1. **Introduction.**

   In October 2011, as part of an academic reform initiative to embed academic success, the NCAA Division I Board of Directors (Board) adopted new initial-eligibility standards and new two-year college transfer standards. In addition, the Board revised the NCAA Division I Academic Performance Program penalty structure and adopted academic requirements for access to postseason competition.

   This document is intended to educate the Division I membership and affiliate organizations regarding the new initial-eligibility standards, explain the Board's rationale, including the data on which the Board's decisions were based, and discuss the potential impact on access to higher education. In addition, this document will set forth membership suggestions for enhancing the new standards and identify the extensive outreach efforts to provide notice and education to member institutions, conferences, prospective student-athletes and outside organizations.

2. **Summary of New Division I Initial-Eligibility Standards.**

   The new initial-eligibility standards require student-athletes who initially enroll full time in a collegiate institution on or after August 1, 2016, to meet increased requirements to be eligible for athletics competition in the initial year of full-time enrollment at a Division I institution. Specifically, there are two primary components of the new initial-eligibility standards for competition:

   a. The sliding-scale index (combination of standardized test score and core-course grade-point average) will increase by approximately 0.500 grade-point average units for a given standardized test score; and

   b. A core-course progression will be required. Beginning with 2016 certifications, 10 (of the required 16) core courses must be completed prior to the seventh semester of high school. Seven of the 10 core courses must be in English, math or natural or physical science. In addition, the 10 core courses completed prior to the seventh semester must be used in the final academic certification (i.e., cannot be repeated for grade-point average purposes after the seventh semester begins).

   Student-athletes who meet current qualifier requirements (which will remain essentially unchanged)\(^1\), but do not meet the new initial-eligibility standards, will be eligible, as academic redshirts, to receive athletically related financial aid in the initial year of full-

---

\(^1\) The Division I sliding-scale index will be slightly recalibrated to address an indexing discontinuity and reflect changes in the relationship between SAT and ACT that have occurred since the sliding-scale index was last modified in 2003. The recalibrated sliding-scale index was developed with assistance from ACT, Educational Testing Service and the College Board.
time enrollment. In addition, academic redshirts may practice in the initial term of full-
time enrollment and may earn practice in subsequent terms, provided they successfully
complete nine semester-hours or eight quarter-hours of academic credit in the preceding
term of full-time enrollment. Academic redshirts may not, however, compete in the
initial year of full-time enrollment.

3. **Rationale for New Standards.**

a. **Academic Preparedness.**

The new initial-eligibility standards are one component of a broader academic
package that is designed to embed academic success into collegiate athletics. Part
of the academic package is a shift from simply obtaining eligibility to compete in
college athletics to demonstrating academic success in high school that indicates
student-athletes are academically prepared to succeed in the initial year of full-
time enrollment and eventually graduate from a Division I institution. Thus, the
new standards emphasize academics as a first expectation and a commitment
toward academic success and graduation.

In addition, the focus on academic preparation, not just eligibility, furthers the
purpose of student-athletes arriving on campus ready to learn, being supported
when they are enrolled and holding student-athletes, coaches, teams and
institutions accountable for academic performance. It also puts an emphasis on
providing the best opportunity for all student-athletes to receive a quality
education upon entering a Division I institution. As such, student-athletes who
have stronger academic profiles and are likely to be academically successful
during their initial year of enrollment will be allowed to compete immediately,
while student-athletes who are more at risk academically (academic redshirts) will
have an opportunity to concentrate on academics for one year prior to being
eligible for athletics competition. The goal of this shift is to increase the
likelihood of academic success in the initial year of full-time enrollment and
emphasize a commitment toward graduation from a Division I institution.

b. **Configuration.**

The new initial-eligibility standards continue to use core-course grade-point
average, ACT or SAT scores and core-course accumulation. However, they are
combined in a more nuanced way to identify student-athletes at risk of academic
difficulties in college and provide an opportunity for institutions to intervene in
educationally-appropriate ways through an academic redshirt year in the initial
year of full-time enrollment.
In addition, it is important for student-athletes to prepare for college at a steady pace and take college preparatory courses not only in a steady progression, but also in an academically-appropriate manner. As a result, student-athletes will have to demonstrate academic progress throughout high school and not just during their senior year (grade 12) to be eligible for athletics competition in the initial year of full-time enrollment at a Division I institution.

c. Academic Redshirt Year.

