# President’s Athletics Task Force

## Women’s Soccer Subcommittee

As part of the President’s Athletics Task Force, a subcommittee was convened to assess the feasibility of starting a Division I Women’s Soccer program at Wichita State University.

### POSITIVE FACTORS

### Space in the athletics schedule

Women’s Soccer would be a useful addition to the Athletics Departments slate of offerings. The sport is played in the fall, and would represent, in the absence of football, the only true outdoor team spectator sport offered during the fall semester. That fact could make it a natural focal point not just for fans, but also for campus life and student involvement activities such as homecoming.

### Strong soccer infrastructure

Wichita has a rich soccer tradition that has made it a prominent feeder to state and regional university soccer programs. As evidenced by the strong support and energy surrounding the launch of the FC Wichita semi-professional men’s and women’s teams, there is a well-established soccer fanbase and, more importantly, strong youth and high school programs from which to draw recruits.

### Robust Regional Competition Options

There were 333 Division I Women’s Soccer teams on the pitch in 2019, including many in the region. In fact, Wichita State is among the only major universities in the region that does not offer women’s soccer.

Among traditional Wichita State geographic rivals, KU, K-State, Oklahoma State, Tulsa, ORU, SMU, Memphis, Creighton, Drake, SLU, SIU, UNI and Missouri State all field teams. Ten members of the American Athletic Conference field teams.

The proximity of these schools, as well as many more DII options, mean the impact on the travel budget might be minimized during early stages of the program’s existence.

### NEGATIVE FACTORS

The negative factors are centered around the expense of starting a program in a challenging and unpredictable financial climate.

### Startup costs

Division I Women’s Soccer teams require the addition of 14 scholarships on a 35-player team. This would push Wichita State closer to – but not beyond – the Title IX gender balance requirements. Other startup costs include a three-person coaching staff and possibly additional support staff to shoulder the increased load for athletic training, strength and communications functions.

Kansas State University, which recently launched Women’s Soccer, took a two-year approach prior to its inaugural season. In fall 2014 a coaching staff was assembled, and recruitment began. The school broke ground on training facilities and a field in May 2015 and the team began playing in fall of 2016.

### Facilities

Cessna Stadium is not currently configurable to accommodate Women’s Soccer. Should the program begin play before Cessna can be renovated, it would have to start life in rented off-campus facilities. Going off campus adds expense on top of the startup costs while diminishing the desired impacts on campus life. While Cessna renovations are on being planned, the necessary field width would require a complete replacement of the stadium’s track well before expected, adding addition costs to the final price tag.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The subcommittee reached the conclusion that Women’s Soccer is feasible and could be successful at Wichita State, but that the financial realities of the COVID-19 pandemic cast doubt on the wisdom of starting a program until the Cessna Stadium renovation fundraising and construction plan comes into better focus.

The subcommittee recommends the following steps be taken until more is known about the stadium projects:

* A formal feasibility study should be undertaken by the Wichita State University Athletic Department within the next year to include:
	+ An estimate costs of program operation (staffing, scholarships and support)
	+ A regional market study to determine the appetite for Division I Women’s Soccer at Wichita State.
	+ A facilities plan. This can be conducted by Facilities Planning and held for activation at a later time. The plan should cover both the requirements for an on-campus facility as well as the potential availability of local venues such as the Stryker Complex.

