

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY PUEBLO

-STUDENT FEE GOVERNING BOARD REQUEST- FISCAL YEAR 2027

Department: Intercollegiate Athletics
Fee: Student Fee for Athletics
Submitted by: Paul Plinske, Vice President for Athletics and Strategic Partnerships
Fee Increase Request: Current Hourly Rate: \$16.75; Requested Hourly Rate: \$18.00 for a requested increase of \$1.25

MISSION AND VISION

The mission of Intercollegiate Athletics is to develop champions through academic excellence, athletic achievement and community engagement with the ultimate goal of building productive citizens. Our vision is to be an athletic powerhouse and the standard for holistic student-athlete development and academic opportunity.

CSU Pueblo Athletics Narrative

The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics plays a central role in advancing the mission, strategic priorities and community impact of Colorado State University Pueblo. As a proud and successful member of the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC) and NCAA Division II, the CSU Pueblo ThunderWolves serve as ambassadors for the University while delivering meaningful educational, developmental and engagement opportunities for students, employees and the broader community.

Pack Athletics provides comprehensive services that support student success both in and out of the classroom, including coaching, academic support, leadership development, strength and conditioning, sports medicine, mental wellness resources and life-skills programming. These services are designed to promote safety, physical and emotional well-being, and holistic student development while reinforcing the University's commitment to retention, graduation and career readiness.

Participation in intercollegiate athletics enhances student learning through experiential education. Student-athletes develop essential competencies such as time management, teamwork, communication, resilience, conflict resolution and leadership; skills that directly translate to academic achievement and workforce preparedness. Athletics complements the classroom experience by fostering accountability, discipline and a growth mindset, helping students persist toward degree completion and long-term success.

Athletics also serves as a powerful driver of student engagement and campus community. Often described as the "front porch" of an institution, athletics elevates CSU Pueblo's visibility, strengthens institutional pride and creates shared experiences for students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members. Home competitions and campus events provide opportunities for connection, belonging and school spirit, encouraging students to remain engaged on campus while strengthening relationships across the University.

Student-athletes represent approximately 18% of CSU Pueblo's undergraduate population and play a meaningful role in enrollment by attracting peers, families and prospective students to campus. With 550 student-athletes annually—many receiving partial financial aid—Athletics generates positive net tuition revenue while contributing significant external funding through philanthropy, sponsorships and community partnerships. Alumni engagement remains strong, with former student-athletes and supporters providing financial contributions, mentorship, internships and professional opportunities that directly benefit current students.

Diversity and inclusion are foundational to Pack Athletics. More than 60% of student-athletes identify as ethnic minorities, and approximately 70 student-athletes each year come from countries outside the United States. This global and multicultural representation enriches the learning environment, supports the University's diversity goals and prepares all students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Athletics further advances CSU Pueblo's priorities by strengthening community partnerships and regional impact. State-of-the-art facilities and competitive success attract local and national stakeholders to campus, driving economic activity while deepening relationships with schools, youth organizations, nonprofits and civic leaders. Through outreach, service projects, youth camps and game-day experiences, Athletics actively contributes to community wellness, engagement and pride.

Ultimately, CSU Pueblo Athletics is a catalyst for student success, employee engagement and community connection. By integrating competitive excellence with academic support, wellness resources, diversity initiatives and experiential learning, Pack Athletics delivers measurable value to the University while preparing students to lead, serve and succeed—on campus, in their careers and in their communities.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Intercollegiate Athletics fulfills a critical role in the attainment of the University's mission and vision. Since August 2025, we have experienced great success in our Athletic Department. Here are specific examples of how Intercollegiate Athletics is working to make a difference at CSU Pueblo.

