ATHLETICS AND ACADEMICS IN COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS: THE NEW ACADEMIC REFORM POLICY IN THE NCAA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the new Academic Reform Policy being initiated by the NCAA at the Division I-A level of collegiate athletics. This new policy brought a new precedent in collegiate athletics and academics that will be felt for many years to come. This study examined collegiate athletics and academics in general, in order to discover why the NCAA thought this new policy was necessary. This study included research and statistics from the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) website on all divisions of athletics, in particular athletics at the Division I-A level. The researcher focused the study’s attention on Division I-A football programs by contacting head coach’s and administrators in order to obtain first hand views and opinions on the policy and its possible effect towards their respected football programs. The data was collected through a qualitative process by using one-on-one interviews, surveys and mailed questionnaires.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to my Mother and Father for everything they have done for me. Your love and support is unmatched, I am a very lucky son. To my two tremendous and adventurous sisters, my Grandmothers and Grandfathers and Erin Ziech, I love you all and I’ve been blessed to have you all in my life. Aunts, Uncles, cousins, friends and coaches who always made me believe that anything is possible to achieve if you truly want. This milestone in my life would not be possible without you.
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Table of Contents

Abstract………………………………………………………………………………...2
Dedication………………………………………………………………………………...3
Acknowledgments……………………………………………………………………4
Chapter 1 - Introduction…………………………………………………………………..6
  Statement of the Problem…………………………………………………………7
  Purpose and Research Question……………………………………………….….8
  Definition of Terms……………………………………………………………….9
  Delimitation and Limitations…………………………………………………...10
Chapter 2 - Literature Review………………………...…………………………………11
Chapter 3 - Method…………………………………………….......................................23
  Study Design…………………………………………………………….23
  Procedures, Instruments, Reliability, Validity…………………………..26
  Data Analysis……………………………………………………………26
  Ethical Issues…………………………………………………………….27
Chapter 4 – Analysis…………………………………………………………………….28
Chapter 5 - Summary…………….……………………………………………………...35
  Discussion…………………………………………………………………..37
  Recommendations……………………………………………………39
References………………………………………………………….……………………40
Appendix………………………………..…………………………………….………....42
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Are collegiate student-athletes not graduating from college at the same success rates as regular collegiate students? This topic is a concern that is emerging in universities’ athletic programs as certain collegiate sports obtain a level of popularity and power that exceeds the university it represents. With this level of concern comes a new Academic Reform Policy (APR) being initiated by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for athletic programs at the Division I level. The policy holds colleges, universities and their athletic programs responsible for the academic success of its student-athletes. Penalties for not achieving acceptable academic success could be loss of scholarships and or exclusion from being able to participate in postseason play. This is an aggressive stance by the NCAA, as in previous years the student-athlete would have been solely punished for poor academic performance. Presently, the athletic program itself is being held accountable for the academic success of all its student-athletes.

What this means to athletic programs and its coaches is that coaches must now pay attention to the level of readiness of each freshmen or transfer student-athlete that comes into the program. A freshmen with low ACT or SAT scores, may now be viewed as a risk because he or she might affect the academic success of a program which will hinder that particular sport, even if the freshmen is not expected to participate in the sport that season. At each level of NCAA athletics, student-athletes have academic success when involved in some athletic programs then those involved with other athletic
programs. Which raises the question of why some athletic program’s student-athletes enjoy more academic success than those involved with other collegiate sports? Previous literature on this topic has examined this particular situation and the researcher has used past reviews of the topic to expand the study to include all levels of NCAA athletic programs and the academic success and graduation rates of student-athletes. The obvious underlying goal is that universities want their athletic programs and student-athletes to have academic success and graduate from their institution. Some universities are known for the success of their athletic program. If these programs were to lose scholarships or be banned from post season play it not only hurts the athletic program, but the university’s overall image.

*Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this study was to examine collegiate athletics and academics to determine why the NCAA found it necessary to initiate a new aggressive academic policy. By doing this, the researcher will show whether the Academic Reform Policy created by NCAA leaders is needed at some levels of collegiate athletics and not needed at others. The researcher looked at all collegiate sports and whether certain collegiate sports have more academic success and higher graduation rates then others. This is a concern because some collegiate sports have a higher level of national recognition and because of this; certain athletic teams mean more to universities because they bring in more revenue, income and national prominence to the university itself. In particular, the researcher has surveyed Division I-A football programs and the impact of the new academic policy has on particular universities or colleges. The researcher attempted to find themes and attitudes from coaches and administrators who have direct contact with
the academic policy and its positive or negative impact within Division I-A football and athletics in general.

*Research Questions*

Does the academic success of collegiate student-athletes depend on what sport he or she is involved in at the collegiate level? Will the NCAA’s new Academic Reform Policy cause athletic programs, and in particular football, to take academics more seriously and pay attention to the academic success and graduation rates of its players? Why is there a difference in academic success with student-athletes involved at different levels of athletic participation in college, and is this reflected in the graduation rates of those student-athletes?

