

Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics

Public Opinion Poll

December 2005

A recent Census-balanced and representative telephone poll among 502 American adults completed in late December 2005 for the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics by Widmeyer Research and Polling of Washington, DC found that:

- ***Americans say the NCAA should “stay the course but remain diligent.” Americans are aware of and strongly support NCAA reforms designed to improve the academic performance of college athletes but believe more needs to be done to ensure that colleges and universities emphasize academics over athletics.***¹

Americans are Favorable to NCAA Academic Reforms

A majority of Americans are aware that the NCAA is implementing policies that will penalize college teams whose athletes do not meet certain academic standards and nearly all are favorable to these policies.

- A majority of Americans (52%) are aware of NCAA policies that penalize teams that fail to meet certain academic standards.
- 9 in 10 Americans (89%) are favorable to these policies; 2 in 3 (67%) are VERY favorable.

More than one-third of Americans are aware that the NCAA has instituted new policies to improve the graduation rates of athletes at colleges and most are favorable to these policies.

- 36% of Americans are aware of the NCAA policies to improve graduation rates.
- 9 in 10 Americans (90%) are favorable to these policies; 2 in 3 (65%) are VERY favorable.

¹ The following summary provides supporting documentation for this conclusion. Please contact the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for additional background information about the poll, which was conducted among 502 American residents 18 years of age and older. Widmeyer used an RDD (random digit dialing) method to ensure that all results are representative of the U.S. population by demographic variables such as gender, age, income, geography, ethnicity and household composition. All results can be projected to the adult U.S. population. The margin of error for the poll is +/- 4.4%.



Americans Support Knight Commission Reforms

Americans support Knight Commission recommendations focused on academic reform in college sports.

- 4 in 5 Americans (79%) support a policy that would make college teams that fail to graduate at least half of their players ineligible for conference championships or for post-season play.
- 3 in 4 Americans (74%) support a policy that rewards colleges and universities with the highest athlete graduation rates and best records of NCAA compliance with additional revenues from post-season play.

Americans Want Continued Vigilance; Not Complacency

Although Americans recognize that reforms are underway, they remain concerned about the negative influence of athletics on academics. The sentiment that college should be about academics and not athletics is strongly held by most Americans.

- 78% of Americans say an athlete's college experience should be about academics, not sports.
- Many more Americans (56%) say that *college athletics programs only care about whether athletes are eligible to play*, compared to being genuinely concerned about their athletes' academic performance (35%).
- 85% of Americans are concerned that colleges accept athletes who have no reasonable chance of graduating.
- 80% of Americans say it is unfair for colleges to have easier admission standards for athletes than other college students.
- 3 in 4 Americans (74%) say that accepting athletes into college who don't have the same qualifications as other students hurts, NOT helps, the athlete in the long term. In fact, 4 in 5 Americans agree (82%) – 56% strongly – with the statement: *Giving athletes who struggle academically unfair advantages causes them more harm than good.*



DETAILED TABLES²

Definitions used in the heading of the following tables are as follows:

- All – all respondents
- Men – self-identified as male
- Women – self-identified as female
- College grad - graduated from a 4-year college
- Sports fan - self-identified as a person who “closely follows college sports”

Were you aware that the NCAA is implementing policies that will penalize college teams whose athletes do not meet certain academic standards?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Yes	52	61	43	62	80
No	48	39	57	38	20

How favorable are you to the idea of the NCAA penalizing college sports teams that do not meet certain academic standards?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Very favorable	67	68	66	74	67
Somewhat favorable	22	19	26	20	25
Not very favorable	4	6	2	3	6
Not at all favorable	4	4	4	2	1
Don't know	3	3	2	1	1

Were you aware that the NCAA has instituted new policies to improve the graduation rates of athletes at colleges?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Yes	36	48	25	44	58
No	64	52	75	56	42

How favorable are you to the idea of the NCAA instituting new policies to improve the graduation rates of athletes at colleges?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Very favorable	65	62	69	69	72
Somewhat favorable	25	28	22	22	24
Not very favorable	2	2	3	4	1
Not at all favorable	4	3	6	2	3
Don't know	4	5	0	3	0

² This section provides all questions asked and answers given that support the conclusion outlined in this document.



Respondents asked: I am going to read a list of steps that could be taken that could lead to academic reform on college campuses as it relates to athletics and college sports. Please tell me whether you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose each:

College teams that do not graduate at least half of their players would not be eligible for conference championships or for post-season play.	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Strongly support	49	51	48	47	45
Somewhat support	30	25	34	36	14
Somewhat oppose	9	9	8	11	21
Strongly oppose	7	10	4	4	14
Don't know	5	5	6	2	6

Rewarding colleges and universities with the highest athlete graduation rates and best records of NCAA compliance with additional revenues from post-season play.	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Strongly support	38	41	36	34	51
Somewhat support	36	34	37	33	35
Somewhat oppose	11	10	11	14	2
Strongly oppose	4	4	3	3	2
Don't know	11	11	13	16	10

An athlete's college experience should be about academics, not sports.	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Strongly agree	48	45	51	47	48
Somewhat agree	30	30	31	34	27
Neither agree or disagree	5	10	1	4	13
Somewhat disagree	12	9	14	13	6
Strongly disagree	3	3	3	1	6
Don't know	2	3	0	1	0



Which one the following statements best describes your views about athletic departments at colleges and universities?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
They only care about whether athletes are academically eligible to play	56	58	55	59	42
They are genuinely concerned about their athlete's academic performance	35	34	36	30	51
Don't know	9	8	9	11	7

How concerned are you about colleges accepting athletes who have no reasonable chance of graduating?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Very concerned	56	60	53	51	52
Somewhat concerned	29	23	34	36	29
Not very concerned	7	7	7	7	8
Not at all concerned	5	7	3	3	5
Don't know	3	3	3	3	6

Do you think it is fair or unfair for colleges to have easier admission standards for athletes than other college students?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Fair	17	22	13	17	33
Unfair	80	73	85	83	67
Don't know	3	5	2	0	0

Do you think accepting athletes into college that don't have the same qualifications as other students helps or hurts the athlete in the long term?	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Hurts	74	65	78	64	59
Helps	19	29	14	26	35
Don't know	7	6	8	10	6

Giving athletes who struggle academically unfair advantages causes them more harm than good.	All (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	College Grad (%)	Sports Fan (%)
Strongly agree	56	47	62	49	56
Somewhat agree	26	32	21	33	14
Neither agree or disagree	5	6	3	4	8
Somewhat disagree	8	7	9	13	9
Strongly disagree	3	5	2	0	11
Don't know	2	3	3	1	2