The Drake Group
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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN COLLEGIATE SPORT

POSITION STATEMENT

Why the NCAA Academic Progress Rate (APR) and the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) should be Abandoned and Replaced with More Effective Academic Metrics[1]

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Drake Group[2] conducted a comprehensive assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of current academic progress standards for participation in college athletics. Our purpose was to determine whether these standards effectively measure success in college, and we found a significant need for reform. The Drake Group found that NCAA academic measures are often public relations "smokescreens," hiding widespread exploitation of academically underprepared athletes and academic fraud by institutions chasing financial success in Division I athletics. The Drake Group identified no easy or single solution to this failure of academic standards. The NCAA must impose multiple reforms simultaneously to hold institutions and coaches accountable for the academic success of recruited athletes.

Specifically, the NCAA should discontinue its use of the Graduation Success Rate, Academic Progress Rate, and NCAA Division I Head Coach APR Portfolio calculations because they are fundamentally flawed metrics that (1) do not permit comparison with non-athlete students, (2) do not recognize institutional differences in mission, classroom competitiveness, and student quality or the

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1 Preferred citation: Gurney, G., Lopiano, E. Snyder, D., Willingham, M., Meyer, J., Porto, B., Ridpath, D.B., Sack, A., and Zimbalist, A. (2015-Revised 2017, 2019, 2021) The Drake Group Position Statement: Why the NCAA Academic Progress Rate (APR) and Graduation Success Rate (GSR) Should Be Abandoned and Replaced with More Effective Academic Metrics. Retrieve at: https://thedrakegroup.org/2015/06/07/drake-group-questions-ncaa-academic-metrics/

2 The Drake Group is a national organization of faculty and others whose mission is to defend academic integrity in higher education from the corrosive aspects of commercialized college sports. The Drake Group goals include: (1) ensure that universities provide accountability of trustees, administrators, and faculty by publicly disclosing information about the quality of educations college athletes receive; (2) advance proposals that ensure quality education for students who participate in intercollegiate athletics; (3) support faculty and staff whose job security and professional standing are threatened when they defend academic standards in intercollegiate sports; (4) influence public discourse on current issues and controversies in sports and higher education; and (5) coordinate local and national reform efforts with other groups that share its mission and goals. The Drake Group is "In residence" at the University of New Haven. For further information see: http://thedrakegroup.org

effect of these factors on underprepared college athletes and (3) invite academic fraud when mismatched recruits are denied appropriate remediation through academic support services. Alternatively, the Drake Group proposes eight academic reforms that would hold NCAA member schools and coaches accountable for recruiting athletes capable of graduating and for remedying academic deficiencies that might otherwise make graduation unlikely.

INTRODUCTION

One of the NCAA's stated basic principles for the conduct of intercollegiate athletics is:

> ***2.5 The Principle of Sound Academic Standards.***
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> *Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be maintained as a vital component of the educational program, and student-athletes shall be an integral part of the student body. The admission, academic standing and academic progress of student-athletes* ***shall be consistent with the policies and standards adopted by the institution for the student body in general.***[3]

For more than 50 years, the NCAA has wrestled with the issue of minimum academic eligibility requirements for intercollegiate athletic participation. The Association has created and modified standards for initial eligibility at member institutions for athletes entering from high school or junior college, or transferring from 4-year institutions. It has also created and modified standards for continuing eligibility once the athlete is enrolled at an institution. Over time, these standards and their chosen metrics have ceased to compare athletes to their non-athlete peers. The standards have also failed to consider institutional characteristics that may affect an athlete's ability to succeed academically. The departure of NCAA academic metrics from sound academic standards has created a negative correlation: as athlete exploitation increases, the academic integrity of the member institution decreases, subjugating the institution to media and public scrutiny.

The NCAA created the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) and the Academic Progress Rate (APR) to minimize the potential negative headlines resulting from reporting lower graduation rates for athletes compared to non-athletes. The APR aims to be a real-time predictor of GSR; it is supposed to allow the institution to track the athlete's progress toward graduation. These independent metrics allowed the NCAA to avoid raising significant academic standards required to participate in athletics. They also allowed the NCAA to publish misleading information regarding the academic success of athletes compared to non-athletes. Contrary to the NCAA's suggestion, the measures used to compare athletes and non-athletes are not equivalent because they account for differing variables in their calculations.

In 2010, the NCAA developed and implemented an additional reform measure, the Division I Head Coach Portfolio. This measure was intended to hold coaches accountable for the academic performance of their athletes. It sought to provide a public-exposure incentive for coaches to recruit and retain academically qualified athletes. Unfortunately, using this measure has not resulted in improved graduation rates. Instead, it has provided student-athletes and athletics staff the impetus to perpetrate academic fraud, sacrificing institutional integrity in a classic example of an unintended consequence of a policy decision.

[3] National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2020) *2020-21 NCAA Division I Manual*. NCAA: Indianapolis, IN, August, 2020.

Throughout the history of collegiate athletics, the NCAA has used flawed metrics to measure the academic success of college athletes. It has skewed the numbers to overstate performance. It then touts its academic reforms, even though the evidence suggests otherwise. For instance, national trends exist toward rising graduation rates for college students, grade inflation, and the creation of less rigorous majors. Perhaps more alarming is the NCAA's failure to mention that graduation rates and academic performance measures for Division I football and men's basketball are significantly below those of the general student body and other non-revenue college athletes.

Not all of the NCAA's academic standards apply to all NCAA membership divisions (Division I, II and III). For purposes of this analysis, we examined only Division I standards and results, recognizing that revenue growth and perceived publicity benefits enjoyed by successful athletic programs in this division have created huge pressures to keep athletes eligible, often resulting in abuses to "beat" the academic metric.

This report aims to (a) enhance the reader's understanding of college athlete eligibility and success standards, (b) identify the strengths and weaknesses of these standards, and (c) recommend how the NCAA should measure academic success. Further, The Drake Group will examine whether the NCAA and institutions are using academic progress measures as public relations smokescreens, hiding underachievement, exploitation, and academic fraud by institutions focused on the financial success of Division I athletic programs, their coaches, and administrators.

NCAA ACADEMIC MEASURES: DEFINITIONS – HISTORY – EFFECTIVENESS - ALTERNATIVES

Initial Eligibility Standards – High School Students

In 2003, the NCAA enacted the most recent iteration of initial eligibility reforms for high school students entering its member institutions, which actually lowered academic standards. A high school student was required to have completed 16 core courses with a minimum GPA of 2.0, to have earned a corresponding minimum standardized test score on a sliding scale, and to have graduated from high school. Theoretically, a student could fail every question on a standardized test and still qualify. Previously, a minimum composite score of 17 on the ACT or 820 on the SAT was required. The sliding scale was a response to the criticism that standardized-exam requirements disproportionately disqualify minority athletes from eligibility.[4]

The stated purpose of the 2003 initial eligibility changes was to increase the number of minority athletes who graduate from college. The actual results have been:

- Lower test-score standards, coupled with high-school grade inflation, resulting in more athletes who meet NCAA eligibility standards with very low-test scores. Many of these students possess inadequate skills to manage college academics, increasing the need for academic-support services at institutions already struggling with tight budgets."[5]
- Negligible gains in minority access to higher education through big-time college sports. The NCAA's 'Student-Athlete Ethnicity Report' included as variables the participation rates of self-reported ethnicity classifications, by team, each year from 1999 to 2009. It revealed that the

[4] Gurney, G.S.. (2011) Stop Lowering the Bar for College Athletes. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 10, 2011). Retrieve at: http://chronicle.com/article/Stop-Lowering-the-Bar-for/127058/

[5] Ibid.

