



# TIDES

THE INSTITUTE FOR DIVERSITY AND ETHICS IN SPORT

MAKING WAVES OF CHANGE

## Keeping Score When It Counts:

## Assessing the Academic Records of the 2020-2021 Bowl-Bound College Football Teams

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# *Keeping Score When It Counts: Assessing the Academic Records of the 2020-2021 Bowl-Bound College Football Teams*

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## Executive Summary

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The overall academic success of college football student-athletes declined this year and the gap between white and Black football student-athletes widened for the 56 Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) bowl-bound schools. The results were reported in “**Keeping Score When It Counts: Assessing the Academic Records of the 2020-21 Bowl-Bound College Football Teams**,” a study released by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) which is in the DeVos Sport Business Management Graduate Program at the University of Central Florida.

It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an unprecedented 2020 bowl season. After 16 bowl games were cancelled and 23 FBS schools opted-out from postseason games, only 56 teams accepted invitations to a bowl game in 2020-21, compared to 78 in 2019-20. The reduced number of teams has impacted portions of this year’s Bowl-Bound study results. Regardless, the discrepancy between white and Black football student-athletes remained a significant issue.

Richard Lapchick, director of TIDES and the primary author of the study, said, “The academic success of FBS football student-athletes has declined this year. The overall football student-athlete Graduation Success Rate (GSR) for bowl-bound teams is 78.0 percent, a decrease from 79.1 percent in 2019.

Lapchick added, “One positive trend did continue in 2020. Every school participating in a bowl game had at

## *Overall Football Student-Athlete GSR*

**79.1%** ↓ **78.0%**  
 2019 2020

## *Average GSR for Black Football Student-Athletes*

**73.8%** ↓ **73.4%**  
 2019 2020

## *Average GSR for White Football Student-Athletes*

**89.4%** ↑ **89.7%**  
 2019 2020

least a 50 percent GSR for their football teams for the third time in four years. Notably, every bowl-bound football team in 2020 had a GSR of at least 60 percent.”

Lapchick stated, “Unfortunately, the gap between white and Black football student-athletes continues to be a major issue. The gap this year is 16.3 percent, up from 15.6 percent last year. Among the 56 bowl-bound teams, the average GSR for Black student-athletes is 73.4 percent, down slightly from 73.8 percent in 2019. The average GSR for white football student-athletes is 89.7 percent, up from 89.4 percent in 2019. One team graduated less than half of their Black football student-athletes, which is two less than in 2019. No team graduated less than half of its white football student-athletes.”

Lapchick noted, “It must be emphasized that Black and white football players graduate at a higher rate than their male non-athletic peers in the student body within D1 schools. The graduation rate for Black male students as a whole is only 42 percent, in comparison to the 67 percent graduation rate for white male students, according to the NCAA Education and Research Data. That 25 percent gap for the general student population remains totally unacceptable for education in America. The problem goes back to the academic preparation some students get from elementary school through high school.”

Lapchick continued, “The University of Alabama, Clemson University, The Ohio State University, and the University of Notre Dame will contend in the College Football Playoff for the National Championship. Alabama, Clemson and Notre Dame had very strong academic standing while Ohio State lagged behind.”

The four schools graduated 88 percent, 83 percent, 69 percent, and 91 percent of all their football student-athletes, respectively. As for their Black student-athletes, they graduated 84 percent, 77 percent, 60 percent, and 82 percent, respectively. Their white football student-athletes graduated at rates of 100 percent, 100 percent, 90 percent, and 96 percent, respectively. The substantial graduation rate gaps between white and Black football student-athletes at these schools is disturbing.

All four schools did well with their Academic Progress Rates (APR). Clemson and Alabama’s APRs led the group at 993 and 990, respectively, ranking them among

the top 10 out of the 56 bowl-bound teams. Ohio State followed with a 985 and Notre Dame’s APR was 970.

Northwestern, Notre Dame, Wisconsin, and Memphis would have played for the National Championship if there was a college football playoff based on GSR among bowl teams. All of these teams graduated at least 90 percent of all football student-athletes and at least 82 percent of Black football student-athletes. Northwestern and Wisconsin graduated 100 percent and 94 percent of their Black football student-athletes, respectively.”

