



“THE SOUTHLAND STANDARD”

THE SOUTHLAND CONFERENCE STRATEGIC PLAN

SPRING 2018

THE SOUTHLAND STANDARD

VISION STATEMENT

The Southland Conference shall strive to be a premier Division I Conference by leveraging institutional collaborations to accomplish academic success and athletics excellence.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Southland Conference shall achieve the highest level of academic success, including the establishment of policies and procedures that encourage, support, and promote academic accomplishments, including the graduation of its student-athletes; and, to competitively perform in an exemplary manner in all sports, striving for Conference championships in order to participate successfully in NCAA championships.

CORE VALUES

The member institutions of the Southland Conference shall operate intercollegiate athletics programs within a structure of shared core values:

- **EXCELLENCE**
- **STUDENT-ATHLETE FOCUSED**
- **INTEGRITY**
- **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**
- **SPORTSMANSHIP**
- **FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY**

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STRATEGIC EMPHASIS AREAS

The member institutions of the Southland Conference have identified eight areas of emphasis in the strategic plan:

- **ACADEMICS**

The Conference's academic image shall be enhanced as member institutions meet all NCAA Academic Performance Program standards, and annually receive an NCAA academic achievement financial unit beginning with the 2019-20 distribution. Institutional academic departments shall collaborate in an effort to collectively improve student-athletes' scholastic performance toward the ultimate goal of graduation.

- **COMPETITION**

The Conference membership shall be competitively successful in Division I athletic endeavors, achieving multiple qualifications into NCAA Championships, and shall strive for a Ratings Percentage Index (RPI) ranking of 20 or better among the 32 Division I conferences. Members shall also have expectations for competition under the guidance of exemplary sportsmanship by all athletic participants, support staff and spectators.

- **MEMBERSHIP**

The Conference shall be responsive to national realignment by proactively evaluating impacts on the league and its members. In considering possible new members, the Conference shall only consider high-quality institutions that enhance the league's overall value. While considering the image of the Conference while attracting new institutions of strong academic and competitive standing, the Conference shall also remain focused on retention of current members.

- **STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE**

The Conference and its membership shall improve the total student-athlete experience by improving regular and postseason competition in all sports. This is achieved through increasing exposure of student-athlete accomplishments, enhancing life skills programming and setting a standard of excellence in health and safety.

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STRATEGIC EMPHASIS AREAS

The member institutions of the Southland Conference have identified eight areas of emphasis in the strategic plan:

- **MARKETING AND BRANDING**

The Conference shall increase its brand recognition on a local, regional and national level through a variety of traditional and new platforms, and will actively promote institutional and individual student-athlete success in academics, athletics and community service.

- **GOVERNANCE, OPERATIONS AND POSITIONING**

The Conference shall maintain the high standards of integrity and NCAA compliance, and ensure that appropriate input exists in the decision-making process for all entities involved in Conference governance. Further, Conference members shall be active in national governance issues through NCAA committee service.

- **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

The Conference and its membership shall be recognized as leaders within Division I in promoting a commitment to diversity and inclusion in its hiring practices and all other operations, and also be an active participant in the NCAA's Diversity and Inclusion initiatives.

- **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

The Conference and its membership shall ensure that all athletic departments are funded appropriately to succeed in NCAA Division I, including a commitment to fully-funding scholarships in all sports. The Conference shall also work collaboratively with the membership to establish opportunities for increased revenue and a reduction in institutional expenditures where possible.

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ACADEMICS

Outcomes:

- **Member institutions shall strive for exemplary graduation rates of its student-athletes.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Integrity)*
- **Member institutions will annually meet NCAA Academic Performance Program standards for postseason competition.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Member institutions will annually receive an NCAA academic achievement unit when distribution begins in 2019-20.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Fiscal Responsibility)*
- **Increased collaboration will occur between institutional, non-athletics department, academic units (i.e., faculty and staff) of conference members.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Member institutions shall actively participate in national recognition programs for student-athlete academic success (e.g., NCAA Postgraduate Scholarships, NCAA Woman of the Year, NCAA Walter Byers Scholarship, National Football Foundation Scholar-Athlete, etc.)** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **The academic reputation and image of the conference will be enhanced as its members will all be SACSCOC-accredited.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Integrity)*

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ACADEMICS

Objectives:

