletes must navigate NCAA rules, state NIL laws, and sometimes their own conferences' or institutions' policies for disclosure and eligibility. There are no "NIL laws" in Canada, thus income earned on NIL by student-athletes in Canada, must comply with existing Canadian tax laws. Here are some critical points about NIL rules:

**Earnings:** Athletes can receive third-party compensation for endorsements, social media promotions, autograph signings, and other activities.

**Reporting:** Student-athletes must report their NIL activities to their school, following state laws or school and conference requirements.

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<sup>41</sup> NCAA, "Division II Finances", Online: [Division II Finances - NCAA.org](https://www.ncaa.org/division-ii/finances) [Last Accessed: 22 October 2025].

<sup>42</sup> Athlete Narrative, "Cracking the Code, Are DII Players Eligible For NIL Funding?", Online: [Cracking the Code: Are D2 Players Eligible for NIL Deals? - Athlete Narrative](https://www.athlete-narrative.com/cracking-the-code-are-dii-players-eligible-for-nil-funding/) [Last Accessed: 22 October 2025].

<sup>43</sup> College Sports Commission, "Enforcement", Online: [Enforcement](https://www.collegesportscommission.com/enforcement/) [Last Accessed: 22 October 2025].

**Professional Services:** Athletes can hire professional service providers, such as agents or marketing consultants, to help manage their NIL activities.

**State Laws:** NIL regulations can vary by state, so athletes need to be aware of their specific state's rules. No such regulations exist in Canada.

**School Payments:** Schools are still prohibited from directly paying athletes for their participation in sports, although this may change due to the recent legal proceedings described herein.<sup>44</sup>

Although DII student-athletes are formally eligible for NIL deals, the scale and kinds of opportunities are dramatically different from DI institutions. To this point, according to Opendorse (an NIL engagement platform), average earnings for DII students was \$390 in 2024, and over 50% of NIL deals are \$100 or less.<sup>45</sup> However, the IC heard accounts of two SFU men's basketball players who accepted generous NIL deals, one estimated at \$10,000 to attend a competitor DII school and another who left SFU for an estimated \$60,000 NIL deal at a DI school. This illustrates the impact that NIL and the transfer portal can have on a team, and where schools that cannot compete to retain top talent through NIL compensation are at a competitive disadvantage.

This illustrates the growing breadth of opportunity for NIL to impact the competitive landscape, including significant NIL offers from DI schools in some sports to attract talented DII athletes. Division II schools face intensified fundraising challenges and rising operating costs without the opportunity to offer meaningful direct athlete compensation to keep or attract recruits. DII teams cannot compete with DI schools who can offer significant amounts of money to attract top talent. The loss of key players through NIL and the transfer portal can erode talent, competitiveness, and team culture.

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<sup>44</sup> Investopedia, "NIL and the NCAA: What Are the Rules?" Online: [NIL and the NCAA: What Are the Rules? \(investopedia.com\)](https://www.investopedia.com/articles/finance/11/111520-nil-ncaa-rules.asp) [Last Accessed: 9 November 2025].

<sup>45</sup> GNAC, "SFU Athletics Powerpoint Presentation", 15 October 2025.

## Transfer Portal

**"Since its introduction in 2018, the NCAA transfer portal has revolutionized college sports, transforming the landscape into what many now call the 'Wild West' of athlete movement."<sup>46</sup>**

The NCAA Transfer Portal (the Portal), established in October 2018, is a centralized online database that enables collegiate student-athletes to formally declare their intent to transfer from one NCAA institution to another. Its primary purpose is to streamline and standardize the transfer process, and empower student-athletes with greater autonomy over their collegiate careers. The Portal functions as a digital marketplace where athletes can signal their availability to other programs, and coaches can identify and recruit potential transfers within NCAA compliance guidelines. Prior to its implementation, student-athletes were required to seek permission from their current institution before contacting other schools.

Since its inception, the Portal has evolved including a 2024 rule change that allows academically eligible students to transfer an unlimited number of times without penalty, subject to specific timing criteria according to their sport. This shift has fundamentally altered the landscape of college athletics, increasing athlete mobility, reshaping recruiting strategies, and introducing new challenges related to team stability, academic progress, and competitive balance. These changes reflect a broader shift in NCAA philosophy, emphasizing student-athlete rights and aligning with legal trends favoring athlete mobility and economic opportunity — including NIL rights.<sup>47</sup>

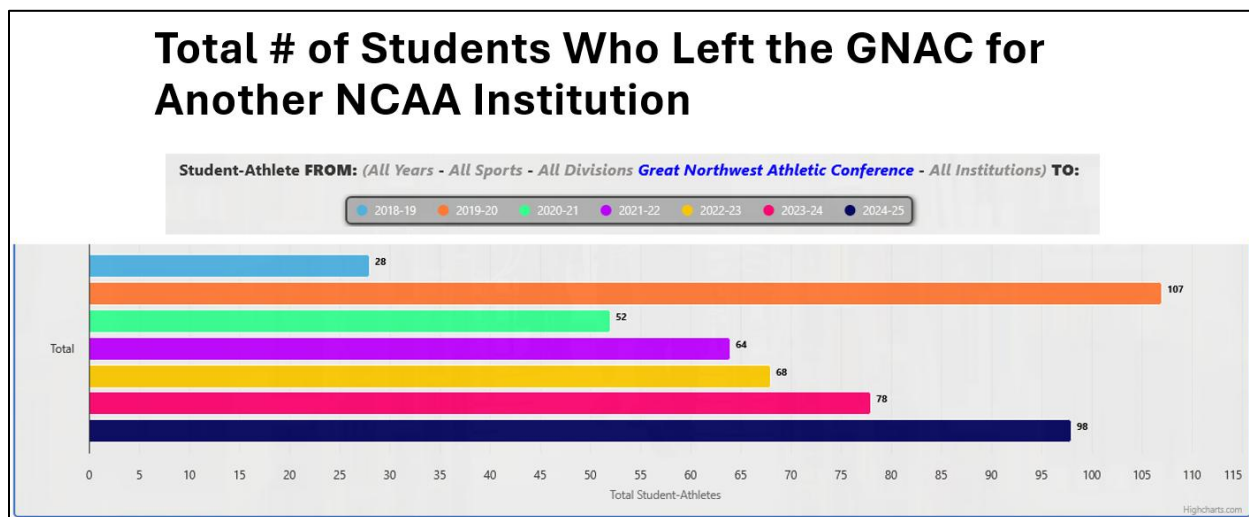
Figure 1, provided by the GNAC, illustrates the total number of students who left the GNAC for another NCAA institution between 2018 and 2025.

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<sup>46</sup> Fan Arch, "The Pros and Cons of the Transfer Portal: A 2025 Perspective." Online: [fanarch.com/blogs/college-football/the-pros-and-cons-of-the-transfer-portal-a-2025-perspective](https://fanarch.com/blogs/college-football/the-pros-and-cons-of-the-transfer-portal-a-2025-perspective) [Last Accessed: 10 November 2025].

<sup>47</sup> Venable LLP, "Chalk Talk: Are NCAA Transfer Portal Rules a Violation of State Law Bans on Non-Competes?" Online: [Chalk Talk: Are NCAA Transfer Portal Rules a Violation of State Law Bans on Non-Competes? | Insights | Venable LLP](#) [Last Accessed: 10 November 2025].

Figure 1: Total # of Students Who Left the GNAC for Another NCAA Institution



Additional data provided by the GNAC provides a specific analysis for SFU indicating the total number of students who entered the Portal (Figure 2), and the total number of students who left SFU for another NCAA institution (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Total # of SFU Students Who Entered the Portal

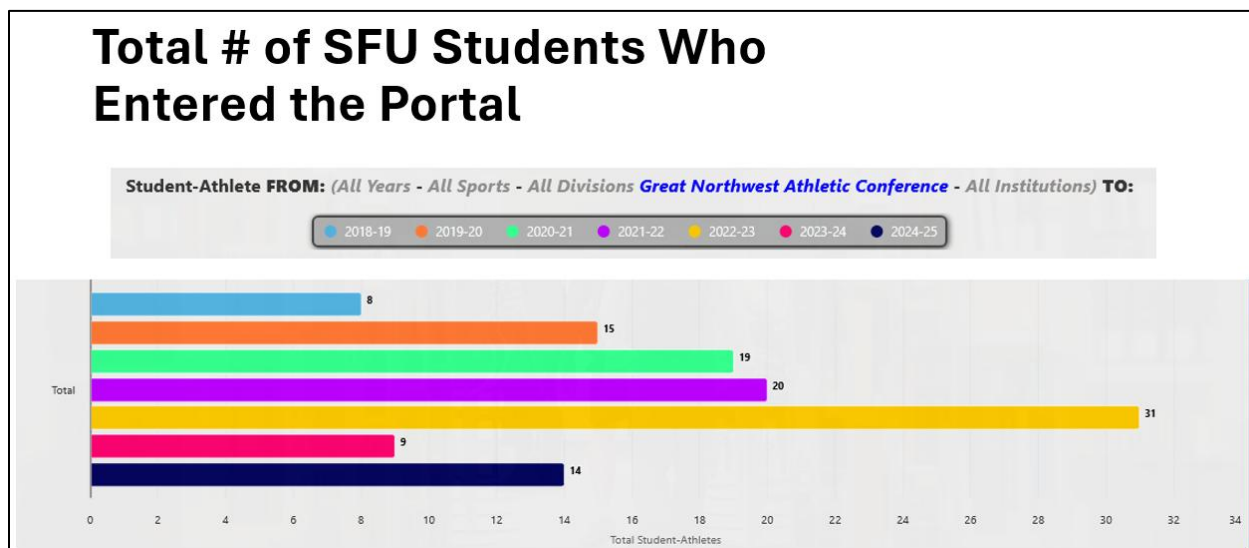
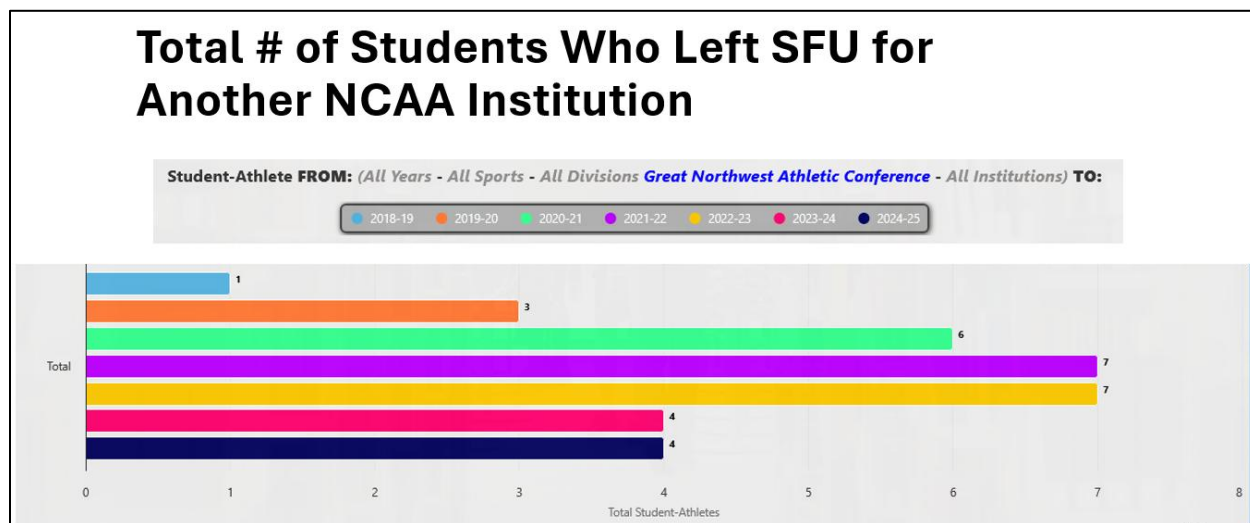




Figure 3: Total # of Students Who Left SFU for Another NCAA Institution



It is likely — and expected — that a spike in the number of SFU students who entered the Portal in 2023 is related to the football program's termination. In the most recent reporting period (2024-25), 14 SFU students entered the Portal and four left SFU for another NCAA institution. SFU has added 38 students since 2018, while losing 32 according to data provided by the GNAC.

The Portal's impact is profound and multifaceted. It has democratized athlete movement, enabled programs to rapidly rebuild rosters, and intensified competition for talent — most acutely at the DI level. However, it has also introduced volatility for some programs, and raised concerns about academic disruption, tampering, and the widening resource gap between well-funded and smaller programs. The Portal has given rise to many critics who decry the impact it is having on the collegiate sport landscape and culture. For example:

"The NCAA transfer portal, originally intended to provide athletes with greater freedom, has evolved into a chaotic free agency system with significant consequences for academics and team dynamics. While the portal empowers athletes to escape unfavorable situations or seek better opportunities, it often undermines their educational progress. Many student-athletes struggle with credit transfers, delayed graduations, and a culture that prioritizes sports over academics. At the same time, the portal pressures coaches to continually recruit their own players to prevent departures, creating instability in team rosters. Coupled with the rise of "name, image, and likeness" (NIL) deals, which incentivize athletes to chase financial opportunities, the portal shifts the focus of collegiate athletics further from

education. Reflecting on this trend, it's clear that changes are needed to restore balance and put the "student" back in student-athlete."<sup>48</sup>

As the NCAA continues to adapt its policies in response to legal, financial, and stakeholder pressures, the Portal remains at the center of ongoing debates about the professionalization of collegiate athletics in the United States.

### 3.4 The GNAC Conference

The IC interviewed leadership members of the GNAC, including the Commissioner and the CEO/Board Chair. The GNAC was founded in 2001 and includes 10 full-time member institutions across the Western United States, as well as SFU as the sole international member. Its catchment area is described as "the largest geographic footprint among NCAA Division II conferences" <sup>49</sup>, covering five U.S. states and the Province of British Columbia (Table 7).

Table 7: GNAC Members and Distance from SFU

Institution	Approximate Distance from SFU <sup>50</sup>
Western Washington University	84 km
Seattle Pacific University	221 km
Saint Martin's University, Washington	316 km
Central Washington University	386 km
Western Oregon University	601 km
Northwest Nazarene University, Idaho	983 km
Montana State University Billings	1,534 km
University of Alaska, Fairbanks	3,377 km
University of Alaska, Anchorage	3,559 km
Average Distance from SFU	1,229 km

<sup>48</sup> Minding The Campus, "Put the 'Student' Back in Student-Athlete." Online: [Put the "Student" Back in Student-Athlete — Minding The Campus](#) [Last Accessed: 10 November 2025].

<sup>49</sup> GNAC, "About Us", Online: [About the GNAC - Great Northwest Athletic Conference](#) [Last Accessed: 20 October 2025].

<sup>50</sup> Note: Approximate distance using MapQuest.

The GNAC sponsors a total of 16 sports for men and women, illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8: GNAC Sports

Women's	Men's	Co-ed
Basketball	Baseball	Cross-Country
Golf	Basketball	Track and Field (Indoor)
Rowing	Golf	Track and Field (Outdoor)
Softball	Soccer	
Soccer		
Volleyball		

The GNAC has maintained stability in its core sports — basketball, soccer, cross country, track & field, baseball, softball, and volleyball — since inception. Football was discontinued in 2021, which forced SFU to enter into a two-year affiliate agreement with the Lone Star Conference in Texas (LSC). After the LSC informed SFU that it would not extend the affiliate agreement, SFU discontinued its football program after one season (2023) in the LSC.