Troubling statistics in the study of the bowl-bound teams included:

- 54 schools (96 percent) had GSRs of 70 percent or higher for white football student-athletes, which was more than 1.5 times the number of schools with equivalent GSRs for Black football student-athletes (35 schools or 62.5 percent).
- All bowl-bound schools graduated 50 percent or higher of their white football student-athletes while one of the 56 bowl-bound schools graduated less than 50 percent of their Black football student-athletes.

In addition, the size of the gap among some schools is alarming:

- Louisiana Tech had a GSR for Black football student-athletes that was 45 percentage points lower than their rate for white football student-athletes. In 2019 there were three bowl bound teams that had a GSR for their Black football student-athletes at least 40 percentage points lower than that of their white football student-athletes.
- 41 percent of bowl-bound schools (23 total) had GSRs for Black football student-athletes that were at least 20 percentage points lower than their rates for white football student-athletes. This percentage remained the same as in 2019.

Five schools had a GSR for their Black football student-athletes that exceeded their rates for white football student-athletes, two more than 2019. They were Hawaii, Brigham Young, Northwestern, Ball State, and Wisconsin.

There were no schools that had an overall GSR for football student-athletes that was better than the overall GSR for student-athletes of the school.

This year there will be six bowl games in which both teams have APRs higher or equal to 970. The Sugar Bowl has **Clemson** and **Ohio State** with APRs of **993** and **985**, respectively. The Rose Bowl has **Alabama** and **Notre Dame** with APRs of **990** and **970**, respectively. The Citrus Bowl has **Auburn** and **Northwestern** with APRs of **980** and **995**, respectively. The Duke's Mayo Bowl has **Wake Forest** and **Wisconsin** with APRs of **990** and **986**, respectively. The Music City Bowl has **Iowa** and **Missouri** with APRs of **971** and **973**, respectively. The Cheez-It Bowl has **Miami (FL)** and **Oklahoma State** with APRs of **973** and **979**, respectively.

NCAA statistics were used in this study. The Institute reviewed data collected by the NCAA from member institutions for the graduation rate study. The Institute reviewed the six-year graduation rates of each school's freshman class that enrolled in 2013-14, and it then calculated a four-class average (freshmen classes of 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13, 2013-14).

The NCAA created the APR in 2004 as part of an academic reform package designed to more accurately measure student-athletes' academic success as well as improve graduation rates at member institutions. The APR holds each team accountable for the success of student-athletes in the classroom and their progression towards graduation. Individual teams are penalized if they fall below an APR score of 930, which is an expected graduation rate of 50 percent of its student-athletes. Up to 10 percent of scholarships can be taken away. Teams can also be subject to historical penalties for poor academic performance over time.

According to the NCAA, the APR is calculated as follows:

- Each student-athlete receiving athletically related financial aid earns one point for staying in school and one point for being academically eligible.
- A team's total points are divided by points possible and then multiplied by 1,000 to equal the team's Academic Progress Rate.

## Keeping Score at a Glance

**42%** **VS.** **73%**  
**Black Male Student** **Black Football**  
**Body Graduation Rate** **Student-Athlete GSR**

**67%** **VS.** **90%**  
**White Male Student** **White Football**  
**Body Graduation Rate** **Student-Athlete GSR**

*Gap in Average GSRs between White and Black Football Student-Athletes*

**15.6%** **↑** **16.3%**  
**-2019-** **-2020-**

***"This year, every school participating in a bowl game had at least a 50 percent GSR for their football teams for the third time in four years."***

- In addition to a team's current-year APR, its rolling four-year APR is also used to determine accountability.

The new postseason eligibility structure took effect in the 2012-13 academic year, with a three-year implementation window, which moved the benchmark from 900 to 930. For access to postseason competition in 2020-2021, teams must achieve a 930 four-year average APR or a 940 average over the most recent two years to participate in championships.

In this year's study, all bowl-bound teams surpassed an APR of 930.

