

# Rebranding Academic Success: A Longitudinal Comparison of NCAA Graduation Metrics

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First circulated in 2004, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) utilizes Graduation Success Rate (GSR) to report the graduation rate of athletes competing at member institutions. Created by the NCAA itself as a stated alternative to traditional measures of student graduation rates (e.g., Federal Graduation Rate [FGR]) that the NCAA argued failed to capture the complexities contributing to college athletes failure to earn an academic degree, the GSR calculation removes athletes that transfer institutions, drop out in good academic standing, or declare for a professional draft from the graduation rate equation entirely. Given the standardized United States Department of Education rate, the FGR, includes such athletes in the graduation calculation, the NCAA claimed it was an inaccurate and misleading metric in which to measure college athletes graduation rates. Given the stated purpose of collegiate athletics is supplementary and complimentary to the academic mission of higher education, the annual reporting of FGR contributed to the belief that collegiate athletics failed to adequately provide pathways to degree attainment. More pointedly, poor graduation rates existed as contradictory to the NCAA's collegiate model of athletics and principle of amateurism, both of which rest upon the tenant that a permissible athletic grant-in-aid compensates collegiate athletes with an invaluable commodity: an education culminating in an academic degree.

Since its unveiling 20-years ago, GSR has been readily accepted socioculturally in the United States and utilized to rebrand quantifiable metrics in which to measure college athletes academic success and rate of graduation. Promulgated as justification for defending and maintaining the historical operation of the NCAA as an institution, the NCAA and its member institutions report "record" GSRs year-after-year. Scholars have noted, however, that GSR fails to adequately capture the true nature of college athletes rate of graduation and is a misleading measure of academic success and the commitment to NCAA ideals. In the wake of such criticism, the adjusted graduation gap (AGG) was created to address the inadequacies of the NCAA's GSR metric.

Annually, the College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) calculates and reports AGG, a formula that statistically represents the comparative difference between traditional students (i.e., non-athletes) graduation rates and those of college athletes at NCAA member institutions. An analysis of AGG over the past 15-years indicates that college athletes graduate at rates significantly lower than the

traditional student body. Whereas GSR maintains college athletes are attaining degrees in high numbers, AGG exposes the gap between the graduation of traditional students and their athlete peers.

Utilizing a comparative analysis between FGR, GSR, and AGG, this presentation will illustrate the distinct differentiation between the three metrics for determining college athletes rate of graduation: FGR, GSR, and AGG. These differentiations in the reporting of college athlete graduation rates are indicative of the statistical manipulation of graduation rates and will be discussed through the framework of institutional propaganda. Within such framework, the authors argue that the creation and dissemination of GSR is of strategic and targeted value to the NCAA, utilized to rebrand the academic success of college athletes in a manner consistent and favorable to the mission and maintenance of the NCAA as an institution. For more information on AGG, we invite conference attendees and interested parties to visit [www.csri.org/reports](http://www.csri.org/reports).