1. **Overview.** Initial-eligibility standards (NCAA Bylaw 14.3) establish a minimum level of academic achievement necessary for a student-athlete to be eligible to receive athletics aid, practice and compete in the initial year of full-time enrollment at a Division I or II institution.

Division I initial-eligibility standards, effective August 1, 2016, require student-athletes to meet increased requirements to be eligible for competition, emphasize academics as a first expectation and focus on steady academic progression throughout high school, as opposed to attaining eligibility in grade 12. Further, the goal of an academic-redshirt year is to provide appropriate assistance, structure and resources that facilitate the best opportunity for academic success in the initial year of full-time enrollment.

The IEW process provides relief from normal application of initial-eligibility standards in cases where the evidence demonstrates relief is warranted. However, IEW relief does not change a student-athlete's legislated final academic certification status. In addition, an IEW will not be processed for a student-athlete who has enrolled full time at a two-year college.

The NCAA Division I Committee on Academics and NCAA Division II Academic Requirements Committee annually review and approve this directive, which provides guidelines for the staff and subcommittees to analyze and decide IEWs.

2. **Submission.** The Eligibility Center must release the student-athlete's final academic certification before an institution may submit an IEW via Requests/Self-Reports Online. Institutions are encouraged to review Best Practices before submitting the waiver. An IEW application is complete when the institution has submitted all required information, documentation and signatures via RSRO. Also, the waiver is ready to process when the institution has submitted all additional information and/or documentation requested by staff.

3. **Data Analysis.** Initial-eligibility standards are based on extensive review and analysis of data regarding student-athlete academic success. Further, the IEW process includes a data-based analysis of the student-athlete's predicted first-year GPA (computed using a research-based formula [based on high school performance]) to determine whether approval is warranted based on the strength of the overall academic record (see Divisions I and II Data Tools).

4. **Academic Criteria.**

   a. **Considered.** The following may be considered regarding a student-athlete's *pre-full-time enrollment* academic record:

   (1) Core courses, core GPA, ACT and SAT scores (including NCAA conversion scores for 2017 graduates who attempted the redesigned SAT [March 2016 and beyond]; see 2017-18 and 2016-17 academic certification procedure resources);
(2) Core-course progression;

(3) Trending of academic performance;

(4) Core courses not used in the final academic certification;

Note: May not outweigh courses used in the final certification.

(5) Old and new model certifications completed for international student-athletes, per International Student Records Committee policy;

(6) Initial-eligibility standards applicable to the student-athlete's graduating class (based on the earliest full-time enrollment opportunity); and

(7) Other information determined on a case-by-case basis.

b. Not Considered.

(1) Courses that do not meet legislated core course or nontraditional course requirements, including courses the Eligibility Center has not reviewed;

(2) Raw scores achieved on the redesigned SAT (except pre-2017 graduates);

(3) Invalidated academic credentials or canceled test scores;

(4) Courses completed after full-time enrollment or while receiving athletics aid; and

(5) ACT/SAT attempts after full-time enrollment (see Section No. 5c for exceptions).

5. Mitigating Circumstances. In analyzing IEWs, the student-athlete's deficiency is weighed against the overall academic record and the mitigating circumstances asserted for failing to satisfy initial-eligibility requirements. The larger the deficiency, the more significant and compelling the mitigation must be to provide relief. Further, all mitigating circumstances are analyzed to determine whether they directly impacted the student-athlete's ability to satisfy initial-eligibility requirements, whether they were within the student-athlete's control and whether they are supported by documentation (e.g., contemporaneous). Grade-point average deficiencies are analyzed stringently, as they generally reflect the entire academic record.

Examples of mitigating circumstances include:

a. Personal Hardship. When personal hardship is asserted as mitigation, it is analyzed to determine whether it directly impacted the student-athlete's ability to satisfy initial-eligibility requirements, as well as whether it is supported by documentation.
If a student-athlete lost an academic opportunity (e.g., missed term) due to extraordinary circumstances (e.g., incapacitating injury or illness, extreme financial difficulty, civil unrest, natural disaster), core courses replacing the lost opportunity may be considered, even if they were completed outside of the core-curriculum time limitation.

b. **Reclassification.** When reclassification (repeating a term or more) is asserted as mitigation, an IEW may be approved, provided (a) the reclassification was outside of the student-athlete's control, (b) the only deficiency is two core-course units or less, (c) he or she completed additional core courses that would rectify the deficiency, and (d) the supporting documentation *clearly demonstrates* (e.g., no failures within the deficient subject area) he or she would meet qualifier requirements absent the reclassification.