*Hypothesis*

There is a relation between a student-athletes choice of collegiate sports and the level he or she chooses to play in with the academic success and graduation rates of each student-athlete. The new Academic Reform Policy will have a positive affect on collegiate athletic programs academic success and graduation rates of its student-athletes.
Definition of Terms

ACADEMIC REFORM POLICY: The new standard for what Division I-A athletic programs will be measured by to determine the academic success or lack of in any sport.

DIVISION I-A: Universities and colleges that can give out full athletic academic scholarships to student-athletes.

DIVISION I-AA & DIVISION II: Universities and colleges that can give out certain number of full and partial athletic academic scholarships.

DIVISION III: Universities and colleges that are not allowed to give out scholarships for athletics.

NCAA: The governing body of intercollegiate sports in America.

STUDENT-ATHLETE: A collegiate student-athlete is a person who participates in a collegiate sport while pursuing a college degree.
Delimitation and Limitations

Delimitations for this study are the researcher’s ability to speak with coaches or administrators at the Division I-A level, and get their thoughts and opinions on the Academic Reform Policy and the effect it could have in collegiate sports, in particular with college football. In addition, many universities, at all NCAA levels of competition, surrounded the researcher with successful athletic programs. These programs have academic success with their student-athletes. The research pool, was beneficial because the researcher was able to research athletic programs at all levels of NCAA competition and make comparisons from the data gathered.

Limitations to this study are the fact that not every university and its athletic teams were examined. Therefore, there are certain athletic programs, which have a high level of academic success and graduation rates among its student-athletes that will not be recognized. The other side to this delimitation is that athletic programs with lower academic success and graduation rates were not recognized as well. In addition, the timing of this study coincided with a hectic time in collegiate football, especially at the Division I-A level. The coaches and administrators who are being targeted by the researcher were unavailable to contribute to the study because of their commitments to recruiting and spring practices.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher reviewed the literature by gathering data and articles that were prevalent to the subject of academics and athletics. The articles ranged from graduation rates of student-athletes at Division I level to a comparison between student-athletes and non-student athletes at the collegiate level. The importance of academics in collegiate athletics was brought to light this past year when NCAA President Myles Brand initiated a new Academic Reform Policy; it will also be referred to as the incentive-disincentives program, aimed at collegiate athletics and its student-athletes. This policy has been in the works since 1989, when a survey by the Knight Foundation Commission found that of the 106 Division I-A institutions, 48 basketball programs and 19 football programs had under 30 percent graduation rates (Knight Foundation Commission, 2001).

This view has changed 180 degrees in 15 years. Back then college athletics was simply another part of the amateur sports world. Collegiate athletics has become more of a business for both the student-athlete and the university it represents. Student-athletes in some sports view the university only as a stepping stone to professional sports and choose to stay one or two years before leaving to try and become a professional athlete; many never returning to get a college degree. This is the opposite for football players playing in
the lower divisions of NCAA football such as Division II or III. The opportunity to play professionally is slim so the choice to concentrate on academics and a career is placed as a higher priority. The new academic reform policy being initiated by the NCAA places the burden of academic success squarely on the shoulders of the athletic programs, coaches and more importantly on the student-athletes. Programs that do not meet the NCAA graduation rate criteria may be banned from post season play for a significant amount of time or have the number of available scholarships cut. The university has something to lose with this academic policy as well. Low graduation rates can cost universities resources, limit its ability to meet educational objectives and give the university the image that they can not meet the educational, social and emotional needs of its student-athletes (Adams, 2003).

Additionally, state funded universities which seek funds for its academic and athletic programs, may lose out on performance-based funding because of its poor graduation rates compared with other state funded universities. The point of this statement is to show that the university does benefit from a student-athlete staying in school and graduating. The coaches and players have something to lose by not achieving academic success. Athletes play collegiate sports with the goal in mind to win and participate in post season play. By not achieving mandated academic and graduation success everything the players and coaches have worked towards will have been wasted. A university or college benefit both from student-athletes achieving academic success and graduating and from the athletic success of the program. In order for the coaches and players to succeed, they must have everything; a high graduation rate, academic success and athletic success in order for the hard work and effort to truly pay off.
This is where the new academic policy really starts taking form and showing exactly how a university or athletic program will be judged of it academic success. The NCAA uses a set equation to determine the Academic Progress Rate (APR) of an athletic program. A team’s APR score is determined by dividing the maximum number of points possible by the number actually earned (Understanding Academic Progress Rate Reports, 2005). The equation is very basic. A scholarship student-athlete can obtain two points each semester. One point for being eligible and for being retained for the following semester, a student meeting both this criteria would be awarded two out of two possible points. If this same student-athlete did it again the next semester, he or she would be awarded the same amount of points for a two semester total of four out of four. At the end of each year, the NCAA calculates a team’s total points for each athlete and divides that by the number of scholarship athletes on the team and multiplies that percentage by a 1000 in order to get the total points that team acquired. The number a team must get to be considered, having academic success, is above 925 or 92.5 percent. A team with a point below this number would come under the penalties or restrictions that were mentioned above.

