Media Contacts:

Dr. Chris Corr, Executive Director: CSRI – Troy University
(334) 808-6787 (office) (828) 803-9233 (cell) ccorr@troy.edu

Dr. Richard M. Southall, Director: CSRI – University of South Carolina
803-777-5550 (office) 901-240-7197 (cell) southall@hrsm.sc.edu, @CSRISouthall

Dr. Mark S. Nagel, Associate Director: CSRI – University of South Carolina
803-777-3751 (office) 770-891-9714 (cell) nagel@sc.edu, @mnagelusc

Allen Wallace, Communications Manager: College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management – University of South Carolina
803-777-5667 (office) 706-267-0959 (cell) awallace@sc.edu, @allenwallace

2023 Adjusted Graduation Gap Report: NCAA FBS Football

College Football Playoff Top-10 AGG = -28.7

Power-5 Black players = -24.2; Power-5 White players = -2.7

Columbia, SC – January 15, 2024... The College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, SC, released its fourteenth-annual National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) Football Adjusted Graduation Gap (AGG) report today. The overall FBS AGG improved/decreased from -17.5 in 2022 to -16.7 in 2023. While both Power-5 and Group-of-5 AGGs improved/decreased slightly year-to-year, there remains a significant gap between FBS football players' graduation rates and those of full-time male students.

The CFP Top-10 has an AGG of -28.7, greater than the overall Power-5 AGG (-18.6) and greater than the Group-of-5 AGG (-14.8). The 2023 Power-5 Conferences' AGG remains sizable and significant at -18.6 while the Group-of-5's AGG of -14.8 reflects a 1.3 percent decrease from 2022. In addition, the AGG for Power-5 Black players (-24.2) improved/decreased by 1.2 percentage points from 2022, while the AGG of White players on Power-5 rosters (-2.9) improved/decreased by 0.8 percentage points (see Table 1 and Chart 2 in Appendix).

It is worth noting the potential impact of both the global COVID-19 pandemic, loosening of Division I transfer restrictions, and the transfer portal on AGGs. The current 4-class cohort includes a 2021-2022 graduating class that was significantly impacted by COVID-19 disruptions. Additionally, the transfer portal has triggered an influx of transferring athletes. Since the Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) retains transfers as part of a school's cohort, in all likelihood this growth in transferring athletes increases the number of "left eligible" players, decreasing the number of players graduating at their initial schools, which is reflected in greater AGGs.

Also noteworthy is the potential impact of conference realignment on upcoming graduation rates. Next year's report will include 15-FBS programs that moved conferences in 2023 while the following year will include an additional 14-FBS programs that will realign to new conferences to begin the 2024 academic year. As nearly a quarter of FBS member institutions will have transitioned to new conferences in the coming years, the impact on graduation rates for subsequent cohorts is worthy of further examination to determine the impact of conference realignment on FBS football player graduation rates.

While in the fourteen-year history of the AGG the gap between FBS football players' graduation rates and those of full-time male students has been consistently large, more research is needed to determine the cause(s) of the continued notable increase in Group-of-5 AGGs.

Study Highlights

(See tables and charts in Appendix for additional information)

❖ The Group-of-5 Conferences' average AGG is -14.8. While the Group-of-5 AGG is still 3.8-points less than the Power-5 AGG, the gap between FBS subdivisions is the second smallest in the 14-year AGG history.

- The Group-of-5 Conferences' AGG is 1.3 percentage points smaller than last year's record high of -16.1. The Group-of-5 AGG has nearly doubled in the past four years.
- The overall Power-5 Conference AGG continues to be large (-18.6).
- The Power-5 average AGG is 0.4 percentage points less than last year (-19.0).
- The difference between Black and White Power-5 AGGs is 21.5 points. The Black players' AGG is (-24.2) compared to an AGG of (-2.7) for White players.
- The difference in the Black-White AGG is much less in the Group-of-5 (10.9 points) than the Power-5 (21.5 points) but the gap has grown 2.2 points since 2022 (-8.7).
- Among the Power-5 Conferences, the Big XII continues to have the smallest AGG (-13.6), while the SEC had the largest AGG (-22.4) for the third consecutive year.
- The Mid-American Conference (MAC) continues to have the smallest Group-of-5 AGG (-6.3), while the American Athletic Conference (AAC) had the largest (-29.0) for the second consecutive year.

