

# The Case for a Minimum 2.0 Standard for NCAA Division I Athletes<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

As long as sport spectacle has existed on college campuses, scandal borne out of the uneasy relationship between commercial sport entertainment and higher education has existed as well. At its genesis in 1906, the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) top priority was taming the rough and tumble game of football, which threatened the health and lives of the young men who competed and called into question the institutions of higher education where those games were played (Falla, 1981; Lester, 1999; Oriard, 2001; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Smith, 1988; Watterson, 2000). In retrospect, the NCAA's first attempt at college sport reform seems to have been its most effective and long lasting. Assuaging public concerns about the violence of college football, the NCAA moved on to what would become century long projects to address issues of academic eligibility and institutional accountability for educating athletes. Imperfect and inherently predisposed to undermine the central purposes of academic life, big-time college sport has visited upon the American public the necessity for reform movements seemingly without foreseeable end (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Duderstadt, 2000;

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1. Throughout the manuscript, the authors have avoided using the term "student-athlete," electing instead to refer to college athletes simply as athletes. In recent years, a growing number of scholars are calling for a considered and careful use of this term in light of its history. In brief, the term is a legal invention intended to obscure the pay for play system created when the athletic scholarships became one year renewable awards in the 1950s. For an extensive discussion of this see Ellen J. Staurowsky & Allen L. Sack, *Reconsidering the Use of the Term "Student-Athlete" by Academic Researchers*, 19 J. SPORT MGMT. (forthcoming April 2005), reconsidering the use of the term 'student-athlete' by academic researchers. The term appears here only in the context of a direct quote.

Gerdy, 1997; Report of the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, 2001; McMillen, 1992; Savage, 1929; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Sperber, 1990, 2000; Thelin, 1994).

Beginning in the late 1800s through present day, each generation has witnessed its share of concerned faculty, students, coaches, administrators, lawyers, public policy makers, and sportswriters who seek to eliminate threats to academic integrity by addressing issues related to athlete recruitment and eligibility for admission, athletic scholarships, and academic eligibility (American Association of University Professors, 2002; Hanford, 2003; Greenberg, 2003; Suggs, 2004a & 2004b).<sup>2</sup>

The resiliency of the problems that plague college sport are traceable in their lineage. In his 1932 book entitled *King Football*, expelled Columbia University student Reed Harris indicted big-time intercollegiate sport for its "commercialism, anti-intellectualism, distorted priorities, fraud, [and] hypocrisy" (Oriard, 2001, p. 3). Seventy years later, the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics (2001) would use similar language to describe the ills of college sport. In 2001, the Commission determined, "The most glaring elements of the problems- academic transgressions, a financial arms race, and commercialization - are all evidence of the widening chasm between higher education's ideals and big-time college sports" (p. 1).

The tensions that arise out of the alliance between college sport and higher education are seen in the daily contradictions that characterize the enterprise. As a case in point, in 2003 the NCAA lamented the public perception that it focused on making money rather than educating athletes (Brown, 2003). In response to this perception, which arose in part from the fact that the athletes who generate the revenue that allows the NCAA to exist as it does graduate at rates much lower than either other athletes or the general student body, the Association launched what it refers to as "the NCAA brand."<sup>3</sup> According to

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2. In 1895, the Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives, which would eventually evolve into the Big Ten was created (Smith, 1988). In a speech before the National Press Club on March 4, 2003, president of the NCAA Myles Brand noted that "In a sense, the NCAA was the reform." Myles Brand, *Academics First: Progress Report*. Speech delivered to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C. (March 4, 2003), available at <http://www.ncaa.org/releases/MylesBrand/20030304npc.html>.

3. Graduation rates for football and men's basketball are typically lower than that for athletes in other sports. According to NCAA graduation rate data released in September of 2003, the overall graduation rate for athletes was 62%. Football players, men's basketball players, and women's basketball players graduated at rates of 54%, 44%, and 66% respectively. African-American athletes in these sports tend to exhibit lower rates of graduation (football - 49%; men's basketball - 41%; women's basketball - 58%). Press Release, NCAA Division I Graduation Rates Rise to 62%; Increase Attributed To Increased Eligibility Standards (Sept. 2, 2003), available at <http://www.ncaa.org/releases/research/2003090201re.htm>.

Dennis Cryder, NCAA vice-president for branding, broadcasting, and promotions, this course of action was taken because "CBS, ESPN and corporate America expected the NCAA to invest in itself as a brand in order to maintain and enhance the value of the NCAA assets purchased by these 'investors.' They aren't paying \$6 billion merely to be 'associated with' the NCAA" (Brown, 2003).

