

Feedback on Academic Concepts - Increased APR Benchmark and Increased Initial Eligibility Standards
Submitted by: National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) Executive Board
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Increased APR Benchmark and Penalties

Generally, the increased benchmark for APR penalties from 925 to 930 is supported. Further, the penalty of losing postseason competition is seen as a much needed “wake-up call.” Some concerns/thoughts for consideration by the Committee on Academic Performance include:

- Potential of increased academic integrity issues. Since 2003, it appears there has been an increase in the number of academic fraud cases. With the increased benchmark and the consequences, there is potential for this to continue to increase.
- Increased concern over major / course clustering – While the N4A membership does not believe that there is a practice of “putting” students in the “easy” majors, there continues to be serious concerns expressed by the academic community over this issue. The increased penalty benchmark/penalties will likely continue this discussion. What strategies can be implemented to help individuals better understand these issues and the progress towards degree benchmarks student-athletes are required to meet (and are meeting if the graduation rates continue to increase)?
- While the Academic Performance Program has been in place since 2003, there is so much turnover in both Academic Support units, compliance units, and coaching staffs, there needs to continue to be strong educational outreach efforts to ensure institutional staff understand the “nuts and bolts” of APR and the new penalty structure. The N4A is a willing partner to assist with these efforts.
- CAP hoped the Academic Performance Program would encourage coaches to consider changes in their recruiting to be certain they were recruiting students to their institutions that could succeed academically. The reality is that instead of changes in recruiting, there are increased pressures on those individuals involved in the day to day of APR. Some unintended consequences of an increased benchmark and more significant penalty structure may include:
 - Increased pressure on individuals inputting data
 - Increased attention on roster management
 - Increased pressure on those involved in process of submitting adjustments/waivers
 - Increased pressure on academic support units to be sure those transferring to another institution have the 2.6 to earn the transfer adjustment.
 - Increased efforts to “manage” the APR rather than improve the academic success, retention, and graduation of student-athletes.

Implementation Questions/issues

- Will individuals who qualify for postseason be prevented from competition if the team is <930?
- Institutions with more limited resources may need more time to adjust to meet the new standard.
- Data collection occurs in early fall for the previous academic year yet is not publicly released until May. Will the data in May be what determines eligibility for postseason in the subsequent year?

- Example: Fall '11 will finalize the data from 10-11 yet will not be released until Spring '12. Will this data impact postseason during 12-13? For those teams competing in the postseason during the spring – this may cause some confusion as they will already know there “new” multiyear average at this point (which may be above the 930 benchmark).

Increased Initial Eligibility Standards

The N4A Executive Board is strongly supportive of increased initial eligibility standards. Some potential models for consideration include the following:

Suggested Models:

- **First year competition based on academic qualifications**
 - Students meeting the 2.5/820 may be immediately eligible for aid/practice/competition
 - Students not meeting the 2.5/820 are eligible for aid/practice/competition only if they demonstrate a 9th grade level on the Wide Range Achievement Test 4, Nelson/Denny, or other comparable competency based academic skills exam.
 - Students not meeting the 2.5/920 who demonstrate less than a 9th grade competency level eligible for aid/practice only.
 - Consider limiting practice time to 10 hours/week for those students not eligible for competition during the first year.
 - This model would ensure that freshmen student-athletes have attained the necessary reading and academic learning skills to be successful in their first year of academic studies
- **Tiered System of Initial Eligibility**
 - Eliminate the sliding scale and use a reading / writing comprehension competency metric to become a full qualifier.
 - Communicate with the SAT and the ACT organizations to determine what an appropriate minimal skill level is that would suggest that a student is capable of competing at the collegiate level. If a student did not meet that standard, but was admissible to a university, then the institution should be allowed to extend a scholarship offer to the student with the commitment to help them improve their skill level while sitting out for a year. This would not cut access, but would allow for an academic year in residence where skill development would be the focus.
- **Modify Core Course taking patterns**
 - Limit the number of core courses students can use to meet NCAA Eligibility Center requirements during their senior year.
 - Currently, students may underperform during their first few years of high school and then determine they are not on track to meet NCAA requirements. These students may take 8 core courses during the senior year and earn good grades. While at times, this means the student underachieved during the first three years of high school and is capable of the work, it may also mean they were “scrambling” during the senior year and grade inflation came into play.
- **Determine Qualification Status based on Six Semester Transcripts**
 - Establish initial qualifier status off of sixth semester transcripts and use reading instrument for students to gain full qualifier status if they can prove they are college ready .

- This would lessen the senior year inflations and actually move the focus to learning not grade chasing.
- **Evaluate Institutional Characteristics**
 - Use institutional data to compare to the incoming stats of student-athletes and in all sports. Each campus is so different – while a national standard is necessary, perhaps there is a way to encourage institutions to consider the “gap” of who they are admitting and how the academic profiles compare to the general student body.
 - The GRO model provides an assessment tool to evaluate the academic risk each student-athlete presents. This model may be useful in evaluating academic risk and determining if an institution has the support structure in place to assist students appropriately.

Items for Additional Consideration:

- The prevalence of students significantly at-risk for graduation is more common in certain sports (Football, Men’s Basketball). Consideration should be given to sport specific guidelines in teams who have historically been underperforming and/or not meet certain academic benchmarks.
- There are increased numbers of student-athletes graduating early and enrolling in college. Historically very bright students would enroll early but now at-risk students graduate early as well. We have seen a dramatic increase in students graduating early from high school. Students are taking online courses and other means to graduate which is compromising their high school education and causing issues with school systems.
- Grade inflation needs to be kept in mind when considering initial eligibility standards. While the data shows that high school grade point average is most predictive of success in college, several individuals spoke to the significant improvements seen to academic records during students’ senior years. Increasing the GPA requirement may not change the level of academic preparation of the incoming students.
- Require institutions to assess reading skills of all incoming freshmen / transfers who were non-qualifiers prior to practice/competition. This practice would ensure that in a timely manner all new student athletes have been assessed for the basic academic skills necessary for learning at a university and for the potential for undiagnosed learning disabilities. Hopefully the student’s academic support plan would be appropriately adjusted based on the assessment.