REPORT OF THE
NCAA DIVISON I ACADEMIC CABINET
FEBRUARY 1-2, 2010, MEETING

***KEY ITEMS*.**

- **Review of Eligibility Standards for Prospective Student-Athletes.** The NCAA Division I Academic Cabinet continued its review of initial-eligibility and transfer-eligibility requirements. Based on NCAA research, along with feedback from the NCAA Division I Board of Directors, two-year college and academic support communities, the cabinet continues to believe that the greatest improvements in student-athlete academic preparation will come when all eligibility requirements (e.g., initial eligibility, progress toward degree, transfer) are aligned to support student-athletes' academic success. The cabinet considered enhancements to the current initial and transfer eligibility requirements designed to identify those prospective student-athletes who are academically prepared for college work, and to foster additional support and accommodation to student-athletes who are academically underprepared. The cabinet will continue to discuss both models in June when it meets jointly with the NCAA Division I Committee on Academic Performance.

***ACTION ITEMS*.**

1. Legislative Items.

- None.

2. Nonlegislative Items.

- None.

***INFORMATIONAL ITEMS*.**

1. Review of Initial-Eligibility Standards. The cabinet continued its review of the division's initial-eligibility standards with the goal of further developing Division I initial-eligibility requirements to ensure they can be used to appropriately identify academically prepared prospective student-athletes.

NCAA research continues to indicate that a combination of standardized test scores and high school grades is a better predictor of academic success than using either grades or tests alone. However, when examined independently, the high school core grade-point average is two to three times more predictive of first-year college academic success than

test scores. This is an increase from earlier years, as the high school grade-point average has become more predictive as the number of required core courses has increased. Based on these findings and feedback from the Board of Directors and the NCAA Division I Leadership Council, the cabinet continues to focus on a prospective student-athlete's high school core-course grade-point average as an important element of any enhancement to the current initial-eligibility model. The cabinet noted that requiring a higher core-course grade-point average should increase the probability that a particular prospective student-athlete will be academically successful in the first year of enrollment and eventually will graduate from an institution.

NCAA research also indicates that certain revisions to the initial-eligibility standards could result in an increase in false negatives outcomes (i.e., declaring as ineligible prospective student-athletes who are able to be academically successful over time). Such modifications may negatively affect a number of individual prospective student-athletes, while producing only a slight overall increase in aggregate academic success and graduation. Therefore, to reduce the likelihood of such results, the cabinet is interested in identifying a series of required interventions to support academic success among academically underprepared student-athletes, rather than blocking such prospects from accessing higher education through athletics scholarship and participation opportunities.

In response to feedback from the Board of Directors, the cabinet discussed a tiered model of initial eligibility that focuses on preparing prospective student-athletes to be academically successful in the college setting. Under such a model, a prospective student-athlete who presents an academic profile indicating academic preparedness for college and who is regularly admitted by his or her certifying institution would have full access to financial aid, practice and competition in the initial year of enrollment. Prospective student-athletes who are admitted with academic profiles predicting greater challenges in achieving collegiate academic success also would have access to financial aid and some athletics participation, but would be subject to specified interventions during the first year of college enrollment. Some examples of possible interventions include mandatory learning assessments, required academic support plans and limits on missed class time. Such interventions would be designed to address issues beyond direct access to higher education and would be intended to improve the quality of the long-term educational experience of student-athletes who are less academically prepared when they arrive on a college campus. The cabinet noted that a tiered approach would provide an opportunity to implement the most appropriate legislative, policy and best practice recommendations to promote academic success among those who are underprepared, without imposing a national standard that might limit opportunities for prospective student-athletes who are capable of succeeding in college with an appropriate level of academic support.

At its June meeting, the cabinet will consider benchmarks for initial-eligibility tiers, as well as potential interventions for the first year of enrollment. These concepts will be examined during its joint session with the Committee on Academic Performance. In preparation for this meeting, cabinet members were charged to discuss potential modifications to the current initial-eligibility model with their respective conferences and other contacts and to gather feedback prior to the cabinet's June meeting.

2. Review of Two-Year College Transfer Student-Athletes. Using data recently submitted by the Division I membership, the cabinet began the task of identifying a model for transfer student success that will motivate the necessary academic behaviors for two-year college transfer student-athletes to be academically successful at four-year institutions. NCAA research indicates two-year college transfers accounted for approximately five percent of all Division I student-athletes in the 2007-08 academic year, and that this percentage had declined in each of the previous four years. Baseball and men's basketball have the highest rate of two-year college transfers, while women's sports other than basketball have the lowest rate of two-year transfers. Generally, data indicate that two-year college transfers tend to be less academically prepared and do not perform as well as nontransfers and four-year college transfers; however, the graduation rate for two-year college transfers has increased recently and the rate of two-year transfer student-athletes departing their four-year institutions while not eligible has decreased.

