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2012 Adjusted Graduation Gap:

NCAA Division-I Baseball and Softball

Second Annual Softball/Baseball AGG Report Reveals Continuing Large Gaps between Graduation Rates of Male Full-time Students and Baseball Players

Chapel Hill, NC – April 19, 2012... The College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill released the second-annual installment of its NCAA Division-I Baseball and Softball Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) report today. The 2012 Baseball/Softball AGG report indicates the overall adjusted graduation gap between NCAA D-I baseball players and the general full-time male student body is once again sizable (-18.8), with the gap for “major” NCAA D-I conferences (-30.7) basically unchanged from the 2011 Report’s benchmark (-30.8).

On a much more positive note, the 2012 AGG for NCAA D-I softball players (-3.9) is only slightly greater than last year’s AGG (-3.0). The AGG for “major” NCAA D-I softball conferences remained unchanged at (-6.7). Baseball and softball “mid-major” conference AGGs are consistently smaller. This may be the result of some conferences being comprised of schools

that have lower academic entrance standards, more full-time students drawn from lower socio-economic backgrounds, or simply players who graduate at rates comparable to the full-time student population. Another reason for lower AGGs is mid-major schools may admit athletes who are representative of their general student body. CSRI director and AGG report coauthor Dr. Richard M. Southall noted, “Large or small AGGs are not inherently ‘bad or good.’ However, the AGG Report is useful for open and honest discussions regarding college baseball and softball players’ educational achievement. Everyone involved in higher education and college sport needs to be willing to use such data to address possible reasons why NCAA D-I football, men’s basketball and baseball players do not graduate at rates comparable to full-time male students.”

This year’s Softball and Baseball AGG Report reveals – similar to football and men’s basketball players – a large gap between Federal Graduation Rates (FGRs) of NCAA D-I baseball players and adjusted FGRs of full-time male students. Perhaps baseball’s grueling cross-country schedule, indicative of a *pre-professional* culture in big-time college sport, is a factor associated with large AGGs? “University and athletic administrators need to take a good, hard look at the AGG data and formulate policy to address the situation. Ignoring the data is not an option,” commented Dr. Nagel, associate professor at University of South Carolina, and CSRI Associate Director and AGG co-author.

As is the case in women’s basketball, graduation gaps are not present in all NCAA sports. Once again, the data reveal NCAA D-I softball players graduate at rates comparable to full-time female students at NCAA D-I universities. A significant number of conferences have “positive” or minimally negative AGGs, meaning their softball players actually graduate at rates higher than (or comparable) full-time female students. However, even in softball several “major” softball conferences (i.e. Pac 12, MWC, & WAC) have double-digit AGGs.

Dr. Woody Eckard, University of Colorado-Denver economics professor and AGG chief statistician commented, “We hope college-sport stakeholders use these data to engage in an

informed examination of the Collegiate Model of Intercollegiate Athletics. The question is whether the current climate provides ALL college athletes access to a meaningful education.”

The 2011 Division-I Baseball and Softball AGG Report utilizes the published 4-class average FGR for the 2004-2005 cohort (the latest available) and adjusts the student-body FGR to remove the FGR’s “part-time bias.” This allows for a more realistic comparison of reported NCAA Division-I baseball and softball players’ federal graduation rates with adjusted full-time student federal graduation rates. Results of the baseball report included:

- Twenty-eight of 30 NCAA D-I baseball conferences have negative AGGs. The Southwestern Conference had a “positive” AGG (+2.4), while the Patriot League had no AGG (0.0). In addition, the Northeast (-0.4) and Mid-Eastern (-0.9) had only minimally negative AGGs. In the remaining 26 conferences, men’s baseball player graduation rates are less than the estimated full-time male student-body rate by non-trivial amounts, with 22 conferences having double-digit AGGs.
- The difference in aggregate baseball AGG between major and mid-major conferences is -18.0 points. The significantly lower graduation rates and larger AGGs for major D-I baseball players, strongly suggests these athletes are not as well integrated into the general student body as their mid-major counterparts.
- Not surprisingly, there is a very strong negative correlation (- 0.726) between a conference’s baseball success and AGGs, i.e., greater success is linked to larger gaps (See Table 3.)

Results of the women’s report included:

- Ten softball conferences, nine of which are mid-majors, have positive AGGs. In other words, softball players’ graduation rates in these conferences exceed the estimated full-time female student-body rates. The Big Ten Conference (+4.7) was the only major conference to post a positive AGG.

- However, the two conferences with the largest AGGs (Sun Belt [-17.4], Summit [-17.0]) are also “mid-majors.” In addition, four out of the seven conferences with the greatest AGGs are also mid-majors.