Simultaneous to the implementation of this unprecedented attempt to commercialize and commodify college athletes and the college sport experience for consumers, the NCAA Division I membership was considering an "academic reform package" known as the incentives/disincentives program (Christianson, 2004). Passed in April of 2004, the program is intended to improve academic progress, retention and graduation rates by assessing penalties in the form of scholarship reductions, recruiting limitations, ineligibility for NCAA team pre-season and post-season play, and possibly restricted membership status for those who fail to achieve a designated academic progress rate (APR) (Christianson). NCAA officials believe the program has the potential to dramatically strengthen the academic success of athletes and to hold institutions and teams accountable (Brown, 2004; Christianson; Davis, 2004). However, implementing these reforms at a time when the branding of college sport ensures that commercial pressures on athletes to perform and coaches to win will be greater than ever before has prompted some to question the logic of the plan (Blaudschun, 2004; Withers, 2004).

Rather than bridging the gap between academics and athletics, several college sport insiders harbor a view that the disincentives plan as it has come to be known may in fact exacerbate the problems. Boston College athletic director Gene DeFilippo, observed that "schools that have played by the rules in the past will continue to do so. And the schools that haven't will continue to do what their doing" (Blaudschun, 2004, p. D1). Commissioner of the Big East Mike Tranghese expressed a similar sentiment stating "the people who cut corners are still going to cut corners" (Blaudschun, p. D1). In turn, North Carolina State football coach Chuck Amato commented, "We call them student-athletes. But sometimes a diploma and an education aren't one and the same thing" (Blaudschun, p. D1). Making a veiled reference to the ways in which a college degree could be undermined or rendered meaningless, University of Mississippi athletic director Peter Boone queried "What does it mean if more kids get degrees but they are in basket-weaving?" (Blaudschun, p. D1). The revelation in the fall of 2004 that athletes in numerous high profile football programs received academic credit for being members of their teams and attending practices and games was unknown to those officials seeking to

reform college sport, including William Friday, chair of the Knight Commission, and Myles Brand, president of the NCAA, offers a telling commentary on the mechanisms of academic subterfuge that exist (Schlabach, 2004).<sup>4</sup>

Distilled to their essence, the problems surrounding college sport emanate from concerns regarding the public good. Can athletes in the corporate culture of college sport receive a meaningful education? What does the athletic enterprise do to the integrity of the academic mission of institutions of higher learning? Do athletes receive the educations they have been promised? Are the educational interests of athletes sacrificed to serve the economic interests of their individual institutions, the NCAA, athletic conferences and their corporate partners?

In this article we address the need for a cohesive plan of reform that addresses the structural impediments to academic success created by institutions of higher learning that have chosen to be promoters of mass public spectacle. More specifically, we argue for the adoption of a minimum grade point average of 2.0 in order for athletes to participate in their sport as a systemic corrective that has the potential to empower athletes to place their educational interests above their athletic interests. In Part I, an approach to college sport reform grounded in faculty obligations to educate athletes and protect the educational interests of athletes will be developed. In Part II, we examine the question of whether colleges and universities have a legal duty to educate athletes along with the ethical obligations faculty have to educate athletes. In Part III, we offer a historical overview of the 2.0 rule and a rationale for its adoption today. We conclude, in Part IV with a discussion of the implications of this approach.

## PART I. COLLEGE SPORT REFORM FROM THE FACULTY PERSPECTIVE

Although some would argue faculty have always played a role in college sport reform, participation has generally involved selected faculty from around

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4. In the August, 2004 interview with *Washington Post* writer Michael Schlabach, NCAA President Myles Brand was quoted as saying, in response to the news that football players were receiving credit for going to practice and playing in games, "They [schools] give letter grades? That's terrible. You can't have that." In an editorial bearing Mr. Brand's byline which appeared in the *Washington Post* on September 28, 2004, he defended the practice saying "Credit for participation has long been part of college curricula" (p. A27). Based on the article, this reversal occurred in response to NBC airing a piece at half-time of the Notre Dame-Michigan game where two athletic directors attempted to defend the practice and numerous other broadcast and print journalists around the country questioned the propriety of this practice.

the country with varying formal roles and responsibilities. Although the NCAA has required institutions for several decades to designate someone called a "faculty athletics representative," a notable shift in faculty involvement in athletics matters occurred at the moment when the business of college sport began to take off in the 1980s. Professor Percy Bates, long time faculty athletics representative from the University of Michigan, "acknowledged that as money became more of a factor in the business of running intercollegiate athletics, the people making the decisions tended to be those in greater control of the purse strings" (Brown, 1999). During the 1980s, a struggle for control of college sport ensued between athletics directors, who were dealing increasingly with the burgeoning professional enterprise, and college presidents, upon whom ultimate responsibility for athletics fell, especially when things went awry. Indicative of that time, the Association clarified that the faculty athletics representative designated after January, 1989 "shall be a member of the institution's faculty or an administrator who holds faculty rank and shall not hold an administrative or coaching position in the athletics department" (NCAA, 2004, p. 22).

