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Since its inception, collegiate football has been impacted by low retention and graduation rates. While admission standards are on the rise at major public universities, many under-prepared student-athletes (football) are admitted each year because they are the 'best' player in the state/country, creating academic disparities. The history, culture and economic success of the university athletic program, especially football, play a pivotal role in explaining these disparities.

The data collected and recorded over the past two decades will demonstrate that there is a growing disparity in the academic preparation between college students and college student-athletes (football) at thirty-one Division I institutions. The GPA (grade point average), SAT (Scholastic Achievement Test) scores, and graduation rates, however, do not accurately measure these discrepancies. The academic deficits of the special admit student-athlete can only be assessed through performance-based measurements of reading, writing and math. Ideally, these assessments should be done much earlier in the education process so that remediation can take place before entering college. Despite the academic support and resources available to special admit student-athletes, it is not possible to remediate and take college level degree applicable courses at the same time. The graduation rate of DI football players (50%, 2009) can be explained, then, by the low admission standards that suggest a lack of proficiency in basic academic skills.

ACADEMICS & ATHLETICS - A CLASH OF CULTURES:  
DIVISION I FOOTBALL PROGRAMS

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In an effort to field a collegiate football team of the best possible athletes, schools admit students who do not always meet their admission standards (called ‘special admits’). Over the past two decades, these student-athletes who are admitted to select universities and colleges with Division I athletic programs have risen in numbers due to the increasingly competitive entrance requirements. The disparity between the academic preparedness of these two student populations (students and student-athletes) can be severe, yet it has gone largely unstudied and unchecked nationally (Jaschik, 1998).

“There are no NCAA limits on special admits, nor are there national statistics on their performance, including how many of the students graduate or how far below academic requirements some schools are willing to go” (Alesia, 2008). College entrance requirements observed by required standardized tests, grade point average and advanced course backgrounds have all changed the playing field of college admissions over the last twenty years. This paper will compare the NCAA ‘clearing house’ process for admission to the overall general admission standards at 31 public Universities, and examine the changes that have taken place over the last few decades (Imes, 2008). (See table 2) Statistics argue that low admission standards directly influence graduation rates.

It is important to examine the history, culture and economics of collegiate sport in an effort to better understand the educational dilemma of admitting the underprepared

student-athlete. According to the National Academic Advising Association, this subgroup of students is considered to be academically underprepared as a result of prior educational experiences (e.g., academic failure, poor preparation, low expectations (Miller & Murray, 2005). Academic integrity, educational responsibilities and the future of the athletic institution are all at stake. Even the best academic support programs may not be able to offer enough remedial instruction to support these students' efforts toward graduation, and more importantly their success in life after college.

### **Historical Survey and Summary of Collegiate Athletics<sup>1</sup>**

1852- First intercollegiate athletic contest – boat race on Lake Winnepesaukee

between Harvard and Yale

1859 – First intercollegiate baseball contest – Williams vs. Amherst

1869 – First intercollegiate football game – Princeton vs. Rutgers

1901 – 25 colleges and universities played intercollegiate football

1902 – First College Rose Bowl

1905 – Football was reformed by college presidents forming an NCAA

Organization

1929 – Academic integrity of college athletics was questioned by Carnegie Foundation study

1956 – Athletic scholarships are allowed/legitimate (NCAA)

1968 – NCAA membership is divided into two divisions

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<sup>1</sup> Three principal sources are used for the above Historical Survey – Shulman & Bowen, Bowen & Levine and Grant, et al.)

- 1973 – Admissions standards are established by the NCAA (2.0 high school GPA minimum)
- 1975 – Title IX – allowing for equal access for Women’s sports in colleges
- 1978 – NCAA membership is now three divisions and conferences take leadership roles
- 1984- ESPN and other cable networks expand revenue possibilities for NCAA and Colleges
- 1986 – Admission standards are changed - SAT scores adjusted to 700-combined minimum (verbal and math) 2.0 GPA in 11 core courses
- 1990 – NCAA clearinghouse rule changes from 11 to 14-core course minimum (sliding scale added, for example, SAT 2.0 + 700 SAT combined)
- 1992 – Football Bowl Coalition formed (later replaced by Bowl Alliance)
- 1998 – Football Bowl Championship Series (BC) established
- 2008 – NCAA clearinghouse rule changes from 14 to 16-core course minimum

During the 1870’s collegiate football developed rapidly and became very popular. Historian Frederick Rudolph noted, “this exciting new sport not only reverberated with the national character but also foreshadowed what was to come in college sports more generally” (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). During the next thirty years, the university setting changed and evolved while football took on a life of its own, with a fan base that was rooted in school spirit. In the fall of 1905, President Roosevelt had to intervene to make sure that the game was regulated, not only because of critical injuries (including deaths) but also from the increasingly commercial aspects of the sport. President Roosevelt recognized the clash between sport and academics, yet was still able to convince 12



college presidents to save football. Many would say that this is origin of the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association).

In 1929, the Carnegie Foundation thoroughly analyzed college athletics and questioned its relationship to the educational goals and missions of colleges and universities. As early as 1945, educators debated whether College players should be paid, or if a league should be created separate from the university/college systems. In response, the NCAA ramped up the rulebook so that these athletes would remain amateur and unpaid. Meanwhile, the schools benefited from the revenue brought in, but some schools, such as the University of Chicago, opted out of college football all together.

Prominent educators complained that College Athletics could potentially jeopardize the academic integrity of the institutions. That complaint has been carried forward, especially as big money entered into the picture by the 1950's. From the 1950's until the 1990's the NCAA received the majority of the revenue produced by college sports, however with the cable network entering the scene in the 80's decade, the schools themselves could profit.