Fall 2025 Semester Highlights

Academic Excellence

- 3.113 combined GPA
- 99 Student-Athletes with Above 4.0 GPA
- 15 sports over 3.0 GPA
- One Academic All-American (Zack Rakowski, football)

Athletic Achievement

- RMAC Title, Football
- RMAC 3rd Place, Volleyball
- Nine All-American performances
- Two RMAC Players of the Year, Caelyn Gunn (Volleyball) and Elena Stankovic (Volleyball)
- Three Teams in NCAA Championships (Women's Cross Country, Football and Volleyball)

Community Engagement and Strategic Partnerships

- Special Events with Advancement Office, Alumni Association and Foundation
 - Conducted ThunderWolves Golf Classic (25 corporate teams)
 - Hosted two Alumni Tailgates at home football
- Partnerships with School District 60 and 70
 - Canvas Community Classic (football and basketball)
- Title IX Sexual Assault Training with Office of Institutional Equity
- Collaboration with Pueblo YMCA and Boys and Girls Club
 - Community Service Day (Love Your Y Day)
 - Junior ThunderWolves

HISTORY OF ATHLETICS AND STUDENT FEES

CSU Pueblo currently sponsors 20 varsity sports. This year, we serve 550 student-athletes, along with 30 cheer and dance members. This amount represents approximately 18% of CSU Pueblo's undergraduate student body. As shown in the chart below, the percentage of student-athletes on campus has grown steadily since 2014-15, while our enrollment has declined.

	<u>Undergraduate Students</u>	<u>Student-Athletes</u>	<u>Percentage of All Students</u>
2014	4,227	607	14%
2015	3,362	618	18%
2016	3,391	569	17%
2017	3,744	542	14%
2018	3,630	532	15%
2019	2,909	577	20%
2020	2,728	613	22%
2021	1,997	636	32%
2022	2,434	675	28%
2023	2,721	640	24%
2024	2,943	578	20%
2025	3,073	550	18%

*Undergraduate enrollment numbers pulled from NCAA Annual Report submitted by CSU Pueblo. These are full-time, student-fee paying students.

Over the years, Athletics has relied heavily on Student Fee revenue to support student-athlete scholarships, sport operations and administrative costs. This funding is inherently variable and cannot be accurately projected until census dates are finalized each fall and spring. As illustrated in the chart below, the total financial support generated through Student Fees for Athletics has declined. This imbalance has directly impacted our ability to fully serve student-athletes and maintain a structurally balanced budget.

The chart below outlines historical Student Fee rates (per credit hour), total Student Fee revenue and the percentage of Athletics' overall operating budget supported by these funds.

	<u>Student Fee Per Credit Hour</u>	<u>Total Student Fee Revenue</u>	<u>Percentage of Total Budget</u>
2014-15	\$12.65	\$1,426,448	25%
2015-16	\$12.65	\$1,329,088	21%
2016-17	\$12.65	\$1,386,054	19%
2017-18	\$13.65	\$1,342,628	19%
2018-19	\$14.00	\$1,302,465	16%
2019-20	\$15.00	\$1,323,507	16%
2020-21	\$15.50	\$1,224,012	14.5%
2021-22	\$15.50	\$1,112,915	14%
2022-23	\$15.50	\$1,140,375	11%
2023-24	\$15.50	\$1,151,019	11%
2024-25	\$16.25	\$1,186,250	11%
2025-26	\$16.75	\$1,222,750	11%

Use of Student Fee Revenues

Each year, the Athletic Department relies on Student Fee Revenue to assist with three specified areas: Student-athlete scholarships, sport-specific program operational expenses and administrative costs associated with membership in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC) and NCAA Division II. The chart below outlines how Student Fee Revenue was used in FY26.

<u>Student Fee Revenues (FY26)</u>			
Scholarships	\$	350,000	
Operations	\$	749,750	Game officials, team travel (bus, hotels, food), equipment and uniforms
Administrative Costs	\$	123,000	Compliance software, health insurance premium, RMAC dues and security
Total	\$	1,222,750	

Regarding the \$350,000 in annual scholarship allocations, the chart below illustrates how funds were distributed across our 20 varsity sports last year, along with the primary funding sources (University E&G transfer, Student Fee transfer and Foundation support). Allocation levels and funding sources are determined by several factors, including Title IX requirements, historical distributions and available philanthropic resources.