After calculating the numbers for the 2003-2004 season, the NCAA found that of the 5,100 Division I-A teams, more than 7 percent of the teams were not meeting the new academic standards. Additionally, more than 50 percent of the Division I-A have at least one team that is not meeting academic standards (Brand, 2005). NCAA President Myles Brand states in an article for the NCAA website that the new academic policy is not a witch hunt to find academically struggling athletic programs, but to facilitate a change towards academic policies that are a necessity in collegiate athletics. Brand states:
The goal is to change behavior, because even more restrictive penalties await programs that do not change. For the commitment the student-athlete makes to the athletic success of the program, the institution owes a commitment to that student-athlete for his or her academic success (Brand, 2005).

The NCAA is trying to make the athletic programs part of the institutions again, instead of their own branch off the school. College and universities want to be associated with great athletic programs, they always have, but now there is that stigma in society that NCAA sports are becoming bigger than the school that they are associated with. These new standards being enforced and the concerted effort to change the behavior and focus of athletic programs will help in restoring this bond between athletics and academics and the institution which does represent both. With this being said, there are still conflicting notions towards whether all institutions really feel this way.

This leads to the next aspect to consider, whether or not the university or college is looking out for the best interest of its student-athletes? There are skeptics that believe university officials both in academia and athletics see the dollar sign as the main value instead of well being of the student-athletes. To them, there are always more student-athletes who can help the athletic programs and the university on the athletic field, which in the end helps them out financially and provides a great recruiting tool for potential students (Thelin, 2002). The success of a university’s athletic program can warrant the attention of non-athletes who decided to attend the university in order to attend games and cheer for the team they have watched and rooted for over the years. This type of attention and devotion to an athletic program can decide for a non-athlete where he or she
wants to attend college without having academics and a certain career in mind (Mixon, 1995). Mixon (1995) refers to this as “advertisement effect”, which is way a university can attract both student-athletes and non-student athletes to its campus.

In some cases, the academic success and therefore the graduation success of student-athletes at some universities does not matter as much because their athletic programs previous success will always bring students to its campus and athletic programs. In an article for Chronicle of Higher Education (1999), Vanderbilt Chancellor Joe B. Wyatt stated this about universities and athletic programs. “Although we offer academic services to student-athletes, college administrators have not emphasized and reinforced academic success for those students nearly as much as we have athletics success.”

Perhaps we've been too eager for more "wins" and the publicity and financial benefits that often follow (Wyatt, 1999). This is what student-athletes will sometimes face when they attend a university that sees dollar signs in the place of its athletes. How are they supposed to achieve academic success and graduate when their academic interests are not being looked after in a proper manner? This obviously does not apply to all universities, but it does exist and is a problem that needs to be dealt with to ensure that student-athletes are having every opportunity to achieve academic success and receive a diploma.

A student-athlete graduating from college can depend on many variables. The first variable is what type of academic background the athlete comes from. This is true for all NCAA institutions at every level. A student-athlete may come from high school or junior college with acceptable grades and qualifying ACT or SAT scores, but is not ready
academically to handle the load that is expected at the college level. In the article *Academic Fit of Student-Athletes: An analysis of NCAA division I-A graduation rates*, the authors wrote about the open-enrollment policy of universities from the World War II era to the end of the 1980’s. This open-enrollment policy allowed coaches to recruit any student-athletes to their institutions regardless of their academic ability. One such documented case involved Dexter Manley of Oklahoma State, who made it through college while suffering from illiteracy (Ferris, 2004). This open-enrollment policy brought about the 1990 *Students-Right-to-Know-Act*, which President George Bush eventually signed into law. The thought process behind the bill was that universities, under the eye of public, would now be held accountable for educating its student-athletes and providing the necessary academic resources in order to make this happen (Ferris, 2004).

The second variable is the student-athletes own social and academic integration level which influences their ability to learn in a college setting (Adams, 2003). In the article *The Impact of Intercollegiate Athletics on Graduation Rates Among Major NCAA Division I Universities*, the authors write about student-athletes academic and social integration at the university level. Adams (2003) defines academic integration as the development of a strong affiliation with the college academic environment both in the classroom and outside the classroom (Adams, 2003). This type of integration might include anything from participating in classroom discussions or projects with regular students to going outside the classroom in order to participate with an on-campus group that has some correlation with the class the student-athlete is involved in. The second part of this directly ties in social integration, which the authors define as the development of a
strong affiliation with a college’s social milieu, both in the classroom and outside of class (Adams, 2003). The integration aspect of college that the authors’ mention directly correlates with the graduation rate of a student-athlete because of the direct relationship a student-athlete feels towards a university; which has given the student-athlete much more than an opportunity to compete in athletics.

