

Part One: Why The SEC Should Be Working Right Now

“Wait and see.”

That’s the approach everyone seems to be taking when it comes to the idea of conference expansion.

Scratch that.

Fans and media aren’t taking a wait and see approach. They’re way out ahead of things... to the point of looking pretty foolish every time another “report” turns out to be nothing more than incorrect speculation.

But the folks actually involved in possible conference expansion — university presidents, athletic directors, conference commissioners, etc — well they are taking their time. Everyone seems to be waiting for the Big Ten to make its Big Move.

That includes the Southeastern Conference.

Down south we like to think of the SEC as the juggernaut to end all juggernauts. And it is pretty close to being that. But as we continue this series over the next few days (it’ll be a multi-parter), we’ll show why the Big Ten actually has more chips on the table right now than your beloved local league.

SEC commissioner Mike Slive made it clear a few weeks ago that his league would be ready to move if forced. To paraphrase him, the conference plans to maintain its perch near the top of the college sports world.

Fair enough.

But I would suggest to you — and to the commissioner — that the movers and shakers in the SEC had best be figuring, factoring and planning for the future right now. They shouldn’t be waiting around for the Big Ten to tip over the first domino.

That doesn’t mean the league should rush out and grab up the first two or four schools it can find. Heck, it doesn’t mean that the league should expand at all.

What it means is that the SEC power-brokers should be doing their research this instant. Reports should be drawn up. Outside companies should be hired to give analysis. Behind-closed-doors phone calls should be placed.

The SEC’s decision-makers should be considering every school in the United States as a potential dance partner. If there are schools out there that the SEC

feels would be of help to them, then they shouldn't wait for the Big Ten to snap them up.

And if the SEC feels that one league moving to 16 teams does NOT shift the balance of power in college athletics too far toward that new behemoth league, then it should do nothing.

Either way, the Southeastern Conference should do what it usually does — lead the way. It should act rather than react.

Waiting for the Big Ten to announce its plans could leave the SEC without a dance partner when the music stops.

Here's how:

Let's say that the Big Ten does max out as a 16-team super-conference. Let's say they grab Missouri and Nebraska from the Big 12 and Syracuse, Rutgers and Pittsburgh from the Big East, as has been much speculated.

That leaves the Big 12 in a precarious spot. But already that league's leaders have held meetings with their counterparts in the Pac-10 to discuss a possible partnership. That's not a merger, mind you, but a partnership. The two leagues' schools would play more often. The television rights for both conferences would be negotiated together as part of one massive deal.

Perhaps Utah and TCU would be added to the mix, as well.

If that were the case, a television network would be able to secure the rights to 22 schools' games in one swoop by dealing with a Big 12 / Pac-10 consortium. That network would be able to effectively control college sports west of the Mississippi and it could lock up markets like Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Denver, Kansas City, Dallas and Houston in the process. Not bad for one negotiation, eh?

Now let's suppose that the folks on the East Coast get the same idea. In order to survive, the remaining Big East schools might forgive the ACC for its past transgressions and try to work out a media/on-field partnership with their brothers to the south.

Let's also suppose that the ACC — currently in need of a new television contract — decides that its best way to fend off possible SEC expansion is to pair up with the folks up north.

A television network (or networks) reaching a single agreement with an ACC / Big East syndicate would lock up the best college basketball package in the nation. It would also grab hold of some of the country's biggest television

markets: New York, Boston, DC, Baltimore, Charlotte, Atlanta and Miami.

So where would that leave the SEC? As a regional player at best.

The Big 12 / Pac-10 combo would stretch from Canada to Mexico and from the Pacific to the Mississippi.

The new Big Ten would cross the northern part of the country from Omaha to the Atlantic.

A Big East / ACC merger would claim the eastern seaboard from New England to the Florida Keys.

Meanwhile, the SEC would basically be left in the footprint of the old Confederacy, outnumbered, just as its predecessor was.

Effectively, the SEC would be the smallest “big” coalition of schools left on the landscape. The league already features mostly small television markets. To make matters worse, the populations of most of the SEC’s states are small compared to the giant states of California, Texas, Ohio and New York. That means that each year, more and more children would be raised as Big East / ACC fans, Big Ten fans or Big 12 / Pac-10 fans than SEC fans.

Consider that a bit of cruel arithmetic. To quote the evil king in “Braveheart,” “If we can’t drive them out, we’ll breed them out.”

In just a few quick moves — moves that are much more likely than some of the far-fetched expansion theories already being floated — one of the nation’s most powerful conferences could become one of the nation’s smallest and least influential.

Ah, yes, influence. How much sway do you think a 12-team, regional SEC would hold when it came to BCS or NCAA decisions? Think an expanded Big Ten and partnered-up big-market leagues wouldn’t have more pull than their country cousins down south?

None of this is to say that the SEC must expand right away just for the sake of expansion. But it is to say that the league needs to be considering anything and everything, including quick expansion.

Everything should be on the table right now. Not in two months, now. And if the Southeastern Conference feels that Move X would benefit the league long-term, then by all means, it should make Move X before anyone else has a chance to.

Things can change quickly in this world. If you don’t believe the SEC could go from the top dog to the runt of the litter, you’ve not been paying attention to just

how quickly they can change.

Ten years ago newspapers were still powerful and successful. Ten years ago all 12 SEC schools had different football coaches.

And ten years ago you'd never heard of Twitter, Facebook, iPods, or some group of militants called the Taliban.

Things change quickly. Mike Slive and the SEC's presidents need to keep that in mind.



Part Two: How We Got To This Point

How did we get here?

What is it about Spring 2010 that's led to possible seismic changes on the college sports landscape? What's the rush to expand the conferences? Is it an attempt to beat the end of the Mayan calendar in 2012?

To make things as simple as possible, there are basically three factors that have led college presidents and conference commissioners to start drawing up new maps and contemplating new marriages.

The first has nothing to do with 2010, either. In fact, it actually began in 1992.

1. Conference Championship Games

In the late 1980s, then SEC commissioner Harvey Schiller had an idea. As he tells it he was thumbing through the NCAA rule book when he first realized that his conference could hold a football championship game. Well, it could IF his league had at least 12 teams in it.

So Schiller and SEC presidents started whispering about the possibility of expanding the league and creating a newfangled title game that they believed would be a sure cash windfall.

NCAA president Walter Byers wasn't pleased when he heard the rumors of what was being discussed down in Birmingham. "What the heck are you doing?" he asked Schiller. "That (rule) was not meant for you. It was meant for hockey, volleyball and soccer (and smaller divisions) where they have 12 or 14 or 16 schools."

"But that's not what the rule book says," Schiller told him. As the ex-commish recently related to Paul Finebaum of The Mobile Press-Register, the conversation went south from there to the point that Byers called the SEC's commish an SOB and told him there would never be an SEC Championship Game.

But just a few short years later — in December of 1992 — there was such a game. And college football hasn't been the same since.

The new title game set aside the SEC as a trendsetter league, a pioneer. It resulted in added exposure for the league. It also produced the buckets of cash that were initially expected... and then some.

Last year, the conference raked in \$14.3 million for its 2008 title game. In early June we'll learn that the league made even more from last December's Alabama-

Florida match-up.

Other leagues have taken notice. Two other BCS conferences (the Big 12 and the ACC) have jumped on the bandwagon, but have yet to record the same amount of success as the SEC's title tilt.

Now the Big Ten is eyeing expansion partly in hopes of creating its own title joust. As coaches in that league have pointed out in the past months, the Big Ten virtually disappears from the college football scene in early December. A championship game would change that. It would also put some more sacks of money in Big Ten coffers, which has never been more important than it is now.

2. The Economy

According to Bloomberg.com, "Declining gifts and massive investment losses caused the nation's college university endowments to suffer their worst year (from July 2008 to June 2009) since the Great Depression."

The average loss was reported to be 18.7%. Endowments actually spent more than they earned for that fiscal year. And while the past year's numbers should look better, there's no question that schools are feeling a bigger pinch than ever before.

If you've read the front page of your local paper (if you still have a local paper), you know that your Hometown U. has probably been faced with massive spending cuts, a reduction in courses offered, salary freezes, hiring freezes and worse.

If you read your sports page, you also know that coaching salaries — both for head coaches and assistants — have been on the rise.

Schools need more cash. They don't just want it, they need it. To get it, they'll do whatever they feel they have to do. Even toss out traditions.

The NCAA recently expanded the size of its men's basketball tournament to 68 teams. It had toyed with actually expanding to 96 and that remains a possibility somewhere down the road.

The NCAA has also given a thumbs-up to two new bowl games this season.

Do the math. More tournament bids and more bowl bids mean more dollars pouring into the bank accounts of the nation's biggest conferences.

With more bids available (and possibly even more available in the future), wise conference heads realize that the more bids a league lands, the more cash

comes in to be spread around evenly.

How do you increase the odds of landing more bowl and tournament bids? By adding more teams to your conference (and by taking them away from someone else's conference).

Whether it's bowl bids, tournament bids, television deals or — on the academic side — bigger and better research funds and grants, bigger conferences mean bigger bucks.

3. Television

TV deals are the third accelerant at play in the drive for expansion.

Less than three years ago, the Big Ten launched the Big Ten Network. Its early troubles were too numerous to count, but the biggest issue was the league's inability to land the channel on major cable carriers.

While the Big Ten was trying to get their network off the ground, the SEC used the idea of starting its own network as leverage in its negotiations with CBS and ESPN.

Having seen the troubles faced by the Big Ten, the SEC chose to make CBS and ESPN its "official" networks. The two nets apparently bought the league's bluster about an SEC network, too, as they agreed to jaw-dropping new deals.

CBS inked a 15-year deal with the league that nets the SEC \$55 million per year. ESPN then backed up a Brinks truck and signed a separate 15-year agreement to the tune of \$150 million per year.

That's more than \$200 million dollars every year coming into the SEC. Tally that and it's \$3 billion coming into the SEC over the life of the two mega-deals.

And talk about timing. Shortly after the SEC signed its record-crunching contracts, the US economy hit the skids. Had the league's contracts been up for renewal a year or two later, it could have been the SEC that was left to get creative.

The Big 12, ACC and Pac-10 are now in that boat. They've had their own talks with the nation's networks about new deals, but no one is seeing numbers that come close to approaching the SEC's landmark agreements.

That's why those three leagues are contemplating starting their own networks.

Some, like the Big 12 and Pac-10 have talked about partnering up in their next round of television negotiations. Any network landing the football and basketball rights to a Big 12 / Pac-10 joint venture would tie up 33% of all the television households in the United States. One contract, one third of the TV homes. There's not a network out there that wouldn't jump at that deal.

There has even been talk of the ACC and Pac-10 working together to launch their own channel. Imagine ACC games in primetime at 8pm on the East Coast and Pac-10 games in primetime at 11pm on the West Coast. All on one channel.

Just as the SEC's deals sent shockwaves across the sports horizon, so has the success of the Big Ten Network. Since its initial struggles, the league's channel has boomed to bigger success than anyone — including Big Ten officials — had projected.

A co-ownership deal with Fox (51% Big Ten, 49% Fox) has helped. Landing on more cable carriers has helped, too. Adding more markets to the mix would likely push the network even further from red to black to pure, deep green.

Last year, Big Ten schools made about \$9 million each from the league's deals with ABC and ESPN. They pulled in another \$7 to \$8 million from the Big Ten network. Those numbers should grow this year.

If the Big Ten can add markets like Kansas City, St. Louis and New York City to its network's roster, it might be able to land on even more cable carriers. Cable carriers who already clear the network might be willing to move the channel onto better cable tiers as well.

Over the next few days, we'll continue our series by looking at some of the unfounded fears of expansion and what the SEC's goals should be if it does expand. We'll take a school by school look at the expansion candidates both in athletic, financial and academic terms. Finally, we'll show you what we believe to be the league's best case scenario.

Keep in mind that might mean doing absolutely nothing.

But before we can get to the finish line, it's important to know why all of this is starting and why it's starting now.

The answer to that — as you can see above — is as easy as 1-2-3.

Part Three: Unfounded Fears

This week the Big Ten conference will be holding its yearly meetings in Chicago. Expansion will certainly be a topic as officials from the 11 member schools meet, but commissioner Jim Delany has said that no final decisions (or formal offers) will be made.

That won't stop a new wave of "here's what's going to happen stories" from appearing across the internet this week. Your local talk radio station will once again be dominated by expansion talk, too.

When it comes to the Southeastern Conference's future plans, I've been surprised to hear so many fears tossed about by fans from the Ozarks to the Atlantic. And many of fans' worries and warnings shouldn't be major concerns at all.

Below are five of the most common concerns that we here at MrSEC have heard over the past few weeks. Let's examine these fears to see if they're legit... or just hot air.

