

**31.3.4 Automatic Qualification.** Each governing sport committee shall forward annually to the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet those conferences that should receive automatic qualification for their teams or individual student-athletes into NCAA championships. Prior to forwarding the list of conferences to receive automatic qualification, a governing sport committee shall ensure that the member conference meets the requirements specified in Bylaws 31.3.4.1 through 31.3.4.7. A member conference may appeal to the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet the automatic-qualification review of the sport committee and the committee's decision to find, or not find, a conference qualified for automatic-qualification status. The decision of the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet on such appeals will be final. *(Revised: 1/14/97 effective 8/1/97, 4/27/00, 11/1/07 effective 8/1/08)*

**31.3.4.1 Requirements—Division Championship.** To be eligible for automatic qualification in a Division Championship, a member conference must meet the following requirements: *(Revised: 1/9/06 effective 8/1/06)*

- (a) Conference competition must be conducted in the applicable sport and the conference champion in that sport must be determined not later than the date on which participants are selected for the NCAA championship, either by regular in-season conference competition or a conference meet or tournament, as indicated at the time of application. If a conference's competition to determine its automatic qualifier is unexpectedly terminated (e.g., due to inclement weather), the conference may designate its qualifier, provided it has established objective criteria for making that designation and has communicated that information to the appropriate sports committee by a specified deadline. *(Revised: 8/13/93)*
- (b) In the event of a tie for the conference championship, the conference shall have the responsibility of determining which team or individual shall represent the conference in NCAA competition. If a play-off is held, such competition shall be considered conference competition, not NCAA competition.
- (c) In sports other than championship subdivision football, a conference may establish subdivisions and conduct competition within each subdivision to determine a conference champion, as long as each subdivision consists of at least four members. Conferences with subdivisions of four members must conduct double round-robin competition within each subdivision, plus a postseason tournament, to determine their champion. Conferences with subdivisions of five or more members may conduct either single or double round-robin competition within each subdivision, plus a postseason tournament to determine their champion. (Note: This regulation does not apply to Division I men's or women's basketball. In those sports, a conference may conduct either double round-robin, in-season competition, or a minimum of 14 conference games in order to determine its champion.) *(Revised: 12/9/91, 10/18/95, 10/27/98, 12/15/06)*
- (d) In championship subdivision football, football-playing conferences that subdivide into five or more teams are required to conduct a single round-robin competition within each division and develop a formula for determination of the conference champion, which must be approved by the Football Championship Committee prior to the start of the season. A postseason championship game is not required. *(Adopted: 10/27/98, Revised: 12/15/06)*
- (e) The conference must maintain and actively enforce compliance with eligibility rules at least as stringent as those in Bylaw 14 applicable to its members. The use of an ineligible student-athlete by a team in a conference that has been granted automatic qualification may result in the involved team being denied the right to be the automatic entry in the NCAA championship. The governing sports committee may recommend loss of the automatic-qualification privilege for the conference during the season in which the violation occurred or for a future championship.
- (f) All eligible member institutions must agree to participate in the appropriate NCAA championship. If a conference champion is ineligible to compete, declines to compete or

cannot compete for any reason, automatic qualification shall be withdrawn for that year and the remaining conference members shall be considered at large. Automatic qualification for a conference shall not be withdrawn if a conference champion declines to compete in an NCAA championship for reasons related to written religious policies against competition on certain days. Under such circumstances, the conference's second-place team (as determined by the conference), shall receive the automatic bid to the NCAA championship. *(Revised: 4/20/99)*

- (g) All institutions may hold membership in only that conference in the sport in which automatic qualification is sought and may participate in only that conference's process to determine the automatic qualifier. *(Adopted: 12/5/94)*

**31.3.4.2 Requirements—National Collegiate Championship.** [#] To be eligible for automatic qualification in National Collegiate Championship, a member conference must meet the following general requirements: *(Adopted: 1/9/06 effective 8/1/06)*

- (a) Have at least six active members that sponsor the applicable sport in any division (note: a provisional member in the process of becoming an NCAA member cannot be used to meet the requisite number);
- (b) The six active members must have conducted conference competition together for the preceding two years in the applicable sport;
- (c) There shall be no waivers of the two-year waiting period; and
- (d) Any new member added to a conference that is eligible for an automatic bid shall be immediately eligible to represent the conference as the automatic qualifier.

