

NCAA Division I-A Compliance Officers' Perceptions of Division I Freshman Eligibility Requirements

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In 1983, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) adopted standards for determining freshman eligibility at the level of Division I athletics. These standards, commonly referred to as Prop. 48, were meant to improve the academic outcomes of college athletes. The three elements of these regulations are standardized test (SAT or ACT) scores, successful completion of a core of academic courses in high school, and a minimum grade point average in those core courses.

The rules have been revised several times since their inception, with the first revision in 1986. This created a sliding scale between test scores and high school grade point average in the same eleven core courses. In 1989, the NCAA attempted to eliminate the partial qualifier status by creating legislation known as Proposition 42. Revisions to freshman eligibility requirements continued following the removal of Proposition 42. The core course requirements rose from eleven to thirteen and the sliding scale of test scores and core course grade point averages changed as well. In January 1993, the NCAA Convention approved the creation of the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse, which became operational in August of that year. Further revisions to the requirements became effective on August 1, 2003. There was an increase in the core course requirements from thirteen to fourteen.

In August of 2008, the core course requirement will increase from 14 to 16, providing a significant challenge to students who wish to become eligible for freshman participation in athletics at the Division I level. It will also create considerable challenges for college athletic department compliance personnel who work to determine freshman eligibility for the athletes recruited by their coaches. The basis of a student's freshman intercollegiate athletic eligibility is their high school performance but much of the burden of administrating freshman eligibility policy falls upon college athletic department personnel, in particular, each school's NCAA compliance officer/director.

The primary purpose of this quantitative study was to determine the perceptions of fairness and satisfaction held by Division I-A compliance officers/directors regarding the procedures and purposes of NCAA freshman eligibility requirements. Additionally, these compliance directors were asked to provide opinions regarding the NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse function and communication process as well as impending changes to freshmen eligibility policy. Responses were compared based upon respondent gender, number of years in their current position, respondents' school athletic conference, and school membership in the (football) Bowl Championship Series. The study was based in research related to college athletic governance and results of this study will contribute to the formulation of research regarding NCAA freshman eligibility policy as well as provide insight into how freshman eligibility requirements affect students and athletic department personnel.

Compliance officers at all 119 NCAA Division I-A institutions were contacted via e-mail and asked to complete an online questionnaire using the Opinio online survey system. The questionnaire contained items about the general regulations and the accommodations for students with learning disabilities found in NCAA Division I freshman eligibility requirements. There were specific questions regarding the change in core course requirements from 14 to 16 and how this change will affect different student populations.

The survey also contained a section of statements designed to assess the compliance officers' perceptions of NCAA Division I freshman eligibility policies. This section was adapted from Barnes' (2003) previous study of high school counselor's perceptions of NCAA Division I freshman eligibility. The sum of the Likert-type scale responses reflects respondent's perceptions of Division I freshman eligibility policies. The statistical analyses related to this scale included a one-way ANOVA by conference, independent measures T-test by gender, and independent measures T-test by BCS status.