1. ESPN and CBS won't renegotiate their contracts with the SEC, so the league will lose money by expanding.

In most cases, contracts written between networks and conferences include language that make it clear that the current deal will remain in place as long as there are no major changes to the conference. If six teams left the SEC, you can trust that ESPN would be screaming for a new deal. The alternate holds true as well.

But a renegotiation of contracts might not be necessary in the first place.

Let's say that the SEC expands to 16 teams and lassos Texas, Texas A&M, Clemson and Georgia Tech. (Those are just four teams chosen at random, not a suggestion.)

Now let's say that the SEC — trying to make sure its schools play against each other more often — goes to a nine-game conference schedule for football (like the Pac-10 and Big Ten) and an 18-game schedule for basketball (like the Pac-10, Big Ten and Big East).

Currently SEC squads play a grand total of 48 non-conference football games (12 teams, four a piece) each year. They also play 48 conference games head-to-head.

In basketball, the SEC teams currently play 96 games per season against one

another.

The vast majority of those games (96 football, 96 conference games in basketball) are the property of ESPN and CBS.

But if the league grows to 16 teams and expands its in-conference football and basketball schedules, it is creating more inventory to sell.

Do the math: 16 teams playing three non-conference football games a year still equals 48 games. But 16 teams playing a nine-game conference slate adds 24 more games to the league's schedule. Instead of having 96 football games to sell per year, the SEC would have 120 games to sell.

In basketball, the league would jump from 96 games per year to 144 in-conference contests per season.

Now let's say that CBS and ESPN continue to broadcast the same number of SEC games (for the same price) even after expansion. That gives the league more inventory — two games per week during football season — that could be sold off to other networks.

The result would be more television money coming into the league, without a renegotiation of the CBS and ESPN deals.

Would that new revenue be enough to make expansion worthwhile? That would depend on how much a network (or networks) would be willing to pay for the final picks of SEC football and basketball games each week.

Tooling around the dial on a fall Saturday or winter Wednesday should tell you that someone would be willing to pay. Even the dregs of the SEC barrel would outdraw mid-level games from other conferences.

2. The league would be too tough and national titles would become impossible to win.

Last week, Nick Saban suggested that SEC coaches feel they have to win the national championship twice each season just to claim the BCS crystal football... once by winning the SEC and once by beating the best BCS foe in the country.

Many fans seem to agree. Adding a Texas or a Florida State would make the SEC too difficult and would prevent the league from winning future titles.

Of course, that's exactly what coaches and fans said when the SEC added its conference championship game in 1992. Since then, the league has catapulted to the unquestioned, unrivaled ruler of college football.

Until 2007, no two-loss team had ever been given a shot in the national championship game. But that year voters (and computers) rewarded LSU for playing in the toughest conference in America and placed the Tigers in the title game. The Bayou Bengals' easy victory further proved the league's dominance.

An SEC team has been voted into the title game for four consecutive seasons, winning each time. Three of those squads had a loss on their schedule when they were selected.

Obviously, a strong argument can be made that the addition of more powers to the SEC would actually enhance the conference's odds of winning future titles.

The same holds true in basketball. The 16-team Big East — whether it deserves the praise or not — is considered the top hoops league in America. Its teams whip up on each other throughout the regular season, yet every postseason the NCAA tournament selection committee rewards the league with a plethora of tourney bids. The league captured eight bids this past March.

3. Rivalries would be lost.

This one, sadly, is true. But it's also a common occurrence in college sports. When the SEC expanded and broke into two divisions in 1992, several great rivalries were lost.

New rivalries took their place.

If the yearly Oklahoma-Nebraska tussle can be lost from the college football schedule, any rivalry can be replaced. Currently the oldest rivalry west of the Mississippi (Kansas versus Missouri) is being threatened by the Big Ten's possible expansion.

The loss of tradition is frustrating, but it's never been a roadblock for previous expansions in college athletics. Not even in the tradition-rich SEC.

4. The SEC can't expand too wide or fans can't drive from one school to another.

In the Pac-10, the University of Washington is located in Seattle. The University of Arizona is located in Tucson. That's a distance of 1,608 miles and a driving time of 24 hours and 11 minutes (if you go by Yahoo! maps).

In the ACC, Boston College is located in Chesnut Hill, Massachusetts and the University of Miami is located in Coral Gables, Florida. That's a distance of 1,477 miles and a driving time of 23 hours and 17 minutes.

If you want to drive from Colorado to Texas A&M in the Big 12, it's a 1,070-mile trek that will take you 16 hours by car.

The Big Ten is looking at a possible expansion that would stretch it from Nebraska to New York City. That's 1,300 miles and 20 hours.

In other words, in this day and age, travel is less of a concern than it's ever been. Will softball and golf teams have further to travel? Yes. But increased revenue — if expansion does increase revenue — should cover the costs.

As for the fans, the leagues don't care. Presidents, athletic directors and commissioners know that if a product is good enough, someone will fill the seats in a stadium or arena. It might not be folks from the visiting school, but someone will be there to pay for a ticket.

The size of other leagues already proves that.

And for the record, a drive from Gainesville to Fayetteville is 1,034 miles and a 16-hour trip. It's not like the SEC hasn't stretched its boundaries already.

5. Traditionally bad teams will have even less hope of improving in an expanded league.

The SEC's traditional cellar dwellers in football are Vanderbilt and Mississippi State. Add a Miami to the East and a Texas to the West and you would expect their hopes of improvement to only grow slimmer.

But what if the Southeastern Conference decided against two eight-team divisions and instead found a way to work with a four-division alignment? That idea is already being floated in Big Ten circles regarding that league's possible expansion.

In such a case, the chances for a Vandy or a Mississippi State to claim a division title would actually increase, not decrease with expansion.

Currently, the Commodores would have to jump five teams to earn an East Division crown. In a four-team division, Bobby Johnson's club would need only to best three other teams.

How would a four-division set-up work? We'll discuss that in a future installment of this series.

As you can see, the five most common worries tossed out by the anti-expansion crowd aren't necessarily worries at all. And you can be certain that SEC presidents and athletic directors — if they see a way to 1) secure their long-term

strength and 2) secure their long-term financial future — will ignore any and all warnings and press forward with expansion anyway. IF they see a way to make money.

As we explained in Part Two of this series, cash is king. Any worry a fan might have will take a backseat to dollars and cents... and in most cases, the worries aren't really much to worry about in the first place.



Part Four: If The SEC Is Going To Act, It Should Act Boldly

Two summers ago, the Southeastern Conference signed a \$150 million per year contract with ESPN. Talking heads across the nation praised the league for “making ESPN its network.”

At the time, they (we) were correct. The Big Ten was struggling to gain clearance for its own regional network. The SEC had just signed one of the richest deals imaginable. The ESPN deal would provide coast-to-coast coverage, too, not just regional coverage.

But not quite two years later, the ACC has now cut an even richer per-year agreement with ESPN. Yes, the ACC. The league that has for so long been the butt of so many SEC fans’ football jokes.

A bigger contract than the SEC’s? Whoda thunk it?

“Whoda thunk it” is precisely why Mike Slive and the SEC’s presidents should be looking long and hard at the possibility of expanding the Southeastern Conference.

The common refrain amongst many in the south has been, “We’re the most powerful league in the country, why should we expand?” Quite simply, that’s presumptuous. It’s also bad business.

Top executives don’t run their companies by looking at how things stand now. They succeed by trying to figure out how things will stand 10, 15 or even 50 years from now.

The SEC stands head-to-head with the Big Ten on sports’ Mount Olympus... for now.

But by 2024 — when the league’s twin contracts with CBS and ESPN run out — that might not be the case. Slive and the SEC presidents should not assume that the league’s current run of on-field dominance will continue in perpetuity. In fact, the league’s current strength is a product of forward-thinking, landscape-changing decisions made by previous league commissioners Harvey Schiller and Roy Kramer 20 years ago.

As I’ve stated in just about each piece of this series, none of this means that the SEC must expand. It simply means that the SEC should seriously consider expanding. If its studies and research shows that expansion is a positive move, then it should act boldly. Perhaps even swiftly.

And if the SEC does decide to grow, history tells us what the league’s goals

should be.

“Il nous faut de l’audace, encore de l’audace, toujours de l’audace.”

– French revolutionary Georges Danton

Alright, you might recognize a version of that quote from the movie “Patton.” Forcing his men to fight without rest, George C. Scott warns his subordinate, “L’audace, l’audace, toujours l’audace.”

“We must dare, dare again, always dare!”

So why do I use a quote from the French Revolution in a column regarding possible SEC expansion? Because if the SEC is going to expand, it needs to dang well do just that. Expand. All the way.

There has been talk for a quarter-century that eventually the American sports nation would be ruled by four 16-team superconferences. If the SEC is going to expand now, then it should do so with the goal of controlling the sports landscape for decades to come.

In college basketball, the NCAA tournament will eventually be expanded to 96 teams. It almost happened this spring.

With each tournament win being worth roughly \$1 million, the more bids (and wins) a conference can muster, the more cash to divvy up amongst its teams each spring.

Ditto the college football bowl season. More teams, more bowl bids. More bowl bids, more money.

Dare, dare again, always dare. If a four-team expansion makes monetary sense, the SEC needs to go in that direction and worry about rivalries and traditions later. In fact, if the SEC sees value in growing into some sort of 20-team megaconference, then that too should be considered.

“Our manifest destiny is to overspread the continent allotted by providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”

– John L. O’Sullivan

When the great writer O’Sullivan opined of westward expansion in the mid-1800s, the millions he was referring to were people. Today, that quote could just as easily be used to reference dollars.

As discussed in Part One of our series, the SEC is at risk of becoming the most regional of the major BCS leagues. I don’t mean that in a good way.

Simple mathematics shows the perilous ground on which the SEC currently stands. The Big Ten states include four of the biggest states in the union. If this were an election, the Big Ten would win the electoral college pretty easily.

If the Big Ten states are home to 67,379,505 people, it's safe to assume that the majority of these folks are Big Ten fans. By comparison, the SEC is home to 58,581,019 people. That means there are 10 million more Big Ten fans out there for television networks to chase.

If the Big Ten expands — as rumored — by adding Pittsburgh, Rutgers, Syracuse, Missouri and Nebraska, it's population base balloons to more than 103 million people. You don't have to be a math whiz to conclude that major networks will be more likely to fork over cash to a Big Ten that's supported nearly 2-to-1 more than the SEC.

The Big Ten is churning out more graduates per year than the SEC, too. Big Ten schools have a collective student population of more than 450,000. The SEC — with one more school — stands at little more than 300,000 students on campus each year.

Forget the SEC's superior football of today. Look to the future. If other leagues start expanding, the SEC will need to grow as well. That means truly expanding, growing the footprint of the league, turning new areas into SEC hotbeds.

In a recent chat with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution's Tony Barnhart, former commissioner Kramer said, "The tricky part is that we would have to broaden our (geographical) footprint to increase the revenue enough to justify the move."

Clemson, Georgia Tech, Florida State and Miami — the schools most often mentioned as possible SEC targets — don't have much impact when it comes to stretching the SEC's boundaries.

League fans like the idea of adding more nearby schools that seem to "fit" the SEC. But if league presidents do come to the conclusion that expansion is a necessity, it's not the conference's manifest destiny to simply spread deeper into areas that are already considered "SEC Country."

"Make the world England."

– English Colonial policy

If the SEC needs to expand outwardly, the powers that be should not limit themselves when considering new dance partners. Notre Dame currently plays in the Big East in all sports but football (it also schedules three Big East schools per year in football). In previous years, the ACC and Pac-10 have courted the Irish as well.

Texas has had discussions over the years with the Pac-10, the SEC and the Big Ten.

The southern-based ACC recently expanded into Massachusetts by landing Boston College.

Bottom line? Put down your atlas.

If the SEC believes that Texas or even Notre Dame would add the most dollars to the league's bank account, then those schools should be the league's targets.

If a private school seems to have the most to offer, then a private school should be considered for an invitation, even though the SEC is made up mostly of state schools and land grant institutions.

In other words, if the dollars are there — dollars that can help secure the long-term strength of the length — SEC presidents should consider even those schools that do not appear to be a “normal” fit for the SEC.

“The gods are on the side of the stronger.”

– The Roman historian Tacitus

Conferences with more schools will naturally hold more power and sway when it comes to NCAA and BCS decision-making. To allow another league to outsuperpower the SEC would be a major setback. And honestly, I don't see the Slive or the league's presidents allowing that to happen.

If the Big Ten and SEC were to expand to 16 teams, those leagues might set off a chain reaction that would cause the Big East and Big 12 to eventually disappear. With more schools, the Big Ten and SEC would most certainly push for the current two-teams-in-the-BCS limit to be upped to a three-teams-in-the-BCS rule.

Additional BCS bids would mean millions more for the leagues that land them.

