UIS
Nickname
Task Force
Report
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Dear Student Government Association,

The UIS Nickname Task Force is pleased to present you with this draft report with provides preliminary analysis regarding the possible change to the current UIS nickname, the PrairieStars. The report highlights all work completed by the task force as well as its recommendations. This report is issued in a draft format due to the recommendation for the task force to continue investigation of this issue into the fall semester of the upcoming academic year. The task force has included all rational for this decision, which is highlighted in the recommendations section of this draft report. Members of this task force have enjoyed working on this issue and hopes this information proves helpful in the further investigation of the UIS nickname.

Sincerely,

The UIS Nickname Task Force
Task Force Members

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- Student Government Association
  President

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- Community Relations Representative

Noelle Rooke
- Athletics Representative

Aaron Mulvey
- Student Representative

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- Student Representative

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- Student Representative

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Tyler Scherer
- Student Representative

Katie Reynolds
- Student Representative

Cody Von Burg
- Student Representative

Ryan Lynn
- Student Representative
Overview

As requested by the UIS Student Government Association, this task force was charged to:

1. Reach out to members of the UIS community and educate them on the issue of a possible change to the current UIS nickname/mascot while also seeking their feedback on the issue.
2. Research all intended and unintended outcomes related to changing the current UIS nickname/mascot.
3. Provide a recommendation to the UIS Student Government Association as to whether UIS should change its current nickname/mascot and, if applicable, provide:
   a. 5 investigated possible alternative nicknames/mascots
   b. A summarized feasibility of changing the nickname/mascot
   c. Explanation of best practices for transitioning to a new nickname/mascot

Outreach

The task force’s outreach efforts started with review of the survey conducted by UIS Survey Research Office last December, which showed results as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your current status?</th>
<th>Strongly in Favor</th>
<th>Somewhat in Favor</th>
<th>Somewhat Not in Favor</th>
<th>Not in Favor at All</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UIS Student</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln Land Student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UIS Faculty Member</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UIS Staff Member</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UIS Alumni / Alumna</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the Springfield Community but not affiliated with UIS</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon review of these survey results by the task force, it was determined that more outreach was needed. Further outreach took place in the following areas:

Student Outreach

Students were sent an email regarding this task force and its duty to investigate a possible change to the current UIS nickname. This email communication with students invited students to respond to the task force via email, participate in the UIS Nickname Task Force Facebook page, and visit the student government website for more information regarding the process. Student response via email and to the Facebook page showed an overwhelming majority were in support of a change.

An article was also published in the student newspaper on campus, The Journal. This article outlined the charge to the nickname task force and also educated students about the issue.
Student members of the committee feel as though current students do not have a sense of pride in the current nickname. Student members also noted that “PrairieStars” is rarely used on any apparel related to UIS and is currently not used on the athletic uniforms. Student members of the task force heavily involved in supporting athletics, find the process of supporting athletics to be difficult with the current nickname. One of the problems is how difficult the current nickname is to use for promotional materials and for chants. One student member of the committee noted that students who rarely attend athletic events normally do not have an opinion regarding a possible nickname change. This student further suggested that some student do enjoy the current nickname due to its uniqueness. The Student Athletics Advisory Committee was also approached about a possible change and came to a consensus that if a change is made, the nickname should be shortened to “Stars”. A member of the UIS baseball team also contacted the task force after discussion with the team and appeared to be supportive of a change by offering possible alternatives to the current nickname.

**Athletics Outreach**

Per discussion with current coaches and student-athletes, there appears to be a mixed mindset regarding the changing of the current nickname. The younger athletes typically do not feel a sense of pride to our current nickname and would not be opposed to a stronger nickname or just simply removing “Prairie” from the current nickname. The older student athletes that have ties to our alumni, especially men’s soccer, feel strong ties to the PrairieStars and have given negative feedback in regards to changing the current nickname. Some member of the athletics staff and administration shared concerns about the survey conducted by the UIS Survey Research Office in the Fall 2012 semester. These concerns were in regards to the possibility that the survey could be taken multiple times due to the lack of a login procedure. After consultation with the UIS Survey Research Office, it was confirmed that the survey tracked user IP addresses and did not accept multiple responses from the same IP address. Further, the UIS Survey Research Office stated that the degree of error resulting from a person using multiple devices to take the survey is minimal.

**Faculty Outreach**

Faculty members of the university were contacted via email in order to be educated about a possible nickname change and also in order to seek their feedback regarding the issue. 21 faculty members replied to the email with opinions regarding the possible nickname change. 15 faculty members that responded were in favor of the change while 6 respondents were opposed to a change. Some respondents that were against changing the current nickname were opposed due to the current nickname’s historical ties with the university.

