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## SECTION II ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

### Previous Certification Self-Study

- 1. List all “corrective actions,” “conditions for certification” or “strategies for improvement” imposed by the NCAA Division I Committee on Athletics in its first-cycle certification decision (if any) as they relate to academic integrity issues. In each case, provide: (a) the original “corrective action,” “condition,” or “strategy” imposed; (b) the action(s) taken by the institution and the date(s) of those action(s); and (c) an explanation for any partial or non completion of such required actions. Please note, the institution is not required to respond to recommendations for required actions developed by the peer-review team unless those same recommendations were adopted by the Committee on Athletics Certification.**

Mercer University was found to be in compliance during its 1994 first-cycle certification process. No "corrective actions," "conditions for certification," or "strategies for improvement" were imposed by the NCAA Division I Committee on Athletics Certification. Therefore, Mercer has no follow-up items to report.

- 2. List all actions the institution has completed or progress it has made regarding all plans for improvement/recommendations developed by the institution during its first-cycle certification process in the academic integrity area. Specifically, include: (a) the original plan; (b) the actions(s) taken by the institution; (c) the date(s) of the action(s); (d) actions not taken or not completed; and (e) explanations for partial completion. Please note, the institution will not be required to fulfill an element of a first-cycle plan if the element does not affect conformity with an operating principle.**

No plans for improvement/recommendations were developed by the institution during the first-cycle certification process in the academic integrity area.

- 3. Describe any additional plans for improvement/recommendations in the area of academic integrity developed by the institution since the first-cycle certification decision was rendered by the Committee on Athletics Certification.**

Improvements in the area of academic integrity developed by the University since the first-cycle certification decision include:

The Office of Student Athlete Support Services (SASS) was formed in the summer of 2001 to expand academic support services for student-athletes. Initiatives of this office include:

- Provision of a common study hall for all student-athletes in spring 2002.
- Development of a Class Absence Form which identifies the classes a student-athlete will miss throughout the term; each student-athlete is required to discuss such absences with his/her professors.

- Monitoring of competition schedules, travel schedules and practices for each student-athlete to ensure class absences do not exceed those permitted under University policy.
- Enhancement of the individual student-athlete academic progress reports reviewed by head coaches and the Director of Student Athlete Support Services to provide greater detail on academic performance.
- Inclusion of a student-athlete checklist in the *Handbook for Undergraduate Advisors* covering NCAA, Atlantic Sun Conference, and Department of Intercollegiate Athletics rules.
- Institution of a new academic policy in fall 2002 requiring a student-athlete to pass a minimum of six credit hours per semester to be eligible for team participation the following semester.

The Mercer Athletic Council developed a class attendance policy for student-athletes to minimize the amount of class time missed, and to allow the student-athlete and the instructor to arrange for missed assignments. The policy was taken before the undergraduate deans and the College of Liberal Arts Curriculum Committee and approved by the President in November of 1996.

The nine-member Athletic Academic Advisors Council was created in the fall of 2001. The council consists of eight faculty advisors, the Assistant Athletic Director/Senior Woman Administrator and the Faculty Athletics Representative. It provides a forum for advisors and Department of Intercollegiate Athletics staff to discuss issues pertaining to the advising of student-athletes. The Council submits comments and/or recommendations to the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics for their review.

- 4. List all actions the institution has completed or progress it has made regarding required actions identified by the NCAA Committee on Athletics Certification during the institution's interim report process (if applicable) as they relate to academic integrity issues. Specifically, include for each: (a) the required action, (b) the action(s) taken by the institution, (c) the date(s) of these actions(s), (d) action(s) not taken or completed, and (e) explanation(s) for partial completion.**

There were no required actions identified by the NCAA Committee on Athletics Certification during the institution's interim report process.

## **Operating Principle**

- 2.1 Academic Standards. The Association's fundamental principles indicate that an intercollegiate athletics program shall be designed and maintained as a vital component of the institution's educational system, and student-athletes shall be considered an integral part of the student body. Consistent with this philosophy, the institution shall demonstrate that:**

- a) **The institution admits only student-athletes who have reasonable expectations of obtaining academic degrees.**
  - 1) **If the academic profile of entering student-athletes, as a whole or for any student-athlete subgroup, is significantly lower than that of other student-athlete or comparable student-body groups, the contrast shall be analyzed and explained by appropriate institutional authorities.**
  - 2) **If the graduation rate of student-athletes, as a whole or for any student-athlete subgroup, is significantly lower than that of other student-athlete or comparable student-body groups, this disparity shall be analyzed, explained and addressed (though specific plans for improvement) by appropriate institutional authorities.**
- b) **Academic standards and policies applicable to student-athletes are consistent with those adopted by the institution for the student body in general or the NCAA's standards, whichever are higher.**
- c) **The responsibility for admission, certification of academic standing and evaluation of academic performance of student-athletes is vested in the same agencies that have authority in these matter for students generally.**

