Media Contact: Dr. Richard M. Southall
southall@email.unc.edu, 919.962-3507 / 901.240-7197 (cell)

Adjusted Graduation Gap: NCAA Division-I Football

Study Reveals Large Gaps between Graduation Rates of
FBS College Football Players and Full-time Male Students

Chapel Hill, NC – August 26, 2010… The College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill released the NCAA Division-I football installment of its annual Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) report today. Among numerous findings, the report indicated the adjusted graduation gap between NCAA D-I football players and the general full-time male student body is sizable, particularly for Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) conferences that compete at the highest level. The AGG is smaller at schools with lower entrance standards and more students drawn from lower socio-economic backgrounds. CRSI director and AGG report coauthor Richard Southall noted, "The AGG provides strong evidence that FBS football players do not graduate at rates comparable to full-time male college students at their universities."

The 2010 Division-I Football AGG Report utilizes the published 4-class average graduation rates for the 1999-2002 cohort (the latest available) and adjusts the student-body Federal Graduation Rates (FGR) to remove the "part-time bias." This allows for a more realistic comparison of reported NCAA Division-I football athlete graduation rates with the adjusted full-time student graduation rate.

Results of the football report included:

- The Southwestern Athletic Conference (SWAC) was the only NCAA Division-I football conference to have a positive Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) (+6), reflecting SWAC football players graduating at a rate 6 percentage points better than the full-time male student body at SWAC schools.

- Of all 23 D-I conferences, the Pac-10 had the greatest negative AGG (-30), with Pac-10 football players graduating at a rate 30 percentage points lower than full-time male students at pac-10 universities.

- The top-seven spots in the 2010 NCAA D-I Football AGG Report are all (FCS) conferences: SWAC, Mid-Eastern Athletic (MEAC), Big South, Southern (SoCon), Southland, Northeast, and Patriot League. The Ohio Valley Conference (OVC) had the largest negative AGG (-20) of all FCS conferences, one percent greater than the Big Sky.

- The bottom-five AGG NCAA D-I Football spots (19-23) are all held by (FBS) conferences: Western Athletic (WAC), Atlantic Coast (ACC), Big Ten, Mountain West (MWC), and Pac-10. The Mid-American Conference (MAC) had the least FBS AGG (-10).

- Based on the AGG, there is an overall negative graduation gap of (-13.9) between NCAA Division-I football players (54.5) and full-time male students (68.4). The gap is greater for FBS football players (-18.5), than for FCS football players (-9.7).

- Since football players at both FBS and FCS schools graduate at approximately the same rate (54.5), the greater FBS gap is a result of full-time male students graduating at a higher rate (73.0) than full-time male students attending FCS schools (63.2).

- Complete NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap Tables for FBS and FCS conferences are found in the Appendix.

The graduation rate disparities are likely at least partly attributed to the extra-curricular time football players devote to their sport, particularly during the fall term. NCAA FBS football players' time commitment, including travel, is approximately that of a full-time job. Southall noted, "Football at the FBS level is akin to a full-time job. So is being a student. Something inevitably has to give, and the AGG reveals what is 'giving' is football players' graduation rates."

The authors of the study (CSRI Director Dr. Richard Southall, Dr. E Woodrow Eckard, and CSRI Associate Director Dr. Mark Nagel) commented that "The AGG report suggests the need for additional research regarding how various factors, including socio-economic status and educational background, may contribute to the AGG."

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 (athletes and non-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 the athletes they recruit, 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 useful measure of graduation rates for athletes is called the Graduation Success Rate (GSR). The GSR, a creation of the NCAA, excludes from its calculation of graduation rates those athletes—primarily transfers—who left a particular school prior to graduating (i.e. early), but in good academic standing. The NCAA methodology also includes athletes who transfer into an institution in a school's graduation rate. A major strength of the GSR when compared to the FGR is its recognition that athletes often take a different path to graduation than other students. One of the limitations of the GSR is the inability to compare its "graduation" rate to the general student body, since as yet, there is no way to calculate a GSR for the general student body.

The AGG was developed to partly address some of the shortfalls of the FGR and GSR. The AGG compares the adjusted graduation rate for full-time students and the reported FGR for college athletes from the following NCAA Division-I sports: football – 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.

The College Sport Research Institute believes in the full disclosure of all measures pertaining to college athlete graduation, including the FGR, GSR, and AGG since one measure is not "better" or somehow "fairer" than the other. They simply measure different things. The FGR focuses on an institution's ability to retain students it admits, while the GSR attempts to account for athletes who leave a school that initially admitted them.