It is also important to note that Title IX played a role from 1972 forward. It mandated that women have equal access to collegiate sport opportunities. To this day, money generated from women's sports is abysmal in comparison to men's sport, both in and out of the collegiate setting. Most of what are referred to as the "Olympic sports" on college campuses are funded predominately by the two men's revenue sports of basketball and football.

The history of regulating college sport is important for understanding the degree to which institutions today emphasize athletics in allocating admissions slots and other resources. On the one side where the regulations may disallow the colleges from paying student-athletes, on the other side they both admit and offer certain accommodations that other students are not privileged to or are given access for (Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

The greatest accommodation for the college student-athletes, besides admission itself, is that they may have access to a 'full-ride', which is tuition, room and board, and expenses (an expense account for monthly incidentals). Often times meals and travel (a vacation tournament in Hawaii for example) are perks of their privileges. Tutors and Academic Centers including Math and Writing labs are provided to student-athletes. Most major campuses do offer a learning center and writing center; however, these tutors are peer tutors, not necessarily content or academic experts such as the ones found in the Academic Support Centers for Student-Athletes.

Historically, academic standards for student-athletes have been a great area of concern. This was brought to the forefront in the early 1970's. By this point, the effort to set up common standards among the schools had, for the most part, failed. The only agreed upon academic achievement that was required for admission was a high school diploma with a GPA of 2.0 or better. At the 1983 NCAA convention, in response to the efforts of an ad hoc committee of college presidents that had sought to bring about reform of athletics through the American Council on Education, new academic requirements were adopted. As of 1986, freshmen were not able to participate in sports unless they scored an SAT 700 (verbal and math combined) and a 2.0 high school GPA in 11 core courses (Shulman 2002, p.13).

In 1990, the standards changed again to a 14 course rule and now in 2008, a 16 course rule. The current 16 courses must include successful completion of 4 years of English, 3 years of Math, 2 years of Science, 2 years of Social Science and 4 additional

years of courses from across the high school curriculum (from any area above, including foreign language and non-doctrinal religion/philosophy).

### **Economic Success**

The mission of higher education is to promote opportunities for educational growth in an atmosphere of academic achievement and integrity. The overriding goal of big-time sports is to win – which translates into high level entertainment and big revenues (French, 2004). In an effort to increase their revenues, Athletic Departments at NCAA Division I schools have grown over the years. The football program alone can now employ anywhere from 30 to 150 people. The trouble is that it is difficult to understand where all of the profits go from ticket sales, television appearances, donations, corporate sponsorships and naming rights. Disclosure is far from transparent, and since these institutions all operate on a not for profit status, one might wonder why the IRS does not investigate. As reported in 2005 by USA Today, financial information collected from 119 DI schools was incorrect; these identified discrepancies ranged from minor infractions to a major \$34 million dollar error (Grant, et al., 2008). The budgets for the smallest to largest of these schools are 5.5 million to 90 million as of 2004/05 (source: Department of Education from Grant, et al. 2008).

The typical budget in a sports program at any given university is about 32% on salary, 31% on facilities and 18% on scholarship. As of 2006, the largest growing category in the budget was for salary and benefits (Grant, et al., 2008). It will be interesting to see how that plays out given our current economic downturn. Booster

support will likely decrease, although there is a lot of fat that can be trimmed from Athletic Department budgets. The growth in revenue over the last four years has been reported as climbing dramatically in many of these programs. Team coaches' and Athletic Directors' outrageously large compensation packages will be difficult to reverse; but this may prove to be necessary during the current economic crisis.

In 2006, the NCAA entered into an agreement with CBS to televise the men's basketball tournament. At this time, CBS paid the NCAA an average of \$545 million per year in tax-free money. The president of CBS Sports was quoted as saying; "There is no more important event at CBS, not just CBS Sports, than the men's basketball championship". The NCAA receives 85% of its revenues from the sale of television rights. Each year, the NCAA distributes more than \$100 million from its Basketball Fund to Division I institutions (Grant, et al., 2008).

The Football Bowl Series (BCS) has an agreement with the Fox network paying \$80 million annually from 2007 – 2010, however ESPN has out bid them and will pay \$125 million per year from 2011-2014. These monies are distributed based on performance in the NCAA. Each tournament or bowl victory earns more money for the winning team's athletic conference. The Rose Bowl continues to remain under a separate contract (Fizil & fort, 2004).

In a 2006 letter to the NCAA, House Representative Bill Thomas (CA) wrote “rewarding athletics instead of academic performance seems to be contradictory to the NCAA's tax-exempt mission, and sends a message to member institutions and athletes that athletics is more important than academics”. Congress investigated the non-profit status of the NCAA. The non-profit status is justified (according to the Operating Board) because it supports higher education and the importance of academics. A few questions

posed (many questions were asked but never answered) were, why does the NCAA distribute more than \$100 million each year based on athletic rather than academic performance? What percentage of NCAA revenue do your member institutions spend solely on academic matters?

“Coaches' salaries account for one of the biggest expenses of Division I-A athletic departments”, according to reports printed in USA Today last year. More than 35 college coaches receive salaries of at least one million dollars per year. Sources of revenue to pay these rising salaries include student fees, corporate sponsorships, and television deals. Paying coaches excessive compensation also makes less revenue available for other sports, causing many athletic departments to operate at a net loss.

