Chicago State aces NCAA test of academic progress

Perfect scores among some teams, high scores in others top off great year, significant gains in Academic Progress Rates (APR)

June 20, 2012 — When student-athletes at Chicago State crossed the graduation stage in May:

- One women’s volleyball player was headed to medical school
- A golfer was headed to a doctoral program in chemistry
- And a pair of tennis-playing twins, well, they’re going straight to work after maintaining 3.9 GPAs and carrying more than a full load (20 hours) each semester.

These graduates tell the story born out by Chicago State University’s latest NCAA report on academic progress rates (APR), which shows significant progress and impressive gains among CSU’s 14 sports over the 2009-2010 period, including two women’s teams that clinched perfect scores of 1,000.

“This has been a really big year,” said CSU President Wayne D. Watson, Ph.D. “We’ve instituted some game-changing policies that provide a firm foundation for student-athletes to make the grade in the classroom first, then the field.”

These supports include mandatory study hall hours, late library hours, one-on-one tutoring in all subjects, which is a service open to all students under the Watson administration, and contracts each student-athlete signs to affirm their understanding to and commitment for academic responsibility.

Moreover, Chicago State has taken great steps toward changing the composition of its sports teams by using admissions standards higher than those imposed by the NCAA. At CSU, first-time, full-time freshmen must have a 17 ACT score and a 2.5 GPA in core courses. The NCAA has a sliding ACT scale.

The NCAA report of its 335 Division I member schools shows the following:

- Women’s tennis and golf maintained perfect single-year APR scores of 1,000.
- Six teams surpassed the NCAA’s new 930 APR cut off for single-year scores: These teams include men’s baseball, men’s basketball, women’s basketball, and women’s volleyball.

— more —
CSU-APR:

- Three teams that previously struggled to meet the APR benchmark collectively improved by 278 points.
- Three teams (men’s basketball and baseball, and women’s volleyball) were lifted from postseason penalties levied the previous year.

“I’m particularly proud of our women’s basketball team, which as done extremely well year after year,” Watson says. “But as I told our athletes in May, I’m more proud that they’re engaging in rigorous study and preparing themselves for the job market. The skills learned as student-athletes provide the competencies that make thriving in the global marketplace that much more effective.”

Although the NCAA will not publish its final GSR (graduation success rate) report until the fall, preliminary evaluations suggest CSU will make significant improvement in this measure of student-athlete academic achievement also, according to Watson.

These gains are all the more impressive because Chicago State is classified as a “limited resource institution,” according to the NCAA. These schools have been afforded longer time to implement new and evolving NCAA academic progress requirements because their schools have very small budgets, and much less staff and resources to deploy personalized support and attention to coed players.

But comply, they must.

“We’ve gotten feedback from the NCAA that our results are impressive,” says Constance Wright, Esq., CSU’s assistant athletic director for academic services. “As long as we keep progressing like this, we won’t be penalized, and our students will get the most out of the college experience — academically, athletically and socially.”

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