Graduation Risk Overview

User Guide
Graduation Risk Overview (GRO) User Guide

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Introduction

The Graduation Risk Overview (GRO) is a voluntary tool designed to help institutions perform a real-time assessment of an individual student-athlete's potential barriers to graduation. When risk is defined in terms of a student-athlete’s likelihood of graduation, it requires the consideration of all factors that can reduce a student-athlete’s chance of graduation. Under the GRO model, every student-athlete has some degree of risk of not graduating until the time that he or she actually completes all graduation requirements. Therefore, each student-athlete’s risk can be evaluated and placed on a continuum based on the risk factors specific to that individual.

This document provides an overview of the GRO module, including an introduction of each risk factor within the module. Background information for the risk factors is included, as well as additional information that may enhance the overall implementation of the GRO module at an institution.

GRO Risk-Assessment Models

GRO includes two unique models to assess a student-athlete’s risk of not graduating: one for student-athletes entering the institution as a freshman or transfer and another for continuing student-athletes. Separate models account for risk factors that develop after the student-athlete has enrolled in college and can present a significant threat to a student-athlete's likelihood of persistence to graduation.

The data-driven models were developed after an examination of more than 50 academic and nonacademic risk variables. GRO includes the risk factors determined to have the greatest impact on a student-athlete's likelihood of graduation success. Based on a thorough review, the risk factors were narrowed to five categories:

1. Academic background/achievement;
2. Role of academics (in the student-athlete's life);
3. Transfer status;
4. Personal history; and
5. Sport-related issues.

Each risk category includes one or more risk factors that may be identified for a particular student-athlete. Within each category, points are added to the overall risk score if any factor
within the risk category is met (for example, high school grades are below a certain level or ACT/SAT score is below a certain mark). This allows for the examination of many related risk factors and the opportunity to add locally-identified risk factors within a risk category without over-emphasizing that category or producing a change in the overall risk score. The formulas are illustrated in Tables 1 and 2 on the following pages.

While the GRO formulas are based on data from across the division’s diverse membership, the models are designed to allow institutions to modify the risk factors in order to appropriately accommodate institutional differences. Therefore, GRO is useful for all campuses, regardless of institutional mission, student demographics, geographical location or available resources. Additional information on locally-identified variables is provided in the description of risk factors below and in the Graduation Risk Overview Instruction Document.

The GRO formulas are based on the assumption that the cumulative effect of risk factors, rather than one particular factor, may be responsible for a student-athlete not graduating. Under this cumulative-risk approach, unique risk factors are measured for each student-athlete and an overall risk score is determined by adding together the individual weights of each of the risk factors present. Some risk factors are weighted more heavily based on models built using a review of national data on student-athlete academic performance collected by the NCAA research staff over a 15-year period.

The default assumption for each risk factor is that it does not exist for the student-athlete. Therefore, the failure to assess certain factors could lead to risk assessments that are lower than warranted. However, an institution may elect to assume that some or all student-athletes carry a certain risk factor depending on local circumstances and availability of support services. The GRO module allows an institution to establish default responses for a particular risk factor in order to reflect the assumption of a particular risk factor. In addition, increased dialogue with or evaluation by coach staff member may prove useful in providing additional information relevant to evaluating individual risk factors that could preclude graduation.