## **Self-Study Items**

1. **Describe the process by which student-athletes are admitted to your institution, and identify the agencies vested with this responsibility. In what ways (if any) do the process and/or criteria used for the admission of student-athletes differ from the process for admitting students generally? Be specific and give careful attention to key decision points (e.g., establishment of admissions criteria, approval of special admissions) in these processes and the individuals or groups involved at each point, including the role, either formal or informal, the athletics department plays (if any) in the admissions process for student-athletes.**

The admission policy for student-athletes is identical to that for all potential Mercer students. The Vice President for University Admissions and Student Financial Planning establishes admissions criteria, including that for approval of special admissions, and criteria for the award of institutional aid. The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics invites and hosts recruits on campus in accordance with NCAA guidelines, but representatives from the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics do not participate in admissions decisions. The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics informs Admissions of NCAA Recruiting Calendars for all sports so that they are aware of NCAA "dead periods."

The process by which all applicants are admitted starts with an application to the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, where applications are tracked in a computerized student information system. Each freshman applicant is required to provide a complete application, an official high school transcript, prior college transcripts, and official scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or the American College Testing (ACT) college entrance exams. Students for whom English is not the primary language are required to submit a score from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in lieu of an SAT or ACT

score. The athletic liaison from Admissions (a regular admissions counselor assigned this duty) assists in encouraging student-athlete prospects to apply. The Office of Undergraduate Admissions has access to the Web-based NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse for notification of initial eligibility decisions.

Completed files are assessed by an admissions counselor to determine admissibility. Admissions requirements have gradually been increased for the Macon campus undergraduate program over the last several years. Current requirements for acceptance to the College of Liberal Arts, the Tift College of Education, or the Stetson School of Business and Economics are 1000 on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) or 22 on the American College Testing (ACT) assessment, and high school grade point average of 3.0 or higher. Accepted applicants to the School of Engineering must meet these criteria and have a minimum SAT math score of 550. Students for whom English is not the primary language are required to submit a score from the TOEFL of at least 550, or 213 on the 300-point computerized version. These admission requirements have been in place since fall 2002.

Applicants who meet the minimum high school grade point average but have an SAT score between 900 and 1000 may be admitted via a summer program. Summer program students who receive a "C" or better in English 108 and an elective course are admitted to the University for the following fall term. (The summer program was established in 2001.) Freshman applicants who do not meet the minimum high school grade point average and SAT requirements, or who do not successfully complete the summer program, are denied admission to Mercer.

In 2001, admissions requirements were a combined SAT of at least 950 or ACT of 21 and at least a 3.0 high school grade point average for admission to the College of Liberal Arts, the Stetson School of Business and Economics, and the Tift College of Education. Applicants with at least a 3.0 high school grade point average and at least a combined SAT of 1000 or ACT of 22, including a minimum 550 math SAT and/or 23 math ACT, were admitted to the School of Engineering.

In 2000, applicants with a combined SAT of at least 900 or ACT of 19 and at least a 3.0 high school grade point average were admitted to the College of Liberal Arts, the Stetson School of Business and Economics, and the Tift College of Education. Applicants with at least a 3.0 high school grade point average and at least a combined SAT of 950 or ACT of 21, including a minimum 520 math SAT and/or 22 math ACT, were admitted to the School of Engineering.

In 1999, applicants with a combined SAT of at least 890 or ACT of 18 and at least a 3.0 high school grade point average were admitted to the College of Liberal Arts, the Stetson School of Business and Economics, and the Tift College of Education. Applicants with at least a 3.0 high school grade point average and at least a combined SAT of 920 or ACT of 20, including a minimum 500 math SAT and/or 21 math ACT, were admitted to the School of Engineering.

Prior to the establishment of the special summer admission program in 2001, student applications with substandard test scores would be reviewed by a faculty committee monthly.

The committee would determine if other factors were to be considered in the admission decision. Such factors included writing samples, additional grades, scores from SAT II exams or other standardized tests, and letters of recommendation.

Each transfer applicant is required to provide prior college transcripts and a completed application. Transfer applicants must have a minimum 2.0 college grade point average for admission (minimum of 2.5, effective fall 2003).

- 2. Compare the admissions profiles of student-athletes who received athletics grants-in-aid with the profiles of students in general by submitting the following information for the three most recent academic years: average standardized test scores for freshman student-athletes who received athletics aid (by gender, by racial or ethnic group, and according to the eight sport groups listed in the NCAA Division I graduation rates disclosure form) and for all entering freshmen students (by gender and by racial or ethnic group). [Note: Use Attachment No. 1 and the graduation-rates disclosure form methodology to compile these data.]**

A comparison of admissions profiles of student-athletes who received athletics grants-in-aid with the profiles of students in general can be found in Attachment 1. While the average standardized test score of student-athletes falls below students in general, student-athletes must meet, without exception, identical admissions criteria as any other potential student. The average standardized test score for student-athletes was above the minimum score required for admission to the University when analyzed in total, by gender, by race/ethnicity, and by sport group.

