THE NCAA MANUAL

The 2010-11 NCAA DIVISION I MANUAL is a voluminous annually updated record that asserts: “The competitive athletics programs of member institutions are designed to be a vital part of the educational system” (Article 1.3.1, p. 1). The Manual then states its basic purpose: “to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body and, by so doing, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports” (Article 1.3.1, p. 1). Perhaps even more compelling is the Manual’s identified obligations of member institutions: “Legislation governing the conduct of intercollegiate athletics programs of member institutions shall apply to basic athletics issues such as admissions, financial aid, eligibility and recruiting. Member institutions shall be obligated to apply and enforce this legislation and the enforcement procedures of the Association shall be applied to an institution when it fails to fulfill this obligation” (Article 1.3.2, p. 1). Consequently, the student athlete(s) and the respective institution(s) are accountable and, therefore, best to make well-informed choices. In the interest of making-informed choices prior to realizing NCAA membership, the student athlete will benefit from the wealth of readily available NCAA data generated for the purpose of informing member institutions and others about the NCAA’s study of student-athletes’ academic performance.

INFORMED OWNERSHIP OF THE MANUAL BY THE NCAA STUDENT ATHLETE

Paramount to overall educational success (social, academic, and athletic) in the post-secondary setting is the need for individual student athletes to actively engage with this “living” document as technical members to better understand the legislative and practical aspects of the organization in which they choose to participate and to be more mindful of the potential and real implications and ramifications of NCAA active membership. The educational experience of the NCAA student athlete is not without criticism. Sharp and Sheilly (2008) state that “many commentators believe that the current commercial structure of big-time college sports is essentially incompatible with education…Numerous books have addressed the basic incompatibility of big-time college athletics and educational primacy (Sharp and Sheilley, 2008, p. 103). Sharp and Sheilley (2008) illuminate the core concerns: “Not only do typical athletes in big-time sports enter at an academic disadvantage, they often encounter a diluted educational experience while attending their schools” (p. 103). In its own defense, the 2007-2008 NCAA Division I Manual specifies its commitment to educational primacy: “Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational well-being of student-athletes…The admission, academic standing and academic progress of student-athletes shall be consistent with the policies and standards adopted by the institution for the student body in general” (2.2 and 2.5, pp. 3-4).

Ultimately, the NCAA student athlete must be mindful and take ownership of their overall educational experience. In doing so, the NCAA student athlete is aware that there exist obstacles in the process of receiving a meaningful education including: time demands; choice of major; negative stereotypes and academic motivation; and the culture of the team (Sharp and Sheilley, 2008). At the same time, Sharp & Sheilley (2008) aptly point out that there are many strategies that can be implemented to help student athletes in their quest for a meaningful education. Clearly, awareness of and respect for the issues aforementioned and the content balance of the NCAA Manual will foster a successful educational experience for the NCAA student athlete.

A CAREER PERSPECTIVE ON COLLEGIATE SPORTS

Even before encountering the obstacles and rewards of NCAA membership, it is important for potential members to recognize NCAA’s data presented under “Resources” on their home page that reflects the reality that a small percentage of high school athletes eventually experience NCAA membership, a smaller percent of NCAA members realize professional athletic careers, and, overall in most NCAA athletic domains, less than 0.08% percent of high school students realize professional athletic careers (“Chart on the Probability,” n.d.). Therefore, it is critical for student athletes to have personally considered their career plan in the long-term and to have identified – if not prepared for – the likelihood that they will not continue their athletic career beyond the collegiate level. Alternate career choices and respective road maps must be strategically identified.

**References**

Epstein, A., Anderson, P., (2009). Utilization of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Manual as a teaching tool. *Journal of Legal Studies Education, 26 (1),* 109-136.

Sharp, L. A. & Sheilley, H. K. (2008). The institution’s obligations to Athletes. *New Directions for Higher Education, 142,* 103-113.

The 2010-11 National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Manual. Retreived from [www.ncaapublications.com/p-4180-2010-2011-ncaa-division-i-manual.aspx](http://www.ncaapublications.com/p-4180-2010-2011-ncaa-division-i-manual.aspx)