During the early 2000's, 35-40% of DI athletic departments reported a profit; so the question then becomes, is athletics a good investment for the University (Grant, et al. 2008)? There is no need to debate the issue of which is more important, athletics or academics, because we know that education is far more valuable to society than sports. The fact of the matter is that many people, not just students, derive considerable utility from watching, reading and talking about sports; it is part of our culture (Grant, et al., 2008). Moreover, entertainment by sport maybe helpful to the country's current need for economic recovery.

In economics terminology, the NCAA is a cartel, a formal organization that controls prices and production. One must keep in mind that in the case of the NCAA, the cartel functions as a monopoly; and monopolies earn above normal rates of return.

Therefore, intercollegiate sports programs at DI schools must be profitable, whether or not they are willing to admit their financial success to the public (Zimbalist, 1999).

College programs, which over the years have produced winning 'revenue' sports teams and even some that have only produced non-revenue (but popular) winning teams, continue to attract better 'athletically gifted' students. These students, however, are just a small part of the broader culture, which produces enormous amounts of revenue. It is what is beyond the college education that is sought after, large amounts of money. Unfortunately, this drive for athletic success does not equate with academic success. While more and more children are on multiple teams at very young ages, including traveling teams, the classroom, along with education and learning, becomes a second priority at best.

CHAPTER II  
ISSUES SURROUNDING COLLEGIATE SPORT

**Philosophical and Ethical Issues**

The drive for athletic success raises moral concerns, especially when it comes to admissions standards. While the DI Institution strives for athletic success, admissions must be concerned with academic success. Therefore, moral reasoning cannot be ignored in college admission standards for student-athletes, and it is an important part of this research. Common morality is useful in examining the legitimacy of college athletics in general, and especially when discussing those students who enter a college or university significantly underprepared and under qualified for the academic expectations of the school. While college athletics may be morally justified, it is questionable whether admitting underprepared and/or under qualified students to participate in the athletic program is justified. I am prepared to grant that there are benefits to a student-athlete's college attendance, but ultimately, admitting under prepared students constitutes deceit and is immoral.

College admission standards have risen significantly in the past one to two decades, leaving the NCAA requirements for admission clearance behind by several hundred SAT points. Admitting students to college with significant academic underachievement is unjust. When a university admits a student, the student, as well as the university, assumes that the student can earn a four-year college degree. Of course,

no one admitted to college is guaranteed a degree; he must earn it by meeting the requirements. But once admitted, it is assumed that the student is capable of completing a degree. There may be many reasons why some do not succeed. But a lack of the essential capacity to complete college studies must not be one of those reasons. This is one of the concerns of this thesis: does the drive for athletic success undermine or compromise the academic success of student athletes? Evidence demonstrated in Chapters III and IV suggests that it does. I believe that this compromise raises moral concern, especially with regards to deception and dishonesty.

Student-athletes who are academically underprepared yet admitted to competitive colleges are deceived in a number of ways. First, the coach and the institution are telling them that they can earn a college degree. Second, they are being told that their chances of making money in professional sport are considerable. Third, they are told that they will be given all the resources and time necessary to meet the demands of both academics and athletics, therefore insuring success after college. In many ways, this is no different from their high school experience, where they are passed through school learning nothing academically but being told, again by coaches and the school, that they will have a number of great scholarship opportunities to the top tier universities.

An additional deception is that, in admitting underprepared students, the university and the coaches are setting them up for failure. The amount of remedial work necessary for them to succeed would exceed any reasonable expectations of the academic support services available. As I demonstrate later in this paper, the literacy grade level



discrepancy is too large to correct while the student is taking the necessary coursework to stay eligible at the college level.

The chance that a college football player will thrive academically while competing at the Division I level of athletics seems improbable. The average athletic schedule (regulated by the NCAA) is a 20-hour practice week. This requirement, however, does not appear to be followed; and there are some gray areas as far as what counts for the allowed 20 hours (Griffin, 2008). Film, meetings and travel, along with specific medical training needs may take a student closer to a 30-hour week schedule (Holsendolph, 2006). Students must be enrolled in 12 hours of course work, bringing their week to a possible 42 hours not including study time. The average college student spends between 15 and 20 hours per week studying, which brings a football player's schedule to 62 hours per week (Griffin, 2008). It should be noted, however, that since many of these players are not prepared academically, they will need remedial work as well. This work adds another 5-10 hours per week for skill building and mentoring. Hence, taking your most at-risk college student and imposing such heavy demands is arguably immoral, on the part of the NCAA officials, Coaches, Recruiters and University Administrators.

While the demands are great, free will is a factor that must be considered. A college scholarship is simply an offer to be accepted or rejected. Student-athletes choose to accept the scholarship and stipulations that come with it. But anecdotal evidence suggests that an underprepared student truly does not understand all the stipulations that come with the scholarship. They truly understand that hard work, both on and off the

field, is necessary; but they assume that, with the hard work they can be successful. However, the hard work they are being asked to do must be realistic, and it should not set them up for failure. Given the amount of hours needed just to keep up, frustration is a likely reaction and tends to work against academic success. This raises the ethical question of whether or not these students should be admitted. These student-athletes are forced to make difficult decisions, which may put them in direct conflict with the demands of both their academics and their athletics. Again, this addresses the issue of whether the drive for athletic success undermines or compromises academic success.

The NCAA Division I manual is an instrument to be used by compliance officers at each institution to monitor coaches and athletes. It is, however, “impossible to write a rule for every unethical action” (Lapchick, 2006). The NCAA defends the student-athletes’ heavy workload by pointing out the value of a college education. The focus on the fact that education leads to later success in life supports the value of the degree. The student-athletes understand this, but they also assume that the heavy workload will allow them to achieve success, both on and off the field. This might be a realistic assumption of those who are significantly underprepared for college; but the problem is that they have no clear understanding of what college academics is about.