- The Conference shall develop an academic consortium of personnel from each campus, singularly focused on student-athlete academic success, meeting for the first time in the summer of 2019.
- All athletic teams shall earn a four-year average NCAA Academic Progress Rate of 985 or higher; or all athletic programs shall earn an overall athletic department NCAA Graduation Success Rate of 90 percent; or all athletic programs shall achieve a Federal Graduation Rate within athletics that is 13 percentage points higher than the institution's general student body.
- The membership shall develop a sharing and bonus plan for the new NCAA Academic Distribution.
- The membership shall develop and share best practices to achieve collective academic success.
- The membership shall explore additional reward opportunities for academic achievement.
- The Conference shall seek collaborative methods for academic achievement with regional partners such as other conferences and Division I institutions.
- The Conference, through its various media platforms, shall actively promote the academic successes of its member programs and student-athletes, and shall seek available opportunities to do the same on campuses.
- The Conference shall identify assistance programs to ensure members can achieve academic success, and if necessary, shall actively participate in NCAA programming focused on low-resourced institutions.

Tasks:

- Develop an annual or biennial Academic Consortium meeting shall include academic personnel from athletic departments, campuses (Provosts, Deans, Directors, Faculty, etc.), NCAA academic staff and other guests of importance. The sole purpose of the consortium meeting is the academic well-being and success of student-athletes, developing best practices and outcomes that meet the goals and objectives above.
- Seek formal or informal gatherings for regional partners (e.g., Division I conferences, institutions) to review best practices, other developments and ideas related to academic success.
- Continue recently-developed annual Conference Academic Performance Award, develop annual APR academic team honor per sport, and publicly honor the academic staffs of high-performing athletic departments.
- Encourage in-person or video interaction of campus academic staffs in the Conference.
- Create Conference medallion for graduating student-athletes as a keepsake and for display during commencement exercises.
- Explore need for on-campus academic review program similar to cycle of Conference compliance reviews.
- Utilize influence of campus SAACs to encourage better overall academic performance. Institutional Athletic Councils shall encourage SAAC interaction.
- Increase Conference office/Campus participation in national and regional academic awards programs for student-athletes.
- Establish Conference-wide monitoring/assessment plan for successful outcomes.

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COMPETITION

Outcomes:

- **Strive for one conference member in men's and women's basketball, in addition to the automatic qualifiers, receiving a NCAA tournament bid.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Qualify two or more members annually in the FCS postseason football competition.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Strive to have NCAA at-large selections and multiple postseason berths in all sports.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Achieve Conference RPI of 20 or better in all sports.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Promote exemplary sportsmanship by student-athletes, coaching staff members, and fans at regular and postseason competitions.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Integrity, Sportsmanship)*

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COMPETITION

Objectives:

- BKB: Develop a Conference basketball improvement strategic plan encompassing coaching, scheduling, operations, branding and marketing.
- BKB: All Conference men's and women's basketball teams shall strengthen Ratings Percentage Index (RPI) to 200 or better.
- BKB: All Conference men's and women's basketball teams shall explore and contract with Multi-Team Events (that provide more home games) in non-conference play.
- BKB: Explore basketball scheduling partnerships with peer conferences (and higher-ranked conference as RPIs improve).
- BKB: Develop competitive criteria, primarily in the area of scheduling, for all men's and women's basketball programs to follow.
- BKB: Increase likelihood of best performing basketball teams having advantage to receive NCAA Tournament bid.
- BKB: Increase the involvement of athletics directors in developing more competitive non-conference scheduling.
- FB: Develop football competitive criteria, primarily non-conference scheduling that values prominent FCS competition.
- FB: Recommend eight-game Conference schedule to facilitate upgraded non-conference schedules.
- ALL: Evaluate existing sportsmanship policies and develop and encourage best practices within membership.

Tasks:

- New Deputy Commissioner hire will oversee Conference basketball operations, including development of competitive success strategies.
- Develop a two- or three-year RPI opponents' grid to ensure Conference basketball teams play quality non-conference teams to meet RPI objectives (subject to NCAA metric changes).
- Explore alternatives to current scheduling models for cost containment.
- Develop core scheduling model for each conference sport.
- The Conference should review and determine maximum number of non-Division I games played by men's and women's basketball teams, and review number and/or cap "guarantee games" required of teams.
- Continue stair-stepped Tournament bracket to ensure top seeds have earned competitive advantage after 18-game Conference schedule.
- Athletic directors should approve non-conference basketball schedule based on Conference's developed minimum criteria.
- Athletic directors should leverage professional relationships to encourage better basketball scheduling opportunities.
- Develop football competitive criteria, such as scheduling only DI non-conference opponents by no later than 2021, and exploring eight-game conference schedules to add prominent FCS opponents.
- Develop football scheduling partnership with peer FCS conference(s) once eight-game Conference schedule is established.
- In addition to year-end McCarty Citizenship Awards, develop sport-by-sport Conference sportsmanship awards, promote individual and team sportsmanship achievements through Conference's traditional and social media platforms, and form sportsmanship committee to develop new/changing expectations.
- Consider 20-game Conference basketball schedule, with games before Christmas, to limit non-DI games (to an allowable a maximum of two), thus improve RPIs.
- Establish Conference-wide monitoring/assessment plan for successful outcomes.

