

*Empowering Educators: Facilitating the
Transition of Student-Athletes with
Disabilities into College through NCAA
Division-I Clearinghouse Guidance*

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Abstract

Ensuring the successful transition of athletically gifted students with disabilities into National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) post-secondary educational programs hinges on the competence of coaches and the support provided by special educators who are well-versed in NCAA requirements. This study was undertaken to equip secondary educators with the necessary knowledge of NCAA Division-I requirements, empowering them to facilitate the seamless entry of athletes with disabilities into post-secondary education and athletic programs. In a multiple probe design study involving four male and female educators, we assessed the effectiveness of our NCAA lesson package. The results established a significant correlation between our NCAA

lessons and an enhancement in educators' knowledge. An overall Percentage of Non-Overlapping Data (PND) effectively demonstrated the intervention's high efficacy across all four educators.

Keywords: athletically gifted, post-secondary, transition, scholarships, education, disability.

Literature Review

Students with disabilities pursue the transition from high school to postsecondary education to enhance their chances of completing their academic journey, thereby improving their lives. This endeavor offers a host of benefits, including access to higher-paying jobs, the potential for career advancement, and the cultivation of a more productive workforce that contributes positively to their communities. This transition equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for success throughout their lives.

As per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (6), this transition is recognized as a civil right for students with disabilities, ensuring their successful journey from high school to postsecondary education. Additionally, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) offers programs tailored

to aid students with disabilities in their transition to postsecondary education. The NCAA, a governing body that oversees college athletics, has specialized rules to support the transition of these students (3).

The NCAA, with its wide-reaching influence on college athletics, places great emphasis on academic performance and athletic excellence. NCAA Division-I institutions, known for their substantial athletics budgets and scholarship offerings, provide unique opportunities for students (3). To assist students with disabilities, the NCAA has established specific rules and requirements for their successful transition. These rules necessitate that students with documented disabilities initially meet eligibility criteria akin to their peers (3).

Furthermore, the NCAA's regulations require students to pursue courses that have received the association's approval, ensuring equivalence with standard academic offerings in the respective field of study. For students aiming for Division-I institutions, enrollment in additional courses immediately after high school graduation is permitted (3).

The NCAA's Academic Performance Program (APP) plays a pivotal role in ensuring Division-I student-athletes excel academically, offering incentives and penalties to encourage successful academic performance (3). This program is not limited

to the general student-athlete population but extends its support to gifted students with disabilities.

Over the years, the NCAA has established standardized requirements for college eligibility. NCAA Division-I maintains identical requirements for students with and without disabilities, with accommodations available to aid in meeting these requirements. Students planning to participate in the Division-I program can engage in college courses both before and after high school graduation with NCAA eligibility center approval (3).

Successful college transition for students with disabilities hinges on their completion of specific academic core courses (3). These students typically commence their Division-I journey during 9th to 12th grade, and are required to pass 16 core courses, maintaining a minimum GPA of 2.0 in these subjects. These core courses encompass four years of English, three years of Math, two years of Physical or Natural Science, two years of Social Science, one additional year of studying English, Science, or Math, and finally, four years of studying Philosophy, Religion, Foreign Language, or other relevant subjects (3). Students are also expected to take ACT or SAT exams, scoring a minimum of 400 on SAT or 37 on ACT, with the combined score meeting the NCAA's minimum requirements based on a sliding scale (NCAA, 2016).

The NCAA, as an organization dedicated to the regulation of athletes and the organization of athletic educational programs, plays an integral role in shaping students' lives during their transition. Initially, the NCAA held reservations about the coexistence of educational missions and athletic pursuits, with concerns that athletic activities could detract from academic commitment (9). However, this perspective evolved to acknowledge that, through proper guidance and leadership by coaches, students can effectively balance both academic and athletic goals.

The choice of sports as a career often relies on the competence of the athletic team's coach. Competent coaches instill self-confidence and self-regulation in students, identify individual athletic abilities, and provide tailored guidance. Thus, the success of students with disabilities depends on the proficiency of coaches and educators who implement sound educational programs. Special education teachers, counselors, and principals must establish a comprehensive plan to support students' success in sports and academics while navigating the NCAA Division-I program. Challenges may arise if educators fail to grasp the intricacies of the program, potentially impacting students' academic and athletic pursuits.