The third variable mentioned is directly tied in with a student-athletes academic and social integration level. Adams (2003) writes that there is a direct correlation between a student-athletes academic and social integration and the student-athletes academic persistence to stay in school and graduate. As student-athletes academic and social integration increases, their overall persistence increases as well (Adams, 2003). A student-athlete might be more inclined to leave a university to pursue other athletic options (a professional sports career) because he or she does not feel a certain connection with a university. A coach will always try to sell a university on its, “family atmosphere”, but the truth is that a student-athlete, or a non-student athlete, will only get out of a university what he or she puts in. If a student-athlete sees the university only as a stepping stone there is a good chance that the only type of integration he or she will take part in is in the athletic capacity. Thus limiting his or her ability to have academic success and lessen the chance of him or her graduating from the university.

The success of an athletic program can also play a determining role in student-athletes graduating from college. The article “Bowls Versus Playoffs: The Impact on Football Player Graduation Rates in the National Collegiate Athletic Association” examines whether the success of a collegiate football program plays a role in the graduation rates of the program’s athletes. The article examined athletes at the both the
Division I-A and I-AA level. Results indicated that at the Division I-A level, a program’s success did affect student-athletes graduation rates. While at the Division I-AA level, there was no direct correlation between a program’s success and its academic success (Amato, 1996). So why would there be correlation at the Division I-A level and not at the Division I-AA level? One main determining factor is the post season schedule for Division I-A football programs and those of I-AA (this also plays a role in Division II and III). Programs at the Division I-A level participate in post season bowl games, in addition to fact that the NCAA is entertaining the possibility of adding a 12th game to the regular season schedule; further extending a team’s regular season in addition to the possibility of extending a team’s season because of the possible bowl game. Teams’ that participate in a bowl games extended their season by a month or more. These bowl games come in December and the beginning of January, which is during finals of most universities and colleges. Student-athletes would normally be able to concentrate on their studies during this time, but with more practices and another game added to the season there is more athletic distraction for the student-athletes when they should be concentrating on finals and end of semester projects. At the Division I-AA, II, and III level there is a playoff system for post-season play. This means that the teams that make it into the post-season and then to the national championship, their season ends in the middle of December. This allows student-athletes whose teams do make the post-season to finish out their season and still have time to concentrate on their academics and upcoming finals. The academic success of student-athletes participating in bowl games depends on how much emphasis coaches’ place on academics and athletics and whether
or not they can find an equal balance of the two in order for the athletes to succeed in both areas.

The role of athletics within a university, and the role that athletics plays in the development of student-athletes has been a highly debated topic. There are those who encourage athletic participation in college and the certain traits it instills within a student-athlete. In contrast, there are people who oppose collegiate sports, instead taking the view that college is meant for the sole purpose of obtaining a degree. In the article “A Comparison of Athletes and Non-Athletes at Highly Selective Colleges: Academic Performance and Personal Development” the authors list the skills that student-athletes gain by competing in collegiate athletics. From improving one’s interpersonal skills and leadership abilities, to forgoing racial and ethnic backgrounds in order to form bonds with students’, faculty and alumni on and off campus (Aries, 2004). The student-athletes participation in college athletics helps with the development of these skills. The other side of this argument is that the amount of time a collegiate sport demands from a student-athlete does not allow them to fully concentrate on school or getting good grades. It does not matter that a student-athlete might be developing other skills because he or she is not developing the skills that are needed in order to ensure academic success and the ability to graduate with a degree. There is also the perception that students who participate in sports gain an unfair advantage in the admissions process because of their ability to play a collegiate sport (Aries, 2004). All these points bring about the question. Does playing a college sport give an athlete an advantage in life or take it away by limiting his or her academic success?
There is documented proof that students’ participating in collegiate athletics do under perform in the classroom, but the authors do point out that the student-athletes’ who do “under perform” in the classroom are usually participating in high profile sports; such as football and basketball (Aries, 2004). There is also the problem of student-athletes not growing socially because of their lack of integration with non-student athletes. There is the perception of athletes integrating with only other athletes, in short, they form their own subculture on campus and do not interact with those outside of this culture. This is more prevalent in larger universities and colleges where classrooms and campuses are larger thus an athlete is not constantly forced to participate with others in classroom projects or on-campus organizations. As stated earlier, social integration is one aspect that directly correlates with a student-athletes academic success and consequently his or her graduating from the university or college. Aries (2004) looked at three research questions that directly tied in with a student-athletes academic performance in college:

1. Do student-athletes differ from non-student athletes in their entering academic qualifications?  
2. Do student-athletes see group membership posing greater difficulties to academic performance than members of non-athletic extracurricular groups?  
3. Do athletes underachieve relative to students who enter college with similar backgrounds and academic credentials?

