

June 15, 2020

Seattle Pacific discontinues women's gymnastics

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the reasons for discontinuing women's gymnastics?

The decision to discontinue women's gymnastics at SPU came after a deliberate review and analysis of the state of that sport in the NCAA Division II structure and the conference alignment along with the financial challenges accelerated by COVID-19. The institution reviewed a variety of factors such as the viability of the program, financial commitments (scholarships, operating expenses) and the cost to maintain and improve facilities.

Only five other NCAA Division II schools sponsor women's gymnastics and those nearest to Seattle are more than 2,000 miles away, in Denton, Texas (Texas Woman's University) and St. Charles, Missouri (Lindenwood). A total of 11 other schools annually competed to qualify for the National Collegiate Championships, an event that has been hosted by USA Gymnastics since 1987 after the NCAA discontinued its sponsorship of a dedicated Division II championship. Included in the group of USAGym competitors are five Division I schools with self-imposed lower scholarship levels to meet Division II standards, along with Division III Centenary College.

Who was involved in this decision to discontinue gymnastics?

University and athletics leadership were involved in the review and decision-making process and the Board of Trustees affirmed the decision.

Will the scholarships of affected student-athletes be honored?

Yes. The university is committed to honoring all scholarships of gymnastics student-athletes who want to finish their academic career at Seattle Pacific and will compete their degree in four years. Students must adhere to all NCAA, university and athletic department policies to maintain eligibility and receive aid.

Who is impacted by the gymnastics program being discontinued?

The entire SPU athletics family and the local gymnastics community are affected by this difficult decision. Those directly impacted include three coaches and 19 student-athletes and their families, including five newcomers that were set to join the team in the fall.

Can student-athletes transfer to other NCAA programs?

Yes. Under NCAA transfer rules, a student is immediately eligible for competition when the athlete's original institution discontinues the sport in which the student practiced or competed.

How are 2020 signees affected?

SPU will honor the incoming National Letter-of-Intent (NLI) signees' athletic scholarships. These prospective student-athletes may pursue other athletic opportunities if they choose to compete at another university.

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Would SPU like the impacted student-athletes to stay?

Certainly. These student-athletes are valued members of the Seattle Pacific community and we will work closely with these young women to help them remain at SPU and complete their degrees.

Will gymnastics student-athletes continue to have access to support services such as academic counseling and athletic training for continued rehabilitation purposes until graduation from SPU?

Yes. Athletic training services and academic counseling will continue to be provided by Seattle Pacific.

How is the university helping the affected student-athletes?

SPU athletics and university staff will support these student-athletes through the transition process. The athletics compliance director, academic staff and leadership team are available to discuss scholarship, transfer information, academic advisement and counseling resources. Those student-athletes with current or on-going medical needs will continue to have access to athletic training services.

Those with compliance or transfer portal questions should contact Assistant Athletic Director Shelby Stueve at 206-281-2973 or stueves@spu.edu

Should individuals need support through this difficult transition, the SPU Counseling Center can be of assistance by calling 206-281-2657

Is the University considering eliminating other sports?

No. The NCAA requires Division II schools to sponsor a minimum of 10 sports, at least five of them women's sports. SPU will retain an inventory of 12 intercollegiate sports and seven of them are women's sports, which keeps the university in alignment with Title IX regulations.

Why make the announcement now?

There is no ideal time to implement painful decisions like this. The announcement was made immediately following the spring quarter to enable the impacted student-athletes as much time as possible to find a new school where they can continue competing in gymnastics, if they choose to do so.

What effect did the pandemic have on this decision?

The status of the gymnastics program and its viability was being carefully examined prior to the coronavirus outbreak. The only impact of the pandemic was to hasten the timeline of the decision to discontinue sponsoring the sport at SPU.

What other budget-saving measures are you considering?

Several assistant coaches and administrative staffers experienced furloughs in May that will continue through July. We are committed to continuing to examine our athletics department budget, making sure that we balance the desire to be prudent with our resources while still robustly supporting our student-athletes.

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What effect will this have on the Falcons conference alignments?

Gymnastics was the only sport at Seattle Pacific that did not compete under the umbrella of the Great Northwest Athletic Conference (GNAC), which does not sponsor the sport. The gymnastics program was a member of the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation (MPSF), of which SPU will no longer be an affiliate.

Will women's gymnastics be reinstated in the future?

Given the underlying reasons for the decision and the state of the sport in the NCAA Division II landscape, there are no plans to reinstate women's gymnastics to the catalog of intercollegiate sports sponsored by Seattle Pacific.

Would additional donor support prompt the reinstatement of the gymnastics program?

Unfortunately, it will not. The decision would be the same, given the status and trend of women's gymnastics at the NCAA Division II level.

How will the University engage donors to honor their wishes regarding planned gifts to the gymnastics program?

The University Advancement Office will assist all donors regarding affected gift agreements. It is our sincere hope that donors will redirect their donations to continue to support SPU student-athletes.

How does this impact the Falcons Gymnastics Center and the youth programs?

Both will be discontinued effective immediately. SPU will no longer conduct gymnastics camps and will cease sponsorship of a competitive youth club team. The gymnastics practice facility will be re-purposed for another function to enhance the campus and athletics community.

Will former Falcons gymnasts and teams still be recognized by Seattle Pacific?

Definitely. In its 47 years, dating to 1974, Seattle Pacific constructed a remarkable legacy in the gymnastics arena. The Falcons won three national team championships: 1986 (NCAA Division II), 1992 (USAG) and 1997 (USAG). Those championship banners will continue to be displayed in Brougham Pavilion. The individual accomplishments of SPU gymnastics, including 32 national titles and 221 All-America awards, will not be forgotten. Those fantastic Falcons will be included in the Hall of Fame selection process to be considered for the athletic department's highest honor to recognize their significant accomplishments.