Complete NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap Tables for NCAA Division-I softball and baseball conferences are in the Appendix.

Discussion

Southall noted, “This report’s findings need to be openly and honestly discussed. The college baseball season’s intensity and length is problematic for a number of reasons. These athletes’ commitment is similar to that of ‘professional’ baseball players. The day-to-day grind, with its physical demands, travel and missed class time is bound to affect these players’ education. But the other question we need to discuss is what role does gender or a sport’s culture play in graduation rates. Are baseball players subtly or openly encouraged to focus on their athletic role at the expense of their education? Additionally, baseball players have no choice in the length of season or number of mid-week games. They must try to fit a full-time academic-course load into a demanding practice and game schedule. Intercollegiate athletic administrators are aware of these issues. Our reports simply make public what they already know.”

The authors of the study (CSRI Director: Dr. Richard M. Southall, Dr. E. Woodrow Eckard, and CSRI Associate Director: Dr. Mark S. Nagel) commented “The AGG report suggests the need for additional research into how socio-economic status, educational background, cultural diversity, and athlete-migration patterns may reveal themselves in these data.”

AGG Report Development

In 1990, Congress mandated full disclosure of graduation rates at schools that award athletically-related aid and receive federal financial aid. The Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) reports the percentage of students (including athletes) who graduate within six years from the

school they entered as freshmen. As a result, the FGR provides a measure of the extent to which colleges and universities retain and graduate students, thus providing one measure of whether schools are fulfilling the NCAA's mission of maintaining athletes as an integral part of the student body. The strength of the FGR is its focus on student retention.

Another measure of graduation rates for athletes is called the Graduation Success Rate (GSR). The GSR, a creation of the NCAA, excludes from its calculation athletes—primarily transfers—who leave a particular school prior to graduating (i.e. early), but in good academic standing. The NCAA methodology includes athletes who transfer into an institution in a school's GSR. The GSR is a useful adjunct to the FGR, in that it recognizes athletes (based at least partly on their interests and abilities) may take a different path to graduation than other full-time students. Similar to many part-time students who must work a full-time job while in school, athletes may transfer from one school to another – either of their own accord or at the behest of a coach who encourages them to transfer or “non-renews” their yearly grant-in-aid (GIA). It should also be noted a major limitation of the GSR is the inability to compare athletes' GSR to a similar rate for the general student body. In addition, at times NCAA athletes' Graduation Success Rates and Federal Graduation Rates for the general student body are intermingled in discussions of graduation rates. Unless clearly delineated, such comparisons often confuse the general public and result in a more favorable impression regarding the retention and graduation of college athletes from the university to which they initially enrolled. As long as the purpose and scope of the GSR is clearly delineated, and its limitations are clearly identified, it is a useful indicator of college athletes' persistence in making progress toward a degree.

The Adjusted Graduation Gap was developed to address a limitation of the FGR and provide a context to examine retention rates among various student populations on college campuses. The AGG compares an adjusted graduation rate (AGR) for full-time students and the reported FGR for college athletes from the following NCAA Division-I sports: football – Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) & Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), men's and women's basketball,

softball and baseball. Reports regarding each sport are released at various times during the year. Just as the FGR and GSR have limitations, the AGG is not intended to be used in isolation or refute the FGR or GSR analyses.

The College Sport Research Institute believes all measures pertaining to college athletes' graduation rates should be utilized in any such discussion, since no one measure is "perfect," "better," "more accurate" or somehow "fairer" than another. They simply measure different things. The FGR focuses on an institution's ability to retain the students (including athletes) it initially admits, while the GSR attempts to account for athletes who leave a school that initially admitted them. The AGG's fundamental premise is that contrary to many full-time students, college athletes (especially those in revenue sports) work a full-time job (athletics) while in school. The AGG examines the gaps in graduation rates between these dissimilar students: athletes who work full-time at their sport and those full-time students who usually do not hold down a full-time job.

Historically, standard evaluations of NCAA athlete graduation rates have involved comparisons with general student-body rates presumed to pertain to full-time students. However, at many schools general student body rates include a significant number of part-time students. This is problematic because athletes must be "full-time" and should therefore be compared with other full-time students. The downward "part-timer bias" in the student-body rate distorts the comparison. Because part-time students take longer to graduate, this significantly reduces the measured general student-body graduation rate (FGR). CSRI's Adjusted Graduation Gap addresses this "part-timer bias" using regression-based adjustments for the percentage of part-timers. These estimates then become the basis for the AGG comparison of graduation rates among full-time students.¹

¹ Technical details of the AGG can be found in E. Woodrow Eckard, "NCAA Athlete Graduation Rates: Less than Meets the Eye," *Journal of Sport Management*, January 2010, pp. 45-58.

