United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman, Committee on Labor and Human Resources, U.S. Senate

September 1989

STUDENT ATHLETES

Most Schools Meet Proposed Academic Performance Reporting Requirements

GAO/HRD-89-157BR

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Human Resources Division

B-226818

September 11, 1989

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy
Chairman, Committee on Labor
and Human Resources
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This report responds to your July 28, 1989, request that we provide information concerning academic performance and other issues related to student athletes in preparation for a hearing scheduled for September 12, 1989, on Senate bill 580, the "Student Athlete Right-to-Know Act." That legislation would require those postsecondary institutions, which receive federal assistance and which offer athletic scholarships, to report annually to the Secretary of Education such items as graduation rates and fields of study for both student athletes and their entire student bodies. In particular, you asked that we provide information on the following issues:

-- The reporting burden the proposed legislation would impose on schools.

-- The graduation rates of student athletes in men's basketball and football as compared to all students at the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) member schools.

On September 7, 1989, we provided your office the preliminary results of our analysis. This briefing report summarizes the information presented at that meeting and expands on information we reported to the Subcommittee on Postsecondary Education, House Committee on Education and Labor, on May 17, 1989.[1]

We developed the information on reporting burden primarily from telephone interviews with officials from a random sample of 96 National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics

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[1]Student Athletes: Information on Their Academic Performance, GAO/HRD-107FS, May 17, 1989.

(NAIA) and NCAA member schools. The NAIA and the NCAA are the two largest athletic organizations that administer intercollegiate sports programs at colleges and universities. Their combined school membership is about 1,300, of which the NCAA has more than 800 member schools. These schools would be affected by the proposed legislation, and officials of these schools and associations are among the most knowledgeable individuals on student athletic issues. Results based on our sample are statistically projectable to these schools. We grouped these schools by those that would be subject to the proposed legislation and those that would likely be exempt.

In addition, we obtained statistics on graduation rates from the NCAA on its Division I-A schools for both student athletes and all students.[2] The NCAA develops these graduation rate statistics from an annual survey of its 293 Division I schools. (See apps. I and II for additional details on our study objectives and methodology.)

Reporting Burden on Affected Schools

Both the Senate and House (H.R. 1454) bills were introduced on March 15, 1989. They are identical and would provide a means to make student athletes more aware of the commitment of postsecondary institutions to academics as well as athletics. As shown in table 1, the major provision of these bills would require that institutions prepare and submit an annual report on seven data items to the Secretary of Education, who would in turn compile and publish the data annually.

As we noted in our May 1989 report, the NAIA and NCAA are currently planning to collect and publish some of the required data. The NCAA is considering publishing its graduation rate information (which it now makes available for its division I schools only in the aggregate) by individual institution. The NAIA, which previously has not collected this data, is planning to compile an annual report that would develop information similar to that to be required.

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[2]The NCAA generally categorizes its member schools by the size of their athletic programs and related facilities--from Division I (the largest) to Division III (the smallest). Division I is further divided from I-A (the largest, such as members of the Big 10 Conference) to I-AAA (the smallest, such as members of the Midwestern Collegiate Conference).

Table 1: Reporting Requirements of the Student Athlete Right-to-Know Act

1. Graduation rates for students receiving athletic scholarships by sport, race, and sex.

2. Graduation rates for all students by race and sex.

3. The number of students receiving athletic scholarships who earned academic degrees by field of study, type of academic degree received, and sport.

4. The number of students who earned academic degrees by field of study and type of academic degree received.

5. The number and proportion of students who received athletic scholarships and earned a degree within 5 years by sport, race, and sex.

6. The number and proportion of students who earned a degree within 5 years by race and sex.

7. The amount of federal financial assistance received by students who participated in intercollegiate athletics.

Our findings are in appendix III. Regarding reporting burden, we found that:

-- Fifty-six percent of the schools we interviewed would likely be subject to the bills' provisions because they reported offering athletic scholarships, while the remaining 44 percent would likely be exempt because they reported offering no athletic scholarships.

-- According to both sets of schools, most of the required information is already collected, although it may not always be automated.

-- Almost all schools stated that they could compute information on the amount of federal financial assistance their student athletes receive.