The interface between the faculty athletics representative and faculty governance structures varies widely as do institutional mechanisms for determining who will serve in that capacity. As John Allison (1995), the Spence Centennial Professor of Business Administration at the University of Texas at Austin pointed out in his analysis of the NCAA and member institutions decision making structures and processes, "one of the key problems in current intercollegiate athletics culture is that the very people who are most likely to participate meaningfully in athletics decision making and representation are those least likely to have the ability to exercise an independent voice even if they choose to do so" (p. 20). For those seeking to understand the root causes of college sport reform failure, it might be worthwhile to note that whereas "faculty athletics representatives have long been thoroughly integrated into the infrastructure of the NCAA . . ." "the need for a significant faculty athletics representative role depends on institutional circumstances" (NCAA, 1998, p. 3). In effect, faculty are fully integrated on NCAA committees but their roles on individual campuses are much less defined and far more unstable.

In October of 2002, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) issued a report entitled *The Faculty Role in the Reform of Intercollegiate Athletics: Principles and Recommended Practices*. In that report, the AAUP acknowledged the emergence of faculty groups around the country, including The Drake Group and the Committee on Institutional

Cooperation (CIC) (a group associated with the Big-Ten and Pac-10 which eventually adopted the name Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics).

The efforts of these groups are grounded in an understanding codified in principles of academic governance, that the "faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction. . .and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process" (AAUP, 2004). As the AAUP points out, "it is the faculty's duty to ensure that the athlete has a full opportunity to participate in the educational process, and that the proper balance is achieved between the athletic and educational experiences" (AAUP). "In short, colleges and universities must make certain that college athletes remain students first, and that they have available, and are able to take full advantage of, the same opportunities for intellectual development and personal growth as other students" (AAUP).

Whereas more faculty are awakening to the need to attend to athletic matters, approaches to college sport reform differ across groups. In the spring and summer of 2004, the Coalition for Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA) took a more traditional route in developing a response to sport reform issues. Reacting to existing NCAA legislation, COIA developed a list of what they call best practices that should be adopted on college campuses as guideposts for shaping the relationship between athletics and academics within higher education (COIA, 2004).

In contrast, the Drake Group suggests that one of the major errors faculty reformers have made over the years is affording deference to the NCAA and uncritically adopting the NCAA's terminology and frameworks for conceptualizing the relationship between college sport and higher education. To do so advertently or inadvertently replicates the power structures and belief systems that produce the problems. Alternatively, by anchoring discussions about college sport reform in principles of academic freedom and responsibility, a clearer argument for the faculty obligation to reassert authority on athletic issues emerge. When those principles are used as a departure point, the framework for reform shifts from the television contracts, playing fields, and financial interests that have "branded" college athlete experience to the classroom, advising sessions, and educational interests of students who play sports.

Four key proposals form the basis of what the Drake Group believes is a cohesive approach to meaningful reform. The proposals are organized in a logical progression and each reinforces and supports other proposals in the plan, starting with a minimum 2.0 grade point average to participate in athletics, the replacement of the one year renewable scholarship with a five

year scholarship, a first year residency requirement, and institutional disclosure of academic courses taken by athletes (The Drake Group, n.d.).

It should be stated at the outset that the Drake Group Plan is premised on the idea that college sport reform efforts have not been well served by accepting the oft-stated notion that athletes are just like all other students on campus. The foundation for this claim is located in the principles of sound academic standards and amateurism that articulate a vision of college sport participation as an "avocation" for athletes and an expectation that athletes are to be treated in a manner in the areas of "admission, academic standing and academic progress. . . consistent with the policies and standards adopted by the institution for the student body in general" (NCAA, 2004, p. 3-4).

Reliance on the superficial comparisons between athletes and other student subgroups who may participate in band, campus media, debate club, and student government that follow from these stated NCAA principles have derailed many a worthy reform proposal. Whereas enrollment in a college or university creates some recognizable common ground between athletes and their peers, the practices associated with athletics, from recruitment to scholarship aid to the demands of training and competing, set athletes apart from other students. The litmus test is the fact that institutions do not invest considerable sums of money to recruit students to play intramurals. In contrast, athletes are identified, sought after, and courted with promises of athletic scholarships, with the expectation that if they do not perform satisfactorily in their sport, they jeopardize their opportunity to remain in school.

Because the recruitment of athletes often times has characteristics similar to those used in recruiting academically gifted students (early identification, targeted recruitment efforts, the promise of scholarships), there is widespread confusion about the degree of parity that exists between students attending universities on scholarships based on academic merit and those who attend universities on the basis of athletic merit. The key distinction here is that academically gifted students are being courted, and rewarded, for the very reason higher education exists (i.e., academic achievement grounded in the curriculum or core of the institution). In contrast, athletes are financially bound to educational institutions by virtue of their playing a sport, an achievement grounded in the extracurriculum, in theory, a complementary but not core function of educational institutions.

