Program Summary

DoIT provides professional video recording, multimedia production and post-production editing for athletic events, special events at NIU’s Convocation Center, campus events, and events for entities such as the Illinois High School Association.

This program also includes:

• Television camera work, event direction/production, audio and replays for athletic events on ESPN3;
• Extraction and production of athletic archival footage for use in sports marketing campaigns;
• Audio/video recording and editing for athletic press conferences; and
• Support for video coaching and analysis using video captured from robotic cameras used during football practices and games.

DoIT staff mentor and supervise 20+ NIU students who become prepared for careers in video direction and production. The program has growth opportunities but exists on shaky financial ground. Its viability depends on funding from external customers.

Criterion 1: Importance to University Mission / Operations

Importance to Mission

Engaged students graduate.

DoIT provides support and real working experiences for students pursuing a career in multimedia and broadcasting. Students engage with full-time staff and professional freelancers, daily gaining experience working live broadcasts with state-of-the-art equipment. As students improve, they have opportunities to edit videos and create graphics on special features, highlight videos, and promotional videos that air to large audiences as well as ESPN. As students or interns fulfill their graduation requirements, they are invited to participate as professional staff for events and productions.

Many alumni of this “Huskie Vision” program have enjoyed broadcast and media careers with Comcast Sports Net Chicago, The Chicago White Sox, The Chicago Cubs, United Center, The Chicago Bears, ESPN, Chicago Sky, NEP, 120 Sports as well as many non-sporting companies including McDonald’s, Salvation Army, Camera Originals, Nocturne PRG, Illinois High Schools and city municipalities.

Importance to Operations

Supporting competitive athletic teams is an integral part of NIU’s strategy for a well-rounded and rich educational experience. The majority of this program’s attention is focused on supporting the NIU Athletics with professional-quality broadcasts, marketing campaigns, onsite camera work, and video coaching. This is expensive and underfunded work.

Other campus units could benefit by having conferences professionally recorded and edited, but with the inevitable fees that must be charged for the service, this is an untapped operational market.
Program Portfolio

This program’s focus on NIU Athletics gives exposure to over 400 student athletes to broadcasting outlets such as ESPN, Chicago media networks and many on-line social networks. The “Huskie Vision” staff provides outlets for collegiate sports competitions, humanized features of student athletes, marketing and promotions for NIU, as well as the public exposure of content of videos, broadcasts, historical features of the NIU and DeKalb community’s -- all produced by NIU staff, alumni and students.

Program Synergy

This program works closely with NIU Athletics and the university’s Marketing and Communications staff to provide professional-quality broadcasts and video content. It also relies on Networking and Broadband programs to distribute video and has eventual ties with Storage as we consolidate infrastructure with our enterprise offerings.

Criterion 2: Quality / Effectiveness

Functions and Services

DoIT provides the following services:

• Sports, event and training video production;
• Post-production editing;
• Production of feature videos;
• Live Sports Broadcasting for ESPN3 including
  o sponsor messages;
  o special effects;
  o computer graphics;
  o replays;
• Live broadcasting of entertainment or special events;
• Live broadcast journalism of guest speakers such former Vice President Dick Cheney;
• AV support for arena events, meetings, banquets and ceremonies;
• Provide student experiential learning for broadcast career paths; and
• Produce and distributes individual collegiate sports videos for coaching.

To meet current obligations, the current staffing level is insufficient. Extra help, third parties and student workers must be hired for most events. There are significant opportunities to expand services into other venues and provide outside live video for more athletic events, but more trained staff is required.

Measures of Quality

The end results produced by video production and broadcast services are professional grade, on par with what one would expect from a national broadcast channel like ABC. The process of delivering such programming requires highly detailed planning, coordination and skill of execution.

That said, incidents regularly occur at all live broadcasting events that must be addressed or worked around. The bigger the event, the more equipment can fail and more staff can make mistakes. Except for major equipment failures, the skill, experience and teamwork of the broadcast crew ensures these incidents do not show in the broadcast.
Evidence of Quality

The community of professional broadcast crews that this team interacts with provides frequent and consistent feedback that the NIU production quality is as good as any national broadcast. The NIU team is frequently asked to consult with lower tier regional staff as to help them improve their own video production and broadcast services.

Quality Improvement

The number one improvement to the program would be the addition of staff trained in broadcasting and video production.

DoIT staff record and recap all incidents that happened during every event so those issues will be prevented or resolved before the next event. For example broken equipment would be fixed, replacement parts orders, and new procedures put in place to prevent incidents.

