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## UIS hits a few bumps on road to Division II

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Scott Reed admits the University of Illinois Springfield Prairie Stars athletics program has had growing pains this academic year during its transition to NCAA Division II and the Great Lakes Valley Conference.

Not only did several of the Stars' 10 sports teams struggle to get wins, but the non-renewal of six scholarships prompted multiple members of the women's basketball team to speak out against coach Marne Fauser.

"We knew this wouldn't be an easy transition," said Reed, the assistant director of athletics for operations and communications. "There's going to be bumps in the road. What we're doing we believe is in the best interest of everyone involved, the student-athletes, coaches, program and university.

"We're in the growing pains phase. That could incorporate people being unhappy. That could incorporate us taking some lumps in some games like we did and things of that nature, but we believe in what we're doing."

The State Journal-Register obtained copies of 25 letters sent by UIS' Office of Financial Assistance between Aug. 28, 2009, and April 14 to student-athletes regarding their athletic aid in response to a request made under the state Freedom of Information Act. The names of the student-athletes who received the letters were redacted.

Of those 25 letters obtained by the newspaper, 10 were non-renewals, eight were renewals, six were cancellations and one was a reduction in aid.

Citing department policy, Reed could not discuss specific details related to particular sports, coaches and athletes.

The school had about 108 student-athletes this academic year.

### **Fauser's scholarship moves are scrutinized**

Fauser's decision to not renew the scholarships of six of the nine UIS players following a 3-24 women's basketball season didn't go over well with several of the student-athletes and some faculty members.

Junior chemistry major Susan Coryell was one of the UIS basketball players who lost her financial aid. The Yorkville native played three seasons for the Stars.

"I think what happened to me, as well as the rest of the girls cut from the UIS women's basketball team this season, is unfortunate," she wrote in an e-mail. "I do not agree with many of the decisions that Coach Fauser made during and after the season, and I do not believe that anyone past, present or future should be subjected to the treatment many of us endured this season.

"It is thoroughly disappointing that the promises that were made honoring my financial assistance for all four years of my schooling could not be kept. I am looking at roughly six years of medical school ahead of me plus my fourth year as an undergraduate at UIS." However, athletic scholarships cover a one-year period, and NCAA bylaws permit the non-renewal of aid for "any reason" once the period has concluded.

"(Student-athletes) are made aware of that when they go in," Reed said. "There's a general student-athlete code of conduct, but they also can be specific to a sport, too. Most of our coaches, if not all of them, have specific rules of their own. So, they are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

"It's not just showing up and playing. There's so many other factors both involving athletics and outside of athletics in terms of behavior on campus, behavior in the classroom and fully throwing yourself into what you're doing here and things of that nature."

All UIS student-athletes receive a yearly statement of terms from the Office of Financial Assistance. A disclaimer is included in the document, which students are required to sign and return.

The disclaimer states: "The offer and acceptance of financial assistance for the academic terms and in the amount specified herein is not a promise, offer, or guarantee of financial assistance in future academic terms, and the student-athlete acknowledges that he/she has no right to or expectation of future assistance."

UIS athletic director Rodger Jehlicka must send reduction of aid and non-renewal of aid information to the Office of Financial Assistance by today, according to the UIS student-athlete handbook.

### **Does an athlete have any options?**

NCAA bylaws permit an appeal by a student-athlete whose scholarship is reduced or not renewed. The UIS Office of Financial Assistance handles appeals. UIS director of financial assistance Gerard Joseph would not say Thursday how many appeals his office has handled since August.

Sophomore basketball player Kelly Thompson's financial aid was not renewed at the end of the season. She appealed the decision and

lost. She will continue her career at Millikin.

Barbara Hayler, a UIS criminal justice professor, has come to the aid of Coryell and other junior student-athletes who lost their athletic scholarships by establishing the Help Honor Our Promises for Education Fund. Hayler hopes monetary donations will help those athletes, regardless of sport, with their academic costs. Since it would help athletes no longer on scholarship, Reed doesn't consider it an athletic fund.

"When they're not enrolled student-athletes we can't say, 'Give it to that person or that person,' " Reed said. "It's a nice gesture on her part, but it doesn't really involve student-athletes. It's her thing and God bless her if she wants do it."

He acknowledged UIS must have recruits and athletes who can compete in Division II.

The school competed this academic year as a provisional member in NCAA Division II after leaving the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and the American Midwest Conference. UIS should obtain full NCAA membership in July.

"At this level, if you're going to be competitive in this league, you're going to have to be preparing yourself year-round and that's for all our sports," Reed said. "The majority of our student-athletes saw that this year, too. The ones who were here in our NAIA days said, 'Whoa. This is a big step up in competition.'

"The coaches know what it's going to take to be competitive in this league. Those expectations academically and athletically are out there. This year was a great eye-opening experience for our coaches. They saw firsthand what level of athlete this league has. You'll see that the caliber of our student-athlete in terms of performance on the playing field is going to be going up, up and up."

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