**Alumni Outreach**

Members of university alumni were educated on the issue of a possible nickname change by a variety of different methods. An email was sent to all alumni that the University has an address for on February 13, 2012. Alumni were invited to submit feedback via email to the SGA or on the UIS Nickname Task Force Facebook page. The Facebook page quickly became an open forum with heated discussion. The consensus from alumni on the Facebook page is they are not in favor of a change. Given the
environment developed on the Facebook page, I looked to the emails to provide a more levelheaded approach.

As of today, we have processed 114 emails. We must take into consideration that many alumni were asked to email the Student Government to provide their feedback. Given the number of responses and the amount of discussion on Facebook, it can be said with certainty, our alumni care about this issue. Given this is the highest level of engagement we have seen by our alumni in response to any communication in the past year, we should take this very seriously.

Overview of feedback*

- **30% - In Favor of a Change**
  - Many of these responses were short and some were rather silly.
  - Major themes – Preference, Drop Prairie, and Athletics
  - Some alternative suggestions were made
- **45% - Opposed**
  - Many of these responses were constructed with passion and showed alumni connection to their alma mater.
  - Major themes – History, Athletics, Preference, Costs, Compliance, Rebrand existing, and Drop Prairie
- **5% - Neutral**
  - Many responses were based on process and the concern about the process not being outlines
- **20% - Unknown**
  - Many of these responses were unclear on their position and some simply provided suggestions but didn’t define position

Other ways in which alumni were contacted regarding this issue include: the alumni LinkedIn page, UIS Soccer Alumni Facebook Page, the University of Illinois Alumni Association Facebook page. Further, a The State Journal-Register covered the topic on February 16th, 2013.

A number of alumni respondents had connections with the UIS/SSU (Sangamon State University) soccer program and feel that a nickname change would distance them from the university. In addition, many respondents that were graduates of SSU feel that they are already disconnected due to the university name change and a change to the nickname would cause a greater disconnection with the institution. Overall, the consensus of alumni is that we keep Prairie Stars and consider as an alternative: rebranding, new mascot, and/or dropping Prairie.

**Springfield Community Outreach**

Community members were educated of this issue via three articles in the local newspaper, The State Journal-Register, on October 11, 2012, February 17, 2013, and March 17, 2013. The article on October 11, 2012 included an online poll, which at the time of this report showed: 53% of the 469 respondents
were in favor of keeping “PrairieStars”, 11% of respondents said drop “Prairie”, and 35% of respondents said approved of a complete change. This online poll was available to community members, alumni, and students.

Further outreach to the community resulted in conversation with around 25 community members in the Springfield area. In general, most community members did not seem to have strong feelings one way or another. However, community members with ties to SSU/UIS felt more strongly about changing the name. Comments ranged from: “sure go head and change it, with the right marketing it really doesn’t matter”, to “why you would change it now? It’s worked fine for the last 40 years.” Several individuals mentioned that in the last several years they felt as if the name and teams had gained in popularity. It was noted by the UIS Director of Community Relations that this may be related to the university’s greater visibility in the community and in the media. Several individuals contacted supported the idea of dropping “Prairie” and being the “Stars”.

The UIS Marketing Department does not believe the city of Springfield would care about, much less oppose a nickname change that was driven by the students as opposed to being mandated by the administration. The department further notes that raising awareness of the change would likely only be solved by the passage of time, but a recent high school change (Glenwood) has provided a model that shows it can be done.

Marketing/Recruitment Outreach

In order to receive feedback from future students of the university the UIS Marketing Department was contacted and asked to provide feedback. The marketing department reached out to a number of employees of the UIS Admissions Office.

Student ambassadors are employees of the UIS Office of Admissions and work with the recruitment of new students. There was a consensus among student ambassadors that 1) a university’s nickname is extremely important for school pride; and 2) we need to change the nickname. The reasons ranged from difficulty in explaining it to the families/students they lead on tours, to embarrassment to tell friends at other universities, to a deep disappointment that UIS doesn’t have something better to instill in other students the same type of pride these ambassadors have for UIS.

Admissions counselors also work closely with possible new students through the UIS Office of Admissions. Two counselors advocate for change, one would favor a change if the name were unique enough, one opposes a change, and one believes it won’t hurt or help recruiting but it may help branding the university.

Finally, the marketing office plays a vital role in the recruitment of new students and was asked to provide insights regarding a possible change to the current UIS nickname. The marketing office felt as though it was imperative to change the nickname. They believe that a nickname typically becomes more beloved over time, yet forty-plus years have achieved neither familiarity nor love for the name “Prairie Stars” if our own students are yearning for a change in 2013. The marketing office also believes the power of “fan-dom” cannot be overstated related to a university’s recruitment, retention and
image-building efforts. They believed a nickname has the power to unite us collectively like nothing else can. The office felt that a nickname should instill pride and loyalty, energize the student body regardless of win records, inspire student participation and involvement, and create alumni loyalty and giving. The office believes there is very little evidence that the Prairie Stars name has done that over the years.

