



2011
COLLEGE WRESTLING COACHES
ACADEMIC MANUAL

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FORWARD

During the summer of 1988, I was presented with the opportunity to become the head wrestling coach at SUNY-Binghamton, which is now known as Binghamton University. I had wrestled at Binghamton during the preceding four years and was excited to see if I could effectively teach the skills that I had learned as a student-athlete. It did not take me too long to realize, that if I hoped to be a successful college coach, I would need to acquire a great deal more skills, knowledge, and abilities than what I had developed as an undergraduate student-athlete.

Although I like to think I had some success as a coach, I became aware that my skills and abilities were better suited to inspiring college students to be successful academically rather than athletically. During my nine-year coaching career, I coached 13 Academic All-Americans, while also serving as a resident director on campus, earning my master's degree, and eventually developing Binghamton's academic support program for student-athletes as the university prepared its move from Division III to Division I. These experiences helped shape my career.

A year after stepping down from coaching to direct Binghamton's Education Enhancement Program full-time, I accepted a position at San Diego State University (SDSU) as an academic advisor for student-athletes. Within two years, I was appointed as the director of SDSU's student-athlete academic support program and remained there until accepting a similar position at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in 2005. Earlier this year, I was promoted and currently serve as an Assistant Vice President at UCF with a focus on academic support, success, and retention for all students on campus.

After hanging up my head coach's whistle I remained connected with the sport of wrestling serving as a volunteer coach and high school official when time permitted. Starting in the fall of 2003, I was also heavily engaged working to save the wrestling program at Binghamton, which had been eliminated and was finally reinstated in 2005. Then in 2008, I reached out to Mike Moyer to offer whatever assistance I could provide the NWCA to help prevent other programs from being dropped due to academic concerns.

Since then I have been working as a consultant with the NWCA, primarily with NCAA Division I coaches, to assist them in understanding Academic Progress Rate information and implementing strategies for success. Along with presenting at the annual NWCA convention and assisting with the Coaching Leadership Academy, I remain in contact with Division I coaches throughout the year to help develop academic improvement plans specific to each institution's needs.



This manual represents a continuation of the support I have already offered coaches and an introduction to others, who I have not yet assisted. The ideas and information shared within these pages have been acquired over the past quarter century. They have been tested at both large and small institutions, at Universities in all three divisions of the NCAA, at NAIA schools, and at junior colleges. Most of the best practices contained within these pages have been implemented successfully at more than one institution. Some of the ideas are original; however, most have been shared with me after being successfully implemented at institutions throughout the country.

I offer this manual as a guide for developing a comprehensive academic game plan that can be effective at any institution of higher learning. I welcome any feedback you may have from what is included in the manual and most certainly welcome any questions that come to mind. I hope you find the information valuable to you and your staff, and I look forward to working with more coaches on a one-on-one basis in the future.

OBJECTIVES AND VALUES

This manual has been developed for college wrestling coaches, who are members of the National Wrestling Coaches Association (NWCA). It is intended to serve as a resource for new coaches looking to develop systems to ensure academic success and veteran coaches hoping to find another competitive edge. Specifically, this manual is written with four objectives.

1. Assist coaches with the successful recruitment, retention, and graduation of college-bound wrestlers so that the sport remains a viable option for high school student-athletes for decades to come.
2. To provide coaches with 'best practices' which will ensure that our college wrestlers have tools and systems to be successful as undergraduate students.
3. To provide coaches with a basic understanding of graduation rates and Academic Progress Rates (APR), and why they are essential to the survival of our sport at every level.
4. Provide coaches an opportunity to reflect on what has been successful and what can be improved in the area of academic achievement within their program.

As the sport's leaders, there is no greater activity we can accomplish than to retain and grow the current opportunities available to students who wish to compete in wrestling at the college level. It is through retention of our current programs that we then have the opportunity to demonstrate strength and grow the number of programs in the future.

As most coaches understand, college wrestling is a unique sport often supported with limited funding or direct access for team-specific academic support. Therefore, college



coaches and wrestlers must learn to do more with less and excel under less than ideal conditions. Four core values are central to this manual and are the guiding principles for what is, and is not, included in the following pages.

These values include:

- The pursuit of excellence
- Integrity
- Accountability
- The development of the total person

By embracing these core values as a part of the intercollegiate wrestling environment, coaches will help protect the sport of wrestling on their respective campus and solidify its existence in the profession of higher education.

The pursuit of excellence is the most critical of these four values. A central function of a coach is to guide those in their program to reach a level of superiority, demonstrated by outperforming others. College coaches are expected to inspire their student-athletes to strive for excellence in the classroom as well as on the mats. A commitment to excellence in all activities involving the student-athletes on a college wrestling team is essential to the longevity of our sport.

Integrity is the foundation from which excellence is built. Excellence cannot truly be achieved without conducting one's self in ways that are honest and honorable. Whether student-athletes are winning championships or earning an A in a course, neither accomplishment is completely fulfilling unless achieved through honest efforts and actions.

Hopefully, accountability is another core value shared by every college wrestling program, coach, and student-athlete. Coaches are responsible for the success of their program, period. Coaches are responsible to their director of athletics and college president who hired them. They are responsible to the fans, friends and alumni, who support their program. Coaches are also responsible to the student-athletes they recruit, and their parents, to ensure that all students are provided opportunities to be successful on the mats, in the classroom, and within the community. Therefore, it is important that coaches establish team rules, expectations, a code of conduct, and/or policies that hold their student-athletes accountable for their actions. Whereas integrity is the foundation of excellence, accountability is the mortar that can hold a program together through challenging times.

As leaders in our sport, it is essential that coaches embrace the opportunity and responsibility to help students-athletes leave college differently from how they entered it. Our greatest mission as coaches and leaders involves mentoring student-athletes to



develop from adolescents to adults. The college experience is full of opportunities to transform young men into productive members of a larger society. The sport of wrestling fosters an environment of risk-taking, vulnerability and challenges, which are essential to personal development. Along with promoting excellence, instilling integrity and insisting on accountability, this manual attempts to inspire coaches to be active in the holistic and transformative educational process of the student-athletes in their program.

Reflective Questions

- Are core values important for our program to be successful?
 - Why or why not?
- Have I established in writing and communicated the core values of our wrestling program?
 - If yes, what are they?
 - Are they shared with all who are involved with our program – coaches, athletes, parents, fans, administrators, etc.?
 - If no, why not?
 - Why should a prospective student-athlete choose to attend our school and wrestle in our program if we are not unique?
- Is academic excellence one of our core values?
 - Brainstorm activity: List all who benefit when our wrestlers do well academically?
 - How do we define academic excellence?
 - How do we demonstrate our commitment to academic excellence?
 - What are the drawbacks to establishing academic excellence as a core value?

RECRUITING – STARTING WITH THE END IN MIND

“Recruit the right student-athlete. There are those exceptions, but I now believe that finding the right student-athlete who is given the right freshmen schedule will do well academically.”
– Anonymous Division I Head Coach

One key function for every college wrestling coach is the recruitment of student-athletes. Finding student-athletes, who can win championships within your program and graduate from your university, is essential to attaining the level of success that athletic directors, university presidents and fans of college wrestling desire. Through research conducted by the NCAA, we have learned that incoming freshman wrestlers often have high school academic profiles consistent with student-athletes in most other sports. However, they often perform below national averages in terms of maintaining academic eligibility, being retained at the university, and ultimately graduating. Therefore, it is important for



coaches at all levels to explore issues that are particular to college wrestling and find solutions to increase retention and graduation rates.

Issues particular to college wrestling include:

- The wrestling season covers more than one semester, often requiring student-athletes to prepare for and take multiple midterm and/or final exams while the season is in progress.
- Wrestlers are often less likely to ask for help than other student-athletes, perhaps because of the individualistic nature of the sport.
- The start of the competitive season often coincides with midterm exams on many campuses.
- Wrestling is a one-on-one, combative sport, with weight class divisions, requiring a very high investment of time and energy to properly condition and prepare oneself for competition.
- Many freshman wrestlers take more lumps in the first few months in the practice room than they ever experienced in their high school careers.
- Funding for summer school is not always available for wrestlers to catch up or get ahead of their progress towards a degree.
- Dedicated academic support for wrestlers – tutoring, mentoring, and a team academic advisor – is limited on many campuses.

Although these are a few issues particular to our sport, we must not use them as excuses for failing to succeed academically. Instead, we must seek solutions and systems, which help us overcome these obstacles as we strive to reach our team goals.

Wrestling coaches must establish a comprehensive academic support program specifically for the student-athletes in their program to overcome these and other challenges. Those who do not seek solutions to these challenges **MUST** refrain from recruiting too many high-risk student-athletes. From the onset, coaches need to be involved in developing an individual academic game plan for all new student-athletes and other high-risk student-athletes prior to classes beginning each term. Coaches must also explore what it will take – beyond hope and prayer – for any wrestler recruited into their program to have a legitimate chance to be successful academically, and graduate.

What are High-Risk Indicators?

Research on male, college students suggests that they are less likely to graduate from a four year institution if ...

- They are a first generation college student,
- They do not have the means to finance their education (full scholarship, family support, job, loans, etc.),



- They have not completed four years of English and math in high school,
- They are required to take college prep courses in reading, math or English during their first year in college,
- They have not earned Advanced Placement (AP) or dual enrollment credit in high school,
- They have transferred from one institution to another,
- They live out-of-state from where they are attending college.

As we know, many students who present more than one of these indicators have graduated from two and four-year institutions. However, these are a few indicators coaches must be aware of and consider during the recruiting process so that they can help support the student while he is attending college.

Interpreting a Prospect's Academic Profile

Three variables are often used to determine a student's academic preparation for college. They include SAT/ACT scores, high school GPA, and class rank. The SAT/ACT score indicates how a particular student did on one test on one day. It does not indicate how much preparation a student may have put into the test. Taking the SAT/ACT a second time is recommended for students with low scores or low academic profiles (defined in relation to the average student at your institution). Many students will increase their score significantly on the second attempt. If the SAT/ACT score seems much lower than what one would expect based on the student's GPA or class rank, inquire about the discrepancy. Some students do not take tests well because they do not know how to prepare for them. For other students, a low SAT/ACT test score may indicate a potential learning disability in math or reading comprehension.

The high school GPA indicates how a student did over four years but it doesn't explain how strong the high school's curriculum may be. Also, many schools record overall GPAs differently. Some schools include physical education courses, which can boost an athlete's overall GPA, while others do not. Coaches should pay particular attention to how many courses a student passed in English, math and science and if the student is taking these types of classes in their senior year. For example, a student who did not take math in his senior year will probably struggle in a general education math class in his first year. Also, some schools indicate the number of days absent on their transcript and this information can be very revealing of a student's commitment to earning a college degree. The class rank indicates how a student *competed* against other students in a similar curriculum over four years. Class rank is often the best predictor of how successful a



student may be in college and is one of the reasons high schools may be reluctant to include it on a student's transcript. Students who do not rank in the top 30% of their high school may initially have difficulty competing at many four-year institutions, especially at those institutions where the average incoming student ranks in the top 10% or 20% of their high school class.

When recruiting a student who is below the top 30% of his class, it is important to follow up with the school to find out the percentage of students who go to college from that particular high school. Some schools send more than 80% of students to four-year institutions while others may send less than 20%. Irrespective of a student's academic profile in high school, each new student should be considered as a high-risk student in your program until he proves otherwise.

Recommended Reading

The NCAA produces a resource annually called, *The Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete*. It contains information on the NCAA Eligibility Center and what is required for a student to be eligible to compete in college athletics at an NCAA institution, and recruiting regulations. This guide can be accessed at:

http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal/ncaahome?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/ncaa/NCAA/Legislation+and+Governance/Eligibility+and+Recruiting/InformationforCollege-BoundStudent-Athletes.

Five Best Practices for Recruiting

- 1 Conduct Thorough Academic Background Checks: During the recruiting process seek out information on the following for incoming freshman AND transfers: class rank, high school GPA, SAT/ACT scores, degree earned, career and major interest, academic concerns and strengths, study habits, immediate family members who have earned a college degree, college expectations, and any learning disability issues that may affect a broad range of academic and functional skills.
- 2 Screening Specific for Transfer Students: Along with conducting the background check listed above, the student's college transcripts should be screened to determine how many credits were earned at all previous institutions that may meet degree requirements at your institution prior to being admitted. Students



often lose credits when they transfer. This can impact progress-toward-degree requirements and delay graduation.

- 3 Clearly Define Academic and Athletic Expectations: Prospects and their parents should be made aware of your expectations to earn or renew a scholarship during the recruiting process. Share your team rules on academics with them and highlight academic services and resources that are available to college wrestlers at your institution. Lay out your Academic Game Plan for them so they know from day one what will be expected of them.
- 4 Parent Involvement: Although the “Helicopter Parent” has received much negative attention in higher education recently, parent’s involvement is important in helping students reach their full academic potential. Keep the parents involved in their child’s academic development. Inform the student and parents that you will request a FERPA release from the student so you can share academic information with his parents if he enrolls at your institution (See Appendix A). With the release, you are able to call or send information home to the parents at midterm or end-of-term to give an academic update. Parents typically like these updates – whether there is good or bad news to share – and it helps keep the student accountable (See Appendix B).
- 5 Give the Graduation Guarantee: Approximately 50% of students who enroll in college DO NOT graduate. It is an alarming statistic but one that has existed for over 50 years. The next chapter focuses on developing an academic game plan for your wrestling program. The program should be set up to guarantee that the students who follow it will graduate (or at the very least, leave your program in good academic standing). Few things hold a person more accountable for their actions than their own words. Above all else, this manual is written to give you the courage and tools to be able to have confidence in guaranteeing prospects and their parents that if they choose to enroll at your institution and remain in your program they are choosing to graduate from your institution with a meaningful degree.

Reflective Questions

- What best practices are we utilizing with our program to recruit student-athletes who are good academic fits for our campus?
- How many students have we recruited to our program in the last four years (scholarship and walk-ons)?
- How many have graduated or are on pace to graduate?



- How many student-athletes on my team are first generation college students?
- How many earned four years of high school credit in English and math?

RETENTION: DEVELOPING A GAME PLAN FOR SUCCESS

“The success of any organization is tied to its ability to attract and retain talented, hard-working people who believe in the organization’s mission. This holds true in college athletics as well.”