In the absence of challenging and refuting this mythology, faculty members will be ineffective in proposing and passing measures that will open up avenues for college athletes to advocate on their own behalf for their own educational interests. Further, by stripping away the mythology within a

framework of faculty responsibilities, a less obstructed view of ways to avoid a collective failure to educate athletes is possible.

PART II. INSTITUTIONS MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE A DUTY TO EDUCATE ATHLETES BUT FACULTY HAVE A DUTY TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR EDUCATIONAL INTERESTS

Hilborn (1995) argued that the establishment of an institution of higher learning's duty to educate athletes would promote meaningful change within the college sport system. He wrote,

When a student-athlete is required to reach his or her highest possible level of academic [and athletic] achievement without regard to whether the individual has time or energy to meet only minimum academic requirements to maintain eligibility, the institution is demonstrating a lack of regard not only for the welfare of student-athletes but also for the centrality of education in its mission (Hilborn, 1995, p. 769).

Although intuitively logical, heretofore, the limited number of athletes who have sought to hold coaches and institutions accountable for failure to educate have not found relief in the courts, where there has been a general unwillingness or hesitancy to impose such a duty. In *Jones v. Williams* (1988), Curtis Jones alleged that both the Detroit Board of Education and a junior college in Idaho had ignored his inability to read or write and "carried" him academically so that he would be eligible to play basketball. The fact that Jones had not received the most fundamental benefit of formal education was compounded by abuse he received from teammates and his classmates who knew he was illiterate. According to Jones, the ridicule to which he was subjected resulted in him suffering a nervous breakdown. The Michigan court structured its decision to avoid a consideration of the duty question altogether, determining that the school board was immune from liability because it was serving a government function while no ruling was issued about the Idaho junior college because the court lacked jurisdiction (*Jones*, 1988, p. 175).

In *Jackson v. Drake University* (1991), Terrell Jackson claimed that the head coach had promised him that he would be a star on the men's basketball team and that Jackson would receive a high quality education. An academic tutor was provided to Jackson, however basketball practices were scheduled during his allotted study and tutoring times. Jackson alleged that he was encouraged to enroll in "easy courses" and that he should allow the coaching staff to prepare his papers. Threatened with losing his scholarship because he refused to accept these options, he eventually quit the team. The court



reasoned that it could not find a duty to educate and justified its decision on the basis of judicial inexperience in defining the standard of care (*Jackson*, 1991, p. 1495). The court also expressed hesitation to find a duty to educate because of the potential for an unforeseen amount of litigation involving college athletic programs and intensified judicial scrutiny of how college and university athletic programs operate (*Jackson*, p. 1495).

In a third case, Kevin Ross sued Creighton University under a theory of educational malpractice and breach of contract for exploiting him for his basketball skills while not affording him with the academic support he needed to be successful as a student and the time he needed to take full advantage of those services (*Ross v. Creighton*, 1990). At the time his athletic eligibility expired, he had a 7th grade reading level and he was 32 credits short of the number he needed to graduate (*Ross*, 1990, p. 1322). Although the court found that Ross had a cause of action under breach of contract, the court determined that Ross could not recover under educational malpractice because such a determination would create a likelihood that other students dissatisfied with their grades might seek similar relief (*Ross*, p. 1328).

Whereas efforts made by athletes to hold colleges and universities accountable to a duty to educate has yielded discouraging results from a legal standpoint, the moral obligation of faculty members to advocate for athletes to be educated is firmly located in the *AAUP Statement of Professional Ethics*. It is here that faculty are reminded of their duty to actively protect the educational interests of students who are athletes as part of their obligation to uphold standards of academic freedom. For professors to remain silent about practices that undermine the ability of athletes to access the education they have been promised violates a professor's obligation "to seek and to state the truth" and to "practice intellectual honesty" (AAUP, 1990, pgs. 75-76) As teachers, professors are to "avoid exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students," "encourage the free pursuit of learning in their students," and "protect their academic freedom" (pgs. 75-76.). The discussion to follow is grounded in the faculty obligation to protect the educational interests of students and to advocate for mechanisms that will protect the access athletes have to academic freedom.

PART III. THE HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF THE 2.0 GRADE  
POINT AVERAGE

A. History of the 2.0 Grade Point Average

As Mondello and Abernethy (2000) point out in their historical overview of athlete academic eligibility, "From the moment universities began sponsoring intercollegiate athletics, administrators have debated what academic standards, if any, should be implemented to correct the dubious reputation that college athletes are not serious students" (p. 128). Originally, responsibility for enforcing minimum academic eligibility standards was left up to individual colleges and universities. However, in the early part of the twentieth century, as "tramp" athletes traveled from school to school drawn by extravagant offers of all-expense paid vacations and other inducements, the NCAA interceded, requiring athletes to make progress toward a degree as a condition of athletic participation (Waller, 2003, p. 191).