**31.3.4.3 Notification—Automatic Qualification in Jeopardy.** A governing sports committee must issue a written warning one year in advance to a conference that is in jeopardy of losing its automatic qualification. (Note: This regulation does not apply to the following championships in which a play-in system has been established: baseball, women's softball, women's volleyball and men's soccer.) *(Adopted: 10/3/06)*

**31.3.4.4 Additional Requirements, Sports Other Than Men's Basketball.**

**31.3.4.4.1 Multi-Sport Conference.** To be considered eligible for automatic qualification in a particular sport, a multi-sport conference must include six core institutions that satisfy continuity-of-membership. For the purposes of this legislation, core refers to an institution that has been an active member of Division I the eight preceding years. Further, the continuity-of-membership requirement shall be met only if a minimum of six core institutions have conducted conference competition together in Division I the preceding two years in the applicable sport. There shall be no exceptions to the two-year period. Any new member added to a conference that satisfies the continuity of membership requirements shall be immediately eligible to represent the conference as the automatic qualifier. *(Revised: 4/27/00, 10/00, 4/29/04 effective 8/1/04, 8/5/04)*

**31.3.4.4.1.1 Exception.** A multi-sport conference that adds a conference-sponsored sport may be considered for automatic qualification in that sport, provided the conference includes at least six active Division I institutions that have conducted conference competition together at the Division I level in the sport the preceding two years and the sport is sponsored by less than 50 percent of the Division I membership. *(Adopted: 4/27/06 effective 8/1/06)*

**31.3.4.4.2 Single Sport Conference.** To be considered for automatic qualification in a particular sport, a single sport member conference for a sport sponsored by less than 50 percent of the Division I membership must include six institutions that have conducted

conference competition together the preceding two years in the sport in question at the Division I level. *(Adopted: 8/5/04, Revised: 4/27/06 effective 8/1/06)*

**31.3.4.4.3 Grace Period.** A conference shall remain eligible for automatic qualification for two years following the date of withdrawal of the institution(s) that causes the conference's membership to fall below six institutions, or below six members with continuity of membership, provided the conference maintains at least five Division I members. *(Adopted: 8/5/04)*

**31.3.4.4.4 Exception—2002-03 Academic Year.** After September 1, 2003, a member conference that met the requirements for automatic qualification during the 2002-03 academic year may continue to receive automatic qualification provided the conference composition does not change (unless the change results in the addition of a core member). *(Adopted: 4/24/03)*

**31.3.4.5 Additional Requirements, Men's Basketball.** The member conference must include seven core institutions. For the purposes of this legislation, core refers to an institution that has been an active member of Division I the eight preceding years. Further, the continuity-of-membership requirement shall be met only if a minimum of six core institutions have conducted conference competition together in Division I the preceding five years in men's basketball. There shall be no exception to the five-year waiting period. Any new member added to a member conference that satisfies these requirements shall be immediately eligible to represent the conference as the automatic qualifier. *(Revised: 8/14/90, 12/3/90, 4/27/00, 4/29/04 effective 8/1/04)*

**31.3.4.5.1 Grace Period.** A conference shall remain eligible for automatic qualification for two years following the date of withdrawal of the institution(s) that causes the conference's membership to fall below seven institutions, or below six members with continuity of membership, provided the conference maintains at least six Division I members. *(Adopted: 4/27/00, Revised: 4/29/04 effective 8/1/04)*

