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# **ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES**

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## **EVALUATION GUIDE**

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### Background.

Based on feedback from the membership, the NCAA Division I Committee on Athletics Certification partnered with the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A) to develop sample materials to provide institutions as a resource for the required academic support services evaluation and report. These materials include example lists of potential interviewees, potential documents to review prior to and during the visit and suggested questions to ask during interviews. The committee agreed these materials will provide guidance to individuals conducting these evaluations to demonstrate the nature and scope expected by the committee in this evaluation.

This document is intended to provide guidance for institutions in the conduct of the academic support services evaluation, along with a sample format for the written report. This document should be used only as a guide to assist the institution in examining and improving its academic support services for student-athletes. It is important to note that institutions are **not** required to use these specific materials in order to conduct a satisfactory evaluation; nor, does the use of these materials alone ensure completion of an acceptable evaluation. The committee will continue to accept reports of any format, provided institutions demonstrate that the evaluation conducted was comprehensive in nature and meets the requirements set forth by the committee.

**Please note: Institutions must involve on-campus academic authorities who do not have day-to-day responsibilities in the academic support services area as participants in the evaluation of academic support services (e.g., academic board, undergraduate education office, provost office) and are not permitted to solely rely on outside entities or individuals (e.g., conference office, peer colleagues) to conduct this evaluation. An outside entity or individual (e.g., conference office, peer colleague) may assist in the coordination or facilitation of the evaluation, provided they do not serve as the lead authority. For example, the outside entity or individual (e.g., conference office, peer colleague) could provide materials for the institution's academic authorities to use during the conduct of the review, observe interviews or suggest questions to ask during the interviews. However, in no way should the balance of responsibility for the academic support services evaluation shift from on-campus academic authorities to outside entities or individuals (e.g., conference office, peer colleague).**

## **SAMPLE EVALUATION AND REPORT**

**PLEASE NOTE: The following report is only a sample format. The observations, recommendations and individuals interviewed are only an example of how an evaluation could be conducted and reported.**

### **Purpose of Evaluation.**

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide recommendations that can improve the overall effectiveness of the institution's academic support services for student-athletes. The evaluation is not intended to be an investigation or an audit. As required by the NCAA Division I Committee on Athletics Certification, this evaluation includes a review of the eight required areas only.

The following areas were evaluated:

1. Academic counseling and/or advising resources and services;
2. Tutoring;
3. Academic progress monitoring and reporting;
4. Assistance for student-athletes with special academic needs;
5. Assistance for at-risk student-athletes;
6. Academic support services facilities;
7. Academic evaluation of prospective student-athletes; and
8. Student-athlete degree selection.

An evaluation committee of faculty and staff external to the athletics department were selected by the president to conduct this evaluation and to provide a written summary of their recommendations to the director of athletics, faculty athletics representative and the athletics council.

### **Format for Evaluation.**

The evaluation committee of faculty and staff selected to conduct the evaluation include representatives from the athletics council, faculty senate, provost office and office of student affairs.

The evaluation committee included:

- <Evaluation Committee Names and Titles>

The evaluation committee examined the following documents prior to conducting the evaluation:

1. Mission statement and goals for academic support services;
2. Most recent NCAA athletics certification self-study report;
3. Most recent academic support services evaluation report;
4. Student-athlete handbook;
5. Athletics departmental policies regarding student-athlete well-being issues (e.g., class absences, competition and practice scheduling, etc.);
6. NCAA Division I Academic Progress Rate (APR) improvement plans;
7. Academic support services budget;
8. Academic profile data of entering students (e.g., first-year students, transfers);
9. Special or alternate admissions policies and procedures;
10. Special or alternate admissions data (e.g., high school grade point average, SAT/ACT test score, first year grade point average, credit hours earned);
11. APR report;
12. Graduation success rate report;
13. Sampling of student-athlete eligibility files;
14. Tutorial handbook;
15. Academic support services organizational chart, including reporting lines; and

16. List of academic support services personnel, titles and responsibilities.

The evaluation committee conducted interviews with key constituents to examine the existing policies and procedures of academic support services for student-athletes. [Please note: the following is a list of groups included but should not be considered comprehensive. Each campus is unique and, therefore, it is imperative to understand the "lay of the land" and to involve all key personnel in the evaluation.]

**Example Constituent Groups and Individuals to Interview during the Evaluation.**

Listed below are the names and titles of individuals interviewed:

1. Athletics administration;
2. Academic support services staff;
3. Coaches;
4. Student-athletes;
5. Faculty athletics representative;
6. Provost office;
7. Office of academic affairs;
8. Athletics council members;
9. Compliance staff;
10. Institution administrators;
11. Representatives from the faculty senate;
12. Office of admissions and records; and
13. Other groups recommended by the institution.

