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## **The Real Story Behind Lindenwood University's Recent Decisions**

By John R. Porter, EdD, President, Lindenwood University

There have been varied perspectives shared publicly regarding Lindenwood University's decision to discontinue 10 sports teams. I wish to provide additional context, highlight the reasoning behind our strategic decisions to transform Lindenwood, and clarify any potential misinterpretations regarding financial challenges.

Lindenwood University is in a strong operating position and is focused on institutional success. Enrollment is up 4.1 percent. Revenues have increased by 9.7 percent this year, and resources are being reinvested into groundbreaking initiatives that serve our students. The University maintains very little debt, and our healthy endowment, largely unrestricted, provides the financial strength to boldly invest in our future.

The decision to discontinue 10 athletic teams aligns with our overarching strategy and newly instated core values: Students First, Do What's Right, Thrive Together, and Have Grit. Each element contributes to Lindenwood's transformative journey.

First and foremost, our commitment to "Students First" served as the guiding principle behind this complex decision. Lindenwood boasted one of the largest athletic programs nationwide, with 30 NCAA teams – a greater scale than flagship public universities which typically sponsor fewer than 20 teams. However, our commitment to providing a quality experience meant confronting the reality that such an extensive program was not sustainable. Following this decision, we are tied as the largest athletic department in our conference. In addition, we will continue to invest in our remaining teams to provide an experience in alignment with our peer institutions.

In upholding the value of "Do What's Right," we faced a tough call – delay the announcement until spring and spare students the immediate impact before finals week or tell them now and be upfront about the decision. Given our commitment to transparency and, ultimately, to the well-being of our students, we chose to communicate this decision promptly. This afforded students the time and agency to plan for the upcoming spring semester. It wasn't an easy thing to do. But it was the right thing to do.

We made a firm commitment to maintain scholarships for all affected athletes throughout the remainder of their undergraduate education. This offer also extends to incoming students who were recruited for the discontinued sports. These actions underscore our unwavering dedication to student success and well-being within the Lindenwood community.

Our strategy is rooted in anticipating and meeting the evolving needs of students. This year, we initiated a realignment, forming a dedicated student experience division to promote student

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persistence and retention. Our staffing plans include an expanded academic advising team which will enable a more personalized approach to student success and mentorship. This investment underscores our strategic imperative to anticipate what students need and deliver it when and how they need it.

We are being strategic as we work to position Lindenwood as “The Next Great Learner-Centric University.” Our commitment to "Thrive Together" encompasses investing in mental health and counseling services, recognizing the challenges students face post-pandemic. Paired with substantial investments in technology and ongoing financial support for our students, it reveals a university that is actively responding to the evolving landscape of higher education.

In the face of a changing market, Lindenwood is not merely adapting; we are charting a course for a future where innovation, resilience, and student-focused values lead the way. The recent adjustments are not signs of financial trouble but strategic moves to ensure that Lindenwood remains at the forefront of providing high-quality, affordable education.

As we navigate this transformative journey, we are actively reaching out to the New Majority – underserved students, including first-generation students, students of color, military families, and adult learners. Our new offerings will include competency-based education for business students and subscription-based pricing, making high-quality education accessible and affordable.

Additionally, in a move that distinguishes us from struggling universities, we are proud to award annual raises to our faculty and staff. This commitment to our people further exemplifies our fiscal stability and unwavering dedication to the Lindenwood community.

Finally, our commitment to "Have Grit" underscores our resilience, recognizing that negative reactions and misunderstandings are an inherent part of our journey. This enduring determination propels us forward in navigating challenges, exemplifying that Lindenwood's narrative is not one of adversity but a compelling story of transformation, and an unwavering dedication to our students' success and future prosperity. Go Lions!

## **Author Bio:**

John R. Porter, EdD, is president of Lindenwood University and has an extensive background in fiscal management, business growth and sustainability, developed over three decades with IBM Corporation.

(636) 949-4908

[Presidents\\_office@lindenwood.edu](mailto:Presidents_office@lindenwood.edu)

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