

Reported GRs and APRs: Another View from the Sidelines

By Frank G. Splitt

Doug Lederman asks: “Who needs point spreads and passing statistics?” He answers by saying: “The key information at this time of year: financial payouts for the teams and the graduation rates of the players” [1]. This comment puts the financial payouts aside and focuses on the reported nearly 75% of bowl-bound football teams meet NCAA's academic standards [2].

One need only look at big-time (NCAA Div IA) college and university campuses where the building and expansion of football stadiums, basketball arenas, and other athletic facilities reflects the extant values and priorities at these institutions of higher education. This building frenzy is not only symptomatic of the American public's sports culture, but also of the strong influence of wealthy and/or politically connected boosters, many of whom sit on big-time school governing boards. Thank goodness there is resistance to this mindless activity [3].

In the meantime, it seems that the American public is quite content with not really knowing what's going on so long as it is being entertained. Apparently the public does not care that the most important products from its big-time colleges and universities are professional football and men's basketball players – representing the output of alternative educational systems engineered at Academic Support (Eligibility) Centers that are absolute marvels of ingenuity, innovation, deceit, and deception.

Without transparency, accountability, and independent oversight, there is no way of knowing what really goes on at these centers. Reported improved academic performance is problematic. Put another way, there is no basis for knowing how much of the reported improvement in academic performance of college athletes is verifiable – in the sense that quality degrees were earned in accredited majors – and how much of the improvement is attributable to academic corruption.

No doubt, the reported academic performance is much better than it would be in a transparent system with independent oversight. [4] Results are suspect – given the millions of dollars some schools earn from their football programs and the millions of dollars these schools spend on elaborate academic eligibility centers. The November 2007, posts to Lindsey Luebchow's New America Foundation blog site tell a timely story in this regard. So too does Gregg Easterbrook. [6] However, it seems that only Luebchow has taken note of the fact that the NCAA reported GRs and APRs are problematic.

Also, it is unfortunate that the academic performance data reported by the Institute of Diversity and Ethics in Sports (IDSE) – the source of the data used by Lederman [1] and Wolverton [2] – is not only the same NCAA data that comes from schools that have compelling financial reasons to game the system, but are given a patina of correctness and respectability because of the outstanding personal reputation of the IDSE's director, Richard Lapchick.

One can only wonder what the GRs and APRs would be given an NCAA – including its member institutions – that is transparent, accountable, and subject to government oversight by the DOE’s accrediting arm. Also, it would be interesting to have aggregated GR and APR data for bowl-bound team members that actually play? The data for the 50% of the players with the most playing time would be a good start.

We need to get priorities right at our nation's universities. Members of bowl-bound football teams will not likely make the American team that engages its global competitors on issues such as climate change, energy research, stem cells and nuclear proliferation – all of which will have major global impacts.

NOTES

1. Lederman, Doug, “Football Bowl Games: View from the Sidelines,” <http://insidehighered.com/news/2007/12/04/bowls>. This essay is based on the author’s comment, “A View from the Sidelines of the Rice Bowl,” posted 12/04/07 at the same URL.
2. Wolverton, Brad, “Nearly Three-Fourths of Bowl-Bound Football Teams Meet NCAA's Academic Standards,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 4, 2007.
3. Lederman, Doug, "Creating a Ruckus at Rutgers (Again)," <http://insidehighered.com/news/2007/11/21/rutgers>, and Splitt, Frank G., “The Rutgers 1000: An Academic Profile in Courage,” http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Rutgers_1000.pdf.
4. Splitt, Frank G. “The Academic Performance of College Athletes: No Doubt Worse than Reported,” http://thedrakegroup.org/Splitt_Academic_Performance_of_College_Athletes.pdf
5. http://www.newamerica.net/people/lindsey_luebchow .
6. Easterbrook, Gregg, "If academics mattered," Tuesday Morning Quarterback, Nov. 29, 2007 <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=easterbrook/071127>