The NCAA did not return to the issue of academic eligibility again until after World War II (Waller, 2003). With the passage of the GI Bill, football coaches discovered a way of expanding their pool of players by recruiting veterans subsidized by the United States government and college-age athletes who received support from jobs, loans, or alumni support (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Watterson, 2000). As football coaches and institutions cultivated a flirtation with "pay for play," competition for recruits escalated while concerns regarding the erosion of amateurism grew.

The crucial events of the postwar crisis were the adoption, then abandonment, of the so-called Sanity Code. . . which required that financial aid be determined by need and administered by the institution only; be limited to tuition, incidental fees, and a single meal during the season and be earned by work 'commensurate with the services rendered' (Oriard, 2001, p. 117).

In the aftermath of the repeal of the Sanity Code in 1951, another 15 years would pass before the NCAA attempted "to establish uniform eligibility requirements that would supersede those of member colleges and universities" (Waller, 2003, p. 193). In 1962 the NCAA Executive Committee, a committee comprised of educators and administrators at NCAA member institutions, allocated funds to finance a study to examine whether academic success could be predicted for athletes based upon their high school academic record and initial year of collegiate enrollment (Falla, 1981, p. 145).

The committee recommended developing an expectancy table to determine predictors for academic success in college (Falla, 1981). The table was based on high school grade point averages and on scores achieved on one of the standardized entrance examinations, the American College Testing Program Test (ACT) or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).

In 1965, the membership at the NCAA Convention adopted the expectancy table, renaming it the "1.6 Rule" (Falla, 1981). The 1.6 Rule "relied on a relatively complex forecasting method that attempted to predict an incoming student-athlete's ability to maintain a 1.6 grade-point average (GPA) during his or her first year of college" (Waller, 2003, p. 193). In effect, the 1.6 Rule meant that incoming freshman, even though not eligible to compete, could not practice or even receive an athletic grant if they did not present an academic profile that predicted they would achieve a 1.6 GPA. In its entirety, the 1.6 Rule stated,

A member institution shall not be able to enter a team or individual competitor in an NCAA sponsored meet unless the institution:

1. Limits its athletic grant-in-aid awards and eligibility for participation in athletics to incoming student athletes who have a predicted grade point average of at least 1.6 (based on a 4.0 scale) as determined by demonstrable, institutional, conference or national experience; and
2. Limits its subsequent awards and eligibility for participation to student athletes who have a grade point average, either accumulative, or for the previous academic year, of at least 1.6. (Falla, 1981, p. 146).

The editors of *Sports Illustrated* and several college administrators called the 1.6 Rule, "a long overdue piece of legislation designed to guarantee that every student athlete in all of the NCAA's member schools maintain at least a C minus grade point average. A mark of C minus amounts to 1.6 on a 4.0 grading system" (Falla, 1981, p. 146).

Despite its apparent clarity, there were several ways colleges and universities could circumvent this legislation, including what was still ultimately the individual institution's prerogative at the time to determine who was eligible and who was not. Whereas institutions were supposed to use the NCAA's tables, they had the latitude to use their own predictive tables, which were less demanding than the one passed at the convention. Several amendments were passed over the next few years demanding that institutions using tables less restrictive must have tables that were representative of the institution's student body and required a minimum level of academic attainment (Falla, 1981). Considerable controversy surrounded the use of the

prediction tables. Concerns that athletes from minority and/or disadvantaged backgrounds would be treated unfairly due to inherent biases in the standardized tests used as predictive measures of academic success led to further refinement of legislation pertaining to initial eligibility (Mondello & Abernethy, 2000; Waller, 2003).

The first suggestion to use a 2.0 grade point average as a predictor of academic success in college for athletes was introduced at the 1973 NCAA Convention (Falla, 1981). "Much more straightforward than its predecessor, the 2.0 Rule abandoned standardized testing and required only that prospective student-athletes complete high school with a 2.0 GPA" (Waller, 2003, p. 193). This legislation superseded and replaced the prediction table system by stating, "athletic grants-in-aid be limited to athletes who have graduated from high school with a minimum grade point average of 2.0 for all work taken and certified officially on the high school transcript" (Falla, 1981). The rule also addressed satisfactory progress issues and the requirements needed to compete and maintain an athletic scholarship, which mainly included maintaining a 2.0 grade point average after the initial year of enrollment. The 2.0 Rule addressed the issue of competition and athletic financial aid in an athlete's first year, but did not tackle the issue of college preparatory classes and standard admissions, still leaving the admissions process of athletes up to each institution. This standard would stay in place until the beginning of the next wave of academic reform in intercollegiate athletics in 1984 (McMillen, 1991).