CSRI Position on Graduation Rates

In 1990, Congress mandated full disclosure of graduation rates at schools that award athletically related aid and receive federal financial aid. The Federal Graduation Rate (FGR) reflects the percentage of students (athletes and non-athletes) who graduate within six years from the school where they initially enrolled as a full-time student. The FGR measures the extent to which colleges and universities retain and graduate recruited athletes, thus providing one measure of whether they are fulfilling the NCAA's mission of maintaining athletes as an integral part of their student body. The strength of the FGR is its focus on student retention.

Another useful graduation rate measure, created by the NCAA to track athletes, is called the Graduation Success Rate (GSR). The GSR excludes from its calculation athletes—including transfers—who leave a particular school prior to graduating (i.e., early), while in good academic standing. The NCAA methodology also includes athletes who transfer into an institution in a program's GSR. The GSR recognizes college athletes may take a different path to graduation than other full-time students. However, a limitation of the GSR is that currently no comparable "graduation" rate exists for the general student body. In other words, the GSR and FGR measures are not comparable.

The NCAA created the GSR to address the FGR treating all college transfers as non-graduate dropouts. In effect, it treats all athletes meeting minimal eligibility requirements who leave college before graduation as transfers who graduate, ignoring that many transfers drop out and never graduate.

The AGG was developed to partly address FGR and GSR limitations. The AGG compares an adjusted FGR for full-time students and the reported FGR for college athletes. Reports for each sport are released at various times during the year.

CSRI believes in the full disclosure of all measures pertaining to college athlete graduation, including the FGR, GSR, and AGG since one measure is not "better" or somehow "fairer" than the others as each measure different things. The FGR focuses on an institution's ability to retain and graduate students it admits, while the GSR attempts to account for athletes who leave a school that initially admitted them.

Historically, standard evaluations of NCAA athlete graduation rates have involved comparisons with general student body rates presumed to pertain to full-time students. However, many schools' general student body rates include a significant number of part-time students. This is problematic because all NCAA athletes must be "full-time" and should therefore be compared with other full-time students. The downward "part-timer bias" in the student-body FGR distorts this comparison. Because part-time students take longer to graduate, this significantly reduces the measured general student-body FGR, making the relative rate of college athletes at many schools and conferences appear more favorable. CSRI's Adjusted Graduation Gap methodology addresses this "part-timer bias" using regression-based adjustments for the percentage of part-time students enrolled at an institution.[1] The adjustments also account for the aggregate influence of school-specific factors such as location and student demographics. These estimates then become the basis for the AGG comparison.

---

[1] For details, see Eckard, E. W. (2010). NCAA athlete graduation rates: Less than meets the eye. *Journal of Sport Management, 24*(1), 45-59. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.24.1.45

CSRI

The College Sport Research Institute (CSRI) is housed within the Department of Sport & Entertainment Management at the University of South Carolina – Columbia. CSRI is dedicated to conducting and supporting independent data collection and analysis related to college sport issues.

Along with conducting and disseminating in-house research on college athletes' graduation rates, post-athletic transition issues, and oscillating migration patterns, CSRI hosts the annual CSRI Conference on College Sport in Columbia, SC. This conference provides a forum for research of current college-sport issues and possible solutions to these challenges. CSRI also publishes a peer-reviewed scholarly journal entitled: *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics (JIIA)*, which provides an additional outlet for research related to college-sport issues.

This is the fourteenth-annual installment of CSRI's FBS football AGG Report. We hope this information encourages continuing research and discussion regarding both graduation rates and the quality and type of educational opportunities offered college athletes.

