



There's a commonly held stereotype that doctors don't all have the best bedside manner. I've been lucky to know a few doctors in my life (some as friends, at least one as family) that don't measure up to that perception; they're engaging, informative, and personable. Unfortunately, the last 48 hours have demonstrated that it might actually apply to UAB president Ray Watts (especially after the release of [an extended video clip showing his interaction with members of the football team during their closed door meeting](#)).

In February 2013 I wrote of [the need for the next president of UAB to dream bigger dreams while being willing to use the bully pulpit to do so](#). Recent events weren't exactly what I had in mind.

There is something most doctors are normally good at doing - offering us options and encouraging us to get a second opinion. Even those with the worst bedside manner are capable of this feat. I haven't found a real instance of the UAB president providing any to the student body. The document used to justify Tuesday's announcement (merely part of the strategic plan that still needs to be made public upon its completion) took one off the table right off the bat - competing as a Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) school instead of Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). Given the answers former UAB athletic director Brian Mackin wrote to UNC Charlotte during their exploratory process - ones shared in a [this piece published on the Business of College Sports on December 3](#) - it's understandable why; we are in the heart of the most rabid college football fan base in the country. (Incidentally, if you're still attempting to blame Mackin for what happened even after you realize he basically gave up his post because he didn't agree with it, stop.) Note, [14 of the 16 schools in Division I to discontinue football since 1995 are FCS schools](#) as mentioned in this piece on the site's front page today.

What happened at East Tennessee State?

Another option not readily offered was allowing students to decide if they'd be willing to increase student fees to offset the anticipated costs for the program. This is how East Tennessee State University will bring their team back to action next year to compete in the FCS. [Their student government voted 22-5 to increase their student fees by \\$125/semester to support a return of football in 2013](#). Their university president was in attendance at the vote. This followed [a controversial vote of the entire student body in 2007](#) (four years after the program wrapped up its final season at 3-6 knowing it was the last one) that failed to garner support. The vote in 2013 was not without [some students voicing concern about how they would find another \\$1,000 over four years to pay for their college education \(an extremely legitimate one\)](#), but the option was presented and considered.

Could their plan work if carried out at UAB?

Based on their plan (as it was [passed by Tennessee's state Board of Regents](#)) and UAB's currently listed total student population of 18,568, a similarly approved measure would generate \$4,642,000

per year if implemented next academic year. Even if enrollment numbers did not increase, \$23,210,000 would be available over a five-year period. If the UAB Football Foundation were also able to average \$5 million in fund raising efforts per year for the next five years, UAB would have \$48,210,000 available to use. Taking the level of passion showed in recent days into consideration and assuming the student body did continue to increase, it's safe to say the \$49 million deficit cited in the analysis could easily be filled - and that's before the city, county, and state get involved - saving all three discontinued teams.

The timeline of events at East Tennessee State University reminds us neat and tidy is not always possible and that solutions could take time (something the current Blazers may not possess). The idea of an FBS team not taking the field in the Football Capital of the South does have some cringing and upset - after all, as former long-time *Birmingham News* sports editor [Zipp Newman](#) famously wrote, "Football is a religion of the Southland, played by the boys and lived and relived daily by their families." I'm positive the 'Dean of Southern sports writers' would be calling for frank, candid discussions about the options available short and long-term. We need someone - maybe even the university president - to be more candid about what's possible.

It's also worth noting if the process necessary for an East Tennessee State-type of solution are carried out the same way here, the final decision would lie with the university system board of trustees. It would be a moment to see if they will listen to their students or if this is about something else. It'd also show if they were willing to take the words of their first chancellor (UAB's first president, [Joseph Volker](#)) to heart about dreaming big dreams for Birmingham.

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