The goal of the academic redshirt year is to provide appropriate and targeted interventions, as well as proper instruction, assistance, structure and resources, to assist academically at-risk student-athletes with their transition to college and ultimately provide student-athletes the best opportunity to succeed. It is also expected that the academic redshirt year will help student-athletes initially manage their time commitments involved in Division I athletics and promote graduation as the primary expectation among all Division I student-athletes. Practice is permitted in the initial term of full-time enrollment to allow academic redshirts to establish a bond with their teammates and coaches that enhances student-athlete retention; however, failure to demonstrate academic success in the preceding term of enrollment by passing nine semester- or eight quarter-hours will result in a lack of practice opportunities in the subsequent academic term. It will be important for member institutions to identify an academic plan that includes quality interventions and provides the academic support necessary to be successful during the academic redshirt year.

d. Notice.

In April 2012, the Board voted to amend the effective date for the new initial-eligibility standards from 2015 to 2016. The Board's action ensured that individuals who were already enrolled in grade nine when the new standards were adopted (October 2011) would not be subject to or adversely impacted by the new standards. In addition, the 2016 effective date provides extended notice and more time for educational-outreach initiatives, as well as the opportunity for individuals who begin grade nine during the 2012-13 academic year to adjust their high school academic preparation to meet the new standards.

4. Data Analysis.

The NCAA Division I Academic Cabinet and the NCAA Division I Committee on Academic Performance spent considerable time reviewing research regarding initial-eligibility regulations prior to creating the package of proposals to improve academic success. After a thorough evaluation of research data regarding the academic preparation
and behaviors of Division I student-athletes, as well as extensive discussion by committees, presidents and Division I members, the Board adopted new initial-eligibility standards.

The new standards were designed to identify student-athletes with a high likelihood of academic success in the initial year of full-time enrollment at a Division I institution. In adopting the new initial-eligibility standards, the Board considered the following data:

a. The best predictors of academic success in the first year of collegiate enrollment are a combination of high school core-course grade-point average and ACT or SAT score. The new standards were designed to appropriately weight these two predictors based on how they project collegiate academic success;

b. Student-athletes whose high school academic performance predicts an average of C grades or worse in their first year of collegiate enrollment are most at risk of not graduating. The current sliding scale, which will remain essentially unchanged and will be used to determine whether a student-athlete is initially eligible for athletics aid and practice (in the first term), is set at a level that predicts approximately a C average in the first year of collegiate enrollment;

c. Student-athletes who meet the new initial-eligibility standards have a composite high school academic record (based on grades in core courses and ACT or SAT score) that predicts approximately a 2.600 grade-point average (B and C grades) in the first year of collegiate enrollment;

d. Prospective student-athletes on a Division I Institutional Request List in 2010 completed an average of 19.4 core courses in high school;

e. Qualifiers complete an average of 15.4 core courses after six semesters and nonqualifiers complete an average of 11.5 core courses after six semesters; and

f. 81.1 percent of nonqualifiers and 99.9 percent of qualifiers have at least 10 core courses after six semesters, while 78.7 percent of nonqualifiers and 99.6 percent of qualifiers have at least seven core courses in English, math and natural or physical science after six semesters. Thus, while the vast majority of student-athletes are completing core courses in an educationally-appropriate progression, the data show a subset of unsteady core-course accumulations.

5. **Impact on 2010-11 First-Year Student-Athletes.**

The data below reflect the percentage of first-year student-athletes who would not have been eligible for athletics competition during the 2010-11 academic year had the new
initial-eligibility standards been effective. However, it is important to note that 2010-11 first-year student-athletes were not subject to the new standards, so the percentages below do not account for students who would have adjusted their academic preparation if they had knowledge in high school that a new standard was required to compete in the initial year of full-time enrollment at a Division I institution. Previous increases to initial-eligibility standards suggest that some student-athletes will enhance their academic preparation, so the eventual impact could be substantially lower.

a. 15 percent of first-year student-athletes;

b. 41 percent of first-year men's basketball student-athletes; and

c. 35 percent of first-year football student-athletes.


a. Access to Higher Education.

Based on current NCAA data, it is estimated that approximately 15 percent of student-athletes who enter a Division I institution meet the academic risk standard and would be required to take an academic redshirt year if the new standards were effective today. However, the academic redshirt year does not limit opportunity or access to higher education, as student-athletes who meet the current qualifier standard (which will remain essentially unchanged) will still be eligible to practice, receive athletically related financial aid and be part of the team, which provides intangible benefits.

Furthermore, the new initial-eligibility standards are not designed to make attendance at a Division I institution less attainable. There are essentially no new restrictions on the receipt of athletically related financial aid. In fact, the purpose of the academic redshirt year is to provide academically at risk student-athletes with a transitional year to adapt and gain the academic foundation necessary to be successful in college.