Many students exhibit athletic prowess, benefit from world-class facilities in institutions with NCAA Division-I programs, and follow demanding schedules (4). These schedules may limit access to athletic facilities, creating hesitations and doubts among students. Students may question whether they have the necessary experience to excel, with educators obligated to anticipate and address these concerns (4). Student affairs practitioners, athletic administrators, faculty, special education teachers, principals, counselors, and coaches must be attuned to students' expectations and concerns. It is vital to provide opportunities for students to hone their talents and experience accelerated growth.

Furthermore, preparing students for NCAA Division-I requirements is a multifaceted endeavor. The introduction of summer pre-enrollment classes, designed to simulate academic, athletic, and social scenarios, can provide students with disabilities a proactive mindset to meet Division-I standards (2). Students already prepared for college before pre-enrollment courses exhibit a head start. These courses can align students with the NCAA Division-I program and provide the requisite skills and knowledge. Educators can utilize these programs to remain updated and comprehend students' needs better, thereby supporting them in reaching their goals.

Competence among educators is a prerequisite to inspire and guide student-athletes effectively. They must be well-informed about NCAA prerequisites to assist students in their academic and athletic pursuits. Coaches play a pivotal role in nurturing athletes and serving as mentors. They should adopt a humanistic approach and a coaching philosophy that tailors guidance to individual students (5). Moreover, a student-athlete's choice of coach and the educational environment can greatly influence their success. Students have the right to approach different coaches to benefit from diverse perspectives. Thus, collaboration and adaptability in coaching methodologies are crucial for achieving success.

By creating supportive methods, educators can ensure students are well-prepared and possess a clear transition plan from secondary education to postsecondary life. Quality instruction, leadership, coaching, and learning experiences can facilitate the seamless integration of sports into post-secondary education for gifted students. Therefore, this study aims to educate educators about the essential NCAA Division-I requirements to facilitate the transition of athletes with disabilities into post-secondary education.

Method

Participants

This research involved four educators, including two male and two female educators, with ages ranging from 22 to 55. All participants possessed experience in teaching or coaching and had been involved in facilitating the transition of gifted student-athletes with disabilities from high school to Division-I and Division-II programs.

Participant Profiles

1. Macky: A 55-year-old female counselor with 20 years of experience in counseling. Macky held certification as a counselor and had been actively engaged in advising students within the NCAA context for the past 12 years. She specialized in assisting students with disabilities in making informed decisions concerning their academic and athletic pursuits.

2. Mary: A 30-year-old female special education teacher with a master's degree in special education. While Mary had a strong understanding of the NCAA program, she had not previously provided support to students within the NCAA framework. Mary's professional experience encompassed six years as a special

education teacher, including three years at the middle school level and three years at the high school level.

3. Petter: A 33-year-old male football coach with six years of coaching experience and a master's degree in leadership education. Although Petter's exposure to the NCAA was limited to two years, he held certification as a coach and demonstrated proficiency in coaching.

4. David: A 40-year-old male football coach who had served as an athletic director for five years. David, a certified coach with six years of coaching experience, also held a master's degree in special education. His exposure to the NCAA extended over five years.

Setting

The study was conducted within the serene environment of a public library located in a bustling metropolitan area in the southwestern region. The participants received instruction on NCAA Division-I requirements in a designated study room within the public library setting, chosen for its conducive atmosphere that facilitated the participants' comprehension of the educational materials.

Design

To mitigate potential threats to internal validity, we employed a multiple probe design, allowing for a comprehensive

assessment of the research intervention's impact. The multiple probe design afforded readers the opportunity to evaluate the effects of the instructional intervention on participants' knowledge development and skill enhancement.

Dependent Measure

The dependent measure of this study was the percentage of correct answers achieved in the NCAA Division-I requirement quizzes.

Measurement Procedures

Four quizzes, each corresponding to the content of one of the four NCAA lessons, were developed. These quizzes comprehensively covered the material presented in each of the four NCAA Division-I requirement lessons. Each quiz consisted of two parts, each containing ten questions. The first five questions were in a true or false format, while the subsequent five questions provided multiple-choice options. During the baseline phase, participants completed four NCAA Division-I requirement quizzes. Subsequently, the study implemented a staggered approach, with each NCAA content lesson being taught on successive days, followed by a posttest quiz associated with the respective lesson unit.

