



San Diego State University prepares for institutional advancement

CONDUCTS COMPETITIVE ASSESSMENT OF ATHLETICS LANDSCAPE

Challenge: Preparing for the future

San Diego State University (SDSU) has robust plans to advance the institution's brand through the success of its intercollegiate athletics programs. With a new stadium, and a sharper understanding of the competitive landscape, the Aztecs are well positioned for a stronger future.

The Aztecs Snapdragon Stadium was built to replace the SDCCU Stadium (formerly Qualcomm Stadium), a multi-use venue shared with the San Diego Chargers. When the NFL team relocated to Los Angeles in 2017, the move presented an opportunity for SDSU to build a new stadium to expand the campus footprint and invigorate surrounding communities.

As part of its \$3.5 billion proposal to the city of San Diego, the university included significant investments for developing business, entertainment, and recreational areas west of campus, where the stadium is located.

"This is what San Diegans asked for, and Snapdragon Stadium is just the beginning. SDSU Mission Valley will be a catalyst for incredible community economic growth and will provide opportunities for generations of future students and alumni," said SDSU President Adela de la Torre.

IN BRIEF

- San Diego State University (SDSU) Athletics collaborated with Huron to prepare for conference realignment and solidify its long-term goals.
- To understand how SDSU compared to its competitors and the requirements to compete at a higher level, the two organizations developed a set of focused assessments examining the athletics landscape.
- The result was a detailed roadmap to elevate SDSU Athletics to new heights.

With the opening of Snapdragon Stadium and an acute awareness of the continued shift in the national intercollegiate athletics landscape, SDSU turned momentum into action and began preparing for its next chapter.

Approach: Aligning resources for a new era

In September 2021, SDSU leadership issued an RFP for an independent study of its competitiveness in the Mountain West Conference (MWC) and the broader intercollegiate athletics landscape. Notably, Huron was selected to execute the project among 20 other professional services firms.

“Having quantifiable data to demonstrate our strengths and areas of opportunity has been incredibly valuable. Huron helped us understand how to better align our resources and our unique culture to our long-term strategic plan,” said Director of Athletics JD Wicker.

The first step Huron took was to develop a unique set of focused assessments to understand how SDSU compared to its competitors and the requirements for competing at a higher level.

Competitiveness Assessment Approach



Internal Assessment

An examination of SDSU’s strengths, opportunities, and other determinants of success.



Cohort Institution Study

An evaluation of peer institutions’ performance and comparisons to conference and national competitors.



A Path Forward

A detailed roadmap identifying actions and investments to enhance competitiveness.

One vital factor is the level of investment in the athletics portfolio. Huron helped SDSU understand appropriate spending levels for the MWC and forecast the investment required to remain competitive in a new conference. To drive the investigative process, Huron incorporated multiple sources of data, including:

- **Interviews** – Huron conducted in-depth interviews with SDSU stakeholders and select institutions within the MWC, other Group of Five (G5) conferences, and the Pac-12 and Big 12 conferences.
- **SDSU data** – SDSU provided financial data and background on all athletics programs, student-athletes, staffing and coaching levels, and more.
- **Industry data** – This included trends and survey data from the NCAA, the Department of Education, and select conferences.
- **Huron proprietary data** – Huron leveraged its knowledge of the evolving national and conference landscape and its experience in helping other higher education institutions and departments of athletics succeed.

The result was a detailed roadmap aligning available resources for finances, competitive success, student-athlete wellness, and facilities with prioritized opportunities identified throughout the study. SDSU has already begun implementing several initiatives resulting from the Huron deliverables.

Results: A collaborative playbook

According to Nevala, SDSU leadership recognizes the role of athletics in influencing its strategic position and contributions to fundraising, national and international visibility, and applicant appeal. This mindset enabled the Huron team to work with stakeholders beyond the athletics department, from the president to the institutional offices of finance and student affairs.

With Snapdragon Stadium fully operational and Huron’s detailed roadmap to guide the Aztecs’ future complete and in action, San Diego State Athletics is prepared to elevate its department to new heights.



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