CSRI Research Team

Dr. Chris Corr – Executive Director: CSRI and Assistant Professor, School of Hospitality, Sport, & Tourism Management at Troy University.

Mr. Marek Taškár – Student Research Assistant: CSRI and Graduate Student, School of Hospitality, Sport, & Tourism Management at Troy University.

Dr. Richard M. Southall – Director: CSRI and Professor, Department of Sport & Entertainment Management at the University of South Carolina.

Dr. Mark S. Nagel – Associate Director: CSRI and Professor, Department of Sport & Entertainment Management at the University of South Carolina.

Dr. Christopher Atwater – Research Associate: CSRI and Assistant Professor, School of Hospitality, Sport, & Tourism Management at Troy University.

Appendix

Table 1 – 2023 FBS Power 5 and Group of 5 AGGs

All FBS	Overall Mean	Black Mean	White Mean
Average	-16.7	-21.4	-5.2

Power-5 Conference	Overall Mean	Black Mean	White Mean
Big XII	-13.6	-17.0	+4.7
Pacific-12	-18.0	-27.0	-5.6
Big Ten	-19.2	-26.2	-6.6
Atlantic Coast	-19.9	-24.4	-6.8
Southeastern	-22.4	-26.4	+0.9
Average	-18.6	-24.2	-2.7

Group-of-5 Conference	Overall Mean	Black Mean	White Mean
Mid-American	-6.3	-13.7	+3.8
Sun Belt	-10.1	-13.3	-4.5
Conference-USA	-10.7	-14.6	-2.7
Mountain West	-18.0	-21.2	-11.9
American	-29.0	-30.3	-23.2
Average	-14.8	-18.6	-7.7

Notes:

❖ Power-5
   o Notre Dame excluded – Independent in football
❖ Group-of-5
   o Air Force & Navy excluded – Data not comparable to civilian schools

Table 2 – 2023 College Football Playoff Rankings AGGs

College Football Playoff	Overall Mean	Black Mean	White Mean
Top-10	-28.7	-37.1	-6.2
Power-5 non-Top-10	-17.1	-22.1	-2.3

