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2013 Adjusted Graduation Gap:

NCAA Division-I Baseball and Softball

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

Chapel Hill, NC – April 17, 2013… The College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill released the third-annual installment of its NCAA Division-I Baseball and Softball Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) report today. The 2013 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 (-17.9), with the gap for "major" NCAA D-I conferences (-31.4) slightly higher than the 2012 Report's result (-30.8) and the 2011 report's benchmark (-30.7).

On a more positive note, the 2013 AGG for NCAA D-I softball players (-3.0) is much smaller than for baseball, and is slightly better than last year's softball AGG (-3.9) and the same as 2011. The AGG for "major" NCAA D-I softball conferences (-2.4) was better than either 2012 or 2011 (both were -6.7). Baseball "mid-major" conference AGGs are consistently smaller while this year's softball "mid-major" results were only slightly higher than the "majors".

While NCAA Division-I baseball has a different relationship with Major League Baseball (MLB) than football and men's basketball have with their professional leagues, AGG data reveal baseball players still graduate at disproportionately lower rates than full-time male students. The D-I baseball AGG is in fact larger than that for D-I football (-12.5), albeit smaller than that for men's basketball (-20.0). Focusing on when college players leave for a professional sport career, begs the question of why college athletes in football, men's basketball or baseball have such lower graduation rates than the general student body. That players don't graduate is not inherently bad, if they have equal access to an education. The inherent questions are: 1) How many baseball players eventually come back to school and finish their degrees? 2) What is the quality of their college education?

"Unfortunately, critical questions that would explain what happens on campus are not contemplated, let alone answered, by many athletic administrators. We continue to see large graduation gaps between baseball players and their counterparts on campus, with little concern expressed by many athletic directors," noted Dr. Mark Nagel, associate professor at the University of South Carolina and CSRI Associate Director.

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" AGGs, meaning their softball players actually graduate at rates higher than full-time female students, and the Southwestern Conference stands out with a positive 14.4% AGG. However, several softball conferences (Mountain West, Sunbelt, Western Athletic and Summit) have double-digit negative AGGs.

Dr. Woody Eckard, University of Colorado-Denver economics professor and AGG chief statistician commented, "The large baseball AGGs, particularly in the major conferences, may simply reflect decisions by athletes to turn professional before graduating. Nevertheless, the NCAA's "student-athlete" model is undermined to the extent that athletes see their college experience as minor league training for a sports career, and athletic departments accommodate this view."

The 2013 Division-I Baseball and Softball AGG Report utilizes the published 4-class average Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) for the 2004-2005 cohort, consistent with the latest football and basketball AGG reports published earlier, 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 (+3.7), while the MEAC had no AGG (0.0). In the remaining 28 conferences, baseball player graduation rates are less than the estimated full-time male student-body rate by non-trivial amounts, with 20 conferences having double-digit AGGs.

- The difference in aggregate baseball AGG between major and mid-major conferences is -16.9 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. For example, a significant number leave after their junior year after being drafted by a MLB team.

- The mean AGG for all African American baseball players (-28.4) is almost 40% greater than the mean AGG for all white players (-20.8)

- Not surprisingly given previous AGG reports in various sports, there is a very strong negative correlation (- 0.845) between the AGGs and a conference's baseball success, as measured by RPI, i.e., greater success is linked to larger gaps (see Figure 1).

Results of the softball report included:

- Nine softball conferences, eight 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 (+5.0) was the only major conference to post a positive AGG.

- However, the four conferences with the largest AGGs (Summit [-17.1], Western Athletic [-17.0], Sun Belt [-14.3] and Mountain West [-10.3]) are also "mid-majors." In addition, 10 out of the 12 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.

"The three year AGG data, as well as the very large negative correlations provide evidence college baseball has become a de facto minor-league system," noted Southall. "It is not surprising MLB and the NCAA have been exploring developing a relationship in which baseball leagues (MLB and minor league baseball) would fund scholarships and influence college baseball. As more and more college players are picked in the MLB draft, professional baseball wants to exert more influence in college baseball. This is a business decision, not an educational one. The large gaps reflect the increasing professionalization of college baseball."

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 that no similar rate exists for the general student body, and so comparisons between athletes and other students cannot be made. In addition, at times NCAA athletes' GSRs and FGRs 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.

Any analysis should recognize 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. Under such circumstances, it's not surprising that athletes graduate at lower rates.

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]

In fall 2013, 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

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[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.

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 http://exss.unc.edu/research-laboratories/college-sport-research-institute/ or call **(919) 843-9627.**

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Appendix

Table 1: 2013 Softball NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Report (2004-2005 4-class Cohort)

Conference	AGG	Major or Mid-major
Big Ten	5.0	Major
Big East	-1.9	Major
Southeastern	-2.6	Major
Atlantic Coast	-2.9	Major
Big 12	-3.5	Major
Pacific-12	-8.4	Major
Southwestern	14.4	MM
Northeast	9.1	MM
Metro Atlantic	6.5	MM
Mid-Eastern	3.3	MM
Pacific Coast	3.2	MM
Ohio Valley	2.5	MM
Horizon	1.6	MM
Big South	0.2	MM
Missouri Valley	-0.1	MM
Mid-American	-1.4	MM
Conference USA	-2.2	MM
America East	-2.4	MM
Atlantic Sun	-2.4	MM
Big West	-5.7	MM
Patriot	-5.8	MM
Big Sky	-6.4	MM
Atlantic 10	-7.5	MM
Southern	-8.0	MM
Colonial	-8.3	MM
Southland	-8.4	MM
Mountain West	-10.3	MM
Sun Belt	-14.3	MM
Western Athletic	-17.0	MM
Summit	-17.1	MM
Mean: AGG All Conferences=	-3.0	
Mean: AGG Major Conferences=	-2.4	
Mean: AGG Mid-Major Conferences=	-3.2	

Table 2: 2013 Baseball NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Report - (2004-2005 4-class Cohort)

Conference	AGG	Major or Mid-major
Big Ten	-16.4	Major
Big East	-21.4	Major
Southeastern	-33.1	Major
Atlantic Coast	-34.4	Major
Big 12	-37.6	Major
Pacific-12	-45.6	Major
Southwestern	3.7	MM
Mid-Eastern	0.0	MM
Patriot League	-1.0	MM
Horizon League	-2.0	MM
Northeast	-3.1	MM
America East	-6.5	MM
Ohio Valley	-7.1	MM
Metro Atlantic	-7.9	MM
Summit	-8.6	MM
Mid-American	-8.8	MM
Big South	-12.3	MM
Missouri Valley	-12.9	MM
Atlantic Sun	-13.6	MM
Atlantic 10	-13.8	MM
Southern	-16.3	MM
Great West	-17.1	MM
Colonial Athletic	-19.2	MM
Southland	-20.6	MM
Conference USA	-21.5	MM
Sun Belt	-26.0	MM
West Coast	-28.2	MM
Western Athletic	-30.6	MM
Big West	-37.5	MM
Mountain West	-38.3	MM
Mean: AGG All Conferences	-17.9	
Mean: AGG Major Conferences	-31.4	
Mean: Mid-Major Conferences	-14.5	
p-value, difference-between-means test, majors vs. mid-majors=	0.0030	

Figure 1: Rating Percentage Index (RPI) vs. Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG)