

Student-Athlete Academic Performance at Berkeley: A look at the facts

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Let's start by agreeing that student-athlete graduation rates in football and men's basketball are bad¹. Berkeley expects much, much better.

Let's also agree that although there are many teams with excellent graduation rates, the problem is not limited to football and men's basketball. Graduation rates in several other sports², including softball, men's water polo, and men's soccer, have been lower than Berkeley expects. At the same time, let's agree that many teams have fine graduation rates, with 9 of 23 teams having graduation rates better than the general student body³.

To do something about this, we need to understand its cause. Berkeley is proud of its reality-based research orientation, and we need to apply those same standards here⁴. We should first examine the preconceived notions about causes and see whether they're correct.

The first preconception involves admissions. It goes something like:

- We have a special admission process for athletes because that way IA gets to admit whomever they want.
- IA doesn't care whether student athletes are academically qualified or not.
- Unqualified students flunk out, and that's why we have graduation problems.

All of those points are false.

¹ The most recent NCAA report lists the football graduation success rate (GSR) for students entering in 2003-2006 to be 44%, a drop from 46% the previous year. The men's basketball corresponding cohorts GSRs are 38% and 50% respectively.

² For the complete set, see the most-recent report to the campus University Athletics Board at <http://vcaf.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2013-10-GSR.pdf>

³ The 2013 WASC report, available at <http://vpapf.chance.berkeley.edu/wasc> shows that the 6-year freshman graduation rate for all students is 91%, and the 4-year graduation rate for transfer students is 90.1%.

⁴ The GSR is an imperfect measure. Because student athletes transfer in and out of Berkeley at different rates from non-athletes, and because the NCAA GSR numbers only reflect student-athletes who have received athletic scholarships, it is difficult to compare the GSR to other indications of graduation rates and academic success. We don't go any further into those issues here, because although they are interesting, they don't help us understand why Berkeley's GSR is currently so much worse than our peer institutions. For more on this topic, see LaForge and Hodge, "NCAA Academic Performance Metrics: Implications for Institutional Policy and Practice", *The Journal of Higher Education*, Volume 82, Number 2, March/April 2011, pp. 217-235
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_higher_education/summary/v082/82.2.laforge.html

We have a special admission process for athletes for only one reason: The NCAA sets recruiting cycles by sport. None correspond to the timing of the state-mandated admissions cycle. As long as we recruit student athletes we have to have a separate process. That said, Berkeley's athletic admissions process parallels our general admission process, but with considerably more direct faculty oversight. The student-athlete admissions process is under the control of the Senate's committee on Admissions, Enrollment and Preparatory Education (AEPE). The student-athlete admission decisions are made by the Student Athlete Admissions Committee (SAAC), which consists of five faculty members plus the Director of Undergraduate Admissions. No one from Intercollegiate Athletics has a vote. This process has been documented⁵ and continuously reviewed⁶ by the Berkeley Academic Senate for more than ten years. This policy is entirely consistent with holistic review process⁷ that Berkeley has developed over the past 15 years for general undergraduate admission⁸. As mentioned above, it exists because the admissions cycle for student athletes centers on different dates than for regular students,⁹ which in turn is because the recruiting process is effectively a negotiation between high school students and schools. Many athletic teams have very small single year cohorts, typically 3 or 4 people for a basketball, tennis or golf team, and student-athletes who want to have some assurance of being able to join a team in their sport and compete want lots of information & assurance before deciding where to attend. The student-athlete recruiting process exists to resolve that tension. The faculty-led student-athlete admissions committee is involved through the entire process. The committee makes an initial decision about whether a student's academic background is sufficiently strong for them to be recruited. Later, it makes the final decision about the admissibility of each student athlete.

