



A Guide to Assist Institutions in Avoiding APR Penalties

This document was created to assist member institutions with finding ways to avoid Academic Performance Rate (APR) penalties. Each institution is unique and every element may not be appropriate for all campuses; however, this document should serve as a catalyst for campus dialogue and help to foster ideas that lead to successful strategies to avoid APR penalties.

A GUIDE TO ASSIST INSTITUTIONS IN AVOIDING APR PENALTIES

FIRST THINGS, FIRST

1. Each institution must recruit talented student-athletes who can have academic and athletic success on the intercollegiate level.

2. The Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference (MEAC) strongly encourages institutions to send their student-athletes to summer school to give them an academic advantage for eligibility and graduation.

3. It is important that institutions take a broad-based approach to the APR process. A combination of the following offices/individuals should be involved in the process:

- (a) Compliance Coordinator
- (b) Athletic Academic Support
- (c) Registrar
- (d) Financial Aid
- (e) Institutional Research
- (f) Head Coach
- (g) Admissions
- (h) Chief Academic Officer (Academic Provost)
- (i) Faculty Athletic Representative

4. It is extremely important that institutions are appropriately tracking APR Data by doing the following:

- (a) Completing the Conference recommended Progress Towards Degree form for each student-athlete each semester.
- (b) Ensure that transcripts are included in each student-athlete's file each semester.
- (c) Perform exit interviews for any student-athlete leaving your institution (i.e., transfers, not returning).
- (d) Secure copies of approved eligibility waivers.
- (e) Squad List information should be up-to-date.
- (f) Track fifth year student-athletes
- (g) Ensure copies of any grade changes, degree declarations, class substitutions, i.e. is include in respective student-athlete files.

The institution should perform a thorough and complete data analysis each semester to determine issues that need to be addressed.

5. Ensure that the athletic academic support office is following written institutional academic policies (university catalog). Chief Academic Officer (Vice Provost for Academic Affairs) needs to ensure that the university catalog is up-to-date and the athletic academic support staff is informed of any changes.

6. It is important for institutions to discuss the academic profile of the type of student-athlete that will be successful at your institution and communicate it to your coaches. This includes an assessment of high school core grade-point average, test scores, transfer grade-point average, institutional grade-point average, earned credits, types of courses taken (college prep, advanced placement, etc.), progress-toward-degree status, institutional academic standing or other factors. Coaches must adhere to this profile when recruiting prospective student-athletes. Institutions need to determine the percentage of prospective student-athletes that do not meet the profile (i.e., special admits, at risk) can be recruited based on the institution's ability to support

them academically. This policy must be enforced through a top-down approach (president to director of athletics) to ensure that coaches are consistently following the directive.

7. There needs to be head coach's accountability incorporated into institutional policies. Coaches have constant, direct contact with student-athletes; therefore, their involvement and accountability is a critical component in regards to eligibility and retention. For example:

- (a) Coaches should be responsible for ensuring that student-athletes attend study hall.
- (b) Coaches should be rewarded if their team achieves a certain single-year or multi-year APR score.
- (c) Coaches should not be eligible for bonuses if they do not meet established APR thresholds.
- (d) Items (a) through (c) should be reflected into coaches' contracts.

8. It is important for institutions to determine if they have the appropriate number of staff in the Athletic Academic Support Office to support student-athletes academically.

- (a) The National Association for Academic Advisors for Athletics recommends a minimum of at least a 125/1 student-athlete to academic counselor ratio for the athletic academic support.
- (b) All Athletic Academic Support Personnel with advising duties within athletics in the Conference be certified by the National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A).
- (c) The Athletic Academic Support Program should be integrated with the total institutional academic support and retention programs.