Currently, the CSU Pueblo Foundation holds \$8.5 million in endowed gifts designated exclusively for athletic scholarships. These restricted endowments generate up to 3% in annual interest and must be used according to donor intent, limiting flexibility. As a result, scholarship funding from the Foundation fluctuates year to year based on market performance and donor contributions, creating significant challenges for long-term financial planning.

In contrast, Student Fee revenue provides critical budget stability. Continued reliance on Student Fees—particularly for scholarships—allows Athletics to better forecast expenses, maintain financial predictability and ensure consistent support for our student-athletes.

FY26 Athletic Scholarship Distribution									
Fiscal Y	Chart C	Account N	Account Name	Object Code	Budget	E&G Transfer	Student Fee Transfer	Total University Support	Remaining Transfer Needed
2026	PB	2651013	WOMEN'S CC/TRACK	6669	200,000	34,287	18,999	53,286	146,714
2026	PB	2651015	FOOTBALL	6669	1,025,000	167,627	99,121	266,748	758,252
2026	PB	2651016	WRESTLING	6669	205,000	28,235	16,929	45,164	159,836
2026	PB	2651017	WOMEN'S GOLF	6669	100,000	7,453	4,200	11,653	88,347
2026	PB	2651019	BASEBALL	6669	180,000	5,061	3,034	8,095	171,905
2026	PB	2651020	MEN'S GOLF	6669	100,000	7,059	4,232	11,291	88,709
2026	PB	2651021	MEN'S BASKETBALL	6669	250,000	61,665	36,972	98,637	151,363
2026	PB	2651022	MEN'S SOCCER	6669	170,000	23,441	14,054	37,495	132,505
2026	PB	2651024	SOFTBALL	6669	100,000	26,087	15,000	41,087	58,913
2026	PB	2651025	VOLLEYBALL	6669	210,000	52,173	31,000	83,173	126,827
2026	PB	2651026	WOMEN'S BASKETBALL	6669	245,000	65,962	38,600	104,562	140,438
2026	PB	2651027	WOMEN'S SOCCER	6669	205,000	35,597	21,000	56,597	148,403
2026	PB	2651028	WOMEN'S TENNIS	6669	35,000	8,571	5,000	13,571	21,429
2026	PB	2651029	MEN'S CC/TRACK	6669	200,000	20,244	12,138	32,382	167,618
2026	PB	2651030	MEN'S LACROSSE	6669	25,000	17,048		17,048	7,952
2026	PB	2651031	WOMEN'S LACROSSE	6669	70,000	16,770	20,221	36,991	33,009
2026	PB	2651032	SWIMMING	6669	60,000	16,770	9,500	26,270	33,730
					3,380,000.00	594,050.00	350,000.00	944,050.00	2,435,950.00

Sport-specific operational expenses directly support the student-athlete experience and include game officials, team travel and equipment, uniforms and supplies. These investments are essential to student-athlete health and safety, competitive skill development and CSU Pueblo's brand reputation. Transportation, lodging and meals are central to the intercollegiate experience and ensure student-athletes are safe, supported and prepared while competing on the road. Likewise, sport-specific equipment and uniforms contribute to game-day readiness, injury prevention, ongoing development and institutional visibility.

Collectively, annual operational costs total approximately \$1.7 million, including about \$182,000 for game officials, \$936,000 for team travel and \$545,000 for equipment, uniforms and supplies. This represents roughly \$1 million more than the amount currently supported through Student Fee revenue, creating a significant structural gap that directly affects our ability to sustain high-quality programming for our student-athletes.

Administrative expenses reflect required or mission-critical services necessary to maintain compliance and membership with the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference and NCAA, while also ensuring student safety, communication and operational continuity. These include compliance software, video and broadcast services through Hudl, anonymous reporting via RealResponse, conference membership dues, secondary health insurance coverage for injured student-athletes, game-day security and website hosting. Together, these administrative costs total approximately \$123,000 annually. While less visible than team operations, these services are essential to safeguarding student-athlete welfare, meeting regulatory requirements and sustaining CSU Pueblo Athletics' competitive standing and professional standards.