adoption of less rigorous eligibility standards had minimal impact (positive) on African-American access to participation in football and basketball. Rarely mentioned is that for four years leading up the 2003 reforms, number of minority participants who met the higher minimum test score standard had increased steadily. Between 1999 and 2002, the African-American participation rate in Division I men's basketball increased 2.9 percentage points, from 55.0 to 57.9 percent.[6] But between 2003 and 2009, after the reforms, it rose only three points, to 60.9 percent. The same growth trend was evident in football: between 1999 and 2002, African-American participation increased from 39.5 percent to 43.8 percent, but between 2003 and 2009, it increased only two points, to 45.8 percent. According to the NCAA's reports on federal graduation rates of African-American student-athletes in Division I, the most recent data for men's basketball revealed a one-point decline in the 2003 cohort, to 43 percent, and for football a one-point increase, to 48 percent, over the previous year."[7]

- Removing the minimum standardized test requirement has challenged the academic integrity of higher education by widening the gap between the average academic profiles of athletes and non-athletes. The result is a depreciation of a "degree's value," coupled with an invitation to institutions to maintain an athlete's eligibility by committing academic fraud. This academic fraud includes counseling underprepared athletes to: (1) enroll in less-demanding academic majors, (2) select the least demanding courses available regardless if they are needed to earn a degree, (3) enroll in courses with faculty who are "easy" graders or who require little to no work to complete course requirements and select increased online and independent study courses to free more time devoted to athletic activities, and (4) participate in acts of academic dishonesty in conjunction with academic tutors, coaches, and staff members hired by the athletic department. As a result, member institutions often fail to provide their athletes with a meaningful education. The richest athletic programs have developed multi-million-dollar academic support programs, hiring academic support professionals, class checkers, learning specialists, and counselors who focus on keeping athletes eligible.
- At the high school level, preparatory schools now offer higher GPAs at a price. The result is massive grade inflation, as individuals have learned the system and recognize that an artificially high GPA can negate a poor performance on a standardized test.
- In August, 2016, the NCAA has raised to 2.3 the minimum grade point average for eligibility to practice, compete, and receive financial aid and will require the completion of 10 core units prior to the start of the college athlete's senior year.
- The Association also created an Academic Redshirt year from competition for college athletes who would otherwise qualify under the former GPA/test score sliding scale. The athlete who otherwise qualifies but fails to meet minimum 2.3 GPA is eligible for financial aid, has no restrictions on practice time, and is not required to seek remediation or academic support.[8]

In 2016, the NCAA raised the minimum GPA from a 2.0 to a 2.3 to qualify for competition while creating an Academic Redshirt category whose qualifiers would not be eligible for competition during their first year of enrollment.

[6] The first year for which the NCAA provides data is 1999.

[7] Ibid. Of course, another factor possibly affecting these numbers is that the percentage-point increase may occur more readily when the starting level is lower.

[8] 2015-2016 NCAA Division 1 Manual pages 155-161

The NCAA membership should reinstate the minimum standardized-test scores of 17 composite on the ACT and 820 combined verbal and math on the SAT for freshman athletics eligibility. This requirement is necessary to establish minimum reading and mathematics proficiencies for incoming students. It would ensure that college athletes have at least rudimentary academic skills or, at a minimum, would require institutions to apply their own entrance requirements equally to both athletes and non-athletes. Absent minimum scores on standardized tests, institutions must address the admission of underprepared athletes in some other rational way. Otherwise, they will continue to exploit predominantly minority football and men's basketball players, and academic fraud designed to keep athletes eligible to play will persist.

Recommendation 1 – Require Institutional Match for Initial Eligibility of High School Students

This recommendation returns primary responsibility to member institutions to determine whether the college athletes' high school credentials are sufficient for academic readiness on their campuses. Any student whose academic profile (high school grade point average and other measures used to determine institutional admissions, e.g., standardized test scores) is more than one standard deviation below the mean academic profile of the previous year's incoming class at the recruiting institution should be ineligible for athletic participation during the freshman year. The institution that admits the athlete must provide: (1) athletic scholarship assistance during the year of transition; (2) academic skills and learning disability testing; (3) if necessary, a remediation program supervised by academic authorities; (4) if necessary, a reduced for-credit course load to accommodate the time required for remediation; (5) a 10 hour per week participation restriction applicable to athletics-related activities (practice, meetings, etc.); and (6) tenured faculty oversight of the student's academic progress throughout his or her enrollment at the institution.[9] This recommendation would negate the need for NCAA initial eligibility standards and permit each member institution to focus on admission factors relevant to a holistic approach and "good fits" for their unique institution. Such initial eligibility reform would not require the need for the NCAA Eligibility Center by returning responsibility for admissions and initial eligibility decisions to member institutions. Athletes admitted with academic profiles below the entering class would be remediated and made college ready prior to athletic competition.

Initial Eligibility Standards – Junior College Transfers

The most recent reforms became effective in August of 2012. To be immediately eligible to participate upon transfer to an NCAA member institution, a student must have attended a two-year college full time for at least one semester or quarter. The student must also have earned an average of at least 12-semester or quarter credit hours for each full-time term at the two-year college and at least a 2.500 GPA in all transferable hours including no more than two physical education activity credit hours from the two-year college to meet the requirements for immediate eligibility.

The NCAA summarized key research findings regarding 2-year college transfers to NCAA member institutions as follows:

[9] For a more complete discussion of freshmen eligibility issues, see Gurney, G., Willingham, M., Lopiano, D., Porto, B., Ridpath, D.B., Sack, A., and Zimbalist, A. (2015) The Drake Group Position Statement: Freshmen Ineligibility in Intercollegiate Athletics. (April 20, 2015). Retrieve at: [http://thedrakegroup.org]

- Two-four transfer students enter NCAA Division I schools with lower high school grades and test scores than other groups of students.

- Two-four transfers leave college ineligible at higher rates than any other group of student-athletes.

- Two-four transfer graduation rates lag behind those of student-athletes who enter a Division I school from high school.

- The grade-point average at the two-year institution is the best predictor of all first-year outcomes examined.

- Ineligibility rates decrease significantly as grade-point averages earned at two-year institutions increase.

- Student-athletes with more core academic credits[10] perform better at four-year institutions. Science is a strong predictor.

- Students with a high number of physical education activity credits tend to have less academic success at the four-year institution than their two-year institution grade-point average would predict.

- Generally, data pertaining to high school academic performance do not add appreciably to the prediction equation once academic behavior at the two-year institution is known.[11]

Recommendation 2 – Carefully Monitor the New Higher Standards Governing Initial Eligibility of 2-Year College Transfers

Based on the above information, athletics administrators and the NCAA should pay particular attention to the new rule requiring a 2.5 cumulative GPA to transfer from a 2-year institution to a four-year institution. They should monitor this rule to ensure it fosters success at 4-year colleges. Those with a vested interest in academic integrity should consider requiring the student to graduate from junior college or meet the normal transfer admission standards of the four-year institution. The following academic profile rule should be implemented:

Any student whose academic profile (high school grade point average and other measures used to determine institutional admissions, e.g., standardized test scores) is more than one standard deviation below the academic profile of the four-year institution's entering class of the previous year should be ineligible for athletic participation in their first year of attendance. Under these circumstances, the institution should provide: (1) athletic scholarship assistance to support the athlete during the transition; (2) academic skills and learning disability testing; (3) if necessary, a

[10] New NCAA academic standards were implemented on August 1, 2016. These standards require the completion of ten core courses before the beginning of the senior year. A description of core academic credit can be found at: https://web3.ncaa.org/lsdbi/reports/getReport/90008, NCAA bylaw 14.3.1.1 c, p. 172

[11] National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2012) Two-Year Transfer Summit. A power point presentation at the 2012 Mesa College Two-Year Transfer Summit. Presentation by Jennifer Strawley and Diane Dickman.

remediation program supervised by academic authorities; (4) if necessary, a reduced for-credit course load to accommodate the time required for remediation; (5) a 10 hours per week participation restriction applicable to athletics (practice, meetings, etc.); and (6) oversight by tenured faculty of the student's academic progress while enrolled at the institution.[12]

Progress Towards Degree Standards – GPA and Satisfactory Progress

The NCAA currently requires continuing academic eligibility (Progress Toward Degree) standards, as depicted in Table 1 on the next page. These standards disregard the typical high school and college standard required for graduation: a cumulative GPA of 2.0. When universities require students to remain in "good academic standing," they often use the same 2.0 standard as a floor for the minimum acceptable GPA required for graduation within a particular major. At the sophomore level the NCAA allows athletes to participate with a 1.8 cumulative GPA. Considering the time and energy constraints associated with playing a sport in college, to permit the adoption of a lower standard than a 2.0 GPA during college while in an academic probation status is ludicrous and validates prioritizing athletics over academics.

