

NCAA Division I Academics/Eligibility/Compliance Cabinet  
Directive Regarding the Standard of Review  
for Progress-Toward-Degree Waivers

1. Background.

Effective fall 2003 and thereafter, NCAA Division I student-athletes enrolling in their first full-time term of collegiate attendance are required to complete increased minimum progress-toward-degree requirements to earn eligibility for competition. In anticipation of waiver requests seeking relief from these standards, the NCAA Division I Academics/Eligibility/Compliance Cabinet drafted this directive to provide guidance to the NCAA staff and the NCAA Division I Progress-Toward-Degree Waiver Committee as outlined below, with the understanding that both entities may use discretion in the application of this directive. Further, exceptions to this directive may be applied by the staff, the Progress-Toward-Degree Waiver Committee, and/or the Academics/Eligibility/Compliance Cabinet when warranted by the circumstances of a specific case.

2. Guiding Principle.

Institutions seeking a progress-toward-degree waiver on behalf of a student-athlete for relief of NCAA Bylaws 14.4.3.1-(a) (24/36 credit hours), 14.4.3.2 (40/60/80 percentage of degree), 14.4.3.2.1 (33/50/67 percentage of five-year degree), 14.4.3.3.1 (90/95/100 grade-point average), 14.4.3.1-(b) (18/27 hours earned during regular academic year), and/or 14.4.3.1-(c) (6 hours earned per academic term) must present evidence of compelling mitigating circumstances along with a reasonable expectation for the student-athlete to recover academically for the waiver request to be granted. Such waivers will be reviewed under the presumption of a good-faith effort on the part of the student-athlete and his/her institution toward completion of the student-athlete's collegiate degree within five years of the student-athlete's full-time enrollment, unless and until circumstances surrounding the waiver request indicate otherwise.

3. Threshold for Review.

The student-athlete's academic record, including any deficiencies, in existence at the time of the waiver shall be reviewed through analysis of the student-athlete's cumulative total of quality points (as determined by the multiplication of grades and credits earned). If the analysis of the student-athlete's quality point total predicts he or she has less than a 25 percent chance of graduating, then the waiver shall be denied by staff for failure to meet the threshold for review of a progress-toward-degree waiver case.

4. Staff Approvals.

The staff is granted the authority to approve waivers of the progress-toward-degree requirement(s) based on a review of some or all of the following information:

- A quality-point analysis indicating the student-athlete has a greater than 50 percent chance of graduating;
- A reasonable academic recovery plan, signed by both the student-athlete and an institutional representative;
- Documented compelling mitigating circumstances surrounding the waiver request (See Section No. 6.).

5. Staff Denials.

The staff is granted the authority to deny waivers of the progress-toward-degree requirement(s) based on a review of the following information:

- a. A 25 percent (or lower) chance of graduation, based on the student-athlete's quality-point analysis;
- b. The absence of mitigating circumstances (See Section No. 7.);
- c. Any previous reviews of the student-athlete's academic progress through the progress-toward-degree waiver process;
- d. Clear case precedent warranting denial of the appeal.

6. Documentation.

Institutions are encouraged (and in some cases, may be required) to provide the following supporting documentation with waiver requests:

- a. Standard documentation (to be provided unless staff indicates otherwise):
  - (1) A completed progress-toward-degree waiver application;

- (2) Letters or statements from the institution and student-athlete explaining the reasons for the deficiency;
  - (3) Evidence of the compelling mitigating circumstance(s) supporting the waiver request; and
  - (4) A copy of the student-athlete's current official transcript and transcripts from any previous institutions (print screen transcripts will not be accepted).
- b. To be provided if needed (or if requested by NCAA staff) to support waiver request:
- (1) Description of the degree major as found in the academic catalog;
  - (2) Degree audit;
  - (3) Current course-enrollment list; and
  - (4) An academic recovery plan, designed by the institution, that demonstrates how the student-athlete's individual efforts, course schedule planning (including consideration of academic- and athletics-related time demands) and use of academic resources will correct his/her academic eligibility deficiencies. An acceptable academic recovery plan also will demonstrate that the student-athlete is able to graduate within five years of full-time enrollment and the plan must be signed by both the student-athlete and an institutional representative with academic oversight for the student-athlete.

7. Mitigating Circumstances.

- a. Circumstances which may be considered as compelling mitigating circumstances and supported by objective documentation shall include, but are not limited to, the following:
  - (1) Hardship;
    - (a) Situations clearly supported by contemporaneous documentation, which indicate that the student-athlete was unable to complete the progress-toward-degree requirement as a result of significant physical or mental circumstances suffered by the student-athlete, family member or others on whom the student-athlete is dependent;

- (b) Extreme financial difficulties as a result of a specific event (e.g., layoff, death in the family) experienced by the student-athlete or by an individual on whom the student-athlete is legally dependent, which prohibit the student-athlete from completing the progress-toward-degree requirement(s). The circumstances must be clearly supported by objective documentation (e.g., decree of bankruptcy, proof of termination) and must be beyond the control of the student-athlete or the individual on whom the student-athlete is legally dependent;
    - (c) Natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, floods).
  - (2) Restrictive degree programs;
  - (3) Restrictive transfers;
  - (4) Military service, Peace Corps or selective service commission or foreign equivalent, official church mission or pregnancy;
  - (5) Participation in athletics activities as defined by Bylaw 14.2.1.5 (Pan American, World Championships, World Cup, etc.);
  - (6) Other unforeseen events and/or circumstances beyond the student-athlete's control.
- b. Circumstances that will not be considered as compelling mitigating circumstances may include, but are not limited to, the following:
- (1) Unreasonable reliance by a student-athlete on misinformation from an institutional staff member (e.g., misadvisement);
  - (2) Institutional lack of understanding regarding the progress-toward-degree requirements;
  - (3) Failure to follow an academic recovery plan submitted with a previously approved appeal of the progress-toward-degree requirements (which left the student-athlete deficient for the next eligibility certification).