In response to the first two questions, the authors found that student-athletes did have lower academic qualifications in contrast to non-athletes when entering college (Aries, 2004). The second question found that student-athletes did experience a harder time achieving academic success because of their involvement with a collegiate sport. The third question was a push, as student-athletes were found to have the same amount of
academic success as non-athletes who entered college with similar backgrounds and academic skills (Aries, 2004). Student-athletes need to do more than just the bare minimum to succeed at the university level because many of them are coming into the process a step or two behind the non-athletes. It is also the responsibility of the university or college to provide the necessary academic and counseling services in order to help those who need the extra help to succeed. In the end, the academic success of a student-athlete comes down to his or her own determination to succeed. In some cases a student-athlete will be playing catch-up to non-athlete because their collegiate sport demands a certain amount of his or her time that can not be directed to classes and assignments.

From this, a question is raised; why do some athletic programs and their student-athletes enjoy more success than others? One area that might be a cause of academic success is how much emphasis a coach places on academic success. Amato, (1996) stated that the academic success of student-athletes could depend on the athletic success that a program is experiencing. Athletes involved in a sport that is competing at a high level and winning its games, matches or meets will have a choice to make on whether to keep pursuing academic and athletic success or concentrate solely on athletics. Here is a situation where an academic minded coach will help steer the athlete in the right direction to ensure both academic and athletic success is achieved. A coach who decides to concentrate on athletics and does not pay the same attention to the academic side of his or her athletes’ schedules will be in trouble when the NCAA places its incentives and disincentives academic policy into full effect. Again, if the coach does not have the academic interests of the student-athletes in mind then it is in the hands of the student-athlete to take the necessary steps in order to achieve academic success in addition to his
or her role in athletics. The ability to make this decision can be traced back to the academic skills a student-athlete has when coming into college and the ability the student-athlete has to integrate academically and socially outside of the athletic program. In an article by Gaston-Gayles (2004), the author writes that even though graduation rates are above the average of past years, there are still athletic groups that are not graduating at the current average. The author stated that commitment to athletics by a student-athlete was negatively correlated with that athlete’s GPA (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). Even though an athlete might really want to achieve academic success, when it comes down to achieving academic or athletic success the chance of the athlete choosing athletics is fairly high. According to Gaston-Gayles (2004), these student-athletes are called failure acceptors, meaning the athletes are not motivated to approach success or avoid failure. The opposite of this is success-oriented athletes, these athletes are motivated to approach success, but not avoid failure. The success-oriented athlete, when faced with choosing between academics or athletics, chooses to not fail in either athletics or academics, but instead concentrates on doing both equally well and achieving success in each area (Gaston-Gayles, 2004). The ultimate goal is that every student-athlete would come into college prepared and ready to become that success-oriented student-athlete. The reality is, that is not happening, nor does it appear to be a trend that will start anytime soon. With the new incentive-disincentive academic reform policy coming into play a coach may now have to try and find these success-oriented student-athletes in order to keep up both athletically and academically to the new standards being established.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Study Designs

The study design gathered the thoughts and opinions from Division I-A football coaches or football program administrators on the Academic Reform Policy and its affect on their program and student-athletes. The study was done using a qualitative purposeful sampling method. Qualitative method was used when surveying coaches and administrators at the Division I-A level to find out their feelings and beliefs about the new Academic Reform Policy and the effect it will have in collegiate sports, in particular football. Each method of survey recorded how coaches and student-athletes view themselves and academics within their athletic world.

The researcher in this study used a cross-sectional survey design. This method of design allowed the researcher to examine current attitudes and practices of coaches and administrators towards the new Academic Reform Policy being implemented by the NCAA. The qualitative survey was sent to select coaches and administrators at the Division I-A level that have direct contact with that institution’s football program.

The advantage of using this method is that the researcher was able to collect and measure data on current academic practices by college coaches and athletic programs in a short amount of time. A disadvantage of using this method was that the researcher used
thoughts and opinions from one particular Division I-A sport, football, and not from every Division I-A sport who may have different views and opinions on the new Academic Reform Policy.

*Procedures*

The researcher was able to use statistics already compiled by the NCAA in order to choose what schools to use in the research. Universities or colleges were selected by athletic success (both wins and loses), academic reputation and graduation rates of the student-athletes in all sports. A list of universities or colleges was compiled from the NCAA official web site. Once the list was completed, the researcher sent, via e-mail, the following components:

1. An introduction letter, introducing the researcher and explaining the research
2. A survey of open ended questions about the Academic Reform Policy and the effect it will have on that school’s football program
3. Contact information of researcher if there is any questions

After the coaches or administrators returned their surveys, the researcher took each respondents, respected views and opinions and compared and contrasted them to the other completed surveys in order to find topics and themes on the reform policy.
Instruments

The study was a qualitative style of research. The coaches’ and administrators surveyed were given a qualitative survey with five open-ended questions dealing with their opinions and views on the new Academic Reform Policy and the possible effects it may have in certain areas of their programs.
Reliability

To ensure internal reliability, the following strategies were used:

1. The researcher used open-ended questions and surveys. These were viewed and approved by experts in both the coaching field and the academic field.
2. The researcher set the alpha level for the Likert style survey at .05.