Recommendation 3 – Adopt the Commonly Accepted Measure of Good Academic Standing

To be eligible for athletics, a student should be required to attain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 during all semesters in which the student participated in athletic competition. Any athlete not meeting the 2.0 standard can participate in practice no more than 10 hours per week, may be prohibited from traveling with the team or engaging in other team activities, and may be required to participate in an academic support program.

[12] For a more complete discussion of freshmen eligibility issues, see Gurney, G., Willingham, M., Lopiano, D., Porto, B., Ridpath, D.B., Sack, A., and Zimbalist, A. (2015) The Drake Group Position Statement: Freshmen Ineligibility in Intercollegiate Athletics. (April 20, 2015). Retrieve at: [http://thedrakegroup.org]

Table 1 – NCAA Progress Toward Degree Academic Eligibility Requirements

ACADEMIC CLASS (SEMESTER OF FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT)	NCAA CONTINUING ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS
FRESHMAN	• Must be enrolled in **12 credit hours** at all times to compete and practice • Student-athletes must complete a minimum of 6 hours in the previous full time regular academic term • Student-athletes must complete a minimum of 18 hours during the regular academic year (fall & spring)
SOPHOMORE (entering 3rd semester)	• Must have earned at least 6 credits each semester • Minimum of 18 credit hours must be earned during the fall and spring semesters • Student-athletes must earn a minimum of 24 credit hours (can use summer school hours to meet 24) • Developmental or remedial hours used to meet 24 credit hour rule cannot be used to satisfy credits toward degree • 90% (1.8 GPA) of minimum cumulative grade point average for graduation each semester
JUNIOR (entering 5th semester)	• Must have earned at least 6 credit hours each semester • Must have earned at least 18 credit hours during the regular academic year (fall & spring) • Must have officially declared a major with paperwork on file in the Registrar's office and entered in Banner system • 95% (1.90 GPA) of minimum cumulative grade point average for graduation each semester • 40% of degree must be completed • Graduation audits must be completed prior to the end of the 6th semester
SENIOR (entering 7th semester)	• Must have earned at least 6 credit hours each semester • Must have earned at least 18 credit hours during the regular academic year (fall & spring) • 100% (2.00 GPA) of minimum cumulative grade point average for graduation each semester • 60% of degree must be completed
5TH YEAR SENIOR (entering 9th semester)	• Must have earned at least 6 credit hours each semester • Must have earned at least 18 credit hours during the regular academic year (fall & spring) • 100% (2.00 GPA) of minimum cumulative grade point average for graduation each semester • 80% of degree must be completed
➢ **All student-athletes must be considered in good standing as defined by their major department/college** ➢ **Once a student-athlete has officially declared a major, all applicable hours used towards meeting the satisfactory progress requirements must be applicable toward the student's designated degree program**	

- Remedial or developmental hours may count as part of the required 24 hours during the first year of college attendance, but may not be used to meet the "percentage of degree" eligibility requirements.
- "Elective" hours can be counted as degree hours **only** if the student's degree program allows for electives.
- Hours cannot be earned for a repeated course that was previously passed.
- Hours cannot be earned for a class passed with a "D" if the major requires the course be passed with a "C" or higher.
- Hours toward a minor can be used for eligibility **only if a minor is required** for the student's degree granting program.
- "Percentage of degree" requirements and grade point average also apply to transfer students.

Graduation Rate Measures

An important difference distinguishes the Federal Graduation Rate (FGR), which is part of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1972, from the Graduation Success Rate (GSR), which the NCAA developed. The FGR applies to all students, whereas the GSR applies only to athletes, allowing no comparison to non-athlete peers. An institution's FGR is tabulated as the number of fall semester, full-time freshmen students in an entering cohort who eventually graduate from their original institutions within six years,

divided by the number of students in the original entering cohort. The HEA requires all institutions that participate in federal student aid programs to use the FGR to disclose graduation rates for the student body and to disaggregate the data by gender, race, and ethnicity.

The HEA disclosure requirements also apply to schools that offer athletically related student aid in any form. Thus, the FGR for athletes, whether used to examine the FGR for an entire athletic program or a particular team, includes only athletes who receive athletically related aid. All students in the athlete FGR cohorts must be first-time, full-time freshmen entering in a given fall term while receiving athletically related financial aid. College athletes who do not receive such aid at entry or who transfer into the institution are excluded from the cohort. Whether for athletes or non-athletes, the retention of all students who were admitted and who persisted to graduation is the most important measure of institutional success. Admittedly, the FGR is limited because it includes only students who enter college in the fall as first-time, full-time undergraduates. Still, it is the only current nationally available graduation measure that permits a comparison between the academic success of recruited athletes who receive athletic financial aid and that of their non-athlete counterparts. The NCAA does not use this measure. Instead, it developed and uses the Graduation Success Rate (GSR), which it insists measures academic success more effectively.

A graduation rate metric is useful only if it enables a comparison of the graduation of athletes compared to nonathletes. The math for the Federal Graduation Rate is simple. The Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) computes the number of students who enter the institution as full-time students in September of every year and then determines the number of students in that cohort who graduate six years later at that institution. Then the graduation rate of students can be compared with those who participated in athletics and received athletic scholarships. The Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) permits this comparison. The NCAA Graduation Success Rate (GSR) does not allow a comparison with non-athlete students because it significantly changes the original FGR scholarship athlete cohort by allowing removal of transfers out (dropouts and stopouts), addition of transfers in and the counting of non-athletic scholarship recipients (Ivy League and military academies) as scholarship athletes. The institution which recruited and enrolled the athlete is not held accountable for those who leave the college. The result is a mathematically flawed overcompensation bias and purposefully[13] deceiving graduation rate metric that produces GSR rates that are estimated significantly higher percentage points higher than the FGR for the following reasons:

1. <u>The GSR does not count "Left Eligibles" in the numerator or denominator</u>. The GSR *does not count* any athlete who leaves the institution and would have been eligible to participate if he or she stayed (termed "left eligible" or "LEs") who simply dropped out or whose whereabouts are unknown. By eliminating LEs who simply dropout from their institutions, which lowers the denominator, graduation rates are deceptively inflated. No effort is made to examine who these students are (sport, race, gender, etc.) or their experiences in intercollegiate athletics that caused their departures. Here is an example of what happens. The cohort comprised of the 2017-2020 classes (the latest available GSR calculation consisting of athletes who entered six years previously) had a total number of 124,931 enrolled athletic scholarship athletes and the reported GSR was a whopping 90% (an estimated 112,438 of the 124,931). This dataset deleted 25,637 LEs.[14] If we return this liability to the total enrollment denominator, the NCAA's reported 90% graduation rate becomes an estimated 74.6 percent. Thus, the inclusion of LEs who do not enroll

[13] The NCAA is aware of these deficiencies and has not addressed them.