- 3.a Please describe the process by which students may be admitted if they do not meet the institution's standard or normal entrance requirements and identify the agencies vested with this responsibility. This should include any second-level or subsequent review processes or appeals procedures which may be utilized when students are not automatically admitted because they do not meet the institution's published entrance requirements.**

Starting in 2001, applicants who meet the minimum high school grade point average but have an SAT score between 900 and 1000 may be admitted via a summer program. Summer program students who receive a "C" or better in English 108 and an elective course are admitted to the University. The agency vested with responsibility for the summer program is the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. There is no appeal procedure.

- 3.b Compare and explain any differences between the percentage of freshman student-athletes receiving athletics aid who were admitted through any of the processes described in part (a) above and the percentage of freshman students generally who were so admitted. Provide these comparative data for the three most recent academic years. For the student-athlete data, information should be displayed for each of the sport groups, organized by year, listed in the NCAA Division I Graduation-Rates supplemental form. [Note: Use Attachment No. 2 to compile these data.]**

The process described in part (a) was established in 2001. In 2001, 140 students were invited to participate in the summer program, two of which were student-athletes. Eight students accepted the invitation and participated in the summer session, including both student-athletes. Seven of the participating students received a “C” or better in English 108 and an elective course and were admitted to the University for fall 2001. Both student-athletes met the summer requirements and gained admission to the University.

All seven students admitted via the summer program enrolled for fall 2001. As can be seen on Attachment No. 2, 1% (7 of 669) of all new freshmen enrolled for 2001-02 were admitted through the summer program, and 6% (2 of 33) of entering student-athletes receiving athletic aid were admitted through the program. It should be noted that 100% (2 of 2) of the student-athletes invited to participate in the summer program accepted, while only 4% (6 of 140) of non-athletes (132 out of 138) accepted the invitation.

**4. List the step-by-step sequence of actions taken by particular individuals on your institution’s campus to certify initial eligibility for transfer student-athletes. Identify by name and title the individual(s) with final authority for certifying initial eligibility.**

Once a student-athlete has been identified as a transfer student:

- 1) A release form from the previous institution must be obtained for students transferring from a four year institution.
- 2) A Historical Account Form is requested.
- 3) Transcripts are submitted to the Registrar’s Office for evaluation.
- 4) Contingent on the accepted transfer hours in relation to applicable NCAA regulations, the student-athlete’s eligibility is determined.
- 5) The Associate Vice President for Admissions for transfers admits the student-athlete under the same standards set forth for the general transfer student. In many cases, the student is accepted to the University before being identified as a student-athlete.
- 6) The Registrar (Paul Schnepf) certifies that the information on the Eligibility and Squad List is accurate and is the final authority for certifying initial eligibility.
- 7) The Atlantic Sun Conference Associate Commissioner for Compliance certifies that the correct NCAA rules have been used to establish eligibility.

**5. List the step-by-step sequence of actions taken by particular individuals on your institution’s campus to certify student-athletes’ continuing eligibility. Identify by name and title the individual(s) with final authority for certifying continuing eligibility.**

Once admitted, student-athletes are tracked by the Office of Student Athlete Support Services throughout the semester, and at the completion of each semester. The Administrative/Eligibility Coordinator reviews the academic progress of each student-athlete on an annual basis to ensure the student meets the NCAA requirements of satisfactory progress, progress towards a degree, and minimum grade point averages.

The eligibility for participation in activities outlined in the *University Bulletin* is strictly adhered to:

*“Except where required as a part of class work in a course, a student on academic probation may not participate in any extra-curricular activities that represent Mercer University. Representative activities include: intercollegiate athletics, student government, student organizations, staff work on campus publications, debate, musical performances, dramatics, cheerleading, theater stage work and acting.”*

The sequence of actions taken to certify continuing eligibility is as follows:

- 1) The Administrative/Eligibility Coordinator records grades each semester after receiving them from the Registrar’s Office.
- 2) The Director of Intercollegiate Athletics advises coaches of any student-athlete who is ineligible for competition due to probation.
- 3) The Administrative/Eligibility Coordinator checks to assure that duplications are not made on previously earned hours.
- 4) The Faculty Athletic Representative checks to assure the Student Athlete Statement and Drug Testing Consent Form are complete.
- 5) The Registrar (Paul Schnepf) certifies that relevant information on the Eligibility and Squad List is accurate and is the final authority for certifying continuing eligibility.
- 6) The Atlantic Sun Conference Associate Commissioner for Compliance certifies that the student-athlete has met NCAA requirements as indicated on the Eligibility and Squad List.

Starting fall 2003, the NCAA Compliance Assistant software program will be utilized in certifying continuing eligibility.

- 6. Please attach as an appendix the institution's official NCAA graduation-rates report (institution's two -page report) for the three most recent academic years for which this information is available.**

See Appendix II-A (NCAA graduation-rates report for 1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 cohorts).