**Areas Reviewed in the Evaluation.**

Academic Counseling and/or Advising Resources and Services.

Individuals interviewed: athletics administration, academic support services staff, compliance staff, faculty athletics representative, student-athletes and coaches.

Interview Questions:

1. What support services are provided for student-athletes?
2. What are the policies or requirements for using these services?
3. Are the services available to all student-athletes?
4. How are student-athletes made aware of these services?
5. How are progress-toward-degree requirements monitored?
6. What are the responsibilities of the academic support services staff and campus academic advisors?
7. What methods are used each term to ensure student-athletes are taking courses that fulfill progress-toward-degree requirements?
8. Is there regularly scheduled communication each term between academic support services staff and campus academic advisors? If yes, describe the frequency and type of communication.
9. How regularly do coaches meet with academic support services staff?
10. Describe the orientation program presented by academic support services staff for all student-athletes.
11. How many full-time staff members are in academic support services?
12. What are the titles and job responsibilities of full-time staff?
13. What are the reporting lines of the staff in academic support services?
14. What is the ratio of full-time athletics academic advisors to student-athletes?

15. What part-time staff does academic support services use? Describe their roles and job responsibilities.
16. Are development opportunities provided for academic support services staff? If yes, please describe.
17. Describe involvement with institutional academic support services external to athletics where collaboration is significant (e.g., honors program, learning disabilities, minority student support, university orientation).

Observations:

1. The academic support services staff participates in monthly meetings with campus academic advisors. These meetings discuss advising issues, curriculum changes, adjustments and/or changes in degree audit and general everyday academic advising information. Relationships are established and maintained through this venue. Clear communication is encouraged through networking when concerns arise regarding degree audits.
2. The registration process for student-athletes is clear and concise. All student-athletes are required to have their registration forms signed by their campus academic advisor after their advising session. Quite often, pre-advising meetings are established to gauge the student-athlete's responsibility and accountability with these sessions.

Recommendations:

1. Currently, the academic support services staff reports exclusively to the director of athletics. The committee suggests that the institution examine the reporting lines to consider reporting external to athletics.
2. Some academic support services staff members meet regularly with coaches; however, the committee suggests that regular meetings occur with coaches from all sports.

Tutoring.

Individuals interviewed: academic support services staff, coaches, student-athletes, athletics administration and tutors.

Interview Questions:

1. What support services regarding tutoring are provided for the student-athletes?

2. What are the policies or requirements for using these services?
3. Are the services available to all student-athletes?
4. How are student-athletes made aware of these services?
5. How are tutors recruited, selected, trained and evaluated?
6. Is there a tutorial handbook? If yes, please describe how often it is reviewed and updated. Also, identify who is responsible.
7. What training occurs to ensure that tutors are knowledgeable of applicable NCAA, conference and/or institutional compliance rules and regulations?
8. What methods are in place to ensure that tutors adhere to NCAA rules and regulations?
9. What programs are in place to provide ongoing training for tutors?
10. Is the tutorial program certified? If yes, by what association?
11. What are the methods by which a student-athlete is assigned a tutor?
12. What strategies are used to ensure that you have enough tutors to meet the academic needs of student-athletes?
13. What type of collaboration, if any, exists between academic support services and tutoring services on campus?

Observations:

1. The tutorial program is an extremely important component of academic support services. The tutorial coordinator is a full time, benefited institutional employee. It is the tutorial coordinator's responsibility to ensure recruitment, orienting, training, supervision and oversight of the tutors is handled professionally and ethically. The tutorial coordinator has created a tutoring handbook (attached is table of contents from the manual).
2. A critical component of the orientation program for tutors is to ensure academic integrity. The staffs of both the office of student conduct and the compliance office within athletics are involved in the orientation training. During this time, the staff shares real case studies and consequences regarding the ramifications of inappropriate behavior. The tutorial program is certified through the College Reading and Learning Association at the third level. The continued commitment to certification remains a point of focus for the program.

3. The tutorial coordinator consistently seeks feedback from other members of the academic support services staff regarding best measures regarding assignment of tutors. An emphasis is not to allow tutors to become tutors exclusively for certain teams. The tutorial program offers student-athletes three methods of receiving tutorial services. The three methods are individual (one-on-one) requests, drop-in tutoring and team study halls. All assignments are approved by the coordinator and all tutorial sessions occur in one of three highly supervised support study areas.