FY26 Academic Year Re-Cap

The 2025-26 academic year required Athletics to make difficult but necessary financial decisions to stabilize operations and position the department for long-term sustainability. In response to broader institutional budget pressures, Athletics implemented across-the-board 10% reductions, reduced scholarship allocations and paused several vacant positions. These measures were designed to preserve core programming and competitive opportunities while minimizing disruption to the student-athlete experience.

In addition to internal reductions, the institution proposed a \$2 million reduction to Athletics' University E&G budget transfer. Rather than receiving \$5,585,056 in E&G support as we did in FY25, Athletics received \$3,585,056 for FY26 — a \$2 million decrease. In conjunction with this reduction, Athletics was tasked with generating an additional \$2 million in new revenue as part of what was described as a "pilot test." To date, we have generated approximately \$500,000 in new revenue and are hopeful of surpassing \$1 million by the end of the spring term.

While these actions have helped address immediate fiscal challenges, they have required programs to operate with leaner staffing models and more constrained resources. Throughout this period, our priority has remained clear: protecting student-athlete academic success, competitive integrity and the overall quality of the Wolfpack experience.

Looking ahead, continued structural adjustments will be necessary as Athletics aligns its financial model with enrollment trends, conference benchmarks and evolving institutional priorities. FY26 represents an important transition year—one focused not only on fiscal stabilization, but also on building a more sustainable and resilient future for CSU Pueblo Athletics.

Plan for Upcoming Year (FY27)

In FY27, Athletics will transition from short-term cost containment toward long-term strategic alignment and financial sustainability. Over the coming months, we will conduct a comprehensive review of personnel structures to ensure staffing levels appropriately support competitive success, operational efficiency and student-athlete

services. This review will evaluate organizational models across all programs and identify opportunities to streamline operations while protecting the core student-athlete experience.

A key component of this process will be benchmarking our financial model against peer institutions within the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference (RMAC). This analysis will help determine where CSU Pueblo Athletics currently stands in relation to conference competitors and guide future decisions necessary to maintain both competitiveness and fiscal responsibility.

To address rising operational costs associated with equipment, uniforms and facility usage, Athletics plans to implement an equipment and user fee of \$200 per semester per student-athlete beginning in FY27. This measure aligns CSU Pueblo more closely with common practices across intercollegiate athletics while helping offset increasing program expenses.

Institutional support through the University Educational & General (E&G) fund transfer will total \$4,535,056 for FY27. While this represents restored baseline support following prior reductions, Athletics will absorb a \$100,000 reallocation to assist the University's FY27 Incremental Budget needs. In addition, Athletics will carry a fundraising expectation of \$750,000 in new revenue generation beyond existing external funding streams, reinforcing the department's continued commitment to diversifying revenue sources.

Another critical factor influencing the FY27 budget is the pending decision by the Student Fee Governing Board regarding Athletics fees. Because the final outcome remains unknown, the current budget assumes a flat fee projection. At present, the FY27 financial outlook reflects a projected deficit, meaning additional expense adjustments and operational decisions will be required to present a balanced budget.

Collectively, these efforts—including continued fiscal discipline, personnel evaluation, conference benchmarking, expanded revenue expectations and the introduction of user fees—will influence sport sponsorship, roster management, student-athlete services and overall competitive positioning. While these decisions present challenges, they represent necessary steps toward building a more resilient and sustainable Athletics program.

Our priority moving forward will be thoughtful planning, transparent communication and deliberate decision-making to ensure CSU Pueblo Athletics remains strong, competitive and aligned with institutional priorities.

FY27 budget planning is actively underway, and the following draft comparison reflects progress to date.

