

NCAA ATHLETICS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Message Points

HISTORY

In 1989, former NCAA Executive Director Richard Schultz introduced the athletics certification concept. A two-year pilot program of 34 NCAA Division I institutions began in 1990.

A special committee studied the results of the pilot program over the next year and a streamlined version of the program was formulated and supported by the former NCAA Presidents Commission, the former NCAA Council and the Knight Foundation Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics.

Athletics certification was approved by Division I institutions at the 1993 NCAA Convention as a key part of the Association's reform agenda.

The NCAA Division I Committee on Athletics Certification, comprised of 15 administrators (chief executive officers, faculty athletics representatives, directors of athletics, senior woman administrators, conference commissioners) from the membership, is appointed to administer the program and determine the certification status of each Division I institution.

The second cycle of the athletics certification program incorporates a number of adjustments made after the first cycle of institutional self-studies was conducted.

- The membership made changes for the second cycle in response to evolving standards (e.g., through modifications in the operating principles) and the committee's expectation is that institutions would have made progress in the first-cycle certification areas.
- An institution will be evaluated primarily on information from its second-cycle self-study, with the exception of the institution's implementation and progress on required actions from the committee's first-cycle decision, as well as those plans for improvement adopted by the institution in the first cycle related directly to the operating principles.
- With the expansion of the certification cycle from five to 10 years, the committee also will be working to reduce the number of individuals in the pool of peer reviewers, while increasing the quality of peer reviewers.
- As a result of an effort to streamline the certification program, several operating principles were eliminated and procedures modified in January 2004. Institutions are only responsible for responding to committee required actions and institutional plans for improvement that relate to currently legislated operating principles.
- The committee remains sensitive to the needs and desires of the membership and continually will monitor the certification program of Division I institutions for its effectiveness and intended purpose, which ensures the Association's fundamental commitment to integrity in intercollegiate athletics.

- If circumstances change substantially (e.g., due to modifications in NCAA or federal legislation), the committee will consider making changes during the second cycle, as opposed to holding all substantive changes until the third cycle.

PURPOSE

Athletics certification is meant to ensure the Association's fundamental commitment to integrity in intercollegiate athletics by:

- Opening the affairs of athletics to the institutional community and the public.
- Setting standards (called operating principles) for the operation of Division I athletics programs. They cover three basic areas: (a) governance and commitment to rules compliance; (b) academic integrity; and (c) equity and student-athlete welfare.
- Putting in place tough sanctions for institutions that fail to conduct a comprehensive self-study or correct problems over a reasonable period of time.

BENEFITS OF SELF-STUDY

The core of athletics certification is the institution's self-study in which campus-wide participation is critical. Such benefits include:

- Self-awareness. The self-study offers a unique opportunity to educate individuals across campus about the athletics program's goals and purposes, the many challenges facing athletics and the ways in which athletics support the institution's overall mission.
- Affirmation. Athletics certification is couched in the affirmative -- its aim, after all, is to certify -- and the self-study process will reveal many aspects of the athletics program worthy of praise.
- Opportunities to Improve. Even an outstanding program can be better, and problems will be identified routinely as part of any institution's self-study. As these problems come to light, the self-study process will offer a forum for suggestions from individuals with a wide range of experience.

CONDUCTING THE SELF-STUDY

Member institutions are permitted six to eight months to complete the certification self-study, which formally begins with the institution's orientation videoconference by an NCAA staff member.

Each member institution forms a self-study steering committee that must include the chief executive officer, faculty athletics representative, director of athletics and senior woman administrator.

To ensure broad-based participation by various campus constituent groups, representation from the following groups may be sought: (a) governing board; (b) administration external to athletics; (c) faculty; (d) student body; (e) student-athletes; (f) alumni; or (g) representatives in good standing of the institutions athletics interests.

EVALUATION OF SELF-STUDY

Once an institution's self-study report is completed, a peer-review visit (generally two days in length) will be conducted.

The Committee on Athletics Certification (CAC) will identify issues it believes may prevent the institution from establishing conformity with the operating principles. These issues will be provided to the peer-review team and the institution prior to the visit.

A maximum of a four-member peer-review team will be selected from a pool that includes individuals from Division I institutions or conferences that have a general knowledge of intercollegiate athletics. These individuals must hold the position of chief executive officer, director of athletics, faculty athletics representative, senior woman administrator or have a recognized expertise in particular areas addressed in the certification program. A chief executive officer will serve as chair, whenever possible.

Any rules violations relating to an operating principle discovered by the peer-review team will be included in its written report to the institution and the committee.

THE CERTIFICATION DECISION

The committee will render its decision based on materials provided by the institution and the peer-review team. An in-person appearance by institutional representatives may be requested by the committee.

Upon reviewing the institution's self-study report, the issues identified by the committee, the peer-review team's report, and the institution's response to the peer-review team report, the committee will notify the institution of its certification decision.

The committee is obligated to choose from one of three options in determining each institution's certification status:

1. Certified.

An institution that has been "certified" is considered to be operating its athletics program in substantial conformity with the operating principles. This classification denotes that: (a) any

problems identified by the institution in its self-study or by the peer-review team during its evaluation were considered by the committee to be not serious enough to affect the institution's certification status; and (b) the institution demonstrated adequate follow-up to concerns and/or improvement plans directly related to the operating principles that were identified by the institution or the committee during the institution's previous regular or interim self-study.

2. Certified with Conditions.

An institution that has been "certified with conditions" is considered to be operating its athletics program in substantial conformity with the operating principles. However, this classification denotes that: (a) problems identified by the institution in its self-study or the peer-review team during its evaluation were considered serious enough by the committee to cause it to withhold full certification until those problems have been corrected; or (b) the institution did not demonstrate adequate follow-up to concerns and/or improvement plans directly related to the operating principles that were identified by the institution or the committee during the institution's previous regular or interim report.

3. Not Certified.

An institution that is "not certified" is considered not to be operating its athletics program in substantial conformity with the operating principles. This classification denotes that: (a) problems identified by the institution in its self-study or the peer-review team during its evaluation were considered by the committee to be very serious or pervasive; or (b) the institution did not demonstrate adequate follow-up to concerns and/or improvement plans directly related to the operating principles that were identified by the institution or the committee during the institution's previous regular or interim self-study and action must be taken by the institution before it can be certified conditionally.

An institution classified as "not certified" may be placed in a restricted membership category (ineligible for NCAA championships) for up to one year for failure to correct problems during a specified time period. If problems continue to remain unresolved, the committee may reclassify an institution as a corresponding member (no longer an active member of the NCAA).

Participation in this program is separate from the Association's enforcement process. Determination of a "certified" status is not an indication that an institution is free of infractions or exempt from the occurrence of violations of NCAA rules and regulations.

The identification and acknowledgment of problems during the process should not be viewed as a sign of an "unhealthy" program but, rather, as an indication that the institution is committed to the self-study process and its own improvement.

Once an institution is notified of the certification decision, the committee will announce its decision publicly through a standard press release.