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**Sent Via Email**

June 7, 2022

Dr. Dianne F. Harrison  
Chair, NCAA Division I Committee on Academics

Dear Dr. Harrison:

We write to provide an update on a recent Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics recommendation related to the work of the NCAA Division I Committee on Academics.

As directed in our 2021 "[Achieving Racial Equity in College Sports](#)" report, the Knight Commission funded independent research to examine if institutions are qualifying for financial awards through the NCAA's new academic incentive program with large racial gaps in GSR scores. This review was conducted to evaluate the need for an additional standard or filter for NCAA institutions to receive funding for meeting academic benchmarks.

As background to the Knight Commission's long-standing engagement on these issues, the Commission first recommended tying a portion of NCAA revenue distribution to academic outcomes of athletics teams in [2001](#) and [consistently promoted the merits of this values-based change until its adoption](#). While the Academic Performance Program is an important step to affirm the educational mission of colleges and universities, [based on the research](#) presented at our [May 16, 2022 meeting](#), too many schools with large racial graduation gaps among athletes still qualify for academic awards.

Specifically, based on the most recent public data from 2019, nearly 80 percent of the roughly 350 Division I schools would qualify for the academic unit by meeting one of the three benchmarks for academic success under the current NCAA Academic Performance Program criteria. However, our research found that 47 of those schools had a graduation gap of more than 25 percentage points between their Black and White Athlete Graduation Success Rates (GSRs).

As a result of the revealing research and considering the overarching goals of the program, the Knight Commission recommends that to qualify for academic-based awards, institutions must first demonstrate that the gap between their Black and White Athlete GSRs is not more than 25 percentage points. If this new Racial Equity criteria had been implemented in 2019, 66 percent of DI schools would have qualified for the academic unit instead of 79 percent of DI schools. This level of qualifying schools (66 percent) is consistent with the original goal of the Values-Based Revenue Distribution Working Group that created the academic incentives standards.

The ultimate goal is to eliminate this racial equity gap in GSRs completely. Accordingly, the Commission further recommends that the standard of 25 percentage points be re-evaluated periodically (at least every four years) with the intent of lowering it to incentivize schools to close the gap.

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Finally, our recommendation applies to the gap between Black and White college athletes because Black college athletes are both the largest racial minority in Division I and the minority group with the largest negative graduation gap compared to the graduation rate of White athletes.

We request the opportunity to discuss this recommendation, along with the independent research, with you and the entirety of the Committee on Academics. We believe that this recommendation will uphold the intent of the NCAA Values-Based Working Group while holding schools accountable for the education of all their college athletes.

Best regards,



Arne Duncan  
Co-Chair



Len Elmore  
Co-Chair



Nancy Zimpher  
Co-Chair

Cc: Kevin Lennon, Vice President NCAA Division I  
Jennifer Henderson, Managing Director, Academic and Membership Affairs, NCAA  
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