FY26 vs. FY27 Budget - DRAFT

	<u>FY26</u>	<u>FY27</u>	<u>Difference</u>
Revenue			
University (E&G)	\$ 5,585,056	\$ 4,535,056	\$ 1,050,000
	\$ (2,000,000)	\$ (100,000)	\$ (1,900,000)
Additional Revenue Generation	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 750,000	\$ 1,250,000
External	\$ 2,435,472	\$ 2,341,940	\$ 93,532
Student Fees (\$16.75 credit hour x 73,000)	\$ 1,222,750	\$ 1,222,750	\$ -
Camps and Clinics	\$ 861,500	\$ 861,500	\$ -
Ticket Sales	\$ 375,000	\$ 450,000	\$ (75,000)
Equipment/User Fees (455 athletes x \$400)	\$ -	\$ 182,000	\$ (182,000)
Total	\$ 10,479,778	\$ 10,243,246	\$ 136,532
Expenses			
Salaries and Benefits	\$ 3,505,025	\$ 3,504,579	\$ (446)
Scholarships	\$ 3,380,000	\$ 3,190,000	\$ (190,000)
Camps and Clinics	\$ 524,500	\$ 442,000	\$ (82,500)
Operations	\$ 3,288,811	\$ 3,178,253	\$ (110,558)
Total	\$ 10,698,336	\$ 10,314,832	\$ (383,504)

How We Know We'll Be Successful

Success will be measured through a combination of financial performance, operational efficiency and student-athlete outcomes. Key indicators will include adherence to budget targets following the FY26 reductions, progress toward aligning our expenditures with peer institutions in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference, stabilization of staffing models and the successful implementation of the student-athlete equipment/user fee. We will also monitor roster stability, retention, academic performance and competitive results to ensure fiscal decisions do not disproportionately impact the student-athlete experience at Colorado State University Pueblo.

Reporting and Accountability

Progress will be tracked through regular financial and operational reporting. This will include monthly budget-to-actual reviews, personnel summaries, scholarship utilization reports and sport-by-sport detailed expense tracking. We implemented these practices in 2025 and will continue them going forward. Leadership will receive periodic updates outlining cost savings achieved, emerging risks and areas requiring adjustment. In addition, conference benchmarking data will be incorporated to provide context on where we stand relative to RMAC peers. These reports will allow for timely course correction and ensure transparency with campus leadership.

Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

Achieving these goals requires strong collaboration across multiple areas, including Athletics leadership, Finance, Human Resources, Enrollment Management, Facilities and Recreation Services. Coaches and sport administrators will play a critical role in managing team budgets and communicating changes to student-athletes. We will also work closely with campus partners to evaluate staffing needs, implement new fee structures and coordinate facility

usage. This collective approach ensures decisions are informed, aligned with institutional priorities, and focused on long-term sustainability rather than short-term fixes.

STUDENT FEE REQUEST

The Student Fee Sub-Committee for Athletics respectfully requests an increase in the Student Fee from \$16.25 to \$18.00 per credit hour for the 2026-27 academic year, representing a \$1.25 per-credit-hour adjustment. Currently, Student Fee support accounts for approximately 11% of the Athletics operating budget.

This modest increase is critical to offset rising operational costs driven by inflation, stabilize Student Fee–supported expenses and better align CSU Pueblo with peer institutions in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference. Most importantly, it will help Athletics sustain essential services that directly support student-athlete safety, wellness, competitive excellence and academic success; while preserving the overall quality and appeal of the student experience.

After careful review of current financial pressures and programmatic needs, the Sub-Committee believes this request is both reasonable and necessary to maintain institutional competitiveness, support student success and ensure continued value for students, employees and the broader campus community.

RATIONALE FOR STUDENT FEE REQUEST

Due to current fiscal-year constraints, Athletics has implemented a mandatory 10% cut of all sport budget operations, has reduced scholarship allocations and has been unable to fill mission-critical positions, including an assistant athletic trainer and several assistant coaching roles. These cuts and vacancies directly impact student-athlete safety, supervision, recovery and overall well-being. At the same time, rising operational costs continue to strain already limited resources. The requested Student Fee increase is essential to sustaining safe, competitive and educationally meaningful experiences for our student-athletes.

Our rationale for this request is as follows:

To address the costs of inflation while protecting student-athlete safety.

Inflation continues to impact all collegiate athletic programs, but its effects are particularly significant at Colorado State University Pueblo, where we sponsor 20 varsity sports and serve nearly 550 student-athletes. The largest portion of our Student Fee budget supports operational expenses such as travel, equipment, officials and game-day services—areas that are directly tied to student-athlete safety and competitive readiness. As costs rise, our ability to provide appropriate medical coverage, quality equipment and safe travel environments becomes increasingly challenged.

As outlined previously, Athletics currently projects approximately \$1.2 million in Student Fee revenue. In FY25, we budgeted roughly \$680,000 for operations but ultimately spent approximately \$1.6 million due to inflationary pressures beyond our control. This gap limits our ability to adequately staff athletic training services, support coaching coverage and maintain safe participation standards. Additional Student Fee support in FY27 will help close this gap and stabilize essential safety-related operations.

To maintain current levels of student-athlete support amid staffing and budget constraints.

While Athletics is budgeted to receive \$1.2+ million, representing only a modest year-over-year increase. For FY27, we are requesting a \$1.25 per-credit-hour increase to generate approximately \$91,250 in additional revenue. This funding will help preserve existing services while addressing growing safety concerns caused by unfilled athletic training and coaching positions.

As shown in the accompanying budget overview, scholarship and administrative allocations will remain unchanged. Any additional Student Fee revenue would be directed toward sport-specific operations, medical coverage and student-athlete support services to ensure consistent supervision, injury prevention, recovery resources and safe competitive environments.

To better align with our Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference peers and enhance retention.

CSU Pueblo currently provides approximately \$3,000 less per student-athlete than the RMAC average, despite sponsoring 20 varsity sports. This funding gap impacts our ability to attract and retain qualified coaches and support staff, directly affecting student-athlete development and safety oversight. As we strategically manage roster sizes, a modest Student Fee increase will help bring CSU Pueblo closer to conference norms while strengthening support systems for our student-athletes.

Comparative RMAC data shows that CSU Pueblo ranks near the top in total expenditures while also sponsoring one of the highest numbers of sports, including football. Several peer institutions—some without football—are spending as much or more per sport. This proposed increase will help maintain competitiveness within the RMAC while supporting the staffing and operational infrastructure necessary to protect student-athlete welfare.

To sustain Athletics' appeal while advancing student success and wellness.

CSU Pueblo Athletics has achieved competitive excellence, strong academic performance and meaningful community engagement—outcomes driven by dedicated student-athletes, coaches and staff. However, continued success requires adequate investment in people and programs. Ensuring proper athletic training coverage, coaching support and safe competition environments is fundamental to student success. This Student Fee increase will help preserve these core elements while maintaining Athletics' national profile and institutional value.

As the University prepares for FY27 and anticipates significant base reductions, Athletics faces further operational strain and additional cuts. These cuts will likely deepen existing staffing shortages and safety concerns. While we understand the broader fiscal challenges, we respectfully request that the Student Fee Governing Board consider the critical role Athletics plays in enrollment, retention, engagement and student wellness. This modest increase will help protect a mission-critical unit while allowing Athletics to continue supporting students, employees and the broader community.

DEVELOPING CHAMPIONS

In closing, the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics sincerely values its partnership with the Student Fee Governing Board and appreciates your continued support of Colorado State University Pueblo. Our academic achievement, competitive success, student-athlete safety and community engagement are directly tied to your investment. Simply put, our progress reflects your commitment to our students—and together, we help advance the University's mission.

With the proposed \$1.25 per-credit-hour increase, Athletics will take an important step toward achieving a balanced and sustainable operating model while preserving essential services that support student-athlete health, wellness and success. We remain committed to transparency and accountability and have consistently reported back to both the Athletics Sub-Committee and the Student Fee Governing Board on how these resources advance our mission and vision. Your continued partnership will allow us to maintain safe competition environments, support student success, and ensure Athletics remains a strong contributor to the campus community and the broader region.

Student Fee Sub-Committee for Athletics

Douglas Branch, student

Sam Howery, student

JJ McCradie, student

Dr. Krista Bridgmon, Athletic Board of Controls

Jenna McKinley-Fall, Associate Athletic Director/Senior Woman Administrator

Dr. Paul Plinske, Vice President for Athletics and Strategic Partnerships