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Wrestling program will be eliminated women's swimming will be added

Summary:

(July 28, 2003)-In a budget-driven move, the University of Minnesota, Morris has announced that it will eliminate wrestling for men and women effective with the 2004-05 academic year. Further, UMM will add the sport of women's swimming.

"During this biennium we will continue to see the impact of recent state reductions in University operating budgets as we work to cut \$1.5 million dollars from UMM's \$26 million base budget," said Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Sandra Olson-Loy in making the announcement. "This difficult decision addresses the need to reduce expenditures while strengthening our core."

UMM has used the same criteria in making all of its budget-driven decisions: 1) strengthening the core of students' education and experience and 2) saving resources. With regard to athletics, UMM looked at its athletic programs in the context of the move this fall to the Upper Midwest Athletic Conference (UMAC) and UMM's commitment to building a competitive program.

"As we build a strong NCAA Division III athletic program in a time of fiscal austerity, we need to sponsor sports with high student interest that advance the liberal arts mission of the institution," continued Olson-Loy. "In that analysis, we have determined that men's and women's wrestling are no longer viable sports for UMM."

A historical review of UMM's programs indicates the following determining factors:

- The trend shows fewer colleges sponsoring men's wrestling nationally. In UMM's former NCAA Division II conference, the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference, only three continuing members sponsor men's wrestling. Just four of the 13 Division III Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference members sponsor wrestling. No UMAC schools sponsor wrestling.
- The growth predicted in women's intercollegiate wrestling in the early 1990s did not materialize. Wrestling has not achieved the level of participation the NCAA requires for emerging sports for women (i.e. 20 college varsity and competitive club teams as well as other measures of demonstrated support). For women, the NCAA sponsors 19 sports plus 7 emerging sports wrestling is not among them. UMM is the only university in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest sponsoring women's wrestling.
- Numbers of entering freshmen students who wrestle at UMM have decreased sharply to approximately eight new freshmen (men and women) each year.
- Between 60 and 70% of entering students who wrestle at UMM are gone before their junior year. This attrition level greatly exceeds the student body average.

"The decision to end wrestling at UMM was not an easy one in light of the success of the talented students involved in our wrestling programs and the national visibility they've brought to our small campus," said Olson-Loy. "We are proud of our students and alumni who have achieved success in wrestling and at UMM. Coach Doug Reese has worked hard

to build this program and we recognize his contributions to these areas."

The wrestling program will continue for the coming year (2003-04). Women's swimming will begin in 2004-05. UMM will work with Regional Fitness Center management to develop the program in order to maximize collaboration on staffing, facility scheduling, and aquatics programming.

UMM's decision to begin a women's swimming program continues its commitment to strengthening sports participation opportunities for women. Although UMM currently sponsors nine sports for women and seven for men, 55% of student athletes are male and 45% female, within a student body that is 60% female.

Minnesota high school participation in girls' swimming is strong prospective and current students have expressed interest in a collegiate swim program at UMM, and UMM has excellent collegiate swim facilities already familiar to area swimmers from high school and club competition.

"In this time of limited resources, UMM is reallocating funds to begin a program with great promise in attracting and retaining talented students," said Olson-Loy.

One in every five UMM students is involved in Cougar athletics, with athletes succeeding academically at rates above the student body as a whole. Nearly half of UMM's entering students played a varsity sport in high school and 1/3 were high school team captains.

"We remain resolute in our belief in the value of a strong intercollegiate athletics program within a rigorous public liberal arts college, said Olson-Loy. "We are committed to building a competitive athletic program true to UMM's vision and mission."

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