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2014 Adjusted Graduation Gap Report: NCAA D-I Baseball and Softball

Columbia, SC – May 13, 2014…The College Sport Research Institute at the University of South Carolina released the 4th annual Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Report for NCAA Division I baseball and softball. The 2014 report reveals – once again – that baseball players, similar to profit-athletes in FBS football and NCAA D-I men's basketball, graduate at rates much less than full-time male students. For 2014, NCAA baseball's top-ten power-conferences[1] had a record -31.29 AGG. The overall NCAA D-I baseball AGG was -18.6. Three conferences had AGGs in excess of -40 (Pac-12 [-44.3], Big West [-41.9], and MWC [-41.3]). (See Table 1.)

Meanwhile, softball players – who do not have professional-sport aspirations – have significantly smaller AGGs and continue to graduate at rates comparable to full-time female students. The six "major" NCAA D-I softball

[1] These conferences include: Big Ten, Big East (American), SEC, ACC, Big XII, Pac-12, A-10, CUSA, Big West, MWC

conferences had an average AGG of (-7.0), while the overall AGG was (-4.3). (See Table 2.)

Many casual observers may not be aware that baseball's four-year (-30) AGG is comparable to that of NCAA D-I men's basketball (-31) and larger than FBS football (-18). While baseball is often held up as an exemplar of the NCAA's collegiate model of athletics, the data reveal baseball players' federal graduation rates (FGRs) are at historically low levels and only about 4-5 percent of all players on MLB rosters are college graduates.

These facts arise in a college baseball setting in which television networks and university athletic departments unrelentingly monetize college baseball broadcasts, Major League Baseball (MLB) teams increasingly draft top college players after their junior season, and players face a challenge of trying to pursue a meaningful college education while also chasing big-league dreams.

The report's authors noted, "While players, coaches, administrators and fans chase College World Series' berths, there seems to be little concern expressed about college baseball as a viable alternative to a traditional minor league path to the big-leagues."

Report Highlights

- One baseball conference – Horizon League – had a positive AGG (+1.2).
- Twelve baseball conferences had negative AGGs in excess of (-20).
- Seven softball conferences had positive AGGs.
- The Southland Conference had the largest softball negative AGG (-18.1).

CSRI Research-Team Statement:

In light of recent attention paid to FBS football and men's basketball – in the mainstream media, this study's results highlight that baseball players are also not graduating at rates comparable to full-time male students. These data call into question the degree to which many NCAA D-I male athletes have access to a meaningful education leading to a degree from the school to which they initially enroll. For baseball players, such access may be compromised as their training and competition schedules continue to increasingly resemble those of professional baseball players (NCAA, 2011).

The College Sport Research Institute calls on university and athletic-department administrators to acknowledge that the increased professionalization of college baseball has resulted in extensive cross-country travel and increased missed class time for over-worked players. Consequently, NCAA D-I conference commissioners, university presidents, athletic directors, university faculty, students and fans should openly and honestly ask themselves whether the educational bargain at the heart of the collegiate model is being met.

CSRI and Adjusted Graduation Gap Background

The College Sport Research Institute is dedicated to conducting and supporting independent data collection and analysis related to college-sport. CSRI is housed within the Department of Sport and Entertainment Management (SPTE) in the College of Hospitality, Retail, and Sport Management (HRSM) at the University of South Carolina. 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 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.

In 1990, Congress mandated full disclosure of graduation rates at schools that award athletic grant-in-aid and receive federal financial aid. The Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) reports the percent of athletes and students who graduate within six years from the school they entered as first-year students. As a result, the FGR provides a measure of the extent to which colleges and universities retain and graduate students (including athletes) who begin their college career at that school. The strength of the FGR is its focus on student retention.

This College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Report compares an Adjusted Graduation Rate (AGR) for full-time students with published Federal Graduation Rates (FGRs) for National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division-I baseball and softball players in major and mid-major conferences.

A comparison of published FGRs of NCAA athletes and the general student population includes a significant number of part-time students at many schools. This is problematic because NCAA athletes must be "full-time." Consequently, it makes sense to compare full-time college athletes with other full-time students. Without adjusting for the possible downward "part-timer bias" in the student-body rate, any comparison may be distorted – or somewhat skewed. Because part-time students take longer to graduate, reported general student-body FGRs may be significantly reduced, making the relative rate of college athletes at many schools and conferences appear more favorable. Using regression-based adjustments for the percentage of

"part-timers," the 2013-14 CSRI Division-I Baseball and Softball AGG Report utilizes the latest published FGR 4-class average graduation rates and addresses this "part-timer bias." These estimates then become the basis for a realistic comparison of reported NCAA Division-I basketball player graduation rates with adjusted full-time student graduation rates.

This research is not intended to challenge, refute, or replace any other graduation-rate reports or methods currently used. Instead, it is a way to compare college-athlete graduation rates to full-time student bodies at schools, conferences, and college athletics in general.

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Table 1: 2014 NCAA Division-I Baseball Adjusted Graduation Gaps

Conference	2014 AGG	
Atlantic 10	-16.2	Major
Big Ten	-20.1	Major
American	-23.5	Major
Conference USA	-23.8	Major
Southeastern	-32.8	Major
Big 12	-34.3	Major
Atlantic Coast	-34.9	Major
Mountain West	-41.4	Major
Big West	-41.9	Major
Pacific-12	-44.3	Major
Average Major	**-31.3**	
Horizon League	1.2	MM
Southwestern	0.6	MM
Patriot League	-4.8	MM
Mid-Eastern	-5.3	MM
Metro Atlantic	-6.9	MM
Northeast	-7.0	MM
Ohio Valley	-7.9	MM
Summit	-9.2	MM
Atlantic Sun	-9.7	MM
America East	-10.0	MM
Mid-American	-10.8	MM
Southland	-13.1	MM
Big South	-13.6	MM
Big East	-15.1	MM
Colonial Athletic	-17.2	MM
Southern	-17.5	MM
Missouri Valley	-18.3	MM
Sun Belt	-25.7	MM
West Coast	-26.9	MM
Western Athletic	-27.2	MM
Average Mid Major	**-12.2**	
Average All DI	**-18.7**	

Table 2: 2014 NCAA Division-I Softball Adjusted Graduation Gaps

Conference	2014 AGG	
Big Ten	2.0	Major
Southeastern	-2.9	Major
Big 12	-5.6	Major
Atlantic Coast	-9.7	Major
Pacific-12	-12.3	Major
Sun Belt	-13.6	Major
Average Major	**-7.0**	
Southwestern	7.4	MM
Northeast	6.4	MM
West Coast	6.1	MM
Metro Atlantic	4.7	MM
Mid-Eastern	4.7	MM
Big South	0.5	MM
Big East	0.0	MM
Mid-American	-1.1	MM
American	-1.1	MM
Patriot	-1.2	MM
Missouri Valley	-1.3	MM
Colonial	-3.3	MM
Western Athletic	-4.8	MM
Horizon	-5.1	MM
Conference USA	-5.5	MM
Ohio Valley	-6.1	MM
America East	-6.9	MM
Southern	-7.8	MM
Summit	-8.2	MM
Atlantic Sun	-8.4	MM
Big West	-8.7	MM
Big Sky	-10.0	MM
Mountain West	-10.6	MM
Atlantic 10	-12.9	MM
Southland	-18.1	MM
Average Mid-Major	**-3.7**	
Average All DI	**-4.3**	

Note: For the **Softball** sample, "Major" is a league with at least two teams ranked in the ESPN Coaches poll (available 4/13/14).