1. **Overview.** Initial-eligibility standards (NCAA Bylaw 14.3) establish a minimum level of academic achievement for a student-athlete to receive athletics aid, practice and compete in the initial year of full-time enrollment at a Division I or II institution.

The IEW process may provide relief from initial-eligibility standards, which apply to the initial year of full-time collegiate enrollment; however, IEW relief does not change a student-athlete's legislated final academic certification status. Also, an IEW will not be processed for a student-athlete who has enrolled full time at a two-year college.

The NCAA Division I Committee on Academics and NCAA Division II Academic Requirements Committee approve this directive, which provides guidelines for the staff and subcommittees to analyze and decide IEWs.

Given the unique circumstances due to COVID-19, IEW policy has been temporarily adjusted for the 2020-21 academic year.

2. **Submission.** The Eligibility Center must release the student-athlete's final academic certification before an institution may submit an IEW (via Requests/Self-Reports Online). Institutions are encouraged to review Best Practices and ensure the student-athlete’s academic record is complete before submitting the waiver. An IEW application is complete when the institution has submitted all required information, documentation and signatures via RSRO. Also, the waiver is ready to process when the institution has submitted all additional requested information and/or documentation.

**INITIAL-ELIGIBILITY WAIVER ANALYSIS**

3. **Academic Criteria.**
   a. **Considered.** The following may be considered regarding a student-athlete's *pre-full-time enrollment* academic record:
      (1) Core courses, core GPA and predicted first-year GPA;
      
      *Note:* Core courses not used in the final certification may be considered but may not outweigh courses used in the final certification. Further, IEW analysis defers to academic certification and high school review policies/decisions.

      (2) ACT and SAT scores (NCAA conversion scores for the redesigned SAT [March 2016 and beyond]; see academic certification procedure resource);

      (3) Core-course progression;

      (4) Year-to-year GPA;

      *Note:* most applicable to sliding-scale deficiencies but may apply to core deficiencies.
(5) Old and new model certifications for international student-athletes, per NCAA International Student Records Committee policy (see 2020-21 Guide to International Academic Standards for Athletics Eligibility);

Note: the certification model most favorable to the student-athlete will be used in the IEW analysis; however, old and new model certifications may not be combined.

(6) The student-athlete’s deficiency in meeting COVID-19 Automatic Waiver criteria (for expected Spring/Summer 2020 graduates [based on the initial start of year nine]);

Note: the most favorable deficiency in meeting either COVID-19 Automatic Waiver criteria or legislated requirements will be used in the IEW analysis.

(7) Other information determined on a case-by-case basis.

b. Not Considered.

(1) Courses that do not meet legislated core course or nontraditional course requirements, including courses the Eligibility Center has not reviewed;

(2) Raw scores achieved on the redesigned SAT;

(3) Invalidated academic credentials and canceled test scores;

(4) Courses completed after full-time enrollment or while receiving athletics aid;

(5) ACT/SAT attempts after full-time enrollment (see Section No. 4c for exceptions).

4. Mitigation. In analyzing IEWs, the student-athlete's deficiency is weighed against the overall academic record and the mitigation asserted for not meeting initial-eligibility requirements. The larger the deficiency, the more significant and compelling the mitigation must be to provide relief. Further, mitigation is analyzed to determine whether it directly impacted the student-athlete's ability to satisfy initial-eligibility requirements, whether it was within the student-athlete's control and whether it is supported by documentation (contemporaneous preferred). Sliding-scale deficiencies are analyzed stringently, as they generally reflect the student-athlete’s entire academic record.

Examples of mitigation include:

a. Personal Hardship. When personal hardship is asserted as mitigation, it is analyzed to determine whether it directly impacted the student-athlete's ability to satisfy initial-eligibility requirements, as well as whether it is supported by documentation.

If a student-athlete lost an academic opportunity (e.g., missed term) due to extraordinary circumstances (e.g., incapacitating injury or illness, extreme financial difficulty, civil unrest, natural disaster), core courses replacing the lost opportunity may be considered, even if they were completed outside of the core-curriculum time limitation.
b. **Reclassification.** If a student-athlete repeats a term or more, an IEW may be approved, provided (a) the reclassification was outside of the student-athlete's control, (b) the only deficiency is two core-course units or less, (c) the student-athlete completed additional core courses that would rectify the deficiency, and (d) the supporting documentation *clearly demonstrates* (e.g., no failed core courses within the deficient subject area) the student-athlete would meet qualifier requirements absent the reclassification.

Student-athletes who do not meet all criteria may be considered for partial relief.

c. **Test-Score Time Limitation.** In the following circumstances, an IEW may be approved based on an ACT or SAT attempted *after* full-time enrollment:

   (1) If a student-athlete earns a qualifying score on a retest as part of the testing agency's review process regarding the validity of a prior score;

   (2) If a student-athlete enrolled full time at a collegiate institution that did not require an ACT or SAT score for admission, provided:

      (a) An NCAA school did not recruit the student-athlete before full-time enrollment;

      (b) The minimum required score was achieved on the initial test attempt; *and*

      (c) The student-athlete meets all other initial-eligibility requirements.