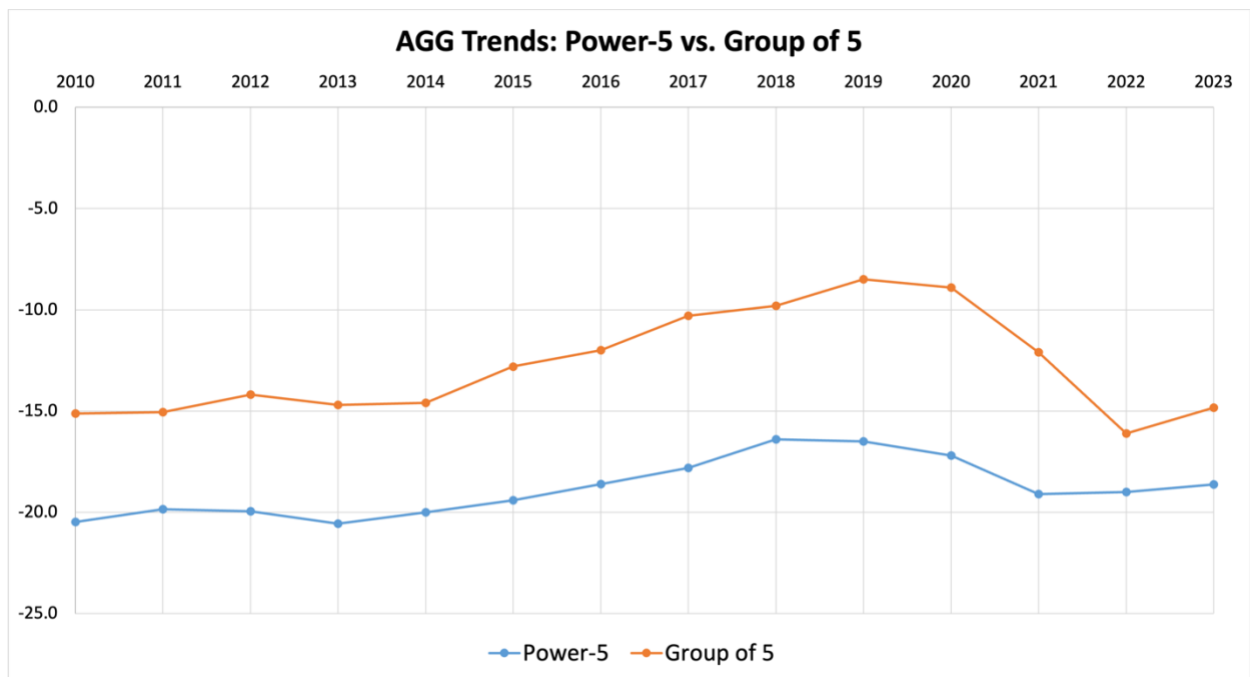## Chart 1 – AGG Trends: Power-5 vs. Group of 5
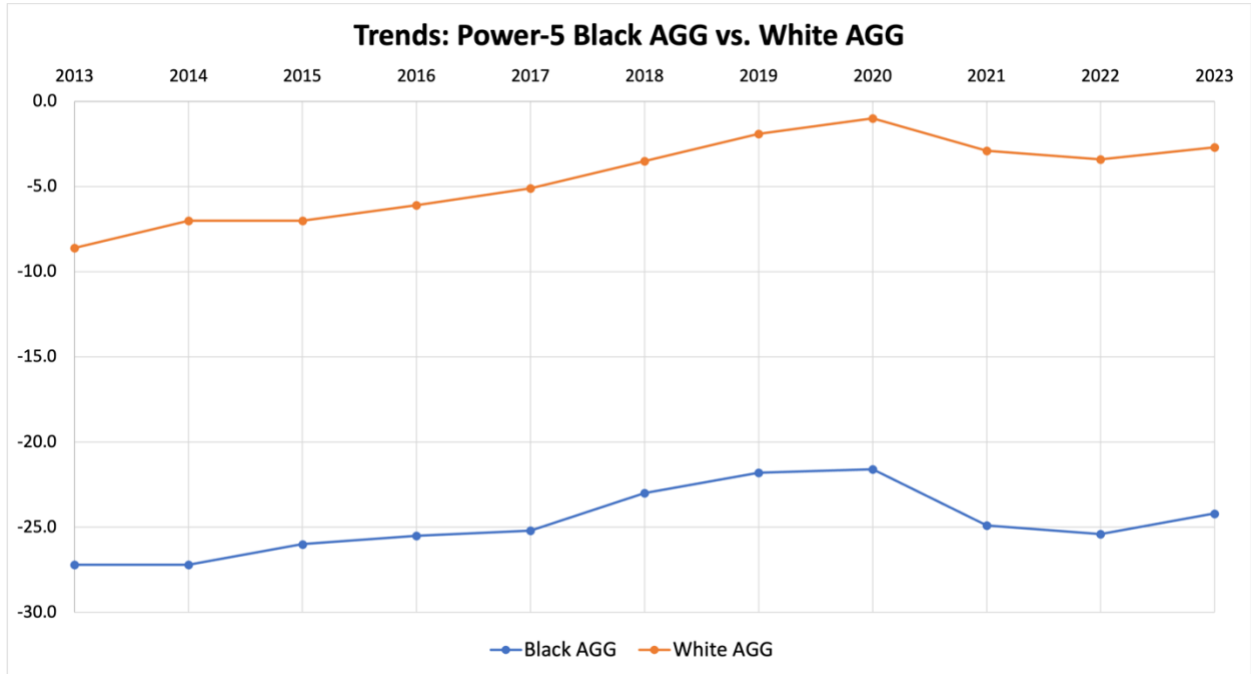
Chart 2 – Trends: Power-5 Black AGG vs. White AGG

Chart 3 – Trends: Group of 5 Black AGG vs. White AGG