### Resignation of Membership

According to the Commissioner of the GNAC, "Since SFU has been a member of the GNAC for longer than 8 years, section 2.6.1 applies."<sup>51</sup>

**"2.6.1 Resignation of Full Member.** A full member in good standing with GNAC that was a member of GNAC as of Jan. 1, 2008, may resign its membership in GNAC by providing written notice to the Commissioner and the Chair of the CEO Board. Upon termination of membership, a resigning member shall not be entitled to any distribution of funds from GNAC.

- If written notice of resignation is received at least two full years (24 months) prior to the effective date of the resignation, the resigning full member shall not be required to pay a resignation penalty to GNAC
- If written notice of resignation is received at least one full year (12 months) but less than two full years (24 months) prior to the effective date of the

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<sup>51</sup> Email communication, Commissioner of GNAC to Bob Copeland, 16 October 2025.

resignation, the resigning full member shall pay to GNAC a resignation penalty equal to one year of full member dues.

- If written notice of resignation is received less than one full year (12 months) prior to the effective date of the resignation, the resigning member shall pay to GNAC a resignation penalty equal to two years of full member dues.

**Resignation of New Full Member.** GNAC intends that full members complete ten full seasons in GNAC before being eligible to resign without penalty. Accordingly, a full member that was admitted to GNAC after January 1, 2008 may resign membership in GNAC upon written notice submitted to the Commissioner and the Chair of the CEO Board under the following conditions:

- If the full member resigns during the first eight years of membership, such member shall pay a resignation penalty equal to eight times the then-current GNAC membership dues.
- If the full member resigns after eight full years of membership in GNAC, such member may resign under the conditions outlined in Section 2.6.1."<sup>52</sup>

### 3.5 The Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference

SFU is an affiliate member of the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC) in the sports of men's and women's wrestling, and men's and women's swimming. These sports are not offered in the GNAC conference. The RMAC is an NCAA Division II conference located in the states of Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Utah. The RMAC is larger than the GNAC and currently competes in 21 NCAA Division II sports and is the most historic athletic conference headquartered in the western United States.<sup>53</sup>

As a Division II member, the RMAC embodies the NCAA DII philosophy of "Life in the Balance," with a mission to "empower student-athletes to realize their full potential in athletics, academics and in life through a richly rewarding and nationally competitive experience at our unique NCAA Division II institutions."<sup>54</sup> A listing of RMAC members is shown in Table 9.

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<sup>52</sup> Email communication, Commissioner of GNAC to Bob Copeland, 16 October 2025.

<sup>53</sup> Rocky Mountain Athletics Conference, "About Us." Online: [Mission, Vision, Values - Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference](#) [Last Accessed: 3 November 2025].

<sup>54</sup> NCAA, "2025-26 NCAA Division II Manual." Online: [NCAA Publications - Manuals](#) [Last Accessed: 10 October 2025].

Table 9: RMAC Members

Institution
Adams State Univeristy, Alamosa, CO
Black Hills State University, Spearfish, SD
Chadron State College, Chadron, NE
Colorado Christian University, Lakewood
Colorado Mesa University, Grand Junction
Colorado School of Mines, Golden
Colorado State University, Pueblo
Fort Lewis College, Durango, CO
Metropolitan State University of Denver
New Mexico Highlands University, Las Vegas, NM
Regis University, Denver, CO
South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City, SD
Western Colorado University, Gunnison, CO
Westminster University, Salt Lake City, UT

The IC received feedback that membership in the NCAA makes it more difficult to leverage competitive rivalries and engage the local SFU community — based on the significant distances from the Burnaby campus, as well as the lack of familiarity with many competitor institutions. Together the GNAC and RMAC include a total of 24 institutions, comprised of many small State colleges and universities as well as faith based schools.

### 3.6 U.S. Academic Accreditation

**"That is a really unusual process for a Canadian public institution. It feels a little bit like a square peg in a round hole." - SFU administrator**

The NCAA mandates academic accreditation through Bylaw 20.10.1,<sup>55</sup> which requires member institutions to be accredited by a recognized accrediting agency in the United States. The United States Secretary of Education recognizes these agencies and has different but complementary standards to which their institutions must adhere. Accreditation also allows institutions to access federal funding and participate in various government programs; however, SFU is an outlier as the only Canadian university in the NCAA and does not enjoy any of these benefits.

<sup>55</sup> NCAA, "2025-26 NCAA Division II Manual." Online: [NCAA Publications - Manuals](#) [Last Accessed: 10 October 2025].

SFU is a fully accredited member of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), which mostly accredits institutions in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. The NWCCU is based in Bellingham, Washington, and has more than 160 members. More than half of these members are commercial and technical colleges with various academic credentialing including certificates, diplomas, and degrees. Concerns were raised by some SFU faculty members that SFU does not "match academically" with the NWCCU cohort of U.S. institutions whose programs operate quite differently than SFU.

SFU began exploring its accreditation requirements in 2008, two years before leaving Canadian Interuniversity Sport for the NCAA Division II in 2010. At the time, according to one SFU official, there was some internal resistance to the concept of a Canadian university seeking accreditation from a U.S.-based organization, coupled with the lack of similar accreditation processes in Canada. Citing "academic freedom," some faculty were skeptical of the process at the time and the difficulty of assessing learning outcomes in a systematic and streamlined way.

Several challenges have been identified by SFU officials, including describing the accreditation process for SFU as a "round peg in a square hole." One SFU administrator described the need for U.S. accreditation as "a hoop we are jumping through for no particular reason (beyond satisfying the athletics membership requirement)." It is clear the foundational reason for seeking U.S. academic accreditation was to satisfy the NCAA membership requirement, but some SFU officials believed that it would facilitate increased enrolment of U.S. students. However, according to one SFU senior administrator, "we never saw large international applications from the U.S."

Accreditation by the NWCCU was described as a "laborious process and a lot of work for academics here (for the purpose of operating an athletics program in the U.S.)." It is a process that requires an extensive commitment of time and financial resources to maintain according to SFU officials. It is estimated that SFU spends as much as \$350,000 annually which includes salaries, operating expenses, accreditation visits, and annual membership dues of approximately \$45,000.<sup>56</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>56</sup> Interview, Independent Consultant and SFU Senior Official, 7 October 2025.

it consumes a significant time commitment from senior administrators including the President, Deans, and other officials — described as a significant drawback and an inefficient use of these resources. The financial cost of senior leadership time spent on accreditation is not factored into the annual financial estimate provided.

The NWCCU is highly complex and demanding on SFU resources. For example, beyond the annual membership fees, additional costs may be assigned for “substantive changes” when new programs are added, or new geographic locations are introduced. Thus, the additional of new programs triggers a change in SFU's accreditation status and requires additional investments in order to maintain compliance with NWCCU standards. This would apply to the addition of the School of Medicine, among other programs both large and small when added. Beyond the resource implications, it raises important philosophical questions about the impact of U.S. accreditation on SFU's mission and institutional planning.

Another issue identified by SFU involves newer accreditation standards that require institutions to segment and assess students based on different group and socio-economic characteristics that might impact learning outcomes. This was described as problematic for SFU because they are limited in some forms of data collection due to privacy laws in Canada.

In British Columbia, post-secondary programs are approved and accredited by the Ministry of Post-Secondary and Future Skills' Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB).<sup>57</sup> Some programs also have "specialized or programmatic accreditation and/or recognition".<sup>58</sup> For example, SFU's Engineering Science is accredited by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board. Requiring another layer of institution-wide accreditation to fulfill NCAA requirements is considered a duplication of efforts and an inefficient use of university resources.

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<sup>57</sup> Province of British Columbia, "Degree Quality Assessment Board." Online: [Degree Quality Assessment Board - Province of British Columbia](#) [Last Accessed: 14 November 2025].

<sup>58</sup> Simon Fraser University, Provost and VP Academic, "Specialized or Programmatic Accreditation/Recognition." Online: [Programmatic Accreditation - Provost and VP Academic - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 14 November 2025].

It is estimated that the average annual cost of accreditation in Canada is under \$100,000 and is less administratively complex, freeing up time for staff and senior institutional leaders. Beyond the cost savings, the Canadian process and indicators are "a better indicator of what is important in the Canadian context" according to one senior SFU official. "We have grown and learned a lot (through the NWCCU process), but arguably we no longer need the NWCCU."

In summary, the impacts of SFU moving its athletics program to Canada would be a more streamlined, efficient, and cost-effective accreditation process based on provincial standards and Canadian laws. Potential annual savings of \$250,000 could be realized, as well as other human resource efficiencies. However, according to the NCAA Bylaw 7.3.4.2,<sup>59</sup> withdrawing from the NWCCU would have a concomitant impact of immediately forfeiting SFU's membership in the NCAA.

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<sup>59</sup> NCAA, "Division II Legislation." Online: [Legislative Services Database - LSDBI](#) [Last Accessed: 10 October 2025].



## Chapter 4: The Canadian Context: U SPORTS and Canada West

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the governance of U SPORTS and Canada West, including a review of each organization's mission, vision, and values. Selected U SPORTS policies are examined in response to questions raised about eligibility, scholarships, equity, and transgender participation. The chapter draws from U SPORTS' recent 2025-2029 strategic plan that charts the course for the organization. The senior leadership of U SPORTS and Canada West were interviewed for this report and are supportive of an application from SFU.

### 4.2 U SPORTS Philosophy and Governance

U SPORTS is the national governing body for university sport in Canada, with oversight of an extensive system that promotes academic excellence with high-performance athletics. U SPORTS presently includes 58 member universities and nearly 15,000 student-athletes, organized into four major conferences: Atlantic University Sport (AUS), Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec (RSEQ), Ontario University Athletics (OUA), and Canada West (CW). U SPORTS' primary role is to foster and regulate interuniversity sport, champion student-athlete development, and to represent the Canadian post-secondary sports system internationally. The benefits of U SPORTS' international competition for student-athletes includes "the opportunity to represent Canada at FISU World University Games and Championships, providing a training ground to join Canada's national teams or become professional athletes."<sup>60</sup>

U SPORTS alumni have gone on to professional careers in various professional leagues including the Canadian Football League, Canadian Elite Basketball League, Canadian Premier League, and Northern Super League, among others. Furthermore, Canadian universities have long served as both training grounds and launching pads for athletes who go on to represent their country at the Olympic games. Across the five most recent Summer Olympic cycles (2008–2024), U SPORTS has

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<sup>60</sup> U SPORTS, "Strategic Plan." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 5 November 2025].

contributed a substantial and consistent cohort of athletes to the Canadian Olympic team, estimated to be approximately 613 unique U SPORTS-affiliated Olympians, with some athletes competing in multiple Games.<sup>61</sup>

The organization is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of four presidential representatives (one from each regional conference), four athletics directors, and one independent member. The U SPORTS CEO serves in an ex-officio capacity. Dr. Tim Rahilly, President and first Vice-Chancellor of Mount Royal University, serves as the Canada West presidential delegate on the Board. Standing committees include Human Resources, Finance, and Governance.<sup>62</sup>

In 2025, U SPORTS unveiled its 2025-2029 strategic plan with the intent to elevate the standard and visibility of post-secondary athletics in Canada "through enhanced national championships, expanded partnerships and a strengthened student-athlete experience."<sup>63</sup> Both student-athletes and coaches were included in the consultation framework for the Plan to ensure it represents their interests and ambitions. The organization's CEO commented on the planning process as follows:

"This strategic plan demonstrates our commitment to making U SPORTS a leading destination for student-athletes, coaches, and staff," stated Pierre Arsenault, CEO of U SPORTS. "By enhancing our national championships, expanding our international presence, and improving the student-athlete experience, we are positioning Canadian university sport for long-term success. The direct feedback from student-athletes, coaches, administrators and conference staff has been essential in identifying the priorities that will shape the future of university sport in Canada."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Note: The definition of a "U SPORTS Olympian" for this report includes athletes who were current, former, or incoming student-athletes at a U SPORTS member institution at the time of their Olympic participation, as well as those who competed in a U SPORTS-sanctioned sport during their university career. Data compiled from various sources including: 1) U SPORTS official releases and athlete lists for each Olympic cycle; 2) Canadian Olympic Committee athlete profiles and press releases, including breakdowns by sport, province, and institution; 3) University athletics department announcements and alumni records 4) Cross-referencing with Olympic Games official athlete lists for each cycle (Beijing 2008, London 2012, Rio 2016, Tokyo 2020, Paris 2024); 5) Additional secondary sources.

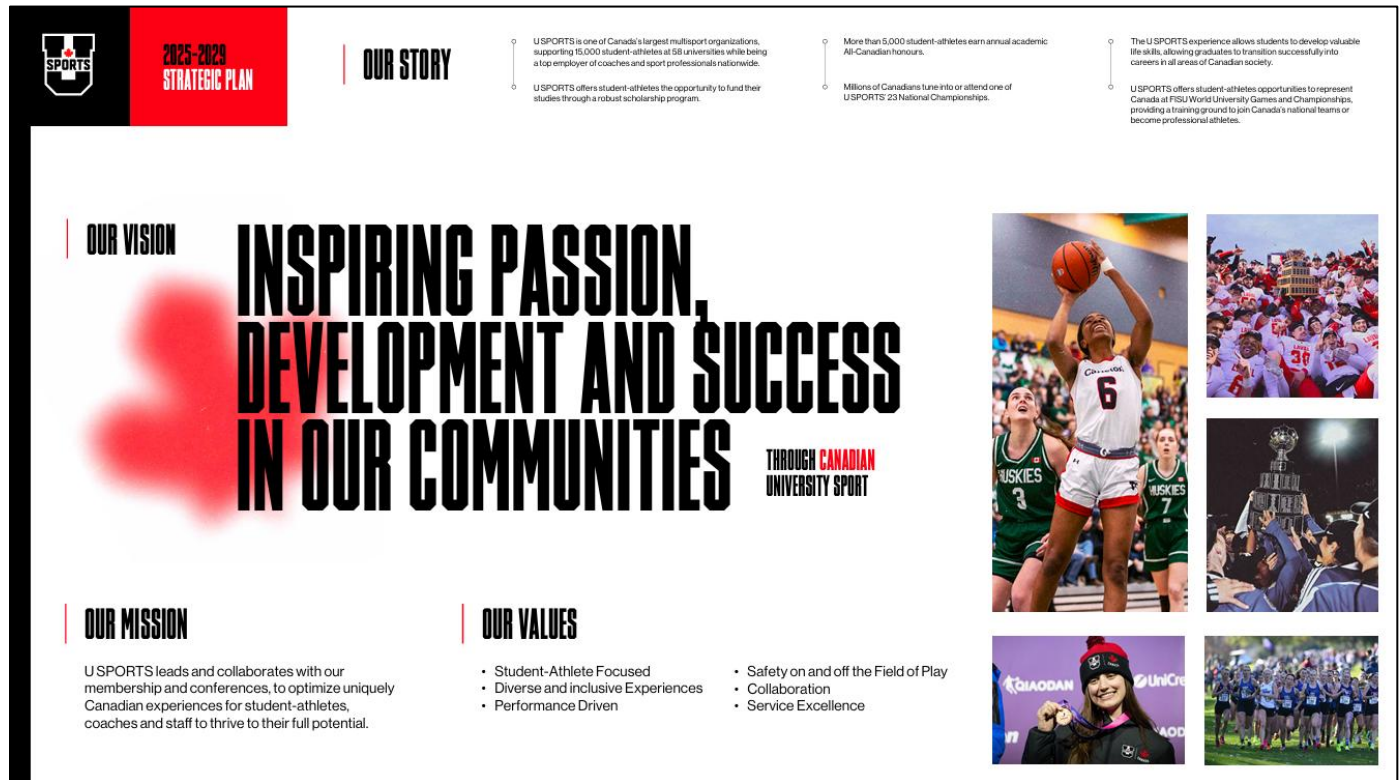
<sup>62</sup> U SPORTS, "U SPORTS Board of Directors confirmed for 2024-25." Online: [U SPORTS Board of Directors confirmed for 2024-25 - U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 5 June 2025].