Student-athletes who do not meet all criteria may be considered for partial relief.

c. **Test-Score Time Limitation.** In the following circumstances, an IEW may be approved based on an ACT or SAT attempted *after* full-time enrollment:

1. If a student-athlete earns a qualifying score on a re-test as part of the testing agency's review process regarding the validity of a prior score; or

2. If a student-athlete enrolled full time at a collegiate institution that did not require an ACT or SAT score for admission, provided:

   a. The student-athlete was not recruited by an NCAA institution before full-time enrollment;

   b. The student-athlete achieved the minimum required score on the initial ACT or SAT attempt; and

   c. The student-athlete meets all other initial-eligibility requirements.

If the re-test score as part of the testing agency's review process or initial post-enrollment attempt is not qualifying, it may be considered as part of the IEW analysis.

d. **Division II Test-Score Deficiencies.** A partial qualifier who presents a test-score deficiency but meets Division II 2018 qualifier requirements will receive an automatic IEW in the academic certification process. However, test-score deficiencies are analyzed stringently for student-athletes who do not receive an automatic IEW. In such cases, significant and compelling mitigation must be presented to warrant relief. Since 2014-15, zero test-score deficiencies have been waived based on mitigating circumstances.
e. **International Academic Track.** When an international student-athlete attended secondary school in a country that meets the following criteria, an IEW may be approved, provided:

(1) The educational system:

   (a) Did not require a subject area necessary for initial eligibility;

   (b) Required students to choose an academic track at an early age, and the chosen track did not require a subject area necessary for initial eligibility; or

   (c) Required a subject area necessary for initial eligibility but did not require an exam that meets core requirements.

(2) The student-athlete’s *only* deficiency is two core-course units or less in social science, natural/physical science or additional academic courses, and the student-athlete has not failed any courses or exams in the applicable subject area; and

(3) Late recruitment or nonrecruited status prevented the institution from having an opportunity to advise the student-athlete to attempt to rectify the core-course deficiency before full-time enrollment.

f. **Education-Impacting Disability.** All student-athletes, including those with a documented EID, must meet initial-eligibility requirements. If an EID is presented in the IEW process, the institution must submit all documentation required in RSRO.

Further, a subject-matter professional may review EID documentation, including information that addresses the impairment, the types of services and/or accommodations available and whether the student-athlete accessed such services and/or accommodations. As part of this review, the subject-matter professional defers to local educational agencies or organizations responsible for assessing students and providing appropriate and reasonable accommodations and/or services. As such, the subject-matter professional does not evaluate or determine whether accommodations and/or services provided to a student were appropriate or reasonable.

When a student-athlete presents an EID, the following factors are considered:

(1) The timing of the diagnosis;

(2) Availability and use of accommodations;

(3) Performance with and without accommodations;

(4) Subject-area and/or course-level progression; and
(5) Other information determined on a case-by-case basis.

Note: A late-diagnosed EID (e.g., during grade 12, after full-time enrollment) is generally less persuasive as mitigation due to the speculative nature of determining the effect an accommodation or accommodations could have had on prior performance.

g. Misadvisement/Lack of Advisement. Misadvisement or lack of advisement by an institution or high school is not, by itself, sufficient mitigation to warrant IEW approval.

However, an IEW may be approved if (a) the student-athlete's only deficiency is two core-course units or less, and (b) the supporting documentation clearly demonstrates (e.g., no failed core courses) the student-athlete would have satisfied initial-eligibility requirements absent the misadvisement or lack of advisement. In such cases involving institutional misadvisement or lack of advisement, the institution may be required to submit an Advisement Process Plan that provides an overview of current advisement procedures and specifies corrective measures to prevent similar situations in the future.

Failure to follow the advisement process plan will not be viewed favorably in subsequent IEW submissions.

h. Not Persuasive (not all inclusive).

(1) Mitigation asserted for a student-athlete who has a reasonable opportunity to rectify the deficiency before full-time enrollment;

(2) High school grading scales, policies or rigor;

(3) Conference or institutional policies (e.g., nonqualifier rules, not conducting preliminary evaluations);

(4) Size of the deficiency (absent other mitigation);

(5) High school misadvisement or lack of advisement once recruitment begins;

(6) Recruitment status or timing as mitigation for performance;

(7) An EID for performance if accommodations were available and/or received;

(8) International student-athletes attempting courses and/or exams in English;

(9) Delayed graduation or reclassification for an athletics purpose;

(10) Failure to follow an advisement process plan from a prior year;
(11) Athletics participation;

(12) Lack of knowledge/awareness regarding initial-eligibility standards.


a. Approval. An IEW may be approved (athletics aid, practice and competition), as follows:

(1) Academic Preparedness. When a student-athlete's overall academic record meets obvious-waiver requirements or *clearly demonstrates* college preparedness.