One example of a current improvement initiative is the effort to clean and polish the fiber optic connections to ensure positive camera link up and delivery of content.

Another is partnering with DoIT network support staff to assist in managing the sizeable web of fiber optic cabling and connection requirements in order to reduce setup time, improve consistency of connectivity, and free up resources for the broadcast crew to attend to other content specific matters.

Criterion 3: Productivity / Efficiency

Scope of Program

This program provides video production or broadcast services for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Annual Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home Football</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote Football</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Olympic sporting events</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHSA</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commencements</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Coaching</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Small</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Medium</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Large</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>303</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remote productions can be as big as MAC championship or Bowl games, or smaller local venues such as the Egyptian Theatre. Larger production efforts require the coordination efforts up to 30 staff providing 22 unique functions and a room or truck full of specialized equipment.
Productivity Comparison

Broadcasts over the ESPN3 platform are overseen by the individual institutions themselves. Beginning in 2014, each of the 12 MAC schools faced the challenge of putting the infrastructure in place to produce broadcasts of ESPN quality. Resources for this investment are partially covered by the MAC, but much of the responsibility and upgrades rest on the individual institutions.

Last year, three MAC schools (Buffalo, Central Michigan and Northern Illinois) were able to move forward with ESPN3 production, whereas Western Michigan will be broadcast ready in another year or two after a nationwide search for a new Assistant Athletic Director for Broadcasting and Multimedia and investing heavily in state-of-the-art equipment like that operated by ESPN.

Resource Comparison

Facilities and equipment professional grade and are as good as found at any peer institution.

However, we have 3 full time producers and one full time engineer, whereas Ball State has 6 producers and group engineering; and Buffalo has 13 fulltime staff.

To limit overtime and avoid burnout, DoIT requires 2 more producers and 4-5 more engineering staff. This would bring skilled staff numbers closer to peer levels and also begin to provide capacity for many more external revenue generating engagements. Managed well, the additional cost of staff could be more than offset by the additional work afforded by our increased capacity.

Cost and Revenues

Costs have risen this year, substantially, as DoIT has completed the first detailed cost model that fully accounts for all equipment and personnel. The service has been losing hundreds of thousands of dollars per year for as long as anyone can remember, drawing subsidies from other programs in the same division or central funds as needed. Now on more stable footing, the program can reduce costs by expanding outward to cover the video needs of outside agencies.

Criterion 4: Internal & External Demand

External Demand

The ESPN3 platform is a piece of a 13-year media rights deal that was agreed upon last August between the Mid-American Conference and ESPN and runs through 2026-27. This provides a worldwide audience which can only be tapped through this venue.

Internal Demand

The primary internal demand is for video coverage of all athletic events, video coaching and video coverage for Convo events. A large portion of athletic events are not being served now and that is for the live broadcasting of outdoor events not held in Huskie Stadium.

This is also the only university platform to provide real work experience to NIU students that want a career in video production or broadcast.
**Criterion 5: Opportunity Analysis**

*Cost Savings Opportunities*

Staff has already been reduced to bare minimums, and as a result are just be able to meet current obligations.

*Future Revenue / Resources*

There exist many more opportunities to provide video production outside of athletics to entities such as:

- City of DeKalb
- DeKalb Police Department
- DeKalb Waste Management
- regional school districts
- IDOT services
- PBS
- Comcast

Discussion between the CIO, CFO, and Provost earlier this year concluded that an external review was needed to fully assess the market and determine the ongoing viability of the program. If it can be expanded, that should provide relief to staff and budgets; however, if it cannot be expanded, serious consideration must be given to shutting down the function.

*Improvement Opportunities*

There is synergy between the staff that support this program and NIU’s Marketing and Communication staff. They could share much of the same equipment and provide assistance to each other.

The additional collaboration with DoIT network support staff leverages a larger group with some similar skill sets that will bring efficiencies to the video production setup, teardown, and equipment maintenance.

*Opportunities in the Field*

To make this program exemplary requires more skilled staff including 2 more producers and 4-5 more engineering staff.

Since NIU Athletics is the primary consumer of the service, if the staff that support this program were to report into Athletics, then additional efficiencies would be gained through the Athletics department management and administration of scheduling, logistics, and planning of events.

NIU could also use the expertise and first class production center to support a video journalism, or video production degree curriculum, which will provide real hands-on experience in ESPN quality broadcast production. This is a stated goal of Western Michigan, which also recognizes the student recruitment potential and brand marketing power.