For the first time, the cabinet was able to review preliminary findings regarding the academic performance of two-year college transfers while at the two-year college. Specifically, the cabinet noted that a prospective student-athlete's overall grade-point average at the two-year college is the most significant predictor of first-year academic outcomes at the four-year college, even more predictive than a student-athlete's grade-point average in coursework transferable to the four-year institution. The cabinet also noted that credits earned in any particular subject area are not related to the first-year grade-point average at the four-year institution, except that there is a negative relationship between the number of physical education credits earned at the two-year college and the first-year grade-point average at the four-year institution. On average, nonqualifiers earn more credits, transferable credits and subject-specific credits (English, math, science) than qualifiers while at the two-year college; however, this difference can be linked to nonqualifiers' longer average enrollment at the two-year college.

To supplement the research findings, the cabinet met with representatives from the two-year college community to discuss possible approaches to improve the academic preparation of two-year college transfers. The group noted that many two-year college transfers are academically prepared and perform well on transfer; however, some transfers are underprepared and require remediation and additional support to prepare for

matriculation at a four-year institution. The two-year college representatives noted that the five-year clock and percentage of degree requirements can present particular challenges for a student-athlete who requires significant remediation at the two-year college. Further, the representatives stated that accommodations within the applicable eligibility legislation would help these student-athletes by allowing time to improve their academic performance without jeopardizing their seasons of athletics eligibility. The cabinet noted that many four-year institutions offer limited or no remedial courses, and that two-year colleges may provide more opportunities and programs for remediation of underprepared students. The cabinet agreed to continue to collaborate with the two-year community to develop a transfer model that ensure that two-year college prospective student-athletes are academically prepared on enrollment at the four-year institution, while also encouraging the continued engagement and retention of these student-athletes to graduation.

The cabinet discussed several concepts to improve the academic preparation of two-year college transfers. The cabinet and representatives noted the potential value of individual education plans that outline the student-athlete's educational path and appropriate support services. The cabinet also noted that an additional year in residence at the two-year college may provide additional time for the student-athlete to improve his or her academic readiness and be more prepared for success at the four-year institution. The cabinet also considered a core curriculum to be completed at the two-year college, though a prescribed combination of courses indicating likely four-year success was not readily apparent based on the research findings. Additional strategies that the cabinet considered include: allowances for remediation at the two-year college, the opportunity to enroll in summer terms at the four-year institution prior to transfer and required tutorial support on enrollment at the four-year institution. The cabinet will continue to consider these concepts during its joint meeting with the Committee on Academic Performance in June.

3. Update on Proposals in the 2009-10 Legislative Cycle. The cabinet noted that NCAA Proposal No. 2009-60 regarding initial-eligibility and progress-toward-degree waiver appeals and Proposal No. 2009-64 regarding nontraditional courses used to meet initial-eligibility waivers both were adopted by the NCAA Division I Legislative Council. Staff from NCAA academic and membership affairs and the NCAA Eligibility Center will begin to implement the concepts from both proposals and will provide progress reports to the cabinet regarding procedural changes and any potential policy changes requiring cabinet approval.

4. Nontraditional Courses Used by Currently Enrolled Student-Athletes to Meet Full-Time Enrollment and Progress-Toward-Degree Requirements. The cabinet

continued its discussion regarding the use of nontraditional courses by current student-athletes to meet full-time enrollment and progress-toward-degree requirements. The cabinet discussed the feedback it received from the Legislative Council chair during its last meeting, as well as feedback from the membership, and identified the following considerations for the development of future legislative proposals:

a. In light of the prevalence and acceptance of nontraditional courses throughout post-secondary education, it is appropriate to provide student-athletes with similar access to such courses as other students at their respective institutions.

b. Institutional autonomy must be maintained with regard to determining the appropriateness of coursework for degree credit and to maintain integrity and security in the delivery of nontraditional courses.

c. NCAA legislation should define more clearly the term "nontraditional courses" to clarify the use of such coursework to meet eligibility requirements.

d. Promoting campus engagement of student-athletes through enrollment in traditional, in-person courses will help foster student-athlete integration into the general student-body and will encourage balanced student-athlete self-identities.

5. Discussion with Representatives from National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A). The cabinet hosted its annual meeting with representatives from N4A. The association's president and president-elect discussed the impact of academic reform on academic support professionals, initial-eligibility and two-year college transfer requirements, and the challenges of supporting academically underprepared student-athletes. The representatives also discussed the impact of varying levels of institutional resources on the academic support provided to student-athletes. Finally, the representatives encouraged the cabinet and Division I governance structure to continue to involve the academic support community in discussions related to academic policy and legislation.

