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Adjusted Graduation Gap:

NCAA Division-I Baseball and Softball

Analysis Reveals Large Gaps between Graduation Rates of Baseball Players and Full-time Male Students

Chapel Hill, NC – April 18, 2011… The College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill released the 2011 NCAA Division-I baseball and softball installment of its annual Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) report today. Among numerous findings, the report indicated the overall adjusted graduation gap between NCAA D-I men's baseball players and the general full-time male student body is sizable (-18.8), but is particularly pronounced (-31) in "Power Conferences" that compete at the highest level. NCAA D-I softball players have a much smaller gap (-3.0) than baseball players, with 11 conferences having positive or no graduation gaps. However, there were several conferences that had negative graduation gaps between -10.3 and -17.3. In addition, the softball AGG is better than the AGG for women's basketball (-8.9).

Baseball's mean AGG is worse than the overall D1 Football AGG of (-13.6) and comparable to the D-I men's basketball AGG of (-20.0).

As was the case in the 2010 football and 2010-2011 men's basketball reports (see: CSRI 2010-2011 AGG Reports @ www.unc.edu/csri) there is a very strong negative correlation between the level of athletic competition (e.g. power conference affiliation) and a conference's adjusted graduation gap. In other words, stronger baseball conferences do a worse job of graduating their male athletes when compared to their full-time male student body. CSRI director and AGG report co-author Richard Southall noted, "The AGG provides strong evidence that many D-I baseball players – just as is the case with football and men's basketball players – do not graduate at rates comparable to full-time male students at their universities."

The 2011 Division-I Baseball and Softball AGG Report utilizes the published 4-class average Federal Graduation Rates (FGR) for the 1999-2002 cohort (latest available) and adjusts the corresponding student-body FGR to remove the "part-time bias." Since the NCAA requires all athletes to be full-time students, This adjustment allows for a "realistic" comparison of reported NCAA athletes' federal graduation rates with adjusted full-time student graduation rates.

Highlights of the report included:

- Twenty-seven of the 30 NCAA D-I baseball conferences have negative AGGs. Eighteen of the 29 NCAA D-I softball conferences had negative AGGs. In other words, 27 baseball and 18 softball conferences' athlete graduation rates are less than the estimated full-time student-body rate of the respective gender.
- The average AGG for NCAA Division-I softball conferences is only -3.0, while the average AGG for NCAA Division-I baseball conferences is -18.8 percentage points.
- The worst softball conference AGG (-17.3: Mountain West Conference) would have placed 16th in the baseball rankings. The best baseball conference AGG (+2.8 for the

Patriot League) would have placed 8th on the softball rankings. The baseball average AGG (-18.8) was greater than any single softball conference's AGG.

- The AGG Baseball "Top Five" Conferences include:

  1. Patriot League (+2.8),

  2. Northeast (+1.1),

  3. Southwestern (SWAC) (+0.2),

  4. Metro- Atlantic (-2.9),

  5. Mid-American [MAC] (-5.5).

- The AGG Baseball "Bottom Five" Conferences include:

  26. Southeastern [SEC] (-35.3 AGG),

  27. Mountain West [MWC] (-36.0),

  28. Pac-10 (-40.6),

  29. Western Athletic [WAC] (-40.7),

  30. Big XII (-42.8).

- The AGG Softball "Top Five" Conferences include:

  1. SWAC (+9.6),

  2. Northeast (+8.7),

  3. Horizon League (+6.7),

  4. MAC (+5.1),

  5. Metro-Atlantic (+4.8).

- The AGG Softball "Bottom Five" Conferences include:

  25. Southern (-10.3),

  26. Summit League (-10.9),

  27. Sun Belt (-13.7),

  28. WAC (-17.1),

  29. MWC (-17.3).

Complete NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap Tables for NCAA Division-I conferences are found in the Appendix (See Tables 1 & 2.).

The graduation rate disparities are at least partly attributed to baseball and softball's multiple "segments," which effectively result in both being year-round sports. Softball's "Championship Segment," runs from the second week in February to the conclusion of the NCAA championships in mid-June. Baseball's spring "championship" season runs from January to the last week in June. However, both sports' fall segments (seasons) start the first of September and end the last of November. Effectively, baseball and softball players devote nine months of the year to in-season competition and practice. Undoubtedly, the year-round nature of these sports is likely a strong contributing factor to baseball's large graduation gaps.