There also may be certain protective factors that mitigate overall risk to some degree. One example is having a strong personal relationship with a faculty member on campus. At the present time, the GRO formulas do not accommodate protective factors directly; however information obtained from the second and third modules of the FLAG program, when available, may help institutions to determine whether certain mitigating factors are present.
### TABLE 1: Academic Risk for Student-Athletes at Entry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Factor(s)/Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>(HS student) HS core GPA &lt; 2.6 or ACT/SAT &lt; 820 or Core units &lt; 16 or Academic nonqualifier or Number of HS &gt; 2 or Educational disability diagnosed or Other locally identified criteria or (Transfer) Transfer GPA &lt; 2.6 (for 2-4 or 4-4 transfers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Academics</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Identifies strongly as an athlete, not as a student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>Academic effort lacking (historical or contemporary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Transferred into current institution (2-4 or 4-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal History</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>First-generation college student or Student has low financial resources or Student is homesick or Other locally identified criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Personal, health, injury, family, mental health or substance abuse issue(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Student-athlete in high-profile sport at the institution or High-profile (e.g., Olympic caliber) student-athlete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Team environment does not prioritize academics or Coach in first year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>0-1 = low risk; 2-3 = moderate risk; 4+ = high risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 2: Academic Risk for Student-Athletes Post-Entry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Risk Factor(s)/Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
<td>+4 or +2</td>
<td>(+4) Current cumulative GPA &lt; 2.0 or &lt;br&gt;Current term GPA &lt; 2.0 or &lt;br&gt;Academically ineligible within the past year &lt;br&gt;(+2) Current cumulative GPA &lt; 2.6 or &lt;br&gt;Current term GPA &lt; 2.6 or &lt;br&gt;Education disability diagnosed or &lt;br&gt;Other locally identifiable academic criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of Academics</strong></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Identifies strongly as an athlete, not as a student or &lt;br&gt;Professional sports opportunity presents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>Academic effort lacking (historical or contemporary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Negative attitude toward major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transfer</strong></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Transferred into current institution (2-4 or 4-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal History</strong></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>First-generation college student or &lt;br&gt;Student has low financial resources or &lt;br&gt;Student is homesick or &lt;br&gt;Other locally identified criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Personal, health, injury, personal, family, mental health or substance abuse issue(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sport</strong></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Student-athlete in high-profile sport at the institution or &lt;br&gt;High-profile (e.g., Olympic caliber) student-athlete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>No athletic eligibility remaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Team environment does not prioritize academics or &lt;br&gt;Coaching change occurred or &lt;br&gt;Student-athlete dissatisfied with athletics experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>0-2 = low risk; 3-4 = moderate risk; 5+ = high risk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scoring

For each GRO formula, an overall risk score is assigned to an individual student-athlete by summing the listed weights for all factors present for the individual. The sum then can be used to place the student-athlete onto a spectrum of risk and to classify the student-athlete as low, medium or high risk based on the number and nature of risk factors identified. Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate possible benchmarks between various levels of risk. While changes to the point values of specific risk factors are not permitted within the module, institutions may want to modify the risk level benchmarks when supported by institutional data. For example, one institution may identify a student-athlete with zero to one point as low risk, two to three points as medium risk and four or more points as high risk. A different institution, based on research indicating likelihood of academic success, may elect to identify zero to two points as low risk, three to five points as medium risk and six or more points as high risk.

The risk score may assist in directing appropriate attention toward a student-athlete; however, this score or classification should not be used alone to determine support services that would be beneficial to the student-athlete. Each individual’s overall level of risk may have different causes and may necessitate different forms of support specific to the type of risk identified. Further, the GRO score should not be used as a tool in the institutional admissions process, but rather to identify which student-athletes may require additional support to achieve graduation. In addition, GRO scores can be compiled across individuals to display aggregate risk levels and to help identify resources needed to support a particular recruiting class, team or athletics program.

FIGURE 1: Overall Classifications for Entering Student-Athlete

GRO LEVELS
0 to 1 point = low risk  2 to 3 points = moderate risk  4+ points = high risk

FIGURE 2: Overall Classifications for Continuing Student-Athlete

GRO LEVELS
0 to 2 points = low risk  3 to 4 points = moderate risk  5+ points = high risk
Web-Based GRO Module

To support institutional implementation of the GRO model, a web-based module has been developed for institutions to save data and to automatically calculate a GRO score for each student-athlete. The password-protected module will permit institutions to designate the individuals who shall have access to the module. In addition, the GRO module eventually will be linked with the remaining two modules of the Facilitating Learning and Achieving Graduation (FLAG) program to facilitate the exchange of information and enhance user functionality.

To provide accessibility and familiarity for campus users, the GRO module is similar to many existing NCAA computer applications. Further, GRO will interface with existing NCAA systems to allow users to import student-athlete names and data from the NCAA Division I Academic Performance Program and NCAA Eligibility Center in order to minimize the need for additional data entry. Remaining data collection will be limited to only those factors that are otherwise unavailable.

The dynamic, real-time nature of the GRO module allows an institution to continually track fluctuations in an individual student-athlete’s overall risk due to the development or mitigation of risk factors throughout his or her collegiate career. It is recommended that a student-athlete is first evaluated prior to or at entry and then at least once per academic year throughout his or her collegiate career (each semester if possible, for optimal utility).