To reiterate what was said above, in admitting these students, institutions may be setting them up for failure, as the amount of remedial work necessary for them to succeed would exceed any reasonable expectations of the services available. It could be argued that since many of these students would not get a college education without sports, they actually come out ahead. In taking classes and receiving services, they get a good part of

the education they did not receive in secondary schools. Further, no one forces them to play their sport. Once they are admitted to the institution, playing is not a requirement for staying. The scholarship would likely be revoked, but there are other avenues of financial aid, and the students could then concentrate totally on academics. But, the academic support services mentioned above would not necessarily be available. Students have received special admissions because of their athletic ability. Unfortunately, the public accepts and therefore allows that Division I football players graduate at a rate lower (55%) than regular college students (79%). People want to be entertained, alumni want to take pride in their athletic teams, and the university wants to make money, so these things are overlooked. Of course graduation is not guaranteed to any student admitted to a college or university. However, student- athletes and their families are presented with an image of how things will turn out for them. In the book, The Game of Life, this example is provided:

The photographs of well-coifed men and women that hang in the windows of many hairdressers' storefronts provide an excellent example of why it is important to recognize differences among subjects at the beginning of an experiment. In every case, the people look beautiful. The message that we as potential customers are receiving from these photographs is "Come in here, and you too will leave looking beautiful." But if, alas, we are far from beautiful when we walk in the door, the chances are that we will not be beautiful when we leave. We may look better--the "treatment" may have a positive effect--but we cannot hope for the outcomes intimated by the alluring photos wherein inputs (beautiful people with great hair) were jumbled together with the "treatment" (haircuts) (Shulman, & Bowen 2001).

The problem of deception is still a concern for the underprepared admitted student-athlete who assumes that a degree and/or a pro career are guaranteed. The allure of a degree and/or pro career overshadows the reality of their attainment. Basic educational ability is assumed in the alluring, but if one is far from that basic education, the allure constitutes deception.

Peter French suggests in his book *Ethics and College Sports*, that the moral rationalization for sports in the university setting fits the mission statements of the major public universities – “to serve the public and strengthen the community”(French, 2004). But is this ‘strength’ at the expense of the student-athlete? It may be argued that the completion of the college degree itself is what makes this a quid pro quo relationship between the student and the college, who in fact do enter into a formally signed NCAA contract upon acceptance. During the recruiting process, promises are made with regards to the academic resources available to student athletes, such as class advising, scheduling and tutoring. The NCAA does in fact mandate programming to help the student-athlete be successful in the classroom. Therefore, once a school admits an underprepared student, they have a duty to provide them with these services and resources. Without these benefits, students are being exploited to make money for and to benefit the reputation of the university, and to entertain students, alumni and the community in which they live. It does appear possible, though, to admit students who are so underprepared that they cannot comprehend college level coursework.

To illustrate a point, here is a relevant example: a state resident student and recognized football player is graduating from high school and interested in attending a

college football program within the state. This student has attended public school since kindergarten in the state public school system and won his local high school a state football championship. He cannot read or write at grade level; it appears from his educational testing that he is functionally illiterate; however, he has somehow cleared the NCAA rules to be an eligible recruit. While he is unlikely to graduate, he will get excellent training and could potentially have a career in the National Football League. Fans will be thrilled by his football skills (blocks and tackles) and he will receive some education, tutoring, and room and board. No student who is admitted is guaranteed a degree; but this particular student signed a contract, played his sport and learned more academically than he did in any other school setting. But academic success at the post secondary level is not determined by “learning more” than a person might have if he were not admitted. Academic success at this level is determined by earning the degree.

The moral question remains: in the drive for athletic success are we undermining or compromising academic success? Are institutions deceiving these athletes in the process? Unfortunately, they are.

Some coaches provide a realistic picture of what is expected of their athletes. True, there are enormous demands on their time, but with the proper services, time management is possible. However, for this to take place, everyone must comply both with the letter and the spirit of the rules. The NCAA and its member institution representatives have enacted rules to prevent the drive for athletic success from undermining or compromising academic success. It is now up to the NCAA and the universities to enforce the 20 hour rule so that coaches do not take advantage of the

students. Student-athletes are promised by way of the contractual agreement that these time rules will be followed. This is a reasonable assumption. It is unethical and deceptive to bend the rules, to find loopholes, to ignore or to skirt the rules. Further, the NCAA should routinely observe and assess the resources available to these students. It is also necessary to reevaluate admissions criteria at this time, given that the discrepancy between students and student athletes (special admits) has grown so wide. Ideally, the relationship between the student and the university is reciprocal: the school gives athletes the avenue to play the sport that they love while providing them with an education in the form of a legitimate college degree.

### **Culture and Race in Sport**

College Sports embodies a culture which is designed, accepted and sustained by our social norms. Reviewing the history and philosophy of college athletics is not enough to inform us about this successful phenomenon. According to much of the research that has been written on the culture of college athletics, there are four consistent forces behind the developments seen in the historical survey: (1) The growth of the entertainment industry and (2) The commercialization of intercollegiate athletics; (3) the ever-increasing importance of a college degree, with the resulting competition in the admission standards and policies; and (4) the greatly increased specialization of athletic talent from early ages, accompanied by improvements in performance (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). The historical relationship in America between education and sports also reflects issues in the culture with regards to relations of race, gender and social class.

Race plays a major role in the culture of college athletics, as minority students make up more than 40% of the football and basketball teams (Smith, as cited in Fitzel and Fort, 2004). “Through socialization, by emulation of esteemed role models and as a consequence of sub cultural values, African American youth are highly oriented to the goal of sports careers” (Anderson and Rudmann, as cited in Ross, 2004).