- Anonymous Division III Coach and Administrator

Coaches quickly understand the importance of creating and following a plan to develop student-athletes as competitive college-level wrestlers. As educators, it is equally as important to create and follow a plan to develop your wrestlers as college-level students. College-level wrestlers often follow a structured nutritional plan, weight training and conditioning program, and practice schedule to achieve competitive goals beyond their immediate grasps. Successful college student-athletes respond positively to structure. Therefore, it is important to establish expectations that the student-athletes in your program will follow a structured academic game plan. Listed below are some ‘best practices’ that should be considered in establishing a successful academic game plan for your student-athletes. Establish your team’s academic game plan based on the resources and personnel available at your institution and the specific needs of the individuals on your roster.

Defining an At-Risk Student

As noted in the previous section all new students should be considered an at-risk student until he proves otherwise. More students drop out of college or transfer in their first year than in any other year, and not all drop out or transfer because they could not handle the academics. Also as noted previously, transfers are less likely to graduate than students who arrive to their institution as freshman. Irrespective of previous success, it is best to consider all new students as at-risk. Students who are not maintaining a ‘B average’ overall (3.0 cumulative GPA) should be considered at-risk as well. Although students only need a 2.0 GPA to graduate from most institution, classes typically get more difficult as a student progresses from a freshman to a senior. Frequently, a freshman with a 3.0 GPA can become a second-semester sophomore with a 2.0 GPA if he is weaned off of mandatory academic support too early.



Academic Schedule

Each student-athlete on your roster should sit with an academic advisor at least once per semester to discuss career goals, desired major, and course selection for subsequent terms. The head coach must insist that this happens and becomes aware of the outcome of the meeting (See Appendix C). The student's advisor should have a copy of the team's practice and competition schedule prior to meeting with students on your team. The following are nine things to consider when developing a student's academic schedule:

1. Class schedules should not conflict with regularly scheduled practices and students should be given ample time between classes and practices to handle pre/post-practice obligations (taping, rehab, shower, eat, etc). 45 minutes is a good benchmark to use when unsure.
2. A class schedule should have balance so that the student has a similar class/practice schedule each day. Students will respond and get into a pattern of waking up each day to attend class or practice if each day has some consistency.
3. Avoid more than three consecutive hours of class time when possible (especially for students with ADD or ADHD, or those deemed as high risk).
4. Avoid online classes for freshmen and sophomores and evening classes that will conflict with competition or other team obligations. Online classes are often challenging for students who have not developed the discipline necessary to monitor their own academic progress or stay on-task within their courses.
5. Freshmen and new transfers should avoid taking more than 12 credits* in their first term (unless necessary) and all credits should be applicable for progress towards degree (except for up to 6-credits of remedial course work if required for freshmen).

* Schools on the quarter systems should avoid more than 9 units for first semester freshmen and transfers.

6. Those in the starting lineup may prefer to take more credits in the fall than in the spring term, in order to have a lighter academic load when peaking for competition at the end of the season. Discuss this strategy with all students on your roster.
7. All students, particularly freshmen, should be encouraged to earn 30 credits each year, including summer courses if necessary. Note: Freshmen at NCAA Division I institutions only need to pass 24 hours in their first year for eligibility purposes.



However, getting ahead of the 'Progress Toward Degree' pace (40/60/80) can pay dividends down the road when a student might want a lighter academic load to focus more on succeeding on the mats.

8. Look at the university's academic calendar before setting your competition schedule. Should students avoid classes on a particular day because of regular travel (Friday for example)? Can you avoid traveling the weekend before the first week of classes in spring term? Can you avoid travel in last week of classes in fall? **DO NOT SCHEDULE ANY COMPETITION DURING FINALS.** Calculate your days missed from class for competition and see how this might compare with other sports on your campus or other wrestling programs within your conference.
9. Insist any person who was recruited and quits the team continues with academic support for the remainder of academic year. Check on this monthly.

Academic Mentoring/Study Hall

Developing a mentoring and team study hall program for all new and at-risk student-athletes may be the most important element a coach can focus on to improve the academic success and graduation rate of student-athletes in his program. This might be even more applicable for part-time coaches or those without full-time assistant coaches. An effective mentoring program includes the following:

- Weekly, one-on-one, sessions for all freshmen and new transfers and any returner who has struggled with maintaining good academic standing. It is recommended that all sophomores with less than a 3.0 GPA continue to meet with a mentor on a weekly basis. The head coach and academic advisor should discuss if juniors and seniors need to continue to meet with a mentor based on the student's academic standing and decide on the frequency of the meetings. Some students may only need to meet with a mentor every other week.
- A mentor can be the team's advisor, coach, a student intern, teammate, faculty member, or a volunteer. The mentor must be committed to meeting with the student on a weekly basis, encourage the student to utilize all academic resources available, provide some guidance on how to prepare for assignments and tests, and develop a student's trust by maintaining confidentiality and high standards of integrity.
- A mentor should have a file for each student that includes the student's class schedule, all course syllabi with instructor's contact information, and the team's practice and competitive schedules.