The NCAA first tracked graduation rates unofficially in the late 1970s after development of the 2.0 Rule to better gauge if athletes were indeed graduating and how their rate compared to the general student body (McMillen, 1991). The need for the 2.0 Rule and the statistical information provided by the graduation rates were challenged by many in the NCAA membership. According to Walter Byers (1995), former executive director of the NCAA, several coaches, athletic administrators, and even faculty saw the need to let underprepared students into college by viewing the benefits of sports in a more win at all costs sense. Yet, numerous cases of academic dishonesty and fraud would dominate college athletics through the rest of the 1970s up to the reform-minded 1986 NCAA Convention (Sperber, 1990).

The first actual, enforced national standard for intercollegiate initial athletic eligibility was named Proposition 48, to mirror its legislative proposal title when first introduced at the 1983 NCAA convention (NCAA, 2001). It is now officially known as Bylaw 14.3. in the current *NCAA Manual*. The new proposal, eventually called Bylaw 5-1-(j), focused on core course requirements (11 total units including three years in English, and two years each in math,

social sciences, and physical science of which one unit must be a laboratory class), high school core course grade point average in the 11 units, and standardized test scores of prospective athletes was passed in January of 1983 (NCAA, 1984). Starting in 1986, Proposition 48 was gradually phased in. Over the years, it would be revisited (NCAA, 1984; NCAA, 1985).

In 1989, Proposition 48 became Proposition 42. This changed Proposition 48 by establishing that an athlete who met one of the benchmark standards (either a 2.0 GPA or a 700 on the SAT or 15 on the ACT) and was labeled a "partial qualifier," "may receive institutional financial aid that is not from an athletic source and is based on financial need only" (Mondello & Abernethy, 2000, p. 135). In turn, an athlete who met neither the GPA nor SAT/ACT benchmarks, "was not eligible for institutional financial aid during the first academic year" (Mondello & Abernethy, p. 135).

In the ongoing evolution of Proposition 48, it would again undergo revision at the 1992 NCAA Convention, emerging this time as Proposition 16. This set of revisions strengthened the legislation in two ways, by increasing the number of required core courses from eleven to thirteen and raising the minimum GPA from a 2.0 to a 2.5 (Benson, 1993). Implementation of Proposition 16 was achieved using an initial eligibility index or sliding scale. For an athlete who did not meet the 2.5 GPA standard, she or he could remain eligible if their SAT or ACT was comparatively higher than 700 or 18 respectively. This sliding scale allowed partial qualifiers to be eligible for athletically-related financial aid even if they were not eligible to compete in athletics (Padilla & Walker, 1994).

The most recent developments on the academic eligibility front occurred in the spring of 2002 when the NCAA Board of Directors passed sweeping initial and continuing eligibility changes (Lederman & Suggs, 2002). The new initial eligibility rules will be phased in between 2005-2008. Eventually recruits will be required to earn a minimum 2.0 grade point average in 16 (up from 14) core high school, college preparatory classes. Once on campus, an athlete will be required to graduate within five years and complete 20 percent of degree work per year. By the end of the sophomore year, an athlete will be expected to attain a cumulative grade point average of 90 percent of the minimum required by his or her institution to graduate (typically 2.0). That expectation rises to 95 percent by the start of the junior year and 100 percent by the start of the fourth year (Lederman & Suggs).

### B. Previous Research on the 2.0 Standard

It is clear that NCAA Initial Eligibility Standards have increased academic progress and graduation rates of college athletes in all groups (Reith, 1995). Conversely, the current minimum GPA standard for athletic eligibility is a 2.0 GPA with a corresponding test score. In August of 2005, new initial eligibility standards will be enforced that are more focused on college prep courses and a minimum 2.0 grade point average in those courses. The use of standardized test scores will no longer be a factor in determining initial eligibility for NCAA Division I and II athletics. Despite the weight given to the 2.0 standard in the initial eligibility requirements, the NCAA equivocates on the standards for participating in athletics once enrolled as seen in the 90/95 rule. The NCAA is increasing the GPA standard to a 1.8 after the first year and a 2.0 after that for continuing eligibility in 2005, but the requirements for percentage of degree are being relaxed (NCAA, 2004).

Just as there are empirically based arguments to support the adoption of a 2.0 GPA standard for initial academic eligibility, so too are there sound reasons for requiring a 2.0 minimum GPA in order for the athletes to compete. A growing number of researchers have found that athletic participation is linked with satisfaction with the overall college experience. Further, athletic participation may also increase motivation to complete one's degree, persistence in college, and completion of a college degree (Astin, 1977; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, & Terenzini, 1995; Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999; Ryan, 1989).