The following sections provide an explanation of each risk factor within the GRO module. For each factor, technical information is presented to describe the factor and the rationale for its inclusion in the GRO formula. Some of the factors are identical for entering and continuing student-athletes; where applicable, differences are described within each section. In addition, information is included that may help institutions implement the GRO assessment on campus.
Category One: Academic Background/Achievement

Entering Student-Athlete

Technical Information

One risk assessment model is used for student-athlete’s in their first academic term at the institution, whether as an incoming transfer student-athlete or a first-time enrollee. Analysis of historical data collected by the NCAA consistently shows that academic performance in high school is the best single pre-college predictor of eventual graduation from college. Presently, high school grades are better graduation predictors than ACT/SAT scores when national data are examined in aggregate, but this is not universally true among all Division I institutions. Two points shall be added to the overall risk score if a student-athlete presents a high-school core-course GPA below the designated benchmark, obtains a ACT or SAT score below the benchmark, does not pass a specified number of core academic classes in high school, is ruled to be an academic nonqualifier coming out of high school, has attended more than two high schools, has been diagnosed with an educational disability or meets some other locally-validated criteria.

Student-athletes transferring from a two-year college or four-year institution should be evaluated based on their GPA at the previous institution(s) and any other locally-identified factors (e.g., number and type of credits being transferred). Research conducted by the NCAA has shown that high school academic behavior is not independently predictive of college graduation once the student-athlete has enrolled at a collegiate institution; therefore high school academic information is not considered for incoming transfer student-athletes. However, an institution may determine that examination of the high school academic criteria may prove useful for a transfer who spent limited time at a previous four-year institution or for a transfer from a two-year college.

Student-athletes with one or more academic risk factors present shall have two points added to the overall risk score. Given that only two total points are needed to move a student-athlete into GRO’s “moderate” risk classification, all student-athletes meeting any of the academic criteria will be categorized at the moderate risk level, regardless of the presence of any other factor.

Additional Information

- The listed GPA benchmarks of 2.6 for high school core GPA, 820 on the SAT (or composite of 17 on the ACT) and 16 core courses passed are suggested minimums. An institution may find that higher benchmarks are more appropriate given the qualifications
of the student-athletes or the student body at their respective institutions and are encouraged to modify the benchmarks accordingly. Based on national data of Division I student-athletes, lower benchmarks are not recommended.

- The GRO model allows for the inclusion of “Other Academic Criteria” countable toward the individual’s overall risk score. Examples of factors an institution could consider include: whether the student-athlete was admitted through an alternate admissions process or whether the student-athlete will require academic remediation on enrollment.

**Continuing Student-Athletes**

**Technical Information**

A two-tiered scoring system is used for continuing student-athletes (all student-athletes who have completed at least one term at the institution). Students who have experienced academic ineligibility, academic probation or other serious local issues should be considered as moderate to high risk of not graduating, regardless of the presence of other factors. NCAA research indicates that student-athletes presenting a GPA below 2.0, either cumulatively or in their most recent academic term, should be considered a strong risk for not graduating. As such, a student-athlete in any of those circumstances should be assigned four points. Two points are assigned for student-athletes with a cumulative or term GPA between 2.0 and 2.6 (or higher, if appropriate at the institution), students who have a diagnosed education-impacting disability or students meeting some other locally-identified criteria.

High school academic behavior (or behavior at a previous college for transfer students) is not factored into this formula, as the NCAA’s research generally shows that high school academic variables are no longer strong predictors of graduation once college academic behavior is taken into account.

**Additional Information**

- The GRO model allows for the inclusion of “Other Academic Criteria” that count toward the individual’s overall risk score. Examples of factors that an institution could consider include: low test or quiz scores; a missed test or quiz; late or missed assignments; excessive absences; or the student-athlete is frequently not prepared for class.
Category Two: Role of Academics

Student-Athlete Identity

Technical Information

Research by the NCAA indicates that student-athletes whose self-identity is more as athletes than as students are at greater risk of not graduating than other student-athletes, independent of academic achievement. Several scales have been developed to assess student-athlete identity, although a simple forced choice item (e.g., Do you identify more as an athlete or a student – yes or no?) has been shown to effectively capture this factor. Student-athletes that think of themselves more as athletes than as students should have one point added to their overall risk score. For continuing student-athletes, the possibility of professional or Olympic-type opportunities that may take them away from higher education is included.