We also asked these schools to provide information on (1) how many staff days they spend annually to collect that portion of information required by the proposed legislation, (2) how many staff days would be needed to design a system to fulfill all these requirements, and (3) how many staff days would be

required to report the information to the Department of Education annually.

Although the time spent collecting and analyzing data varied widely, the schools offering scholarships said they currently spend an average of 39 staff days collecting the data that would be required. They would also need an average of 17 staff days to design a data collection and reporting system that would fully meet the proposed reporting requirements Once this system was established, the schools stated they would need an average of 6 staff days to report this information annually to the Department.[3]

There was little difference between schools that did and did not offer athletic scholarships, and neither group estimated they would need much time to annually report the required information after designing and implementing their reporting systems. Although most schools collect most of the information needed, the schools cited several reasons why it might be difficult to collect this information. (Additional information on these results is discussed in app. III.)

Currently Available Information on Graduation Rates

The NCAA collects graduation rates for both student athletes and the entire student bodies of its Division I member schools. It uses a 5-year completion period for measuring graduation rates. For example, it computed rates for its 1988 report by dividing the number of students and student athletes who entered school in the 1982-83 academic year into the number of those same students and student athletes who graduated by August 31, 1987, respectively.

The NCAA also collects data on the graduation rates of athletes by individual sports. Tables 2 and 3 show these rates for the largest revenue-producing sports--men's basketball and football--at NCAA Division I-A schools. Schools offering basketball programs had lower graduation rates for student athletes in these programs compared to their general student body.

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[3]As you requested, these three averages omit the 5 schools that said they would need the most number of days to meet the requirements, and 5 schools that said they would need the fewest number of days, to exclude extreme values. Appendix III contains the unadjusted mean, median, mode, and range values for these staff day estimates.

Table 2: Basketball Players' Graduation Rates Compared to All Students

Graduation rate (percent)	At 97 Division I-A schools: Basketball	All students
0 to 20	35	4
21 to 40	33	27
41 to 60	11	40
61 to 80	10	20
81 to 100	8	6

Source: NCAA

The NCAA's statistics also show that 30 schools had graduation rates of 5 percent or less for basketball players,[4] while 7 schools had graduation rates of 96 percent or greater for its basketball players.

Table 4 shows that schools with football programs also had lower graduation rates for athletes in these programs when compared with the general student body.

Table 3: Football Players' Graduation Rates Compared to All Students

Graduation rate (percent)	At 103 Division I-A schools: Football	All students
0 to 20	14	5
21 to 40	39	30
41 to 60	31	42
61 to 80	13	20
81 to 100	6	6

Source: NCAA

As we noted in our May 1989 report, although we believe that graduation rate comparisons are useful, such comparisons of academic performance of student athletes with that of the general student population should take into account these students' demographic and academic characteristics in order to help ensure that any conclusions that are drawn are for

[4]The NCAA said that the number of basketball scholarships at a school can sometimes be as few as one during a given year. As a result, if the athlete failed to graduate within 5 years, the school would have a 0.0 graduation rate.

reasonably comparable groups. This information includes factors such as family income, race, sex, American College Testing (ACT) or Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, and their major field of study. Caution needs to be exercised in measuring academic performance unless such demographic and academic characteristics are also considered.

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As agreed with your office, in order to make this information available for your hearing on student athlete issues scheduled for September 12, 1989, we did not obtain written comments on this report from the Department of Education and other interested parties. However, we did discuss its contents with officials of the NAIA and NCAA and incorporated their views and suggestions where appropriate. We also note that it was in large part the excellent cooperation of these organizations and the schools we contacted that made timely completion of this report possible.

We are sending copies of this report to other congressional committees, the Department of Education, NAIA, NCAA, and other interested parties. If you have questions about the information presented, please call me on 275-5365. Other major contributors to this report are listed in appendix IV.

Sincerely yours,

Edward A Densmore

for William J. Gainer
Director, Education
and Employment Issues

Contents

Tables

Abbreviations

ACT	American College Testing
GAO	General Accounting Office
NAIA	National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
SAT	Scholastic Aptitude Test

OBJECTIVE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Our objective was to assist the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources by providing information for its use in preparing for hearings on student athlete issues. In discussions with the committee staff, we agreed to focus our efforts on determining:

-- What the administrative burden would be on the schools if they had to comply with the seven data requirements specified in Senate bill 580 and House bill 1454.