NCAA Division-I Lesson Package

The instructional materials and assessments were meticulously crafted using the comprehensive resources available on the NCAA Division-I website. This section of the website delineates the specific requirements for students in grades 9 through 12 to attain eligibility for acceptance into a Division-I athletic program. Four distinct lessons, each spanning between forty-five minutes to an hour, were developed to cover the fundamental NCAA Division-I requirements. These lessons encompassed the following topics: (A) NCAA Athletes with Disabilities, (B) Registration with the NCAA Eligibility Center, (C) Understanding Division-I, II, and III Information, and (D) Additional Information.

Baseline Procedures

During the no-intervention baseline phase, participants were tasked with completing each of the four quizzes associated with the NCAA Lesson Package. Educators were individually instructed to complete each quiz to the best of their ability, without any external assistance. A time limit of 15 minutes was set for each quiz, and participants completed one quiz during each session over a two-week period.

Intervention Procedures

The intervention phase followed a staggered approach, involving four distinct sessions, each focused-on teaching NCAA requirements. Each session introduced one NCAA required lesson to participants. The instructional techniques employed were tailored to the specific content:

- For Unit 1, a PowerPoint presentation and discussions were utilized to elucidate the concept of NCAA Athletes with Disabilities.
- In Unit 2, posters, handouts, and discussions were employed to expound upon the registration process with the NCAA Eligibility Center.
- Unit 3 featured a PowerPoint presentation that delved into the intricate details of Division-I, II, and III, along with their respective requirements.
- Unit 4 encompassed miscellaneous information about NCAA Division-I requirements. At the conclusion of each lesson, participants were tasked with completing the corresponding unit quiz.

Social Validity

To ensure the comprehensive and accurate portrayal of NCAA requirements, we sought the expertise of two NCAA requirements specialists. They reviewed the quizzes and lesson materials, assessing them for thoroughness and accuracy. Their valuable feedback was instrumental in enhancing the lesson materials and quizzes. Additionally, feedback was gathered from participating educators at the study's conclusion to gauge the utility of the training materials in improving their comprehension of NCAA Division-I requirements.

Interrater Agreement

Inter-rater reliability data were collected by two doctoral students specialized in the field of special education, both holding master's degrees in special education. After the quizzes were collected, each evaluator independently scored them. Inter-rater reliability was determined using the following formula:

Inter-rater reliability = (agreement ÷ disagreement) x 100.

The inter-rater reliability was established at 100%.

Results

Our analysis of the results was conducted through a visual assessment of the graphed data, as illustrated in Figure 1. First, we

will describe the baseline results. Overall, the NCAA Eligibility Lesson Package demonstrated a remarkable enhancement in educators' understanding of the requirements for high school students with disabilities making the transition from high school to college. The subsequent sections present the outcomes for each educator. The collective average of the Percentage of Non-Overlapping Data (PND) effect size across the four participating educators between the baseline and intervention phases was 100, signifying a substantial intervention effect.

Counselor Macky

During the baseline phase, Counselor Macky provided correct answers ranging from 50% to 70% on the NCAA quizzes, with an average accuracy rate of 60%. Subsequent to the baseline data collection, the intervention commenced with the delivery of the first NCAA lesson. As each lesson was taught, Counselor Macky's percentage of correct answers displayed a consistent linear increase, progressing from the stable baseline to 80%, 90%, and ultimately reaching 100%. Refer to Figure 1 for a visual representation.

Special Education Teacher Mary

In the baseline phase, Mary consistently answered NCAA quiz questions correctly at a rate of 60% to 70%, with an average

accuracy of 65%. Following the baseline data collection, the intervention was initiated with the first NCAA lesson. As the lessons unfolded, Mary's percentage of correct responses displayed a steady linear ascent, advancing from the stable baseline to 80%, 85%, and eventually reaching 100%. Refer to Figure 1 for graphical representation

Coach Petter

During the baseline, Petter's correct responses to NCAA quiz questions ranged from 40% to 60%, with an average accuracy rate of 50%. Subsequent to baseline data collection, the intervention commenced with the delivery of the first NCAA lesson. As the lessons were administered, Petter's percentage of correct answers exhibited a consistent linear progression, increasing from the stable baseline to 70%, 80%, and ultimately reaching 90%. The overall PND effect size between baseline and intervention for Petter was 100. Please see Figure 1 for visual representation.