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MEMBERSHIP

Outcomes:

- **Be responsive to national realignment and evaluate impact on Conference.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Enhance the Conference's overall value by only considering high-quality incoming Conference members.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Improve regional and national image of Conference by attracting new institutions of strong academic standing and athletic success, while also focused on the retention of existing conference members.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*

Objectives:

- Evaluate annually the process for the additions or departures of potential or existing conference members.
- Amend new membership criteria to include that all incoming members must be fully funded to NCAA maximum scholarship limits in the sports of football, volleyball, men's and women's basketball, baseball, and softball.
- Retain membership at no less than 12 and preferably an even number of conference members.
- Ensure that the academic qualifications of incoming members are primary factors in membership selection.
- Ensure that the geographic locations are primary factors in membership selection.
- Evaluate the challenges and needs of current conference members and assist them in order to promote member retention.
- Ensure continued collective academic success to solidify current membership and attract interest.

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MEMBERSHIP

Tasks:

- Commissioner keeps constant watch on developing membership changes in Division I, reports movements to Board and other administrative groups.
- Commissioner proactively plans for national movement that impacts Southland, perhaps triggering league membership changes.
- Should current membership first meet fully-funded standard placed on possible incoming members?
- Ensure that the academic qualifications and geographic locations of incoming members are primary factors in membership selection.
- Potential new members shall enhance their membership possibilities by meeting the revised Conference APR standards as detailed in the strategic plan.
- Football sponsorship should be mandatory for new membership.
- Research academic standing of potential members, including NCAA Academic Performance Program results.
- Explore future sports sponsorship opportunities, such as beach volleyball, to ensure membership is maintained.
- Continue to build promotional opportunities through all platforms, especially known and emerging social media outlets.
- Continue growth of digital broadcasting opportunities (such as ESPN3) for all sports to enhance membership.
- Establish Conference-wide monitoring/assessment plan for successful outcomes.

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STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

Outcomes:

- **Improve the total experience surrounding conference regular and postseason competition for all student-athletes in all sports.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Increase exposure of student-athletes in on-campus conference competitions.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Enhance life skills programming at each conference member.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Set a standard of excellence in student-athlete health and safety.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*

Objectives:

- The Conference will develop a set of Best Practices in the following areas:
 1. Championships
 2. Life Skills
 3. Time-off/Time management
 4. Mental Wellness
 5. AT/Medical Services
 6. Nutrition
 7. Career Services
- Expand the championship handbook to include more criteria regarding the student-athlete experience (e.g., welcome signage, greeters, etc.).
- Evaluate and revise standards and criteria required for the hosting of Conference championship events.
- Monitor potential implications to Conference members on recent legislative changes in student-athlete time demands.
- Increase visibility of on-campus athletics events — An institutional Best Practices review.
- Consolidate resources among Conference members to develop more life skills programming, increase distribution of NCAA life skills materials (e.g., leadership and service opportunities), and expand awareness of on-line materials from NCAA National Office.
- Develop strategies to improve Conference-wide sports medicine support at competitions.
- Develop post-championships student-athlete feedback instrument.

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STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE

Tasks:

- Continue the review of championships criteria to achieve excellence and consistency — New Deputy Commissioner will oversee process that's already begun.
- Should be strict adherence to the Conference's championship requirements by host institutions and local communities, ensuring best practices and experience desired by membership. Members must be committed to meeting championship expectations.
- New championships hosts (or an institution's first hosting opportunity in last five years) must undergo advance orientation by Conference staff.
- For appropriate planning purposes, Members/Host Communities should attend previous year's championship event if never served as host (or haven't hosted same event in previous five years).
- Should have better integration of social media on-site. Championship sites must be required have Internet and wireless access capabilities.
- Conference should provide more Southland-branded giveaways.
- Neutral sites for championships shall only be considered when a neutral venue would provide a special opportunity/experience "above and beyond" what an institutional host might provide for event participants.
- Develop best practice scheduling strategies to minimize extended travel and ensure more time for student-athletes on campus.
- Review postseason championships schedules to minimize the impact on final exam periods.
- Continued growth of digital broadcasting (ESPN3, etc.) opportunities for championships.
- Develop broad marketing, promotional events plan on each campus, and targeting students as an important institutional Best Practice.
- Develop institutional professional development/job fair events for graduating student-athletes.
- Collectively contract with presenters that address important life skills subject matter for student-athlete audiences; purchase life skills materials for membership distribution, and be more attentive and responsive to the NCAA's offers of life skills materials for distribution.
- Mandate annual summer meeting of campus sports medicine directors, staffs, exploring collective presentations/initiatives that assist in developing improved sports medicine coverage in the Conference. Key areas of focus are mental health and eating disorder identification methods.
- Establish Conference-wide monitoring/assessment plan for successful outcomes.

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MARKETING AND BRANDING

Outcomes:

- **Increase Conference brand recognition on a local, regional and national level.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*
- **Actively promote institutional and individual student-athlete academic, competitive and community services success stories.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused)*

Objectives:

- Increase quality and volume of video production of Conference competition on each campus with the intent to have campus coverage via over-the-top (OTT) productions (e.g., ESPN3 or other similar companies) by 2021 in football, men's basketball, women's basketball, volleyball, baseball, and softball.
- Develop strategies using social media to reach existing and potential constituent groups.
- Increase branding of Conference at on-campus competitions.
- Enforce existing bylaws concerning conference branding and develop system of fines for non-compliance.

Tasks:

- Require campuses to provide quality digital broadcast coverage (e.g. ESPN3) of listed sports by no later than 2020-21.
 - Assessment of memberships needs to accomplish such should be made by Southland office or outside consultant.
 - Minimum standards and consistent, professional "look" should be met.
 - Conference develops a financial plan to achieve this/Consider shift or reallocation of funds to assist.
- Review other digital opportunities for all sports as technology develops (e.g. Facebook Live).
- Digitally-feed video highlights, interviews to understaffed local, regional and national television partners.
- Meet with Missouri Valley Conference or other leagues/officials to help determine a strategy to bring digital broadcast productions to every campus, perform member-by-member evaluations to determine equipment/staff needs, and perhaps identify one company that can help integrate equipment workflows for each member.
- The Conference shall hire a new digital/social staff position and create team/committee from member schools to assess branding/social media efforts of Conference and institutions.
 - Conference should develop social media strategies that membership is fully aware of to promote effectively.
 - More prominent social media promotion of the best things in Conference: hottest teams, athletes and events rather than equal distribution/fairness of promotion.
 - More staffing at championship events specifically to increase social media presence.
- Continue producing a Southland Conference branding, style and usage guide.
- Include Conference marks prominently displayed at all playing facilities.
- Require Conference logo on promotional schedule posters.
- Develop Conference banner program of all conference members at all basketball facilities.

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MARKETING AND BRANDING

Tasks, continued:

- Add additional Conference content for stadium and arena video boards, etc.
- Conference should develop digital marketing kit and/or video promotion kit (video boards). Updated quarterly or each semester.
- Conference should instruct membership on how to promote league with member publications, posters, schedule cards, video board and other materials.
- Consideration of a video production position at the Conference office with a production room.
 - Receive and disseminate video clips to and from membership and other outlets.
- Establish Conference-wide monitoring/assessment plan for successful outcomes.

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GOVERNANCE, OPERATIONS AND POSITIONING

Outcomes:

- **Maintain the high standards of integrity and NCAA compliance among conference members.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Diversity and Inclusion, Integrity, Fiscal Responsibility)*
- **Ensure appropriate input exists in the decision-making process for all entities involved in Conference governance (e.g., Presidents, FAR, AD, SWA, SAAC).** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Diversity and Inclusion, Fiscal Responsibility)*
- **Sustain a high level of Conference participation in the NCAA Division I governance system, including frequent league nominations for national administrative and sports committee vacancies.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Diversity and Inclusion)*

Objectives:

- Increase interaction between Athletics Directors and Presidents by conducting an annual joint meeting.
- Develop efforts (e.g., survey) to identify the needs of and assist Conference members in their on-campus compliance efforts. Provide Conference's new compliance director time to develop credibility with membership. Further, this should be a priority for the new Deputy Commissioner position.
- Ensure allocation/utilization of conference funds is based upon conference goals developed through the decision-making and governance processes.
- Keep Conference membership engaged in NCAA matters with numerous nominations of its administrators and coaches to national committees.
- Maintain the student-athlete voice is active and meaningful in Conference matters, ensuring the league-wide and campus Student-Athlete Advisory Committees are focused on issues such as NCAA student-athlete matters, issues of well-being, academic success and community service.
- Increase the use of uniform processes and forms in the reporting of information to and among members and the Conference office.