Additional Information

- Early insights to the student-athlete’s identity can be obtained by engaging in conversations with coaches and academic support personnel during the recruiting process.

- If assessments by the student-athlete, coach and academic advisor are inconsistent, additional information may be collected and evaluated to determine whether a point should be added to the total risk score.

- Additional information can be obtained by requiring a prospective student-athlete on his or her recruiting visit(s) to write a statement about his/her personal goals and identity. This statement also can help the institution to discern information relative to the prospective student-athlete’s high school performance, his/her intended major, academic effort, etc.

- Student-athletes also can be asked to complete a self-assessment on enrollment at an institution. The assessment can be objective or subjective in nature, but a subjective assessment may be more difficult to apply, particularly when evaluating incoming prospects. As noted previously, this assessment can be as simple as a single question about the individual’s identity.
In addition to a single-question assessment, an institution could use several questions to measure a student-athlete’s identity. For example, a student-athlete could be asked to respond to the following statements:

- I consider myself a dedicated athlete.
- I consider myself a dedicated student.
- I have many personal goals related to my sport.
- I have many personal goals related to my academics.
- I need to excel in athletic pursuits to feel good about myself.
- I need to excel in academic pursuits to feel good about myself.
- My sports experiences are an important part of my overall college experience; and
- My academic experiences are an important part of my overall college experience.

For each statement, the student-athlete can be presented with a range of possible responses: strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. A response of “somewhat agree” or higher indicates identification as an athlete more than as a student.

In general, a student-athlete’s perception of professional and/or Olympic opportunities may be more important to evaluate than the reality of his or her professional and/or Olympic potential.

Institutions may find it easier to establish one or more objective criterion to determine whether a student-athlete has an opportunity to participate in professional sports (e.g., participates in tryout with professional team, declares for professional sports draft) than to

**Role of Academics/Academic Effort**

**Technical Information**

Data collected from NCAA longitudinal studies of student-athlete experiences indicated that academic effort while in college was a strong predictor of college grades and eventual
graduation. These effects were independent of academic measures like grades and were similarly predictive. The statistical models indicate that adding two points to the overall risk score is appropriate if this factor is present.

Additional Information

- NCAA research indicates that a student-athlete’s self-reported assessment of academic effort is often as accurate as any other measure. The self-assessment can be objective or subjective in nature.

- Information about a student-athlete’s academic effort and commitment can be collected during the recruiting process and following enrollment. Coaches and other academic support personnel should participate in assessments and conversations about identity and effort during recruiting and following enrollment.

Negative Attitude Toward Major (Continuing Student-Athletes Only)

Technical Information

NCAA research has indicated that student-athletes who feel less positive toward their respective majors are more likely to leave without earning a degree. This criterion may be more difficult to assess among underclass student-athletes or those who have yet to declare a major. However, attitudes toward their current classes and their academic plan should provide an appropriate parallel.

Additional Information

NCAA research indicates that this risk factor is most significant once a student-athlete has exhausted athletic eligibility. At this time, the student-athlete is more likely to finish his or her degree program if he or she feels more positive toward the declared degree program.

Example questions to assess a student-athlete’s satisfaction toward his or her major:

- Are you satisfied with your declared major/degree program?

- Have you thought about changing your major?

- If you had an opportunity to go back and declare a different major, would you like to do so?
Category Three: Transfer Status

Technical Information

A substantial body of NCAA research indicates that Division I student-athletes who transfer significantly increase the time to graduation and/or their risk of not graduating. This effect is independent of academic preparation, although it may be exacerbated among underprepared students. The transfer effect may relate to a number of factors including the loss of credits on transfer and lower feelings of engagement and/or community. The NCAA’s research indicates that this effect is independent of whether the originating institution is a two-year college or four-year institution. Thus, any student-athlete transferring to an institution should have one additional point added to his/her overall risk score. Given that higher retention losses are seen among Division I transfer student-athletes even several years after entry, this factor should remain as a contribution of one point to the total level of risk until sufficient mitigation is assessed at the local level.