Recommendations:

1. Recruitment and retention of tutors remains a top priority for the program. The evaluation committee recommends the tutorial coordinator develop a recruitment plan for meeting immediate needs but, eventually, to meet with all departments, student associations and other contacts as identified.
2. It is the evaluation committee's recommendation that the tutorial coordinator meet on a regular basis (at least once a semester) with campus tutorial program leaders. We believe this collaboration is critical to the relationship with other campus groups and helps to facilitate new ideas for training and recruitment.
3. It is recommended that specific training be included in the tutorial manual and the training sessions in regards to working with student-athletes enrolled in online courses, including the proctoring of online tests.

Academic Progress Monitoring and Reporting.

Individuals interviewed: academic support services staff, office of admissions and records and compliance staff.

Interview Questions:

1. What is the role of academic support services staff in monitoring the academic progress of student-athletes?
2. How does the academic support services staff interact with staff from the office of admissions and records and campus academic advisors to monitor academic progress?
3. May coaches communicate directly with faculty or campus academic advisors regarding student-athlete academic performance?
4. What is the procedure for informing coaches, administrators and student-athletes about the academic progress of student-athletes?

5. How is faculty involved in monitoring the academic progress of student-athletes?
6. How does the academic support services staff monitor the number of class absences due to athletics competition?

Observations:

1. Academic support services advisors have specific team responsibilities and are responsible for monitoring all academic areas involved with the team, including monitoring academic progress. The academic progress of student-athletes is primarily monitored through electronic communication with the instructors and individual meetings with student-athletes. The staff has developed a process of gathering the academic updates and compiling reports. The report is shared with the director of academic support services and with coaches on a weekly basis. Only academic support services staff communicate directly with campus instructors. Coaches may not contact instructors without permission from the director of academic support services.
2. The eligibility coordinator and one academic support services staff member have continuous contact with the office of admissions and records. These individuals are the liaisons to the office of admissions and records if there are concerns regarding degree audits. All academic support services staff members are encouraged to foster relationships and ties campus wide. Academic support services has established liaisons for each college to funnel and control communications.

Recommendation:

- It is suggested that academic support services purchase a software program to assist in monitoring the continuing eligibility of all student-athletes.

Assistance for Special Academic Needs.

Individuals interviewed: academic support services staff, coaches, student-athletes, athletics administration and office of disability services.

Interview Questions:

1. How are student-athletes with special academic needs identified?
2. What diagnostic testing is provided generally for students with special needs?
3. What diagnostic testing is provided for student-athletes with special needs?

4. Is comprehensive learning disability testing provided for student-athletes? Who performs the testing? Does this differ from the general student body? If not, how are learning disability testing services provided to student-athletes?
5. What accommodations are available for the general student body if diagnosed with a learning disability?
6. What specific services or accommodations do you provide to meet the needs of student-athletes with special academic needs? Does this differ from those provided to the general student body? If so, how?
7. Does your institution have a learning specialist? If yes, what are his or her qualifications and duties?
8. What type of communication occurs between academic support services staff and the office of disability services?

Observations:

1. Academic support services has a full-time learning specialist located in academic support services but has a direct relationship with the office of disability services. This relationship is critical to the success of the student-athletes with diagnosed disabilities. Accommodations typically available for these student-athletes are note takers, extended time and distraction-free testing environments. The personnel in the office of disability services are responsible for sending notices to instructors regarding these accommodations. Academic support services emphasizes that all student-athletes with documented disabilities must register with their office.
2. All official diagnostic testing is done external to the institution. The learning specialist does the initial screening (documents approved by the licensed psychiatrist/psychologist). The academic support services learning specialist does informal testing using the Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults. The areas tested are nonverbal reasoning, reading comprehension, math calculations, writing mechanics and reading/vocabulary.
3. The major qualification established for the learning specialist is for the individual to have earned, at minimum, a masters degree in an educational discipline (preferably in special education) and have three to five years experience working with college-age students. The learning specialist does oversee a small staff (three graduate assistants) to work with approximately 35-40 student-athletes on learning strategies.

Recommendation:

- There seems to be a very effective working relationship between the academic support services staff and the office of disability services. However, there is a need to coordinate more effectively with coaches and student-athletes to ensure that the student-athletes are using all of the accommodations for which they are qualified.

Assistance for At-Risk Students.

Individuals interviewed: athletics administration, academic support services staff, coaches and student-athletes.