Since there is almost no avenue to professional sport (football) other than through the college, students must first be eligible to enter college by way of the admission process. In 1983, the NCAA passed proposition 48 that was meant to establish stricter academic requirements for entrance into college programs. These standards were again adjusted in 1992 and once again in 1995. Many have argued that the ill-prepared African American male was being discriminated against since this was the only way to enter professional sports (Althouse & Brooks, 2000). 85% of those that lost eligibility under proposition 48 were African-Americans.

“A larger proportion of African Americans than other Americans are still poor or near poor and attend schools in areas that are compromised by inadequate resources” (Althouse & Brooks, 2000). A cultural debate by sociologists has been taking place since the 1950’s, (when public schools were integrated), with regards to the poor graduation rate of black college athletes. Daniel Rascher (sports economist) examines the idea of racism in sport when he states that,

52% of NCAA football players and 61% of NCAA men’s basketball players are African-American, compared with 12.5% for the general US population. The excess revenues generated by these athletes are spent on other programs elsewhere on campus where the population is predominately white (Grant, et al., 2008).

This shows the exploitation of black athletes. Harry Edwards, an activist on improving the academic conditions and images of the African American male believes that the lowering of the SAT scores is in fact is a method of exploitation (Althouse & Brooks, 2000). Given the societal interest of college sports, and the economic strength of the NCAA, a movement to increase the admission standards might actually force better educational opportunities for ill-served youth. Opportunities such as those offered by the Princeton Review Foundation and promoted by the National Alliance of African American Athletes (Althouse & Brooks, 2000).

Discrimination is said to still exist in college sport positions, especially in football where positions are stacked. Stacking is the practice of assigning individuals to sport positions on the basis of race or ethnicity (Althouse & Brooks, 2000). African Americans are still relegated to positions that are said to require speed, quickness, and jumping ability. The collegiate system continues to value the athletic competency of the African-American student-athletes over their academic potential indicated by their poor graduation rates. The results of the Academic Progress Report (Graduation Success Rate): 55% graduation rate, 49% African American (NCAA DI GSR DI football 2006).

Since Title IX, gender equity in college athletics has improved. “The gap in entering SAT scores between women athletes and women non-athletes over time has become equivalent to that of men” (Shulman & Bowen, 2001). “male athletes, however show less academic underperformance than their male counterparts when female athletes are compared to males who play high profile or revenue sports” (Aries & McCarthy, 2004, p. 579).



Sport and higher education have had an uneasy relationship throughout history (Althouse & Brooks, 2000). Football provides an opportunity for African American males to go to college, which again, (some would consider) offsets the racism and discrimination issues that continue to plague college sport. All students admitted to universities must be prepared for college-level academics, which is where the non-student athlete 'at-risk' population and the athlete special admissions now appear to differ. For example, the minority average SAT Verbal Score as reported by the College Board is 456 (2008). This score is more than 100 points higher than the NCAA clearinghouse requirement for initial eligibility. (See Table 4)

Summer Bridge Programs<sup>2</sup> at colleges across the country are made available for admitted first year 'at-risk' students. Leaders of these programs examine the admission statistics from the incoming first year class and invite students accepted with certain risk factors to a special summer school orientation program. At one time, athletic departments took advantage of these programs. A few years ago, the NCAA instituted a summer school policy for incoming freshmen in order to boost graduation rates in the sports of football and basketball. Athletic programs have since established their own summer programs to deal with the challenges of these special admits.

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<sup>2</sup> Many Public Universities sponsor Summer Bridge Programs such as North Carolina, Arizona and California.

## CHAPTER III

### CURRENT TRENDS

#### **Admissions, Recruitment and Retention**

The NCAA Freshman-eligibility standards have been changed over the past 30 years', however, so too have admissions standards at most of the 2700 plus institutions of higher education (4 year) in the United States ([nces.ed.gov/2007](http://nces.ed.gov/2007)). The rate and depth of change varies greatly. College applicants are getting rejection letters more than ever before due to the record-breaking applicant pool. Programs such as Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and dual enrollment (high school and community college together) are increasing the competition. SAT preparatory classes and independent college admissions consultants are swamped with students trying to gain an edge over the competition to be admitted to the college of their choice.

NCAA Division I requires, (according to DI manual 2008-09), that students complete 16 core courses during High School: 4 years of English, 3 years of math, 2 years of science, 1 extra year of math or science, 2 years of social science, 4 years of additional courses (foreign language, religion, philosophy, social science). The GPA and SAT scores are on a sliding scale which means that, for example, if a student has a 2.0 core GPA, he must have a 1010 SAT (verbal and math only); if a 2.5 GPA, he must have a 820 SAT, a 2.8 GPA, he must have a 700 SAT. The problem is that students with as

low a score as 350 verbal, 350 math SAT are well below the national average college-bound student.

The GPA itself then becomes a questionable measurement; one might argue that the same is true in the reverse (low GPA, higher SAT). Antidotal evidence shows that many DI football players have studied important core courses with non-certified teachers, such as their coaches, who pass them with B's and C's. Often times the admissions files show that the student never passed the end of course test, but then passed a summer school course which counted towards the same requirement, the end of course test, however, gets waved. The divide between athletics and academics has increased over the past two decades. While the average college-bound student scores have increased (both SAT and GPA), the DI 'special admit' football player scores have been stagnant.