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 rates, making the relative rate of college athletes at many schools and conferences appear more favorable. CSRI's Adjusted Graduation Gap addresses this "part-timer bias" issue using regression-based adjustments for the percentage of part-timers. These estimates then become the basis for the AGG comparison.[1]

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. As of fall 2010, CSRI has over 100 supporting members from across the United States, including current and former students, faculty, current and former college and professional athletes, athletic administrators, and the general public.

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

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[1] Technical details 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.

issues and research related to pressing college-sport issues, publishes a peer-reviewed scholarly journal: *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics* (*JIIA*), and releases periodic research reports related to college sport issues.

This is the initial installment of the College Sport Research Institute's (CSRI) 2010-2011 Adjusted Graduation Gap Report. Moving forward, AGG summaries will be released three times per year, to coincide with the fall, winter and spring sport seasons. It is hoped the AGG encourages research and dialogue regarding not only graduation rates, but also the quality and type of educational opportunities afforded college athletes.

Dr. Southall is Director-College Sport Research Institute and Assistant Professor of Sport Administration and Graduate-Program Coordinator Department of Exercise and Sport Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Dr. Eckard is Professor of Economics, Business School, University of Colorado Denver.

Dr. Nagel is Associate Director- College Sport Research Institute and Associate Professor, Department of Sport and Entertainment Management, University of South Carolina.

Ms. Jenna Tomalski is an undergraduate student at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was a CSRI research assistant on this project.

Mr. Greg Lewinter is an undergraduate student at Ithaca College and was a CSRI research assistant on this project.

Appendix

Table 1: 2010 NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Report

1999-2002 4-class Cohort

Conference	AGG	Sub-Division
1. Southwestern Athletic (SWAC)	+6	FCS
2. Mid-Eastern Athletic (MEAC)	0	FCS
3. Big South	-3	FCS
4. Southern (SoCon)	-4	FCS
5. Southland	-9	FCS
6. Northeast	-9	FCS
7. Patriot League	-10	FCS
8. Mid-American (MAC)	-10	FBS
9. Missouri Valley (MVC) (FB)	-12	FCS
10. Big East	-12	FBS
11. Colonial (FB)	-13	FCS
12. Great West	-15	FCS
13. Sun Belt	-15	FBS
14. Conference USA (C-USA)	-15	FBS
15. Big XII	-16	FBS
16. Southeast (SEC)	-19	FBS
17. Big Sky	-19	FCS
18. Ohio Valley (OVC)	-20	FCS
19. Western Athletic (WAC)	-20	FBS
20. Atlantic Coast (ACC)	-20	FBS
21. Big Ten	-23	FBS
22. Mountain West (MWC)	-26	FBS
23. Pacific-10 (Pac-10)	-30	FBS

AGG = (FB Fed Rate) – (Adjusted Male Student-body Fed Rate)*

* Adjusted for part-time students

Notes:
1. Conference membership based on fall 2009 football season.
2. Sample: 23 conferences – 11 FBS and 12 FCS
       217 schools – 116 FBS and 101 FCS; 173 public and 44 private
3. Independents excluded.
4. (FCS) Ivy League excluded – unreported FB Fed Rates for all 8 members
5. (FCS) Pioneer Football League excluded - unreported FB Fed Rates for 7 of 10 members
6. Individual schools excluded because of unreported FB Fed Rates: Air Force (Mountain West), Austin Peay State (Ohio Valley), and Duquesne (Northeast).

Table 2: 2010 NCAA Division-I Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) (AGG) Report

1999-2002 4-class Cohort

Conference	AGG*
1. SWAC	+6
2. MEAC	0
3. Big South	-3
4. SoCon	-4
5. Southland	-9
6. Northeast	-9
7. Patriot	-10
8. MVC (FB)	-12
9. Colonial (FB)	-13
10. Great West	-15
11. Big Sky	-19
12. OVC	-20

AGG = (FB Fed Rate) – (Adjusted Male Student-body Fed Rate)*

* Adjusted for part-time students

Table 3: 2010 NCAA Division-I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) (AGG) Report

1999-2002 4-class Cohort

Conference	AGG*
1. MAC	-10
2. Big East	-12
3. Sun Belt	-15
4. C-USA	-15
5. Big 12	-16
6. SEC	-19
7. WAC	-20
8. ACC	-20
9. Big Ten	-23
10. MWC	-26
11. Pac-10	-30

AGG = (FB Fed Rate) – (Adjusted Male Student-body Fed Rate)*

* Adjusted for part-time students