- 7. Review the graduation rates for student-athletes who received athletics grants-in-aid, various student-athlete subgroups and for students generally during the last three years, and comment on any trends or significant changes. Specifically, identify and explain deficiencies in graduation rates for any of the following when compared to the graduation rates of students generally; student-athletes generally, student-athletes of a particular sports team, student-athletes by gender, student-athletes by ethnicity and student-athlete sub-groups (i.e., ethnicity) within particular sport teams.**

The graduation rate for student-athletes was higher than, or equal to, the graduation rate for students generally for the past three years (1993-94, 1994-95 and 1995-96 cohorts).

Due to the small number of the student-athletes on athletically related aid in the three cohorts under examination (43 in 1993-94, 20 in 1994-95, and 25 in 1995-96), graduation rates must

be interpreted with care; modest numbers of individuals can greatly impact rates when the denominator is small. This problem is exacerbated when student-athletes are further disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and sport team. Because over half of new freshmen athletes do not receive athletically related aid, new freshmen athletes that did not receive athletically related financial aid are included in the following analysis. Six-year graduation rates are summarized in Table II-A.

Table II-A  
Six-Year Graduation Rates for Freshman Cohorts Entering  
1993-94, 1994-95, and 1995-96

	Student-Athletes on Athletically Related Aid		Student-Athletes Not on Athletically Related Aid		All Student-Athletes		All Students
	N	Grad Rate	N	Grad Rate	N	Grad Rate	Grad Rate
<b>All</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>51%</b>
<b>Gender</b>							
Female	55	67%	30	57%	85	64%	52%
Male	32	44%	65	62%	97	56%	50%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>							
Amer Ind/AN	1	100%	0		1	100%	14%
Asian/PI	0		2	100%	2	100%	68%
Black non-Hispanic	7	29%	5	60%	12	42%	43%
Hispanic	1	100%	4	25%	5	40%	41%
White non-Hispanic	68	57%	84	61%	152	59%	53%
Nonresident Alien	9	78%	0		9	78%	66%
Other/Unknown	1	100%	0		1	100%	39%
<b>Sport</b>							
Men's Basketball	6	33%	0		6	33%	
Baseball	9	33%	27	63%	36	56%	
Men's Cross Country/Track	4	75%	2	50%	6	67%	
Men's Other	13	46%	37	62%	50	58%	
Women's Basketball	14	50%	1	100%	15	53%	
Women's Cross Country/Track	5	20%	0		5	20%	
Women's Other	36	81%	28	54%	64	69%	

Source: Office of Planning, Budgeting and Institutional Research/IPEDS Graduation Rate Surveys

Graduation rates for male student-athletes on aid fell below males in general and male athletes that did not receive athletically related aid. Men's sports with low graduation rates for athletes on aid were basketball (33% - 2 of 6), baseball (33% - 3 of 9), and golf (33% - 2 of 6). Due to a limited sample size for these sub-groups, one additional graduate would place that respective sport at, or above, the rate for males in general. These rates, although below average, are not considered a significant deficiency.

Graduation rates for female student-athletes on aid were higher than females in general and female athletes that did not receive athletically related aid. The only women's sport with a

relatively low graduation rate was cross country/track at 20% (1 of 5). Two additional graduates would have placed the graduation rate for that sport well above females in general.

Graduation rates for black non-Hispanic student-athletes on aid fell below black non-Hispanics in general and black non-Hispanic athletes that did not receive athletically related aid. The graduation rate for black non-Hispanic student-athletes on aid is based on a small sample of seven people and thus has to be analyzed carefully. For example, one additional graduate would increase this percentage by 14 points to the level for black non-Hispanic student population in general. The graduation rate for black non-Hispanic athletes in total is comparable to black non-Hispanic students in general.

- 8. Please attach academic standards and policies contained in the university's catalog/bulletin, athletics department manual, student-athlete handbook and/or institutional handbook for students. Describe exceptions, if any, to the institution's regular academic standards and policies applicable to the general student body (e.g., good academic standing, definition of minimum full-time status) that are available to student-athletes.**

In general, academic standards at Mercer University exceed NCAA standards. University academic standards and policies apply to all students; there are no exceptions for student-athletes.

Academic integrity at the University is presented in the Mercer Honor System statement that is published annually in the Student Handbook (*LAIR*). This information is stated on pages 57-58 of the 2001-02 *LAIR*. Most of the University's academic standards and policies, including admission to the University, are found in the annual bulletin. Information on academic standards and policies is also outlined in the *Student-Athlete Handbook*. Academic standards and policies can be found in the Macon campus 2001-2002 *Bulletin* at the pages indicated below.

