1. **Overview.**

The legislated initial-eligibility standards establish a minimal level of academic achievement necessary to receive athletically related financial aid, practice and compete in a student-athlete's first year of full-time collegiate enrollment at a four-year NCAA Division I or Division II institution. If a student-athlete fails to satisfy these standards, the presumption is that he or she is not adequately academically prepared for the rigors of athletics competition and/or practice in the first year of full-time collegiate enrollment. In creating the initial-eligibility standards, the Divisions I and II membership have determined the baseline standards that a student-athlete should meet in order to be academically eligible. These standards are used as a proxy for the academic readiness of a student to be academically successful during the first year of full-time collegiate enrollment at a four-year NCAA institution. As it is a proxy, there may be instances where a student-athlete has demonstrated that he or she is academically prepared to succeed at a four-year NCAA institution but has not met the legislated standards.

The goal of the initial-eligibility waiver process is to provide student-athletes relief from the legislated initial-eligibility standards in cases where such relief is warranted. This document outlines the cases for which relief may be granted. Institutions seeking an initial-eligibility waiver on behalf of a student-athlete for relief of NCAA Bylaws 14.3.1.2 (core-curriculum requirement) and/or 14.3.1.3 (test-score/grade-point average requirement) must present evidence as outlined herein.

The NCAA Division I Board of Directors has adopted legislation that raises the initial academic eligibility standards for competition, effective August 1, 2016, reinforcing the importance of academic readiness for entering Division I student-athletes. Therefore, within the initial-eligibility waiver process, the threshold for full relief (i.e., receipt of athletically related financial aid, practice and competition) will be set correspondingly high.

2. **Initial-Eligibility Data Analysis.**

Initial academic eligibility standards have been set based on the extensive review of longitudinal data regarding the academic success of student-athletes. Similarly, the initial-eligibility waiver process will take into account a data-based analysis of a student-athlete's likelihood of academic success in his or her first year at an NCAA institution based on the student-athlete's core-course grade-point average, core-course units, standardized test score and other academic factors. NCAA staff will employ this research-based academic formula as part of its analysis of waiver requests to determine whether relief is warranted.
3. **Academic Criteria Considered.**

   a. In addition to the aforementioned data-based analysis, NCAA staff may consider the following components of a student-athlete's academic record.

   (1) All SAT/ACT exams, including residual exams administered on campus or subject-area exams (e.g., SAT Subject Tests).

   (2) Performance in college courses completed prior to initial full-time enrollment.

   (3) Performance on institutional placement exams.

   (4) Student-athlete's collegiate course schedule, including placement level.

   (5) The history and timing of completed core courses during the student-athlete's secondary-school enrollment.

   (6) For international student-athletes from exam-based countries, year-to-year performance as indicated on official transcripts.

   (7) Other elements of a student-athlete's academic record as determined by staff on a case-by-case basis. Such elements may include:

      (a) The rigor of the courses taken by the student-athlete.

      (b) Trending of the student-athlete's academic performance throughout his or her high school years.

   b. The following academic credentials will NOT be considered as part of an initial-eligibility waiver:

   (1) Coursework that does not satisfy the legislated definition of a core course. For example, if a student-athlete completes coursework that is deemed not core through the core-course review process, this coursework will not be considered as part of the initial-eligibility waiver.

   (2) Coursework that was invalidated through the prospective student-athlete review (PSA Review) process. For example, if a student takes courses that are subsequently invalidated through the PSA Review process and, therefore, not used in the initial-eligibility certification process, this coursework will not be considered as part of the initial-eligibility waiver.
(3) **College-level coursework.** Although the staff may consider documentation regarding the student-athlete's potential to be successful at a collegiate institution, it cannot consider coursework completed as a full-time college student unless that coursework is acceptable coursework for initial-eligibility purposes. In the context of a conditional waiver, the staff may condition relief on the attainment of a certain academic record during the student-athlete's first full-time term of collegiate enrollment.