<sup>63</sup> U SPORTS, "U SPORTS unveils 2025-2029 strategic plan, reaffirming commitment to student-athlete success and national sport leadership." Online: [U SPORTS unveils 2025-2029 strategic plan, reaffirming commitment to student-athlete success and national sport leadership - The Sport Information Resource Centre](#) [Last Accessed: 5 November 2025].

<sup>64</sup> U SPORTS, "U SPORTS unveils 2025-2029 strategic plan, reaffirming commitment to student-athlete success and national sport leadership." Online: [U SPORTS unveils 2025-2029 strategic plan, reaffirming commitment to student-athlete success and national sport leadership - The Sport Information Resource Centre](#) [Last Accessed: 5 November 2025].

The following excerpt from the strategic plan articulates the organization's mission, vision, and values.

Figure 4: U SPORTS Vision, Mission, Values<sup>65</sup>



The mission is focused to "optimize uniquely Canadian experiences for student-athletes, coaches, and staff to thrive to their full potential." Core values that were refined through the planning process demonstrate U SPORTS' commitment to excellence and serving the diverse needs of student-athletes, as noted in Table 10.

<sup>65</sup> U SPORTS, "Strategic Plan." Online: [U SPORTS - English](https://www.usports.ca/en/strategic-plan) [Last Accessed: 5 November 2025].

Table 10: U SPORTS Core Values<sup>66</sup>

U SPORTS Core Values	Focus
1. Student-athlete focused	Placing student-athletes at the centre of decision-making.
2. Diverse and inclusive experiences	Ensuring equitable opportunities across all programs.
3. Performance driven	Encouraging excellence on and off the field.
4. Safety on and off the field of play	Prioritizing health, well-being and best practices in sport safety.
5. Collaboration	Strengthening relationships with members, partners and stakeholders
6. Service Excellence	Enhancing the experience of all those involved in Canadian university sport.

The mission, vision, and values of U SPORTS are aligned with the Department's purpose, values, and vision — including the provision of "high-quality" varsity opportunities articulated in the 2025-2029 strategic plan.

The key strategic priorities of the plan are described as follows:

"As part of its efforts to **elevate competition and recognition**, U SPORTS will continue enhancing its national championships, celebrating academic and athletic excellence, and expanding Team Canada's impact at international university competitions.

The plan also aims to **lead through sport** by strengthening U SPORTS' integration within the national sport system, growing partnerships, expanding the brand's reach and reinforcing the value of Canadian university sport as a premier destination for high-performance athletes.

With a renewed focus on **enhancing the university sport experience**, U SPORTS will emphasize diversity and inclusion, student-athlete health and safety, academic success and collaboration with its conferences and member institutions. The perspectives of student-athletes and coaches played a key role in shaping this priority, ensuring their needs remain at the forefront of U SPORTS initiatives.

<sup>66</sup> U SPORTS, "U SPORTS unveils 2025-2029 strategic plan, reaffirming commitment to student-athlete success and national sport leadership." Online: [U SPORTS unveils 2025-2029 strategic plan, reaffirming commitment to student-athlete success and national sport leadership - The Sport Information Resource Centre](#) [Last Accessed: 5 November 2025].

Finally, U SPORTS is committed to **operational excellence**, with continued evolution in governance, strengthened financial sustainability, enhanced service delivery and new resource development strategies at the forefront."

U SPORTS offers national championships in 23 sports — 11 men's sports and 12 women's sports (Table 11), each governed through established policies and procedures including athlete eligibility, scholarships, and standards relating to academic and athletic achievement. U SPORTS not only cultivates talent that often advances to represent Canada in international events, such as the Olympics and FISU World University Games, but it also supports a holistic approach where academic achievement is balanced with sporting excellence, similar to the NCCA DII.

**Table 11: U SPORTS National Championships**

Men's Sports	Women's Sports
Basketball	Basketball
Cross Country	Cross Country
Curling	Curling
Hockey	Hockey
Soccer	Soccer
Swimming	Swimming
Tennis	Tennis
Track & Field (Indoor only)	Track & Field (Indoor only)
Volleyball	Volleyball
Wrestling	Wrestling
Football	Field Hockey
	Rugby

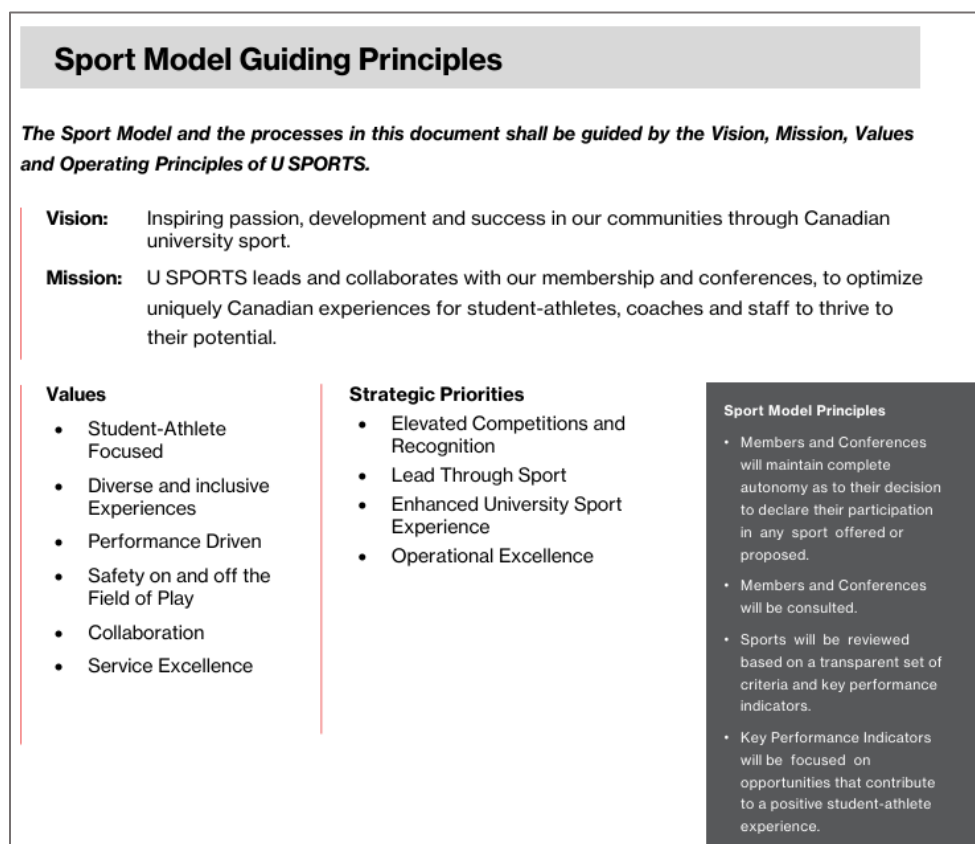
These 23 sport offerings include 13 of SFU's current 16 sports that are sponsored in the NCAA Division II. However, U SPORTS does not offer softball or men's and women's golf which would mean the elimination of these sports in the SFU varsity sports model. There are other differences in the competitive structure and rules of some sports between the NCAA and U SPORTS governance

models that will impact the experience of student-athletes, which is most pronounced in wrestling, track and field, and volleyball.

### U SPORTS Sport Model Program

In 2019, U SPORTS created a new Sport Model Program (SMP) including criteria related to the addition of sports to the national championships program and the reclassification or removal of existing sports. This provides U SPORTS with the flexibility to adapt to emerging sports as well as reconsider the sponsorship of other sports that do not meet the criteria. The SMP distinguishes two categories of sport including "Core National Championship Sports and Partnership Sports."<sup>67</sup> Within the latter category are three sub-categories including Pilot Sports, Invitational Sports, and Conference Sanctioned Sports. The guiding principles of the SMP are shown in Figure 12.

Figure 5: U SPORTS Sport Model Program



<sup>67</sup> U SPORTS, "Sport Model Program." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].

The SMP is clearly aligned with U SPORTS values and strategic priorities that place the focus on student-athletes. It also reinforces the principles of member and conference autonomy.

### 4.3 Selected U SPORTS Policies

SFU student-athletes expressed concerns about the impacts of moving to U SPORTS, including questions about scholarships and eligibility, among others. The following section highlights a number of U SPORTS policies that can be further consulted to provide answers to these questions.

#### 4.3.1 Policies and Procedures 40 - Eligibility

Several resources are provided to help current and prospective student-athletes navigate eligibility. These are:

- Recruits and Prospective Student-Athletes FAQs: [U SPORTS - English](#)
- Current Student-Athletes FAQs : [U SPORTS - English](#)

Several foundational principles are included in the Eligibility Policy that are aligned with U SPORTS' mission, vision, and values. For example:

##### "40.10.1 PRINCIPLES

The following principles are observed in the formulation of U SPORTS eligibility rules:

40.10.1.1 U SPORTS shall promote ethics, fairplay, and the opportunity for all eligible athletes to participate in interuniversity sport while pursuing their education.

40.10.1.2 All athletes must be demonstrating progress towards furthering their education and maintaining academic success.

40.10.1.4 Athletes are eligible according to acceptable course load standards as established by U SPORTS."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 40 Eligibility." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].

These principles illustrate the focus on successful academic progress which is tied to athletics eligibility. According to Article 40.10.3.2.1 (Course Load Requirements), "A student-athlete must be enrolled in a minimum of three (3) courses recognized towards a degree (minimum 9 degree-granting credit hours or equivalent as confirmed by the registrar) in the semester in which they are competing within U SPORTS..."<sup>69</sup>

Article 40.10.2.4 is applicable to current SFU student-athletes who have consumed eligibility through participation in the NCAA. This counts against U SPORTS eligibility.

"40.10.2.4 Application of Eligibility Rules to New Members In the academic year a university becomes a member (probationary or otherwise) of a Regional Association, the respective teams that compete under the traditional school name or uniform of the new member shall be subject to the entirety of Policy 40 – Eligibility Rules, with the exception of 40.10.4.1 (post-secondary participation and the August 2021 40-10-5 charging of eligibility) in certain instances. In the event a team is already participating within a jurisdiction that charges eligibility, U SPORTS will recognize the consumption of eligibility within that jurisdiction in accordance with that jurisdiction's rules. Irrespective of the application of 40.10.4.1 and the charging of eligibility, a student athlete who wishes to transfer to another U SPORTS school shall be subject to the U SPORTS to U SPORTS transfer rule."

Currently, in the NCAA a maximum of four years of eligibility is permitted, however, discussions are in progress about extending eligibility to five years. Five years of eligibility is permitted in U SPORTS. Specific references to the NCAA are provided in Article 40.10.4.3 as it relates to NCAA participation.

"40.10.4.3 Maximum Years (all sports)

40.10.4.3.1 An athlete shall be allowed to participate in U SPORTS competition for five (5) academic years.

40.10.4.3.2 An athlete who has been assessed a season of competition (or a year of eligibility or equivalent) in any recognized sport(s) of U SPORTS in four academic years within a non-Canadian post-secondary jurisdiction is ineligible for U SPORTS competition.

40.10.4.3.3 An athlete who has completed their eligibility to participate in any recognized sport of U SPORTS within another post-secondary jurisdiction, in

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<sup>69</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 40 Eligibility." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].



accordance with that jurisdiction's rules, is ineligible for U SPORTS competition, with the following exceptions:

- a) NJCAA (or equivalent) student-athletes
- b) NCAA and NAIA student-athletes who have been assessed a season of competition (or equivalent) in three or less academic years but are no longer eligible for NCAA or NAIA competition because of the jurisdiction's respective time-clock / terms of attendance regulations subsequent to their attendance at their NCAA or NAIA institution.
- c) CEGEP student-athletes are subject to Policy 40.10.4.2 "CEGEP Participation".
- d) U SPORTS registered student-athletes who participate concurrently at institutions that hold dual membership in both the U SPORTS and another jurisdiction (e.g. NAIA) shall not forfeit their fifth (5th) season of U SPORTS eligibility if they participate in four (4) years of competition in that other jurisdiction as a U SPORTS registered student-athlete, in the same sport.

The Eligibility Policy includes important provisions about how eligibility is applied involving student-athletes entering directly from a non U SPORTS post-secondary institution.

"40.10.4.3.3 An athlete who has completed their eligibility to participate in any recognized sport of U SPORTS within another post-secondary jurisdiction, in accordance with that jurisdiction's rules, is ineligible for U SPORTS competition, with the following exceptions:

(...)

- b) NCAA and NAIA student-athletes who have been assessed a season of competition (or equivalent) in three or less academic years but are no longer eligible for NCAA or NAIA competition because of the jurisdiction's respective time-clock / terms of attendance regulations subsequent to their attendance at their NCAA or NAIA institution."<sup>70</sup>

In short, the NCAA (currently) has four years of eligibility. According to U SPORTS, if an athlete has consumed three or fewer years of eligibility, the student-athlete would use the balance of their five years of eligibility in U SPORTS. However, if an athlete has completed four years of eligibility in the NCAA, they would have no remaining years of eligibility in U SPORTS. U SPORTS officials suggest that in the unique case of SFU, "So while it would be a small group of individuals, we would need to determine how to assess those who had completed their fourth year of eligibility in the year prior to SFU entering U SPORTS." This would be a one-time issue for the single cohort of SFU athletes

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<sup>70</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 40 Eligibility." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].

joining U SPORTS and those SFU athletes completing their third or fewer years of eligibility would easily transfer to the U SPORTS system. Furthermore, it is unknown at this time how a change to the NCAA eligibility policy (currently proposed from four to five years), would have concomitant impacts on the current U SPORT policy as it relates to the NCAA.

Eligibility is a complex topic and can vary according to individual circumstances. As such, the entirety of the policy should be consulted to determine eligibility based on an individual's unique individual circumstances.

#### 4.3.2 Policies and Procedures 50 – Athletic Financial Awards

In U SPORTS, athletics scholarship are commonly referred to as Athletic Financial Awards (AFAs). Several Guiding Principles are foundational to this policy including:

"50.10.1.3 U SPORTS supports equal opportunity for all U SPORTS athletes within the context of the established rules of U SPORTS.

50.10.1.4 All U SPORTS athletes must demonstrate progress towards furthering their education and maintaining academic success.

50.10.1.5 U SPORTS promotes gender equity in the implementation of the awards policy."<sup>71</sup>

The system for calculating the number of AFAs is based on several factors, including the Championship roster sizes of different sports, and the number of scholarship equivalencies allowed per sport. These are noted below.

"50.10.2.6 Championship Rosters

50.10.2.6.1 The Championship Rosters for calculating eligible awards will be:

Basketball (M) 12 Basketball (W) 12

Cross Country (M) 7 Cross Country (W) 7

Football 48

Field Hockey 16

Hockey (M) 20 Hockey (W) 20

Rugby (W)

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<sup>71</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 50 Athletic Financial Awards." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].

25 Soccer (M) 18 Soccer (W)  
18 Swimming (M) 18 Swimming (W) 18  
Track and Field (M) 29 Track and Field (W) 29  
Volleyball (M) 14 Volleyball (W) 14  
Wrestling (M) 10 Wrestling (W) 8"<sup>72</sup>

Each sport has a scholarship "ceiling" in term of the number of award units that can be used to determine AFA awards available at each institution. Article 50.10.3.2.1 illustrates the number of award units by sport.