- A form should be completed for each session and kept in the student's file. It should indicate how the student is doing in each class, attendance in the class, and assignments that are due within the next two weeks. This will allow one to keep a log of the student's grades and have an ongoing update on how each student is doing in each class (See Appendix D).
- Students should come to each session prepared to discuss all graded assignments. They should also bring their notebooks, which should be checked regularly to confirm the student is attending class and taking effective notes.
- Incentives should be established for students to earn their way out of mentoring sessions based on the student's GPA, class attendance, and commitment to academic success. However, all new students should remain in mentoring program for at least one year.
- Students who fail to report to mentoring appointments should be held accountable as if they missed a team practice.
- New and at-risk students should be required to complete at least eight hours of study time (to include tutoring and mentoring appointments) each week, preferably in a monitored environment. Students who say they do not have enough school work to keep them busy for eight hours a week are probably not completing all of their reading and homework assignments, which will affect their grades negatively. Coaches should be made aware of those who did not complete their required study time each week and the student should be held accountable as if he missed a team practice.

Academic Tutoring

Many institutions offer tutoring for the general student population and may have separate writing and math labs, while others have comprehensive tutoring programs specifically for student-athletes. Explore what resources are available for your student-athletes and encourage them to be proactive and seek assistance frequently.

- Whether tutoring is available or not, students should initiate contact with their instructor immediately if they are earning a C or less in the class to seek extra help. This step lets the instructor know the student is willing to work to improve his grade and the instructor may be able to refer a good tutor or study group.
- All students, particularly new students or those enrolled in remedial English courses, should have all papers proofread by a tutor before submitting it for a grade. Tutors can often help students develop an outline, clarify ideas, and offer advice on grammar. Tutors CANNOT type papers and should never correct a



paper by writing on it. The tutor should work alongside a student on the paper and offer suggestions for the student to edit himself. This important best practice can help the student maintain the integrity of his paper and not subject the student or tutor to charges of plagiarism. Students should spell check all papers before sitting with a tutor for help.

- Math tutors are typically most effective if they work with a student on a regular basis. Insist students, especially freshmen, seek tutoring for all math courses on a regular basis.
- Tutors should not be solely used to cram for an exam the night before. This will typically frustrate both the student and tutor.
- Some courses do not lend well for tutoring. In these cases, encourage students to form study groups and seek guidance from their instructor.

Time Management

The *5-P Principle: Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance* is a concept student-athletes can appreciate. New students often struggle with managing their time wisely because they often do not know what lies ahead or have not developed this advanced skill. A typical student-athlete's weekly schedule may include 20 hours of practice, 12-15 hours of class time and a minimum of eight hours of studying. In total, this is equivalent to a full-time job. The following best practices will help reduce stress for students and coaches:

- Insist that students have and use a daily planner.
- Have students create a weekly log of how their hours are spent each week to include, sleeping, eating, classes, practices, studying, work, relaxation, etc. Most people are unaware of how they spend their time in a given week.
- Coaches are encouraged to discuss effective time management skills with students regularly, especially at the beginning of each semester and before the competitive season kicks into gear. Do not take for granted that new students know how to manage their time effectively. Encourage team members to learn from veteran teammates who are successful in this area.
- Let your students know as early as possible when the team will be leaving campus for competition so they can inform their instructors in advance if they will miss class. Also, designate time on road trips for studying whenever possible.
- Mandatory study hall on Sunday evenings is a good way to ensure students are doing some work on the weekends and is a good time to review all syllabi, so that each student is aware of what assignments are coming up.



Class Attendance

If there is one element more important than developing an effective mentoring/studying program it is ensuring that students attend class. “Never miss, never fail,” is a strategy that is nearly 100% effective.

- All students should inform their instructors of days they might miss class for competition at the start of each semester before the add/drop period is over in case the instructor is not going to accommodate the student-athletes. Some institutions have policies for student-athletes who miss class for competition. Make sure your students know this policy and have them share it with their instructors. Many freshmen may have new adjunct instructors, who teach many freshmen level classes and may not know the university’s policy.
- Students should also remind the instructor each time they are going to miss class for competition. This is often best accomplished by writing an instructor an email 3-5 days ahead of time so that there is documentation that the instructor was informed. Although students may miss class for competition, they are still responsible for all notes, assignments and tests they may miss. Making arrangements for makeup exams can be communicated in the email as well.
- Conducting random class checks on your new and at-risk students is effective in letting students and instructors know you are committed to the student-athlete’s academic progress and that you are holding the students accountable.
- Students should be held accountable for missing class as if they missed a team practice.

Reflective Questions

- How many of these best practices are a part of our program?
- Which of these best practices need to become a part of our program?
- Who on my campus can help me develop a mentoring program for my team?
- Does the head coach and team advisor both know how many credits each student needs to complete to graduate?
- How can we hold our students more accountable for their academic success?
- How can the head coach hold his assistant coaches, team advisor, captains and himself accountable for the academic success of the team?
- How can I reward individuals on the team for achieving academic success?
- Does your institution have a policy for students who miss class for competition?
If so, do you and your student-athletes know it?



- What can the coaching staff do to help our students manage their time more effectively? Do you encourage/require them to use a daily planner?

Author's Note: These are general best practices that can meet the needs of many intercollegiate wrestling programs. However, each program is different and has specific characteristics that may not allow for some of these best practices to work effectively. Should you need assistance adopting these or other best practices for your program please contact MRG Consulting at MarkGumble@gmail.com.

UNDERSTANDING GRADUATION RATES AND ACADEMIC PROGRESS RATES

The academic success of the student-athletes on any team is one of the top three critical measurements observed by college administrators in determining future resource allocation to teams. Along with competing for championships and maintaining outstanding citizenship within the community, athletic directors and university presidents expect to see student-athletes graduate. Graduation rates are more important to athletics directors and presidents than a team's grade-point average and number of academic All-Americans or individual scholar-athletes. Graduation rates speak to the bottom line of the success of an institution and the university's CEOs are more concerned with the bottom line than any other type of measurement of academic accomplishment.

"Are we getting a good return on our investment," is a question more and more athletic directors and presidents are asking in today's challenging economic climate. If a team's graduation rate is not at least on par with other students on campus, other sports within the athletics department, and other teams within the conference, it is considered an at-risk program in today's climate.

NCAA Bylaw 13.3.1.2 stipulates that Division I and II institutions are required to distribute graduation rate information to student-athletes and their parents. The Federal Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 requires institutions, which receive federal student aid, to disclose basic institution information including graduation rates and information on students receiving athletic related aid. This is the type of information that presidents share with board of trustee members and athletics directors share with donors.



It is important that wrestling coaches at the NCAA, NAIA and Junior Colleges levels, know how to access this information. The NCAA public website maintains a database of graduation rates for Division I, II and III institutions, while this information can be found on most NAIA and Junior College's institution's WebPages.

Below is some basic information on various public graduation rates and the NCAA Division I Academic Progress Rate (APR) and is intended to serve as a primer for college coaches. To find out more information on this topic contact your institution's compliance coordinator or MRG Consulting.

The Federal Graduation Rate

This graduation rate measures the number and percent of freshmen who enroll as full-time students at an institution in the summer or fall semester and graduate within a six-year period. It does not measure those students who enter as transfers. Nor does it measure freshmen who are admitted in the winter or spring. It also measures student-athletes, who enter the institution under those same conditions. However, at NCAA Division I institutions, it only measures those who receive athletic related aid during their first year.

These graduation rate reports can be found on the NCAA website for Division I, II, and III institutions. They show how student-athlete's graduation rate compares to the general student population at the institution for the single year cohort (class entering the university six years previously). The NCAA website also provides the four-year cohort (the four-year classes that entered the university between 10 and 6 years previously).

Graduation Success Rate (GSR)

The GSR is also a six-year measurement, but it only measures student-athletes on athletic aid at NCAA Division I institutions. Unlike the Federal Graduation Rate, it includes all transfers and any athletes admitted as full-time students in the spring term, while excluding those who leave the institution in good academic standing, have military obligations, go on church missions, become physically disabled, or die within six years of first enrollment.

The cohort for this measurement is typically significantly larger than the cohort used to measure the Federal Graduation Rate, and the graduation rate is typically higher. Although the Federal Graduation Rate is a good benchmark to measure how student-athletes compare to their peers on campus, the GSR is an effective way to measure how a wrestling team compares to other sports on campus or how one wrestling team compares to other wrestling teams within its conference or nationally. The GSR can also be found on the NCAA website.



Academic Success Rate (ASR)

The ASR is specific to NCAA Division II institutions and is very similar to the GSR. However, it also includes all non-scholarship freshmen who are on rosters on the first date of competition. The ASR can also be found on the NCAA website.

Academic Progress Rate (APR)

APR is a measure of NCAA Division I teams' academic performance on a term-by-term basis and is reported annually. The APR provides a real time "snapshot" of a team's academic performance on the basis of retention and eligibility. The APR specifically measures how each student, who receives athletic related aid on the current roster, are doing in terms of retention, remaining eligible, and graduating each semester. Based on a scale from 0 - 1000, teams that do not meet benchmarks can be penalized by the NCAA. Teams that fail to maintain a multiyear score of 925 are subject to loss of scholarships, while teams that fail to maintain a multiyear score of 900 may face a reduction of practice and contests and/or a ban from post-season competition.

The APR was originally established to serve as a predictor of future graduation rates. For example, a multiyear score of 925 was intended to predict a 50% graduation rate. However, since its inception in 2004, the APR scoring has been modified to account for student-athletes leaving early to become professional athletes or transferring after their first year with a 2.6 GPA or better. Recent data suggests that in some sports a score of 940 is more likely to project a graduation rate exceeding 50%.

Author's Note: There is currently national dialogue about increasing the minimum APR score needed to avoid future penalties. To be proactive, all NCAA Division I wrestling programs should be implementing plans to maintain a rate above 950 to prepare for what the future may hold.

Frequently Asked Questions About APR

How is APR Calculated?

Each student who is on aid is placed into a given annual cohort and for each term he can earn one point for being retained and one point for remaining eligible or graduating each term (for non-scholarship teams, a subset of recruited student-athletes is used). In a given year, a student can earn a total of four points, two each term. One E-point (eligibility) and one R-point (retention) can be earned each term. APR is calculated by



dividing the number of points earned by the total number of possible points and multiplying by 1000.

For example:

- Team USA has 14 wrestlers receiving athletics aid
- 12 of 14 are eligible after fall
- 14 of 14 are retained after fall
- 14 of 14 are eligible after spring/summer
- 12 of 14 are retained after spring/summer
- $52/56 \times 1000 = 929$ (rounded up) single year APR
- The same process is used over four years to calculate multi-year rate, which is published annually by the NCAA and is used to impose penalties

Are there circumstances to have a team's single-year APR score adjusted?

Yes, there are opportunities to receive adjustment points but the student must have earned his E-point in his last regular term to have his R-point adjusted. The requests are based on mitigation affecting individual student athletes and are considered on the guiding principles that impact individual student-athletes and whether the circumstances are beyond the student-athletes and/or teams/institutions control. Examples include:

- Degree program was discontinued
- Student-athlete unable to return to school due to incapacitating physical or mental circumstances
- Life threatening or incapacitating injury or illness suffered by a member of the student's immediate family.
- Extreme financial difficulties as a result of a specific event
- Participation in Olympic or international competition
- Participation in a professional sport
- A student who was enrolled for more than one full year, leaves with a 2.6 GPA or higher, earns the E-point in the last term and transfers immediately to another 4-year institution
- Other unforeseen events beyond the control of the student and/or institution's control

What is the penalty structure for APR?

There are two different penalty structures. The first, referred to as a 'contemporaneous penalty', is designed to be rehabilitative rather than punitive and include financial aid restrictions limited to 10% reduction of the team's total financial aid. Teams with multi-year APR below 925 are subjected to penalties if any student in the most recent single year cohort left the institution and was not eligible. That student is often referred to a '0



for 2' as he did not earn any APR points in a given semester. Teams are penalized one scholarship for each student that is a '0 for 2,' up to 10% total of all aid provided for that team. The team has to take the penalty in the current or following year.

The second penalty, known as a 'historical penalty', is designed to be punitive for teams that habitually underperform academically. Teams with multi-year APR below 900 are reviewed for historical penalties and the penalties are progressive and cumulative as noted below:

- Occasion 1 – public announcement
- Occasion 2 – Same as 1 AND financial aid and practice restrictions
- Occasion 3 – Same as 2 AND postseason competition restriction
- Occasion 4 – Same as 3 AND restricted membership status for institution
- Must demonstrate three "clean" years (multi-year APR above 900) in order to avoid progression in the historical penalty structure

Is there a way to have an APR penalty waived?

Yes, any Division I wrestling program that is facing contemporaneous or historical penalties should develop an academic improvement plan based upon information contained in this document – IF ONE DOES NOT ALREADY EXIST – and discuss the penalty waiver process with their institution's compliance coordinator immediately. If your program is facing penalties, you are encouraged to also contact MRG Consulting for additional support.

Reflective Questions

- How does the graduation rate of student-athletes and/or wrestlers compare to other students on campus?
- How does our team's graduation rates compare with other sports on campus?
- How does our team's graduation rates compare with other teams in our conference?
- How does our team's APR score compare with other sports on campus and teams within the conference (if applicable)?
- How do I create an academic improvement plan and who can help me with this project?

THE NEXT STEPS

There is a popular saying among faculty and administrators in higher education that, "students do not care what you know until they know you care." Taking the steps to put a comprehensive academic plan in place, and communicating it with others on campus,



will let people know you care about the full development of the students in your program. It will signify to your athletic administrators that you are supporting the university mission and perhaps more than anything it will help build trust among the students on your team and their parents.

If you have academic support specifically for student-athletes on your campus, you want to start building your plan in consultation with the professionals in that office. Seek their expertise in helping you add new best practices to your academic support plan. Involve your faculty athletic representative or sport supervisor with opening doors to others on campus. It is critical that you identify and partner with people on your campus, who might be able to assist you if your athletics department doesn't offer specific academic support for student-athletes.

Communicating with faculty members in order to learn how your students are doing in their courses is a great way to build partnerships on campus. However, this is best delegated to the team's academic advisor to do, if you have a specific advisor designated to your team (See Appendix E). If you do not have a designated advisor you should first check with your sports supervisor or Athletic Director to learn if they are okay with you contacting instructors directly. Some instructors may feel uncomfortable sharing academic grade information directly to coaches.