In fall 2012, CSRI will once again publish AGG data on NCAA D-I football. It is hoped ongoing AGG reports will encourage research and dialogue regarding not only graduation rates, but also the quality and type of educational opportunities afforded college athletes.

CSRI

The College Sport Research Institute is dedicated to conducting and supporting independent data collection and analysis related to college-sport issues. CSRI is one of eight laboratories and institutes within the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In keeping with its mission and goals, the institute sponsors an annual conference dedicated to providing college-sport scholars and intercollegiate athletics practitioners a forum to discuss issues and research related to pressing college-sport issues, publishes a peer-reviewed scholarly journal: *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics (JIIA)*, releases periodic research reports related to college-sport issues, and provides graduate and undergraduate research opportunities for students interested in college-sport research.

For more information regarding CSRI, please visit www.unc.edu/csri or call **(919) 843-9627**.

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Appendix

**Table 1: 2012 Softball NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Report
(2004-2005 4-class Cohort)**

Conference	AGG	
Northeast	10.8	MM
Metro Atlantic	8.3	MM
Southwestern	6.6	MM
Horizon	4.9	MM
Big Ten	4.7	
Mid-American	2.1	MM
Pacific Coast SB	1.9	MM
Mid-Eastern	0.2	MM
America East	0.1	MM
Missouri Valley	0.1	MM
Ohio Valley	-0.6	MM
Big East	-2.6	
Big South	-2.6	MM
Atlantic Coast	-3.3	
Patriot	-4.4	MM
Southeastern	-4.5	
Atlantic 10	-5.3	
Big 12	-5.4	
Big West	-6.0	MM
Southern	-6.3	MM
Atlantic Sun	-7.2	MM
Conference USA	-7.6	
Southland	-8.0	MM
Colonial	-11.2	MM
Pacific-12	-13.5	
Mountain West	-14.8	
Western Athletic	-15.1	
Summit	-17.0	MM
Sun Belt	-17.4	MM
Mean: all conferences =	-3.9	
Mean: majors =	-6.7	
Mean: mid-majors =	-2.4	

**Table 2: 2012 Baseball NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG)
Report - (2004-2005 4-class Cohort)**

Conference	AGG	
Southwestern	2.4	MM
Patriot League	0.0	MM
Northeast	-0.4	MM
Mid-Eastern	-0.9	MM
Horizon League	-3.3	MM
Metro Atlantic	-5.7	MM
Mid-American	-7.4	MM
America East	-8.1	MM
Big South	-12.0	MM
Atlantic Sun	-13.4	MM
Missouri Valley	-13.4	MM
Ohio Valley	-14.2	MM
Atlantic 10	-14.4	
Summit League	-15.9	MM
Southland	-16.0	MM
Southern	-16.2	MM
Big Ten	-17.6	
Big East	-19.1	
Great West	-20.3	MM
Colonial Athletic	-22.8	MM
Conference USA	-25.2	
Sun Belt	-27.8	MM
West Coast	-28.2	MM
Atlantic Coast	-32.2	
Southeastern	-33.8	
Big West	-34.8	MM
Mountain West	-36.4	
Big 12	-41.1	
Western Athletic	-41.4	
Pacific-12	-45.6	
Mean: all conferences = -18.8		
Mean: majors = -30.7		
Mean: mid-majors = -12.9		

Table 3: Baseball Success/Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Correlation Analysis - (2004-2005 4-class Cohort)

Conference	AGG	2011 RPI
Southwestern	2.4	0.416
Patriot League	0.0	0.471
Northeast	-0.4	0.463
Mid-Eastern	-0.9	0.403
Horizon League	-3.3	0.441
Metro Atlantic	-5.7	0.468
Mid-American	-7.4	0.474
America East	-8.1	0.454
Big South	-12.0	0.508
Atlantic Sun	-13.4	0.517
Missouri Valley	-13.4	0.519
Ohio Valley	-14.2	0.464
Atlantic 10	-14.4	0.482
Summit League	-15.9	0.453
Southland	-16.0	0.516
Southern	-16.2	0.507
Big Ten	-17.6	0.500
Big East	-19.1	0.511
Great West	-20.3	0.409
Colonial Athletic	-22.8	0.493
Conference USA	-25.2	0.544
Sun Belt	-27.8	0.519
West Coast	-28.2	0.497
Atlantic Coast	-32.2	0.569
Southeastern	-33.8	0.578
Big West	-34.8	0.512
Mountain West	-36.4	0.509
Big 12	-41.1	0.557
Western Athletic	-41.4	0.510
Pacific-12	-45.6	0.556

- 0.726 = correlation
 Strong Negative Correlation
 < D-I Baseball Success correlated with < AGG