9. Institutions should assess the effectiveness of their Athletic Academic Support Office organizational structure. The following is a recommended organizational structure:

- (a) All programs should include appropriate institutional oversight and review of student-athlete progress, academic performance, and student-athlete welfare
- (b) No academic counselor should report to any coaching staff(s)
- (c) Each team should have a designated member of their coaching staff as an academics liaison
- (d) Clear academic policies regarding the academic expectations of student-athletes and coaches including communication with campus faculty
- (e) Academic support programs should have some reporting relationship with the campus academic administration

10. Institutions should assess whether their athletic academic support program provides the essential components/services to support the student-athletes academically. The following are recommended components of an academic support program:

- (a) Tutoring services
- (b) Supervised study hall
- (c) Monitoring of academic coursework performance
- (d) Monitoring of NCAA progress toward degree requirements
- (e) Monitoring of athletic eligibility
- (f) Workshop programming or coursework for student-athlete survival skills
- (g) Academic support services should demonstrate an integration of campus student life programs and services
- (h) Routine rules education for student-athletes
- (i) Accommodations for and monitoring of student-athletes with learning disabilities
- (j) Specific academic success programs for at-risk student-athletes
- (k) Mentoring of academic at-risk student-athletes
- (l) Structured supervised study for at-risk student-athletes
- (m) The development of a student-athlete handbook

11. It is important that the athletic academic support office is using campus resources to assist in supporting student-athletes, like the following:

- (a) Counseling Center
- (b) Career Center
- (c) Student Support Services

APR STRATEGIES

The following are best practices that were developed from APR Improvement Plans based on specific APR team trends. Although these practices were developed based on teams that were not meeting the APR threshold, if followed, these practices could potentially assist institution in avoiding APR penalties.

ELIGIBILITY

1. Increase frequency of supervised study hall, tutoring and academic progress checks.

a. Possible Measurable Goals.

- (1) Increase the number of supervised study hall hours to eight per week in season and to 16 per week during the off season.
- (2) Require freshmen and "at-risk" student-athletes to attend four hours of need-based/subject-specific tutoring per week, which may be completed within their structured study hall times.
- (3) Circulate academic progress reports three times per semester. This should be accessible online to faculty to complete and submit to the athletic academic support program.
- (4) Achieve 75 percent return rate from faculty on academic progress reports.

b. Steps.

- (1) Increase academic staff to two full-time employees and one graduate assistant.
- (2) Academic staff will distribute and collect academic progress reports three times per semester from professors and faculty.
- (3) Transform study tables from an hours-based format to an objectives-based format. Advisors must outline a daily academic work plan for each student-athlete to complete at objectives-based study tables.
- (4) In conjunction with mandatory study hall sessions, require weekly meetings with assigned assistant coaches to verify the student-athletes have completed assignments and are ready to attend classes for the week.
- (5) Similar to class attendance, tutors will report weekly on student-athletes' attendance and completion of required tutoring hours.

(6) After team's final game of the season, study table hours will increase.

2. Require new and "at-risk" student-athletes to meet with an athletics academic coordinator. Increase new student-athlete participation in the summer bridge program.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

(1) Eighty percent of all new, incoming student-athletes will enroll in the summer bridge program.

(2) One hundred percent of new and "at-risk" student-athletes will meet weekly with an athletics academic coordinator.

b. Steps.

(1) After signing any National Letter of Intent or financial aid agreement, all incoming freshmen and transfer student-athletes will be provided information on enrollment for the summer bridge program as well as an accompanying letter from the head coach requiring attendance.

(2) Identify incoming student-athletes that are considered "at risk" of not graduating or having academic difficulties at the institution.

(3) Enroll incoming student-athletes in a college learning strategies course to address study, time management and organizational skills prior to first semester of full-time enrollment.

(4) Hold weekly or biweekly meetings with all freshmen, transfer and "at-risk" student-athletes to review grades and attendance for all classes.

(5) Distribute comprehensive electronic grade and attendance reports to instructors every three weeks for all freshmen, transfer and "at-risk" student-athletes.

(6) Based on academic performance [below 2.500 grade-point average at midterm or notice of unexcused absence or failing grades in progress reports], student-athletes may be moved into the "at-risk" program at any time at the discretion of athletics academic staff.

3. Reduce the percentage of academically "at-risk" student-athletes recruited.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

(1) Reduce the number of academically "at-risk" student-athletes that are on the team at any given time to 10 percent of team's roster.

b. Steps.