4. **Required Documentation.**

Institutions are required to provide, at a minimum, the following supporting documentation with all initial-eligibility waiver requests:

a. A completed initial-eligibility waiver application via the AMA Online Case Management System;

b. All SAT and/or ACT scores, including any scores not listed on the NCAA Eligibility Center final certification report;

c. Letters or statements from the institution and student-athlete explaining the reasons for the deficiency;

d. Evidence of the student-athlete's academic record as outlined in Section 2 Initial-Eligibility Data Analysis section;

e. Evidence of the compelling mitigating circumstance(s), if any, supporting the waiver request;

f. The student-athlete's final certification report from the NCAA Eligibility Center website, if applicable;

g. A copy of the student-athlete's transcript from each high school program attended; and

h. If applicable, an academic support plan that demonstrates how the student-athlete's individual efforts, course-schedule planning and use of academic resources [including appropriate accommodations for any education-impacting disability (EID)], will position the student-athlete to succeed academically during his or her initial year of full-time collegiate enrollment. An acceptable academic support plan must be signed by both the student-athlete and an institutional representative with academic oversight for the student-athlete.
An academic support plan is required in all cases for which the high school core-course grade-point average is below 2.300. In addition, the NCAA staff reserves the right to require an academic support plan be submitted for any initial-eligibility waiver.

5. **Information to Be Considered.**

When reviewing an initial-eligibility waiver, the staff may consider any information submitted by the applicant institution. In addition to the required supporting documents, the following may be provided or requested by the staff:

a. Letters of recommendation or support;

b. Student-athlete's signed, written statement;

c. For waivers other than EID waivers, case precedent provided by the applicant institution;

d. Evidence of misadvisement or a lack of advisement by the student-athlete's high school or by an NCAA member institution; and

e. Other information as requested.

6. **Staff Decisions.**

In analyzing all initial-eligibility waiver cases, the staff will review the student-athlete's academic record and weigh the student-athlete's academic record against the initial-eligibility deficiency and the mitigating circumstances presented as reasons for that deficiency.

a. **Approvals.**

As noted in the overview of the directive, the threshold for receipt of a full approval is high for Division I student-athletes in light of the recently adopted increase in initial-eligibility standards. The staff is granted the authority to approve waivers of initial-eligibility requirements as follows:

(1) When an academically high-achieving student-athlete failed to meet the prescribed initial-eligibility standards, but his or her academic record reflects a level of academic achievement that clearly demonstrates he or
she is academically prepared for college-level work, as supported by NCAA data, and mitigating circumstances are presented that adversely impacted the student-athlete’s ability to satisfy initial-eligibility requirements; or

(2) When mitigating circumstances for a deficiency are presented such that absent those circumstances, it is clearly evident that initial-eligibility requirements would have been met.

(3) **Special Circumstances:** Rarely, circumstances surrounding a waiver request are so unusual that the NCAA Division I Academic Cabinet and NCAA Division II Academic Requirements Committee have authorized a “staff special” approval. These are unlikely to ever be replicated given the highly unusual nature of the circumstances, but warrant relief. Such cases are reported annually for review to the Academic Cabinet and Academic Requirements Committee.

b. **Partial Approvals.**

The staff is granted the authority to partially approve waivers of initial-eligibility requirements in those circumstances that do not meet the criteria for either approval or denial.

(1) **Partial Approvals for Athletically Related Financial Aid Only.** When a student-athlete's academic record, based on the use of data analysis noted, does not project a likelihood of academic success during the initial year of full-time collegiate enrollment, but there are mitigating circumstances present to warrant a partial waiver of initial-eligibility requirements, a waiver may be partially approved to permit the receipt of athletically related financial aid only.

(2) **Partial Approvals for Athletically Related Financial Aid and Practice.** When a student-athlete's academic record, based on the use of data analysis noted, demonstrates a likelihood of academic success during the initial year of full-time collegiate enrollment, and there are mitigating circumstances present to warrant a partial waiver of initial-eligibility requirements, a waiver may be partially approved for athletically related financial aid and practice.

The staff is also granted the authority to partially approve a waiver to allow for receipt of athletically related financial aid and limited participation in practice activities when his or her academic record, based
on the data analysis noted, minimally demonstrates a likelihood of academic success during the initial year of full-time collegiate enrollment, but there are mitigating circumstances present to warrant such a partial waiver of initial-eligibility requirements.

c. Conditional Approvals.

The staff is granted the authority to conditionally provide relief for waivers of initial-eligibility requirements as follows:

(1) When a student-athlete graduates from high school and enrolls early in a collegiate institution; and

(2) When the student-athlete's academic record demonstrates his or her academic readiness for college-level work, staff may partially approve an initial-eligibility waiver for the student-athlete to receive athletically related financial aid during the initial term of enrollment.