If the SEC sees that expansion is its best move, then it should expand with the goal of collecting more power and influence.

In other words, if you want to make sure that the deck is always stacked in your favor, own the casino.

More than just a land or money grab, expansion should also be a power grab for the SEC. The bigger the stronger and the stronger the better.

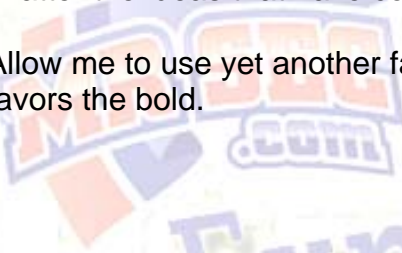
If the decision-makers in the SEC decide that expansion is a positive proposition

for the league, then they should not limit themselves in their discussions of who should be targeted for membership.

The conference should be daring enough to expand to a whopping 16 teams (or more) if that appears to be the right move. It should look to expand its geographic footprint and its population base — spreading the gospel of the SEC to new converts, if you will. The league should also be willing to eye teams from coast-to-coast if those teams appear to be the most valuable assets available. Finally, size equals power and SEC brass should make the seizing of more power a top priority in this process.

The ACC and ESPN have reminded us this week that things can change quickly. History tells us that to keep up with those changes, the SEC must be ready to shatter the ideas that have come before.

Allow me to use yet another famous historical quote to sum that up: Fortune favors the bold.



Expounding on Expansion

Part Five: Don't Forget About Academics and Politics

Mention the words “conference expansion” and fans start dreaming of ways to create the world’s greatest football league. “This team is great and it’s in the Southeast.” “Well this team would be a natural rival with Georgia and Florida.” “This team won a national title this decade.”

That kind of talk is fun. But it’s not the kind of chatter you’re likely to hear when a group of university presidents get together. And ultimately, any decision on SEC expansion will be made by the league’s 12 presidents, not by Mike Slive, the league’s coaches, or its fans.

Money will be key. Securing future funds, future fanbases (i.e.: population bases) and future power will all be goals.

And football? Well, it’s part of the equation, too, but it’s not the 95% of the deal that some in the media would have you believe.

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said this week that academics shouldn’t be overlooked in the current expansion frenzy.

“You’re hitting on the most important part of this deal that people are actually missing. Our presidents are in it not because of football. Let’s be clear. And I agree with them.” Adding more schools from the AAU — more on that group in a minute — “would take us to a whole other level” as a conference.

That’s not just a Big Ten view. Former ACC commissioner Gene Corrigan recently discussed just how much of a role academics played in his league’s expansion back in the early 90s.

“I think if you would have asked the people at Florida State about joining, there were some who probably thought, well, (the ACC is) not good enough in football. But if you ask some people in the faculty, they’d say, ‘We get to be in the same league as Duke and Virginia and Carolina and Georgia Tech!’”

Even football coaches understand the importance of finding good academic “fits” for a league. “At Wake Forest, we want to be a great football team, we want to win as many games every year as we possibly can, but we can’t sacrifice academics,” Jim Grobe said. “And it’s good to compete against other schools that have the same goals and aspirations.”

In other words, while you and your buddies are debating the merits of Florida State or Texas A&M as potential SEC dance partners, you’d best not be forgetting about academics.

The AAU and The CIC

When you read the letters AAU, you probably think of a mid-summer basketball league. But in the Big Ten, those three letters mean something completely different.

All of the Big Ten's 11 schools are members of the Association of American Universities. That's a collection of 63 of the biggest research-oriented schools in North America.

According to the AAU, the 110-year-old organization "focuses on national and institutional issues that are important to research-intensive universities, including funding for research, research and education policy, and graduate and undergraduate education."

Compared to the research spending of top-flight major universities, even the biggest athletic budgets pale in comparison. In 2008, the University of Florida was one of only three schools to top \$100 million in athletic spending.

Think \$100 million is a lot of cash to spend? Multiply it by five and you have what UF spent in 2008 on research projects. In fact, Florida receives more than \$550 million annually in sponsored research funding.

Presidents pay attention to those kinds of dollars.

In addition to focusing on AAU membership, the Big Ten has also created the Committee on Institutional Cooperation. The CIC, according to its director, was designed to "save money, solve problems, share assets and build opportunity for faculty and researchers."

All eleven Big Ten schools — as well as original member the University of Chicago — benefit from this consortium. Imagine the ability to buy in bulk. The CIC has also digitized millions of books that can be shared across the conference via fiber optic network.

"By almost any metric — investment in research, number of top ten academic programs, national rankings and enrollment — the CIC universities are very similar," said Barbara McFadden Allen, the group's director. "This helps us move together on projects and initiatives in ways that would be difficult for a more disparate group."

If and when the Big Ten expands, Allen said the league will "be bringing in a university and not a team."

Michael Hogan, the incoming president at the University of Illinois, has thought about possible Big Ten membership while serving at his last school, the

University of Connecticut.

“Part of what appealed to me about it was, there’s an academic counterpart to the Big Ten, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, which is based there in Urbana (Illinois). It brings together presidents and provosts to share ideas on the academic side, including sharing programs that make them widely available to all students in the Big Ten. It’s a nice match of the academic and sports part of the institution all across the board in the Big Ten.”

Starting to get the picture? The presidents of the SEC do. They’re surely aware that their own league lags behind the Big Ten in terms of academic reputation.

According to the latest rankings provided by “US News & World Report,” the average Big Ten university ranks at #50. The average SEC school comes in at #91. On average, Big Ten schools receive and spend more than \$500 million in research funding each year. In the SEC research funding reaches only about \$227 million per school.

Then there’s the whole 11 to two lead the Big Ten holds in AAU memberships. Only Florida and Vanderbilt are in that club from the SEC.

In short, the Big Ten is a league of massive, big budgeted schools that focus on graduate degrees and academic research. The schools of the SEC are solid, spend well in research, but focus more on the undergraduate side of things.

That’s something for fans to think about when trying to hash out which schools are most likely to receive SEC invitations (if any).

The SEC’s presidents are trying to take steps to close the gap on the Big Ten academically.

Part of ESPN’s television deal with the SEC forced the network to partner with the league in the creation of [the SEC Academic Network](#).

Launched last August, the online network features “content from every (SEC) institution ranging from research, innovation and economic development to community partnerships, civic engagement and service.”

“The commitment to highlight the accomplishments of SEC member institution academic programs was a key component of our new television agreements,” Slive said. “This network will provide our 12 institutions with the ability to create and distribute academic and other non-athletic programming through the world on a regular and full-time basis.”

In other words, it’s a PR wing designed to push and improve the SEC’s academic brand. But good advertising isn’t the only step the league’s presidents are

taking.

In 2005 the SEC created the Southeastern Conference Academic Consortium. Consider it a very young version of the Big Ten's CIC.

According to a 2006 press release, the consortium was created to "bolster teaching, research, public service and other educational activities" at SEC schools. It's goal is to "provide opportunities for schools to work together to enhance and share academic resources. All 12 SEC member schools will work together, outside of the athletic realm, to create a cooperative environment for all students."

If you're bored to tears, you shouldn't be. This is how conferences expand. This is how schools decide which league they will join. Take Texas, for example.

Targeting Texas

Make no mistake, Texas is the prize that the SEC has its eye on. The Big Ten is looking toward the Lone Star State, too. And Washington's athletic director Scott Howard recently said, "I'd be surprised if our (Pac-10) office is not in contact with them. I'm sure those conversations have happened and are taking place."

Texas is big. It's got the television markets, alumni base, name brand, huge facilities and A-1 athletic programs that conference commissioners lust after.

The school also fancies itself to be a Harvard on the Colorado River, which appeals to university presidents.

To hear former SEC commissioner Harvey Schiller tell it, Texas was ticketed to join the league back in the late 1980s. "I spent some time with (Texas athletic director) DeLoss Dodds and he really wanted to join the conference." Unfortunately politicians got involved and the deal fell through. That's how Schiller recalls it anyway.

Folks in Texas remember things a bit differently. Former University of Texas president Robert Berdahl told MySanAntonio.com in 2007 that at the time he was unimpressed with the SEC's academic reputation.

"We were quite interested in raising academic standards and the Southeastern Conference had absolutely no interest in that."

If the former Texas prez is to be believed, we might not be talking about the SEC possibly wooing the Longhorns now had the league agreed to boost its academic standards some 20 years ago.

Academics play a role, folks. A big role.

Politics Play A Big Role, Too

Go back to the early '90s and everyone seems to have a different take on how that wave of expansion took place.

According to Schiller, [the SEC didn't want Texas A&M](#) and balked at a “take ‘em both or you get none” stance from the Texas state legislature.

Meanwhile, Vince Dooley was pushing for Georgia Tech to earn an SEC bid. Florida supposedly wanted both Florida State and Miami to join.

As you know, in the end, Arkansas and South Carolina were the only schools to come on board.

But in Texas, the powerbrokers say that Texas A&M and LSU officials had been angling to bring the Aggies into the league as early as the late '80s. As the story goes, after talks with Miami fell apart, LSU athletic director Joe Dean called A&M AD John David Crow and told him that LSU would sponsor an entry bid from A&M.

Dean said at the time that he believed Texas was “headed north” to the Big Ten or Big Eight (now the Big 12) and that A&M was the “most logical addition to the SEC.”

Unfortunately Texas legislators weren't going to let the state's two biggest schools split. So that meant a Texas and Texas A&M package deal to the Big Eight. But the politicians weren't done yet.

Baylor and Texas Tech had powerful allies throughout the state legislature and, according to some, threats were made to Texas and A&M officials. If they tried to jump from the old Southwest Conference without the Bears and Red Raiders riding shotgun, both schools would see their state funding cut.

Presto Chango, the Big Eight grew not to 10 teams but to 12.

The lesson here is that in many cases, targeting just one of a state's schools can lead to political headaches. There's been much talk that Texas and Texas A&M would still be bound together by politicians today (though officials from both schools seem to be fine with the idea of going in different directions).

History would tell us that any deal for Texas might not just be a combo package with A&M but a super-sized meal that includes Baylor and Texas Tech, too.

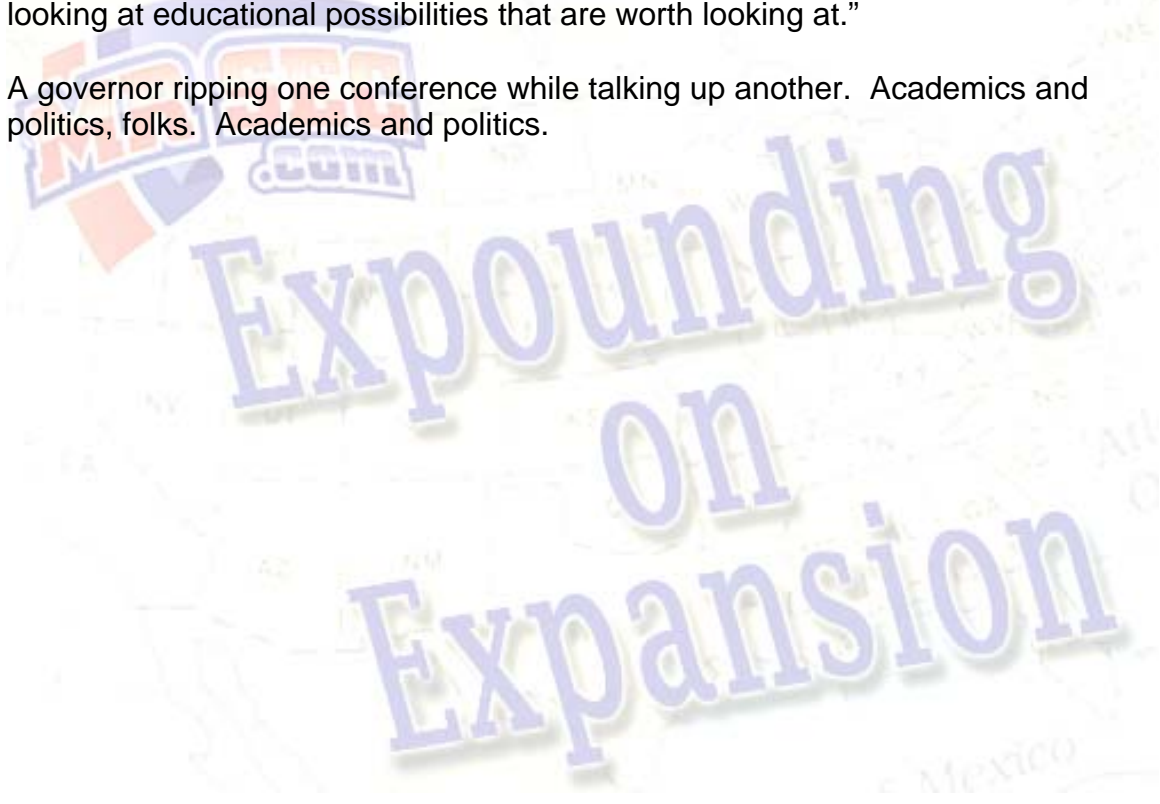
Want Oklahoma? You'll likely hear a howl from Oklahoma State grads in that state's legislature. Ditto Kansas and Kansas State. Double ditto in the case of Virginia Tech and Virginia.

