

Opinion Statement: Turning 68% into 100%.
By: The 32 Members of the Division I Student-Athlete Advisory Committee

Over the years, Division I SAAC has continued to provide feedback on the NCAA's transfer landscape and how to improve the experience for all 170,000 of our peers. We have engaged in discussions with multiple transfer-focused working groups, which have offered piecemeal reform to the Division I transfer environment. Up until now, no reform has successfully addressed the underlying transfer eligibility rule that continues to treat roughly 52,300, or 32%, of Division I student-athletes differently. It is hard to reconcile why a Football, Men's Basketball, Women's Basketball, Baseball or Men's Ice Hockey student-athlete would have to justify why they want to transfer from one school to another school and be immediately eligible when the other 68% of student-athletes have the liberty to transfer without having to sit out of competition for a year. Every student-athlete should be able to transfer once with no requirement of sitting out, so long as they're academically eligible to compete at their second institution. We represent all 100% of Division I student-athletes. It is our responsibility to advocate for every one of our peers and for the Association to do the right thing and prioritize student-athlete welfare.

The current transfer legislation is by no means uniform. All student-athletes in sports other than Football, Men's and Women's Basketball, Baseball, and Men's Ice Hockey have the ability to transfer freely without having to sit a year. By allowing *all* student-athletes the same freedom to transfer, the transfer process is more equitable and uniform. In addition to treating sports differently, there are perceived inconsistencies in the approvals of waivers as well as who is immediately eligible upon transfer.

As collegiate student-athletes, we are first and foremost students. Student-athlete graduation rates are at an all-time high, and we continue to rise to academic challenges. Nearly 9 out of every 10 of us earn our college degrees. Of the 90% of us who earn our college degrees, Men's Ice Hockey players have a 92% graduation rate, Women's Basketball players have a 91% graduation rate, Baseball players have an 84% graduation rate, Men's Basketball players have an 83% graduation rate, and Football players have an 82% graduation rate. The original purpose of the transfer rule was to address low graduation and high transfer rates in those five sports; however, recent data clearly shows that those student-athletes have risen to the occasion and that logic is no longer sound. Moreover, while SAAC acknowledges that academics is vital to the success of student-athletes, we also recognize that any additional academic criteria outside the parameters of current legislation should not adversely affect any racial, socioeconomic, or gender demographic.

Student-athletes have always had a variety of personal reasons for transferring. We would also be remiss to not acknowledge the current timing of the application of this concept with the various financial and personal hardships student-athletes and their families currently and will continue to face for years due to COVID-19. Student-athletes' identities are strongly tied to their sport. Allowing for student-athletes to feel whole upon transfer is critical to their overall college experience. Sports are the very activity that help ground student-athletes in college, and during a time of much uncertainty and emotional hardship, it is important now more than ever to allow all student-athletes the ability to compete in their sport after making the best decision for them and their families.

In addition to the added personal and financial hardships that many individuals are currently facing, financial difficulties around college tuition already existed for many families. For those sports who do not offer many full scholarships, including FCS Football, Baseball, and Men's Ice Hockey, a student-athlete who has transferred to a new institution and is required to sit a year must have the means to pay for the portion of tuition they are responsible for. Many student-athletes who desire to graduate with as little debt as possible are forced into a difficult

financial position of having to pay for an additional year of college by having to sit a year, regardless of their academic standing.

In conclusion, the current waiver space is unsustainable and a change needs to be made. The Transfer Waiver Working Group's former concept would've accomplished this necessary change that would have made the student-athlete experience more equitable, sustainable, and just.

At the appropriate time, we encourage the NCAA and its membership to prioritize our voice--the student-athlete voice--and vote in favor of a uniform concept that treats all student-athletes equal upon transferring, reflects the current data around student-athlete academics, and enhances the overall welfare and experience of everyone.