Coach David

In the baseline phase, David provided correct answers to NCAA quiz questions at a rate of 50% to 60%, with an average accuracy of 55%. After the baseline data collection, the intervention began with the first NCAA lesson. As the lessons

were conducted, David's percentage of correct answers followed a steady linear trajectory, progressing from the stable baseline to 70%, 80%, and ultimately reaching 90%. The completion of the two last lessons culminated in his score reaching 100%. Visual representation is available in Figure 1.

Discussion

This study sought to demonstrate the efficacy of teaching high school educators critical NCAA Eligibility requirements to increase the likelihood of their students with disabilities successfully transition from high school to college. Overall, the study found that teaching educators NCAA Division-I requirements can assist those educators to support and prepare their students for the NCAA Division-I requirements. According to the multiple-probe design, a functional relation was established between the NCAA Lesson Package, and an increase in the percentage of knowledge questions were correctly answered by each participant. An overall PND effective size across the four educators was 100%, which indicates a highly effective intervention.

Coaches' lack of understanding of the NCAA Division-I requirements may point to a lack of awareness among academicians or an inability to take up programs provided for such

certification (1). In this study, educators and coaches updated their knowledge regarding NCAA requirements. This study equipped them to guide student-athletes with disabilities in achieving their goals. Overall, quality of instruction, leadership, teachers, coaching and learning can facilitate a positive integration of sports into postsecondary education for students with disabilities.

Responses from our participants: two coaches, a SPED teacher, and a counselor indicated the social acceptability of our NCAA lessons and believe the lessons should be used to teach educators the NCAA Division-I requirements needed to facilitate the transition of athletes with disabilities into postsecondary education. For example, the counselor mentioned that the NCAA Division-I Lesson package is useful, and he thought about using these lessons in the school to help special education teachers and coaches update their information about the NCAA Division-I requirements so that they can support their students. One of the special education teachers mentioned coaches and sped teachers who develop the IEPs need to know NCAA requirements All participants had positive comments about the intervention.

Limitations

This study is subject to three notable limitations. Firstly, there is a need for additional validation from NCAA experts to assess the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the lesson package

employed in this study. Feedback from experts is instrumental in refining the lesson package to ensure that it accurately aligns with the essential eligibility criteria. The expert feedback will aid in optimizing the lesson package, thereby enabling educators to effectively guide their students towards NCAA Division-I qualification.

Secondly, it is essential to recognize that this is the inaugural study of its kind. To establish the NCAA Lesson Package as an effective educational practice, it is imperative for other researchers to replicate this study. Replication serves as a crucial step in the validation of research findings and contributes to the acceptance of new theories and knowledge.

Thirdly, a parallel lesson package should be developed and evaluated for Division-II and Division-III high school athletes with disabilities who aspire to attend college. These additional lessons can provide educators with comprehensive guidelines and instructional resources, allowing them to remain well-informed about each Division's requirements, thereby assisting their students more effectively.

Implications for Practice

Secondary educators responsible for students with disabilities, particularly those possessing exceptional athletic

abilities, must gain a thorough understanding of NCAA Division-I eligibility requirements to facilitate their students' successful transition into post-secondary education. Educators should undergo training using the lesson package to empower them to support students in achieving NCAA Division-I eligibility. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the substantial role played by special educators in developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), which significantly contribute to making student athletes with disabilities eligible for college sports.

The NCAA Division-I Lesson Package has demonstrated its effectiveness, and it is now poised to be employed in practice to streamline the transition of athletes with disabilities into post-secondary education. This practical application is pivotal for enhancing the opportunities available to these exceptional student-athletes, ensuring a smoother and more inclusive pathway to higher education and athletic pursuits.

Conclusion

In this study, we examined the impact of the NCAA Eligibility Lesson Package on the knowledge of educators and their ability to guide high school students with disabilities in transitioning to college. Our findings indicate a substantial improvement in educators' understanding of NCAA Division-I

requirements. This improvement was clearly demonstrated as participants progressed from baseline quizzes with an average of 60% correct answers to post-intervention quizzes with consistently high scores of 90% to 100% correct answers.

These results underscore the effectiveness of the NCAA Eligibility Lesson Package in enhancing educators' preparedness to assist students in fulfilling NCAA requirements. The substantial and consistent increase in correct responses confirms the practical value of our instructional materials. As educators play a vital role in supporting students with disabilities on their journey to post-secondary education, this study has immediate implications for practice.