- Admission requirements for first-year candidates, p. 21
- Admission process, pp. 21
- Special Admissions
  - Application with General Education Diploma (GED), p. 22
  - Home-School applicants, p. 22
  - Early Admission, p. 22
  - Readmission of former students, p.23
  - Transfer admission from other colleges and universities, p. 24
- Non-Degree Status
  - Transient students, pp. 25, 62
  - Unclassified students, p. 25
  - Auditors, p. 25
- Advance Placement (AP), p. 23
- College Level Examination Program (CLEP), p. 23
- International Baccalaureate (IB), p. 23

Credit by examination, p. 61  
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Units of credit, p. 56  
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Course withdrawal, p. 60  
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Special Grades  
    Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (SU), p. 57  
    Absent from final exam (ABX), p. 57  
    Incomplete (IC), p. 58  
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Degree requirements (undergraduate), p. 65  
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Awarding of degrees, p. 66

## **Operating Principle**

- 2.2 Academic Support. Members of the Association have the responsibility to conduct intercollegiate athletics programs in a manner designed to protect and enhance and education welfare of student-athletes and to assure proper emphasis on educational objectives. Consistent with this responsibility, the institution shall demonstrate that:**
- a. Adequate academic support services are available for student-athletes**
  - b. Student-athletes are encouraged and assisted in reaching attainable academic goals of their own choosing.**
  - c. When it is determined that individual student-athletes have special academic needs, these needs are addressed.**

- d. **The support services are approved and reviewed periodically by academic authorities outside the department of intercollegiate athletics.**

## **Self-Study Items**

1. **Identify, using an organizational or flow chart, how the institution is organized to provide academic support and advising services to student-athletes (i.e., reporting lines and identification of who does what).**

See Appendix II-B. The function and structure of the individual offices is described in self-study item 2.2.2.

2. **Using the following program areas for academic support issues as examples, please describe:**
  - a. **The specific academic support services offered to student-athletes (if any);**
  - b. **Any policies that govern which student-athletes can use these services;**
  - c. **The mechanisms by which student-athletes are made aware of these services;**
  - d. **The mechanism for review of these services by academic authorities outside athletics at least once every three years; and**
  - e. **The mechanism for approval of these services by academic authorities outside athletics.**
    - **Academic Advising – Course selection, class scheduling, degree program assistance, priority registration.**
    - **Tutoring – Availability; procedures and criteria for obtaining assistance; assignment, qualifications, training, experience, etc.; compensation, rate of pay, pupil loads, qualifications, experience, other terms and conditions of employment.**
    - **Success Skills – Study skills, note and test taking, writing and grammar skills, time management skills.**
    - **Study Hall – Availability, facilities, policy for mandatory attendance.**
    - **Freshman/transfer orientation – Availability, attendance requirements.**
    - **Academic progress monitoring and reporting – Individual’s responsibility, frequency, procedures for periodic grade and attendance checks.**
    - **Assistance for special needs – Provisions for diagnosis and treatment of learning disabilities.**
    - **Learning assessments – Provisions for testing and evaluation (e.g. placement testing).**
    - **Mentoring – Availability of mentors, identification and assignment methods, frequency of interaction.**
    - **Assistance for at-risk students – Availability including institution-wide assistance.**
    - **Post-eligibility programs – Availability of scholarships, assistantships and academic support.**

- a. Mercer University offers a wide range of academic support services. Services related to the program areas listed in the self-study item are outlined below. Of the academic support services outlined below, only the student-athlete study hall, CHAMPS, and the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics sponsored academic progress reports are specific to student-athletes.
- b. All of the academic support services outlined below are open to all students without exclusion. Student-athlete specific services are open to all student-athletes without exception.
- c. Student-athletes are made aware of academic support services in a variety of ways. All academic support services are discussed with student-athletes by the Director of the Office of Student Athlete Support Services (SASS) at initial team meetings and before priority registration each semester. In addition, the Director of SASS contacts each coach to disseminate academic support information. At the beginning of the year, SASS personnel meet with each incoming student individually and discuss the academic support services available. Information about tutoring and Supplemental Instruction offered by the Academic Resource Center is available on the Mercer Web site. The Student Athlete Advisory Council (SAAC) also disseminates information periodically through their team representative or by posting information on SAAC bulletin board.
- d. and e. Services outside the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics are reviewed and approved by their respective unit. Student-athlete specific services are reviewed by the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics and departmental staff, and the Faculty Athletic Representative. The Mercer Athletic Council (which includes five faculty members and the Faculty Athletic Representative, also a full-time faculty member) also provide oversight. The Mercer Athletic Council is responsible for reviewing and giving approval of Department of Intercollegiate Athletics academic operating procedures and institutional policies and procedures that affect athletics. The Athletic Academic Advisors Council (made up of faculty advisors from throughout the University) submits recommendations to the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics on ways to improve the academic advisement of student-athletes and the student-athlete academic progress reports completed by SASS.

#### Academic Advising

Each incoming Mercer student is assigned a faculty advisor by the Office of First-Year Experience. Academic advisors serve a variety of roles: they assist students in the preparation of a well-planned academic pathway to both a major and minor, they assist students in the planning of post-graduate opportunities, and they counsel students on the career decisions. Students may declare a major at thirty credit hours; they will be assigned a new advisor in that field of study. All academic advisors have a checklist for student-athletes included in the *Handbook for Undergraduate Advisors* providing NCAA, Atlantic Sun Conference, and Department of Intercollegiate Athletics rules and regulations.