"50.10.3.2.1 The ceiling of the number of award units available at each institution, which is reviewed annually, will be as listed below. The awards units are established by the Athletic Financial Awards Committee using a benchmark of 70% of the Championship Roster for each sport.

Basketball (M) 8.4 Basketball (W) 8.4  
Cross Country (M) 4.9 Cross Country (W) 4.9  
Football 33.6  
Field Hockey 11.2  
Hockey (M) 14 Hockey (W) 14  
Rugby (W) 17.5  
Soccer (M) 12.6 Soccer (W) 12.6  
Swimming (M) 12.6 Swimming (W) 12.6  
Track and Field (M) 20.3 Track and Field (W) 20.3  
Volleyball (M) 9.8 Volleyball (W) 9.8  
Wrestling (M) 7 Wrestling (W) 5.6"<sup>73</sup>

The maximum value of AFA that can be awarded to an individual includes tuition and fees. It does not include what is commonly referred to in the NCAA as "a full ride" which also allows student-athletes to receive scholarship funding towards living expenses including housing and meals. As such, the total amount that a student-athlete can receive in the NCAA surpasses the maximum amount allowable in U SPORTS. However, few teams and student-athletes on current SFU rosters receive the maximum amount allowable. Additional analysis of scholarships/AFAs by SFU team is provided in Chapter 5.4 (Impacts by Varsity Team). Policy 50 also requires that "Institutions must

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<sup>72</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 50 Athletic Financial Awards." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

distribute a minimum of 45% of their total AFA units to student-athletes on men's teams and a minimum of 45% of their total AFA units to student-athletes on women's teams."<sup>74</sup>

#### 4.3.3 Policies and Procedures 80.8 - Equity Policy

Policy 80.8 demonstrates U SPORTS' commitment to the principles of equity and equality and is written to ensure that these principles are adhered to in all its activities. "Equity refers to treatment that is fair and just. This definition of equity includes gender, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, language, disability, income and other diversities."<sup>75</sup> Article 90.20.3.2A identifies "protected groups" which are defined as "any prohibited ground of discrimination or harassment under provincial human rights legislation. This includes race ancestry, ethnic origin, country or place of origin, citizenship, age, creed (religion), sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, family status, disability and colour."<sup>76</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Policies and Procedures 80.80.5 - Transgender Policy

There has been widespread attention on the rights of transgender participants in sport. U SPORTS allows student-athletes to compete as their sex assigned at birth or their gender identify, as noted in the policy excerpt below.

"TRANSGENDER STUDENT-ATHLETES This Policy 80.80.5 governs the eligibility of transgender student-athletes in U SPORTS competition. Student-athletes may not exceed five (5) years of participation in total (including any time in either male or female U SPORTS competition) as per policy 40.10.4.3.1.1. Subject to Policy 80.80.5.4 below, student-athletes may compete on the sport team that corresponds with either their sex assigned at birth or their gender identity, provided that at all times student-athletes are in compliance with the Canadian Anti-Doping Program. Student-

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<sup>74</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 50 Athletic Financial Awards." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].

<sup>75</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 80.8 Equity." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025]

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

athletes may only compete on sport teams of one gender during a given Academic Year (as defined in 40.10.3.1.1)."<sup>77</sup>

This is a complex issue involving multiple levels of sport governance and different legal jurisdictions in Canada. For example, a U SPORTS representative indicated challenges of implementing this policy in provinces like Alberta.

#### 4.3.5 Policies and Procedures 50 - Policy Against Maltreatment in Sport

The central tenant of the Policy Against Maltreatment in Sport is written as follows:

"90.20.1.1A U SPORTS is committed to providing a sport environment in which all individuals are protected from maltreatment and treated with respect and dignity. Each individual has the right to participate in an environment which promotes equal opportunities and prohibits all forms of maltreatment, including discrimination, harassment and abuse."<sup>78</sup>

U SPORTS has adopted the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport (UCCMS), which has been adopted by other National Sport Organizations (NSOs) and Multi-Sport Organizations (MSOs) as a condition of funding. This provides a common approach, tools, and reporting requirements for those who have adopted this Code of Conduct thereby strengthening protection for student-athletes and others that fall under its jurisdiction.

#### 4.4 Canada West

Canada West (CW) is the regional governing body for university sport in Western Canada. The organization falls under the national governance of U SPORTS and is responsible for coordinating interuniversity athletics competition, setting policy, and championing the development of student-athletes across the western provinces. With a legacy dating back to 1919, Canada West "is the leading university athletic conference in the country and is home to champion student-athletes that

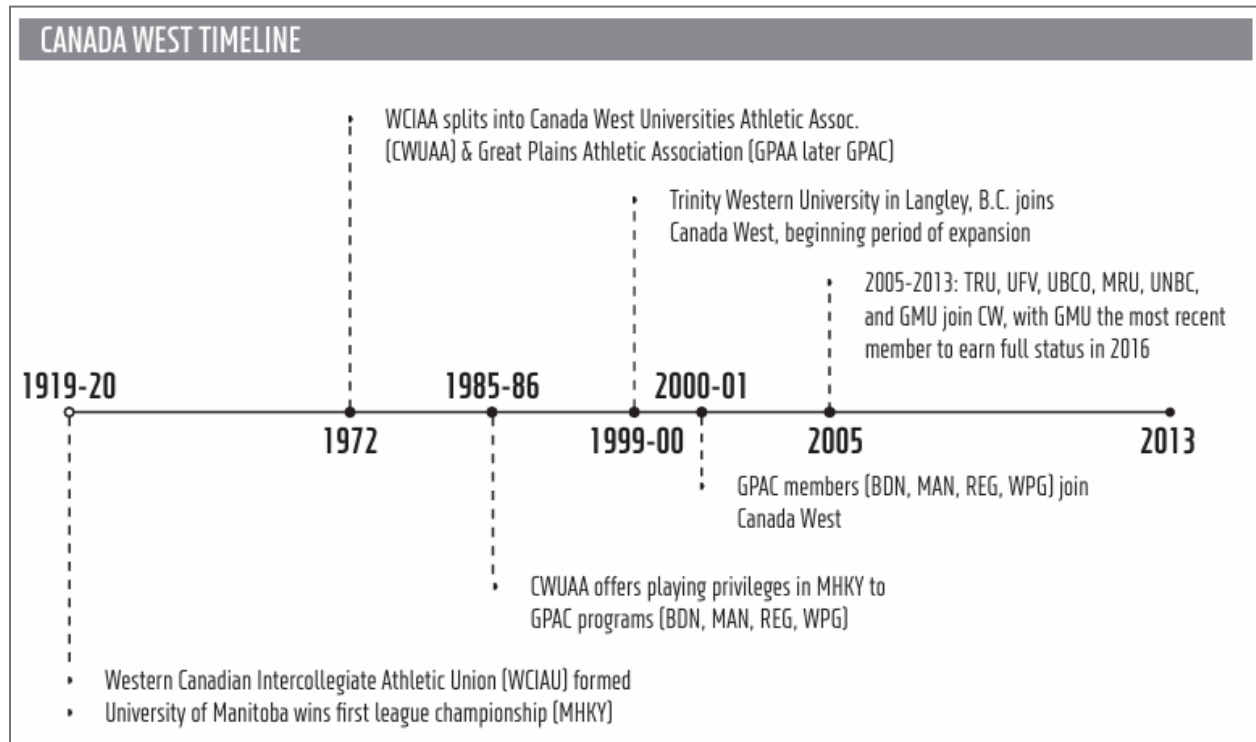
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<sup>77</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 80.80.5 Transgender Policy." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].

<sup>78</sup> U SPORTS, "Policies and Procedures - 90.20 Policy Against Maltreatment in Sport." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 12 November 2025].

excel in the classroom and their communities."<sup>79</sup> The history of Canada West is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Canada West Timeline



The conference includes 17 members from across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Since 1999, Canada West has added 11 new members to its original six charter members, broadening the conference's reach and diversity. This diversity enriches the conference's competitive environment and ensures broad representation of Western Canadian communities in university sport. Furthermore, the concentration of members in British Columbia creates opportunities for local and provincial rivalries to flourish.

<sup>79</sup> Canada West, "History of Canada West." Online: [Cwhistory - Canada West](#) [Last Accessed: 11 November 2025].

Table 12: Canada West Members

Institution [Denotes Province of British Columbia]	Approximate Distance from SFU <sup>80</sup>
University of British Columbia	28 km
Trinity Western University	36 km
University of the Fraser Valley	60 km
University of Victoria	120 km
Thompson Rivers University	341 km
UBC Okanagan	395 km
University of Northern B.C.	798 km
MacEwan University	1,154 km
University of Alberta	1,157 km
University of Calgary	1,226 km
Mount Royal University	1,234 km
University of Lethbridge	1,238 km
University of Saskatchewan	1,657 km
University of Regina	1,861 km
Brandon University	2,230 km
University of Winnipeg	2,441 km
University of Manitoba	2,449 km
Average	1,083 km

Universities in British Columbia comprise 41% of Canada West Members, and the addition of SFU would increase this to 44%. Based on the membership of the GNAC versus Canada West, the average travel distance is approximately 12% shorter in Canada West vs. the GNAC.<sup>81</sup> This, of course, excludes non-conference, exhibition, and playoff games in each respective league that can add significant travel costs. In the NCAA Division II, championship travel costs are paid by the league. Also, Canada West in recent years has made attempts to regionalize schedules in various sports to

<sup>80</sup> Note: Approximate distances using MapQuest.

<sup>81</sup> Note: Additional travel efficiencies are expected for SFU in Canada West due to more regionalized travel schedules in British Columbia. This will vary by team and schedules.

reduce travel costs for members. This provides advantages for institutions in British Columbia given the high percentage of U SPORTS members in the province.

Canada West offers competition in 24 sports (13 women's sports, 11 men's sports), all of which lead to a conference championship. All sports listed below progress to a U SPORTS championship, with the exception of men's and women's golf and rugby 7's which are not sponsored by the national governing body.

**Table 13: Canada West Sports**

Men's Sports	Women's Sports
[Denotes Not Offered by U SPORTS]	[Denotes Not Offered by U SPORTS]
Basketball	Basketball
Cross Country	Cross Country
Curling	Curling
Golf	Golf
Hockey	Hockey
Soccer	Soccer
Swimming	Swimming
Track & Field (Indoor only)	Track & Field (Indoor only)
Volleyball	Volleyball
Wrestling	Wrestling
Football	Field Hockey
	Rugby 15s
	Rugby 7's (Pilot Sport)

The Mission, Vision, and Core Values of Canada West are articulated in their strategic plan, shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Canada West Mission, Vision, and Core Values

CANADA WEST STRATEGIC PLAN
MISSION STATEMENT
To provide leadership in the delivery, regulation, and promotion of university high performance sports programs throughout Western Canada.
VISION
To be Canada's leading university sport conference.
CORE VALUES
The following values are aligned with those of our members and serve to support our vision and mission:
<u>Student-Athlete Centered</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We support a quality learning and athletic experience for student-athletes.</li></ul>
<u>Pursuit of Excellence</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We provide an environment that puts academics at the forefront of what we do.</li><li>• We promote athletics as an integral component of the learning experience at Western Canadian universities.</li><li>• We set high standards of performance, striving to win U SPORTS championships and develop athletes to international standards.</li></ul>
<u>Engagement and Collaboration</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We provide opportunities for members to take ownership and responsibility for the governance of Canada West.</li><li>• We fervently advocate for sport development in Canada.</li></ul>
<u>Equity and Respect</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We maintain high ethical standards in our delivery of university sport programs.</li><li>• We strive to provide an environment of equity, diversity, and mutual respect.</li></ul>
<u>Accountable and Adaptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• We are professionally managed, effective in our communication, transparent in our reporting, skilfully marketed, and adaptable to change.</li><li>• We are financially viable.</li></ul>

The core values of Canada West are centred on the student-athlete experience "that puts academics at the forefront of what we do," and includes the promotion of athletics and maintaining high standards of performance that lead its members to success both nationally and internationally. Student-athlete excellence is identified as a strategic priority by creating "an environment that fosters academic and athletic success." This environment includes National recognition for student-athletes, coaches and support staff and a high-performance sport model that achieves national success.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Canada West, "Strategic Plan," 2019.

## Chapter 5: Stakeholder Perspectives and Impacts

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion of the impacts of moving SFU's varsity athletics program to Canada, including Canada West and U SPORTS as the primary governing bodies. This includes university-wide impacts to SFU, Department of Athletics and Recreation impacts, and impacts on each of SFU's 16 varsity sports teams and student-athletes. This discussion has been informed by primary research including a review of various policies and procedures, stakeholder interviews, and survey research that provided an opportunity for student-athletes and others in the SFU to submit feedback.

A summary of key governance differences and impacts between the NCAA Division II and U SPORTS is provided. This is followed by student-athlete feedback about the impacts of leaving the NCAA and a team-by-team summary of operating differences and impacts of competing in the NCAA Division II and U SPORTS. The potential impacts on a selected number of SFU competitive sport clubs is provided, including men's hockey, men's lacrosse, and women's rugby.

The severity of impacts varies by team. For example, women's softball, men's and women's golf, and outdoor track and field are not offered by U SPORTS. Impacts also vary by stakeholder constituency, with several themes emerging. For example, a strong majority of student-athletes, irrespective of team, believe that the NCAA provides deeper and more competitive sport opportunities and codified policies that prioritize the DII philosophy of "Life in the Balance". Many student-athletes and coaches cited the advantages of CARA hours, which caps the amount of time that a player can spend on athletically related activities. Many expressed concerns that U SPORTS does not offer similar compliance regimes.

Many staff and faculty share concerns about a misalignment of values and philosophy between SFU and the NCAA and United States, including policies and procedures they believe pose potential risks for SFU student-athletes and staff who must cross the U.S. border to compete and work. Several

Department (non-coaching) staff members expressed concerns about having to travel to the United States in fulfillment of their work obligations. However, few coaches expressed concerns about this.

SFU staff and faculty expressed specific concerns for the safety of marginalized individuals based on the erosion of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in the United States, as described herein with reference to several executive orders. The erosion of these initiatives include specific impacts on diversity, equity, and inclusion within the NCAA. Moreover, many of these policies are in contravention of the various human rights codes in Canada. For these various arguments, many are concerned about the reputational risks to the SFU brand by continuing to compete in the NCAA given the current geopolitical environment and erosion of values and human rights that are sacred to most Canadians.

An analysis of the financial implications of competing in Canada versus the United States is provided as well as the fees associated with SFU's application process seeking membership in U SPORTS and Canada West.

## 5.2 NCAA Division II vs. U SPORTS - Key Governance Differences and Impacts

Although both the NCAA Division II and U SPORTS share a commitment to student-athlete excellence and balance, there are many differences in how these leagues are governed, with concomitant impacts on student-athletes, as well as the member institutions they serve. These key differences and impacts are summarized in Table 15. These "common" impacts across all sports are summarized according low, medium, or high impacts. Chapter 5.4 provides a more granular assessment of impacts by sport, which can differ significantly.