Validity

To ensure internal validity, the following strategies were used:

1. The content was viewed for validity by asking experts if the questions being asked represent the correct areas of athletics and academic policies in college and whether all necessary aspects are covered. The experts were: Todd Glaser, Head Football Coach Marietta College, Tony Jennison, Academic Coordinator Marietta College, Debra Higgins, Director of Academic Resource Center Marietta College.
2. Construct validity was measured by the use of statistical measures and how the coaches or administrators respond to the open ended questions.
**Data Analysis Procedures**

The data was organized and reviewed. Qualitative data was collected and examined to see how each coach or administrator’s response compared with one another.

**Preliminary Results**

The researcher expected to prove that Division I-A football coaches and administrators had a positive outlook on the new Academic Reform Policy and that it had a positive influence, especially with football, at the Division I-A collegiate athletics level.

**Potential Ethical Issues**

The researcher obtained permission from each university or college’s head football coach or Director of Football Operations before conducting the survey. All coaches, administrators and institutions being examined were anonymous and confidential. A number will represent each aspect of the survey in the research so no names of schools, players or coaches will be used.
CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Interpretation of the Survey Findings

The findings from each survey represent the feelings of NCAA football coaches and administrators’ outlooks and attitudes towards the Academic Reform Policy being established by the NCAA. The majority of the responses to the surveys conveyed a positive outlook towards the reform policy and the overall impact that it can have. The coaches and administrators, who tended to have a negative outlook towards the reform policy, did find some positive aspects to the policy, but felt that at the moment the negatives outweighed the positives. The surveys were composed of five basic questions that were aimed at obtaining the coach’s or administrator’s overall feelings for the reform policy and how he or she felt it would or could affect certain situations within their football program. From the survey findings, the researcher was able to develop five themes that directly correlated with the majority view towards each particular question. These themes were what the researcher deemed to be the majority opinion or response to each question. It should be noted that these responses and views do not represent the entire Division I-A athletic teams, but only the ones within football who chose to respond to the surveys sent to them by the researcher.
Outcomes

This section addresses the outcomes and feelings expressed by the respondents of the surveys. The section was broken up into five sections, with each section representing a particular question. The selected results of each question represent the majority expression or feelings towards the topic. Results that go against the majority and are documented are noted. The quotes and feelings of the respondents were obtained by the researcher with the assurance that confidentiality would be used and respected. From the five questions and the majority responses to each question the following themes were generated from Division I-A football coaches or football programs administrators on the 2005 Academic Reform Policy.
Respondent Survey Outcomes

Coaches had mixed initial reactions towards the Academic Reform Policy

The respondent first reaction towards the reform policy was that of mixed reactions. Respondents felt that the policy had the ability to be great and a positive tool for college athletics, but additionally there was also a level of skepticism as to whether or not it was ready to be the tool the NCAA wanted it to be. A sample of comments from respondents on their first overall reaction to the policy:

*My initial response to the new policy was skepticism. I wonder if the policy will solve what it is intended to right away. I believe the concept is good and it will work, but some areas need to be ironed out.*

*I think the reform policy is a good concept. It needs to be monitored so that the appropriate measures are used. All sports are different and they need to be treated differently.*

*It is an eye opening policy that is the stressing the right things for academics in collegiate sports.*

*It is a good program and policy, but it will affect other schools and conferences more than it does our conference and institution.*

*Some of the kinks need to be worked out, but I believe it has a very good possibility of creating a fair and honest system for schools to abide by.*

*I think it will have positive results after it gets going and programs start to understand it more.*
Coaches felt there would be potential effects towards recruiting student-athletes.

Previously, the researcher mentioned the fact that with the new policy coaches and programs were now going to take more responsibility towards a student-athletes academic success. The question to coaches and administrators was whether or not this added emphasis towards academics would have an effect on recruiting. A sample of responses:

*Yes, our recruiting techniques will have to be altered a bit to make sure that we meet the new NCAA guidelines.*

*We have always strived to recruit the best possible student-athletes; with high marks in both academics and athletics this new policy will stress this idea more.*

*Yes!*

*The change will come in the way our support staff views potential recruits, it will now be more of a balanced issue between a recruits academic vs. athletic success.*

*Yes, to a degree.*

*Absolutely, we need to recruit as good a student as possible. I also think maturity comes into play...who will strive in a college environment and who will miss their mommy or daddy, girlfriend, dog or just want to go home.*
New policy will have effect on recruiting “academic risks”

With the new emphasis on academic progress rates, and schools being awarded points for a student-athletes academic success or a student-athlete graduating; there is now the possibility that a coach will not target a recruit who could be viewed as an “academic risk” because of the potential to bring down a program’s academic success rate. The respondents’ comments on this possibility:

*There will be a concern towards players who are deemed “academic risks”. Programs must decide if they feel confident enough to help ensure that a student-athlete with this label can have academic success.*

*Yes, but it will only change our views towards potential academic risk student-athletes to a certain level or degree.*

*We will keep recruiting student-athletes regardless, but we will now rely more upon our academic personnel to help these certain student-athletes achieve success.*

*Yes, we will put more consideration into recruiting student-athletes that are risks. We already stress the importance of academics in our recruiting process: This new policy emphasizes the importance even more.*

*Yes!*

*More then ever, coaches will need to be more aware of a recruit’s academic background in addition to their athletic background and whether or not a coach feels that an academic risk recruit can achieve academic success in college.*
Coaches felt the policy provided biasness towards teams with different roster sizes

One area of the academic policy that is under questions is whether or not the policy is biased towards athletic roster sizes. For example: if football loses two scholarships twenty eight, it might not hurt as much as a basketball program losing two scholarships out of eight. The research posed this question of bias towards coaches and administrators within a football program. Their responses are listed:

*There will have to be adjustments because it will be different for some sports then it will be others.*

*Yes, there are unfair things about it. Mainly, it is unfair that a school is penalized for players leaving early to go pro and it is unfair that the school is penalized if a players transfers in good academic standing.*

*I believe that it will hurt every sport.*

*At the moment it seems unfair. Hopefully it will be tweaked and modified in order to make it not this way.*

*Yes, the policy does seem unfair in that it hurts teams more which are smaller in size.*

*Yes, I am worried about sports like baseball which have smaller rosters and athletes are drafted right out of college at any time.*
Coaches felt there was no need to alter current academic policies

The respondents were surveyed to see if the new academic policy would affect their programs current academic policy that was already in place. Many of the respondents felt that the policies that were currently in place were good enough to ensure academic success even with the new guidelines from the policy; a sample of their responses follow:

*It has always been our policy to keep a tight reign on our athletes academically. I think it will alter who we are willing to take in the first place more than anything else.*

*No, we will continue to recruit, support and matriculate quality students and individuals who can compete athletically at the Division I-A level. We have always had extremely high academic standards and expectations of it teams and student-athletes and now other schools will have to raise their standards to compete on our level.*

*We will keep doing what we already doing. We have very good mechanisms for helping our student-athletes achieve academic success and we will continue to do so.*

*No, we will keep doing what we have been doing in regards to our academic programs. We will however attempt to find a way to use the academic policy within our academic system to our advantage.*

*Continue our current academic programs, but we must monitor the new system now as much as we monitor our student-athletes.*

Though the responses show only respondents with similar views and themes, there were respondents to the survey who felt the opposite towards the themes and views above. However, these responses were not repeatedly mentioned enough to form a majority opinion. Therefore no themes could be generated to show these opposing views.
In conclusion, the researcher reviewed each chapter and the responses to the surveys in order to discuss and summarize the topic and to offer recommendations to future researchers on the topic of the academic reform policy.

Summary

In 2004, the NCAA took an aggressive stance towards academics within Division I-A collegiate athletics. This aggressive stance featured a new academic policy which placed the responsibility of a student-athlete’s academic success squarely on the shoulders of the institution and athletic program he or she participated in. The policy, referred to as the Academic Reform Policy (APR), used a point system to determine what type of academic success a program was having or not having. A program that fell below the certain point level, in this case 925 out of 1000 possible points, would face certain penalties that would directly affect that particular sport. The NCAA wanted to put the focus back on the term “student-athlete”, with the first part of that, student, being the word the NCAA wanted to some Division I-A athletic programs to start being more aware of.

The researcher first examined the overall outlook on NCAA athletics, including perspectives on why certain divisions of the NCAA did not need an academic policy as
opposed to Division I-A which the NCAA believes does. First, at the Division I-A level, collegiate athletics is just as much of a business for the NCAA and the institutions. At the lower levels of collegiate athletics, sports might be popular at the school, but they are not going to bring money to the NCAA or a representing institution like a men’s basketball or football team will at the Division I-A level.

Second, lower levels of collegiate athletics do not need to worry about the pro factor every year the way some sports do at Division I-A. The NCAA needed to find a way to get these athletic programs to put more emphasis on the word “graduate” in order to try and deter so many athletes from leaving school early. In Division I-A football, a player can not go pro until he has waited three years after his high school graduation. For most players, this means that after their junior year at college, they can decide to go pro. With the new policy, coaches will need to stay after the athletes who are contemplating going pro after their junior year or risk losing APR points that could affect their team the following year.