Table 1. General SAT Score Data. (Average scores of college bound HS seniors)  
Verbal/Math combined (scale is 200-800) SAT College Board

<i>Year – SAT</i>
1976 – 998
1986 - 1009
1996 - 1015
2006 – 1021

Given the competitive nature of the majority of the DI large public state schools' admissions requirements, along with the number of applicants, the average SAT is closer to 1200 combined and continues to rise, while the GPA is closer to a 4.2 based on a 5-6 rated scale. In 2005, The NCAA introduced the sliding scale for Division I whereby students can have very low SAT/ACT scores if their HS GPA is higher, if your SAT is 610, the GPA must be 3.0, 790; 2.5 and 1010; 2.0.

If a student has a 3.55 grade point average, and a SAT combined of 400 (which means that a student showed up for the test and signed his name), they can be eligible to play DI football or any other sport. This leaves it up to the individual university to admit the student or not. According to data collected from the College Board, from 1998- 2008, the number of students taking AP exams has doubled. More than one half of college bound high school students take honors and/or AP classes. A large percentage of public high schools that feed our best state universities offer up to 8 Advanced Placement classes an/or an International Baccalaureate program.

Each college may then decide on its own specific standards for admission exceptions. ‘Special Admits’ exist at the nation’s largest public universities. According to data provided from the most recent certification reports of the NCAA (1998-2007), thirty-one public universities in the nation’s six biggest athletic conferences reported having “special admits” – students admitted through exceptions to the normal entrance requirements for reasons including a “special talent”. The comparison of freshman students to freshman student-athletes on scholarship and football players shows an overwhelming disparity. 1-9% of the regular student body were recorded as special admits while 5-78% of scholarship athletes were special admits, 16-95% of football players were special admits (Imes, 2008). (See table 2)

### **Underprepared Student-Athletes**

A wing of the NCAA organization referred to as the clearinghouse determines initial eligibility for both academic eligibility and amateur playing status. A number of

ways still exist for both transcripts and test scores to be illegitimate. The clearinghouse has made an effort to legitimize the scores by streamlining the process. The clearinghouse has also made mistakes in the past and with the new 'independent high schools', those that allow students to graduate high school on-line or in the 'virtual classroom', more issues may surface. The football system also has many prep schools such as Hargrave Military Academy and Oak Hill Academy (both in VA) where students can somehow meet NCAA eligibility standards in a 5<sup>th</sup> year of High School.

Once admitted, these students have to meet a minimum GPA requirement and credit hour requirement to maintain eligibility. To keep student-athletes eligible, universities invest considerable resources in academic support services. Duderstadt (2003) noted that at Michigan "the Student Athlete Support Program consists of a director, six full time advisors, three assistant advisors, 70 tutors, 10 specialized writing instructors and 15 proctors for supervised study sessions". Duderstadt, a former president of the University of Michigan, went on record saying that his school "brought in students who had no hope of getting a meaningful education, we keep them eligible as long as we can and then "toss them aside" when they lose it "(Price, 2004).

Many athletic departments keep their athletes eligible by encouraging students to take easy classes and majors. Most football programs have an advisor who assigns schedules and classes; and many colleges offer priority registration for student-athletes. Often the most 'at-risk' and high profile student-athletes have mentors and are assigned 1-1 tutorial sessions to achieve a passing grade. Cheating, of course, becomes a temptation for those students who are so under prepared for the academic rigor of the

institution (Hamilton, 2004). Not only the performance abilities but also the cognitive capacity of the student-athlete plays a role in the legitimacy of their academic achievements. For example, a student who comes from a poor county in the state and attends a public school system that graduates less than 60% of their students from high school is most likely ill equipped to attend, understand, and then pass a college class.

Grade changes and academic special favors are commonplace. Verification of this is openly published by the NCAA violations list and schools are placed under review, put on probation and scholarship funding is deducted. Many of these violations are even self-reported by the University's compliance offices. In March of 2009, the NCAA formally completed the investigation into the latest DI academic scandal. Florida State has been placed on probation for four years; this includes reduced scholarships, vacated records and penalties for former staff involved in the fraudulent activities. Students received inappropriate help in an on-line music class and when a student-athlete exposed this infraction, the audit uncovered other problems as well (NCAA News Release, 2009).

“One widely used measure of educational performance in the intercollegiate athletics community is the graduation rate. While no institution graduates 100% of its eligible students in any one year, higher rates are preferable since low rates generate criticism and potential audits from the NCAA” (Grant, et al., 2008, p.17). New rules regarding Academic Progress Reporting (APR) closely scrutinize graduation rates with the consequences of lost scholarship funding for poor APR rates. Division I football players graduate at a rate of 43-55%, while their non student-athlete classmates typically graduate at a rate of 70-90%. Walter Harrison, chair of the NCAA Committee on

Academic Performance recently expressed his concern about football eligibility and graduation rates (NCAA News Release, 2009).

Keep in mind, however, that roughly 1-2% leave school early to play professional football. Those who do make it to graduation day often have majored in a less demanding curriculum. Athletic academic advisors are trained to consider what is the best course load for students to take in order to meet the university standards while staying eligible to play their sport (Hosick, 2008). “Not all majors require equivalent hours in class and studying, and not all majors will produce a similar flow of earnings in the future” (Grant, et al. 207).

The recruitment of the student-athlete is one of the most dramatic changes in college sports over the last 75 years. Although the NCAA continues to strengthen the guidelines (48 pages in the 2008/09 DI Manual), recruiting is an extremely competitive side to this business. The cycle never ends for Football and Basketball, as soon as a recruit signs, coaches go back on the road to stay in front of the top high school players in the state and country, even nationally in some sports (Frank, 2003). Children have started showcasing their talent at a much younger age. Although the rules forbid coaches and staff from speaking to them, they can still be on the ‘watch list’. Unofficial visits can start as early as the second year in high school. Often coaches have their eyes on students early in the middle school years, which is amazing given the growth rates of pre-teen boys.