Additional Information

- Institutions have the ability to create a data variable to identify whether a transfer student-athlete previously attended a two-year college or four-year institution. Please see the GRO Instructions for additional information.
Category Four: Personal History

Family

Technical Information

A single point should be added to the overall risk total if the student-athlete is a first-generation college student, has low financial resources, is likely to experience higher than typical distress due to being away from home/family or meets some similar locally-identified criteria.

Additional Information

- Coaches and administrators should work collaboratively to collect personal characteristics of student-athletes during the recruiting process and throughout enrollment. Simply adding a few questions to a recruiting questionnaire or to a meeting outline for campus visits could facilitate collection of key observational data related to personal history.

- While this risk factor is similar for entering and continuing student-athletes, it is important to note that family circumstances may change substantially over the course of a student-athlete’s enrollment.

Personal Problems

Technical Information

Personal problems such as physical health or injury, mental health, substance abuse or other issues should result in the addition of a point to the overall total. These factors may be more readily identified post-entry than pre-entry.

Additional Information

- Campus personnel may not be aware of some of the items identified under personal history prior to the student-athlete’s enrollment. However, several other sources of data may be available through cross-campus collaboration to assess these risk variables. For example, an institution’s financial aid office may be a valuable resource when assessing if financial resources are a trigger for a student-athlete.
Category Five: Sport-Related Issues

High Profile

Technical Information

Student-athletes competing in sports that are considered high-profile on the institution’s campus or who themselves are particularly high-profile athletes (e.g., Olympic hopefuls) should be considered at additional risk. In particular, research has shown that the high athletics time demands in certain sports (i.e., Division I baseball, softball, FBS football, basketball) have implications for student-athlete academic performance.

Additional Information

The Setup screen within the GRO module allows an institution to specify which team(s), if any, would be considered high profile at the institution and shall have one point added for all student-athletes on the team. See the GRO Instructions for additional information. A point can also be added to an individual student-athlete on the Student-Athlete Evaluation screen.

Team Culture

Technical Information

Factors related to the academic culture of a student-athlete’s team or related leadership of his/her coach also have been shown to relate to a student-athlete’s likelihood of graduation. This factor can be assessed subjectively or based on the team’s NCAA Division I Academic Performance Rate (APR) or Graduation Success Rate (GSR). Institutional and team historical graduation rates are both important predictors of eventual graduation. In addition, data indicate that positive feelings regarding the academic influence of coaches can be an important predictor of academic outcomes. Additionally, there seems to be a diminishing belief in the positive academic influence of the coach as a student-athlete progresses through college (i.e., seniors believe coaches to be less positive influences on academics than do freshmen). Finally, a change in coaches also has been shown to impact both the eligibility and retention statuses of student-athletes. This is relevant for incoming student-athletes in that NCAA research indicates additional risk during a new coach's first year. One point is added to the overall risk score if a coaching change occurs, as NCAA research shows that the last year under one coach or the first year under a new coach relates to increased risk of ineligibility or departure. Another addition to
this factor is an examination of the student-athlete’s satisfaction with his or her athletics experience; expressed or apparent dissatisfaction should be expected to increase overall risk.

Additional Information

- The Setup screen within the GRO module allows an institution to specify which team(s), if any, has a new coach or a team culture such that one point should be added for all student-athletes on the team. See the GRO Instructions for additional information.

- Criteria for evaluating the team culture and environment are at the discretion of the institution; however, decisions about the team culture should be made with broad-based input from institutional personnel (e.g., academic support personnel, director of athletics, faculty athletics representative) and should include objective information supporting the decision.

Exhausted Eligibility (Continuing Student-Athlete Only)

Technical Information

Research indicates that student-athletes who exhaust their athletics eligibility prior to graduation are at increased risk of not graduating even after other risk factors are considered. Student-athletes in certain sports (e.g., football and men's basketball) appear to be at even greater risk for academic failure as they exhaust their athletics eligibility. This is especially true for two-year college transfer student-athletes; but the phenomenon occurs for both transfers and non-transfers. In such cases, two points shall be added to the risk total; therefore, the presence of any additional risk factor would then move the student-athlete into at least a moderate risk grouping.