Table 14: Governance Differences and Impacts - NCAA v. U SPORTS

Governance Item	U Sports	NCAA	Impact (H,M,L)
Eligibility Rules	More flexible eligibility criteria 5 years eligibility	Stricter eligibility criteria 4 years eligibility	Low
Scholarship Opportunities	Tuition and Fees	Tuition, fees, housing, meals	High
Academic Focus	Less emphasis on tracking to degree	Progress towards degree tracked	Medium
Fulltime enrollment for eligibility	9 credit hours – protentional longer path to graduation	12 credit hours	Medium
Time Commitment on Student-athletes	No restriction on when and how long practice sessions are	20 hours per week maximum competition/practice	High
Team Sports – Game schedule	Friday/Saturday – taxing on physical health. Less missed class time	Thursday/Saturday – more recovery time between events. More missed class time	High
Length of Time a student-athlete can participate	If you don't play but are full-time you do not use a term	Maximum of 10 fulltime terms	Low
Graduation Reporting	No	Yes	Low
Academic Retention Reporting	No	Yes	Low
Student-Athlete Advisory Committee	No	Yes	Medium
Faculty Athletic Representative (supports students)	No	Yes	Medium

Post Season expenses paid by Sport Governing Body	To some extent	Yes (regional and national)	High
Sickle Cell Testing in student-athletes	No	Yes (mandatory)	Low
Student-Athlete Medicals	Yes	Yes	Low
Sexual Violence Education	No	Yes (mandatory)	Low
Drug Education Program	Yes	Yes	Low
Safe Sport Training	Yes	Yes	Low

### Key Operating Challenges of Competing in the NCAA

Competing as the sole international member has presented a number of unique operating challenges for SFU, described by multiple individuals as a "square peg in a round hole." Key challenges include the following:

### **U.S. Governance Structure**

As a member of the NCAA, SFU has a voice and a vote as it relates to matters of NCAA governance. However, the university is impotent as it relates to having any influence over U.S. domestic policies, including many that are directly impacting the NCAA at the present time. For example, a staff member in the Department shared the following email received from the NCAA government relations.

"Colleagues,

As chair of the NCAA Division II Executive Board, I write to remind you that now is the time to make sure your Representative hears from you about why Division II institutions support the SCORE Act.

The NCAA and Division II student-athletes and leaders support the SCORE Act. The bipartisan bill tackles the Association's priorities by preempting the patchwork of state laws, providing limited liability protections so college sports can make and enforce uniform rules, and - critically for Division II - ensuring student-athletes are not school employees of their schools.

To build momentum for a floor vote, now is the time to contact your Representatives and urge passage of the SCORE Act."<sup>83</sup>

SFU's lack of influence over such matters of fundamental importance to the university is clear, and problematic. The SCORE Act refers to the Student Compensation and Opportunity through Rights and Endorsements Act that would create a uniform federal framework for NIL rights and athlete protections, require schools to provide expanded health, educational, and transparency measures for student-athletes, and offer limited legal protections for collegiate governing bodies that comply with the U.S. laws.<sup>84</sup> The email from the NCAA underscores concerns about many of the issues of professionalism shared by others in the athletics community. Moreover, it raises important questions about how Canadian laws would apply to these complex issues, which contributes to further operating uncertainty for SFU.

### **Playoffs and Championship Hosting**

SFU's ability to host playoff games and championships outside of the GNAC are limited because of the challenges of crossing an international border for U.S. citizens from non-conference opponents. SFU's membership in the GNAC requires players on U.S. teams to hold passports for cross-border travel to play regular season and conference playoff games in British Columbia. However, this operating philosophy does not extend to NCAA DII players outside of the GNAC. Impacts include fewer opportunities for home fan engagement, increased travel costs, and additional travel burdens on student-athletes. This limitation has forced SFU to host non-conference "home" playoff games across the border in Seattle, Washington, but this practice was discontinued for budgetary reasons. Thus, some SFU teams must travel for away playoff games, although they have earned the right to host such games. This limitation is exacerbated by NCAA DII regulations that require a minimum number of contests (games, meets). These non-conference requirements add cost, complexity, and time away from the classroom. Moreover, it eliminates broader community engagement opportunities for SFU fans to cheer on their home team. This is counter to one of the Department's strategic goals to "Host signature events to attract a wider community audience, create exceptional

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<sup>83</sup> Email Correspondence, NCAA to SFU Department Staff, 4 September 2025.

<sup>84</sup> House Judiciary Committee on Energy and Commerce, "The SCORE Act." Online: [score act one pager.pdf](#). [Last Accessed: 14 November 2025].

participant experiences, and build community pride and connection."<sup>85</sup> Many feel that membership in Canada West and U SPORTS will provide greater opportunities to accomplish this goal through natural local rivalries.

### **Academic Accreditation and Academic Compliance**

The institutional commitment, duplication, and costs associated with U.S. academic accreditation are discussed in Chapter 3.6. Additional challenges were identified related to compliance with academic eligibility requirements (Article 14 of the NCAA Division II bylaws). For example, student-athletes are required to declare their major by the fifth full academic semester, and this, among other requirements, was described as “problematic” by some staff in the Department.

The academic calendar at SFU does not line up with the academic calendars of most NCAA institutions which also puts SFU at a competitive disadvantage in terms of how Countable Athletically Related Activities (CARA)<sup>86</sup> are calculated. One SFU coach produced a chart showing how their team was disadvantaged with less allowable practice time compared to NCAA peers because of how these hours are calculated in according to a different academic calendar for SFU.

### **Athletics Rules Compliance**

The NCAA’s emphasis on compliance enforcement is a crucial feature of its governance, which has been challenging for SFU. Specific examples include “stringent compliance” with recruiting timelines and “starting and stopping” participation timelines that have sometimes impacted SFU’s ability to schedule Canadian exhibition contests. There are many advantages of compliance, including prescribed limits on the amount of time student-athletes can train (CARA hours), mandated training, among others. This differs markedly from U SPORTS which relies on greater self-enforcement amongst members.

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<sup>85</sup> U SPORTS, "Strategic Plan." Online: [U SPORTS - English](#) [Last Accessed: 5 November 2025]

<sup>86</sup> Note: Countable Athletically Related Activities (CARA) are sport-related activities that are required, organized or supervised by coaching staff and therefore count toward NCAA hourly limits for student-athletes.

## Data Privacy

The NCAA requires collecting and reporting extensive amounts of data, including personal information. This has presented challenges for SFU, which must comply with Canadian federal privacy laws, including the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act ('PIPEDA'). PIPEDA sets the ground rules for collecting, using, and disclosing personal information. For example, "our medical information stays in Canada on a system of Canadian servers." Student-athletes are required to sign consent forms to disclose personal information to the NCAA, including, for example, academic grades (required for graduation rate calculations) and drug testing data.

### 5.3 Student-Athlete Feedback - Impacts of Leaving the NCAA

Student-athletes are almost unanimous in their opposition to leaving the NCAA for competitive (U SPORTS) and strongly believe it will diminish their student-athlete experience, both athletically and academically. They are concerned about the loss of important support systems that are codified in the NCAA. For example, Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR), academic advising, training limits (CARA hours), mandatory education (e.g. sexual violence training), among others. Table 15 provides a summary of key impacts that are common amongst SFU teams according to the 106 student-athletes who responded. Each theme is accompanied by selected quotes that represent the theme. Section 5.4 introduces additional impacts and considerations that are specific to different team environments.

Student-athletes are very satisfied with their NCAA experience, citing it as the major reason they chose to attend SFU. Moreover, several athletes indicated the intention to transfer out of SFU should the university leave the NCAA. The most pressing questions include continuity of scholarships and athletic resources (e.g. academic advising, training and medical), and lack of access to the same competitive opportunities and experiences provided in the NCAA Division II (including a loss of some sports entirely).



Table 15: Student-Athlete Feedback - Key Impacts About Leaving NCAA

Theme	Student-Athlete Comments
NCAA Preference/Transfer	<p>"I would transfer, I came to SFU because it's NCAA" (Bball-M)</p> <p>"I chose SFU over more generous NCAA offers because it was the only Canadian university where I could study while competing at the highest collegiate level" (Softball)</p> <p>"I would probably go elsewhere as I came to SFU largely because it's the NCAA" (Track &amp; Field-M)</p> <p>"If you change to U SPORTS a lot of athletes or all the ones I have talked to about the change to U SPORTS all said they would leave" (Wrestling-M)</p>
Competition	<p>"This would impact my development as an athlete as the NCAA has a higher caliber of athletes" (Bball-M)</p> <p>"It would negatively impact the competition level" (CrossCountry-M)</p> <p>"It would affect my future job opportunities and chances to turn pro" (Golf-M)</p> <p>"I would be forced to leave the team because there is no competitive golf in U SPORTS" (Golf-W)</p> <p>"NCAA schedule gives us deeper competition, more high-quality race reps, and clearer national benchmarks to chase" (Swimming-M)</p> <p>"The GNAC/NCAA is far more competitive than U SPORTS and we get to play competitive schools" (Volleyball)</p> <p>"U SPORTS...small talent pools, low visibility, and fewer resources" (Wrestling-M)</p> <p>"I came to SFU for the unique opportunity to compete in the NCAA and experience a higher level of competition" (Wrestling-W)</p>
Financial	<p>"I would not be able to afford SFU without the scholarships the NCAA is able to provide" (Bball-W)</p> <p>"Would this affect the amount of scholarship I would receive?" (Soccer-w)</p>
Pride/Identity/Reputation	<p>"It's a very unique and prideful experience to be the only Canadian university in the NCAA, and removing that would remove one of the biggest reasons why athletes choose to play here" (Bball-W)</p> <p>"Removing us from the NCAA would steal our identity" (Cross Country-M)</p>

	<p>"SFU's membership in U SPORTS would irreparably harm the quality and integrity of SFU athletics" (Track &amp; Field-W)</p> <p>"The student-athlete experience in the NCAA is a special one. We have the unique experience to compete in the NCAA while getting a Canadian degree" (Volleyball)</p> <p>"Leaving the NCAA would risk SFU's identity as the only Canadian NCAA institution" (Wrestling-M)</p>
Academic Factors	<p>"Switching to U SPORTS would decrease my progress towards my degree, specifically because NCAA requires each student to complete 12 credits per semester, and declare their majors by 2nd semester of their third year" (Soccer-W)</p> <p>"I worry for my grades as volleyball in U SPORTS has their season in both fall and spring semesters" (Volleyball)</p>
Health & Wellness	<p>"The NCAA prioritizes athlete well-being through structure regulations and balanced scheduling" (Soccer-W)</p> <p>"Switching over to U SPORTS will also greatly affect student-athletes' mental performance in a negative way" (Wrestling-W)</p>

Consensus: Very High (strong majority), High (majority), Low (minority)

### Student-Athlete Questions

Student-athletes have many important questions, summarized below from the survey responses. There is tremendous uncertainty about the impacts of moving from the NCAA to U SPORTS including questions about scholarships, eligibility, student-athlete supports, academic degree progression, and competitive structures, among others. Student-athletes expressed concerns about their own circumstances and team impacts, as well as the broader impacts on the future of athletics at SFU and the brand and reputation of SFU. There is confusion about what is driving this decision, including the criteria that will be used to determine if SFU athletics will leave the NCAA for U SPORTS. Among the many questions provided in response to the survey is a summary of common themes below.

1. What role does varsity athletics play within SFU's mission?
2. What would scholarships look like in U SPORTS vs. NCAA?
3. Can existing scholarship agreements be maintained?
4. With a transition to U SPORTS, how would resources like sports medicine, academic advising, strength and conditioning be impacted?
5. How will U SPORTS prepare athletes for pro careers, given the loss of NCAA's direct pro pathways, scouting, and media exposure?

6. Has SFU considered the legal and ethical implications of changing athletic affiliation?
7. Could softball join the NAIA?
8. Why would the committee not decide this for 2029 so it doesn't affect people that signed here for the NCAA part of the school?
9. How are we going to manage eligibility status?
10. If we do transition away from the NCAA, how will that process work?
11. How will you address the sports you have to cut if we move to U SPORTS?
12. Would we still be participating in tournaments and duals in the states, or would we be completely prohibited from crossing the border?
13. Over what time frame is the university evaluating the Return on Investment (ROI) of varsity athletics?

The answers to some of these questions can be found in this report. Other questions are left to SFU to answer. There is strong consensus from senior university leadership and the Department to established a committee to address student-athlete questions and to provide support through a transition from NCAA to U SPORTS, should this be the path forward.

In addition to these questions from student-athletes, some alumni who were interviewed by the IC asked what happens to alumni fundraising endowments that were established to support specific SFU teams if any of those teams are discontinued. Several alumni donors indicated they would stop donating to SFU if the program leaves the NCAA.

## 5.4 Impacts by SFU Varsity Team

The severity of impacts varies by team. Three sports (five teams) face critical impacts and are likely to collapse under the U SPORTS model. These include women's softball, men's and women's golf, and men's and women's outdoor track and field. These impacts are noted on the team specific impact matrices provided below with a summary of key operating differences between U SPORTS and the NCAA. Additional feedback is drawn from student-athlete survey responses and input from coaches.

### Men's and Women's Basketball

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	<p>Women's Basketball runs similar seasons, roster numbers and championships in both U-Sports and NCAA.</p> <p>Friday Saturday Game schedule, vs Thursday Saturday in NCAA.</p> <p>Lower scholarship equivalencies in U SPORTS.</p>	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>Friday/Saturday game schedule will impact the physical wellbeing of student-athletes but decrease missed class time.</p> <p>Regular season competition is played primarily in BC, so a reduction in travel cost is anticipated.</p> <p>Lower scholarship equivalencies combined with a lower individual ceiling for scholarships may impact finances for student-athletes currently at the top-end of the current ceiling.</p>	
	USPORTS	NCAA
Budget Estimate	Men: \$430,331 Women: \$389,818	Men: \$473,331 Women: \$430,393
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	Men: 8.4 Women: 8.4	Men: 10 Women: 10
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	Men: 1) 7.83 (78% of maximum) 2) \$184,577 3) \$27,692 Women: 1) 5.11 (51% of maximum) 2) \$141,708 3) \$48,056
Schedule Timeline	Exhibition August   Season Sept - February	Exhibition October   November - February
# of Games	20 Can West   7 out of conference	26 total + 9 Exhibition
Roster size	15   Dress 12	14-16
Travel (Longest Trip)		Wash, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska, Montana (Fairbanks, Alaska)

Additional Feedback Provided:

- "SFU basketball was quite successful, quite competitive in U SPORTS."
- "Men's basketball has had a tiny bit of success...but not the kind of success that we had in Canada."
- "Cutting a few sports saves the budget, keeps us sustainable."
- "Whatever way we go (NCAA v. USPORTS), we've got to fund the programs properly to have success. Otherwise, what are we? Let's not be mediocre if we are going to go to U SPORTS."
- "Pick the sports we want to be competitive at, and let's fund them appropriately in either league."
- "We are starting to see a claw back in the revenue we are generating in the summer through camps and the Academy."
- "Travel is way harder in the NCAA. You're leaving Wednesday mornings back Sunday. I do not look forward to the travel."
- "The student-athlete experience will be just as beneficial in U SPORTS."
- "Did (SFU athletes) in the CIS have a great experience? They'd tell you, it was the best experience of their life. They would tell you it was wonderful. They had an opportunity to win a national championship, and we won five in nine years."
- "Unequal practice time is a natural handicap for SFU because of a different academic calendar."
- "NIL has trickled down to the DII level already."
- "I think that I am bothered by the unfairness of the NCAA, which claims to be the fairest association in the world, but it's not, and that's always saddened my cry a little bit..."
- "We are allowed to work out our athletes about 60 days less than our competition."
- "This would impact my development as an athlete as the NCAA has a higher caliber of athletes."
- "I would not be able to afford SFU without the scholarships the NCAA is able to provide."
- "I personally would not be affected."
- "The truth is, if we stay in the NCAA, I think we will have cuts."