Interview Questions:

1. How are at-risk student-athletes identified?
2. What support services are provided for student-athletes determined to be at-risk?
3. What are the policies or requirements for using these support services?
4. Are the support services available to all student-athletes?
5. How are student-athletes made aware of these support services?
6. What diagnostic testing is provided for at-risk student-athletes? Who performs these tests? Does this differ from the general student body? If so, how?
7. Describe the support services provided to at-risk student-athletes to assist them in developing study skills.
8. Does your institution offer a basic study-skills class? If yes, please provide a copy of the syllabus.
9. Are learning assistants and mentors provided or available to work with at-risk student-athletes? If yes, please describe their qualifications and duties.
10. What is the staffing ratio of learning assistants and mentors to student-athletes?
11. Are at-risk student-athletes required to log a specific amount of time in the learning center (e.g., study hall, tutors) each week? If yes, what are the requirements?

12. How do the academic profiles of at-risk student-athletes compare to student-athletes, at-risk students and the general student body at your institution?
13. What are the policies regarding academic probation?
14. Does your institution provide a summer bridge (or comparable) program for new student-athletes? If yes, are at-risk student-athletes encouraged and/or required to attend? What are the components of the program?

Observations:

1. A complete listing of the support services offered was provided, including the institution's definition of "at-risk" and the policies and procedures regarding at-risk student-athletes.
2. Every new student-athlete is required to participate in the institution's new student orientation sessions. During these sessions, the staff has an opportunity to meet with student-athletes and their parents to discuss the services. Additional opportunities to share orientation information are the freshmen orientation courses and team meetings.
3. Initial screening for at-risk student-athletes is performed during the first week of classes. If the results dictate, full-diagnostic testing is scheduled at a later date at an external facility. The results of this testing and noted observations dictate the type of academic plan that is designed for each at-risk student-athlete. It is required that all at-risk student-athletes have an academic plan on file. It is the responsibility of the academic advisor and/or coordinator to make sure the plan is implemented and followed.
4. The learning specialist works with student-athletes based on their specific academic needs. The sessions with the learning specialist and his or her staffs are designed toward the implementation of strategies. These sessions are not tutorial sessions. Each staff member is assigned a maximum of 10 at-risk student-athletes.

Recommendations:

1. Currently, there is a very limited summer bridge program for new student-athletes. The committee recommends academic support services work in conjunction with the office of student affairs and the academic colleges on campus to expand this program for more new student-athletes.
2. The majority of coaches have been very cooperative when working with the learning specialist and academic support services staff to address the needs of at-risk student-athletes. However, it is recommended that the athletics department stress the importance of this to all coaching staffs to ensure that the needs of at-risk student-athletes are being met.

### Academic Support Facilities.

Individuals interviewed: athletics administration, academic support services staff, coaches, student-athletes and faculty athletics representative.

#### Interview Questions:

1. Is a learning center (or other designated space or facility) available exclusively for student-athletes? If yes, please describe the facility.
2. How many tutorial rooms, offices, classrooms or other facilities are available?
3. Is there a computer lab? If yes, how many computers are available? Does the computer lab have the software equivalent to other labs on campus?
4. Does your institution have computers available to be checked out for team travel? If yes, how many are available? What is the pattern of use? Are there policies related to use?
5. Is the facility accessible to student-athletes during the day and evening hours? What are the hours of operation?

#### Observations:

1. The floor plan for the academic support services facility was provided. There is a desktop computer lab that accommodates 25 student-athletes and a laptop lab that can handle the overflow up to 20 more computer stations. Academic support services also has a classroom that accommodates 30 student-athletes.
2. The offices for the academic advisors are located on the top floor with the main level hosting the tutorial rooms. There are eight large and 10 small tutorial rooms.
3. For monitoring and safety reasons, all rooms have windows that allow for clear vision into the rooms.
4. The hours for the study center are Monday through Thursday 7:30 a.m. to 11 p.m; Friday 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and Sunday 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. The hours are adjusted as finals approach.

#### Recommendations:

1. The facilities seem to adequately meet the needs of student-athletes. It is recommended that academic support services provide additional tutoring opportunities during the daytime hours to better address the needs of many of the student-athletes.

2. It is also recommended that academic support services purchase a software program to monitor the student-athlete participation in the learning center. Currently, this process is done by hand with periodic reports going to coaches and staff.

#### Academic Evaluation of Prospective Student-Athletes.

Individuals interviewed: academic support services staff, office of admissions and records, faculty athletics representative and office of academic affairs.