Given these seasons' intensity and length, some observers see college baseball athletes as essentially minor-league players. Southall noted, "The baseball and softball grind, with three-game series almost every weekend and numerous mid-week single games, is akin to that posed by a 'minor-league' schedule. In addition to the sheer number of games, grueling road trips, practices, and training sessions place tremendous stress on players' academic commitments. As a result, players often miss class or return to campus mentally and physically drained."

"While baseball and softball crowds are smaller than those for football and basketball games, baseball and softball are viewed as potential 'revenue-generating' sports by many colleges and universities, as well as the NCAA. The men's and women's College World Series are now staples of ESPN's spring/summer sport programming. Specifically in baseball, college is now viewed as a viable alternative for players who aspire to a Major League Baseball (MLB) career. As a result, expanding the season makes good sense, from both revenue-generation and player development perspectives. Players, many of whom played similarly arduous 'travel' youth baseball schedules and hope to eventually sign professional contracts, often have little interest in playing fewer games. In addition, even if they wanted to decrease the season's length, they have no voice in any such negotiations. As a result, players are forced to juggle full-time academic-course loads while playing a minor-league like schedule. Inevitably, something has to give, and AGG data reveals what is often 'giving' is NCAA Division-I baseball players' graduation rates."

Finally, an interesting and important finding, consistent with Division-I basketball's AGG results, is that within conferences female athletes - in essentially the same sports - have significantly smaller AGGs. Within conferences, the gap between the graduation rates of baseball and softball players is marked, with twenty of twenty-eight conferences having double-digit gaps (See Table 3 in Appendix.). This strongly suggests that length of season is not the only relevant factor. Cultural differences between male and female sports at universities and within conferences may have an influence.

Southall noted, "Further research needs to be conducted to uncover possible reasons why the softball AGG is either positive or non-existent. The large baseball AGGs are consistent with those found in football and men's basketball. This raises some important questions:

- What is causing such large AGGs in the male sports of football, basketball and baseball?
- Are male college athletes being given an **opportunity** to obtain a quality education equivalent to other full-time male students? "

Everyone involved in intercollegiate athletics should be committed to research that seeks to answer these fundamental questions.

The authors of the study (CSRI Director Dr. Richard Southall, Dr. E Woodrow Eckard, and CSRI Associate Director Dr. Mark Nagel) commented, "Just as the previous two AGG Reports, the Baseball/Softball AGG Report supports the need for additional research regarding how various factors, including socio-economic status, educational background, cultural diversity, and player migration patterns may contribute to these significant negative graduation gaps."

AGG Report Development

In 1990, Congress mandated full disclosure of graduation rates at schools that award athletically-related aid and receive federal financial aid. The Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) reports the percentage of students (both athletes and non-athletes) who graduate within six years from the school they entered as freshmen. As a result, the FGR provides a measure of the

extent to which colleges and universities retain and graduate the athletes they recruit, thus providing one measure of whether schools are fulfilling the NCAA's mission of maintaining athletes as an integral part of the student body. The strength of the FGR is its focus on student retention.

 Another useful measure of graduation rates for athletes is called the Graduation Success Rate (GSR). The GSR, a creation of the NCAA, excludes from its calculation those athletes—primarily transfers—who leave a particular school prior to graduating (i.e. early), but in good academic standing. The NCAA methodology includes athletes who transfer into an institution in a school's graduation success rate. The GSR is a useful adjunct to the FGR, in that it recognizes athletes may take a different path to graduation than other full-time students. Similar to many part-time students who must work a full-time job while in school, athletes may transfer from one school to another – either of their own accord or at the behest of a coach who encourages them to transfer or "non-renews" their yearly grant-in-aid (GIA).