## Men's and Women's Soccer

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	<p>Men's and Women's Soccer run similar seasons, roster numbers, and championships in both U SPORTS and NCAA.</p> <p>Friday Saturday Game schedule, vs Thursday Saturday in NCAA.</p> <p>Higher scholarship equivalency in U SPORTS, although the maximum allowable individual scholarship amount in U SPORTS (tuition and fees) is lower than in the NCAA (tuition, fees, living expenses).</p>	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>Friday/Saturday game schedule will impact the physical wellbeing of student-athletes but decrease missed class time. Regular season competition is played primarily in BC, so a reduction in travel cost is anticipated.</p>	
	USPORTS	NCAA
Budget Estimate	Men: \$368,751 Women: \$317,435	Men: \$413,553 Women: \$349,285
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	Men: 12.6 Women: 12.6	Men: 9 Women: 9.9
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	<p>Men:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) 8.2 (91% of maximum)</li> <li>2) \$272,601</li> <li>3) \$64,475</li> </ol> <p>Women:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) 4.75 (48% of maximum)</li> <li>2) \$107,250</li> <li>3) \$11,000</li> </ol>
Schedule Timeline	August to November	August to November
# of Games	16	16
Roster size	31   Dress 18	28
Travel (Longest Trip)		Wash, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Cali. (Durango/Denver, Colorado)

### Additional Feedback Provided:

- "Revenues from camps and clinics...that money right now isn't to augment our program to make it better, as much as it is to fill the financial (operating) gaps that we currently have."
- "We are categorized as fully funded at 9.0 scholarships, which is very advantageous in D2 "men's soccer."
- "You can play professional soccer until you're 21 years old and still be eligible for five years of eligibility in U SPORTS, that's obviously a good thing because it gives you opportunities for more players."
- "What is really clear to me it we're going to have to reduce sports if we're going to be in a position where we are sustainable. We are probably too heavy in the NCAA as it is."

- "A cool part of the student-athlete experience is seeing places like California, Hawaii, Colorado, or Texas."
- "We are way more like UBC than we are Seattle Pacific or Western Washington."
- "Whatever we choose to do, we need to go all in on it. You cannot halfway do it. If we need to make cuts, so be it. But on the sports that are remaining, go and win something."
- "One of the challenges that we face from time to time is some of these (non conference) schools are documented to come up to Canada. They do make concessions in terms of sometimes we're able to pay neutral sites like Bellingham."
- "In terms of the student-athlete experience, players are protecting the NCAA culture they have currently."
- "We use the transfer portal within the last two years quite frequently."
- "I would no longer have CARA to support and protect me from being overworked and having sport/life balance..."
- "Limited professional pathways as the NCAA directly connects players to the U.S. and international pro pipeline."
- "NCAA fosters progress towards my degree..."
- "NCAA requires me to complete a sexual violence course each year which as a woman makes me feel much safer on campus. U SPORTS does not."
- "NCAA provides 48 hours of recovery time between games."
- "The NCAA has a stronger support system for student athletes..."
- "The NCAA structure, with more games, recovery time, and exposure, better supports player health and long-term development."

## Women's Volleyball

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	<p>Women's Volleyball runs over two semesters in U SPORTS versus one semester in NCAA.</p> <p>Friday Saturday game schedule, vs Thursday Saturday in NCAA.</p> <p>Higher scholarship equivalency in U SPORTS, although the maximum allowable individual scholarship amount in U SPORTS (tuition and fees) is lower than in the NCAA (tuition, fees, living expenses).</p>	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>Friday/Saturday game schedule will impact the physical wellbeing of student-athletes but decrease missed class time. Additional time commitment put on student-athletes in the spring term. May see an increase in scholarship requirements due to two semester commitments.</p>	
	<b>USPORTS</b>	<b>NCAA</b>
Budget Estimate	\$309,040	\$335,341
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	9.8	8
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	1) 3.5 (44% of maximum) 2) \$90,750 3) \$11,000
Schedule Timeline	October - March	September - December
# of Games	20 + CW Playoffs + U SPORTS Championship	24 + Regionals + Nationals
Roster size	16	16
Travel (Longest Trip)		Wash, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska, Montana (Fairbanks, Alaska)

### Additional Feedback Provided:

- "Different rules in NCAA volleyball including 15 unlimited substitutions, versus international rules with six or eight limited subs. We only play in our competitive season during the fall versus two semesters."
- "I would say the level of competition is comparable."
- "The experience in the NCAA it's more professional, it's just cooler."
- "I totally understand if there's political or administrative or financial reasons for leaving, but I don't know if they every could use student-athlete experience as a reason to go back to U SPORTS."
- "We are fortunate (versus some other SFU sports) that we still have a place to play (U SPORTS)."
- "My biggest fear is possible scholarship reduction."
- "We don't have a men's volleyball team so that affects the U SPORTS schedule (as most U SPORTS teams have men's and women's team). Regina also does not have a women's team."



## Men's and Women's Swimming

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	<p>U SPORTS does not set a competitive schedule. Achieving times allows you to attend Canada West and U SPORTS Championships. No minimum number of competitions are required.</p> <p>University students can train and compete with Club level swimmers in U SPORTS.</p> <p>Higher scholarship equivalency in U SPORTS, although the maximum allowable individual scholarship amount in U SPORTS (tuition and fees) is lower than in the NCAA (tuition, fees, living expenses).</p>	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>This maximizes flexibility in scheduling for U SPORTS programs, but could result in fewer competitive opportunities for student-athletes.</p> <p>Expected reduction in travel costs by eliminating 8-day travel to RMAC Conference Championships</p> <p>Opportunity to run a club model program that could support and enhance the varsity team.</p>	
	USPORTS	NCAA
Budget Estimate	Men: 404,850 Women: \$ Included in above (combined operating budget)	Men: \$439,350 Women: \$ Included in above (combined operating budget)
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	Men: 12.6 Women: 12.6	Men: 8.1 Women: 8.1
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	<p>Men:</p> <p>1) 3.14 (39% of maximum) 2) \$72,000 3) \$13,000</p> <p>Women:</p> <p>1) 2.9 (36% of maximum) 2) \$66,000 3) \$21,000</p>
Schedule Timeline	October - March	September - March
# of Competitions	Not set	Minimum 8 - Maximum 16
Roster size	21-23 per gender	18-20 per gender
Travel (Longest Trip)		Wash, California, Colorado, BC (Indianapolis)

Additional Feedback Provided:

- "I do see differences in the level of competition in the NCAA. I feel it's a more athletic-centric vision."
- "Everyone has to meet 12 credit hours as the minimum to be part of the team."
- "I feel the NCAA provides an environment supportive of coaches to provide a better environment for a student-athlete to be successful in school."
- "We are underfunded to be able to win in the NCAA...In the current model, we cannot be competitive."
- "NCAA schedule gives us deeper competition, more high-quality race reps, and clearer national benchmarks to chase..."
- "The main reason I chose to come here is for this unique opportunity and special experiences."
- "A move back to U SPORTS would definitely impact me mentally and likely financially regarding Canada's athlete scholarship system. It would be a big adjustment to say the least, however, I do understand that this is a consideration for everyone's well being and safety. If I get the chance to compete BOTH U SPORTS and the NCAA that would be great..."

## Men's and Women's Track & Field (Note: single combined budget for Track & Field & Cross Country)

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	<p>U SPORTS does not sponsor outdoor track.</p> <p>SFU has no indoor track facilities, limited local competition in BC. Does not include Olympic events 400M, 800M. Throws would no longer exist without Outdoor Track.</p> <p>No indoor track facilities in BC.</p> <p>Higher scholarship equivalency in U SPORTS, although the maximum allowable individual scholarship amount in U SPORTS (tuition and fees) is lower than in the NCAA (tuition, fees, living expenses).</p>	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>Loss of Outdoor Track.</p> <p>Not the same competitive experience for student-athletes. Student-athletes would move from an indoor and outdoor track season to an indoor-only season.</p> <p>Likely no change in coaching employment.</p> <p>Likely will need to compete in Washington state to get competitions.</p>	
	USPORTS	NCAA
Budget Estimate (combined budget for T&F and Cross Country)	Men: \$449,087 Women: \$ Included in above (combined operating budget). Cross country included in above.	Men: \$534,087 Women: \$ Included in above (combined operating budget). Cross country included in above.
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	Men: 20.3 Women: 20.3	Men: 8.1 Women: 8.1
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	<p>Men:</p> <p>1) 3.14 (39% of maximum) 2) \$72,000 3) \$13,000</p> <p>Women:</p> <p>1) 2.9 (36% of maximum) 2) \$66,000 3) \$21,000</p>
Schedule Timeline	December - February	Indoor (Jan-March)   Outdoor (March-May)
# of Competitions	6	Minimum 8 - Maximum 18
Roster size	27-30 per gender	27 - 30 per gender
Travel (Longest Trip)		Wash, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Cali. (Durango/Denver, Colorado)

### Additional Feedback Provided:

- "There is no outdoor track and field in U SPORTS, so a lot of our events would not be represented...we'd have to give up javelin, hammer, discus, 100 hurdles, 110 hurdles, etc."
- "Indoors (in U SPORTS) are all non Olympic events, It's like a 300 and a 600 instead of a 200 and 400..."
- "And while I understand that this isn't just about what we can do athletically, it's definitely a huge impact on our student-athlete experience."
- "The level and depth of competition is very different. The fact that we would lose many student-athletes is very concerning to me."
- "I have heard from many coaches in U SPORTS schools that it's very difficult for them to recruit because they are not offering any kind of full program..."
- "There are still people across Canada that don't know we are in the NCAA. So there's more work to be done."
- "We have really thrived in the NCAA."
- "The compliance and safeguards that we've put in place for the student-athletes has been really important."
- "A disadvantage is that we do not have an indoor facility."
- "The move (to U SPORTS) would be crushing for our program."
- "U SPORTS meets not being sanctioned by World Athletics means that I could not qualify for any of the important national teams I try out for."
- "I would lose the chance to compete in the 100m and 200m sprints during our collegiate season."
- "Being a part of the NCAA has given me experiences that go far beyond just playing sport. I came here because SFU offers something no other Canadian university does."
- "Please stay in the NCAA, it makes SFU special and brings out the best out of athletes like me."
- "This is my first year at SFU, and the reason I came to the school was the DII sports. If SFU moves to U SPORTS, I will have to look for another school to compete for because of the lack of opportunities U SPORTS provides for athletics."
- "Moving to U SPORTS would ruin the athlete experience and dismantle SFU T&F."
- "As a member of the track team, it would greatly impact our competitive seasons. No other school in Canada gives athletes the opportunity to compete in both indoors and outdoors. This would lead to the majority of track athletes transferring to other NCAA schools."
- "This would likely result in a loss of scholarship which would impact me significantly as I have to pay for school myself. This would be a catastrophic loss for myself and my fellow throwers."
- "NCAA allows me to compete at a high level in Canada without having to move to the United States, a decision that was very important to me given the social and political issues right now. The possibility of moving to U SPORTS now feels like a betrayal of the very reasons why we committed to SFU."
- "Moving to U SPORTS would take a real toll on both my mental and physical health..."

## Men's and Women's Cross Country

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	<p>A more limited number of schools in U SPORTS.</p> <p>Slightly lower scholarship equivalency in U SPORTS.</p>	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>Less competitive breadth, equals less developmental opportunities for student-athletes.</p> <p>Lower scholarship equivalencies combined with a lower individual ceiling for scholarships may impact finances for student-athletes currently at the top-end of the current NCAA ceiling.</p>	
	<b>USPORTS</b>	<b>NCAA</b>
Budget Estimate	Cross Country is included in the SFU Track & Field Budget.	Cross Country is included in the SFU Track & Field Budget
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	Men: 4.9 Women: 4.9	Men: 5 Women: 6
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	<p>Men:</p> <p>1) .54 (11% of maximum) 2) \$12,500 3) \$2,000</p> <p>Women:</p> <p>1) .60 (10% of maximum) 2) \$14,000 3) \$4,000</p>
Schedule Timeline	September - November	September - December
# of Competitions	2 + Post season	4 + Post season
Roster size	11-12 per gender	12-14 per gender
Travel (Longest Trip)		Wash, Oregon, Montana (Romeoville, IL)

### Additional Feedback Provided:

- "It would negatively impact the competition level, season training, events run, athletes competing and recruitment process for upcoming athletes."
- "This move would greatly alter my perspective of SFU athletics in a negative way and prevent me from donating to SFU Athletics."
- "It would limit my access to elite competitions and I would no longer gain the experience of travelling."

## Men's and Women's Wrestling

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	<p>Limited number of schools in U SPORTS support wrestling, so competition level is diminished versus NCAA.</p> <p>Different style of wrestling. Men's and women's teams compete in the same location in U SPORTS.</p> <p>Lower scholarship equivalency in U SPORTS.</p>	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>Less competitions equals less developmental opportunities for student-athletes.</p> <p>Shared travel reduces expenses.</p> <p>Potential to combine two full-time coaches with an integrated travel team (U SPORTS).</p> <p>Potential loss of one full-time coaching salary.</p> <p>Lower scholarship equivalencies combined with a lower individual ceiling for scholarships may impact finances for student-athletes currently at the top-end of the current NCAA ceiling.</p>	
	USPORTS	NCAA
Budget Estimate	Men: \$428,938 Women: \$ Included in above (combined operating budget)	Men: \$460,000 Women: \$ Included in above (combined operating budget)
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	Men: 7 Women: 5.6	Men: 9 Women: 10
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	<p>Men:</p> <p>1) 3.74(42% of maximum) 2) \$95,550 3) \$7,500</p> <p>Women:</p> <p>1) 3.23 (32% of maximum) 2) \$84,400 3) \$21,000</p>
Schedule Timeline	October - February	November - February
# of Competitions	8 + Post season	11 + Post season
Roster size	21 (M)   19 (W)	25 (M)   24 (W)
Travel (Longest Trip)		Wash, Oregon, Colorado (M: Golden, CO) (W: Denton, TX)

#### Additional Feedback Provided:

- "The men's and women's wrestling programs are two distinct kind of entities where we compete in different places. We wrestle different styles too at the NCAA for men and women — freestyle for the women, collegiate for the men."
- "Within the Canadian context, it is just freestyle, international style wrestling, and that's the Olympic variation of the sport."
- "Wrestling on the West Coast is growing. The plan is to look at potentially joining a California based conference that works on the West Coast (Mountain Pacific Sports Federation)."
- "The Rocky Mountain conference was really set up initially in terms of wrestling to just be for Colorado schools..."
- "There is a lot of variety in the competition, from DIII to DI."
- "(Mandatory) training for athletes and coaches adds a level of professionalism that enhances the athlete experience."
- "I transferred out of U SPORTS to SFU because the NCAA offers what U SPORTS couldn't: deeper competition, stronger support, and greater recognition..."
- "The unique NCAA schedule allows for our team to compete against many different programs."
- "This high-quality of competition has led to success not only within SFU's collegiate competition framework, but also on the national and international stage for SFU athletes. Burnaby Mountain Wrestling Club, the training group associated with the SFU varsity team, has produced countless Canadian national champions and Olympians."
- "On the academic side, the strict framework outlined by the NCAA in terms of compliance and academic standards results in academic success."
- "The depth and level is not the same. If we switched to U SPORTS, I would not compete under SFU so I could use my time to go to tournaments that would actually help me improve."
- "SFU's membership in another sports association would negatively impact my athletic career as well as my overall collegiate experience. As a female wrestler, there is a great deal of positive progress working in the sport right now, and while Canada is trying its best, most of the momentum is in American wrestling."
- "Travel to the U.S. is a pain in the ass."