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GOVERNANCE, OPERATIONS AND POSITIONING

Tasks:

- Survey membership and encourage discussion on the effectiveness of Conference's governance model (Board-Council-Committees), ensuring the league's administrators are effectively involved in all matters.
- Better define role of the Conference's compliance officer.
- Assess current method of distribution & education of materials provided to Conference members.
- Develop an annual timeline for submission of Conference documents.
- Develop fall joint meeting with presidents and athletic directors. Meeting could include NCAA guests/other notable presenters. Determine whether other joint meetings with additional groups are beneficial.
- All Conference processes/forms digitized.
- Elicit views on the implementation of ACS and/or JumpForward (a combination or mandate use of only one).
- Standard procedures and "look" to how we do things (forms/processes).
- Conference office will actively nominate interested administrators and coaches that can represent the league and its members in the NCAA governance structure. Further, national committee members will be expected to actively inform membership of issues of importance

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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Outcomes:

- **Be recognized as a leader among Division I conferences in promoting a commitment of conference members and the conference office to diversity and inclusion in its hiring practices.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Diversity and Inclusion, Integrity)*
- **Become a regular participant in NCAA Diversity and Inclusion initiatives.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Diversity and Inclusion, Integrity)*

Objectives:

- Establish (“encourage” or “recognize”) the designation of a senior minority athletics administrator on each Conference member’s campus.
 - Welcome other guidance with this and have discussion points to share.
- Develop methods to share information, including best practices, among conference members (e.g., encourage utilization of organizations that provide resumes or other referral materials for men’s and women’s positions such as Women Leaders in Athletics – formerly NACWAA, and Minorities Opportunities Athletic Association (MOAA), NCAA’s Committee on Women’s Athletics (CWA), and the NCAA’s Minority Opportunities and Interests Committee (MOIC).

Tasks:

- Request more presidential feedback on this objective.
- In addition to possible designation of position, develop standardized duties? Developed as a formal Conference committee reporting to Council?
 - The working group believes this ties into the first objective and has a direction in its discussion points. It was believed that creation of this position would need to come from the Presidents (along with a financial plan for this position).
- Encourage broad membership of potential campus members in diverse and inclusive organizations.
- Develop grant program by Conference and members to ensure memberships in national organizations that promote diversity/inclusion.
 - Encourage grant programs utilizing social media/public service announcements. Include SAAC (Conference and institutional) in messaging/education efforts.
- Establish a direct rapport with institutional offices of Diversity and Inclusion to enhance their campus athletic programs for student-athletes and staffs. Standardized reporting to the Conference of what programs/services that are being provided.
- Greater involvement and application to NCAA Diversity and Inclusion programming, including its Minority Coaches Series, the Achieving Communication Success Workshop, and its Minority Leadership Education program.

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FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Outcomes:

- **Ensure athletic departments are funded appropriately to succeed in NCAA Division I.** *(CORE VALUES: Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Fiscal Responsibility)*
- **All institutional teams shall be fully-funded in athletic scholarships.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Fiscal Responsibility)*
- **The Conference office shall maximize collective revenue potential through its corporate rights agreement with Learfield Sports, and seek additional revenue opportunities as they are presented.** *(Excellence, Student-Athlete Focused, Fiscal Responsibility)*
- **Establish opportunities for collaborative efforts among all member institutions to assist in the reduction of institutional expenditures.** *(Excellence, Fiscal Responsibility)*

Objectives:

- Explore group purchasing options among conference members.
- Determine practicality of fully-funding athletic scholarships in all sports.
- Ensuring the achievement of financially meeting tasks/goals in this strategic plan.

Tasks:

- Continue group purchasing opportunities in addition to current group buys (ACS, Arbiter, WinAD, Gridiron, Video Exchange, Instant Replay, etc)?
- Explore other group purchasing options, such as insurance products, athletic equipment, technology, etc.
- Develop other purchasing opportunities beyond the athletic needs of the Conference members?