One of the limitations of the GSR is the inability to compare athletes' GSR to a similar rate for the general student body. In addition, at times NCAA athletes' Graduation Success Rates and Federal Graduation Rates for the general student body are sometimes intermingled in discussions of graduation rates. Unless clearly delineated, such comparisons may confuse the general public and result in a more favorable impression regarding the retention and graduation of college athletes from the university to which they initially enrolled. However, as long as the purpose and scope of the GSR is clearly delineated, at its core, it is a useful indicator of college athletes' persistence in making progress toward a degree.

The Adjusted Graduation Gap was developed to partly address a limitation of the FGR and provide a context to examine retention rates among various student populations on college campuses. The AGG compares an adjusted graduation rate (AGR) for full-time students and the reported FGR for college athletes from the following NCAA Division-I sports: football – Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) & Football Championship Subdivision (FCS), men's and women's

basketball, softball and baseball. Reports regarding each sport are released at various times during the year. Just as the FGR and GSR have limitations, the AGG is not intended to be used in isolation or intended to refute the FGR or GSR analyses.

The College Sport Research Institute believes in full disclosure and use of all measures pertaining to college athletes' graduation, since no one measure is "perfect," "better," or somehow "fairer" than another. They simply measure different things. The FGR focuses on an institution's ability to **retain** the students (including athletes) it initially admits, while the GSR attempts to account for athletes who **leave a school that initially admitted them**. The AGG results draw attention to the issue that, contrary to many full-time students, college athletes (especially those in revenue sports) effectively are engaged in full-time jobs while in school.

Historically, standard evaluations of NCAA athlete graduation rates have involved comparisons with general student body rates presumed to pertain to full-time students. However, at many schools general student body rates include a significant number of part-time students. This is problematic because athletes must be "full-time" and should therefore be compared with other full-time students. The downward "part-timer bias" in the student-body rate distorts the comparison. Because part-time students take longer to graduate, this significantly reduces the measured general student-body graduation rate (FGR). CSRI's Adjusted Graduation Gap addresses this "part-timer bias" using regression-based adjustments for the percentage of part-timers. These estimates then become the basis for the AGG comparison of graduation rates among full-time students. [1]

CSRI

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[1] Technical details of the AGG can be found in E. Woodrow Eckard, "NCAA Athlete Graduation Rates: Less than Meets the Eye," *Journal of Sport Management*, January 2010, pp. 45-58.

data collection and analysis related to college-sport issues. CSRI is one of eight laboratories and institutes within the Department of Exercise and Sport Science at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As of spring 2011, CSRI has over close to 200 supporting members from across the United States, including current and former students, faculty, current and former college and professional athletes, athletic administrators, and the general public.

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 issues and 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.

This baseball and softball AGG report is the third of three College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) Adjusted Graduation Gap Reports for the 2010-2011 academic year. It is hoped annual AGG Reports will continue to encourage research and dialogue regarding not only graduation rates, but also the quality and type of educational opportunities afforded college athletes.

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Appendix

Table 1: 2011 Baseball NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Report - (1999-2002 4-class Cohort)

Ranking	Conference	AGG	RPI
1.	Patriot League	+2.8	0.460
2.	Northeast	+1.1	0.430
3.	Southwestern	+0.2	0.411
4.	Metro Atlantic	-2.9	0.439
5.	Mid-American	-5.5	0.481
6.	Mid-Eastern	-5.6	0.412
7.	Big South	-6.2	0.503
8.	Horizon League	-7.6	0.448
9.	America East	-11.4	0.460
10.	Atlantic Sun	-12.5	0.507
11.	Southern	-13.3	0.509
12.	Big Ten	-15.4	0.508
13.	Atlantic 10	-15.4	0.467
14.	Big East	-16.5	0.515
15.	Ohio Valley	-16.8	0.455
16.	Missouri Valley	-17.9	0.511
17.	Great West	-19.5	n/a
18.	West Coast	-20.5	0.507
19.	Southland	-20.7	0.503
20.	Colonial Athletic	-21.0	0.504
21.	Sun Belt	-23.7	0.522
22.	Summit League	-24.0	0.437
23.	Conference USA	-29.5	0.539
24.	Big West	-32.2	0.541
25.	Atlantic Coast	-33.3	0.571
26.	Southeastern	-35.3	0.578
27.	Mountain West	-36.0	0.481
28.	Pacific-10	-40.6	0.561
29.	Western Athletic	-40.7	0.511
30.	Big XII	-42.8	0.570
	Mean	**-18.8**	

t-statistic = -7.745983 (null: mean = 0)

Notes:

1. AGG = (Baseball Fed Rate) – (Male Student-Body Federal Graduation Rate: adjusted for part-time students)
2. RPI = Rating Power Index, a measure of conference strength. (0.01108862)
3. The RPI covers seasons 2003-08.
4. The Great West had no baseball prior to 2010.