Bowl-bound FBS schools in "Power Five" conferences (Atlantic Coast Conference, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12, and Southeastern Conference) averaged one more point in APR with 969 points than bowl-bound schools in "Group of Five" conferences (American Athletic Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West Conference, and Sun Belt Conference) with 968 points. However, bowl-bound schools in the Big Ten had both the highest APR among all FBS conferences and the highest GSR for Black football student-athletes.

The APR data does not include data from the 2020-21 academic performances of the teams in the study but instead uses four years of data ending in the 2018-19 school year. This is the most updated data available on the NCAA website and provided by the NCAA.

The Institute has taken the position that Federal

Graduation Rates (FGR) gives an unfair depiction of a school because it does not account for transfer students. A student-athlete who transfers in good standing and graduates at another institution counts as a non-graduate at the initial school. The FGR also does not count a junior college student who transfers into a four-year college and graduates as a graduate or a former student-athlete who returns and graduates more than six years after original enrollment. The Institute supports the NCAA's use of the GSR, developed in 2005, which accounts for these factors, as a better way to fairly measure the results.

The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport ("TIDES" or the "Institute") serves as a comprehensive resource for issues related to gender and race in amateur, collegiate and professional sport. The Institute researches and publishes a variety of studies, including annual studies of student-athlete graduation rates and racial attitudes in sport as well as the internationally recognized Racial and Gender Report Card, an assessment of hiring practices in professional and college sport. The Institute also monitors some of the critical ethical issues in college and professional sport, including the potential for 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 social