The last reason for the policy at the Division I-A level is that NCAA President Myles Brand felt that there needed to be a change in the attitude and behavior at the Division I-A level. In Division I-AA, II and III, the majority of the athletes do not have the same attitude towards college as a certain population of athletes at Division I-A. In Division I-A, there are athletes who view college as only a stepping stone towards the next level of sports, going pro. Athletes at the lower levels think of the next level in sports, but in only a few cases do athletes go the next level without staying in school for four years.
The coaches and administrators who were surveyed had different views and opinions on the new policy. Some colleges or universities and their athletic programs will be affected more than others. The key to the program is adapting to it and trying to utilize in order to stay above the 925 line and away from sanctions and penalties. In order to do this, some coaches and administrators will have to change their way of doing things within their programs and their overall attitude towards the policy. It will be this behavioral change that President Brand spoke of that will determine what schools and athletic programs adapt to the policy and start making sure that it does not affect their programs in a negative way.

Discussion

The topic of academics and athletics is one that will always be in the forefront in collegiate athletics, but especially at the Division I-A level. With an increased amount of attention now being placed upon a program's academic success, athletic teams must now realize that in order to reach a certain level of athletic success a certain amount of academic success must go along with it. This is a step that for many years was largely ignored as institutions and athletic programs aimed their targets for the season at an athletic goal and not a combination goal; for example a football national championship and a team G.P.A above a 3.2. That is not to take away from collegiate athletic programs that do have and do accomplish this goal. What will make these next upcoming seasons different from those of the past? Athletic programs must start thinking towards the same goals. In can not be one program having all the athletic success, one all academic success and one doing a little bit of both. Instead of a certain number of teams who might aim
towards a combination goal of athletic and academic success, all teams at the Division I-A level must now make this their goal. By not having a combination goal, a team which might achieve a maximum level of athletic success but below the minimum of academic success, will lose opportunities to achieve that level of athletic success again. By initiating this academic policy, the NCAA is now putting the emphasis of back on the “student” part of student-athlete. This brings college athletics back to the days when student-athletes meant something and “going pro” was only something an athlete did when he or she was done with the academic aspect of their collegiate career. This is not to say that the policy will not deter student-athletes from leaving college early to start their athletic career.

At first, the researcher saw this policy as a way for the NCAA to have even more control over athletic programs and their athletes. Instead, it is almost the other way around. The NCAA is actually putting the control in the coaches and administrators hands and letting them have control over their athletic teams and programs. It is time for coaches to do what they say they are going to do every time they recruit a potential student-athlete. If they promise to give them four great years of athletics and a good education and a college degree, then they need to step up and starting living up to their word. If not, the NCAA has a policy in place that will make sure they do eventually take the necessary steps. Are there college coaches who do make the effort and work with student athletes towards achieving academic success and graduating? Yes, the majority of coaches probably do, but the new policy ensures that the coaches who are not doing that at the present moment will face certain consequences that could harm their program and its student-athletes.
Recommendations for Future Research

In future research on the topic dealing with NCAA and the new Academic Policy, the researcher recommends to set up a longer timeline in order to do more personal surveys and taking advantage of the APR rates for each institution. Use past and present figures to determine whether or not the new policy has been effective in the manner which the NCAA intended it to be. Find out what schools or athletic programs have had low APR rates and were punished by the NCAA and whether or not this had any effect on those programs the following year. This topic and area of interest will only continue to grow and in the future information will be more readily available as schools and athletic programs at the Division I-A level will need to have personnel that deal only with the academic policy and the APR rates of every athletic program at the university or college.


Brand, Myles (2005). Reform will be successful only if institutions enact change. The NCAA News Online. Retrieved March 4, 2005 from www2.ncaa.org/media_and_events/association_news/ncaa_news_online/2005/02_28


APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER TO COACHES/ADMINISTRATORS

Dear Mr.

Good morning. My name is Dan Larson, I am in the final stage of completing my Master of Education at Marietta College, Marietta, OH, where I am an academic counselor and assistant football coach. My thesis topic is "Academics and Athletics: The New Academic Policy in the NCAA". What I am asking for is your cooperation in answering these questions below. Your answers do not need to be elaborate and all answers/responses are confidential and will not be revealed to anyone but myself, the researcher. I appreciate your help and input as I search to find answers to my questions. I hope that everything is going well for you and your program and best of luck with recruiting and during your spring practices.

Sincerely,

Dan Larson
Running Backs/Strength and Conditioning Coordinator
Marietta College
(740) 376-4867 Office
(740) 376-4440 Fax
APPENDIX B

ACADEMIC REFORM POLICY SURVEY

1. What was your initial reaction to the NCAA’s new "academic reform" policy?

2. Will this policy affect the way you recruit potential student-athletes?

3. Will it make you think twice about recruiting a student-athlete who might be viewed as an academic risk?

4. Does the new policy seem unfair? Is it tailored to hurt sports in which roster sizes are smaller? For example: Taking scholarships from a team with 20 athletes then a roster with 80 athletes.

5. Will your academic policies for your team be altered at all because of this new policy? And if altered, will it be now, or in the future when the policy is expected to start taking place?