With this intervention, we contribute to bridging the knowledge gap among educators, thereby enabling them to better guide exceptional athletes with disabilities in their pursuit of NCAA Division-I eligibility. This, in turn, may open doors to post-secondary education opportunities, ensuring a more inclusive and productive future for these students.

Nonetheless, it is critical to recognize the limits of our research. To guarantee that the lesson package completely meets essential eligibility standards, further validation from NCAA

specialists is required. Furthermore, replication is required to establish this intervention as a successful practice in the future.

Finally, this research reveals the NCAA Eligibility Lesson Package's revolutionary potential. We enable educators to be champions and facilitators in students' transitions to post-secondary education by providing them with the knowledge they need to handle NCAA Division-I regulations. This intervention is a step forward towards a more inclusive and optimistic future for individuals with disabilities who want to continue higher education while still participating in sports.

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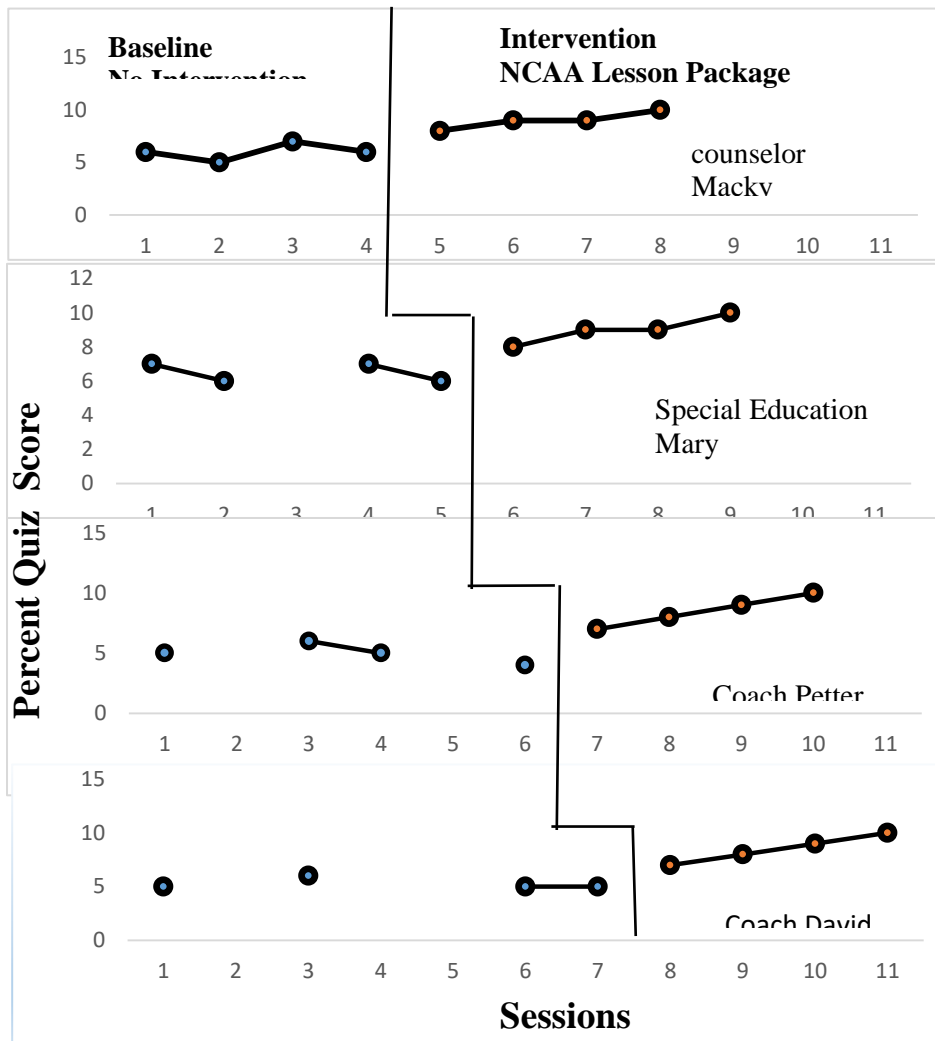


Figure 1: Impact of NCAA Eligibility Lesson Package on Educator Knowledge Enhancement for Transitioning High School Students with Disabilities