[14] https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/gradrates/RES_HowGradRateCalculated.

in another institution and are unaccounted for inflates the GSR by 15.4 percent. The NCAA considers LEs as "likely transfers". The TDG considers this group as dropouts and is consistent with the Federal definition of students who leave the institution.[15]

2. In addition to the 15.4% GSR-compared-to-FGR inflation effect described above, we estimate that the GSR is further inflated by another 10% by the inclusion of all Ivy League and military service academy athletes in the GSR which is supposed to include only those athletes who receive athletic scholarships. The FGR considers these Ivy/military academy athletes as "enrolled students" rather than scholarship athletes because their institutions do not offer athletic scholarships. When Ivy League and military service academy athletes numbering approximately 10,091 and graduating at 90 to 95 percent rates are included in the GSR as scholarship athletes,[16] the impact of their inclusion is estimated at an additional 8 percent.

Bottom line, the NCAA created a graduation metric that could not be compared to the non-athlete student body, produces a more favorable, albeit mathematically opaque and biased graduation rate for college athletes and effectively disguises the lower graduation rates of Black athletes. By not identifying the racial composition of LEs, the public will never know the attrition rates of Black athletes.

As Gurney, Eckard, and Southall explain, transferring out athletes encourages gaming of the system because retention is not important and absolves original schools of their responsibility to graduate the athletes they recruit.[17] Equally distressing is that athletic programs with the most financial resources can manipulate the GSR to their advantage. For instance, an institution can push out an unwanted (from a talent perspective) and academically weak basketball or football athlete by combining a threat with an incentive. The institution informs the player that it will not renew his or her financial aid unless the athlete attends summer school and raises a deficient GPA enough that the current institution will not lower its GSR (transfers out who are academically eligible are removed from the GSR calculation). Also, the institution benefits by not suffering an APR point loss. This ploy is most prevalent in football and men's basketball, sports in which recruiting underprepared[18] athletes is common owing to the financial payoff from winning. Even without such summer school and transfer shenanigans, richer athletic programs can afford a cadre of academic support staff devoted to keeping athletes eligible to play. The incentive for the athlete to leave eligible is largely related to financial aid and the ability to qualify for immediate competition under the recently passed legislation for a one-time transfer exception for all sports.[19] Thus, the NCAA has created a graduation measure that is designed to mislead the public into thinking that athletes graduate at higher rates than the general student body. See Table 2 on the next two pages, which

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15 Ibid.

16 UniversityStats.com for Ivy League retrieve at: https://www.univstats.com/comparison/ivy-league/graduation-rate/) and for military academies retrieve at: https://www.collegetuitioncompare.com/edu/197036/united-states-military-academy/graduation/

17 Ibid.

18 We use this term to refer to athletes with a broad range of academic capabilities whose commonality is that they do not meet the published academic admissions standards of the institution that specially admits them, knowing they are likely to be disadvantaged in the classroom that includes better prepared students. To the extent that this group includes athletes with significant reading and math deficiencies, deficits that can only be overcome with significant remediation, we believe that failure to provide such remediation and reduce athletics time commitments to maximize academic efficacy represents an ethically indefensible and exploitative practice.

19 NCAA rule 14.5.5.2.10 One-Time Transfer Exception

compares FGR and GSR data using 2019 NCAA Division I Final Four Basketball Championship as an example.

Table 2: Federal Graduation Rates Compared to NCAA Graduation Success Rates – 2019 NCAA Final Four Field[20]

2019 NCAA Men's Baketball Championship Field of 64					
	FEDERAL GRADUATION RATES (FGR)			NCAA GRADUATION SUCCESS	
School	4-yr Student Body	4-yr Men's Basketball	Percentage Point Difference of MBB from Student Body	MBB GSR	Percentage Point Difference of MBB GSR from MBB FGR
Duke	95%	69%	-26	100%	31
N.D. State	56%	77%	21	83%	6
Michigan State	79%	54%	-25	100%	46
Bradley	75%	58%	-17	100%	46
LSU	65%	17%	-48	86%	69
Yale*	97%		-97	94%	
Va. Tech	84%	33%	-51	73%	40
St. Louis	77%	50%	-27	75%	25
Liberty	48%	50%	2	92%	42
Miss. St.	59%	43%	-16	91%	48
Maryland	86%	29%	-57	73%	42
Belmont	70%	90%	20	100%	10
Minn.	79%	62%	-17	73%	11
Louisville	54%	54%	0	89%	35
UCF	70%	54%	-16	73%	19
VCU	64%	75%	11	92%	17
Gonzaga	85%	54%	-31	100%	46
Far. Dick.	49%	38%	-11	83%	45
Michigan	91%	47%	-44	100%	56
Montana	49%	55%	6	82%	27
TX Tech	60%	23%	-37	73%	50
N. Kentucky	40%	38%	-2	82%	44
FSU	81%	64%	-17	90%	26
Vermont	76%	62%	-14	100%	38
Murray St.	51%	7%	-44	54%	47
Marquette	81%	31%	-50	88%	57
Buffalo	75%	50%	-25	69%	19
AZ. State	66%	23%	-43	100%	67
Florida	88%	43%	-45	82%	39
Nevada	57%	50%	-7	79%	39

[20] Note that this data is based on the most recent six-year 2019 cohort and that the 4-year student body and men's basketball percentages represent an average of the last four years.

Table 2: Federal Graduation Rates Compared to NCAA Graduation Success Rates – 2019 NCAA Final Four Field (continued)

	FEDERAL GRADUATION RATES (FGR)			NCAA GRADUATION SUCCESS	
School	**4-yr Student Body**	**4-yr Men's Basketball**	**Percentage Point Difference of MBB from Student Body**	**MBB GSR**	**Percentage Point Difference of MBB GSR from MBB FGR**
Baylor	74%	33%	-41	67%	34
Syracuse	82%	50%	-32	80%	30
Virginia	94%	47%	-47	100%	53
Gardner-Webb	49%	27%	-22	82%	55
Tennessee	70%	60%	-10	90%	30
Colgate	90%	100%	10	100%	0
Purdue	78%	46%	-32	67%	21
Old Dominion	52%	33%	-19	71%	38
UC Irvine	86%	50%	-36	62%	12
Kansas St.	63%	57%	-6	100%	43
Oregon	72%	15%	-57	33%	18
Wisconsin	86%	64%	-22	78%	14
Villanova	90%	46%	-44	100%	54
St. Mary's	74%	57%	-17	69%	12
Iowa	73%	64%	-9	83%	19
Temple	71%	70%	-1	92%	22
Oklahoma	67%	38%	-29	69%	31
Ole Miss	61%	38%	-23	45%	7
North Carolina	90%	44%	-46	73%	39
Iona	66%	20%	-46	90%	70
Kentucky	64%	16%	-48	75%	59
Ab. Christian	63%	43%	-20	60%	17
Houston	54%	15%	-39	79%	25
GA. St.	54%	36%	-18	60%	24
Kansas	63%	14%	-49	100%	86
Northeastern	86%	81%	-5	93%	12
Auburn	76%	29%	-47	71%	42
N.M. State	45%	22%	-23	62%	45
Ohio State	83%	55%	-28	75%	20
Iowa State	74%	25%	-49	100%	75
Wofford	81%	50%	-31	89%	39
Seton Hall	66%	45%	-21	100%	55
Washington	84%	55%	-29	80%	25
Utah State	48%	20%	-28	82%	62
Mean	71%	45%	-25	82%	36
*Ivy League does not award athletic scholarships					

More important, we see embarrassing graduation rates, whether using the FGR or the GSR, among schools whose student bodies are predominantly White on teams that are predominantly Black:

- The mean FGR for non-athlete students was 71% compared with the mean FGR for Division I male basketball athletes of 45%, 25 percentage points LOWER than their student bodies.

- Only six (9%) of the 64 teams had FGRs equal to or better than the FGRs of male non-athletes at their institutions.