Germane to this discussion are the findings of studies examining cognitive development of college athletes. In the first year, male intercollegiate football and basketball players demonstrated net freshman declines in reading and mathematics compared to nonathletes and athletes from other sports (Pascarella et al., 1995). In the second and third year, men's football and basketball players tended to have significantly lower levels of writing skills and of critical thinking skills and reading comprehension (Pascarella et al., 1999).

In a study of factors that influence academic achievement and graduation, Ridpath (2002) surveyed senior athletes from a major NCAA Division I-A conference who were within one year of graduation. All of the schools in this conference required a minimum 2.0 GPA to determine academic standing and as a standard for graduation. Only two athletes out of 191 who returned the survey instrument had a current college GPA of less than 2.0. Based on the data available for all respondents, male athletes had an average GPA of 2.8 and females had 3.2. Consistent with the findings of other researchers who

have done similar studies, those athletes who maintained a GPA above a 2.0 are more likely to make academic progress and to graduate in a timely fashion when compared to those athletes who fail to meet that standard (Tinto, 1987).

Contrasting these data with initial eligibility requirements that currently require a minimum 2.0 grade point average or higher with a corresponding test score for the same group of athletes, the data show that like current college GPA, only two out of 191 athletes had a GPA under 2.0 in college preparatory classes (see Table I).

TABLE I

*Core Course GPA Reported By All Sports*

GPA	Frequency	Percentage
1.7	1	.5
1.9	1	.5
2.0	2	1.0
2.2	2	1.0
2.3	3	1.6
2.4	1	.5
2.5	9	4.7
2.6	2	1.0
2.7	7	3.7
2.8	12	6.3
2.9	7	3.7
3.0	9	4.7
3.1	3	1.6
3.2	13	6.8
3.3	14	7.3

3.4	7	3.7
3.5	13	6.8
3.6	11	5.8
3.7	9	4.7
3.8	14	7.3
3.9	8	4.2
4.0	17	8.9
Total	165	86.4
Missing System	26	13.6
	191	100.0*

\*This line refers to the total number of surveys, however, only 165 answered particular question regarding core course GPA.

Many intercollegiate athletic conferences and institutions do, as allowed, require higher grade point averages and satisfactory progress requirements than the NCAA. Most institutions that have low graduation rates require the same grade point average requirements as the NCAA standard. Conversely those that require a higher standard consistently have higher graduation rates among athletes. (Ridpath, 2002). See Table II for a summary of the existing policies governing minimum grade point average for athletic eligibility as found in selected NCAA Division I conferences.



TABLE II

*Conference Breakdown of Required Grade Point Average  
for Athletic Eligibility NCAA Division I beginning Fall 2003*

Atlantic Coast	Same as NCAA (Georgia Tech Higher)
Big 12 Conference	First year-1.6 Second year-1.8 Beginning of third year-1.9 Fourth year and beyond-2.0
Mid-American	First year-1.8 Second year and beyond-2.0
Southeastern Conference	No requirement for regular season Additional for Post- Season
Mid-Continent	Same as NCAA Manual
Horizon League	Same as NCAA manual. Several Institutions have higher requirements
Mountain West	2.0 GPA, certified after two semesters, but only once per year. Certified each semester for seniors.
Conference USA	Same as NCAA Manual
Atlantic 10	Same as NCAA Manual

Southland	Same as NCAA Manual
Ohio Valley	Same as NCAA Manual
Northeast	Same as NCAA (St. Francis Higher)
Pacific 10	Same as NCAA Manual (UC Berkeley is higher)
Big East	Same as NCAA Manual
WAC	Same as the NCAA Manual
Big Sky	Same as NCAA for practice and competition. Typically a GPA requirement only affects competitive eligibility.

When taken together, these findings suggest" that raising minimum academic standards for athletic participation can actually provide motivation for an athlete to work harder academically increasing the expectancy to get a baccalaureate degree (Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999).

### C. Current NCAA Rules for Grade Point Average Requirements

The NCAA currently uses the aforementioned 90/95 rule, NCAA Bylaw 14.4.3.3.1, for competitive eligibility with regard to grade point average.

**General Rule.** A student-athlete who is entering his or her second year of collegiate enrollment shall present a cumulative minimum grade-point average (based upon a maximum 4.000) that equals at least 90 percent of the institution's overall cumulative grade-point average required for graduation. A student-athlete who is entering his or her third year of collegiate enrollment shall present a cumulative minimum grade-point average (based upon a maximum of 4.000) that equals 95 percent of the institution's overall cumulative minimum

grade-point average required for graduation. A student-athlete who is entering his or her fourth or subsequent year of collegiate enrollment shall present a cumulative minimum grade-point average (based upon a maximum of 4.000) that equals 100 percent of the institution's overall cumulative minimum grade-point average required for graduation. If the institution does not have an overall grade-point average required for graduation, it is permissible to utilize the lowest grade-point average required for any of the institution's degree programs in determining the cumulative minimum grade-point average. The minimum grade-point average must be computed pursuant to institutional policies applicable to all students. (NCAA, 2004, pp 160-161).