Further, the staff may condition partial approval of a waiver to permit athletically related financial aid and practice during the following term, or full approval of the waiver on the successful completion of academic requirements as determined by staff during the student-athlete's initial term in residence.

d. Denials.

The staff is granted the authority to deny waivers of initial-eligibility requirements as follows:

- When a student-athlete's academic record does not meet the legislated standards for initial eligibility and:

  (a) No mitigating circumstances are presented;

  (b) The mitigating circumstances are insufficient or do not tie directly to the deficiency; and/or

  (c) The student-athlete's academic record does not warrant partial relief.
7. **Written Misadvisement Plans.**

Misadvisement and lack of advisement by member institutions and high schools is not, unto itself, sufficient mitigation to warrant a full approval of initial-eligibility standards. In order for misadvisement and/or lack of advisement to serve as sufficient mitigation to warrant a full approval of initial-eligibility standards, the documentation received must *clearly demonstrate* that the student-athlete would have satisfied all initial-eligibility requirements absent the misadvisement and/or lack of advisement. Misadvisement and lack of advisement are not sufficient mitigation to provide full relief in cases where a student-athlete presents a core-course grade-point average/test-score deficiency.

a. **Institutional Misadvisement/Lack of Advisement.**

In all initial-eligibility waivers citing institutional misadvisement or lack of institutional advisement as a mitigating circumstance, staff has the discretion on a case-by-case basis to request the following supporting documentation:

1. A written statement of explanation from the person or persons responsible for providing erroneous information regarding initial-eligibility requirements;

2. Contemporaneous documentation demonstrating the misadvisement (e.g., notes, phone logs);

3. A written statement from the student-athlete in question demonstrating whether he or she, in good faith, relied on the erroneous information;

4. The institution's recruitment history of the student-athlete;

5. A written statement or plan from the institution regarding its actions to educate institutional staff in order to avoid misadvisement of future student-athletes. An institutional misadvisement plan may include, but is not limited to the following:

   a. Education sessions with coaches and other personnel who have a role in counseling student-athletes.


   c. Work with the student-athlete's high school to obtain necessary records for initial-eligibility certification.
(d) No sole reliance on other entities (e.g., high school) for information.

(e) More careful evaluation of the student-athlete's transcript to ensure courses are on the high school's list of NCAA-approved core courses.

(f) Advice and encouragement on the completion of additional core courses and/or standardized exams.

b. High School Misadvisement/Lack of Advisement.

In all initial-eligibility waivers citing high school misadvisement or lack of institutional advisement as a mitigating circumstance, staff has the discretion on a case-by-case basis to request the following supporting documentation:

(1) Written documentation from the individual at the high school who provided erroneous information;

(2) A written statement from the individual in question demonstrating whether the student-athlete, in good faith, relied on the erroneous information.

Lack of advisement may be submitted as mitigation if the person or persons at the high school were advising a student-athlete regarding meeting high school graduation requirements, even if those conflict with initial-eligibility requirements.

8. Analysis of Mitigating Circumstances.

The following provides an overview of the mitigating circumstances used to support a request for an initial-eligibility waiver. All mitigating circumstances submitted to support an initial-eligibility waiver request are analyzed to determine whether those circumstances impacted the student-athlete's ability to satisfy initial-eligibility requirements and whether the mitigating circumstances were partially or fully within the control of the student-athlete. As noted in the overview, the threshold for receipt of full relief from initial eligibility is high for Division I student-athletes in light of the recent increases to initial-eligibility standards.
a. Personal Hardship.

Staff may approve waivers involving a student-athlete when circumstances that contributed directly and clearly to a student-athlete's failure to satisfy initial-eligibility requirements are present. In such scenarios:

(1) The circumstances must be out of the student-athlete's control;

(2) The circumstances must involve the student-athlete, the student-athlete's family members, or an individual or individuals with whom the student-athlete has an existing relationship; and

(3) Documentation must be provided to clearly demonstrate the circumstances in question had a direct impact on the student-athlete's deficiency.

b. Presentation of Nontraditional Coursework.

- A student-athlete's completion of courses that do not satisfy the legislated definition of a core course and courses invalidated through the PSA Review process, may NOT be considered as misadvisement in the analysis of a waiver case.

c. Institutional Misadvisement/Lack of Advisement.

(1) The documentation must clearly demonstrate that but for the misadvisement or lack of advisement, the student-athlete would have satisfied all initial-eligibility requirements.