- Forty-three (67%) of the 64 institutions had FGRs that ranged between 20 and 97 percentage points BELOW their student body classmates.

- Fifty-eight (90%) of the 64 institutions had FGRs that were, on average, 25 percentage points BELOW their student body class classmates.

- Demonstrating the incredible inflation of the misleading GSR metric, 40 of the 64 institutions had men's basketball GSRs that were 30 to 86 percentage points HIGHER than men's basketball FGRs

Despite this masking of low graduation rates at individual institutions, the NCAA regularly trumpets the results of aggregated GSR data to argue that overall, college athletes perform better than non-athletes in the classroom. For the most recently available six-year cohort (2013), the NCAA reports a 69 percent Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) for athletes nationwide compared to a 69 percent FGR for all students and an 88 percent NCAA Graduation Success Rate (GSR).[21] By not reporting the progression of all athletes who leave the institution, and by allowing numerous other adjustments to mitigate low graduation rates (such as not counting against an institution's total an undergraduate who leaves to join a professional team), the GSR fails to measure measures graduation rates accurately.

Beyond overstating college athletes' graduation rates, the GSR blinds the higher education community to critical issues. For instance, Bimper notes that of the 70 colleges and universities that competed in football bowl games after the 2012 season, more than half had a 20-percentage-point gap between the graduation rates of Black and White athletes, respectively. One quarter of all teams had a 30- percentage-point gap.[22] In another example of the critical value of being able to compare the academic performance of athletes to that of the general student body, Harper, Williams and Blackman found:

- Between 2007 and 2010, Black men were 2.8% of full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students, but 57.1% of football teams and 64.3% of basketball teams.

- Across four cohorts, 50.2% of Black male student-athletes graduated within six years, compared to 66.9% of student-athletes overall, 72.8% of undergraduate students overall, and 55.5% of Black undergraduate men overall.

- Among NCAA Division I colleges and universities 96.1% graduated Black male student-athletes at rates lower than student-athletes overall.

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[21] National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2014) Division: Overall Division I Graduation Rates. Retrieve at: https://web3.ncaa.org/aprsearch/public_reports/instAggr2020/1_0.pdf

[22] Bimper, A. (2013) Kansas State Scholar Examines the Classroom Experiences of Black Student Athletes. *Research & Studies* (May 2, 2013). Retrieve at: http://www.jbhe.com/2013/05/kansas-state-scholar-examines-the-classroom-experiences-of-black-student-athletes/

- 97.4% of all FBS institutions graduated Black male student-athletes at rates lower than undergraduate students overall. On no campus were rates exactly comparable for these two comparison groups.

- At one university, Black male student-athletes graduated at a rate comparable to that of Black undergraduate men overall. On 72.4% of the other campuses, graduation rates for Black male student-athletes were lower than rates for Black undergraduate men overall.[23]

Equally distressing is that athletic programs with the most financial resources can manipulate the GSR to their advantage. For instance, an institution can push out an unwanted (from a talent perspective) and academically weak basketball or football athlete by combining a threat with an incentive. The institution informs the player that it will not renew his or her financial aid unless the athlete attends summer school and raises a deficient GPA enough that the current institution will not suffer a GSR (or APR) loss. This ploy is most prevalent in football and men's basketball, sports in which recruiting underprepared athletes is common due to the financial payoff from winning. Even without such summer school and transfer shenanigans, richer athletic programs can afford a cadre of academic support staff devoted to keeping athletes eligible to play.

Worse yet, the mechanisms used to ensure that underprepared athletes remain eligible frequently involve academic fraud and misconduct such as (1) counseling athletes to select the least demanding academic majors, (2) counseling athletes to register for the least demanding academic courses or courses conducted by professors with lax grading reputations, (3) creating intensive tutoring programs that raise questions whether the work produced is the athlete's or the tutor's, (4) using athletic-department funds to support academic departments that enroll many athletes in their courses,[24] and (5) counseling athletes to register for independent study courses with professors who require a minimal work product. Athletic departments, not campus academic units, often operate these one-to-two-million-dollar-per-year academic support programs, which lack management or oversight by tenured faculty. One need only examine the FGR and GSR rates of HBCUs to recognize the impact of financial resources on athlete graduation rates and on continued eligibility prior to transfer.

We urge caution and acknowledge the context of examining this HBSU only data for the following reasons:

- Generally, HBCUs are under-resourced and, like under-resourced predominantly White institutions, have graduation rates that are lower compared to predominantly White highly selective and better resourced White institutions.

- The FGR is highly sensitive to socio-economic status in that the six-year cohort initially counts only full-time students and examines whether they graduate six years later. Students with limited resources are more likely to drop out or to become part-time students who take longer to graduate. However, because athletes are required to be full-time students in order to be eligible for athletics, athlete graduation rates should be higher than the student body FGRs.

[23] Harper, S. R., Williams, C. D., & Blackman, H. W. (2013). Black male student-athletes and racial inequities in NCAA Division I college sports. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education.

[24] http://www.wsj.com/articles/at-auburn-athletics-and-academics-collide-1440635278

- HBCU student populations have larger proportions of students from low socio-economic status ("low-SES") households. Low-SES students graduate at half the rate of middle-income students.[25]

Table 3 compares HBCU student body to men's basketball FGRs and examines the relationship between men's basketball GSRs and FGRs.

Table 3: Federal Graduation Rates Compared to NCAA Graduation Success Rates at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) – 2018-19 Data

FGR Compared to NCAA GSR at Division I HBCUs 2018-2019 4-year rates					
	FEDERAL GRADUATION RATES (FGR)			NCAA GRADUATION SUCCESS	
School	4-yr Student Body	4-yr Men's Basketball	Percentage Point Difference of MBB from Student Body	MBB GSR	Percentage Point Difference of MBB GSR from MBB FGR
Alabama A&M	35%	33%	-2	67%	34
Alabama St.	27%	50%	23	77%	27
Alcorn St.	34%	20%	-14	30%	10
Bethune-Cookmn	36%	33%	-3	68%	35
Coppin St.	21%	22%	1	79%	57
Deleware St.	40%	58%	18	71%	13
Fla. A&M	44%	10%	-34	71%	61
Grambling	35%	18%	-17	56%	38
Hampton	58%	40%	-18	67%	27
Howard	61%	54%	-7	73%	19
Jackson St.	38%	50%	12	86%	36
Miss.Valley St.	28%	13%	-15	86%	73
Morgan St.	35%	63%	28	58%	-5
Norfolk St.	37%	43%	6	64%	21
N.C. A&T	47%	40%	-7	77%	37
Prairie View A&M	30%	29%	-1	77%	48
S.C. St.	36%	36%	0	75%	39
Southern @ BR	31%	11%	-20	38%	27
Tenn St.	31%	80%	49	90%	10
TX Southern	20%	25%	5	91%	66
Ark.Pine Bluff	27%	50%	23	50%	0
MD. East. Shore	36%	50%	14	67%	17
New Orleans	35%	33%	-2	67%	34
Mean	**36%**	**37%**	**2**	**69%**	**31**

Two other important observations need to be made examining this group of HBCU institutions with more homogeneous predominantly black populations. First, the average difference between HBSU basketball player and student body FGRs is only two percentage points while the difference between basketball player

[25] Southern New Hampshire University College For America Staff. (2017) Addressing the College Completion Gap Among Low-Income Students. Retrieved from: https://collegeforamerica.org/college-completion-low-income-students/

GSRs and basketball player FGRs is 31 percentage points. This is a stark example of how the GSR is ridiculously inflated compared to the FGR.