-- How the graduation rates for student athletes participating in men's basketball and football compared with the general student body.

To respond to these questions we discussed this assignment with NCAA and NAIA officials, whose headquarters are located in Mission, Kansas, and Kansas City, Missouri, respectively. The NCAA is the larger of the two athletic organizations and has over 800 member schools. The NAIA is an organization that administers programs of intercollegiate athletics at nearly 500 colleges and universities, usually with smaller enrollments than NCAA member schools. Both groups believe that intercollegiate athletics is an integral part of the educational program and that the student athlete is an integral part of the student body. The NAIA sponsors 22 championships in 12 sports, while NCAA has 77 championships in 21 sports.

In determining what information was currently available on the seven data items required by the proposed legislation, we surveyed officials representing 96 randomly selected NAIA and NCAA schools. To determine their administrative burden we asked these officials questions such as whether the information was currently collected, and if so, whether it is broken down by the different variables (race, sex, and sport). (Appendix II contains a discussion of our methodology for selecting and interviewing the various school officials.)

The information we used in developing statistics on graduation rates came from the NCAA's data base. This data base contains information for comparing the graduation rates of student athletes with the general student body. In addition to graduation rates, the NCAA collects various data, such as the grade point averages of entering freshman basketball and football players, and student athletes' fields of study. Completion of the instrument is required by the NCAA's bylaws, and the information reported must be certified by each school's chief executive officer. The NCAA publishes the information in its annual Academic Reporting Compilation and arrays it in a variety

of formats and categories, using median and range values for each category, such as graduation rates of athletes by sport.

This reporting requirement was adopted in 1985 as a means by which a school's chief executive officer could compare the academic records, performance, and graduation rates of student athletes generally at his or her institution to the entire student body. This requirement also stipulates that a summary of the data be distributed annually with the reporting institutions remaining confidential.

The NCAA analyzes this information for its division I schools in three subgroups (I-A, I-AA, and I-AAA). In computing graduation rates, the NCAA divides the number of students entering school in a given year into the number of those same students who had graduated from that school within 5 years. This computation is done for both student athletes and the institution's general student body, and results in overall graduation rates. The NCAA also computes an "adjusted" graduation rate for student athletes only by (1) adding incoming transfer students and (2) subtracting those who (a) left school in good academic standing and (b) have completed their athletic eligibility but are still enrolled in school. This adjustment would normally increase the rate. For example, NCAA's compilation for 1988 (for the 5 years ending August 31, 1987) showed that the adjusted rate increased the graduation rate for student athletes in each reported category.

In discussions with the committee staff, we agreed to report the NCAA's graduation rates for men's basketball and football using the NCAA's division I-A subgrouping and compare these results with the general student body at these schools. It was also agreed that we would report this data by stratifying the graduation rate results rather than using median and range values. As a result, we asked NCAA to format, compile, and present its data in a way that was different than its normal reporting manner. In addition, because NCAA only adjusts the graduation rates of student athletes and not the rates of all students, we agreed to use nonadjusted graduation rates.

The information we have developed is based on the data compiled by NCAA for its 1988 report--the most recent available. The NCAA computed graduation rate information for each comparison category by dividing the number of students or student athletes entering the school in academic year 1982-83 into the number of those same students or student athletes who graduated by August 31, 1987. The limited time we had to respond to this request did not afford us the opportunity to verify the accuracy of this information. We conducted our work during August and September 1989.

TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION OF GAO's SURVEY AND SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

This appendix contains a technical description of our interview survey design, pretesting of the survey, selection of the sample, and calculations of sample errors.

Interview Survey Design

From August 29 to September 6, 1989, we administered a standardized telephone interview, using the computer-aided telephone interview technique, to a random sample of 96 college and university administrators whose schools were members of the NCAA or NAIA. We interviewed administrators who were identified by their school presidents as being the most knowledgeable person to respond to our survey.

The interview survey was primarily designed to obtain facts about what information each school collects on each student, whether that data are maintained in an automated data base system, and whether they currently use this information to compute specific kinds of graduation information. We also asked for their opinion on how difficult it may be for their school to comply with the reporting requirements in Senate bill 580, and how long it would take their school to set up and run a data collection and analysis system necessary to comply with the proposed requirements.

