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# Going Big Time: Binghamton University and the Quest for Division I Basketball Glory

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**Ellen J. Staurowsky, Ed.D, Professor & Graduate Chair, Sport Management & Media, Ithaca College**  
**Jason R. Lanter, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Psychology, Kutztown University**

# Overview

- Researcher Positionality
- The Case of Binghamton University
- The Big Question
- Method & Resources
- More Questions, Few Answers, & Much To Consider

# December 16, 2001

## UNC-Binghamton

- “What happened next was a rare achievement in the corporatized world of college athletics. The Binghamton Bearcats won by losing.” (USA Today, as reported in Smith, 2006)



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# BU Athletics Director Joel Thirer (Smith, 2006)

- Interview in *Binghamton University Magazine*
  - “longstanding history as a small liberal arts school with impeccable academic credentials”
  - “Many believed a stronger athletic program would be detrimental to the University’s academic integrity. The truth is, though, we couldn’t afford to remain Division III”
  - “Remain institutionally competitive in the future”
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# Binghamton As An Academic Institution

- One of nation's premier public academic institutions
- 11,500 undergraduates, 2900 graduates
- Students – all 50 states & 100 countries
- Highly selective – 1290 SATs, 90% of undergrads arrive with advanced placement courses
- Retention rates very good compared to peer institutions

# BU Transition Timeline

- 1995 – BU begins – DI designation & conference affiliation – SUNY “research centers” going DI
  - Albany, Binghamton, Buffalo, Stony Brook
- 1998 – BU complying with DII rules as part of transition
- 2001 – first year in DI
- 2004 – BU’s New Events Center
  - Attendance at men’s basketball games tripled in first five years of transition (600 to 1800)
  - Led conference in home attendance for three consecutive years
- 2006 – 9 conference championships; 9 runners up in 8 sports three Division I All Americans; 24 America East Conference MVPs

# BU Transition Timeline

- 2007 – Joel Thirer, AstroTurf AD of the Year (NACDA DI Northeast)
- May, 2008 – Miladin Kovacevic charged with assault
- 2008-2009 – BU Men's Basketball – AE Conference Championship & NCAA appearance
- February 2009 – Adjunct Instructor in Human Development, Sally Dear
- 2009-Elizabeth Williams v. BU
- June of 2009 – Coach Kevin Broadus, after 2 years at BU, receives a five-year contract extension; placed on leave in October of 2009

# BU Transition

- Fall – 2009 – three of 8 recruits in class of 2008-2009 withdrawn; two more dropped from the team
- October, 2009 – BU BOT commissions investigation of BU men's basketball program
- Fall 2009 – Joel Thirer, AD, leaves AD role to become assistant to the president
- January 2010 – President DeFleur resigns, effective July 2010
- March 2010 – Broadus v. BU

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# The Kaye Report

- “DI athletics inherently present a struggle to balance a pursuit of athletic success – and the accompanying rewards of heightened public recognition of the university – with maintenance of academic and behavioral standards” (p. 4)
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# Transition to DI Not Without Controversy

- 1995 – IAB chair (Provost Swain) presented to faculty the question of whether BU would move to DII
- In the plan, BU would visit the question of whether it would remain at DII or move to DIII
- Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) – presented concerns re: costs
- Despite assurances of a long range planning strategy & fund raising efforts in place, FSEC voted against going DI; went to full Faculty Senate – voted to reserve the right to revisit the question of DI or DIII
- 1999 – Faculty Senate voted down a motion to support a move to go DI
- Creation of the Intercollegiate Athletics Committee – separate faculty entity to review academic issues associated with athletics

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## President DeFleur's

### Leadership (NCAA Self-Study 2005-2006)

- “maintained an active interest & role in the conduct of the athletics program at BU. She made the decision to lead Binghamton into DI, and has since supported efforts to upgrade the program and its facilities, raise funds for athletics, and increase awareness of, and support for, intercollegiate sports on the campus. She consults regularly with the senior staff of the athletics department.”
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# Layers of Oversight

- Chancellor & Board of Trustees – SUNY
- President DeFleur
- Intercollegiate Athletics Board (appointed by President & mandated by the state)
- BU Faculty Senate – Intercollegiate Athletic Committee & Budget Review Committee
- 2005-2006 NCAA Self-Study – rec that Compliance Officer not have a reporting line to someone other than the athletic director – VP for Strategic & Fiscal Planning & Undergrad Ed
- Faculty Athletics Representative

# 2005-2006 NCAA Self-Study

## ■ Special Admits

- BU willing to admit students below level of academic achievement of regularly admitted students
  - High percentage of first year athletes on athletic aid who did not meet BU's admissions standards
  - Recommendation: monitor retention
  - Recommendation to create a faculty advisory committee on athletics rejected
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# Lois DeFleur

- President since 1990
  - Credited with leadership
    - Increasing endowments & reputation
    - Expansion of academic offerings
    - Transition from DIII to DI
  - During Al Walker Era (2000-2007)
    - President DeFleur begins meeting with prospective athletes
  - The Influence of the I-88 Rivalry
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# About Move To DI

(Smith, 2006)

- Brian Hazlett, senior associate director of admissions, agrees. “Especially in the Northeast — an important region for us — awareness of the University and interest among potential students have increased dramatically.”
  - Sherbach adds, “When I was a freshman, it was pretty much unheard of for anyone to get a group of friends together to attend a game, but once the University went Division I, it was suddenly really exciting to go to the games. School spirit increased significantly.”
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# Questions Still To Be Addressed

- Has the public perception of BU as an academic institution changed in the aftermath?
  - Has this affected application numbers, quality of student applicants?
  - Has this affected the ability of faculty to obtain grants or public recognition for their work?
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AMERICA EAST COVERAGE

# Green and White Goes for the **Gold**