   (a) Division I. A student-athlete who meets core-course progression requirements, whose *only* deficiency is three core-course units or less and projects a 2.600 or higher first-year GPA based on NCAA data analysis (using the final academic certification for qualifier requirements) will receive an automatic IEW.

   (b) Division II. A student-athlete whose *only* deficiency is two core-course units or less and projects a 2.600 or higher first-year GPA based on NCAA data analysis will receive an automatic IEW.

(2) Mitigation. When but for the mitigating circumstances, it is *clearly evident* the student-athlete would meet qualifier requirements.

b. Partial Approval. An IEW may be partially approved, as follows:

(1) Athletics Aid and Practice (Division II). When but for the mitigating circumstances, it is *clearly evident* the student-athlete would meet partial-qualifier requirements.

(2) Athletics Aid (initial year of full-time enrollment) and Practice (initial term of full-time enrollment) [Division I]. When but for the mitigating circumstances, it is *clearly evident* the student-athlete would meet academic-redshirt requirements.

   Note: Similar to academic-redshirt legislation (NCAA Bylaw 14.3.1.2), a student-athlete may *earn* eligibility for practice in the next regular academic term of full-time enrollment during the first year in residence (e.g., 2018 spring term) by successfully completing at least nine semester hours or eight quarter hours of academic credit (acceptable toward any of the institution's degree programs) in the preceding regular term of full-time enrollment. There is no recourse (e.g., reconsideration, additional waiver) if a student-athlete fails to meet the condition (see partial approvals FAQ).

(3) Athletics Aid. When mitigating circumstances contributed to the student-athlete’s deficiency but do not rise to the level of but-for mitigation.
Note: A Division I student-athlete may earn eligibility for practice in the next regular academic term of full-time enrollment during the first year in residence (e.g., 2018 spring term) by successfully completing at least nine semester hours or eight quarter hours of academic credit (acceptable toward any of the institution's degree programs) in the preceding regular term of full-time enrollment. There is no recourse (e.g., reconsideration, additional waiver) if a student-athlete fails to meet the condition (see partial approvals FAQ).

A student-athlete who receives a partially-approved IEW may not earn eligibility for competition in the next regular academic term of full-time enrollment during the first year in residence (e.g., 2018 spring term) based on performance in the preceding regular term (e.g., 2017 fall term) of full-time enrollment.

c. **Denial.** An IEW may be denied, as follows:

(1) **Division I.**

(a) **Academic Redshirt.** When it is not clearly evident that but for the mitigating circumstances, the student-athlete would meet qualifier requirements.

(b) **Nonqualifier.** When mitigating circumstances are absent, insufficient or did not contribute to the student-athlete’s deficiency.

(2) **Division II.**

(a) **Partial Qualifier.** When it is not clearly evident that but for the mitigating circumstances, the student-athlete would meet qualifier requirements.

(b) **Nonqualifier.** When mitigating circumstances are absent, insufficient or did not contribute to the student-athlete’s deficiency.

In some scenarios (e.g., student-athlete certified as qualifier, no response to staff communication and/or request within 14 calendar days), staff may cancel an IEW. If a waiver is canceled due to lack of institutional response, it may be re-opened, provided the institution submits a complete response to any outstanding request.

7. **Reconsideration Requests.** The institution may request reconsideration of an IEW decision (staff or subcommittee) based on new information that was not reasonably available at the time of the decision. The reconsideration request (submitted via RSRO) must include (1) a statement on letterhead that explains why the institution believes the information is new and was not reasonably available at the time of the decision, and (2) supporting documentation.

The staff has discretion to determine whether the institution's submission meets the threshold, and its determination is not subject to further review.
If staff determines the threshold is met, staff will review the IEW and render a reconsideration decision. However, if staff determines the institution's submission does not meet the threshold, staff will deny the reconsideration request.

Staff and the subcommittee will not reconsider an IEW decision based on a student-athlete's performance after full-time enrollment (e.g., 2017 fall term).

8. **Appeal Requests.** The institution has 30 calendar days after receiving written notice of a staff decision (initial or reconsideration) to submit a complete appeal request via RSRO. The appeal request must include a statement on letterhead, signed by the athletics director and senior compliance administrator, that specifies the relief sought and explains why the institution believes additional relief is warranted. The subcommittee decision shall be final, binding and conclusive and shall not be subject to further review by any other authority.

If staff denies the institution's reconsideration request, the institution may appeal the initial staff decision, provided it has not done so previously and the appeal request is submitted within 30 calendar days after receiving written notice of the initial decision.