The general holistic review process allows students to be admitted with a wide range of academic indicators. Holistic admission is the logical consequence of the incredible depth of Berkeley applicant pool. We have many more qualified applicants, students who would do well at Berkeley, than we can ever accept. If you

⁵ For the most recent version, see the Senate's web site: http://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/committees/aepe/athletic_policy_approved_2013.pdf

⁶ C.f. http://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/committees/aepe/annual_reports/aepe_ann_rpt_11-12_approved.pdf and similar reports for other years

⁷ For an early discussion of holistic review, see the Report to the Senate: http://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/committees/aepe/aepe_report_0.pdf

⁸ For a recent discussion of general admissions, holistic review, and the consistency of the athletic admissions policy, see the presentation of the AEPE Chair to Divisional Council: http://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/front-page/aepe_crash_course_11-12-13.pdf

⁹ The NCAA closely controls the process for recruiting and admitting student-athletes, based on long experience with the process and its impact on student welfare. It sets specific dates for when coaches can start to talk to high school student athletes, limits how early a student can commit to a particular school (typically by signing a formalized Letter of Intent), and requires that student academic records through the end of their senior year be evaluated to decide whether the student will be eligible for athletic practice and competition during their first year of college.

simply lined everyone up strictly by test scores and GPA, the distinctions well out past our cut-off for admission are below the confidence level of the academic predictors, i.e., it's quite literally a crap shoot. In addition, the numbers alone are seriously slanted against challenged (i.e. low API) schools and it's important for admissions to consider and admit students with a wide range of backgrounds. In order for the selection to be meaningful, you have to read files for more than numbers. Once you start reading the files more deeply, you find that lots of things beside academic indicators gain great importance in helping to find the potential students we really want.

The point of our holistic review process is to look at the entire student record and make a decision that reaches beyond just numbers. The majority of admitted students have very high SAT scores and GPAs, but not all of them do. The process involves an extensive application reading, a system of strong Augmented Review¹⁰ for applicants with special circumstances, and a series of pre-reading normalization steps and post-read checks to ensure the integrity of this process. The Berkeley AEPE faculty admissions committee, along with the BOARS system-wide faculty admissions committee, feels strongly that this holistic approach is necessary to admit the creative, diverse and accomplished student body that UC values.

This process surfaces a small number of general applicants in the general admissions pool who have, by comparison to other applicants, very low test scores and GPAs but with other qualities that make them desirable as Berkeley students. There is no strict bottom limit on the GPA or test score for Berkeley admission. To ensure the integrity of the process, and to provide specific oversight, the 100 admissions with "lowest" academic indicators are re-read by faculty members of AEPE. This low-100 cohort routinely contains students with one or more SAT scores under 400 and high school GPAs below 2.6¹¹. Both statistical studies of student outcomes¹² and anecdotal evidence from the academic advising organizations indicate that these students may struggle for a few semesters, but in the end have similar academic success to the general student body.

The student-athlete admission process has many of the same features, although more attention is paid to the academic prospects and need for academic support of this group than the general low-100's. The student-athlete applicants are grouped

¹⁰ See section 10 of M. Hout "BERKELEY'S COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW METHOD FOR MAKING FRESHMAN ADMISSIONS DECISIONS: AN ASSESSMENT" http://academic-senate.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/committees/aepe/hout_report_0.pdf

¹¹ From e.g. an AEPE internal study of the Fall 2005 – Spring 2006 cohorts, September 2006

¹² E.g. Study of low-100 academic progress by Greg Dubrow for the AEPE Committee, July 2012, which found retention rates for several low-100 and AR cohorts were not significantly below those for the general student body. There were GPA differences in the first semesters, but by the 4th semester they had essentially disappeared. Although the statistics are small, 34/38 and 45/55 of these students graduated within six years, for graduation rates of 89±5% and 82±5% respectively.

by academic record into Gold, Blue and Red categories¹³ (in order of decreasing strength of record). Although the academic records of the category Red admits are, by design of the process, significantly weaker than those of the general admissions cohort, they are approximately the same as those of the students with the weakest records in the general admissions pool¹⁴. This is intentional.

To ensure that sufficient academic support will be available, the number of admissions under the policy is limited to 20 Red, 100 Blue+Red, and 300 total. Typically, 10 Red are admitted each year, with 2 or 3 in football, 1 or 2 in each of men's and women's basketball, and typically about a total of 5 sprinkled across other sports. Typically 25-30 Blue are admitted each year, with about 5 in football, and 2-3 in each of men's and women's basketball, and the remaining 15 or so in 1's and 2's across many sports.

There just aren't enough Red and Blue admits to account for the size of the problem with graduation rates. A football team typically has 80 students on scholarship, with yearly cohorts of about 20 students per year. With only a few Red and Blue-category admits, less than 50% of the class, even if a large fraction of them were flunking out, that wouldn't explain a graduation rate of only 44%. Something else must be going on. Although the basketball cohorts are smaller, with a team size of 15, the basic argument remains the same: Whatever is causing the poor graduation rates, it has to be wider than just the admission of a few students with weak backgrounds.