The above information isn't sexy. It's not fun. And it doesn't make for good sports bar conversation.

But it will play a role in any expansion decision the SEC makes.

Academics and politics will be involved. Just take note of what Missouri Governor Jay Nixon told the Associated Press this spring: "I'm not going to say anything bad about the Big 12, but when you compare Oklahoma State to Northwestern, when you compare Texas Tech to Wisconsin, I mean you begin looking at educational possibilities that are worth looking at."

A governor ripping one conference while talking up another. Academics and politics, folks. Academics and politics.



Part Six: The Criteria For Selecting Teams

As part of our series on SEC expansion, we've told you [why the SEC should be working on its plans right now](#), rather than waiting for the Big Ten to make a move. We've explained [what factors have come together](#) to make 2010 the year of change in college sports. We've shot down [some unfounded fears about SEC growth](#). We've shown [why the league must act boldly](#), if it's forced to expand. And we've taken a look at history to show [how important academics and politics will be](#) in any SEC expansion.

So now comes the fun stuff.

Everyone, their brother and their brother's cousin has an idea about which teams the SEC should chase should it decide that expansion is a smart move. Most of the lists you've probably seen could be put together using just two pieces of information — a football standings sheet from last season and an atlas.

But in keeping with our desire to take a more business-like view of the situation, we're looking at things as an SEC president might. We've done two months of research on everything from dollars to wins to televisions to mileage. The result is a nine-category rating system that we believe covers just about every type of information that SEC presidents would consider if discussing league expansion.

As we've said numerous times, no one wants to see the SEC expand just for expansion's sake. If more dollars, more prestige, and more power aren't attainable through expansion, then research — like ours — should be chucked.

But if the league's presidents do come to believe that adding teams can help the SEC long-term, the criteria you're about to see is exactly the type of data they will consider when trying to decide which schools to invite.

The Candidates

For this piece, we attempted to create a list of potential SEC expansion candidates that "fit" in a number of areas. We have considered only schools currently in BCS conferences, for example. A jump from mid-major status to the SEC simply seems too steep. Also, non-BCS teams would be unlikely to produce the kind of positive impact that league presidents would desire. In the early 1990s, Houston had some discussions with the SEC — along with Texas A&M and Texas — but the Cougars never received the invitation they were hoping for. We believe schools like Houston would probably be in the same boat now.

We also removed from the conversation schools like North Carolina and Duke. The four North Carolina schools make up the center and foundation of the ACC.

Carolina and Duke are considered academic jewels. They also focus on basketball over football. In our view, it is highly unlikely that those schools would make a move... unless their entire league was in danger of collapsing (like say, a somewhat shaky Big 12 where Texas and Texas A&M reside).

No short-timers were considered, either. South Florida has a rising football program. The school is large and it's located in a large metropolitan area. But its athletic track record just isn't long enough at this point. SEC presidents would be forced to judge USF more on the basis of projections than on past athletic history.

On our list are some schools that would appear to be geographic stretches. In some cases, the name value alone required consideration. In others, one school's desirability might force the SEC to weigh the merits of a package deal with a more distant neighbor. For example, Missouri would be a geographic fit with the SEC. If the league believed Missouri to be a prime candidate for expansion, then perhaps an invitation extended to longtime rival Kansas might make the Tigers' decision a bit easier. That combination would certainly help the SEC in terms of both academic and basketball reputation.

Not all of the candidates below would really appear on the SEC's potential wish list, of course. Some schools would bring more to the table than others. And some would be more likely to accept an invitation than others. But for the sake of research, we cast a wide net anyway.

Our list includes the following 18 schools:

Baylor, Clemson, Florida State, Georgia Tech, Kansas, Louisville, Maryland, Miami, Missouri, Notre Dame, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech, Virginia, Virginia Tech and West Virginia.

Before you say, "Aw, the SEC would never consider _____," read the entirety of this piece and the next. Then you might understand why a school like Baylor, for example, warrants examination.

The Categories

Here's a list of what we believe should be taken into consideration by SEC powerbrokers... and why:

1. Proximity

From former SEC commissioner Roy Kramer to ADs and commissioners across the BCS leagues, most people in the know believe expansion will be fueled by conferences' desire to grow their geographic footprints. That kind of growth brings larger populations and more television markets. However, that doesn't

mean the SEC should simply add Washington, Arizona State and UConn in order to span the nation's four corners. While the goal should be growth, that growth has to make some sort of geographic sense.

There are three cities that have hosted (or are scheduled to host) multiple SEC men's basketball tournaments in the current 15-year window: Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans. We added up the distance from each of the 18 schools in our study to each of these three SEC-friendly cities. The total distance of each school from those three cities served as our Proximity grade.

2. TV Markets

Bigger television markets equal high television ratings. Higher television ratings equal more dollars from television networks.

For each of the 18 schools in our study, we counted the Top 50 television markets that they would bring into the SEC fold. A massive state school like Texas would add Dallas, Houston, Austin and San Antonio to the SEC's resume. Notre Dame would offer a national draw. On the other hand, schools already in SEC states would offer no new television households.

3. Population

As we wrote in Part One of our series — and as Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany stated last week — the population base near a school has to be considered. The Big Ten knows that by adding a school like Missouri, it can convert the majority of that state's 6-million-person population from Big 12 fans to Big Ten fans. Exposing those new fans to Big Ten schools (via athletics) will increase the odds of Missouri natives heading to Big Ten universities. That means more students, more alumni, and more donations for the Big Ten.

For the SEC, the mission should be the same. Schools that can best increase the SEC's population base should take precedence over those schools located in smaller states.

4. Academics

[In Part Five of our series](#), we explained the importance that academics will play in expansion. Presidents care more about scholarship than they do scholarship\$. Yes, they are after money first and foremost, but when schools like Florida receive more than \$550 million in research grants each year, there are big bucks at play on the academic side of things, too.

We used nine criteria (as we'll break down in a future piece) to gauge the academic reputations of all 66 BCS schools. In comparing the 18 schools on our candidate list to the 12 schools already in the SEC, we placed each school in one

three categories: “Better than the typical SEC school,” “A good fit with SEC schools,” and “Worse than the typical SEC school.” Obviously, the more a school can help the SEC’s academic reputation, the higher that school scored in our system.

5. Football and Basketball Success

Success in the two most watched men’s sports helps to build a school’s overall “brand.” Therefore, schools that have had recent success in football, basketball or both are more likely to draw in fans, viewers and — as a result — television executives.

In the SEC’s case, improving the league’s basketball reputation should be a secondary goal of any expansion move.

For our purposes, we simply tallied up each school’s total number of bowl bids and NCAA tournament bids over the past 10 seasons.

6. Directors Cup Success

Former SEC commissioner Harvey Schiller has stated that a drawback for Miami during the SEC’s expansion talks 20 years ago was the school’s lack of commitment to its overall athletic program. Obviously, the more programs a school fields the better.

For that reason, we ranked each of our 18 candidates according to their success in the 2008-2009 Directors Cup race.

7. Fertile Recruiting Ground

Any expansion should result in the conquering of new territories. Those territories should be considered as having extra value if they provide a new and fertile recruiting base for the SEC’s existing programs.

We chose to focus on football recruiting. We ranked our candidates based upon the number of 4- and 5-star football players (according to Scout.com) currently playing within their state borders.

Obviously, candidate schools located inside the current SEC footprint don’t bring much new to the table in terms of recruiting base.

8. Athletic Spending

Any school joining the SEC should be able to compete on equal footing with the league’s current members. We used the Department of Education’s most recent

records (fiscal year 2008) to rank our candidates from 1 to 18 in total athletic department spending.

All 12 SEC member institutions ranked among the 64 biggest budgets in the nation in '08. Only Vanderbilt, Ole Miss, and Mississippi State (in that order) ranked outside the nation's 29 biggest budgets.

For the record, the average total spending for an SEC athletic department in 2008 was \$71,501,372. So the higher the budget, the better a candidate's score in our system.

9. Football Stadium Size

Football isn't the end all, be all in the expansion game, but it is a major, major factor. Even at a basketball-first school like Kentucky, football is still the biggest breadwinner.

The larger a school's stadium, the more solid its commitment to football, and the more money it can make from tickets, parking, etc.

So now you know the schools we've examined and the standards we've used to grade them.

Part Seven: Grading The SEC Expansion Candidates

Eighteen expansion candidates ranked in nine different financial, academic and athletic categories. That's what you're about to see. ([For a breakdown of the categories, click here.](#))

Our examination of the SEC's potential expansion partners starts now... with the schools listed in alphabetical order:

SCHOOL: BAYLOR BEARS

PROXIMITY: 2,164 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Dallas (2,544,410 households)

POPULATION: Texas has 23,507,783 residents

ACADEMICS: A good fit with SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 2 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 33rd nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 49 five- and four-star football players in Texas this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 52nd nationally at \$48,545,254 (bigger than just 3 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 50,000 (bigger than just 1 current SEC stadium)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Baylor has the smallest football stadium of the 18 schools we examined. Despite making recent improvements in football and basketball, they also rank dead last in terms of postseason bids over the last decade. So why would the SEC have any interest in the Waco school? One word: Texas. Folks are quick to suggest that Texas and Texas A&M would likely be a package deal in any conference move. But as we pointed out [in Part Five of our series](#), Texas politicians forced Baylor and Texas Tech into the Big 12 back in the mid-'90s. There's nothing to say they wouldn't threaten to cut the state funding of Texas and Texas A&M again should they try to leave BU and Tech behind. So if it meant landing Texas, would the SEC be willing to take all four of the Big 12's Lone Star State schools? That's a lot of fans and a lot of TV viewers.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: If Texas leaves the Big 12 and Baylor doesn't follow, the Bears would likely be heading to the MWC, WAC or C-USA. They'll tag along with Texas if they can.

SCHOOL: CLEMSON TIGERS

PROXIMITY: 1,076 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds no new TV markets

POPULATION: Adds no new population base

ACADEMICS: A good fit with SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 11 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 53rd nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: Adds no new recruiting ground

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 38th nationally at \$56,199,722 (bigger than just 3 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 82,000 (bigger than 6 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Clemson is a natural fit for the SEC in terms of location, fanbase, stadium size, and academics. It's no wonder the Tigers are often rumored to be heading to the SEC. Clemson seems to be a no-brainer. But there's one problem — Clemson adds nothing new to the SEC. The league already can claim the Palmetto State thanks to the membership it granted the University of South Carolina in the early '90s. If the goal of expansion is to gain new recruiting ground, new television markets and a larger population base, then Clemson doesn't fit after all. But if the goal is to simply fill out the roster and get to 16 teams — which might not be the smartest move from a business standpoint — then the Tigers would likely get an invite.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: For all the talk that Clemson is a better fit in the SEC than in the ACC, there's never been a large push from the Tiger fanbase to bail on their longtime home. And as we'll point out when discussing each ACC school on our list, that league's new pact with ESPN might make it more difficult for the SEC to pry a school loose.

SCHOOL: FLORIDA STATE SEMINOLES

PROXIMITY: 1,150 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds no new TV markets

POPULATION: Adds no new population base

ACADEMICS: A good fit with SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 12 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 15th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: Adds no new recruiting ground

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 17th nationally at \$73,125,352 (bigger than 5 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 82,300 (bigger than 6 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Like Clemson, Florida State is a natural fit. For years, Bobby Bowden and the Seminoles campaigned for a spot in the SEC. Even in 1990, Bowden was quoted as saying that it would be "awfully hard" to turn down an SEC bid after fighting for one for so long. But when discussions finally heated up, the FSU hierarchy opted for the more academically-respected ACC. While the Seminoles would add nothing in terms of "new," FSU is still one of the best brands in college athletics. In addition, Florida reportedly supported efforts to get FSU into the league back in the 1990s. If the SEC decides to raid the ACC, expect the first phone call to go to Tallahassee.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: FSU athletic director Randy Spetman didn't duck questions about a move to the SEC during the ACC's recent spring meetings. That's unusual in the current environment. In fact, most ADs are so quick to shoot down rumors that those who don't shoot them down appear to be politicking. However, those same ACC meetings culminated in an ESPN contract that doubled the league's annual television revenue. Spetman might be quicker to nix SEC talk if asked about a potential move today. Still, I would guess that there has already been some back-channel communication between representatives of the SEC and Florida State officials.

