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Conference Graduation Rates Shift with Realignment: ACC Keeps Top Spot Overall; Conference USA Shows Biggest Gain

Lapchick Report Reveals the Effect of Division IA Conference Realignment on Conference Graduation Rates in Football

Orlando, FL...November 10, 2003 – The Institute for Diversity & Ethics in Sport at the University of Central Florida today released *The Classroom Counts*, a study of the effect of Division IA football realignment on conference graduation rates.

Richard Lapchick, who authored the study as director of the Institute, noted that, “The classroom record of student-athletes was barely mentioned amidst all the chess moves made between conferences over the last few months. In all the discussions about shifts of powerful ‘teams,’ the student-athlete was hardly mentioned. *The Classroom Counts* analyzes conference graduation rates, taking into consideration the recent changes in the Division IA football landscape.”

Lapchick, who also is Eminent Scholar Chair of the DeVos Sport Business Management Graduate Program at UCF, said, “Conference USA had the biggest improvement, increasing the graduation rate for all football student-athletes from 52 to 57 percent, and jumping from 48 to 55 percent for African-American football student-athletes. It went from a fourth-place ranking to second (out of 11 conferences) for all football student-athletes, and from fifth to first place for African-American student-athletes. The high graduation rates of newcomers Rice, Tulsa and Southern Methodist bolstered the overall rates.”

Graduation rates were reviewed for all institutions that participated in Division IA football. Based on the current conference structure, an average graduation rate was calculated for each Division IA conference. A new average graduation rate was calculated based on the changes announced for 2005.

Among the results were:

Conference USA had, by far, the biggest improvements for both football student-athletes in general and for African-American student-athletes in particular, as noted above.

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The Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), which initiated the realignment process with the addition of Boston College, Miami and Virginia Tech, started and ended with the top average overall graduation rate for football with a slight increase from 58 to 59 percent overall. It maintained the third best record for African-American football student-athletes with a one point increase to 52 percent.

The Big East brought in Cincinnati, DePaul, Louisville, Marquette and South Florida after losing Boston College, Miami and Virginia Tech. With these changes, the Big East's average graduation rate for football student-athletes dropped from 52 to 46 percent. Overall the Big East went from fourth best to eighth out of 11 conferences, and slipped from fifth to sixth place for African-Americans football student-athletes, as its graduation rate dropped from 48 to 43 percent. *(Note: DePaul and Marquette are basketball only members)*

The PAC 10 and Big Ten, which kept the same members, remained near the top of both lists. The PAC 10 was second for overall football (57 percent) and African-American football (53 percent) graduation rates. As a result of the improvement of Conference USA, the Big Ten slipped from third to fourth overall (56 percent) and it kept the fourth spot for African-American football student-athletes with a 49 percent graduation rate.

While the Mid-American Conference (MAC) lost two schools, its overall graduation rate improved from 51 to 53 percent, maintaining the fifth best record overall; its rate for African-American football student-athletes slipped from 43 to 42 percent, keeping it seventh out of 11 conferences in this category.

The loss of Rice, Southern Methodist and Tulsa caused the Western Atlantic Conference to have the biggest decline in graduation rates. The WAC went from fifth best overall with a 50 percent graduation rate, to third worst at 43 percent overall. The WAC, which had been second for African-American football student-athletes with 52 percent graduating, dropped to fourth worst as result of a graduation rate of 41 percent.

The Conferences with the lowest graduation rates, both overall and for African-American football student-athletes, remained at the bottom. The Sun Belt lost New Mexico State and Utah State and saw their overall rate drop from 42 to 40 percent, while their graduation rate for African-American players remained the same at 34 percent. The Mountain West had graduation rates of 34 percent both for all football student-athletes and African-American football student-athletes.

The SEC and Big 12, which had no changes in members, had overall football graduation rates of 49 and 48 percent (ranking seventh and eighth, respectively) and 45 and 39 percent for African-American football student-athletes (ranking fifth and ninth, respectively).

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Lapchick concluded, “Now that all the conferences are settled and power ratings will be established for on-the-field play, we hope each conference will look at the issues involving the academic performances of all of their student-athletes. It is easy to miss those critical components when financial and bowl issues are pending. The time has now come to focus on the student-athlete.”

NCAA statistics were used in the study. The Institute reviewed 1996-97 graduation (six-year) rates, with a four class average.

The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport serves as a comprehensive resource for issues related to gender and race in amateur, collegiate and professional sports. The Institute researches and publishes a variety of studies, including annual studies of student-athlete graduation rates and racial attitudes in sports, as well as the nationally recognized *Racial and Gender Report Card*, an assessment of hiring practices in coaching and sport management. Additionally, the Institute conducts diversity management training and will hold a biannual National Conference to address diversity issues in sport. The Institute also will monitor some of the critical ethical issues in college and professional sport, including the potential for the exploitation of student-athletes, gambling, performance-enhancing drugs and violence in sport.

The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport is part of the DeVos Sport Business Management Graduate Program in the University of Central Florida’s College of Business Administration. This landmark program focuses on business skills necessary for graduates to conduct successful careers in the rapidly changing and dynamic sports industry while also emphasizing diversity, community service and sport and social issues.

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News release and chart are available at www.bus.ucf.edu/sport/ides/conferences

See accompanying document:

The Classroom Counts: Conference Graduation Rates Before and After Realignment
(Graduation rates tables and charts)