An academic redshirt year will assist student-athletes who are most at risk of academic difficulties in college, but outcomes will likely depend on the manner in which student-athletes and institutions use that year. It will be important for member institutions to not only provide meaningful academic interventions that increase academic redshirts' potential for eventual graduation, but also design and

---

2 The impact on 2010-11 first-year student-athletes corresponds approximately to the percentages of student-athletes in each subgroup who are not currently earning a degree, according to the Graduation Success Rate.
implement quality interventions that will result in positive academic growth during the academic redshirt year.

b. Impact on Minority Student-Athletes.

Historically, academic reform initiatives have increased graduation rates. For example, the overall Graduation Success Rate (GSR) increased from 74 percent to 82 percent from 1995 to 2004, during which a number of academic reform initiatives were implemented. During that same time, the GSR for African-American student-athletes increased by 12 percent (56 percent to 68 percent). As a result of increases in GSR and increased access for minority student-athletes with initial-eligibility changes in 2003, there were almost 600 more African-American student-athletes in the 2004 cohort than the 1995 cohort. Even more importantly, there were over 900 more African-American graduates in 2004 than 1995. It is also important to note that student-athletes in virtually all subgroups continue to graduate at higher rates than nonathlete counterparts. This has been the result of a culture change in college athletics, greater focus on student-athlete graduation through academic support initiatives, more rigorous academic standards and summer school attendance, among other academic initiatives.

In addition, throughout academic reform efforts, including the removal of a strict cut line on ACT and SAT scores in 2003, which resulted in increased participation and graduation by minority student-athletes, NCAA governance bodies have been thoughtful and cognizant of the impact of standards on student-athletes, including those from racial or ethnic minority groups. Currently, graduation rates and the total number of degrees conferred to African-American student-athletes are at all-time highs, and by not tying first-year participation to athletics aid, the expected outcome of the new initial-eligibility standards is to see continued increases in participation by racial or ethnic minority student-athletes (or student-athletes from disadvantaged economic backgrounds), while enhancing the likelihood of graduation. The impact of the new initial-eligibility standards will be closely studied to ensure that these intended consequences are occurring.

c. Impact on Football and Men's Basketball Student-Athletes.

Currently, football and men’s basketball GSRs and Academic Progress Rates (APR) lag behind those of other sports:

1) Two out of three football and men's basketball student-athletes earn a degree, according to the GSR (versus 80 percent among student-athletes in total), meaning that one in three football and men's basketball student-athletes leave school without graduating.
2) Just over half of the first-year student-athletes in football (55 percent) and less than half of the first-year student-athletes in men’s basketball (48 percent) earn a degree from the Division I institution at which they initially enroll full time.

3) Average APRs in football and men’s basketball are about 25 points behind the national average and their trend lines have flattened over the last few years, meaning it is unlikely that the graduation gap will close on its own in the short term.

4) According to the 2010 NCAA GOALS study, more than 50 percent of Division I football student-athletes and 75 percent of men’s basketball student-athletes think it is at least somewhat likely they will play professionally (of 5,500 Division I men’s basketball student-athletes, approximately 50 might make an NBA team).

5) In football and men’s basketball, about one in 10 first-year student-athletes earn less than a 2.000 grade-point average in the initial year of enrollment and three in 10 are below 2.300. These student-athletes are at elevated risk of not graduating, especially if they transfer (transfers with this type of academic performance in the first year graduate at 10 to 20 percent lower rates than those with similar academics who do not transfer), and stand to benefit most from an academic redshirt year.

Thus, although the new standards may have a greater initial impact on first-year football and men’s basketball student-athletes, it is anticipated that the new standards will provide a better opportunity for these student-athletes to demonstrate academic success in the initial year of full-time enrollment and ultimately graduate from a Division I institution.

7. Educational Outreach.

Given that individuals who begin grade nine in the fall of 2012 will be subject to the new initial-eligibility standards, educational outreach initiatives are paramount. The NCAA national office is committed to providing viable educational resources and has developed an educational plan that considers and addresses the concerns of institutions, conferences, prospective student-athletes and outside organizations.

As part of the outreach initiative, NCAA staff has identified and connected with various academic advising, faculty and sport-specific organizations and associations regarding NCAA academic standards and available academic resources, as well as identified annual conventions, conferences and in-person meetings held by conferences, coaches
associations, professional organizations and other key groups. In addition, the national office initial-eligibility outreach campaign involves a collaborative effort by staff members in academic and membership affairs (coaches associations, professional sports organizations, national governing bodies), communications (social media, public service announcements), corporate alliances (corporate partners, messaging during NCAA championships), the NCAA Eligibility Center (high school associations, youth sports organizations, email blasts, E-newsletters, brochures, posters) and enforcement (presentations, distribution of materials at football and basketball events).

8. **Alternatives.**

Since the adoption of the new initial-eligibility standards, there has been extensive discussion from Division I members regarding ways to enhance the standards while ensuring that student-athletes are academically prepared for success in the initial year of full-time enrollment at a Division I institution. Below are examples of membership suggestions to enhance the new standards:

a. **Waivers Based on Summer School Performance:** Permit academic redshirts who meet certain academic benchmarks (e.g., credit hours in core subject areas, grade-point average) during summer school prior to initial full-time enrollment to be eligible for competition in the initial year of full-time enrollment.

b. **Waivers Based on Team APR:** Allow academic redshirts to be eligible for competition in the initial year of full-time enrollment, provided the team's multiyear APR meets a certain benchmark (e.g., 975).

c. **Eligibility in Subsequent Terms:** Permit academic redshirts to be eligible for competition in subsequent terms of the initial year of full-time enrollment, provided academic benchmarks (e.g., credit hours in core subject areas, grade-point average) are met in the preceding term of full-time enrollment.

d. **Travel to Postseason Competition:** Allow academic redshirts to travel to postseason competition (e.g., bowl game, conference championship, NCAA championship) and participate in events associated with postseason competition, provided academic benchmarks (e.g., credit hours in core subject areas, grade-point average) are met in the preceding term and missed class time is limited (or nonexistent). Academic redshirts would not, however, be eligible to participate in postseason competition.

e. **Split Effective Dates:** Maintain the August 1, 2016, effective date for the core-course progression but delay the effective date of the new sliding scale until 2018.
f. **Educational Communication:** Permit coaching and noncoaching staff members to educate prospective student-athlete and non-prospective student-athlete aged individuals regarding academic standards to ensure appropriate involvement of campus personnel in the overall educational efforts. For example, legislation could permit unlimited written or electronic communications between head coaches and individuals enrolled in grade eight solely for educational purposes regarding initial-eligibility standards or permit noncoaching personnel to provide in-person education to junior high and high school students regarding initial-eligibility requirements.

g. **Phase in or Revise Newly-Adopted Sliding Scale:** Move the newly-adopted sliding scale (which increases approximately 0.500 grade-point average units for a given standardized test score above the current eligibility standard) to a level about halfway between the current sliding scale and the 2016 sliding scale for competition. The impact of an intermediate scale could then be evaluated over a two- or three-year period, which would enable staff to collect and analyze data regarding the percentage of first-year student-athletes meeting the intermediate standard, shifts in the demographics of qualifiers and academic performance among academic redshirts. Following the evaluation period, the Board could determine whether to move to the higher competition standard, maintain the intermediate standard or return to the current model of initial eligibility. Such a procedure would allow the academic redshirt designation to be applied to student-athletes with the highest levels of academic risk in a measured fashion and provide an opportunity to thoroughly understand the impact before applying the higher standard to a larger subset of Division I student-athletes.

h. **Revise Core-Course GPA Calculation.** The purpose of the core-course progression is to ensure that student-athletes complete core courses in an educationally-appropriate progression and demonstrate academic success throughout high school. However, despite the core-course progression requirements, current legislation would still enable a student-athlete to complete a disproportionate number of core courses in grade 12 that would be included in the student-athlete's core-course grade-point average calculation, provided the student-athlete meets the legislated distribution.

For example, after six semesters, a student-athlete could present 10 core courses with a 1.800 core-course grade-point average. During grade 12, the student-athlete could complete six core courses to meet the legislated distribution, as well as another six (or more) core courses (e.g., via nontraditional programs) that would be used to increase the student-athlete's core-course grade-point average. This would circumvent the intent of the core-course progression.
Thus, legislation could be amended to calculate core-course grade-point average based on the best 16 core courses that meet the legislated distribution, as opposed to including additional courses (beyond the 16 required) to increase the core-course grade-point average. This would emphasize academics as a first expectation and support the shift from simply obtaining eligibility to demonstrating academic success in high school at a steady progression.

9. Conclusion.

The Academic Cabinet, Committee on Academic Performance and Board of Directors have taken a thoughtful, data-based approach in amending the initial-eligibility standards as part of the academic package adopted by the Board in October 2011. It is a positive sign that the most recent overall Division I GSR is 82 percent and the overall Division I APR is nearly 975. Given the new initial-eligibility standards, it is anticipated that more student-athletes will graduate from Division I institutions.

The NCAA will monitor outcomes of the new initial-eligibility standards for intended and unintended consequences. Ultimately, the new standards emphasize academics as a first expectation and provide the best opportunity for all student-athletes to receive a quality education upon entering a Division I institution. As part of this initiative, it is imperative to ensure that student-athletes are academically prepared prior to engaging in athletics competition. In addition, institutions must provide appropriate academic support and student-athletes, coaches, teams and institutions must be held accountable for academic performance.