#### Interview Questions:

1. Are evaluations of unofficial or official high school, two-year and four-year college transcripts prepared? If yes, what are the procedures?
2. How do you evaluate transcripts of prospective transfer student-athletes?
3. How do you determine if prospective transfer student-athletes will meet progress-toward-degree requirements when they arrive on campus?
4. How do predictors of academic success of student-athletes at your institution compare to the general student body?
5. Does your institution have special or alternative admission policies for prospective student-athletes? If yes, what are the policies?
6. Do faculty members participate in the review of specially admitted prospective student-athletes? If yes, describe.
7. What are the procedures for admitting prospective student-athletes who do not meet the regular admission standard of the institution? Does this differ from the general student body? If so, how?
8. Describe the involvement of academic support services staff in the recruiting process (e.g., unofficial, official visits).

#### Observations:

1. The official visit process incorporates an evaluation of the prospective student-athlete's high school or college transcripts. The review is to identify prospective student-athletes who are significantly deficient in meeting the institution's admissions standards or NCAA eligibility standards. This information is forwarded to sport administrators and coaches

immediately. This review also would identify a prospective student-athlete that would need additional review through the special-admission process.

2. The special-admission process is a faculty-based review. The institution has established five criteria that must be met to avoid the need for special admissions. If a prospective student-athlete falls short in two or more of the five areas, he or she is reviewed as a special admission. The criteria are: (1) 2.5 cumulative high school grade-point average; (2) top half of his or her class; (3) 900 combined SAT score; (4) 420 score in critical reading; and (5) 420 score on the math component of the SAT. The special admission committee meets to review prospective student-athletes to access if their academic history indicates they have the academic ability to be successful on campus.
3. Regarding transfer student-athletes, the office of admissions uses an unofficial transcript and does the first review for transferability of courses. If a course does not match with the database, the course may be sent to the dean's office of the department for review. After all courses have been reviewed, a comparison is done to determine satisfaction with the percentage-of-degree requirements. Academic support services has assigned one person, the eligibility coordinator, to be responsible for the review of each transfer's academic history. The director of academic support services signs off on each of the evaluations.

Recommendation:

- The committee recommends that the director of academic support services sign off on a document that verifies the eligibility status of all prospective student-athletes prior to a National Letter of Intent being issued to the prospective student-athlete. This document would also be signed by the athletics director.

Student-Athlete Degree Selection.

Individuals interviewed: academic support services staff, student-athletes, office of admissions and records and faculty athletics representative.

Interview Questions:

1. What is the process for student-athletes to select a major at your institution? Do student-athletes receive any education for choosing a major?
2. Is there a selection of majors that do not have restricted admission?
3. Are student-athletes satisfied with the selection of majors available to them on your campus? How is this monitored or evaluated?

4. How does your institution monitor degree-selection trends or patterns for student-athletes? Are there trends and/or patterns?

Observations:

1. Approximately 40 percent of the student-athletes initially enroll at the institution with an undeclared major. The other 60 percent move directly into their degree major and are advised by departmental advisors.
2. The undeclared student-athletes take an additional one-hour course which allows them to gather information regarding the institution's curriculums in an effort to make educated decisions concerning their matriculation. This process has served this population well. Students' satisfaction with their choice of major is quite often higher than other matriculated students.
3. The change of major process for student-athletes is the same process for all students on campus. The student-athlete first must be accepted into another major before he or she is allowed to move out of the current area. One of the recent trends on campus is that most majors, as a part of their degree requirements, have increased the transfer grade-point-average minimums and have added additional course requirements with recommended grades in specific courses.

Recommendations:

1. Academic support services has not conducted a formal review of whether student-athletes are clustering in specific majors. The committee recommends that a formal review be completed this academic year with the results and recommendations submitted to the athletics council.
2. The academic support services currently does not have a procedure to monitor student-athlete degree and/or major changes. The institution should formally collect and evaluate this information. Further, this information should be shared with the athletics council.

### **Summary.**

Based on its evaluation of these areas, the evaluation committee believes that the institution has a sound academic support services program. The committee believes certain academic support services can be more effective with the implementation of the recommendations from this report.

The observations and the recommendations listed are not intended to be inclusive. They reflect the continuing issues and themes that were raised as a result of this evaluative process. The committee would welcome any questions or concerns regarding these recommendations. The committee appreciates the cooperation provided by all participants in this evaluation. Everyone who was interviewed was very cooperative and forthcoming with information and documents requested.

The institution's academic support services for student-athletes should be evaluated on a continuing basis. It is important to note that the academic support services evaluation was intended to assist the institution in examining and improving its academic support services for student-athletes. It should not be viewed as a comprehensive "audit" or "seal of approval" relative to the institution's academic support services efforts for student-athletes.