(2) Assertions of high school misadvisement or lack of advisement should be tied to a student-athlete's nonrecruited status at the time of the misadvisement.

d. Nonrecruited Status.

(1) If a student-athlete’s academic record does not reflect a level of academic achievement and demonstrate a clear likelihood of academic success as outlined in Section 7-a-(1) of this document, and as supported by NCAA data, nonrecruited status cannot be used as the sole mitigation to support a full waiver of initial-eligibility requirements. It may support partial waiver relief.
(2) If an institution asserts late recruitment in support of a waiver request, the student-athlete's awareness and knowledge of initial-eligibility requirements may be factored into the staff's analysis.

e. Lost Academic Opportunity.

- If a student-athlete loses an academic opportunity (e.g., a full academic term or terms) due to extenuating circumstances including, but not limited to, an incapacitating injury or illness, extreme financial difficulty, civil unrest or a natural disaster, staff may consider coursework replacing that lost opportunity, even if such coursework is completed outside the applicable core-course time limitation.

f. Student-Athlete Repeating Year of High School.

Staff may approve waivers involving a student-athlete whose grade level is reclassified and he or she subsequently completes coursework outside the core-curriculum time limitation using the following criteria:

1. The student-athlete's reclassification resulted in the successful completion of post-eighth semester coursework;

2. The institution recruiting the student-athlete did not have an opportunity to advise the student-athlete to attempt to rectify any core-course deficiency within the student-athlete's first eight semesters of high school;

3. The student-athlete's only deficiency is one core-course unit of English, and he or she completed an additional unit of English subsequent to his or her eighth semester of enrollment;

   [Note: The staff may consider core-course deficiencies in subject areas other than English on a case-by-case basis.]

4. The student-athlete meets all other initial-eligibility requirements; and

5. Any other relevant considerations (e.g., overall academic record, high test score, etc.)

g. International Cases.

1. Test-Score Time Limitation.
When an international student-athlete triggers full-time enrollment at an international institution that does not require an SAT or ACT and, therefore, is not able to present a standardized test score within the applicable time limitation, the following guidelines are applicable:

(a) No recruiting contact with any NCAA institutional staff member prior to initial full-time enrollment in a collegiate institution; and

(b) Minimum required test score was achieved on the individual's initial taking of either the ACT or SAT.

(c) The student-athlete's academic record (optional).

(2) Academic Curriculum/Track.

When an international student-athlete chooses an academic track pursuant to his or her home country's program at an early age (e.g., 13 or 14) and that track does not require an academic subject that is required for NCAA initial eligibility, and he or she presents a core-course deficiency no more than two core-course units in social science/physical science and there is also either late recruitment or no recruitment history, staff will consider the following in support of the waiver request:

(a) The strength of the student-athlete's academic record (e.g., test score, core-course grade-point average);

(b) Whether the student-athlete attempted to rectify the deficiency?

(c) Whether the student-athlete completed higher-level coursework?

(3) Split Files.

Occurs when a student-athlete graduates from an educational system other than the one in which he or she began secondary school.

(a) Delayed graduation issue: Student-athlete's date of graduation is based on the country in which he or she began secondary education.

(b) Key factors to consider:
i. Did the student-athlete have control over the reclassification?

ii. When is the academic year (e.g., September through June; January through December)?

iii. Was the student-athlete appropriately placed in a grade level based on the objective evidence or records at hand?

iv. Was the reclassification based on a language barrier?

   aa. What courses were completed after the core-course time limitation?

   bb. Does the student-athlete rectify the core-course deficiency (with the inclusion of one additional year of coursework versus multiple years)?

   cc. What is the strength of the student-athlete's overall academic record?

   dd. Was the student-athlete mainstreamed by his or her high school?

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i. Coursework Completed Prior to Grade Nine.

Staff may consider core courses completed prior to grade nine, even if the student-athlete's high school did not award graduation credit for the course, provided the student-athlete's transcript verifies successful completion of the course and he or she demonstrated progression in that academic subject area.

j. Other Circumstances.

There are some circumstances presented in an initial-eligibility waiver case that may not be viewed in a light most favorable to the applicant institution and student-athlete. These circumstances include but are not limited to:

- High school grading scale (e.g., seven-point scale). Standing alone, a high school's grading scale is not viewed as compelling mitigation to provide relief for a core-course grade-point average deficiency.