A second observation is that with regard to both Tables 2 and 3, that the FGRs of these basketball teams are not higher than the student body FGRs as they should be. Athletes should have higher FGRs because NCAA eligibility rules require athletes to be full-time students while student body FGRs are negatively affected by full-time students dropping down to part-time status due to financial circumstances which increases their time to graduation beyond the six-year cohort limit. It appears reasonable to assume that these institutions may be recruiting talented basketball players who are underprepared for college work compared to their student body peers and/or placing athletic demands on athletes that negatively influence their ability to graduate. In analyzing Tables 2 and 3 we use race as a reasonable proxy only because we know the composition of Division I men's basketball teams is 51 percent Black/74 percent persons of color.

Recommendation 4 - Abandon the GSR

The NCAA should discard the GSR as a metric based on its deceptive statistical reliability and validity. The NCAA should not invent its own academic metric designed to portray the academic performance of athletes in a better light than the data support. The NCAA must follow its own statement of sound academic principles by using "*consistent standards adopted by the institution*" for the student body in general. Higher education should commit to measuring the academic success of athletes and non-athletes by means of the same instrument. The GSR has no comparable non-athlete measure; therefore, it prohibits a comparison to college athlete peers.

Academic Progress Rate (APR)

Established in 2003 and enforced beginning in 2005, the APR is a direct measure of retention and an indirect measure of scholarship athletes' academic eligibility, including both minimum grade point average and satisfactory progress toward a degree. It is also a real time predictor of GSR, the NCAA's inflated graduation metric. "Each student-athlete receiving athletically related financial aid earns one retention point for staying in school and one eligibility point for being academically eligible. A team's total points are divided by points possible and then multiplied by one thousand to equal the team's Academic Progress Rate score."[26] Teams failing to achieve the minimum APR requirement, which has been increased from an initial standard of 900 to 930 in 2014-15, are declared ineligible for post-season championship play,[27] and a three-level penalty system corresponding to each consecutive year in which the benchmark is unmet is imposed:

Level One Team is limited to 16 hours of practice a week over five days, with the lost four hours to be replaced by academic activities, representing a reduction of four hours and one day per week of practice time.

[26] National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2015) Frequently Asked Questions About Academic Progress Rate. Retrieve at: http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/frequently-asked-questions-about-academic-progress-rate-apr

[27] It should be noted that an institution can appeal this penalty due to unusual circumstances.

Level Two Competition reductions, either in the traditional or nontraditional season, added to the first level penalties.

Level Three Penalty options as determined by the NCAA Committee on Academics. Options include coaching suspensions, financial aid reductions, and restricted NCAA membership.

Thus, like the GSR, the APR is flawed in that athletic programs with significant financial resources are better able than less affluent institutions to keep athletes eligible through manipulation of the existing rules. Larger, wealthier institutions also provide additional course offerings, which may allow for an easier pathway to a degree at such institutions. For large-roster teams like football, affluent institutions can increase their APR scores by recruiting some academically gifted players to compensate for those who are not. The NCAA has received heavy criticism about the disparate impact on Historically Black Colleges and Universities and lack of affluent, high-profile Football Bowl Subdivision teams among those penalized for failing to meet the APR benchmark. Besides directing athletes to easy courses and majors and providing excessive tutoring help, these institutions manipulate the APR by means of:

- **Extensive Use of Summer School Financial Aid.** Liberal use of summer school financial aid to boost athlete GPAs and ensure that transfers leave with GPAs that do not cause APR point losses is commonplace among the highly resourced FBS institutions, but less of an option for the HBCUs and smaller Football Championship Subdivision and Division I non-football institutions.

- **Learning Disability and Other Waivers.** Athletes who fail to meet initial eligibility standards and can demonstrate a learning disability will often be exempt from meeting standard initial eligibility requirements through an initial eligibility waiver. The NCAA may also waive the requirement to maintain a full-time academic load of 12 credit hours. A successfully written progress-toward-degree waiver can often allow athletes with certified learning disabilities who fail to meet NCAA standards to be granted continuing eligibility by passing enough degree-applicable credit hours. It takes highly skilled staff to maximize these opportunities. As Gurney and Southall revealed strategies for gaming the APR penalty system:

> *Navigating this educational landscape is a bureaucratic challenge for many NCAA institutions. However, the disparity between compliance staffing at FBS schools and "limited-resource" HBCU institutions is enormous. For example, the University of Oklahoma compliance staff consists of 11 professionals, including several lawyers. The University of Southern California is similarly staffed with 11 compliance officers. The University of Alabama maintains a staff of eight. The University of Texas' Risk Management and Compliance Services staff has seven full-time professionals. Conversely, limited-resource universities must make due with almost nonexistent staffs. For example: Arkansas-Pine Bluff has a total of two compliance staff, Hampton University has a single compliance staff "coordinator" and a total of three full-time academic support staff and Mississippi Valley State University has only one compliance officer.*
>
> *As a result of their personnel largess, "unlimited-resource" institutions have staff whose primary duties involve writing admissions waivers and exceptions, as well as monitoring athletes' satisfactory progress toward degree. At one Big 12 institution, a typical year's waiver writing assignments for a compliance attorney included one initial eligibility waiver*

> *and up to seven reduced-hour or other progress-toward-degree waivers and exceptions. Having someone specifically assigned to these tasks is necessary in order to make certain the institution does not suffer embarrassing penalties or fail to compete in postseason competition. Overworked and understaffed, HBCU athletic departments simply lack the human resources to address these issues. Being overwhelmed by the minutia of NCAA eligibility paperwork, they find it impossible to even address waivers.*[28]

- **Medical Waivers and Missed Term Exceptions.** Two common exceptions for satisfactory progress primarily used to manipulate APR scores are the medical exception and the missed term exception. "Athletes or members of their families who become ill with incapacitating injuries or illnesses may also escape APR eligibility penalties through being granted an exception. Athletes who experience depression or suffer other mental illness may avoid progress-toward-degree consequences by withdrawing from classes or dropping down to a part-time academic load. Alcoholism, depression or substance abuse, for example, may be considered an incapacitating illness. The missed term exception permits an athlete to miss one or more semesters one time during their career if they leave eligible. The missed term exception may be used even if the athlete's absence is due to a suspension for academic dishonesty if they were eligible prior to the absence."[29] Again, processing such appeals takes considerable staff time.

- **Supporting Non-Graduates' Return to School**. Affluent schools also manipulate APR scores by providing financial aid to non-graduates who have exhausted their athletics eligibility so they can return to the institution and earn their degrees. Such degree-completion programs may not be feasible for underfunded athletic programs. An example of the benefits of institutional affluence is the University of California at Berkeley, which recently implemented a Degree Completion Program (DCP) for athletes who had exhausted their eligibility without obtaining a degree.[30] For many institutions, degree-completion programs are not economically feasible because of the escalating costs associated with running athletics departments.

However, the most serious flaw of the APR is that it is not the metric it purports to be. The 900 APR was supposed to correspond to a FGR of 50 percent. Even the recently elevated 930 APR is nowhere near reflecting a FGR of 50 percent. When the NCAA realized the 900 APR standard was nowhere near the goal metric, instead of adjusting the APR to correspond to a 50 percent FGR, it pegged the APR to a 50 percent GSR that only approximates a 40 percent FGR. This is a "bait and switch" of the worse kind. Arguments that the GSR takes into consideration athletes leaving in good academic standing and athletes who transfer into an institution, and that it encompasses a larger percentage of athletes cannot and should not hold any weight if comparisons to the general student body are impossible.