   (3) If a student-athlete with an expected graduation date (based on the initial start of year nine) on or before Spring/Summer 2020 was impacted by a canceled ACT or SAT administration due to COVID-19, provided:

      (a) The student-athlete did not attempt the ACT or SAT before full-time enrollment;

      (b) The minimum required score was achieved on the initial test attempt; *and*

      (c) The student-athlete meets all other initial-eligibility requirements.

   If a post-enrollment test score (from an attempt per the above criteria) is not qualifying, it may be considered in the IEW analysis.

d. **International Academic Track.** When an international student-athlete attended secondary school in a country that meets the following criteria, an IEW may be approved:

   (1) The educational system/academic track did not require a subject area or exam necessary for initial eligibility;

   (2) The student-athlete’s *only* deficiency is two core-course units or less in science, social science or additional academic courses, and the student-athlete has not failed any courses or exams in the applicable subject area; and
(3) Late recruitment or nonrecruited status prevented the institution from having an opportunity to advise the student-athlete to attempt to rectify the core-course deficiency before full-time enrollment.

e. **Education-Impacting Disability.** For academic eligibility, the NCAA defines an education-impacting disability as a current impairment that has a substantial educational impact on a student’s academic performance and requires accommodation.

All student-athletes must meet initial-eligibility requirements; however, student-athletes with documented EIDs may receive accommodations, which are intended to provide equal access to learning and create opportunities for academic success. Accommodations include, but are not limited to, those provided via a Section 504 Plan, Individualized Education Program or similar plan (e.g., extended testing time, preferred seating), as well as those provided via NCAA legislation (e.g., courses for students with EIDs, nonstandard ACT/SAT, additional core courses after on-time graduation [Division I]). If an EID is presented in the IEW process, all required documentation must be submitted via RSRO.

Further, a subject-matter professional may review EID documentation, including information that addresses the impairment, the types of services and/or accommodations available and whether the student-athlete accessed such services and/or accommodations. As part of this review, the subject-matter professional defers to local educational agencies or organizations responsible for assessing students and providing appropriate and reasonable services and/or accommodations. As such, the subject-matter professional does not evaluate or determine whether services and/or accommodations provided to a student were appropriate or reasonable.

When a student-athlete presents with an EID, the following factors may be considered:

1. **The timing of the diagnosis;**
2. **Availability and use of accommodations via a Section 504 Plan, Individualized Education Program or similar plan (e.g., academic success plan);**
   
   **Note:** An EID asserted as mitigation for performance may not be persuasive if accommodations were available and/or received.
3. **Performance with and without accommodations;**
4. **Subject-area and/or course-level progression;**
5. **Assertions that approved services and/or accommodations were not implemented in accordance with a Section 504 Plan, Individualized Education Program or similar plan (e.g., academic success plan), if documented by the appropriate academic authority;**
6. **Other information determined on a case-by-case basis.**

**Note:** A late-diagnosed EID (e.g., during grade 12, post-graduation) is generally less persuasive as mitigation due to the speculative nature of determining the effect that accommodation(s) could have had on prior performance.
f. **Misadvisement/Lack of Advisement.** Once recruitment begins, institutions are expected to advise the student-athlete regarding initial eligibility. Accordingly, misadvisement or lack of advisement by an institution or high school is not, by itself, sufficient mitigation to warrant IEW approval.

However, an IEW may be approved if (a) the only deficiency is two core-course units or less, and (b) the supporting documentation *clearly demonstrates* (e.g., no failed core courses, no current or potential sliding-scale deficiency) the student-athlete would meet initial-eligibility requirements absent the misadvisement or lack of advisement. In such cases involving institutional misadvisement or lack of advisement, the institution may be required to submit an Advisement Process Plan that provides an overview of current advisement procedures and specifies corrective measures to prevent similar future situations.

Once an advisement process plan has been submitted, institutional misadvisement or lack of advisement assertions will not be persuasive in subsequent IEWs.

g. **Not Persuasive (not all inclusive).**

1. Forgoing a reasonable opportunity to rectify the deficiency before full-time enrollment (e.g., graduating early, receiving athletics aid to attend summer school);
2. High school grading scales, policies or rigor;
3. Conference or institutional policies (e.g., nonqualifier rules, not conducting preliminary evaluations, required summer bridge);
4. Size of the deficiency (absent other mitigation);
5. High school misadvisement or lack of advisement once recruitment begins;
6. Lack of advisement or misadvisement as mitigation for academic performance;
7. An EID for performance if accommodations were available and/or received;
8. International student-athletes attempting courses and/or exams in English;
9. Delayed graduation or reclassification for an athletics purpose;
10. Failure to follow an advisement process plan from a prior year;
11. Athletics participation;
12. Lack of knowledge/awareness regarding initial-eligibility standards;
13. Performance at the required GPA in a limited number of core courses.
5. Division I Decisions.

The IEW analysis considers both mitigation and the student-athlete's predicted first-year GPA (computed using a research-based formula) to determine whether relief is warranted (see Division I Data Tool).

a. Approval. An IEW may be approved (athletics aid, practice and competition), as follows:

(1) Academic Preparedness. A student-athlete's overall academic record meets obvious-waiver requirements or clearly demonstrates college preparedness.