The Office of Student Athlete Support Services (SASS) provides counseling to student-athletes on a variety of academic issues including course selection and class scheduling. All student-athletes receive priority registration.

### Tutoring

Tutoring is provided through the Academic Resource Center, a service available to all Mercer students. Individual tutoring sessions are drop-in.

Academic Resource Center tutors are assigned as needed to four drop-in labs: writing, math, foreign language, and science. The Writing Lab tutors serve students taking any course that incorporates a writing component and the Math Lab tutors provide assistance with all freshman and sophomore level math courses and a variety of upper level courses. The Foreign Language Lab is provided for students to hone their skills in Spanish, Italian, German, Latin, and French. In the Science Lab, students receive assistance in entry-level chemistry, organic chemistry, physics, general biology, or genetic biology.

Prior to being hired, tutors are required to have written references from discipline-specific faculty and a minimum 3.0 grade point average. In addition, the Academic Resource Center hires only those students who are sophomores, juniors, seniors, or graduate-level. Training is conducted by both the Academic Resource Center Director and Assistant Director at the beginning of each semester and reinforced by bi-weekly training sessions throughout the semester.

The rate of pay for each peer tutor is \$5.15 per hour. Tutoring is provided a total of 115 hours per week of the semester up to finals week. The tutoring hours are Sunday, 4 to 9 p.m. and Monday through Thursday, 5 to 9 p.m. During finals week, the Academic Resource Center remains open for students to use the computer lab and prepare for exams either individually or in small study groups.

### Success Skills

Most freshmen students enroll in University 101 (UNV 101), a class that introduces students to Mercer. Topics include: structure of higher education, Mercer policies, study skills, cultural diversity, critical thinking, ethics, personal relationships, health, safety, and careers. Students enrolled in either the Managed Academic Path to Success (MAPS) program through the Stetson School of Business and Economics or the First Year Seminar-Experiential (FYX) in the College of Liberal Arts do not enroll in UNV 101. However, the topics covered in UNV 101 are integral components in both FYX and MAPS.

In addition to UNV 101, a Mercer student may take a Learning Skills course (LSK 185, 186). These highly individualized courses encompass topics such as time management, note taking, test taking, and overall improvement in study skills.

Mercer University operates a CHAMPS/Life Skills Program. CHAMPS stands for **CH**allenging **A**thletes' **M**inds for **P**ersonal **S**uccess. Created in 1991 by the NCAA to better prepare student-athletes for any challenge they might encounter during and after college, this program assists with the intellectual development of student-athletes while increasing awareness of their environment. This assistance is designed to enhance the student-athletes' performance in any walk of life as well as to increase their ability to cope with demands that arise during the collegiate experience. In doing so, the goal of the program is to help student-

athletes succeed not only on the athletic field, but also in their specific academic field and ultimately in their future career.

### Study Hall

All incoming student-athletes are required to attend 10 hours of study hall per week. After the first year of study, attendance is based on cumulative grade point average. Coaches may assign additional hours at their discretion. Study hall is open for all student-athletes. Attendance is monitored by the Director of SASS. Student-athlete attendance reports are forwarded to the respective coaches on a weekly basis.

Study hall is held in the Academic Resource Center and is open for 45.5 hours from Sunday through Friday. The actual hours are:

Monday- Friday	8-12 AM
Monday- Friday	1:30-4 PM
Monday-Thursday	7:30-10 PM
Sunday	7-10 PM

The following attendance policy is in place.

Absences - a student-athlete is considered absent if he/she does not attend any required study activity, study hall, tutoring, counseling session, etc.

- 1) First Absence
  - a. Will be issued a letter of warning from the SASS Director, outlining the consequences of additional unexcused absences, copied to the Head Coach and the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics.
  - b. Also three additional hours of study time will be assigned and completed in the week.
- 2) Second Absence
  - a. Student-athlete will meet with the Head Coach and SASS Director.
  - b. A second letter of warning will be issued outlining the consequences of excessive absences. The student-athlete will read and sign the letter with copies to the same individuals that received the previous letter.
- 3) Third Absence
  - a. Student-athlete will meet with Head Coach, SASS Director, and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics
  - b. Student-athlete will be suspended from the next two practices after the head coach has been notified, during which time the student must be present in the study hall.
  - c. Head coach will submit a report to the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics detailing the playing and the practice schedules.
- 4) Fourth Absence
  - a. Student-athlete will meet with Head Coach, SASS Director, and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics
  - b. Student-athlete will be suspended from a competition within the next week. Head Coach will determine the competition to be missed.

- c. Continued absences from academic appointments will result in suspension from the team and loss of scholarship.

#### Freshman/Transfer Orientation

All new students are strongly encouraged to attend summer orientation programs. These sessions provide occasions to complete academic assessments, gain an overview of curricular programs, learn more about university resources, and meet with faculty advisors regarding course registration. Additionally, orientation for new first year students and transfer students begins several days prior to the start of classes each semester. All new students are expected to participate in these sessions. New student-athletes are required to attend these orientation sessions in the fall. Orientation programs are coordinated through the Division of Student Life.