BOWL GAMES									
Bowl Name	School Name	Conference	APR	Overall Football Student-Athletes (%)	Black Football Student Athletes (%)	White Football Student-Athletes (%)	Overall Student-Athletes (%)	Overall Football and Student Athlete Diff (%)	White and Black Diff (%)
<b>National Championship</b>									
Sugar Bowl (CFP Semi)	Clemson University	Atlantic Coast Conference	993	83%	77%	100%	93%	10%	23%
	Ohio State University	Big 10 Conference	985	69%	60%	90%	88%	19%	30%
Rose Bowl (CFP Semi)	University of Alabama	Southeastern Conference	990	88%	84%	100%	93%	5%	16%
	University of Notre Dame	Atlantic Coast Conference	970	91%	82%	96%	98%	7%	14%
Peach Bowl	University of Cincinnati	American Athletic Conference	990	87%	86%	92%	94%	7%	6%
	University of Georgia	Southeastern Conference	969	71%	67%	76%	87%	16%	9%
Fiesta Bowl	University of Oregon	Pac-12 Conference	968	78%	70%	84%	87%	9%	14%
	Iowa State University	Big 12 Conference	979	86%	82%	96%	92%	6%	14%
Cotton Bowl	University of Oklahoma	Big 12 Conference	965	70%	64%	92%	86%	16%	28%
	University of Florida	Southeastern Conference	974	83%	75%	100%	89%	6%	25%
Orange Bowl	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	Atlantic Coast Conference	959	72%	65%	92%	88%	16%	27%
	Texas A&M University College Station	Southeastern Conference	965	73%	68%	88%	82%	9%	20%
Lending Tree Bowl	Western Kentucky University	Conference USA	962	64%	59%	86%	82%	18%	27%
	Georgia State University	Sun Belt Conference	958	79%	79%	85%	81%	2%	6%
Armed Forces Bowl	Mississippi State University	Southeastern Conference	984	81%	79%	100%	88%	7%	21%
	The University of Tulsa	American Athletic Conference	945	75%	73%	77%	85%	10%	4%
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl	University of Nevada, Reno	Mountain West Conference	987	75%	68%	79%	85%	10%	11%
	Tulane University	American Athletic Conference	958	88%	84%	91%	93%	5%	7%
TaxSlayer Gator Bowl	North Carolina State University	Atlantic Coast Conference	962	76%	55%	78%	89%	13%	23%
	University of Kentucky	Southeastern Conference	971	79%	75%	100%	92%	13%	25%
Camellia Bowl	University at Buffalo, the State University of New York	Mid-American Conference	959	84%	76%	96%	89%	5%	20%
	Marshall University	Conference USA	951	84%	80%	88%	89%	5%	8%
Outback Bowl	Indiana University, Bloomington	Big 10 Conference	969	88%	81%	97%	91%	3%	16%
	University of Mississippi	Southeastern Conference	995	68%	63%	100%	85%	17%	37%
Citrus Bowl	Auburn University	Southeastern Conference	980	79%	79%	82%	91%	12%	3%
	Northwestern University	Big 10 Conference	995	97%	100%	97%	98%	1%	-3%
Arizona Bowl	San Jose State	Mountain West Conference	952	72%	62%	100%	84%	12%	38%
	Ball State University	Mid-American Conference	969	76%	83%	77%	90%	14%	-6%
Liberty Bowl	West Virginia University	Big 12 Conference	960	69%	62%	100%	84%	15%	38%
	United States Military Academy West Point	Independent	975	75%	63%	94%	91%	16%	31%
Myrtle Beach Bowl	Appalachian State University	Sun Belt Conference	955	77%	71%	85%	85%	8%	14%
	University of North Texas	Conference USA	961	81%	76%	95%	86%	5%	19%
Alamo Bowl	University of Texas at Austin	Big 12 Conference	974	81%	80%	92%	89%	8%	12%
	University of Colorado, Boulder	Pac-12 Conference	955	86%	81%	96%	93%	7%	15%
Montgomery Bowl	University of Memphis	American Athletic Conference	980	90%	88%	100%	93%	3%	12%
	Florida Atlantic University	Conference USA	965	74%	69%	89%	84%	10%	20%
Music City Bowl	University of Iowa	Big 10 Conference	971	87%	78%	92%	89%	2%	14%
	University of Missouri, Columbia	Southeastern Conference	973	84%	78%	100%	89%	5%	22%
First Responder Bowl	University of Texas - San Antonio	Conference USA	961	83%	78%	89%	83%	0%	11%
	University of Louisiana at Lafayette	Sun Belt Conference	956	75%	74%	90%	79%	4%	16%
Cure Bowl	Coastal Carolina University	Sun Belt Conference	956	79%	79%	83%	88%	9%	4%
	Liberty University	Independent	957	65%	65%	65%	88%	23%	0%
Cheez-It Bowl	University of Miami	Atlantic Coast Conference	973	76%	65%	100%	91%	15%	35%
	Oklahoma State University	Big 12 Conference	979	68%	62%	91%	82%	14%	29%
New Mexico Bowl	University of Hawaii, Manoa	Mountain West Conference	949	71%	77%	75%	85%	14%	-2%
	University of Houston	American Athletic Conference	961	67%	59%	94%	81%	14%	35%
Texas Bowl	Texas Christian University	Big 12 Conference	959	70%	67%	78%	87%	17%	11%
	University of Arkansas, Fayetteville	Southeastern Conference	962	76%	64%	100%	85%	9%	36%
Duke's Mayo Bowl	Wake Forest University	Atlantic Coast Conference	990	88%	80%	100%	96%	8%	20%
	University of Wisconsin-Madison	Big 10 Conference	986	91%	94%	87%	91%	0%	-7%
Gasparilla Bowl	University of South Carolina, Columbia	Southeastern Conference	967	89%	89%	93%	95%	6%	4%
	University of Alabama at Birmingham	Conference USA	942	73%	72%	87%	89%	16%	15%
New Orleans Bowl	Louisiana Tech University	Conference USA	964	61%	45%	90%	78%	17%	45%
	Georgia Southern University	Sun Belt Conference	949	67%	66%	67%	84%	17%	1%
Boca Raton Bowl	University of Central Florida	American Athletic Conference	981	81%	81%	82%	86%	5%	1%
	Brigham Young University	Independent	946	70%	73%	71%	82%	12%	-2%
<b>Averages</b>			<b>968</b>	<b>78.0%</b>	<b>73.4%</b>	<b>89.7%</b>	<b>87.9%</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>