While the 90/95 standard does not dictate a specific GPA, it generally refers to a 2.0 standard for graduation used by most colleges and universities as the 100% benchmark. That translates into roughly a 1.6 GPA for the first year of enrollment, and a 1.8 after that then a 1.9 for the senior year and beyond.

Certainly this bylaw gives athletic departments much leeway in maintaining their athletes' eligibility, but does not go far enough in demanding that college athletes receive an education. The question to be asked is if most institutions require a 2.0 for graduation and for an academic probation threshold, are athletes being shortchanged by not being required to meet that standard, while still being able to compete athletically for their respective institutions? There are many NCAA Division I institutions and conferences that already have a 2.0 grade point average requirement for competitive eligibility, at least at some point during enrollment. Regardless of whether the conference and NCAA officials wish to consider a higher standard, it is within the purview of faculties to entertain such measures on their individual campuses.

#### PART IV. DISCUSSION

Historically, one of the criticisms leveled against requirements for athletes to maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.0 each semester to continue participation in their sport is a perception that this unduly punishes athletes by depriving them of their opportunity to play. When thought of as a "graduation eligibility" initiative, the requirement can be viewed as a safety net for academically at risk students who compete in athletics which creates every possible opportunity for the student to graduate on time having had a substantive academic experience. The rationale behind it recognizes that the

institutional commitment to athletics and the practices in which athletic programs engage in at times create demands on athletes that are sometimes irreconcilable with their student role. Considering big-time men's basketball alone for a moment, "approximately six out of 10 male athletes who go to school to play basketball do not graduate" (Kiszla, 2004, p. C-01). Although there may be many factors that contribute to such a result, the fact that men's basketball players in the Big-Ten missed between 15 to 25% of class days during the 2003-2004 academic year, provides some insight into the structural barriers athletes encounter in trying to fulfill their role as students (Alexia, 2004, n.p.).

Recent studies on athletes and role conflict reveal that the vast majority of athletes desire to be successful in their academic pursuits while in college (Settles, Sellers, & Dumas, 2002, p. 577). However, for those athletes who identify most strongly with their athletic role, something which tends to increase over time as athletes become more involved in their sport, they experience greater interference from the demands of their academic role (Settles et al., 2002).

An interview with University of Southern California tight end, Alex Holmes, reveals how this happens. Even with a 1,300-plus SAT score, he struggled to find a balance between his coursework and the demands of his athletic career. Holmes said, "I just devoted myself more towards football. Basically, instead of studying for six hours (daily), maybe I'd get an extra hour of sleep, and an extra hour of working out harder" (Withers, 2004, p. F10). For Holmes, with a 2.8 grade-point average, "I don't expect athletes necessarily to do extremely well in school, not because they're not intelligent but because the amount of pressure on us and the amount of stuff we have to do is so much" (Withers, 2004). Even academically accomplished athletes like Emeka Okafor, the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament's most valuable player in 2004, remark on the primacy athletics has in the lives of college athletes. Despite a 3.76 grade point average and completion of a finance degree in three years, Okafor observed that "For somebody playing basketball, I say it's like having a full time job and going to school in your spare time" (Kiszla, 2004, p. C-01). Okafor's comments expose the student first, athlete second mythology and accurately represent the fact that a basketball player's commitment is not avocational, as the NCAA rhetoric insists, but is, in fact, vocational.

This requirement is not designed to attack the intelligence of athletes but to create a mechanism of institutional accountability that recognizes the pressures Holmes, Okafor, and others describe that interfere with the ability of athletes to make independent decisions to protect their own educational

interests. It is, in effect, a measure that affirms an institutional commitment to academics being first for athletes. As a matter of checks and balances, this kind of requirement, combined with a first year residency requirement, five year scholarship, and institutional disclosure of courses athletes take will ensure that athletes gain the kind of academic foundation they need to better handle the conflicting demands that arise with missed class time, travel, and the mental demands of their sport while also providing the opportunity for those athletes to assert their rights as students to control their academic careers and futures.

The adoption of a minimum 2.0 cumulative grade point average affirms the commitment of colleges and universities to educating athletes. The judicial system's reluctance to rule that institutions sometimes fail in their duty to educate athletes does not obscure the fact that there is a compelling societal need for colleges and universities to educate athletes in accordance with their stated academic missions. In a situation where visible athletic interests routinely overpower the largely unseen educational interests of athletes, this measure offers corrective action that levels the playing field for athletes in the academic domain.

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