## Men's and Women's Golf

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	U SPORTS does not sponsor golf. No competitive schedule in Canada West for CW championship.	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>Loss of SFU varsity status as sport does not progress to a U SPORTS national championship.</p> <p>Loss of sport for 18 student-athletes (9 male, 9 female).</p> <p>Loss of scholarship for 18 student-athletes (Men: \$25,000/year   Women: \$48,000/year).</p> <p>Loss of employment for one FT coach, two PT Assistant Coaches (\$155,000/year)</p> <p>Impact to alumni and people who have donated to endowments.</p> <p>Elimination of operating budget of approximately \$382,735/year.</p>	
	USPORTS	NCAA
Budget Estimate	Men: \$0 Women: \$0	Men: \$382,735 Women: \$ Included in above (combined operating budget)
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	N/A (Golf is not offered in U SPORTS)	Men: 3.6 Women: 5.4
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	<p>Men:</p> <p>1) .98 (27% of maximum) 2) \$30,000 3) \$15,000</p> <p>Women:</p> <p>1) 1.87 (35% of maximum) 2) \$45,500 3) \$8,000</p>
Schedule Timeline	September - October	September - May
# of Competitions	Declare to participate in CW Championship	Minimum 7 competitions for NCAA Championship
Roster size	9 (maximum 5 players per event)	9 (maximum 5 players per event)
Travel (Longest Trip)	BC, Alberta	Wash, Oregon, California (Hawaii)

### Additional Feedback Provided:

- "I would be heavily affected by SFU being a part of U SPORTS as that would affect my future job opportunities and chances to turn pro."
- "Being able to stay in my home country while competing at a very high level has such a big impact on the ability to pursue professional golf after university."
- "There is no incentive to come to SFU if we are not NCAA."
- "I would be forced to leave the team because there is no competitive golf in U SPORTS."



## Women's Softball

<b>Notable Differences:</b>	Women's softball is not sponsored by U SPORTS.	
<b>Impacts:</b>	<p>Loss of varsity status.</p> <p>Loss of sport for 20-22 student-athletes.</p> <p>Loss of scholarship for 20-22 student-athletes: \$71,000/year.</p> <p>Loss of employment for one FT coach, 2 PT Assistant Coaches (\$152,000)</p> <p>Impact to alumni and people who have donated to endowments, equipment, and facilities.</p> <p>Elimination of operating budget of approximately \$192,960/year</p>	
	<b>USPORTS</b>	<b>NCAA</b>
Budget Estimate	N/A	\$192,960
Scholarship Equivalency by Team	N/A (Softball is not offered by U SPORTS)	7.2
Scholarships Awarded (2024 Full-Year Actuals) 1) Equivalency 2) Total \$ Awarded 3) Max. Single Schol.	N/A	1) 3.39 (54% of maximum) 2) \$77,000 3) \$8,000
Schedule Timeline		February - May
# of Competitions		45
Roster size		20
Travel (Longest Trip)		(Los Lunas, NM)

### Additional Feedback Provided:

- "The obvious impact would be that we don't have anywhere to play."
- "Softball is a growing sport in our country, and each year you see more and more athletes going down to the U.S. to chase that dream."
- "I would say in B.C. there are two other legitimate options: NAIA and the Northwest Athletics Conference (NWAC), which is a junior college system."
- "I do not see club teams as an option."
- "There is no established U SPORTS league for softball, which means the program that I have been so proud to be a part of would be left in complete uncertainty."
- "Leaving the NCAA would end varsity softball and break the promise made to athletes who came for that experience, impacting our athletic, academic, and personal paths."

## 5.5 Competitive Sport Club Impacts and Adding New Teams

Moving to U SPORTS may have impacts on some competitive sport clubs including men's lacrosse, men's hockey, and women's rugby. The latter two are offered by Canada West and U SPORTS — thus providing a pathway to varsity status. The IC also reviewed feedback from alumni representatives of SFU football and field hockey, since both of these sports lead to U SPORTS national championships. SFU has been clear about the finality of its decision regarding the football program, however, a move to U SPORTS may ignite the debate about football at SFU.

Such a possibility is remote — and contemplating the addition of any new teams is ill-advised in the next five years at minimum given the current financial challenges at SFU. Moreover, transitioning an entire athletics program from the NCAA to U SPORTS would be a complex process and both energy and resources should be focused on supporting current student-athletes through this process if it is the chosen path. The Department also must codify its sport model, as identified in the strategic plan.

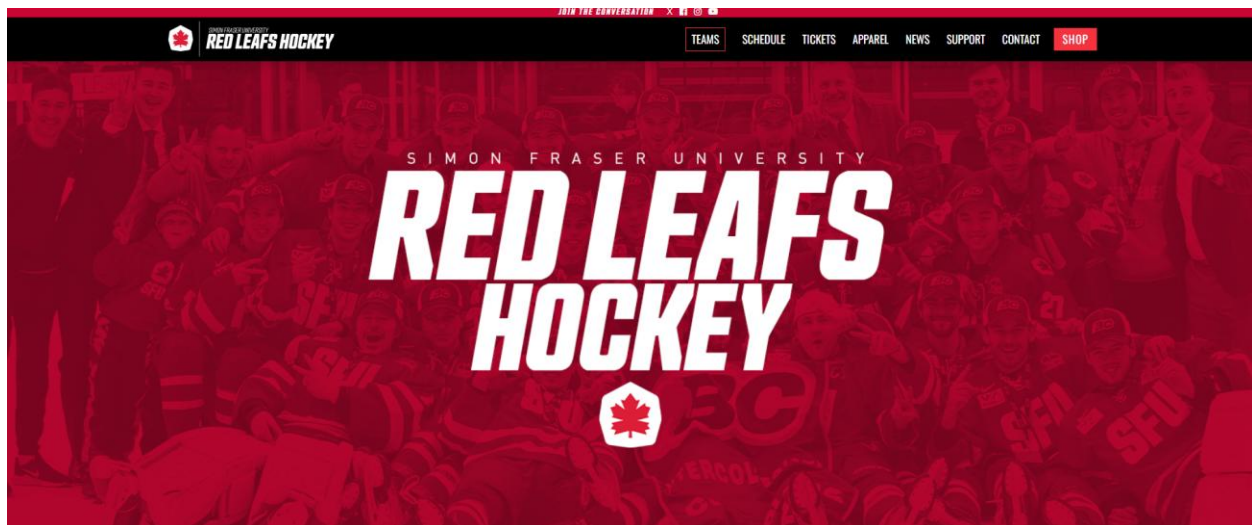
If SFU pursues membership in Canada West and U SPORTS it is important for the Department to get on sound financial and operational footing in the new governance structure without considering the immediate addition of other teams. This will allow the Department to fully understand and assess the costs of participating in Canada West and U SPORTS. Furthermore, the Department is committed to a transparent planning process to define its sport model moving forward that must define specific processes, funding models, and criteria to both add and remove sports. This may provide exciting opportunities for the Department to expand or modify its varsity footprint in the future under the right set of circumstances — but patience is required.

An important question that must be contemplated by SFU administration under a U SPORTS governance model is whether U.S.-based governance of SFU sport clubs is permitted. As well, is travel to the U.S. permitted for SFU varsity sports and competitive sport clubs — and, if so, under what conditions? It is commonplace for U SPORTS members to compete in exhibitions in the United States, and the fate of some existing competitive sport clubs will depend on whether continued participation in the United States is permitted.

## Men's Hockey Club

The men's hockey club currently operates two teams: a non-conference team that competes in exhibition games, including against NCAA DI opponents; and, a second team that competes locally in the British Columbia Intercollegiate Hockey League (BCHIL). Men's hockey at SFU — particularly the non-conference team — is well funded and has the presence and marketing of a varsity team. The team's aspirations have been made quite clear through media interviews, including, "The longtime head coach of the SFU Red Leafs men's club team told Postmedia in October 2023 that he thought a Red Leafs team could be a contender in Div. I within five years if it was upgraded to varsity status."<sup>87</sup>

Figure 8: SFU Red Leafs Hockey Website<sup>88</sup>



The website provides links to both the BCHIL and non-conference teams. The BCHIL was founded in 2006 including both university and college hockey teams and has "established standards consistent with other hockey conferences in North America both at the club and varsity level."<sup>89</sup> BCHIL members include "competitive teams that share a common sport-club template promoting long-term viability,

<sup>87</sup> The Province, "Could NCAA men's and women's hockey thrive at SFU? This coach thinks so." Online: [Could NCAA men's and women's hockey thrive at SFU? | The Province](#) [Last Accessed: 20 October 2025].

<sup>88</sup> SFU Hockey, "Simon Fraser University Red Leafs Hockey." Online: [SFU Red Leafs Hockey Club](#) [Last Accessed: 20 October 2025].

<sup>89</sup> British Columbia Intercollegiate Hockey League, "About Us." Online: [BC Intercollegiate Hockey League - Powered By esportsdesk.com](#) [Last Accessed: 20 October 2025].

academic success and high community impact."<sup>90</sup> SFU competes against teams including Vancouver Island University, University of Victoria, Okanagan Lakers, and the Logan Lake Miners. According to the BCHIL, "Since 2005 SFU has been a mainstay within the BC Intercollegiate Hockey League. Tied atop the BCIHL championship standings with UVIC with 5 banners, SFU is committed to advancing university club hockey within BC and Western Canada."<sup>91</sup>

The non-conference team competes in an extensive schedule of exhibition games across the United States against NCAA DI opponents such as Princeton University (NJ), Boston University (MA), Lake Superior State (MI), Long Island University (NY), Providence College (RI), and University of Alaska-Fairbanks (AK), among others. The team also competes against U SPORTS schools including UBC, Trinity Western University, and Vancouver Island University; SFU is on par competitively with these U SPORTS programs and has also enjoyed success against NCAA DI competition.

Team staff include a Head Coach, Assistant Coach, Goaltending Coach, Athletic Therapist, Equipment Manager, and Communications Manager which illustrates its operation akin to an SFU varsity team. These positions, however, are not subject to NCAA policies because the team is not sanctioned by the NCAA, although they participate extensively against NCAA DI opponents in games that are considered non-conference exhibitions. These opportunities for the SFU non-conference team do not lead to any form of championship as the team is not a member of any structured league. The singular vision is to pursue NCAA Division I membership as described herein.

A move to U SPORTS would have little impact on the second team that competes locally in the BCIHL. It is likely that the first team would cease to exist given the fact that no path exists to the NCAA DI. However, U SPORTS offers a path forward for men's and women's hockey, should there be student-athlete and alumni support. To reiterate, the addition of new SFU sports teams under a U SPORTS model is not feasible in the near term (5 years) as described herein, until the Department gets on sound financial footing and implements its sport model, with defined criteria to add and remove sports.

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<sup>90</sup> British Columbia Intercollegiate Hockey League, "About Us." Online: [BC Intercollegiate Hockey League - Powered By esportsdesk.com](https://www.bchil.ca/) [Last Accessed: 20 October 2025].

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

There has been significant fundraising and alumni investment in the men's hockey program, built on the club's NCAA DI aspirations. This fundraising and alumni support is at risk should the team not continue on its path to NCAA DI. The team operates and "travels like a varsity team," according to a team representative, including meals and other student-athlete support services; however, some of these services are privately contracted such as athletic therapy. According to a club official, "Our players are insured through the school as well as we have private insurance."

### Men's Lacrosse Club

The men's lacrosse club operates in the highly competitive Men's Collegiate Lacrosse Association (MCLA) as a club sport, where the team competes against top-tier NCAA DI and DII schools, including from California, Utah, and Florida. The MCLA is well-established with a long history, and many teams have been operating for decades. SFU is the only Canadian team in the MCLA and competes against schools including Washington State, Boise State, Oregon, and Oregon State, Stanford, among others.

The club is 97% self-funded, with a \$5,000 contribution from the Department (Recreation budget), and \$145,000 from player fees. SFU's location and travel challenges limit the club's ability to host games, which also has an impact on the club's competitive standing in the MCLA. According to a club representative, "we run our program as close to a varsity program as we can." Although the NCAA DII sponsors men's lacrosse (including the RMAC), the costs of participation are too exorbitant for an SFU varsity team, estimated by a club representative could exceed \$750,000.

As with other competitive sport clubs, it must be determined if men's lacrosse will be permitted to continue as a member of a U.S.-based league, in this case the MCLA, as well as the travel requirements and associated policies and procedures. A club representative emphasized the importance of maintaining the ability to travel for games and tournaments, as this is a critical aspect of the program's success.

A possible alternative is the Canadian University Field Lacrosse Association (CUFLA), but club representatives noted logistical challenges and financial limitations of doing so. The CUFLA is

comprised of a Western and Eastern Conference. The Western Conference is comprised of eight universities in Ontario, and the Eastern Conference includes four Ontario universities and two from Quebec. This likely would not provide a feasible option for the SFU Men's Lacrosse Club given the travel distances.

### Women's Rugby Club

The SFU women's rugby club stands as one of the university's most enduring and vibrant student-led sports organization. Established in 1965, the club provides opportunities for competitive play, personal development, and community engagement. Like other competitive clubs at SFU, it operates under the umbrella of SFU Recreation and is largely self-funded. "SFU Rugby is the largest sports club with more than 100 students, non-students, and alumni,"<sup>92</sup> according to SFU's independent student newspaper. Competition includes the Lower Mainland (e.g. Vancouver, East Vancouver, Maple Ridge, Langley), Fraser Valley (e.g. Chilliwack , as well as Kelowna.

SFU Women's Rugby competes in the British Columbia Rugby Union, commonly known as BC Rugby, the recognised governing body for Rugby union in the province of British Columbia.<sup>93</sup> The Club adheres to Rugby Canada and BC Rugby's safety protocols, including concussion management, injury prevention, and player welfare initiatives.

SFU Women's Rugby competes under the banner of "SFU RC", illustrated below, and has a robust social media presence.

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<sup>92</sup> The Peak, "SFU sport clubs you may have missed." Online: [SFU sports clubs you may have missed](#) [Last Accessed: 10 November 2025].

<sup>93</sup> BC Rugby, "About Us." Online: [About BC Rugby – BC Rugby](#) [Last Accessed: 10 November 2025].

Figure 9: Simon Fraser Rugby Club Profile (BC Rugby)<sup>94</sup>



It is not anticipated that repatriating to Canada would have any impacts on the current operations of the Women's Rugby Club. However, Club members may aspire to seek varsity status under a U SPORTS governance model as women's rugby leads to a U SPORTS national championship. As previously discussed, this is not something that is feasible in the short-term, and would have to be assessed within the Department's forthcoming sport model framework.

## 5.6 Financial Implications of Competing in U SPORTS

Membership in Canada West and U SPORTS has important financial implications for the university and Department, including significant one-time application costs of \$990,000 (Table 16). However, these one-time application costs are offset by potential annual savings to the university and Department of \$1,108,798. This includes as much as \$250,000 in annual savings to the university by eliminating the need for U.S. academic accreditation required by the NCAA. Cost savings to the Department is estimated to be approximately \$858,798 which includes the elimination of three programs, Softball and Men's and Women's Golf. Immediate savings from the elimination of these programs is \$575,695. Additional savings across the remaining 13 SFU sports, largely attributable to

<sup>94</sup> BC Rugby, "Simon Fraser Rugby Club Team Profile." Online: [Club Profile – BC Rugby](#) [Last Accessed: 10 November 2025].



reductions in travel costs, are estimated to be \$337,090. The additional savings per sport include no reductions in coaching and athlete support services in order to maintain existing levels of program quality and student-athlete support. However, additional cost savings are possible in some sports including coaching reductions in Wrestling whose competition format in U SPORTS includes a combined travel team. In similar sports currently in the SFU model such as Swimming and Golf, SFU employs one full-time coach.