SCHOOL: GEORGIA TECH YELLOW JACKETS

PROXIMITY: 728 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds no new TV markets

POPULATION: Adds no new population base

ACADEMICS: Better than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 15 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 48th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: Adds no new recruiting ground

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 54th nationally at \$48,061,053 (bigger than just 3 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 55,000 (bigger than just 1 current SEC stadium)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Georgia Tech sits in the geographic heart of the SEC (for now, at least). If not for Bobby Dodd getting upset in 1964, the Yellow Jackets might still be in the league. In terms of academic reputation, Tech would immediately aid the league... which SEC presidents would like. Most schools wouldn't mind a few extra trips into the recruiting hotbed of Atlanta, either. And surprisingly, Tech has had more football and basketball success (15 postseason bids in the last decade) than every school on our list not named "Texas" or "Oklahoma." But politics might play a role. Some say that Vince Dooley wanted to get Tech back into the league in the 1990s. Others say that Georgia (as well as Auburn) tried to block their possible return. Who knows what the feeling would be today?

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Tech bolted on its own in the early '60s. It has fit well with the ACC since joining the league in 1978. Just take another look at the Jackets' recent football and basketball success. The ACC is stronger academically and Tech is an academics-first kind of school. In fact, it would join Vandy and Florida as the SEC's third AAU member institution should it return to its roots. Its athletic spending lags behind most SEC schools and falls more in line with ACC spending.

SCHOOL: KANSAS JAYHAWKS

PROXIMITY: 2,310 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Kansas City (941,360 households)

POPULATION: Kansas has 2,763,075 residents

ACADEMICS: A good fit with SEC schools

FBALL/BBAL SUCCESS: 14 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 72nd nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 6 five- and four-star football players in Kansas this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 26th nationally at \$65,848,760 (bigger than 4 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 50,071 (bigger than just 1 current SEC schools)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Basketball and Missouri. The Big Ten is clearly interested in Missouri with its two large television markets. But Missouri might be a better fit with the SEC. If the league's presidents arrive at that decision, an invitation for Kansas might help lure in the Tigers. The Jayhawks would obviously expand the league's geographic footprint to the North and to the West. And don't laugh, Lawrence is closer to the heart of the league than schools like Texas, Oklahoma State and Miami which have often been mentioned as possible expansion partners. KU is also a member of the AAU which would please SEC presidents. For a league that has struggled with its basketball reputation in recent seasons, adding Kansas would be a coup. Imagine an SEC tournament final between Kansas and Kentucky.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Probably not. And I don't think the SEC is prepared to make so bold a move, either. Kansas is stuck in the same boat with Big 12 rivals Missouri and Nebraska. The old Big 8 became a Texas-centric league the minute the Longhorns joined. UT and Oklahoma take home the most money from the conference's uneven revenue-sharing plan. If pursued — and pursued hard along with one of their oldest rivals — KU might show interest if it believes it can make more money. But unlike the other conferences eyeing expansion, the SEC has shown no signs that it's willing to consider any and all options.

SCHOOL: LOUISVILLE CARDINALS

PROXIMITY: 1,308 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds no new TV markets

POPULATION: Adds no new population base

ACADEMICS: Worse than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 14 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 32nd nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: Adds no new recruiting ground

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 42nd nationally at \$54,438,214 (bigger than just 3 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 57,000 (bigger than just 2 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Like the ACC schools that are so often mentioned, Louisville is a natural "fit" for the SEC. Whether the University of Kentucky would see it that way is another matter. Louisville has a lofty

basketball tradition, though the U of L's future appears a bit shakier now that John Calipari has landed in the Bluegrass State. Working against the school is the fact that Louisville was dubbed a Tier 3 institution in the latest US News & World Report rankings. Louisville isn't a community college by any stretch, but the SEC has only two Tier 3 schools in its current mix (Ole Miss and Mississippi State). I don't think that those presidents I'm always talking about would be thrilled with the idea of adding another. That doesn't mean the Cardinals wouldn't get an invite, but they don't seem to offer a whole lot of "new" to the SEC. Combine that with the academic ratings and the odds appear stacked against this move. And remember, Kentucky is already an SEC state which makes Louisville an SEC market by default.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: A move to the SEC would aid the Cardinals in football, and a just-completed stadium expansion project shows Louisville's commitment to that sport. Also as Kentucky seems to be passing Louisville in basketball, an entry into the SEC might put UK and U of L on a more even plane again. Which is why I wonder if Kentucky would try to block an invitation to the 'Ville.

SCHOOL: MARYLAND TERRAPINS

PROXIMITY: 2,436 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Washington, DC and Baltimore (3,428,210 households)

POPULATION: Maryland has 5,615,727 residents

ACADEMICS: Better than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 13 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 28th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 7 five- and four-star football players in Maryland this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 35th nationally at \$58,686,748 (bigger than just 3 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 51,500 (bigger than just 1 current SEC stadium)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Maryland has a lot going for it. Maybe that's why the Terrapins are being studied by the Big Ten. Maryland's budget ranks in the upper half of the 18 schools we examined. It ranks in the upper half in terms of on-field success and Directors Cup standings, too. In addition, Maryland is a very good academic school (an AAU member) which would add more than five million people to the SEC's population base. It would also connect the SEC to two very big television markets. The SEC probably wouldn't consider such a move, but Maryland represents just the kind of dynamic change other leagues are currently considering.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Maryland was a founding member of the ACC in 1953. Would it be willing to forego years of traditional rivalries for some additional revenue? That probably depends on how much additional revenue the SEC would be talking about. Here's another question: Would the

Terps be willing to spend enough money to keep up with the Joneses of the SEC football world? Traditionally, basketball has come first in College Park, as it has in so many other ACC cities, so the answer might be no. But I don't expect SEC officials to call in the first place. Even though they should probably think about it, if they're forced to expand.

SCHOOL: MIAMI HURRICANES

PROXIMITY: 2,454 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds no new TV markets

POPULATION: Adds no new population base

ACADEMICS: Better than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 11 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 43rd nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: Adds no new recruiting ground

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 41st nationally at \$54,453,995 (bigger than just 3 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 74,916 (bigger than 4 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: It seems that the SEC is already interested in the 'Canes, if recent radio reports are correct. It wouldn't be the first time SEC officials flirted with The U. Miami was a prime candidate to join the league back in the early '90s despite its off-campus football stadium. Miami is also one of the best "national brands" in college sports. Pair the Hurricanes against any other school on the gridiron and you'll draw viewers. The school appears to be on a football upswing, too. Perhaps most importantly to folks like Mike Slive, the Hurricanes are no longer Public Enemy #1 on the NCAA's "Most Wanted" list. While the 'Canes add little in terms of "new" (thanks to the University of Florida, Miami can already be called an SEC market), adding UM would bolster the league's academic reputation.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Unlike their counterparts at Florida State, Miami officials quickly terminated any talk about a possible league switch. They said quite clearly during the ACC's spring meetings that their current home remains a perfect fit for their institution academically and athletically. So can we completely rule out a Miami move to the SEC? Of course not. But those are some pretty loud denials coming out of Coral Gables.

SCHOOL: MISSOURI TIGERS

PROXIMITY: 1,899 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds St. Louis and Kansas City (2,190,810 households)

POPULATION: Missouri has 5,842,713 residents

ACADEMICS: A good fit with SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 11 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 36th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 5 five- and four-star football players in Missouri this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 39th nationally at \$55,619,509 (bigger than just 3 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 71,004 (bigger than 4 current SEC schools)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: For the same reasons that then Big Ten is interested. Missouri offers two big television markets and a solid population base. The Tigers, like Kansas, are an AAU member. A move into Missouri would also push the SEC's boundaries further west. Already bordering on three SEC states (Kentucky, Tennessee and Arkansas), the southeastern "Bootheel" part of Missouri is as close to Oxford, Mississippi as it is to the Tigers' home city of Columbia. That's four built-in rivalries for Missourians living near their state's borders. From a business standpoint, Missouri looks to make a great deal of sense.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: It seems that Missouri officials are so fed up with the Big 12's revenue-sharing plan that they would accept an offer from the WAC if it meant more money. For all the talk surrounding a Missouri-Big Ten marriage, the Show Me State borders just two Big Ten states. And for a school that has put down most of its recruiting roots in Texas, a move into the SEC would at least allow the Tigers to continue to recruit in the talent-rich South. Another reason to prefer a move to the SEC — spring sports. Would you rather play baseball in the sun or the snow? But, as is the case with schools like Kansas and Maryland, I don't believe the SEC is truly interested in spreading its branches too far... even if there's money to be made.

SCHOOL: NOTRE DAME FIGHTING IRISH

PROXIMITY: 2,098 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Notre Dame is a national draw

POPULATION: Indiana has 6,313,520 residents

ACADEMICS: Better than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 12 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 21st nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 5 five- and four-star football players in Indiana this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 27th at \$64,699,091 (bigger than 4 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 80,795 (bigger than 6 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Are you kidding? Notre Dame — regardless of recent football success — is the best-known, most-followed college athletic program in the United States. Can you think of a single SEC school that wouldn't sell out its stadium every time the Irish came for a visit? In football or basketball? There is no way this happens, of course, but that hasn't stopped other leagues from having conversations with Notre Dame officials. The Pac-10 has pursued them. The ACC has pursued them, too. The Big Ten has pursued them several times. And the Big East actually landed every Irish program but

football (though they did force ND to schedule three gridiron games per year against Big East schools). Obviously, the SEC is closer to Indiana than the Pac-10, ACC or Big East, so distance should not be a big concern. If Mike Slive and the SEC want to own the college sports world, they should make a call to South Bend just as everyone else has. But they won't.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: No. Notre Dame has a tradition that Southern sports fans should understand. Just as SEC schools don't like breaking with their traditions (cowbells, anyone?), the Irish faithful don't want to give up theirs... with the main one being the school's independent status. And I'm not sure they need to give it up, either. Notre Dame's recent football problems have come since the school upped its entrance standards which means those woes appear to have more to do with academics than a lack of cash. While a move to the SEC would no doubt aid Notre Dame when it comes to recruiting in the South, I'm not sure if the nation's top Catholic university would be a cultural fit in Dixie. If the Irish land anywhere, it will be the Big Ten.

SCHOOL: OKLAHOMA SOONERS

PROXIMITY: 2,258 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Oklahoma City (694,030 households)

POPULATION: Oklahoma has 3,579,212 residents

ACADEMICS: A good fit with SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 17 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 29th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 4 five- and four-star football players in Oklahoma this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 9th nationally at \$81,404,992 (bigger than 7 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 82,112 (bigger than 6 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Like Florida State, Miami and Notre Dame, Oklahoma is a national brand. The Sooners were second best out of the 18 schools we studied in terms of recent football and basketball success. Oklahoma spends like SEC schools. Oklahoma has an SEC-type stadium. And Oklahoma is an academic fit, as well. The addition of the Sooners would also push the league's boundaries further west, annexing a new state under the SEC flag.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Only if things begin to unravel in the Big 12. School officials have said that they don't believe any school will really leave their league for the Big Ten, but that might be a case of whistling past the graveyard. If the Big 12 takes a hit and OU starts to think that Texas might split, then it'll be every man for himself... and Oklahoma would appear to be a good fit with the SEC.

SCHOOL: OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

PROXIMITY: 2,326 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Oklahoma City (694,030 households)

POPULATION: Oklahoma has 3,579,212 residents

ACADEMICS: Worse than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 14 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 35th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 4 five- and four-star football players in Oklahoma this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 23rd nationally at \$68,816,645 (bigger than 5 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 60,218 (bigger than just 2 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: If it means adding Oklahoma, then OSU needs to be considered. One must consider the possibility that Oklahoma politicians would tie OU and OSU together in the same way that Texas politicians locked Texas with A&M, Baylor and Tech a decade-and-a-half ago. Oklahoma State has had quite a bit of football and basketball success through the years and it's a pretty solid brand. But it's not Oklahoma. Also, the school is a US News & World Reports Tier 3 institution, which wouldn't please SEC presidents. To gain entry, the Cowboys would likely have to ride the coattails of OU.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Mega-booster T. Boone Pickens has said there's really nothing to talk about until the Big Ten actually makes a move of some sort. Once that happens, OSU officials will need to wait a little longer to see what Oklahoma, Texas and Texas A&M plan to do. There are plenty of folks who believe that those four schools could land in the Southeastern Conference together.