In addition, the office believes the current nickname and our astounding lack of a proper mascot, means we do not have something that translates easily to apparel, thus UIS is missing a tremendous marketing and branding opportunity. From a marketing perspective, these “walking billboards” not only raise visibility for the school, but also declare a student’s or alum’s allegiance, a powerful endorsement that benefits recruiting and retention.

In summary, the marketing office strongly recommends a nickname change – not to one that creates similar branding problems for us for the sake of uniqueness, but to one that has the power to carry us into the future well-positioned to be competitive with our peers.

Summary

This outreach was considered sufficient by the task force to provide a general consensus of the opinions of different members of the UIS community. Overall, the summary of this outreach shows results that align fairly well with the results of the survey conducted by the UIS Survey Research Office.

Intended and Unintended Outcomes

Cost

Costs are an important aspect when analyzing the possibly changing the current nickname. The majority of the costs related to a possible change to the current UIS nickname are related to the department of athletics and the department of recreational sports.

The Department of Recreational Sports would have to change the current graphics on the floor of the gymnasium if the current nickname were changed. However, the current gymnasium floor is going to be resurfaced during the upcoming fiscal year regardless of the decision of whether to change the current nickname. The Department of Recreational Sports plans to leave the gymnasium floor with minimal graphics and place any finalized graphics on one of the top layers of sealant placed on the gymnasium floor. Per discussion with the Department of Recreational Sports, this option allows for any changes to the current graphics and will be the most advantageous method of adding graphics to the floor.

The costs anticipated by the Department of Athletics are mostly related to promotional materials. However, the athletic department plans to incur expenses related to the UIS nickname regardless if a name change is made or not. The Department of Athletics feels that the current name recognition is not sufficient and therefore plans to develop and implement a marketing plan. This marketing will take place when the department is able to confirm whether a new nickname will be developed or the current nickname will be kept. The anticipated costs related to this marketing plan are as follows:
Other costs of a possible include changes to the Student Life Building (SLB) gymnasium, changes to the names of programs that reference the current nickname, and also all website references to the current nickname. The costs of changes to the SLB are anticipated to cost $1,000. However, costs related to changes to programs that reference the current nickname and websites that mention the current nickname cannot be accurately measured. Through discussion it was determined that costs would be less if the nickname were just changed to “Stars”, because few programs and websites reference “Prairie”.

Overall, total costs related to a change to the current nickname are $11,150. However, more importantly, it is important to note that additional costs related to a possible change to the current UIS nickname are anticipated to be $1,000, which is the cost of changes to the SLB gymnasium.

**Pride**

Pride is an important issue when discussing a university’s nickname. The university community should take pride in the nickname. Per task force discussion, it was determined that measuring increases or decreases in pride related to a nickname change are not measureable.

**Recognition**

Committee members felt that a university’s nickname should be easily recognizable. A change to the current UIS nickname could possibly result in decreased or increased recognition of the nickname. Per task force discussion, it was determined that any projected change in recognition would be immeasurable.

**Donations**

The committee discussed the matter of increased or decreased donations (charitable giving) related to a possible nickname change and decided that a projected change in donations is not able to be measured.

The UIS Marketing Department does not believe a change would negatively impact donations, even among those who give primarily to Athletics, especially if the Athletics department is in favor of the change.

### Athletic Marketing Plan Additional Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Costs/Logo Development</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage Updates</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Changes</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printed Costs</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$10,150</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Historical Ties

The topic of a possible change to the current nickname brings about an important topic surrounding historical ties related to members of the UIS community. Through discussion, it was noted that many alumni members who graduated from Sangamon State University feel disconnected from the University of Illinois Springfield. Changing the current nickname may make these alumni members feel more disconnected from the university. However, it was also noted that current students may increase historical ties with the university through increased connection with a new nickname. Overall, the projected amount of increase or decrease in historical ties was not able to be measured by the task force.

Recommendation

Based on the above analysis the UIS Nickname Task Force recommends:

1. The investigation of whether the current UIS nickname should be changed continues into the fall of next semester. This would require this task force to stay intact and also the replacement of graduating members of the task force.

2. An outside consultant is hired to analyze other possible nickname suggestions for the campus. This outside consultant should specialize in the area of branding for athletics programs. Further, it is recommended that this consultant be used for any new branding or marketing campaign of a new nickname or the current nickname.

3. Once the consultant has recommended alternative possible nicknames, this task force conducts a ranking survey among members of the UIS community to seek student feedback regarding alternative nicknames. After this ranking survey takes place, the task force will be able to provide a recommendation as to whether the nickname should be changed and if applicable, the suggested alternatives.

4. Disregarding the outcome of the ranking survey and the task force’s final decision, that the current mascot be changed, as it does not relate will to the nickname nor is it popular among students. Outreach results affirm this conclusion.

5. That the nickname and mascot be more widely used in the campus setting, especially, during the time of new student orientation.