Studies of GPAs, probation rates and retention indicate that these students have academic success (or failure) rates similar or better to comparable general students. The Red admits do have lower GPAs and higher probation rates¹⁵ than the Blue and Gold admits and the complete student body, but the proper comparison would be to the low end of the general admission students. Those results are comparable. The Spring 2013 results¹⁶, for example, show that 4.7% of all 1st year students are on academic probation, compared to 1 of 7 Red admits (14% with a $\pm 13\%$ error), 4 of

¹³ Earlier versions of the policy had four categories called A, B, C and D. The basic structure is the same. Gold is roughly equivalent to the previous A, Blue is roughly equivalent to the previous B. Red corresponds to the previous C and the upper part of the D category; the lower half of the D range is no longer admissible under the policy.

¹⁴ Berkeley faculty who are aware of this equivalence still make statements like:

“It is in fact Academic Senate policy that allows for athletes to be admitted with a C average (GPA as low as 2.0) and SAT's as low as 270 (combined SAT score as low as 1100 for three exams, to be exact).

“Compare to the averages for Berkeley admits: Average High School GPA of 4.14 and average SAT scores of 678 in Critical Reading, 706 in Mathematics, and 692 in Writing.”

The dishonest nature of such statements is troubling.

¹⁵ Numerous reports on the academic progress of student athletes can be found on the web site of the Academic Study Center <http://asc.berkeley.edu/rr/aps> Note that the Athletic Study Center reports directly to and is funded by the Vice Provost, fully independent of Intercollegiate Athletics.

¹⁶ Page 8 of http://asc.berkeley.edu/rr/aps/aps-spring-2013/at_download/file

57 Blue admits (7%±3%) and 7 of 193 Gold admits (3.6%±1.3%). The vast majority of athletic admits, including even the ones with the most academic risk, are in good standing at the end of their 1st year. Looking beyond the 1st year, the pattern remains: The Gold admits, the largest group of student athletes, have lower rates of academic difficulty and probation than the general student body¹⁷, the Blue admits are about the same, and the Red rate is somewhat higher.

The students admitted through the student-athlete admission process are not getting into academic difficulty at a significantly higher rate than the corresponding students in the general student body. In both the general admissions process and in the student-athlete admissions process, holistic review is able to find students who, the vast majority of the time, are able to succeed academically at Berkeley. Berkeley's holistic review process has been adapted by UCLA¹⁸ and other campuses, and has generally become the state-of-the-art method for achieving a diverse and strong incoming class. Berkeley was at the very forefront in recognizing the need for holistic review and developing it. Despite this, holistic review periodically comes under attack¹⁹ from people who don't share Berkeley's commitment to enrolling the type of student body that the Master Plan mandates, one that reflects the diversity of the state. From time to time unfortunate statements are made, such as "Can a student with (a specific example) profile truly maximize the UC Berkeley experience? It seems this question has not been taken seriously"²⁰ in an attempt to undermine holistic review. Such assertions are particularly problematic given that the faculty admissions committee (AEPE) during that time was chaired by people with the stature of Cal Moore²¹, David Stern²², George Johnson²³, and Katie Snyder²⁴

¹⁷ This is most likely due to the strong incentives that student-athletes have to keep succeeding academically so that they can continue to compete, and the support that's provided to them as the member of a team community. NCAA eligibility rules are not directly attached to Berkeley's academic probation standards. In early semesters, the NCAA standard is lower than Berkeley's. In later semesters, the NCAA standard is significantly above the Berkeley probation standard. Although some schools prevent students on academic probation from practicing and competing, in general it's thought to be counterproductive to separate student athletes, who are generally quite committed to their sport, from the support structure of the team. Of course, if that team culture is not supportive of academics, the separation may be a good idea; see below for further discussion.