SCHOOL: TEXAS LONGHORNS

PROXIMITY: 2,344 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Austin (6,176,600 households)

POPULATION: Texas has 23,507,783 residents

ACADEMICS: Better than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 20 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 6th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 49 five- and four-star football players in Texas this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 1st nationally at \$112,935,132 (bigger than every current SEC school)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 100,119 (bigger than 11 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: This is THE target. Notre Dame would be great, too, but there's no realistic chance of the SEC landing the Irish

(or approaching the Irish, for that matter). So before wasting his time calling schools that “fit” the SEC’s current geographic footprint, Mike Slive should focus all his efforts on landing Texas. Even if the Big Ten decides not to expand to 16 teams, the SEC should still consider chasing UT (and Texas A&M). The Longhorns bring prestige. They bring quality academics (though for all their bluster, they’re currently residing in a league that’s comparable to the SEC). Also, since the SEC allows its teams to maintain their local media rights, Texas could join the league and still launch its own all-Texas channel. Hooking the Horns would turn about 23 million Texans from Big 12 fans to SEC fans overnight. And adding four Top 50 television markets wouldn’t hurt, either. Forget the distance issues, Texas should be the SEC’s main target.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Like Oklahoma, Texas would likely entertain an SEC offer if — and only if — the Big 12 started to crumble. According to Harvey Schiller, Texas was ready to join the SEC on his watch, but the Texas legislature got involved. But according to Texas’ president at the time, he didn’t like the SEC’s academic standards and nixed things from the get-go. UT officials would likely squawk about academic requirements this time around, too, but as we’ll show in a future piece, the Big 12 isn’t that much better than the SEC. In other words, Texas has gone “slumming” before. So the real issue is money. Texas gets an uneven (read: bigger) share of the Big 12’s cash than any other school. But could it still make more in total revenue by jumping to the SEC, partnering up with the biggest and best football programs in the nation, and launching its own channel? Maybe. But for now, all the eyes of Texas will remain upon the Big Ten. Texas could jump to that league, though doubtful. More likely, the Big Ten will raid the Big 12 and leave Texas officials to consider relocation to either the Pac-10 or the SEC. Once UT officials start to make their plans, you can expect Texas lawmakers to get involved. If they force the Longhorns to take along several of their little brothers, then the Pac-10 and SEC might have to decide if UT is worth the trouble. There are a lot of factors involved in this one, but Texas might be interested in the SEC depending on how things shake out.

SCHOOL: TEXAS A&M AGGIES

PROXIMITY: 2,177 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Dallas and Houston (4,667,870 households)

POPULATION: Texas has 23,507,783 residents

ACADEMICS: Better than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 11 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 13th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 49 five- and four-star football players in Texas this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 22nd nationally at \$69,955,181 (bigger than 5 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 82,600 (bigger than 6 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Don't fall for the "Well, the SEC would have to take A&M, too" talk. Texas A&M would be a solid addition to the SEC with or without Texas. The Aggies boast a passionate fanbase, an SEC-like stadium, a rich tradition, and the Houston television market. A&M's alumni base is big enough that you could also throw in the Dallas television market (and perhaps San Antonio and Austin), if you chose to. Academically, A&M is pretty darn close to Texas in most categories. There's a reason LSU's Joe Dean wanted to help the Aggies join the league in the early '90s. They would have been a good fit.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: If the Big 12 starts to break up, absolutely. A&M had more interest in joining the SEC than Texas did the last time around. College Station's close proximity to Baton Rouge is a plus. And the Aggies are already in the middle of a 10-year series with old SWC foe Arkansas. A&M officials would likely jump at an SEC invitation if the Big 12 begins to break up.

SCHOOL: TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS

PROXIMITY: 3,015 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds no new TV markets in the Top 50

POPULATION: Texas has 23,507,783 residents

ACADEMICS: Worse than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 14 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 57th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 49 five- and four-star football players in Texas this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 62nd nationally at \$42,256,045 (bigger than just 2 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 58,930 (bigger than just 2 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: If you think Austin and College Station are a hike, grab a map and try to find Lubbock. Tech has the smallest athletic budget of the 18 schools we studied, falling between Vanderbilt and Ole Miss in total spending. Tech is also weak in the Directors Cup standings. To make matters worse, SEC presidents wouldn't like the school's Tier 3 academic ranking, either. There's only one reason for the SEC to be interested in the Red Raiders at all and that's Texas. IF the Longhorns express interest in an SEC invitation and IF the Texas legislature tries to force UT into taking Tech, Baylor and A&M as a four-school package deal, the SEC will have to look long and hard at the dollars Texas can provide. The value of the Longhorns (and the Aggies) might make Tech worthy of a throw-in bid. That's the decision the Big 12 arrived at when it formed in the mid-'90s.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Tommy Tuberville might be, but it's hard to believe folks in West Texas would be too pumped about playing teams in Georgia, South Carolina and Kentucky. Then again, they probably weren't too

thrilled about facing off with Iowa State and Kansas State, either. Like Baylor, Tech will probably tag along with Texas for as long as it can.

SCHOOL: VIRGINIA CAVALIERS

PROXIMITY: 2,024 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Washington, DC and Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News (3,044,920 households)

POPULATION: Virginia has 7,642,884 residents

ACADEMICS: Better than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 7 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 8th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 14 five- and four-star football players in Virginia this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 28th nationally at \$63,696,905 (bigger than 4 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 61,500 (bigger than 3 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Virginia spends money. Virginia opens up new recruiting ground. UVA also boasts a large population base and would push the SEC into the Washington, DC television market. And SEC presidents would love to have a school like Virginia join the SEC Academic Consortium. But there is a downside. While the Cavaliers still rank among the nation's elite in the Directors Cup standings (second only to Texas among the schools we studied), Virginia's football and basketball programs have struggled of late. From a business perspective UVA should be considered an automatic. But more than likely, Virginia would have to be part of a Virginia Tech package deal for the SEC to consider extending an invitation.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: As a founding member of the ACC with a stellar academic reputation, it's unlikely that UVA would be interested in leaving its longtime rivals to move to the SEC. Cavalier officials might see themselves as being better fit for ACC competition than SEC competition. And — as is the case with all the ACC schools — that new ESPN television deal might make any potential SEC sales pitch a bit more of a longshot these days.

SCHOOL: VIRGINIA TECH HOKIES

PROXIMITY: 1,661 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Washington, DC (2,335,040 households)

POPULATION: Virginia has 7,642,884 residents

ACADEMICS: A good fit with SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 11 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 46th

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 14 five- and four-star football players in Virginia this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 49th nationally at \$50,863,680 (bigger than just 3

current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 66,233 (bigger than 4 current SEC schools)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: Tech is a natural fit with the SEC. Like Virginia, Virginia Tech would push the league's boundary farther up the East Coast. Tech's biggest alumni base is in the DC area, so the SEC would gain a major television market by adding the Hokies. The state of Virginia is also second best to Texas in terms of potential new recruiting ground (among the 18 schools we studied). Unfortunately, Virginia Tech wouldn't help the SEC in terms of its basketball reputation.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: That's a tough one. The Hokies spent years and years and years pining for membership in the ACC. While Kentucky and Tennessee would no doubt develop rivalries with Tech, much of the Hokies' fanbase has focused on potential ACC rivals for decades. Making matters more complicated, former Virginia governor Mark Warner fought hard to gain Tech an ACC expansion invitation back in 2003. He called upon the University of Virginia's president to back the Hokies in league meetings, which he did. So it's difficult to imagine Tech up and leaving just seven years later (especially now that the league has doubled its television revenue). If the Hokies did leave, it might be as part of a combo deal that included Virginia. Would the SEC be interested in such backdoor wrangling? Probably not.

SCHOOL: WEST VIRGINIA MOUNTAINEERS

PROXIMITY: 2,179 total miles from Atlanta, Nashville, and New Orleans

TV MARKETS: Adds Pittsburgh (1,154,950 households)

POPULATION: West Virginia has 1,818,470 residents

ACADEMICS: Worse than most SEC schools

FBALL/BBALL SUCCESS: 13 total bids out of a possible 20

DIRECTORS CUP SUCCESS: 50th nationally

FERTILE RECRUITING GROUND: 0 five- and four-star football players in West Virginia this year

ATHLETIC SPENDING: 45th nationally at \$53,368,035 (bigger than just 3 current SEC schools)

FBALL STADIUM SIZE: 60,540 (bigger than just 2 current SEC stadiums)

WHY THE SEC SHOULD BE INTERESTED: West Virginia would be an excellent addition in terms of football and basketball. Morgantown is home to one of the nation's most rabid fanbases. WVU can also open up the Pittsburgh market to the SEC via its alumni base and natural proximity to the Pennsylvania city. That's yet another way for the SEC to stretch its boundaries Northward. But there are a lot of problems with a WVU candidacy. The state is very small which means it's not the most fertile recruiting area. Academically, West Virginia is yet another Tier 3 institution. Again, that doesn't mean WVU is a diploma mill, but it

might cause SEC presidents to think twice about handing the Mountaineers an invitation.

WOULD THE SCHOOL BE INTERESTED: Yes. For all its athletic successes, West Virginia still sits in a precarious spot. The Big East is vulnerable. And while it might garner attention from the ACC should the Big East dissolve, WVU officials have to know that their small population base and their current academic reputation could cost them some expansion bids. I'm guessing that the Mountaineers would accept the first thing offered them from the Big Ten (not going to happen), the ACC or the SEC.

So there you have it. Eighteen expansion candidates broken down in nine categories each. In our next piece, we'll tally up our ratings and tell you exactly what the SEC should do on the expansion front. If anything.



Part Eight: The Teams That Fit, By The Numbers

Over the past two weeks, we've done exactly what everyone else in the sports media has been doing — talking about conference expansion.

Only we've been taking a different angle.

Our goal has been to examine the possibility of SEC growth using the same criteria that university presidents would likely use. Instead of simply grabbing a map and discussing last year's bowl invites, we put together a list of nine criteria that will probably be discussed in any expansion meetings.

How do we know that our criteria are the right ones? We've paid attention to what the commissioners, athletic directors and university presidents from other conferences have been saying about this current wave of expansion mania. We've also listened to what former SEC commissioners have said. And we've studied the SEC's own expansion history.

Our criteria — [which are explained here](#) — are: proximity to the heart of the current SEC, new television markets, new population bases, academic fit, recent success in the two revenue-generating sports of football and basketball, Directors Cut all-sports success, new recruiting areas, total athletic department spending, and football stadium size... which indicates a school's commitment to the biggest bread-winning sport.

We selected 18 current BCS schools to examine. Many fit the SEC's current geographic footprint. Many do not. If you've been listening to rival commissioners or former SEC top dog Roy Kramer, you understand the importance of truly expanding a league's boundaries.

We then [graded those 18 schools in each of our nine criteria](#). Hard data, pure rankings. The goal? To decide which schools would actually have the most positive impact on the SEC if invited to join.

Here's how our grading system worked. We ranked each school, for example, in terms of its proximity to the center of the SEC. Georgia Tech is located closer to the SEC's favorite conference tournament homes (Atlanta, Nashville and New Orleans) than any other school. Therefore, Georgia Tech received one point in our proximity ranking.

Texas Tech — which would only be considered IF the Texas legislature demanded a four-team package deal for Texas... as it did when the Big 12 was formed — is the farthest of the 18 schools from the SEC's geographic hub. So Texas Tech was given 18 points.

Obviously, the fewer points the better.

The fewer points, the more a school would bring to the SEC financially, athletically and academically.

Below are our full results:

School	Proximity	TV Markets	Population	Academics	F/B Success	Director's Cup	Recruiting	Spending	Stadium Size	Total Points
Baylor	9	6	1	8	18	9	1	16	18	86
Clemson	2	13	14	8	12	16	13	10	5	93
Florida State	3	13	14	8	10	4	13	3	3	71
Georgia Tech	1	13	14	1	3	14	13	17	15	91
Kansas	13	10	12	8	4	18	8	6	17	96
Louisville	4	13	14	15	4	8	13	13	14	98
Maryland	16	4	9	1	8	6	7	9	16	76
Miami	17	13	14	1	12	12	13	12	7	101
Missouri	6	8	8	8	12	11	9	11	8	81
Notre Dame	8	1	7	1	10	5	9	7	6	54
Oklahoma	12	11	10	8	2	7	11	2	4	67
Oklahoma State	14	11	10	15	4	10	11	5	12	92
Texas	15	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	24
Texas A&M	10	3	1	1	12	3	1	4	2	37
Texas Tech	18	13	1	15	4	17	1	18	13	100
Virginia	7	5	5	1	17	2	5	8	10	60
Virginia Tech	5	7	5	8	12	13	5	15	9	79
West Virginia	11	9	13	15	8	15	13	14	11	109

Scientific? Not exactly. If we wanted this to be a scientific study, we would have weighted each category and given each actual score a corresponding numeric value.

Instead, we were looking for a ballpark number. Some way to summarize what a school brings to the table. Across nine categories, those schools that brought the most “new” assets to the SEC school were rewarded.