The survey instrument was pretested with two college administrators who were knowledgeable about their schools' data collection practices. One of these administrators was also included in our random sample of schools. GAO staff administered the questionnaire to the designated administrators over the telephone. We noted any difficulties the respondent had in answering questions and made changes accordingly.

Sampling Colleges and Universities

Before selecting the random sample, we identified a universe of 482 NAIA and 803 NCAA member schools. We then took a proportional random sample of schools from both associations. One school in our sample was a member of both associations. Since our analysis does not distinguish schools by affiliation, we assigned this school to the NAIA group. The following table summarizes our sampling plan and the response rate we achieved.

Table II.1: GAO Sampling Plan

Association	Universe size	Sample size	No. of respondents	Response rate (percent)
NAIA	482	38	38	100
NCAA	803	62	58	94
Total	1,285	100	96	96

Sampling Errors

We projected our survey results from our sample to the universe of all colleges and universities that are members of the NAIA or NCAA. Each estimate, however, has a sampling error associated with it. A sampling error is the most an estimate can be expected to differ from the actual universe characteristics.

Sampling errors usually are stated at a specific confidence level, 95 percent in this case. This means that the chances are 95 out of 100 that, if we had surveyed all member colleges and universities, the results would differ from the estimates we have made by less than the sampling error of that estimate.

For this survey, the sampling error for each estimate does not exceed plus or minus 9 percent for any categorical question--a question that has a set number of responses. An example of the sample errors for one of the questions we asked is presented in table II.2.

Table II.2: Sample Error Estimate for Categorical Question--Does School Offer Athletic Scholarships?

Offered scholarships	No. in sample	Estimated no. in universe	Percent	Sampling error (+/- %)
Yes	54	693	56	9
No	42	540	44	9
Total	96	1,233	100	

The sample error estimates for the questions we asked that have a continuous range of answers, such as how much time schools spend collecting student data, varied widely. Table II.3 lists the average number of staff days administrators said they spend collecting student data, how much they would need to spend

annually after designing a system to comply with the requirements of the proposed legislation, and the sample error (at the 95-percent confidence level) associated with each estimate.

Table II.3: Sample Error Estimates for Continuous Question--How Much Time Needed to Comply With Bill Requirements?

Activity	Mean (staff days per year)	Sampling error (+/- staff days per year)	No. of respondents
Collecting student data (current practices)	122	76	79
Setting up a system to generate information required by S. 580	47	24	95
Reporting information required by S. 580 after system design	9	5	95

Verifying Responses

We did not check the accuracy of the responses to our survey.

STUDENT ATHLETES: Most Schools Meet Information Requirements of the Proposed Student Athlete Right-to-Know Act

Figure III.1

GAO Human Resources Division

STUDENT ATHLETES:

Most Schools Meet Information Requirements of the Proposed Student Athlete Right-to-Know Act

Figure III.2

GAO Student Athlete Right-to-Know Act

- Senate bill 580 (House bill 1454)
  - Requires annual reporting by any school receiving federal assistance and providing athletic scholarships
  - Report would contain data on seven specific requirements

Figure III.3

GAO Objectives

We were asked to:

- Determine the burden on schools to comply with the legislation
- Provide other information on the graduation statistics for men's basketball and football players

Figure III.4

GAO Scope

- Random sample of NAIA and NCAA member schools
- 38 NAIA and 62 NCAA were selected
- 96 responded

Figure III.5

GAO Methodology

- Used a computer assisted telephone interview
  - Contained 70 questions
  - Interviewed key school official designated by the school president
- Obtained other information from the NAIA and NCAA

APPENDIX III

Figure III.6

GAO Reporting Requirements Contained in Senate Bill 580

Graduation rates by race & sex for:	1. athletes, by sport 2. all students
Number earning degrees by field & degree type for:	3. athletes, by sport 4. all students
Number & proportion earning degrees in 5 years by race & sex for:	5. athletes, by sport 6. all students
Amount of federal financial assistance to:	7. athletes

Figure III.7

GAO Key Variables Required by the Legislation

- Sport
- Race
- Sex
- Field of study
- Type of academic degree
- Time taken to graduate
- Amount of federal assistance