(1) Academic services will determine and assign a relative risk level to each recruited student-athlete based on academic profile and other factors.

(2) Each prospective student-athlete taking an official visit will be administered a questionnaire that is designed to assess academic seriousness and self-regard.

(3) The associate director of athletics for student services or a designated academic services staff member will meet with each prospective student-athlete during his or her official visit to campus.

(4) The institution's academic support staff will be required to develop an individualized educational success plan for each "at-risk" student-athlete. This plan shall be modified on a yearly basis.

(5) Head coach will ensure there is a recruiting culture that emphasizes the necessity of recruiting student-athletes who will be academically successful at the institution.

(6) Institutional admission standards for incoming freshmen and transfer student-athletes have been increased as part of an effort to raise the overall academic profile of the university.

4. Freshmen and transfer student-athletes must meet specific academic requirements in order to receive an offer of athletics aid.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

(1) Freshmen student-athletes must have at least a 2.750 core grade-point average. Transfer student-athletes must have at least a 2.750 cumulative grade-point average in college, and meet the additional NCAA transfer requirements for math and English.

(2) No incoming prospective student-athlete will receive athletics aid if he or she presents an academic transcript below the above noted criteria.

b. Steps.

(1) Compliance office, with assistance from the academic advisor, will evaluate and approve each prospective student-athlete before any official visit is scheduled. Prospective student-athletes also will be discussed in APR improvement team meetings to ensure he or she meets requirements.

(2) Coaches will be required to gain approval from the associate director of athletics for student services, the director of athletics or an applicable body outside of athletics before any offer of athletics aid is made to a prospective student-athlete.

(3) Coaches may appeal (request exceptions) decisions to deny offers of athletics aid by providing a developed plan of academic and social support that is likely to produce meaningful and measurable results.

5. Monitor class attendance.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

(1) Monitor class attendance for 100 percent of student-athletes.

(2) Require 100 percent class attendance by student-athletes, excluding excused absences/team travel.

b. Steps.

- (1) Athletics academic staff and coaching staff will conduct frequent class checks for student-athlete attendance throughout the week.
- (2) Adjust scheduling of away contests and travel to minimize missed class time.
- (3) Coach and/or director of athletics may suspend a student-athlete from competition and/or practice for poor academic performance or class attendance.
- (4) Include class attendance policy in grant-in-aid, which states: "Lack of class attendance without extenuating circumstance may be cause for the discontinuation of athletics aid."
- (5) Use attendance policy during the academic year which conditions practice and competition opportunities on class attendance. Implement a penalty structure for "repeat offenders."

6. Require supervised mandatory study time when away from campus.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

- (1) Supervised mandatory study time will be held on 100 percent of team trips of two nights or more.
- (2) At least two hours of supervised mandatory study time will be held on each of the team's away trips.

b. Steps.

- (1) Academic coordinator will travel with team on all trips of two nights or more.
- (2) Mandatory study sessions will be included in each travel itinerary. If academic coordinator is unavailable on trip, assistant coach will be responsible for conducting and tracking study hall sessions.

RETENTION

1. Design and implement meaningful procedures that will intimately involve a sport liaison, athletic academic coordinator and the athletics administration in the athletics and academic life of the student-athletes so that the negative impact of a future change at the head coaching position will be minimized.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

- (1) Sport liaison(s) will meet with each student-athlete and communicate with his or her family at least four times per academic year.

b. Steps.

- (1) Academic coordinators will provide individual academic reports to the sport liaison on a semester-by-semester basis. The sport liaison will review these summaries to keep abreast of the academic interests and degree progress of the student-athletes.

(2) The sport liaison will attend at least three team meetings and/or practices at the head coach's discretion in an effort to be both more identifiable and more accessible to the student-athletes on the team.

(3) The sport liaison will have a regular presence at home contests. Additionally, the sport liaison will travel to at least three away contests with the team during which he or she may participate in any team meals and activities at the discretion of the head coach.