This isn't the kind of mathematics that only Will Hunting could perform, but it is a more accurate way of looking at the SEC's expansion options than, say, just going with gut feelings. For that, we direct you to the 28,544,327 posts this week on BleacherReport.com.

With the our results now tallied, below is the final list of 18 schools ranked according to what each might bring to the SEC in terms of new value:

Rank	School	Total Points
1	Texas	24
2	Texas A&M	37
3	Notre Dame	54
4	Virginia	60
5	Oklahoma	67
6	Florida State	71
7	Maryland	76
8	Virginia Tech	79
9	Missouri	81
10	Baylor	86
11	Georgia Tech	91
12	Oklahoma State	92
13	Clemson	93
14	Kansas	96
15	Louisville	98
16	Texas Tech	100
17	Miami	101
18	West Virginia	109

So the SEC should run right out and call Texas, Texas A&M, Notre Dame and Virginia, right?

Not exactly. All things being equal, certainly, those four schools would appear to bring the most value to the league. But all things are seldom equal.

From an academic standpoint, three of those schools are viewed as being Top 25 universities and the other (Texas A&M) has a comparable budget and comparable academic standards.

From an athletic standpoint, you're looking at four schools that all rank among the nation's leaders in total spending as well as in all-sports success. They also have four of the biggest "brand" names in collegiate sports.

From a business perspective, those schools would bring in huge television markets and large population bases. They would expand the league's geographic footprint from the nation's capital to the Great Lakes to the Rio Grande. Take that, Big Ten. In addition, each would also provide fertile new recruiting ground for current SEC schools.

In all three of the areas that SEC presidents should be considering, Texas, Texas A&M, Notre Dame and Virginia stand strong.

But the SEC — if it even decides that expansion is in its best interest — will not going to be adding those four schools. It should try to, but it won't.

A few more observations about our final candidate rankings:

- * There's a reason everyone in America is eyeing Texas. Despite its distance from the Big Ten, Pac-10 and SEC, UT has had past discussions with all three of those leagues and is rumored to be a current expansion possibility for each conference again today. The Longhorns — and Texas A&M — simply bring too much to the table to be ignored. From an SEC perspective, both schools would be more valuable than even Notre Dame.

- * Notice how Texas A&M easily outdistances every school on the list not named Texas. Located close to Houston and Dallas and with a huge alumni base that stretches across the Lone State State and the Midwest, A&M should be viewed as a possible expansion partner on its own merits. The last time expansion was on the SEC's docket, A&M was in the middle of the discussion. Some say they were a throw in with UT. Some say the SEC never wanted them. Still others say they were set to come onboard even without the rival Longhorns. Depending on whose self-serving recollections you believe, there have been rumors about an A&M-SEC marriage for more than 20 years now. Former LSU AD Joe Dean once said the Aggies were the "most logical addition to the SEC." He was right.

* The Irish and the SEC won't become partners anytime soon. The fit just isn't right and everyone knows it. But from a pure business sense, there's a reason that leagues as far away from South Bend, Indiana as the ACC, Big East and Pac-10 have chased Notre Dame. If the SEC truly wanted to put the college sports world in a headlock, it too would make a run at the Irish. But it's not going to happen.

* Of all the schools we've examined in this series, the most surprising might be Virginia. The Cavaliers haven't excelled in football or basketball recently, but they certainly offer everything else that conference presidents would desire. Likewise, Maryland scored awfully high in our rankings. And the Terrapins have boasted more success in the big revenue sports of late, winning a national title in basketball in the past decade. When fans and media mention ACC schools as being possibilities for SEC expansion, it's usually the Southernmost members of that league that are named. But the Northernmost ACC schools offer more value to the SEC.

* Oklahoma — as expected — ranks high in most areas. They aren't a close fit and they don't offer a great recruiting base or a boost in terms of in-state television markets. But the Sooners spend money and flat-out win like an SEC program. Unfortunately, they've also been spending a lot of time in the NCAA doghouse of late. When Mike Slive was hired as commissioner, he was directed to clean up the league. Like a modern day Wyatt Earp, Slive has succeeded. The SEC — which once had an embarrassing reputation as a cheater's league — has been surprisingly trouble-free in recent years. Oklahoma, on the other hand, has been involved in both basketball and football scandals in this decade. Even now the school's athletic department is in the midst of an alleged pay-for-play basketball brouhaha. Oklahoma is a big draw and would certainly aid the SEC's athletic reputation. But the stench of major NCAA violations might drive away league presidents.

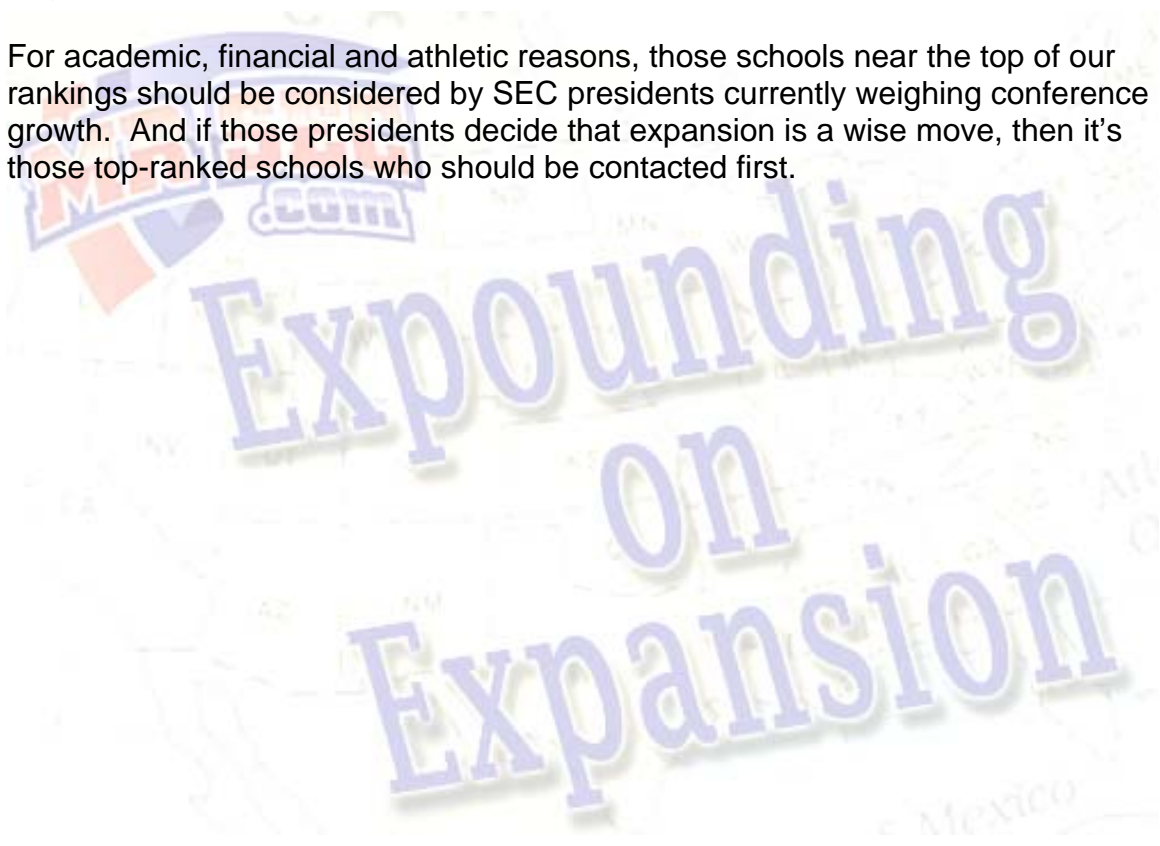
* Our grading system was designed to reward those schools which would bring new value to the SEC — new television markets, new recruiting ground, new population bases. We believe that if every other conference is looking to expand for those reasons, so should the SEC. Kramer, the last commissioner to preside over league expansion, has also said as much. So imagine our surprise when Florida State scored so highly in our system. If the SEC is to dip into waters that it already controls, the Seminoles clearly make the most sense. Of the four Southern ACC schools, FSU offers the most in terms of brand name.

* Virginia Tech (often mentioned) and Missouri (not so much) both should get a look from SEC presidents. They are similar in distance from the SEC (Virginia bordering two league states and Missouri bordering three). They are similar in population base and in terms of new television markets (one would haul in DC and the other would bring St. Louis and Kansas City). They are similar to SEC schools from an academic perspective, too. Their football stadiums are even

similar in size to one another. No, it won't happen, but adding Missouri to the West and Virginia Tech to the East would be better — from a business standpoint — than the SEC's last expansion into Arkansas and South Carolina. And that one worked out pretty well in its own right.

* When it comes to the rest of the schools on the list, why bother? Unless one (or more) of those schools are brought in as part of a package deal that also lands Texas and/or Texas A&M, they really bring nothing more to the league than another mouth to feed. They represent just another hand grabbing for a slice of the SEC's pie. And, yes, that includes the oft-mentioned Clemson, Georgia Tech and Miami... which are rumored to be among the SEC's actual expansion targets.

For academic, financial and athletic reasons, those schools near the top of our rankings should be considered by SEC presidents currently weighing conference growth. And if those presidents decide that expansion is a wise move, then it's those top-ranked schools who should be contacted first.



The Academics of Expansion: The SEC

In the current expansion hubbub, there are a few sites out there — like this one — that have attempted to show how academics *will* play a role in any shuffling that might take place.

To put it simply, research grants mean dollars pouring into a school. The better a school's research partners, the more grant money it will likely have to play with. Those grants can be awfully big, too.

As we previously pointed out in our “Expounding On Expansion” series, the University of Florida, for example, has a huge athletic budget at more than \$100 million. UF also has an annual research budget that is five times larger (\$550 million in most years). But while Florida's athletic budget ranks in the top three in the country, its research spending would place it only near the middle of the pack in the academically-respected Big Ten.

US News & World Report is the largest publication each year to rank America's colleges and universities. Therefore, whenever anyone starts talking about academics and the role they will play in expansion, those USNWR rankings are quoted.

But much more goes into determining whether or not a school is a good fit with a particular conference.

Below you'll find that we have tried to create a much broader breakdown of the current BCS schools. We've cobbled together data from a half-dozen sources: Department of Education figures, school websites, major publications like US News & World Report, etc.

We've broken down each conference (and Notre Dame) in a number of academic categories. Those include:

- * Percentage of applicants admitted
- * Total enrollment
- * Undergraduate enrollment
- * ACT composites (high and low) to show what types of students a school desires
- * Endowment per student (from 2005) which shows the amount of money each school has per student. This number fluctuates and with the last fiscal year being the worst for college endowments since the Great Depression, the current figures would be smaller than what you will see here.

* Research spending (from 2006). The numbers you see in our tables need to be multiplied by 1000. For example, our table shows that Vanderbilt spent \$376,893 via research grants in 2006... in actuality, the school spent \$376,893,000 in research. The SEC as a whole spent more than \$2 billion.

* AAU membership. So important to the Big Ten, Pac-10 and schools like Texas, membership in this exclusive club of major universities is a sign of both big research spending and a great reputation.

* US News & World Report most recent college rankings. USNWR allows ties, so you will see several schools ranked in the same spot. That's not a typo. Tier 3 schools are those that do not rank among the top 125 in the nation (according to USNWR).

The goal of this piece is to provide a broader view of the schools involved in expansion talks. Some schools focus on undergraduate studies. Some lean toward post-graduate work and major research projects. Some are small, some are large. Some are selective, some are not. Some have high academic standards, others do not.

More goes into "academic fit" than just one magazine's rankings. Looking at the data below, you should be able to compare schools to one another, conferences to one another, and schools to conferences.

We've listed the schools alphabetically by conference. At the bottom of each table you'll also find that we've included the totals and averages for most categories. (When averaging the USNWR rankings, remember that Tier 3 schools are not included... so the more Tier 3s in a conference, the lower its actual average should be.)

We begin with the Southeastern Conference.

SEC	% Admitted	Enrollment	Undergrad Enrollment	ACT Low	ACT High	Endowment per Student (\$)	Research Spending (\$) ^{x1000}	AAU Member	US News Ranking
Alabama	60	25,544	21,081	21	27	18,976	35,129		96
Arkansas	58	18,648	14,948	23	28	38,951	99,271		128
Auburn	71	24,137	19,812	22	27	0	126,522		88
Florida	43	51,474	34,654	25	29	13,697	565,491	YES	47
Georgia	55	34,180	25,467	25	29	15,652	323,843		58
Kentucky	77	25,856	18,770	21	27	21,336	323,958		128
LSU	73	28,810	23,396	23	28	8,689	246,093		128

Miss. State	57	17,039	13,208	20	27	0	189,917		Tier 3
Ole Miss	83	15,129	12,682	20	26	16,414	54,217		Tier 3
S. Carolina	59	27,272	18,827	23	28	11,898	153,737		110
Tennessee	71	29,937	21,369	23	28	12,561	240,379		106
Vanderbilt	25	11,847	6,532	30	33	189,936	376,893	YES	17
TOTALS	-	309,873	230,746	-	-	\$348,110	\$2,735,450B	-	-
AVERAGE	61%	25,822	19,228	23	28	\$29,009	\$227,954M	-	91



Expounding
on
Expansion

The Academics of Expansion: The ACC

We have done the research and put together a master list of academic data — from a number of categories — for all of the ACC’s schools.