Recruiting in football is different from the other college sports. While the star athletes are important, football is far more of a team sport than track or swimming, and

the coach must recruit a large number of outstanding players. This is the only way that a team can become nationally ranked; as a matter of fact, ranking the recruit class is a well-known phenomenon now broadcast on sports channels across the nation during college football signing day (mid-February). This particular recruitment technique is one in which the coaches 'over-recruit' just to make sure that they have enough good players who make it through the NCAA clearinghouse. The practice leaves many players frustrated as they end up at a school where they do not get much playing time (Duderstadt, 2003). Summer camps have become a business (sometimes sponsored by corporations such as Nike and Gatorade) for these coaches, allowing them to entice students to participate in the college campus experience and learn some skills. Coaches can then scout these students to find out if they would be potential prospects.

“Recruited athletes and the admissions process are claimed by reporting schools to be the same process for the regular non student-athlete population” (Bowen & Levin, 2003). This may be true, in that an admissions committee must approve the coaches' list of students. Every admissions office has acceptance standards and designated slots are used for those students who might best represent the University in some way. Perhaps they are affiliated with some special program, which could be anything from a scholarship program to an arts program to athletics. Many of these students may still meet the low-averages end of the admissions criteria; however, they are often underprepared for the rigor of the academic environment.

One explanation for the low scores and lack of academic skills of the student athlete population could be a high incidence of unidentified learning disabilities.



According to research collected at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, more than half of the 2006/07 student-athletes tested positive for a Learning Disability or Attention Deficit (28 out of 46). Of these students, only three had been previously diagnosed (Johnson, et al., 2007). Appropriate treatment services were provided along with remedial support in reading and writing. Tutoring and supplemental instruction was also provided; and the results during the first two semesters were positive. More data is necessary to determine if graduation requirements will be met, despite the initial lack of academic skills.

The data collected and recorded over the past two decades demonstrates that there is a growing gap in the academic preparedness between college students and college student-athletes at 31 Division I institutions. Admission standards continue to rise at major public universities; yet many under-prepared student-athletes are admitted each year because they are the 'best' player in the state/country. Is it possible for the graduation rates to rise if the NCAA adjusts their admission standards to better support college level literacy skills? Would it be helpful if student-athletes entering high school programs, or just before, were tested for learning strengths and weaknesses that could then be addressed before entering college? It would be considered best practices for all college special admits to complete structured reading and writing coursework as pre-requisites for the general college curriculum classes. The NCAA would have to decide if this would mean 'red-shirting' the student for one or two years (postponing eligibility).

## CHAPTER IV

### FUTURE NCAA ADMISSION STANDARDS REFORM

Of the 2,707 post-secondary institutions (4 year) in the United States, roughly 40% have NCAA athletic programs (according to [nces.edu.gov/2007](http://nces.edu.gov/2007)). 12% of these schools are considered Division I (DI), 11% D2 and 16% D3 schools. Divisions are determined by the number of scholarships, sports teams, and matches/games scheduled against opponents in that division (Grant et al., 2008). Financial rewards for the NCAA and the colleges themselves are most closely associated with media coverage; DI schools reap the benefits from televised basketball and football bowl games and championships.

In order to achieve the success necessary on the playing field to reach these fiscally rewarding windfalls, schools and coaches must recruit the best players in the country and even the world. Unfortunately, athletic achievement does not equate to academic achievement, although our culture leads us to believe that these operate equally in the parallel world of ‘collegiate sports’. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, (Kohn, 2002) SAT scores of entering students have been on a “virtually linear rise” since 1985 in both the verbal and math sections. The demands of coursework have also increased both in quality and in quantity, as have the grade point averages.

(See table 3)

Grade inflation could be to blame, however, this theory does not seem to be affecting the under-prepared ‘special-admit’ student football player. The NCAA standards for this ‘protected class’ have not kept up with the college bound student population; evidence shows that NCAA acceptable test scores (SAT/ACT) have stayed relatively the same while more core courses must appear on the high school transcript. A sliding scale GPA has been added to offset the low SAT/ACT scores, yet these recruited student-athletes often fall short and end up in front of a special university committee to ask for special admittance. (See table 4)

It is reasonable to argue that the graduation rate of these particular students is in jeopardy. Even the best remedial support and tutorial could not close the educational gap enough in the 4 or 5 years that it takes to earn a college degree. Such “catch-up work” would have to be done while maintaining eligibility -passing degree applicable hours each semester- and basically working a full time job (hours on the field) as well. It is likely that college level literacy skills are not present in this student population who generally score between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> percentile as compared to their college classmates. Basic literacy skills are defined as reading and comprehending at a comparable grade equivalency level necessary to understand college text (ACT 2005 Report). “Only 51 percent of ACT tested high school graduates met ACT’s College Readiness Benchmark for Reading, demonstrating their readiness to handle the reading requirements for typical credit bearing first-year college coursework, based on the 2004–2005 results of the ACT.” These critical reading, writing and comprehension skills are necessary to succeed in post secondary education. Currently, community college systems

offer students with low verbal SAT or ACT scores three semesters of a prerequisite in the area of reading for content information. However, according to the ACT College Reading Readiness Report (2005), 70% of the students required to take a remediation course never graduated.