**Table 16: Canada West and U SPORTS One-Time Application Fees**

Fee Category	CANWEST Fees	U SPORTS Fees
Basic Member Application Fees	\$100,000.00*	\$55,000.00^
Basketball-M	\$106,000.00	n/a
Basketball-W	\$106,000.00	n/a
Soccer-M	\$110,000.00	n/a
Soccer-W	\$110,000.00	n/a
Volleyball-W	\$119,000.00	n/a
Cross Country-M/W	\$36,000.00	n/a
Track & Field-M/W	\$89,000.00	n/a
Swimming-M/W	\$114,000.00	n/a
Wrestling-M/W	\$45,000.00	n/a
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$935,000.00</b>	<b>\$55,000.00</b>

\* Two installments, \$30,000 and \$70,000. Sport fees are calculated using a formula based on operating costs per sport. ^ Includes \$5,000 application fee and \$50,000 entrance fee upon acceptance.

**Table 17: Annual Fees - NCAA Division II v. U SPORTS**

Type of Fee	NCAA (USD)	GNAC + RMAC (USD)	U SPORTS (CDN\$)	CANWEST (CDN\$)
Basic Annual Membership Fee	\$900.00	\$32,000.00 \$6,750.00*	\$14,043.78	\$30,750.00
Basketball-M^			\$821.78	\$15,231.00
Basketball-W			\$405.10	\$15,234.00
Soccer-M			\$777.83	\$7,117.00
Soccer-W			\$635.13	\$6,728.00
Volleyball-W			\$838.43	\$9,044.00
Track & Field-M/W			\$1,489.36	\$628.00
Swimming-M/W			\$1,619.38	\$634.00
Track & Field-M/W			\$1,497.36	\$628.00
Wrestling-M/W			\$1,197.24	\$668.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$900.00</b>	<b>\$38,750.00</b>	<b>\$23,325.39</b>	<b>\$86,662.00</b>

\*RMAC fee represents the Associate Member's Fee for three sports (\$2,250/sport x women's wrestling, men's and women's swimming).

^ Total fees by sport include basic sport fee, coaching fee, and a branding fee.

- Fees subject to change and annual adjustments.



The recurring annual fees to participate in Canada West and U SPORTS in the 13 sports listed in Table 18 are \$109,987 (CDN). Corresponding fees in the NCAA, GNAC, and RMAC are \$39,650 (USD), approximately \$56,000 (CDN). This represents an increase of \$53,987 (CDN) in annual fees under the U SPORTS and Canada West governance model.

Financial operating estimates by SFU team to participate in Canada West and U SPORTS compared to the NCAA DII are summarized in Table 19.

**Table 18: SFU Varsity Team Estimated Annual Operating Estimates — NCAA v. U SPORTS**

Program	NCAA SFU Budget 2024-25	U SPORTS Estimated Budget*	Potential Savings	Percentage Savings
M-Basketball	\$473,331	\$430,331	\$43,000	9%
W-Basketball	\$430,393	\$389,818	\$40,575	9%
M-Soccer	\$413,553	\$368,751	\$44,802	11%
W-Soccer	\$349,285	\$317,435	\$31,850	9%
W-Volleyball	\$335,341	\$309,040	\$26,301	8%
W-Softball	\$192,960	\$0	\$192,960	100%
M+W Track and Field & Cross Country	\$534,087	\$449,087	\$85,000	16%
M+W Golf	\$382,735	\$0	\$382,735	100%
M+W Swimming	\$439,350	\$404,850	\$34,500	8%
M+W Wrestling	\$460,000	\$428,938	\$31,062	7%
Conference & Team Fees	\$56,000	\$109,987	(\$53,987)	(96%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,067,035</b>	<b>\$3,208,237</b>	<b>\$858,798</b>	<b>21%</b>

^ Excluding softball and golf, annual savings across the remaining 13 SFU sports would be \$337,090 (10% average savings per remaining sport).

### \*Methodology

U SPORTS budget projections were informed by confidential benchmarking information provided by UBC Athletics and Canada West. Limitations include the reliability and validity of data, and different institutional policies and operating procedures, including travel (e.g. number of persons per hotel room, drive vs. fly policies, per diem amounts, etc.). Additional limitations include any substantive changes to U SPORTS schedules and championships in the future that could impact these projections, and location of national championships. As such, there is likely to be some variance between actuals and potential savings should SFU gain membership into Canada West and U SPORTS. Estimated program operating costs in U SPORTS include coaching (HC + AC), regular season travel, exhibition travel, championship travel, and other team operating costs. There is the possibility for additional cost savings if/when teams do not proceed to a U SPORTS Championship as each team budget includes a reserve for championship travel. The SFU Department of Athletics was consulted for input regarding these projections to ensure that estimates reflect current operating practices and standards of student-athlete support.

Based on these estimates, the Department has the potential to save \$858,798 in annual sport operating costs by moving from the NCAA to U SPORTS. The majority of this saving is through discontinuation of men's and women's golf, and softball which saves \$575,695. It is estimated that in the remaining 13 sports, \$337,090 in savings could be realized. This represents approximately 10% savings in annual sport operating costs in the remaining 13 sports.

**Table 19: Total Estimated Annual Costs for Department — NCAA v. U SPORTS**

(all fees in CDN\$)

Cost	NCAA (current budget - 16 teams)	U SPORTS /CW (13 teams)	Comments
Sport Operating Costs	\$4,011,039	\$3,098,244	Includes discontinuation of men's and women's golf and softball.
Annual membership fees	\$56,000	\$109,987	Includes conference and sport fees.
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,067,035</b>	<b>\$3,208,237</b>	<b>\$858,798 in savings (21%)</b>

## 5.7 Values and Philosophy

**"I am deeply concerned about the equity implications and the inclusion implications of this. I find this very offensive as a Canadian and it doesn't align with my values as a senior leader at one of Canada's finest public universities." - SFU administrator**

Values and philosophy emerged as a strong theme as it concerns the implications of participating in the United States versus Canada. Most senior university leaders, faculty, and staff who provided feedback expressed serious concerns about a misalignment of values between SFU and the current political and legal environment in the United States. For example, "Allowing SFU's good name to be aligned with the policies that are so anti EDI right now is disturbing and hard to explain." And, "As a publicly funded institution, we have a role to uphold the values of civic society in British Columbia." The two primary areas of concern include human rights and the professionalization of the NCAA. Few student-athletes or alumni expressed similar concerns and are more focused on the loss of competitive opportunities.

The professionalization of the NCAA, including revenue sharing, NIL, and the transfer portal are reshaping the concept of amateurism in the collegiate sector in the United States. Although the impacts of these changes are being felt most acutely at the Division I level, impacts are also evident in Division II. There is tremendous uncertainty as to how these changes will impact NCAA DII in the future which creates operational uncertainty for SFU.

The most impassioned arguments against participating in the NCAA include the impacts of U.S. policy decisions involving the erosion of human rights and the cascading effects on NCAA governance and the experience of marginalized groups. This theme is captured in the following statement made by an SFU administrator:

"This whole shift in the United States right now is very worrying for me in terms of sexual and gender minorities, especially those who have faced so much stigma. It's that silent minority that doesn't even feel welcome. Should we have an instance of somebody not being able to cross the border or being treated badly in the U.S; I'm worried about that, of course, but even more worried about who's not going to show up. Because we're putting our good (SFU) name together with a U.S.-based regime that is headed in a direction that doesn't align with our values."

The IC interviewed an SFU professor who is an internationally recognized expert on female eligibility policies, including gender equity and transgender inclusion policies. The professor shared concerns about the safety for SFU student-athletes travelling to the U.S., in particular international students and students that may include LGBTQ, transgender, and racialized athletes. These concerns are the result of U.S. government policies, executive orders, and enforcement efforts in the United States as discussed herein. This has led to high profile cases of harassment and detention. Few student-athletes or coaches expressed concerns for their safety, and no issues related to cross-border travel have been reported as far as the IC is aware.

Several other senior leaders and staff members expressed similar concerns about participating in the NCAA. For example, "We must be committed to upholding SFU's values and ensure that student-athletes are not put in a position where they feel unwelcome."

The professor, among others, also emphasized the importance of complying with the British Columbia Human Rights Code. In addition to consequences for transgender women athletes, the professor expressed concerns about "the unintended consequences of anti-trans laws and rhetoric in the United States, such as harassment of cisgender girls in sport based on physical characteristics such as body weight, height, and muscularity." They discussed the disproportionate harassment faced by women's basketball players, including death and rape threats, hatred, misogyny, and racism. Lauren Betz, a 6'7" cisgender woman who plays basketball at UCLA, was cited as an example of an athlete who has faced such harassment.

Among the various impacts of considering the NCAA or U SPORTS as the preferred conference for SFU athletics, the professor and others emphasized the most important criterion in making such a decision should be protecting all SFU student-athletes. This should take primacy over all other financial and competitive factors. "We cannot keep our athletes safe, and I think that knowingly putting our athletes at risk, even if it meant only five of them at risk, is counter to SFU's values and fiduciary responsibility."

#### Staff & Faculty Concerns About Travel to U.S.

Several SFU staff and faculty expressed concerns about travelling to the United States for conferences and other professional development and work obligations. This includes Department staff who are required to travel to the U.S. to support their job function as a member of the NCAA.

Travel advisories issued by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) illustrate these concerns. In April 2025, the CAUT released updated travel advice "due to the 'political landscape' created by the Trump administration and reports of some Canadians encountering difficulties while crossing the border." In its advisory, the CAUT states: "Travellers leaving or returning to Canada, particularly those traveling to the U.S., are increasingly vulnerable to preclearance zones and border searches that may compromise research confidentiality and academic freedom... the CAUT strongly recommends that members considering travel to the U.S. review options for remote attendance and

travel only if necessary." The CAUT recommended that academics who fall into the following categories "exercise particular caution when considering travel to the U.S.:"

- Citizens or residents of a country identified in media reports as likely to be subject to a travel ban
- Citizens or residents of a country where there are diplomatic tensions with the U.S.
- Travellers with passport stamps evidencing recent travel to countries that may be subject to a travel ban or where there are diplomatic tensions with the U.S.
- Those who have expressed negative opinions about the current U.S. administration or its policies
- Those whose research could be seen as being at odds with the position of the current U.S. administration
- Travellers who identify as transgender or whose travel documents indicate a sex other than their sex assigned at birth.

It reasons that student-athletes who may fall into these same categories of CAUT members should also exercise caution when considering travel to the U.S. Warnings also have been issued from Global Affairs, Canada, including the following:

"The Canadian government is warning citizens who list 'X' as their gender on their passports could have problems entering the U.S. and other countries. In a change made in recent days, the Department of Global Affairs added an advisory to its United States travel advice page for 2SLGBTQ+ Canadian passport holders. 'While the Government of Canada issues passports with an 'X' gender identifier, it cannot guarantee your entry or transit through other countries,' it wrote. 'You might face entry restrictions in countries that do not recognize the 'X' gender identifier.' The notice advises that Canadians 'may still be asked to provide your sex/gender information as either male or female when travelling.'"<sup>95</sup>

### SFU Faculty Association

In an opinion editorial in the Globe and Mail, the executive director of the SFU Faculty association and adjunct professor of Labour Studies together with the director of Labour Relations for the SFU Faculty Association expressed their concerns about SFU's continued participation in the NCAA.

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<sup>95</sup> CBC, "Canada issues warning for citizens with gender-neutral passports travelling to U.S." Online: [Canada issues warning for citizens with gender-neutral passports travelling to U.S. | CBC News](#) [Last Accessed: 24 October 2025].

"Today, SFU's membership in the NCAA is once again drawing criticism and leading to calls to withdraw and re-invest in Canadian athletics. The original concern – to stand alone with the American league rather than join all other Canadian universities in collegiate sport – remains, but Mr. Trump has provided still more urgent reasons for SFU to reconsider. SFU's continued involvement in the NCAA not only runs counter to efforts to prioritize our national autonomy, at a time when Mr. Trump is threatening the country's sovereignty, but actively threatens the human rights and security of Canada's student athletes."<sup>96</sup>

The article cites "the general risk to all students" in the U.S, including the implications of threatened travel bans and other restrictions on people from 43 countries. This elicited public statements by several Canadian universities "including the University of Toronto, McGill, and the University of British Columbia, who noted the threat this action poses to both students and faculty on temporary visas, whose recognized legal status could not presumed to be respected by American authorities."

The article also raises specific concerns about SFU's continued membership in the NCAA that is "in direct conflict with Canada's Human Rights Act, which was amended in 2016 to include gender identity and gender expression as protected grounds, and with the B.C. Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

### SFU Petition

A petition, entitled "SFU Response to NCAA Ban on Transgender Women in Women's Sports," was addressed to various SFU senior leaders. The petition was signed by 286 individuals, including 167 SFU faculty and staff members and expressed "our concerns about the implications of the recent NCAA policy announcement banning transgender women from participating in women's sports." The petition calls upon SFU to consider these policy changes "to inform SFU's next steps in response to this NCAA policy change."

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<sup>96</sup> The Globe and Mail, "Canada has a proud tradition of collegiate sports. So why is Simon Fraser University still a member of the NCAA?" Online: [Canada has a proud tradition of collegiate sports. So why is Simon Fraser University still a member of the NCAA? - The Globe and Mail](#) [Last Accessed: 24 October 2025].

## 5.7 Additional Feedback - SAAC and SFSA

The IC interviewed representatives of both the SFU Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) and the Simon Fraser Student Society (SFSA), for their perspectives. SAAC representatives expressed support for continuing in the NCAA, which is consistent with the survey feedback provided in this report. In addition, the SAAC informed the IC that they had implemented an internal student-athlete survey for feedback. The IC was not provided with a copy of the survey results. However, it is expected that the SAAC survey likely includes many of the key themes and student-athlete impacts summarized in this report.

The SFSA represents the broader interests of all students - about 37,000 in total, including 30,000 undergraduate students.<sup>97</sup> The SFSA executives expressed their appreciation for being a part of the process as it relates to the IC's work. The SFSA is comprised of representatives of "every department, faculty, and constituency groups," as explained by the representatives. As advocates for all SFU students, the SFSA expressed support for the student-athlete community who would be most directly impacted by leaving the NCAA.

At the time of the IC's interview with the SFSA, the executives who were interviewed indicated that "we have yet compiled our opinions within the executive team and also within a council." The terms of reference for the IC's work did not include consultation with the non-athlete student community at SFU who are less directly impacted than student-athletes and who may hold diverse opinions. The two likely impacts on SFU students broadly include financial impacts and campus culture. Because SFU students fund the Department of Athletics and Recreation through student fees, a decision to remain in the NCAA would likely have financial impacts through higher fees. Competing in Canada West and U SPORTS would provide greater opportunities for home fan engagement which can impact campus culture.

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<sup>97</sup> Simon Fraser University, "Facts and Figures." Online: [SFU Facts & Figures - Communicators Toolkit - Simon Fraser University](#) [Last Accessed: 16 November 2025]

- End of Report -