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1A

FACULTY ATHLETICS REPRESENTATIVES (FAR)

Academics & Athletics as an Integrated Whole: on Campus, in Governance

MEMORANDUM

To: COMMITTEE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
From: 1A FAR Board of Directors
Date: April 1, 2013
Re: Recommended Changes to Initial Eligibility Standards

The Committee on Academic Performance (CAP) has requested feedback on several possible changes to the multi-pronged increase in the Initial Eligibility Standards. This academic reform package was initially proposed by the Academic Cabinet and Committee on Academic Performance, adopted by the NCAA Board of Directors, and scheduled to go into effect in 2016. Recently, at its annual in-person meeting (February 2013), the 1A FAR Board discussed the merits of each of the CAP recommendations. The purpose of this memorandum is to express the 1A FAR Board's opinion on these proposals prior to a final recommendation being made to the NCAA Board of Directors.

Each of the CAP proposed changes appears below, along with the position of the 1A FAR Board.

1. Whether to Revise the Newly Adopted Sliding Scale for Competition

Three proposals have been offered as revisions to the newly adopted sliding scale; these include:

- (a) retain the former sliding scale (i.e. current scale to qualify), but not to have a separate sliding scale for competition,
- (b) assume an intermediate sliding scale for competition, which represents an approximately 0.250 increase in the core-course grade-point average for any given test score (relative to the current sliding scale), or
- (c) maintain the adopted sliding scale for competition, which represents an approximately 0.500 increase in the core-course grade-point average for any given test score (relative to the current sliding scale).

The members of the 1A FAR Board are unanimous in our view that retaining the current sliding scale as the threshold for competition is simply not an option. Given the tendency for many schools to use the achievement of the initial eligibility standards as tantamount to an admissions decision, we must keep these standards commensurate with the demands for success at our institutions. There is minority support within our Board for a more conservative approach given concerns about a possible lack of access (i.e. option “b”); however, the majority of Board members prefer option “c.”

We continue to oppose the revision of the new “competition” sliding scale, thereby decreasing the weight of the core GPA. The NCAA’s data have consistently indicated that core GPA is the best single predictor of academic success in college. If the recently adopted competition standard remains in place, the NCAA predicts an approximate first-year collegiate GPA of 2.6 for PSAs. If this competition qualifier scale is shifted down by 50%, that GPA prediction becomes about 2.3. Because there is a distribution of outcomes about each of these predicted GPAs, the former provides more of a margin above a 2.0 first-year GPA and protects better against academic casualties. In addition, much has been made about the statistic of ~40% to describe the percentage of football or men’s basketball prospects who will become academic redshirts. We believe this figure to be misleadingly high because it is being applied to last year’s PSAs, and, of course, they had no opportunity to meet the new standards while in high school.

We also want to stress that the academic redshirt concept (the policy suggested to be delayed in the modification) does not prevent access to our institutions. The at-risk prospective student-athletes (PSAs) (i.e., those who do not meet the competition scale) may still be admitted, receive athletically-related aid, and practice with the team. They can then use their first year as their redshirt year during which time they have the benefit of having more time to concentrate on academic pursuits, and thereby jumpstart their college experience. We believe that this structure will lead to the SAs’ academic success and graduation. Although, it should be noted that some 1A FAR Board members reported hearing at their Conference meetings that coaches might be less inclined to recruit and make scholarship offers to PSAs who will likely be academic redshirts. If this is so, then the impact of increasing the initial eligibility standards may indeed present significant threats to minority access to our institutions.

2. Revise Core Course GPA Calculation

We support an amendment to specify that only the best 16 core courses may be used in the GPA calculation. “Tightening up” the calculation of high school core GPA is consistent with the overall goal of ensuring that our incoming freshmen are better prepared to meet the academic challenges of the collegiate environment. The course progression concept is critical for providing our institutions the best data possible on academic preparedness before written offers are extended to PSAs and will also obviate the not so occasional practice of taking an inordinate number of core courses under “questionable” circumstances during the senior year. In addition, we encourage continuing educational efforts directed at high schools and PSAs regarding the requirement that 10 core courses (including seven math, English, and science courses) must be completed prior to the senior year, and that the grades earned in those core courses will be used in the overall core course calculation.

3. Whether to Revise the Effective Date of the Sliding Scale for Competition

The request is to consider alternate effective dates for the adoption of the revised sliding scale. The options suggested were (a) a delay to 2018; (b) a delay to 2020; or (c) retaining the currently approved effective date of 2016.

The majority of the 1A FAR Board supports the currently approved date of 2016. We agree with the position of the Academic Cabinet that, if necessary, the new policy could be modified after a few years (e.g. 2020). We believe that 2018 is too far in the future. The implementation of the standards has already been delayed from 2015 to 2016. A comprehensive educational plan is being implemented and is already being delivered in time to affect prospects in their freshman year of high school. We note that our position is consistent with that of the Academic Cabinet, a group of FARs and administrators who studied this issue and the supportive data for months.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We appreciate your continuing interest in the academic success of our student-athletes.