The data includes:

- * Percentage of applicants admitted
- * Total enrollment
- * Undergraduate enrollment
- * ACT composites (high and low)
- * Endowment per student (from 2005)
- * Research spending (from 2006)
- * AAU membership
- * US News & World Report rankings

ACC	% Admitted	Enrollment	Undergrad Enrollment	ACT Low	ACT High	Endowment per Student (\$)	Research Spending (\$) ^{x1000}	AAU Member	US News Ranking
Boston Coll.	26	14,836	9,913	29	32	87,421	35,659		34
Clemson	50	18,317	14,713	25	30	0	179,840		61
Duke	22	14,060	6,496	29	34	276,323	657,080	YES	10
Fla. State	61	38,682	29,869	24	28	11,452	185,633		102
Ga. Tech	61	19,413	12,973	27	31	70,410	440,898	YES	35
Maryland	47	37,000	26,475	NA	NA	9,524	354,244	YES	53
Miami	44	15,323	10,422	27	31	33,863	213,516		50
N. Carolina	34	28,567	17,895	28	31	54,346	443,790	YES	28
NC State	60	31,802	24,145	22	27	0	330,936		88
Virginia	32	24,541	15,208	27	32	107,134	238,754	YES	24
Va. Tech	65	30,739	23,567	NA	NA	0	321,722		71
W. Forest	38	6,788	4,412	27	31	136,690	183,129		28
TOTALS	–	280,068	196,088	–	–	\$787,163	\$3,585,201B	–	–
AVERAGE	45%	23,339	16,340	27	31	\$65,596	\$298,766M	–	49

The Academics of Expansion: The Big East

We have done the research and put together a master list of academic data — from a number of categories — for all of the Big East’s schools.

The data includes:

- * Percentage of applicants admitted
- * Total enrollment
- * Undergraduate enrollment
- * ACT composites (high and low)
- * Endowment per student (from 2005)
- * Research spending (from 2006)
- * AAU membership
- * US News & World Report rankings

Big East	% Admitted	Enrollment	Undergrad Enrollment	ACT Low	ACT High	Endowment per Student (\$)	Research Spending (\$x1000)	AAU Member	US News Ranking
Cincinnati	75	29,319	20,510	21	27	36,158	294,150		Tier 3
Connecticut	54	24,273	16,765	24	28	0	106,477		66
Louisville	71	20,592	14,962	21	27	0	135,873		Tier 3
Pittsburgh	56	27,562	17,427	24	30	0	530,162	YES	56
Rutgers	56	36,041	28,031	NA	NA	15,102	280,994	YES	66
S. Florida	42	46,189	35,918	22	28	0	285,941		Tier 3
Syracuse	51	19,084	13,203	24	29	0	36,100	YES	58
W. Virginia	88	28,840	21,930	21	26	0	122,134		Tier 3
TOTALS	–	231,900	168,746	–	–	\$51,260	\$1,791,831B	–	–
AVERAGE	62%	28,987	21,093	22	28	\$6,407	\$223,978M	–	60

The Academics of Expansion: Big Ten and Notre Dame

We have done the research and put together a master list of academic data — from a number of categories — for all of the Big Ten's school's. In addition, we include Notre Dame's number in this post as well... since they seem to be the main goal of Big Ten expansion.

The data includes:

- * Percentage of applicants admitted
- * Total enrollment
- * Undergraduate enrollment
- * ACT composites (high and low)
- * Endowment per student (from 2005)
- * Research spending (from 2006)
- * AAU membership
- * US News & World Report rankings

Big Ten	% Admitted	Enrollment	Undergrad Enrollment	ACT Low	ACT High	Endowment per Student (\$)	Research Spending (\$) \times 1000	AAU Member	US News Ranking
Illinois	65	43,246	31,417	26	31	19,325	476,198	YES	39
Indiana	71	40,354	31,626	23	29	17,621	142,002	YES	71
Iowa	82	29,117	20,907	23	28	11,039	346,357	YES	71
Michigan	50	41,028	25,994	27	31	112,521	800,488	YES	27
Mich. State	70	46,045	36,072	23	27	20,704	358,097	YES	71
Minnesota	53	51,140	32,557	24	29	29,782	594,877	YES	61
Northwestern	26	19,291	9,336	30	33	248,948	419,985	YES	12
Ohio State	65	53,715	40,212	25	30	33,661	652,329	YES	53
Penn State	51	44,406	37,988	24	28	29,679	567,549	YES	47
Purdue	72	41,433	33,105	23	29	31,612	372,958	YES	61
Wisconsin	59	41,620	30,362	26	30	27,001	831,893	YES	39
TOTALS	—	451,395	329,576	—	—	\$591,893	\$5,562,733B	—	—
AVERAGE	60%	41,035	29,961	25	30	\$53,808	\$505,703M	—	50

And...

School	% Admitted	Enrollment	Undergrad Enrollment	ACT Low	ACT High	Endowment per Student (\$)	Research Spending (\$) \times 1000	AAU Member	US News Ranking
Notre Dame	27%	11,733	8,371	31	34	\$327,695	\$78,553M		20

The Academics of Expansion: The Big 12

We have done the research and put together a master list of academic data — from a number of categories — for all of the Big 12's schools.

The data includes:

- * Percentage of applicants admitted
- * Total enrollment
- * Undergraduate enrollment
- * ACT composites (high and low)
- * Endowment per student (from 2005)
- * Research spending (from 2006)
- * AAU membership
- * US News & World Report rankings

Big 12	% Admitted	Enrollment	Undergrad Enrollment	ACT Low	ACT High	Endowment per Student (\$)	Research Spending (\$) \times 1000	AAU Member	US News Ranking
Baylor	50	14,541	12,162	23	29	0	10,000		80
Colorado	78	32,469	26,897	24	28	8,084	250,255	YES	77
Iowa State	89	26,856	21,607	22	27	17,738	221,998	YES	88
Kansas	92	29,365	21,332	22	27	43,768	131,195	YES	96
Kansas State	56	23,520	18,491	21	26	0	123,746		Tier 3
Missouri	78	30,130	22,980	23	28	16,136	215,240	YES	102
Nebraska	63	23,573	18,526	22	28	8,589	215,850	YES	96
Oklahoma	73	26,140	19,450	23	28	18,919	101,015		102
Okla. State	89	22,995	18,185	22	27	8,501	100,323		Tier 3
Texas	45	49,984	37,339	24	30	44,400	431,398	YES	47
Texas A&M	67	48,039	38,430	24	30	112,055	492,955	YES	61
Texas Tech	68	28,422	23,107	21	26	0	58,591		Tier 3
TOTALS	—	356,034	278,506	—	—	\$278,190	\$2,352,566B		—
AVERAGE	71%	29,669	23,208	23	28	\$23,182	\$196,047M		83

The Academics of Expansion: The Pac-10

We have done the research and put together a master list of academic data — from a number of categories — for all of the Pac-10's schools.

The data includes:

- * Percentage of applicants admitted
- * Total enrollment
- * Undergraduate enrollment
- * ACT composites (high and low)
- * Endowment per student (from 2005)
- * Research spending (from 2006)
- * AAU membership
- * US News & World Report rankings

Pac-10	% Admitted	Enrollment	Undergrad Enrollment	ACT Low	ACT High	Endowment per Student (\$)	Research Spending (\$x1000)	AAU Member	US News Ranking
Arizona	77	36,805	28,442	21	26	9,634	535,847	YES	102
Arizona State	92	51,481	41,626	20	26	5,934	201,955		121
California	21	35,396	25,151	25	32	59,732	546,035	YES	21
Oregon	87	21,452	17,619	NA	NA	15,269	57,153	YES	115
Oregon State	92	19,738	16,224	20	26	0	189,606		Tier 3
Stanford	9	19,782	6,584	30	34	826,950	679,196	YES	4
UCLA	23	38,220	26,536	24	31	39,018	811,493	YES	24
USC	25	33,408	16,384	28	32	84,475	450,173	YES	26
Washington	61	39,675	29,397	23	29	24,591	778,148	YES	42
Wash. State	76	24,396	20,282	21	26	0	196,391		106
TOTALS	—	320,353	228,245	—	—	\$1,065,603	\$4,445,997B	—	—
AVERAGE	56%	32,035	22,824	24	29	\$106,560	\$444,599M	—	62

The Academics of Expansion: A Conference Comparison

Academics equal reputation. Academics equal research grants. Academics equal donations. Academics equal students... and tuition.

Academics won't be the driving force in conference expansion but they will play a role. And if you've wondered why certain schools are considered "a good fit" with a certain conference, you should be able to look at our school-by-school numbers (links below) and come to a clearer understanding.

[SEC academics](#)

[ACC academics](#)

[Big East academics](#)

[Big Ten and Notre Dame academics](#)

[Big 12 academics](#)

[Pac-10 academics](#)

Those numbers aren't meant to be definitive, by any means. We simply present them to give you a thumbnail view of why a school like Texas seems to be more interested in the Pac-10 and Big Ten (academic standards, research grants) than the SEC. Why a school like North Carolina might be less likely to jump from the ACC to the SEC. And why SEC presidents might not have as much interest in adding schools like Louisville and West Virginia.

Let's look at the average academic numbers from each league with Notre Dame's data tossed in, too:

Conference	% Admitted	Enrollment	Undergrad Enrollment	ACT Low	ACT High	Endowment per Student (\$)	Research Spending (\$) $\times 1000$	AAU Members	US News Ranking
ACC	45%	23,339	16,340	27	31	\$65,596	\$298,766M	5 of 12	49 (0 Tier 3s)
Big East	62%	28,987	21,093	22	28	\$6,407	\$223,978M	3 of 8	60 (4 Tier 3s)
Big Ten	60%	41,035	29,961	25	30	\$53,808	\$505,703M	11 of 11	50 (0 Tier 3s)
Big 12	71%	29,669	23,208	23	28	\$23,182	\$196,047M	7 of 12	83 (3 Tier 3s)
Pac-10	56%	32,035	22,824	24	29	\$106,560	\$444,599M	7 of 10	62 (1 Tier 3)
SEC	61%	25,822	19,228	23	28	\$29,009	\$227,954M	2 of 12	91 (2 Tier 3s)

Notre Dame	27%	11,733	8,371	31	34	\$327,695	\$78,553M	No	20
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How 'bout some sweeping generalities?

* SEC schools — on average — are smaller than those in every other conference aside from the ACC. Big Ten and Pac-10 schools churn out more students every year. By default, those schools make more money from tuition, more money from alumni donations, and they churn out more fans each year, too.

* It is no wonder schools are interested in joining the Big Ten and Pac-10. They have higher academic standards, far more endowment dollars per student, higher US News & World Report rankings and more AAU members than the SEC, Big 12 or Big East. In addition, the amount of research spending for those leagues (i.e.: research grants coming in) dwarfs the other four BCS leagues. “Richer and smarter” serve as pretty good lures.

* If there is a league that is close to the Big Ten and Pac-10 academically, it's the ACC. Read that again, SEC fans. If the SEC is forced to expand and it decides to try to raid the ACC, Mike Slive will have to convince some ACC presidents to leave a league with a good academic reputation for one with a so-so reputation. On the positive side, research spending is the area where the ACC lags behind the Big Ten and Pac-10. From a monetary standpoint, at least that's one battle the SEC won't have to fight.

* The SEC, Big 12 and Big East are similar in academic terms. The only difference? The prestige and reputation of AAU memberships. The Big 12 has seven such schools on its roster. The Big East has three members among its eight football-playing members. But the SEC has only two schools in the AAU — Vanderbilt and Florida. Don't think that won't come up if the SEC makes a run at a school currently in the AAU.

We should point out that none of the schools and leagues graded and dissected above are “bad” schools or leagues. We're not talking about online degrees and community colleges here. (“Not that there's anything wrong with that.”)

Also — and let's make this perfectly clear — none of this means that Texas or another AAU member won't be joining the SEC. Academics are just one part of the equation. As we've explained in [our “Expounding on Expansion” series](#), football and television will drive the bus, but other factors *will* come into play. Consider academics among those factors.

And after sifting through all this data, hopefully you'll have a better understanding of [why we've declared some schools to be better academic fits](#) with the SEC than others... and [how we ranked the 18 schools we examined](#).