(4) The sport liaison will make it a general practice to meet with each prospective student-athlete during their official visit to campus.

2. Reduce the number of student-athletes who leave during coaching changes and ensure the student-athletes meet eligibility requirements prior to transfer.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

(1) Ensure that 100 percent of student-athletes who choose to transfer meet eligibility requirements prior to doing so.

(2) Maintain a transfer rate of less than five percent of team's roster during any future head coaching change.

b. Steps.

(1) Director of athletics will maintain open communication with the student-athletes during a coaching change and involve the student-athletes in the hiring process.

(2) Require any student-athlete requesting a release to meet with the director of athletics and senior staff prior to granting a release.

(3) Administration shall take a proactive approach to ensure that the overall experience for student-athletes is positive in the event that a coach leaves institution.

(4) Compliance staff will meet annually with student-athletes to review and explain transfer requirements and legislation.

(5) Academic staff will implement enhanced academic support, progress checks and class attendance requirements for all student-athletes in order to more closely monitor academic progress.

3. Formulate and establish a four-year graduation plan for student-athletes.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

(1) Establish a four-year graduation plan for 100 percent of student-athletes who have a major declared.

(2) Establish a four-year graduation plan for 100 percent of new, incoming student-athletes.

b. Steps.

- (1) Identify student-athletes who, earlier in their college careers, may be pursuing professional opportunities.
- (2) Establish meeting between student-athlete, coach, athletics administrator and academic support staff to review customized academic and graduation plans.
- (3) Academic advisor will assess and monitor student-athlete progress on his or her individual plan each semester, implementing academic support, summer school courses and specific course loads to help maintain progress.
- (4) Implement a yearly "professional sports panel" to mentor student-athletes exploring careers as professional athletes.

4. Decrease number of student-athletes who are not retained. For student-athletes who depart in order to pursue professional sports careers, ensure they depart eligible from the institution to prevent loss of eligibility points.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

- (1) At least 90 percent of student-athletes in any given academic year shall be retained or graduated.
- (2) Provide additional academic support to 100 percent of student-athletes who may consider professional opportunities in that academic year.

b. Steps.

- (1) Implement a process to evaluate the recruiting profile of prospective student-athletes in an effort to gauge the compatibility of the prospective student-athlete with the institution. Advise prospective student-athletes with professional potential of their academic obligations to the institution prior to offers of financial aid and enrollment.
- (2) Identify student-athletes who may explore professional opportunities in order to provide additional monitoring, academic support and counseling in an effort to maintain their academic eligibility.

5. Gauge satisfaction of the student-athlete experience at institution and increase participation of freshmen student-athletes in the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills' events.

a. Possible Measurable Elements.

- (1) Receive 100 percent survey participation and feedback from student-athletes on an annual basis to gauge the student-athlete experience at our institution.
- (2) Achieve 100 percent participation of freshmen student-athletes in the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills' events.

b. Steps.

- (1) Educate all student-athletes regarding counseling and other related services available on campus.

- (2) Create a comprehensive online survey which will be used to measure athletics and academic satisfaction.
- (3) Involve campus counseling services in fall and spring student-athlete meetings.
- (4) Partner with outside groups to provide community service opportunities for student-athletes.
- (5) Develop campus connections for "at-risk" student-athletes and those who are far away from home. Emphasize relationship development between student-athletes and staff members. Create internal reward program to make student-athletes feel appreciated and a part of the program. Establish relationships with parents of current student-athletes. Therefore, parents will understand the role of the staff members and will feel comfortable informing us of problems that might affect the student-athlete, allowing the student-athlete to receive adequate support when needed.
- (6) Director of athletics or designee from athletics department's senior administration will conduct an exit interview with student-athletes wishing to transfer prior to granting permission to contact or release in order to ascertain reason(s) for departure. Identifiable issues will be reviewed with APR Improvement Plan team to address potential adjustments to future improvement plans.

Resources:

NCAA Division I Academic Performance Program Manual (Effective: June 1, 2013).
<http://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/Posted%2BAPP%2BManual.pdf>