Table 2: 2011 Softball NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) Report - (1999-2002 4-class Cohort)

Ranking	Conference	AGG	RPI
1.	Southwestern	9.6	0.375
2.	Northeast	8.7	0.444
3.	Horizon League	6.7	0.454
4.	Mid-American	5.1	0.483
5.	Metro Atlantic	4.8	0.443
6.	Big Ten	4.5	0.558
7.	Mid-Eastern	3.4	0.395
8.	Ohio Valley	0.2	0.488
9.	Missouri Valley	0.1	0.518
10.	American East	0.1	0.473
11.	Big East	0.0	0.515
12.	Atlantic 10	-1.2	0.470
13.	Big West	-1.3	0.532
14.	Patriot League	-2.6	0.424
15.	Big South	-2.7	0.492
16.	Pacific Coast SB	-2.8	0.478
17.	Atlantic Coast	-3.9	0.565
18.	Atlantic Sun	-4.0	0.494
19.	Southland	-5.8	0.477
20.	Big XII	-6.0	0.571
21.	Conference USA	-6.4	0.533
22.	Southeastern	-7.6	0.588
23.	Colonial Athletic	-8.1	0.490
24.	Pac-10	-8.9	0.620
25.	Southern	-10.3	0.478
26.	Summit League	-10.9	0.435
27.	Sun Belt	-13.7	0.514
28.	Western Athletic	-17.1	0.511
29.	Mountain West	-17.3	0.540
	Mean	**-3.0**	

Notes:

1. RPI = Rating Power Index, a measure of conference strength. (0.01108862)

Table 3: Comparison of 2011 baseball and Softball NCAA Division-I Adjusted Graduation Gaps - (1999-2002 4-class Cohort)

Ranking	Conference	Baseball (BA) AGG	Softball (SB) AGG	BA v. SB Gap
1.	Big XII	-42.8	-6.0	-36.8
2.	Pac-10	-40.6	-8.9	-31.7
3.	Big West	-32.2	-1.3	-30.9
4.	Atlantic Coast	-33.3	-3.9	-29.4
5.	Southeastern	-35.3	-7.6	-27.7
6.	Western Athletic	-40.7	-17.1	-23.6
7.	Conference USA	-29.5	-6.4	-23.1
8.	Big Ten	-15.4	+4.5	-19.9
9.	Mountain West	-36.0	-17.3	-18.7
10.	Missouri Valley	-17.9	+0.1	-18.0
11.	Ohio Valley	-16.8	+0.2	-17.0
12.	Big East	-16.5	0.0	-16.5
13.	Southland	-20.7	-5.8	-14.9
14.	Horizon	-7.6	+6.7	-14.3
15.	Atlantic 10	-15.4	-1.2	-14.2
16.	Summit	-24.0	-10.9	-13.1
17.	Colonial	-21.0	-8.1	-12.9
18.	American East	-11.4	+0.1	-11.5
19.	Mid-American	-5.5	+5.1	-10.6
20.	Sun Belt	-23.7	-13.7	-10.0
21.	Southwestern	+0.2	+9.6	-9.4
22.	Mid-Eastern	-5.6	+3.4	-9.0
23.	Atlantic Sun	-12.5	-4.0	-8.5
24.	Metro Atlantic	-2.9	+4.8	-7.7
25.	Northeast	+1.1	+8.7	-7.6
26.	Big South	-6.2	-2.7	-3.5
27.	Southern	-13.3	-10.3	-3.0
28.	Patriot	+2.8	-2.6	+5.4

* Only conference with a larger AGG for women's than men's basketball players.

**Note: West Coast and Great West Conferences not included.