Several institutional changes would improve the likelihood of student-athlete success. Perhaps teaching reading remediation courses along with tutoring and supplemental instruction, after assessing students reading, writing and math skills would be the most beneficial way to increase retention and graduation rates. Upon admission, a summer and full school year without sport focusing on academics, may improve the graduation rate among college football players. High School programs must stop lowering the bar for these and other students who struggle with proficiency exams such as end of course testing during middle and high school. Finally, the NCAA should consider raising their standards of admission or requiring a more accurate way of measuring a recruit's academic performance.

The history, culture and economics of our colleges are clearly intertwined with the nation's desires for sports programs. We are long past the time where we could "reform and restructure intercollegiate athletics on terms congruent with the educational purpose of our institutions" (French 2004, p.119). The institutions are too deep into the big business of entertainment for that to ever happen. Recommendations have been made to take basketball and football away from colleges and create an amateur institution; but this would most likely take a major act of government. Given the current world financial downturn, it is unlikely that this funding would be easily offered and/or removed.

The reality of the “academic-athletic divide” (Bowen & Levin, 2003) is a curious one that continues to widen. What this thesis has shown is that there is a serious disconnect between athletics and academics. This clash is exacerbated by NCAA regulations, as well as poor public education concerning the promotion of solid literacy skills. Without significant changes, these problems will continue to adversely affect the graduation rates of revenue sports, especially Division I football programs.

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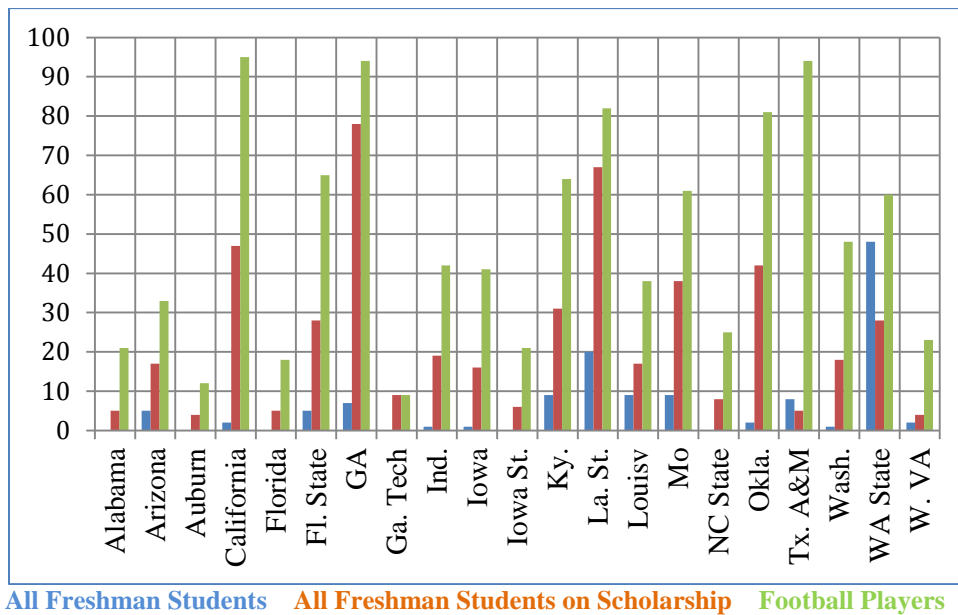
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## APPENDIX A

### DATA

Table 2. Comparison of Admissions. Freshman students, freshman scholarship Athletes and Football players, 31 Division I schools reported\*(Imes)



\*21 schools are shown because the other 10 did not provide information that could be computed into percentages.

Table 3. Average SAT Scores for College Admission and NCAA Minimum Requirements. (SAT College Board)

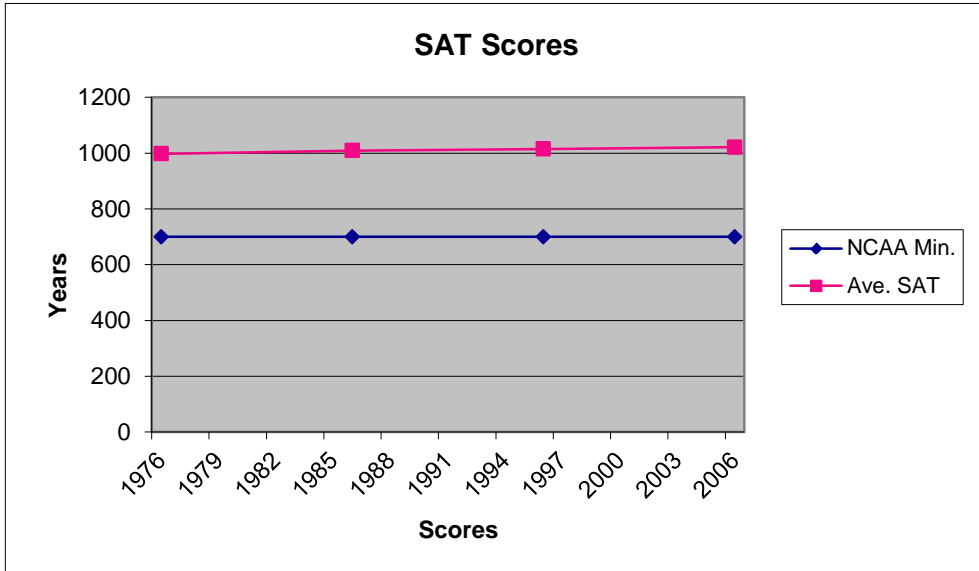


Table 4. Verbal SAT Scores for College Admission and NCAA Minimum Requirements. (SAT College Board and Data from NCAA Clearinghouse standards)