**31.3.4.5.2 Exceptions.**

- (a) Prior to September 1, 2003, the eight-year core principle does not apply to an institution that was a Division I active member, provisional member or a member in the process of reclassifying to Division I as of April 27, 2000. Such an institution would be subject to the provisions in effect on April 27, 2000. The institution may continue to be considered a core institution after September 1, 2003, even if the institution has not been an active member of Division I the eight preceding years. *(Revised: 11/01/01)*
- (b) Men's Basketball. After September 1, 2003, a member conference as of September 1, 1999, may continue to apply the automatic qualification requirements in effect September 1, 1999, until any change (e.g., adding or losing any member) in its men's basketball membership occurs. Thereafter, the automatic qualification regulations in effect September 1, 2003, shall be applicable.

**31.3.4.6 Sports Groupings for Automatic Qualification.** For purposes of evaluating criteria for automatic qualification, the various sports shall be grouped as follows:

- (a) **Team sports**—baseball, basketball, field hockey, football, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, volleyball and water polo. In this category, subject to the approval of the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet, a sport committee may grant exceptions to the six-team requirement for sports that are sponsored by less than 30 percent of the

membership, provided the conference previously included six teams that sponsored the sport; *(Revised: 4/26/07 effective 8/1/07, 11/1/07 effective 8/1/08)*

- (b) **Timed individual sports**—indoor track and field, outdoor track and field, and swimming; and
- (c) **Other individual sports**—cross country, fencing, golf, gymnastics, rifle, skiing, tennis and wrestling. In this category, a sports committee may grant exceptions to the six-team requirement, subject to the approval of the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet. *(Revised: 11/1/07 effective 8/1/08)*

**31.3.4.7 Limitations on Automatic-Qualifying Positions.**

**31.3.4.7.1 Team Sports Other Than Men’s Basketball.** In team sports, per Bylaw 31.3.4.6-(a), excluding the sport of football and any team sport in which automatic qualification is not offered, a sports committee must award, when a sufficient number of applications for automatic qualification exist, at least 50 percent of the championship field to conferences that meet automatic-qualification criteria and provide a play-in criteria. The remaining 50 percent of the championship field shall be reserved for at-large teams. It will be the responsibility of the Championships/Sports Management Cabinet to determine if conference play-ins to a championship field are to be administered by the NCAA championships staff or by the member conferences. *(Adopted: 4/20/99, Revised: 11/1/07 effective 8/1/08)*

**31.3.4.7.2 Men’s Basketball.** In men’s basketball, subject to the championships-access guarantee afforded to the subdivisions as set forth in Constitution 4.01.2.3.1 (e.g., all contests that are part of the championship shall be administered and funded by the NCAA and broadcast on television and any team that participates in the championship shall be awarded at least one financial unit), there shall be a limit minimum of 32 at-large selections and the remainder of the championship field automatic qualifying positions. All competition in the championship is to be administered by the NCAA championships staff. *(Adopted: 4/20/99, Revised: 12/15/06)*

**31.3.5 Selection of Balance of Championship Field.** Once the official representative(s) of each qualifying conference is determined, the governing sports committee responsible for selection of the balance of the championship field shall consider objectively and without prejudice the competitive records of all other eligible student-athletes and teams (including representatives of the other members of the conferences receiving automatic qualification). To the best of its ability, the committee shall select the most highly qualified individuals and teams to complete the championship field in accordance with the regional structure, if any, approved for the particular championship.

**31.3.6 Institution Trademarks.** Participation in a national collegiate championship constitutes acquiescence by the member institution that the Association may use the institution’s name, mascot and other identifying marks in championship-related activities, including television, promotion, licensing and merchandising programs incident to the championship. Revenues derived from such activities, less expenses, will be remitted to the member institution. *(Revised: 11/3/93)*

See [Attachments A and B](#) for information on multisport conference standards and a set of recommended membership standards for aspiring members of Division I.