#### Academic Progress Reports

The Office of First Year Experience sends out academic progress reports on all freshmen in 100 and 200 level classes. Any student in this group below a C average must meet with their faculty academic advisor to formulate a plan to improve their academic performance.

Specific to student-athletes, academic progress reports, administered by the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics, are completed by professors at midterm. The forms are delivered and collected by the student-athlete. The Director of SASS and the head coach review these forms to assess the academic progress in individual classes. Each incoming student must also meet with a staff member of SASS to formulate an academic plan. When a sport is in session, this plan includes meeting every three to four weeks to examine grades and assignments that the student may have received.

#### Special Academic Needs

Student-athletes with a disability are identified and offered services in the same manner as the general student body. The Office of Student Support Services offers services to students with learning disabilities including quiet studio space for exams, extended exam time, taped exams, oral exams, scribes, individual academic, personal and vocational counseling, peer support groups for the development of academic strategies and psycho-social adjustment, computer resources for additional academic development and assistance, taped textbooks, priority academic scheduling, peer tutoring, academic/vocational diagnosis or testing, new student orientation assistance, family consultation, faculty/staff consultation, professional and personal counseling.

Students who suspect they have a disability may come to Student Support Services for a consultation regarding the evaluation and documentation process for services. Professors, coaches, members of the Student Athlete Support Services or other staff members may also refer the student to the Office of Student Support Services.

University policy regarding students with disabilities is as follows:

*Students with a documented disability must inform the instructor at the close of the first class meeting. The instructor will refer you to the Student Support*

*Services office for consultation regarding evaluation, documentation of your disability, and a recommendation as to the accommodation, if any, to be provided. Students must provide instructors with an accommodation form from Student Support Services listing reasonable accommodation to sign and return to Student Support Services. The Student Support Services office is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Connell Student Center. If you do NOT consult with the instructor and follow up at the Student Support Services office during the two weeks of classes, as provided above, you will thereby waive any claim to a disability and the right to any accommodation pertaining thereto.*

#### Learning Assessments

Placement tests are given by individual departments. Foreign language placement tests are required of students who have studied French, German, Spanish, or Latin in high school for two or more years and who wish to continue study of the language or wish to exempt the basic competency requirement in the language. Initial assessment for placement into math courses is done based on SAT Math scores. Placement may change based on AP scores or Math Placement exams.

#### Assistance for At-Risk Students

Mercer does not accept students who may be deemed as at-risk. However, a process is in place for matriculated students who struggle at the beginning of their academic career. The Office of First Year Experience generates progress reports at mid-term to notify a student of their academic progress. If a first-term freshman completes the initial semester with less than a 2.0 grade point average, an academic intervention takes place before the beginning of the subsequent semester. Study skills are reinforced and a course of action for academic success is generated. Mercer offers a variety of options for student who may be struggling in their coursework. These options include: individual tutoring through the Academic Resource Center and the Writing Center, Learning Skills courses, and Supplemental Instruction. These services are offered free of charge to all Mercer students.

#### Post-Eligibility Programs

For students who have exhausted their eligibility and completed their degree, Career Services maintains information on graduate and professional school opportunities, including any opportunities for financial aid. This office will also provide one on one counseling to assist in the process of admission to a graduate or professional school. The Department of Intercollegiate Athletics also keeps on file opportunities for post-graduate scholarships. For those student-athletes who have exhausted their eligibility but have not completed their undergraduate degree, the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics evaluates their needs on a student-by-student basis.

## **Operating Principle**

**2.3. Scheduling. It is a principle of the Association to ensure that, in the conduct of intercollegiate athletics, student-athletes have sufficient time for their academic**

**programs. In accordance with this principle, the institution shall demonstrate that written policies are established in all sports to minimize student-athletes' conflicts with class time and/or final examination periods due to participation in intercollegiate athletics, consistent with the provisions of Constitution 3.2.4.12.**

## **Self-Study Items**

- 1. Attach the institution's written policies related to the scheduling of intercollegiate athletics competitions and practices and describe how they minimize interference with class time and examination periods.**

The policies related to the scheduling of intercollegiate athletics competitions and practices are outlined in the *Athletics Department Policy Manual* and the *Student-Athlete Handbook*. Athletic events are scheduled to minimize conflict with the academic schedule. Head coaches design their respective schedule with the understanding that class attendance is critical to academic success. The Director of Intercollegiate Athletics also reviews and approves the competition of each individual sport. No off-campus athletic competition is scheduled during the first week of an academic term or during final examination periods unless mandated by the Atlantic Sun Conference. In addition, student-athletes are presented preliminary schedules to assist in their choosing of classes that minimize missed class time. The Office of the Registrar provides priority registration to athletes. Athletes can avoid conflicts between athletic participation and academic obligations.

