

## **KNIGHT COMMISSION'S REMARKS ON HBCUS (05-12-21)**

Finally, the NCAA has done too little to support HBCU athletics programs to meet Academic Performance Program (APP) standards for postseason play. Roughly 70 percent of HBCU students come from low-income families, about 40 percent are the first members of their family to enroll in college, and most Black athletes at HBCUs arrive on campus after receiving an education at secondary schools that have been historically underfunded—a lingering aftermath of decades of de jure and defacto segregation and systemic racism. In light of these facts, it is no surprise that HBCUs have disproportionately been on the receiving end of Academic Progress Rate (APR) sanctions affecting postseason play but the size of that sanction gap is both surprising and unacceptable. Of the 159 teams banned from postseason play for APR violations, 114 teams—72 percent—are from HBCUs, even though HBCUs constitute less than seven percent of Division I schools.

Nine years ago, the NCAA created the Accelerating Academic Success Program (AASP) to provide funding to low-resourced institutions, including HBCUs, for initiatives to assist college athletes' academic success as their teams strive to meet higher APR standards for postseason play. In the nine years since the AASP was created, the NCAA awarded \$20 million in grants to low-resourced institutions, \$12 million of which was directed to HBCUs. The AASP grants, averaging a little more than \$1 million a year to HBCUs, are modest compared to the annual NCAA Division I revenue distribution of nearly \$600 million. These grants have provided welcomed academic support for Black athletes, such as summer bridge programs. In order to receive the funding, universities must commit to cost-sharing to demonstrate a sustained institutional commitment to academic improvement.

The Knight Commission has long supported strong academic standards for postseason play, dating back to its landmark 2001 recommendation that at least half of all athletes on a team must be on track to graduate to be eligible for postseason play. That recommendation led to the creation of the NCAA's Academic Performance Program (APP) and the higher academic threshold for postseason eligibility. The Commission continues to support these standards; however, the Commission also recognizes that HBCUs need and deserve substantially more support from the NCAA to ensure Black athletes at HBCUs face a level academic playing field.

The Knight Commission applauds the Division I Committee on Academics decision in May 2020 to extend existing APR filters for under-resourced institutions that enable teams to avoid penalties and maintain access to postseason play by meeting standards that show academic improvement of academically underperforming teams. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the D-I Board of Directors approved a suspension last fall of APR penalties for the next two years, and the Commission concurs with the D-I committee's recently announced decision to use that two-year suspension period to review APR metrics with an eye toward their impact on equity and philosophical consistency.

*In light of the disparate and discriminatory treatment of Black athletes, we recommend that:*

1. The NCAA should eliminate the standardized test to determine first-year athletics eligibility, and
2. To determine first-year athletics eligibility, the NCAA should implement a holistic evaluation process, based on learning sciences research and best admission practices, that places emphasis

on an athlete's high school academic record, including high school grade point average and satisfactory completion of high school core courses.

3. NCAA institutions should employ strict academic policies that will end or require close monitoring of clustering in classes and majors for athletes, and should systematically identify and monitor classes and majors that have a disproportionate number of athletes enrolled. When a disproportionate number of athletes enroll in a class or major, department chairs or the provost should be obligated to present a rationale for clustering that doesn't disadvantage athletes for continuing their disproportionate enrollment.
4. The NCAA should dramatically boost financial support for HBCUs in the AASP program. The Knight Commission believes the NCAA should use the two-year suspension of APR penalties not only to reexamine equity in the APR system but also to reformulate the AASP grants program to ensure it provides more robust academic support, including additional resources and time, for complying with APR standards for postseason play and elevating graduation rates for Black athletes at HBCUs.
5. The Knight Commission will fund independent research to examine if institutions with large racial graduation gaps in GSR scores in one or more sports are qualifying for financial awards through the NCAA's new academic incentive program, and if so, whether the NCAA should institute an additional standard or filter for institutions to receive funding for meeting academic benchmarks.