APPENDIX III

Figure III.8

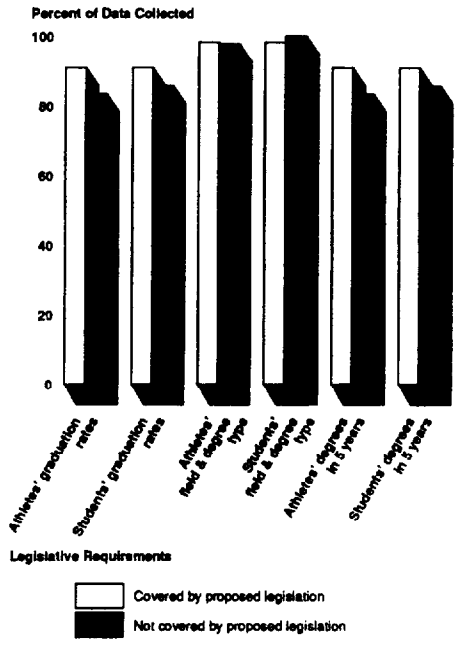
GAO What Did We Find?

- Many schools already collect the required information regardless of whether they were covered by the bill
- Time to collect, design, and annually report the data varied
- Basketball and football players generally graduated at lower rates when compared to all students

APPENDIX III

Figure III.9

GAO Most Schools Currently Collect the Required Data



APPENDIX III

Figure III.10

GAO Most Data Collected on Athletes Is Not Automated

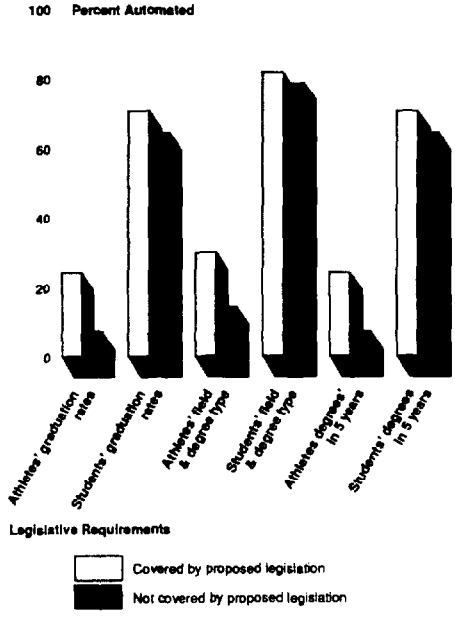


Figure III.11

GAO Staff Days Currently Spent Collecting Required Data

	Schools Covered	Schools Not Covered
Range:	1-2,800	0-1,200
Mean:	118	125
Median:	25	26
Mode:	10	30

APPENDIX III

Figure III.12

GAO Staff Days Needed to Design a Collection & Reporting System

	Schools Covered	Schools Not Covered
Range:	0-365	0-1,000
Mean:	36	61
Median:	10	10
Mode:	5	10

Figure III.13

GAO Staff Days Needed to Annually Report After Design

	Schools Covered	Schools Not Covered
Range:	.5-90	.1-210
Mean:	8	11
Median:	5	4
Mode:	5	5

Figure III.14

GAO Basketball Players' Graduation Rates Versus All Students

At 97 Division I-A Schools

Graduation rate (percent)	Basketball (number of schools)	All students (number of schools)
0 to 20	35	4
21 to 40	33	27
41 to 60	11	40
61 to 80	10	20
81 to 100	8	6

Source: NCAA

Figure III.15

GAO Football Players' Graduation Rates Versus All Students

At 103 Division I-A Schools

Graduation rate (percent)	Football (number of schools)	All students (number of schools)
0 to 20	14	5
21 to 40	39	30
41 to 60	31	42
61 to 80	13	20
81 to 100	6	6

Source: NCAA

Figure III.16

GAO Major Reasons Why It Would Be Difficult to Report

No unified data base.....35%

Key data not automated.....22%

No staff available.....18%

Have no serious problems..13%

Key data not collected.....8%

Other reasons.....4%

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APPENDIX V

RELATED GAO PRODUCTS

Student Athletes: Information on Their Academic Performance (GAO/HRD-89-107FS, May 17, 1989).

Student Aid: Financial Assistance to Scholarship Athletes (GAO/HRD-87-78BR, May 11, 1987).

(104636)

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