- 2. Describe the procedures used by the institution to monitor missed class time for student-athletes.**

Student-athletes are advised of tentative competition schedules before priority registration so that classes can be arranged to minimize potential conflict. After priority registration the Office of Student Athlete Support Services reviews student-athlete class schedules to determine the amount of missed class time. A Class Absence Form (form that identifies the classes a student-athlete will miss throughout the term) is completed and each student-athlete discusses the form with his/her professors.

- 3. Analyze, explain and address missed class time that has been determined by the institution to be significant or excessive for any sport(s).**

Athletic competition is recognized as an excusable absence, but the total number of absences is limited. The attendance policy was written to minimize missed class time while allowing the student and the instructor the opportunity for arrangement of missed assignments.

The policy states:

*A student-athlete is entitled to excused absences during the semester in which he or she participates in intercollegiate competition. For a MWF three or four credit hour course, the student-athlete can have a maximum of eight excused absences, including absences for other reasons than intercollegiate athletic competition. For a TR three or four credit hour course, the student athlete can have a maximum of five excused absences, including absences for other reasons than intercollegiate athletic competition.*

*Notification of an excused absence must be made by the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics to the academic dean and the instructor of the course by the first day of classes in the semester of the excused absences.*

*It is the responsibility of the student athlete to arrange with the instructor to make up all work required during the excused absences, including examinations.*

If the missed classes are not within the University attendance policy limits, the academic advisors work with the student-athlete to change their schedule before the next semester begins. In cases where it would be very difficult to change a schedule because of the classes offered, the student discusses the missed class time with the professor before the semester begins to determine if it is possible to remain in the class. Exceptions can be granted on an individual basis based on prior consultation and approval by the faculty member.

**4. Describe the means by which the institution's policies and procedures regarding the scheduling of athletics competition and practices (e.g., missed class policy) are communicated to student-athlete**

The institution's philosophy of scheduling competitions and practices to minimize conflicts with class periods and academic responsibilities of student-athletes is outlined in the *Student-Athlete Handbook*. Also included in the *Student-Athlete Handbook*, distributed to all student-athletes at the beginning of each academic year, is the attendance policy. The attendance policy is also included on the Class Absence Form. The Class Absence Form, completed by the Office of Student Athlete Support Services, identifies the classes a student-athlete will miss throughout the term. Each student-athlete discusses the form with his/her professors.

**Evaluation**

**2.1 Academic Standards.**

	Currently Yes	Found of Page(s)	Currently No	If Currently No, if deficiencies exist, or if an enhancement has been identified, indicate Plan for Improvement Number
Does the institution demonstrate that:				
a. The institution admits only student-athletes who have reasonable expectations of obtaining academic degrees?				
(1) If the academic profile of entering student-athletes, as a whole or for any student-athlete subgroup, is significantly lower than that of other student-athlete or comparable student-body groups, the contrast is analyzed and explained by appropriate institutional authorities?	X	II-5		
2) If the graduation rate of student-athletes, as a whole or for a subgroup, is significantly lower than that of other student-athlete or comparable student-body groups, this disparity is analyzed, explained and addressed (through specific plans for improvement by appropriate institutional authorities)?	X	II 7-9		
b. Academic standards and policies applicable to student-athletes are consistent with those adopted by the institution for the student body in general or the NCAA's standards, whichever are higher?	X	II-9		
c. The responsibility for admission, certification of academic standing and evaluation of academic performance of student-athletes is vested in the same agencies that have authority in these matters for students generally?	X	II-3, II 6-7, II 9-10		

On the basis of the yes/no answers above, is the institution in substantial conformity with Operating Principle 2.1 (Academic Standards)?  X  Yes       No

**2.2 Academic Support.**

	Currently Yes	Found of Page(s)	Currently No	If Currently No, if deficiencies exist, or if an enhancement has been identified, indicate Plan for Improvement Number
Does the institution demonstrate that:				
a. Adequate academic support services are available for student-athletes?	X	II 12-16		
b. Student-athletes are encouraged and assisted in reaching attainable academic goals of their own choosing?	X	II 12		
c. When it is determined that student-athletes have special academic needs, these needs are addressed?	X	II 15-16		
d. Support services are approved and reviewed periodically by academic authorities outside the department of intercollegiate athletics?	X	II-12		

On the basis of the yes/no answers above, is the institution in substantial conformity with Operating Principle 2.2 (Academic Support)?  X  Yes   No

**2.3 Scheduling.**

	Currently Yes	Found of Page(s)	Currently No	If Currently No, if deficiencies exist, or if an enhancement has been identified, indicate Plan for Improvement Number
Does the institution demonstrate that written policies are established in all sports to minimize student-athletes' conflicts with class time and/or final examination periods due to participation in intercollegiate athletics, consistent with the provisions of Constitution 3.2.4.12?	X	II-17		

On the basis of the yes/no answers above, is the institution in substantial conformity with Operating Principle 2.3 (Scheduling)?  X  Yes      No

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