> *As a result, since the introduction of the GSR, NCAA athletes' reported graduation success has dramatically increased. What has been lost amid the NCAA's public relations campaign is the continued existence of large (30-40 percent) negative graduation gaps*

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28 Gurney, G.S. and Southhall, R.M. (2012) College Sports' Bait and Switch. ESPN.com (August 9, 2012). Retrieve at: http://espn.go.com/college-sports/story/_/id/8248046/college-sports-programs-find-multitude-ways-game-ncaa-apr

29 Ibid.

30 McDonald, C. (2015) Back in the game: Cal program helps former student-athletes graduate. Retrieve at: http://alumni.berkeley.edu/california-magazine/spring-2015-dropouts-and-drop-ins/back-game-cal-program-helps-former-student

> *between NCAA Division I football and men's basketball players and the general student population. In some cases, teams report graduation rates of zero. Simply put, the athletes on whose skill the entire commercial enterprise depends, college football and men's basketball players, are dramatically less likely than other students to obtain a degree. This is to say nothing about the quality of the education to which they have access.*
>
> *By consistently simply asserting the GSR "more accurately assesses the academic success" of college athletes and steadfastly referring to GSR rates, NCAA members have convinced the media to almost exclusively use the new, more-favorable metric. Intentionally or not, the NCAA's APR and GSR metrics confuse the media, fans and the general public. Using the GSR and APR to tout graduation success and increased academic standards is undoubtedly savvy marketing and public relations, but these metrics are fundamentally nothing more than measures of how successful athletic departments are at keeping athletes eligible, and have increasingly fostered acts of academic dishonesty and devalued higher education in a frantic search for eligibility and retention points.*[31]

If the FGR is used instead of the GSR, exceptions should not be allowed for several reasons:

1. No FGR exclusions are permitted for members of the general student body who experience family issues, medical issues, and learning disabilities.

2. Athletes have a huge retention advantage compared to the general student body in that they are required to be full-time students and they receive financial, aid so they do not have to work. Furthermore, athletes benefit from sophisticated academic support programs. The FGR does not reflect such general student advantages; indeed, it is artificially low as a comparable standard because many initially full-time students drop down to part-time and are unable to graduate in six years, but must still be counted.

3. Some commentators argue that the FGR should be adjusted if the athlete returns to school after six years and graduates. But many non-athlete students do the same, yet the FGR is not adjusted. The FGR is useful because institutions cannot easily tamper with it; that is precisely why the NCAA should adopt it. It will thwart athletic-department gamesmanship.

Thus, to further advantage athletes with exclusions or exceptions to the FGR is unjustified.

Lastly, because the APR is pegged to retention and current eligibility to compete, any penalty imposed on a current team (i.e., banning the team from post-season play) for failures of previous members of the team penalizes students who are not responsible for the benchmark failure. The institution, not the athletes, should suffer the penalty.

[31] Gurney, G.S. and Southhall, R.M. (2012) College Sports' Bait and Switch. ESPN.com (August 9, 2012). Retrieve at: http://espn.go.com/college-sports/story/_/id/8248046/college-sports-programs-find-multitude-ways-game-ncaa-apr

Recommendation 5 - Discard the APR program as an Academic Metric, Establish the FGR as the Proper Metric to Impose Coach and institutional Penalties and Require Mandatory Five-Year Scholarships

The APR should be discarded because its original purpose was to be a real time predictor of GSR, which is a flawed metric for the reasons discussed above, most notably that it does not compare the academic performances of athletes and non-athletes. Besides being easily manipulated by affluent institutions, the APR, in eliminating teams from post-season play, unfairly penalizes less affluent institutions and current athletes who are not responsible for their institutions' failure to recruit academically prepared athletes. Enforcement of the higher 2.0 cumulative GPA standard for athletic eligibility (see Recommendation 3) is sufficient to maintain the integrity of regular season and post-season championship eligibility. The 2.0 cumulative GPA properly holds the athlete accountable for his or her academic responsibilities, with loss of individual eligibility for competition as the proper penalty. The FGR can hold institutions and coaches accountable for fulfilling the promise of an education to the athletics they recruit.

Thus, the NCAA should establish a rule that requires each sport program of a member institution to compute and maintain an FGR, without any exceptions or exemptions for athletes, that equals or exceeds the national average FGR or the institution's own FGR, whichever is lower. Failure to achieve this benchmark should NOT be used to declare a team ineligible for post-season play. Rather, institutions should absorb the penalties for such failure, which penalties should increase if benchmark failure continues for consecutive years:

First Year	**The institution is prohibited from receiving 25 percent of (a) any national championship, bowl or other post- or pre-season NCAA sponsored or sanctioned event media rights fees, sponsorships, advertising, licensing or gate receipt revenue distributions in that sport, (b) any conference regular season or championship media rights fees, sponsorships, advertising, licensing or gate receipt revenue distributions in that sport and (c) any non-sports specific NCAA revenue distributions. The institution may not decrease academic support program expenditures.**
Second Consecutive Year	**The institution is prohibited from receiving 50 percent of (a) any national championship, bowl or other post- or pre-season NCAA sponsored or sanctioned event media rights fees, sponsorships, advertising, licensing or gate receipt revenue distributions in that sport, (b) any conference regular season or championship media rights fees, sponsorships, advertising, licensing or gate receipt revenue distributions in that sport and (c) any non-sports specific NCAA revenue distributions. The institution may not decrease academic support program expenditures.**
Third Consecutive Year	**The institution is prohibited from receiving 100 percent of (a) any national championship, bowl or other post- or pre-season NCAA sponsored or sanctioned event media rights fees, sponsorships, advertising, licensing or gate receipt revenue distributions in that sport, (b) any conference regular season or championship media rights fees, sponsorships, advertising, licensing or gate receipt revenue distributions in that sport and (c) any non-sports specific NCAA revenue distributions. Additional penalties, as determined by the NCAA Committee on Academics, may be levied**

including coaching suspensions, financial aid reductions, recruiting limitations, and restricted NCAA membership.

Because more than 1100 institutions offer academic programs of varying academic rigor, the institutional comparator FGR is of critical import. The optional use of the national average FGR in lieu of the institutional FGR gives reasonable leeway to highly selective institutions. Use of the FGR, which emphasizes athlete retention and graduation from one's original institution, will reduce the current practice of discarding athletes for whom an institution finds more talented replacements. Most importantly, it will require institutions to recruit student-athletes capable of competing academically with other students attending and graduating from that institution. This standard will create academic expectations of athletes that are equal to those the institution has for the rest of the student body.

Key to desired effect on graduation is to replace the current option of guaranteeing athletic scholarships for five years with a requirement that athletic scholarships be guaranteed for five years. Institutions must be encouraged to recruit athletes who are capable of graduating and to invest in athletes' academic success for the duration of their college careers.

The **NCAA Division I Head Coach APR Portfolio**

In 2010 the NCAA established the Division I Head Coach APR Portfolio. Established by the Committee on Academic Performance at the request of the Division I Board of Directors, the database aims "to create more transparency in the Academic Performance Program and strengthen the accountability of coaches for the academic performance of their student-athletes."[32] The Head Coach APR Portfolio includes the single-year team APR for a head coach at each institution where he or she has held that post, along with the average single-year APR in the coach's specific sport for comparison purposes. Interim head coaches are not included in the database.
The current NCAA coaches' metric is fundamentally flawed because:

- The coach is evaluated based on the academic progress of athletes recruited by others as well as the academic progress of athletes the coach recruited himself or herself.
- The APR metric is pegged to the NCAA Graduation Success Rate, itself a flawed metric for reasons already stated.

[32] Hosick, M.B. (2010) NCAA Releases Academic Progress Rates for Coaches. NCAA.org (December 15, 2010). Retrieve at: http://www.ncaa.com/news/basketball-women/article/2010-08-05/ncaa-releases-academic-progress-rates-coaches NCAA Head Coach Academic Portfolio Retrieve at https://web3.ncaa.org/aprsearch/coachAprSearch

Recommendation 6 – Adopt the Proper Coach Metric

The NCAA should abandon the Coaches' Academic Progress rate as currently constructed and should replace it with a Coaches Graduation Rate. A coach should be held responsible for the academic success and graduation of every athlete that coach recruits, earning a 1.0 for every recruit who graduates within six years of initial enrollment from the institution to which the coach recruited him or her. That number would be divided by the total number of athletes recruited. The institution should be required to publish the Coaches' Graduation Rate for each head coach or former head coach (i.e., one who has been fired or has moved to another institution) in its program.