6. Results of Comprehensive Academic Support Services Survey. The cabinet continued to review the results of a comprehensive study of academic support resources and practices for student-athletes at Division I institutions. The cabinet reviewed individual student-athlete and institutional characteristics that influence first-year academic outcomes, as measured by grade-point average and eligibility status, with a particular focus on institutional investment in academic support services. The research staff will continue to review the survey results and will provide additional reports at future cabinet

meetings. Specifically, the cabinet asked to study the impact of particular support services on student-athlete academic performance and the potential implications of various reporting structures for the academic support unit (e.g., within athletics, outside athletics, both).

7. **Academic Support Plan as Required Information in Initial-Eligibility Waivers.** The cabinet initially supported a revision to the initial-eligibility waiver policies and procedures to require an academic support plan to be submitted with certain initial-eligibility waiver requests. For example, an academic support plan may be appropriate when the prospective student-athlete's academic record falls outside the threshold to be considered in the waiver process. The cabinet noted that an academic support plan would require the institution to be proactive and identify strategies to support the student-athlete to be academically successful and eventually graduate. The cabinet asked the initial-eligibility waiver staff to further develop the concept – including when a plan will be required, what elements will be required in a plan, and who will approve the plan – for review during the June cabinet meeting.

8. **Academic Certification of Prospective Student-Athletes from Exam-Based Countries.** At the request of the NCAA International Student Records Committee, the cabinet discussed the academic certification policies and procedures for international prospective student-athletes, particularly in situations when a prospective student-athlete from a country that bases graduation on the successful completion of examinations delays his or her graduation. The cabinet noted that the current process of using credits and passing grades from the prospective student-athlete's transcript (rather than grades from the core-course exams) could provide a benefit to those who delay graduation over those who graduate on time. The cabinet considered several alternatives provided by the International Student Records Committee to revise the certification procedures for international student-athletes from exam-based countries.

As a general principle, the cabinet noted that prospective student-athletes from exam-based countries should be certified using grades from the examination, rather than the prospective student-athlete's transcript, regardless of a delay in graduation. This approach recognizes the nature of exam-based countries and is consistent with the educational system in the prospective student-athlete's home country. Further, a consistent approach for all prospective student-athletes from a particular country appears to be the most fair and appropriate.

The cabinet noted that the International Student Records Committee will continue to consider appropriate modifications to the certification procedures at its March meeting, and will work with the Eligibility Center staff to implement any changes. The cabinet

also requested information about the number of such cases reviewed by the Eligibility Center each year, and the reasons for the delayed graduations, to help determine the appropriate approach to certifying initial academic eligibility in these situations.

9. Initial-Eligibility Waivers and Prospective Student-Athlete Reviews. The cabinet received a report on the number and outcome of initial-eligibility waivers and prospective student-athlete reviews processed through December 31, 2009. The academic and membership affairs staff has reviewed 499 initial-eligibility waivers thus far, which represents a slight decrease from 2008-09. In addition, the academic and membership affairs staff has processed 294 prospective student-athlete review cases.

Waivers involving a core-course deficiency have decreased, which was anticipated given the pattern observed in the years surrounding previous changes in core-course requirements. The staff has noticed a continued increase in the number of waivers for international prospective student-athletes, including those who begin in an international country and graduate from a domestic high school. Approximately 78 percent of all waiver requests receive some type of relief, which is similar to the rate in 2008-09.

10. Progress-Toward-Degree Waivers. The cabinet received a report regarding progress-toward-degree waivers submitted during the 2009-10 academic year. The NCAA academic and membership affairs staff has processed 362 requests to date, compared to 485 for the same time period in 2008-09 and 386 in 2007-08. The greatest percentage of waiver requests are related to the percentage-of-degree requirements, followed by the 18/27-credit hour rule. Approximately 68 percent of waiver requests are approved or conditionally approved, which is comparable to a 70 percent approval rate in previous academic years.

The cabinet also reviewed a report of progress-toward-degree waivers for baseball student-athletes that have been conditionally approved based on the student-athlete following an established, individualized academic recovery plan and passing all of his fall courses with grades that would allow the courses to be degree applicable. Such waivers were first granted during the 2008-09 academic year. Of the 23 such waivers granted in fall 2009, 21 student-athletes satisfied the established conditions to be eligible for the 2010 season.

11. NCAA High School Review Committee Policies and Procedures. The cabinet approved revisions to the High School Review Committee's policies and procedures, as recommended by the High School Review Committee. The revisions provide the Eligibility Center staff additional flexibility in the identification of schools to be reviewed

and further clarify the committee's hearing procedures. The cabinet noted these policies also must be approved by the NCAA Division II Academic Requirements Committee and will be distributed to the Division I and II membership once that action has been taken.

12. Facilitating Learning and Achieving Graduation (FLAG) Update. The cabinet received an update regarding the development and implementation of the FLAG program. Specifically, the Graduation Risk Overview (GRO) module, which assists institutions to evaluate and quantify each student-athlete's risk of not graduating, was released to the membership in December 2009. The second module, an online database of support services associated with specific risk factors, is currently under development by the national office staff. The module is projected to be available to the membership during spring or summer 2010.

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