• A student-athlete who meets core-course progression requirements, whose only deficiency in meeting qualifier requirements is three core-course units or less and projects a 2.600 or higher first-year GPA (based on the final certification for qualifier requirements) will receive an automatic IEW.

(2) Mitigation. But for the mitigation, it is clearly evident the student-athlete would meet qualifier requirements.

b. Partial Approval. An IEW may be partially approved, as follows:

• Athletics Aid (Initial Year) and Practice (Initial Term). Mitigation contributed to the student-athlete’s deficiency but does not rise to the level of but-for mitigation.

Note: Similar to academic-redshirt legislation (Bylaw 14.3.1.2), a student-athlete may earn eligibility for practice in the next regular academic term of full-time enrollment during the first year in residence (e.g., 2021 spring term) by successfully completing at least nine semester hours or eight quarter hours of academic credit (acceptable toward any of the institution's degree programs) in the preceding regular term of full-time enrollment. There is no recourse (e.g., reconsideration, additional waiver) if a student-athlete does not meet the condition (see partial approvals FAQ).

A student-athlete who receives a partially-approved IEW may not earn eligibility for competition in the next regular academic term of full-time enrollment during the first year in residence (e.g., 2021 spring term) based on performance in the preceding regular term of full-time enrollment (e.g., 2020 fall term).

c. Denial. An IEW may be denied, as follows:

(1) Academic Redshirt. It is not clearly evident that but for the mitigation, the student-athlete would meet qualifier requirements.

(2) Nonqualifier. Mitigation does not contribute to the student-athlete’s deficiency.

If an IEW is canceled due to lack of institutional response, it may be re-opened, provided the institution submits a complete response to any outstanding request.
6. Division II Decisions.

The IEW analysis considers both mitigation and the student-athlete's predicted first-year GPA (computed using a research-based formula) to determine whether relief is warranted (see Division II Data Tool).

a. Approval. An IEW may be approved (athletics aid, practice and competition), as follows:

   (1) Academic Preparedness. A student-athlete's overall academic record meets obvious-waiver requirements or clearly demonstrates college preparedness.

   • A student-athlete whose only deficiency in meeting qualifier requirements is two core-course units or less and projects a 2.600 or higher first-year GPA (based on the final certification for qualifier requirements) will receive an automatic IEW.

   (2) Mitigation. But for the mitigation, it is clearly evident the student-athlete would meet qualifier requirements.

b. Partial Approval. An IEW may be partially approved, as follows:

   • Athletics Aid and Practice. Mitigation contributed to the student-athlete’s deficiency but does not rise to the level of but-for mitigation.

c. Denial. An IEW may be denied, as follows:

   (1) Partial Qualifier. It is not clearly evident that but for the mitigation, the student-athlete would meet qualifier requirements.

   (2) Nonqualifier. Mitigation does not contribute to the student-athlete’s deficiency.

If an IEW is canceled due to lack of institutional response, it may be re-opened, provided the institution submits a complete response to any outstanding request.
RECONSIDERATIONS AND APPEALS

7. **Reconsideration Requests.** The institution may request reconsideration of an IEW decision (staff or subcommittee) based on new relevant information that was not reasonably available to any involved individual at the time of the previous decision. The reconsideration request (submitted via RSRO) must include (1) a statement on letterhead that explains why the institution believes the information meets the threshold, and (2) supporting documentation.

The staff has discretion to determine whether the institution's reconsideration request meets the threshold. If so, staff will review the IEW and render a reconsideration decision (which restarts the 30-calendar-day appeal deadline); however, if not, staff will deny the reconsideration request. If the subcommittee has previously rendered an appeal decision, staff may consult the subcommittee chair regarding whether a subsequent reconsideration request meets the threshold. If the subcommittee chair has a conflict of interest or is not reasonably available, the remaining subcommittee members may decide (via majority vote) whether a subsequent reconsideration request meets the threshold.

Staff and the subcommittee will not reconsider an IEW decision based on a student-athlete's performance after full-time enrollment (e.g., 2020 fall term).

8. **Appeal Requests.** The institution has 30 calendar days after receiving written notice of the most recent staff IEW decision (initial or reconsideration) to submit a complete appeal request via RSRO. The appeal request must include a statement on letterhead, signed by the athletics director and senior compliance administrator, that specifies the relief sought and explains why the institution believes additional relief is warranted. The subcommittee decision is final, binding and conclusive and is not subject to further review by any other authority.

An appeal request submitted more than 30 calendar days after written notice of the most recent staff decision must include a letter of explanation regarding the institution's failure to submit the request within 30 calendar days. The subcommittee chair has discretion to determine whether the subcommittee will hear the appeal. If the subcommittee chair has a conflict of interest or is not reasonably available, the remaining subcommittee members decide (via majority vote) whether to hear the appeal.

If staff denies the institution's reconsideration request, the institution may appeal the previous staff decision, provided it has not done so previously and the appeal request is submitted within 30 calendar days after receiving written notice of the previous decision.