If you don't have specific academic support for student-athletes on your campus or if you want specific ideas on how to implement some of what you have read throughout this manual, contact me directly if I can be of any assistance. Appendix F is provided for those institutions that do not have academic advisors specifically designated for their team. It is intended to help in tracking the eligibility of the student-athletes on your roster. Although it is an example for NCAA Division I programs, it can be adapted for tracking eligibility at NCAA Division II, III, NAIA and Junior College programs.

Although the best practices listed throughout this brochure will likely be impactful at many institutions, due to lack of resources or personnel, some creativity may be needed to implement them effectively on your campus. There is no charge for MRG Consulting's services to members of the NWCA; please contact me if I can be of any assistance.

Two resources I often utilize when looking to enhance the academic support programs offered at the University of Central Florida are the National Association for Academic Advisors for Athletes (N4A) and the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). Each association provides resources for those looking for additional best practices to assist with student academic success. Below are links to their resource pages that you or people on your campus may find beneficial.



<http://nfoura.org/thelockerroom/>

<http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Monographs/M18.htm>

The bottom line is that the NWCA and MRG Consulting encourage and expect that all college coaches take intentional action to enhance the efforts in providing academic guidance, inspiration, and support to the student-athletes on each college campus. The leaders of wrestling programs must be vigilant. We need to collaborate and continue to stay ahead of issues that impact the growth of our sport.

Three years ago the NWCA made a commitment to assist Division I coaches with improving the APR scores. At the 2008 NWCA Convention held in Las Vegas, the Division I coaches came together, collaborated, and shared many of the best practices listed throughout this manual. I left Las Vegas that weekend believing that improvement was sure to follow as the fellowship and passion for the sport of wrestling was too strong not to evoke change. Since then wrestling's APR scores have improved at a rate higher than almost all sports competing at the Division I level.

Collectively, we have two choices when it comes to dealing with the academic needs of the student-athletes in or sport. We can either evolve or become extinct.

"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change"
-- Charles Darwin

Author's Note: The information contained in this manual is intended to be used as a guide and is not intended to be used in place of best practices established at particular institutions. At no time should these best practices, or the attached appendixes, be used in substitution for what may be used by the compliance office or office for student-athlete academic support on your campus without their consent. The information is to be used in collaboration with best practices, or as a means to start dialogue towards improving best practices, that are currently in effect on your campus.



APPENDIX A

Release of Academic Information

As a student-athlete at (name of institution), I understand that I am responsible for maintaining good academic standing in order to be eligible to practice and compete in intercollegiate athletics. Therefore, my (coach, academic advisor) will work with me as necessary in order to maintain my eligibility. By signing below, I am granting the (coaching/advising staff) permission to communicate with my parents/legal guardians about my academic status as necessary, including permission to send them updated academic progress reports throughout the academic year.

Name

Sport

Signature

Date



APPENDIX B

Semester Grade Tracking Form

STUDENT NAME

MENTOR

COURSE:	COURSE:	COURSE:	COURSE:	COURSE:
EXAMS Date Grade				
1.	1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.	5.
PAPERS Date Due Grade				
1.	1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.	5.
QUIZZES Date Grade				
1.	1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.	8.	8.
9.	9.	9.	9.	9.
10.	10.	10.	10.	10.
HOMEWORK Date Due Grade				
1.	1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5.	5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6.	6.	6.
7.	7.	7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.	8.	8.
9.	9.	9.	9.	9.
10.	10.	10.	10.	10.

COMMENTS:



APPENDIX D

Weekly Mentor Meeting

Name: _____ **Sport:** _____ **Mentor:** _____ **Advisor:** _____
Date: _____ **Time In:** _____ **Time out:** _____ **No Show: Y/N**

CHECKLIST	COMMENTS
___ Came Prepared (books, notes & grades)	_____
___ Lecture and Reading Notes	_____
___ Class Attendance/Travel	_____
___ Tutoring Appointments	_____
___ Professor Visits	_____
CLASS:	GRADE: ACADEMIC ACTION:
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
MENTOR NOTES	



APPENDIX E

Professor Contact Letter

Dear (PROFESSOR NAME):

I am writing you today to check on the following student-athletes' progress in your (COURSE) course:

(NAME OF STUDENT ATHLETES)

Have they been attending regularly? How have they been doing on graded assignments and exams? Are there any important dates coming up, in regards to exams or assignments?

Any additional information that you can provide regarding their status in your class will be greatly appreciated! If you would prefer, I can also be reached via telephone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Please note, as an additional acknowledgment of our concern for the student's success, the student-athletes have completed a waiver form for their FERPA rights to grant the academic-athletic advising staff the authority to share and discuss that information for the purpose of monitoring their NCAA athletic eligibility and academic success.

I thank you in advance for your time and assistance! Have a wonderful day!

Sincerely,