Transparency of Academic Metrics

Academic integrity in intercollegiate athletics requires a system of checks and balances and transparent academic metrics. These safeguards will ensure that learning occurs, not just that athletic eligibility is maintained.

Institutions often use the Federal Education Rights Protection Act (FERPA) to hide evidence of academic corruption and exploitation of football and men's basketball athletes from public scrutiny, while releasing only good news. They will release information about the A student, but will not discuss the number of athletes clustered in an eligibility-friendly major. FERPA has also enabled institutions to deny knowledge of academic misconduct committed by-athletic department staff, coaches, and even faculty members. The public cannot evaluate claims of academic improvement without knowing the classes that players take, the names of instructors, and overall course and team GPAs. Thus, true academic reform cannot occur without public accountability.[33]

A careful reading of FERPA shows that only identifiable educational information is prohibited from being disclosed.[34] Dr. Jon Ericson, former Provost at Drake University, and attorney Matthew Salzwedel have presented a plan for academic disclosure that would comply with FERPA. In their article entitled "*Cleaning Up Buckley: How The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Shields Academic Corruption In College Athletics,"* they argue that The Buckley Amendment allows an appropriate level of academic disclosure regarding college sports, which disclosure will shame institutions into changing their behavior.[35]

A sound academic disclosure plan should not disclose individual athlete academic information. Academic disclosure is ***about institutional behavior****;* namely, the complicity of administrators and faculty in academic corruption and the resulting denial to many college athletes of a meaningful college education. Institutional resistance to full disclosure has occurred in past academic scandals, most notably at Auburn University and the University of North Carolina. Both universities were embarrassed, and both made

[33] Splitt

[34] Reipenhoff, J & Jones, T. (2010, December 17). Secrecy 101. *The Columbus Dispatch. Retrieved from http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2010/10/14/secrecy-redirect.html*

[35] Salzwedel, Matthew and Ericson, Jon, "Cleaning Up Buckley: How The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Shields Academic Corruption In College Athletics," WISCONSIN LAW REVIEW, Volume 2003, Number 6, 2004: 1054-1113. http://www.locklaw.com/freeinfo/articles/articles_buckley.pdf

positive changes once their "eligibility manipulation" became public, albeit after some kicking and screaming. Faculty and others who desire to provide bona fide educational opportunities for college athletes need an effective tool for achieving that end. History shows that public humiliation prompts universities to operate with integrity.[36]

The NCAA currently requires athletes to consent to share their academic information with institutional employees who are responsible for determining eligibility. That same requirement should apply to the disclosure of that information, as long as such disclosure does not reveal the identity of the athlete. Because disclosure would not reveal athletes' names, no harm would occur to any individual student, nor would anyone's privacy be invaded. Such use would be in keeping with the letter and spirit of FERPA. Yet, the aggregated use of individual data would expose institutional misbehavior by identifying athletes' course selections, their choices of professors and academic majors, their advisors, and team GPA's. Without identifying any student by name, this information would expose academic clustering, suspect courses, and issues like those that occurred at Auburn and the University of North Carolina.

Recommendation #7 - Academic Disclosure

The NCAA should require every member institution to establish an academic check and balance system consisting of an Academic Oversight Committee comprised of tenured faculty, a peer review certification program, and regularly issued public reports. At each institution, members of the faculty senate or the highest faculty governance authority would elect the Academic Oversight Committee. This committee would meet annually with the head coach of each team to review the academic progress of all athletes on that team. The committee would be required to report to the faculty senate (or other highest faculty authority) annually on the academic progress and admission qualifications of college athletes and, when possible, to compare athletes to non-athletes. The methods of comparison would include average SAT and ACT scores by sport, Federal Graduation Rates by sport, independent studies and/or online courses taken by sport, the professors offering the independent studies and their average grade assigned, admissions profiles, athletes' progress toward a degree, trends in selected majors by sport, average grade distributions of faculty by major, incomplete grades by sport, grade changes by professors, and the name of each athlete's faculty advisor.

The NCAA certification program, which included a more comprehensive examination of athletic programs' academic elements than that conducted by the regional accreditation agencies, was discarded in 2010, but the Association should reinstitute it. This program would require each Division I institution to undergo an athletics certification process at least once every ten years. That process should include peer review, by an external body funded by the Association, of a campus-wide self-evaluation conducted by various institutional committees assembled for that purpose. A majority of the members of these campus committees should be tenured faculty members.

Each NCAA member institution should also make public an annual report, to include the following data:

[36] Ibid

a. certification status of each member institution;
b. federal graduation rate for all students, all athletes, athletes by sport, and for all athletes admitted with a waiver of admission standards (Special Admissions);
c. number of recruited athletes required to complete one year in residency prior to initial eligibility;
d. number of recruited athletes admitted to the institution with a waiver of published admissions standards compared to the number of students overall receiving such admissions; and
e. Coach Graduation Rates of all head coaches employed by the institution.

What Changes May Result from the Adoption of these Recommended Academic Metrics and Recommendations?

Assuming the eight recommendations are adopted in their entirety, the following outcomes are anticipated:

1. Coaches will be more likely to recruit academically qualified athletes who will be eligible for competition in their first year of college.

2. Coaches will be less likely to pressure marginal athletes to transfer because of the negative impact of that practice on the revised Coaches' Graduation Rate.

3. Athletes eligible as freshmen will possess adequate reading, writing, and math skills and will be more likely to compete with their non-athlete peers in the classroom.

4. Athletes not eligible as freshman will receive the remedial education necessary to remedy their academic deficiencies, the promise of financial aid, and continuing academic support throughout their five-year tenure at the institution. Remediation will be designed by each institution. Therefore, they will be more likely to graduate from the institution that recruited them.

5. Athletes not eligible as freshmen will not be required to enroll in a full-time program of college coursework that counts toward a degree or to earn a minimum GPA. Yet they will be able to receive a remedial education, diminishing the institutional temptation to commit academic fraud in order to meet athletic eligibility and satisfactory progress requirements.

6. The graduation rates of athletes currently underperforming in more selective institutions of higher education will improve.

7. Highly selective institutions will be less likely to exploit underprepared football and basketball players even when they waive normal admissions standards to recruit those players.

8. Academic data on the academic progress of college athletes will be more transparent, facilitating evaluation by faculty, administrators, and the public.

CONCLUSION

The NCAA's GSR and APR, or any metric that assumes college athletes are unique and should be treated as academically distinct from the rest of the student body, invites the exploitation of athletes and violations of academic integrity. When no comparator metric to the non-athlete student body exists, no "speed limit" is available to keep athletic programs honest. Unless academic standards for athletes are anchored to institutional academic standards and expectations for all students, athlete academic standards will float with the tide of institutional greed. The standard for athletes will become the one that will allow coaches and institutions to attract the most talented athletes so they can win and prosper. On the contrary, higher education's promise to any student, athlete or non-athlete, must be a meaningful education that satisfies legitimate standards set by the faculty and leads to good academic standing and graduation.

Furthermore, institutions must acknowledge the importance of matching the academic abilities of their athletes to the academic profile of the larger student body for "a good fit". If institutions continue to waive admission requirements for athletes or recruit athletes whose academic profiles do not match those of their non-athlete classmates, then institutions must remediate the academic skills of these athletes before allowing them to compete. Otherwise, athletes will continue to suffer exploitation, as institutions trade in the promise of a meaningful education for the easiest majors and courses, resulting in continued athletics eligibility, but little or no preparation for life after the cheering stops.