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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: Feedback on Initial Eligibility Concepts

As you know, earlier today we submitted comments on behalf of 1A FAR in response to your request for feedback on several of the initial eligibility concepts and models. In addition to crafting our own input, the 1A FAR Board has also had the opportunity to review the N4A Feedback on Initial Eligibility Concepts/Models (copy attached).

The N4A document creates some interesting additional opportunities for future review and analysis by both CAP and the Academic Cabinet. First, we must note that we respectfully disagree with the N4A recommendation that incoming student-athletes who have less than a 2.3 GPA should be considered as non-qualifiers. We believe that the “academic redshirt” approach provides a better balance in allowing aid and practice, but not competition during the initial year of college, for those incoming student-athletes who have a GPA below a 2.3, but who otherwise meet the revised sliding scale.

From further communications with Bart Byrd – this year’s President of N4A, however, we understand that the main concern for N4A relates to their recommendations regarding the reading issue. Mr. Byrd has emphasized that for those student-athletes who either cannot read or who struggle with reading, the academic advisors for athletics – unsurprisingly – have tremendous difficulty in supporting these young men and women in their academic goals. Accordingly, we would urge CAP (and/or the Academic Cabinet) to consider reviewing data concerning the N4A reading thresholds proposal and to explore whether it should be a part of future academic reforms, or to assess whether the data support a similar type of threshold at a different percentile of standardized reading score. We believe that we should endeavor to support the efforts of our academic advisors who are in the trenches working with our student-athletes on a daily basis.

Additionally, although there is not unanimity on the issue among our board members, we also believe that CAP and/or the Academic Cabinet should endeavor to explore the possible academic benefits of the N4A recommendation to consider limiting practice hours during the academic redshirt year to emphasize an increased focus on academics and possible remediation needs during that year.



N4A Feedback on Initial Eligibility Concepts/Models

The National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) strongly supports the discussion of increased standards for initial eligibility. Significant concerns have been discussed regarding the increased numbers of student-athletes on campus who are academically underprepared. The information below provides points to consider regarding the current models being discussed and offers a suggested approach to evaluate academic preparation specifically related to reading, a foundational skill required to be successful in the university setting.

Initial Eligibility Standards

- If the Committee on Academic Performance determines that 2.3 is the appropriate grade point average required for students to earn competition during the first year, the N4A encourages consideration for students not meeting the threshold to be non-qualifiers. This would send the clear message that higher academic standards are necessary for all students to participate in intercollegiate athletics.

Practice During First Year for Students Not Meeting Certain Standards

- If students not meeting certain standards are eligible to practice during the first year, the N4A encourages CAP to consider the following:
 - Decreased practice hours (10 hours per/week) to emphasize an increased focus on academics during the first year.
 - Eliminate the concept of earning practice during the second term – A concern with this model would be the increased pressure during the first term to “put” the students in the easiest schedule possible so they can pass 9 hours and “earn” practice during the subsequent term. This would send an incorrect message to students and reduce the benefit of the “academic year.”

Proposal for Evaluation of Academic Readiness

The following is a suggested proposal offered for consideration by CAP. Reading is an essential component of college and workplace readiness. Low literacy levels often prevent students from mastering other subjects. Poor readers struggle to learn in text-heavy courses and are frequently blocked from taking academically more challenging courses and curricula. The intent of this proposal is to provide the necessary remediation to new student-athletes without the distractions of full commitment to intercollegiate athletics so they may be more fully engaged in purposeful academic exploration.

A minimum score of 430 on the SAT critical reading or a sub score of 15 on the ACT under national testing conditions on a national test date must be met for eligibility for full practice and competition during the first two full time semesters at the certifying institution. Student-athletes below these scores may be eligible for up to 10 hours per week of practice or voluntary conditioning activities.

Rationale:

The N4A proposes that the minimum reading sub score be set at the 25th percentile of college students taking the standardized examination. The 25th percentile number limits affected student-athletes to those needing the most remediation. This rule does not restrict access to higher education; affect financial aid or the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate athletics competition. Affected student-athletes would have four years to complete their competition. The legislation does not require institutional testing, additional certification, and is cost effective. It is hoped that institutions would provide effective remediation available within the institution and athletic departments to address this target population. This legislation would also remind coaches of the importance of assessing prospects' academic preparedness during recruitment.

