

University Sports Administration

\$265 Million Donated Because of the School's Football Team?

Part 2

Dear President Saunders and Commissioner Bounds,

It's not a bad idea to reassess USM activities from time to time, especially those that cost students and taxpayers tens of millions, maybe hundreds of millions, when viewed from a decades' long perspective.

Are you, Drs. Saunders and Bounds, courting donors thinking you can dazzle them with Division 1 football or basketball teams? (Let's put aside the embarrassing loss two weekends ago to weak competition, and last weekend's victory over a Division 1-AA team.) I suspect that's one of your goals even though future teams are unlikely to fair any better than past teams particularly when it comes to being financially self-sufficient, let alone contributing funding to the primary mission of USM. Of course, I have a rather old-fashioned view of USM's primary mission -- educating students and pushing back the boundaries of knowledge. It should be an embarrassment that after decades, students are forced to subsidize football and basketball teams, the supposed "cash" sports.

Consider a couple of recent reports that cast a different perspective on expectations of donations arising from Division I football and basketball teams. The first is a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* report:

William S. Dietrich II, a former steel-industry executive, plans to give \$265-million to Carnegie Mellon University—the largest gift in the university's history—after his death, [the institution announced](#) on Wednesday.

According to the [Pittsburgh Post-Gazette](#), the longtime trustee's donation is intended to drive the university's global efforts and bolster graduate and undergraduate students in “scholarship, artistic creation, and research.” The gift is about a quarter of the size of Carnegie Mellon's endowment and is the 14th-largest donation ever made to an institution of higher education, according to *The Chronicle's* [database of large gifts](#). It trumps Carnegie Mellon's second-largest gift by more than \$200-million, the [Post-Gazette](#) reported.

Criticisms of comparing CMU with USM might include Pittsburgh is a big city in comparison to Hattiesburg. That's true, but it's also true with regard to supporting Division I athletics.

Let's address the excuse that USM and Hattiesburg are small. Let's consider just one example—

there are others.

What school has the largest endowment in Kentucky? Sports fans and myopic administrators might guess the University of Kentucky or University of Louisville with their juggernauts in Division I basketball. Well, they're not even close. The largest endowment by far belongs to a much smaller school than USM located in a city much smaller than Hattiesburg: Berea College in Berea, Kentucky. Its endowment is \$1,023,255,000. That's right, over a billion dollars!

And what is USM's endowment? It's more embarrassing than its Division I football and basketball teams' performance: a paltry \$89 million. And that's after 100 years! [President Saunders was so proud](#) of the \$89 million, she bragged about it for news reporters.

Embarrassing and silly”

And by the way, Berea College doesn't have Division I football or basketball teams, either.

Chauncey M. DePree, Jr., DBA, Professor, USM
Editor