¹⁸ http://www.today.ucla.edu/portal/ut/080905_holistic-admissions_reed.aspx

¹⁹ "Lifting the Veil on the Holistic Process at the University of California, Berkeley" New York Times August 4, 2013 <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/04/education/edlife/lifting-the-veil-on-the-holistic-process-at-the-university-of-california-berkeley.html>

²⁰ John Cummins, Kirsten Hextrum "THE MANAGEMENT OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS AT UC BERKELEY: TURNING POINTS AND CONSEQUENCES" <http://cshe.berkeley.edu/publications/publications.php?id=449> Page 25

²¹ Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, he's been the Department Chair, Dean of the L&S Physical Science Division, AVP Academic Affairs, and was the first Recipient of the Berkeley Faculty Service Award.

²² Professor Emeritus of Education, he's also served on the system-wide admissions committee, and is a recognized expert on high-school preparation.

²³ Professor of Mechanical Engineering, co-PI of Cal Teach, previously Associate Dean of Engineering, Vice Chair for Instruction, and a recipient of Leon Henkin Citation for Distinguished Service,

who together have been taking admissions seriously for more than a decade. Berkeley's admissions policy has been thoughtfully developed by a duly appointed arm of the Faculty Senate, whose work has been informed by careful consideration of the data. A charge to the contrary is quite out of order.

Returning to the point of student athletes, another preconception is that students spend so much time on their sport that it adversely impacts their academics.

It's certainly true that Division-I and Olympic level sports require commitment, including the commitment of time. The NCAA has a rule²⁵ that restricts the amount of required time to 20 hours a week in the competition season (typically one specific semester) and 8 hours a week outside it. Intercollegiate Athletics has a Compliance Office that tracks activities against this rule²⁶. Violations are rare and inadvertent.²⁷

Still, that rule only governs "required" activity. Students routinely spend additional time on their sport. They get up early to run, they spend extra time in the gym practicing, and they put in time in weight rooms. How are we to think about this?

First, why does the NCAA exclude this type of activity from the rule's 20- or 8-hour cap? Students who want to excel at things they're passionate about, including but not limited to athletics, are very motivated to spend their time: for example, ASUC Senators are up past midnight most Tuesdays in ASUC Senate meetings, and that's just a small part of their commitment.²⁸ Student athletes will make their own

recognizing a faculty member who shows exceptional commitment to the educational development of students from underrepresented groups

²⁴ Associate Professor of English, previously faculty director of the Writing Program.

²⁵ Rule 17.1.6, which places limits of 20 hours per week during the playing season and (generally) 8 hours a week outside the playing season on "countable athletically related activities". These are defined in Rule 17.02.1 as "Countable athletically related activities include any required activity with an athletics purpose involving student-athletes and at the direction of, or supervised by, one or more of an institution's coaching staff (including strength and conditioning coaches) ... Administrative activities (e.g., academic meetings, compliance meetings) shall not be considered as countable athletically related activities." The full set of NCAA Division-I rules is available at <http://www.ncaapublications.com/p-4322-2013-2014-ncaa-division-i-manual.aspx> as a free PDF download.

²⁶ An in-depth education and training program ensures that coaches and student-athletes are aware of the rule, including the various types of activities covered and not covered. Coaches report time for every activity for every student athlete on each day. Audits are done on both the coaches' reports and the student experiences. A central record of all this information is retained, exceptions tagged and investigated, and statistical summaries are periodically reviewed. Statements such as "the campus must take a stand against coaches violating this rule" (Cummins 2013) are deeply disrespectful of the compliance staff and/or a demonstration of willful ignorance.

²⁷ It's been more than five years since the last one.

²⁸ The Cal Band's required time commitment in Fall semesters is 4 or 5 two-hour practices, plus 10 hours on football game days, totaling up to 20 hours per week, plus significant individual practice and study. See <http://calband.berkeley.edu/join-us/#A%20Typical%20Week>

choices about what to do to achieve excellence. Long experience has taught the NCAA that trying to limit those activities by rule will just drive them underground, where they're not reported & monitored for health and safety. Further, Berkeley takes great pride in bringing to campus students who are committed to excellence and willing to work hard. To what extent can we back off from that in athletics? Expecting our student athletes to not care about being as good as possible in their chosen sport seems unrealistic.

The time spent during the in-season semester can be quite large. A survey of football at Berkeley reported a range of 32 to 40 hours per week for total time spent in-season, 17 to 23 hours per week off-season. Although these certainly seem large, the off-season time is actually not unusual for Berkeley students. Letters & Science Advising even has a form²⁹ for changing your schedule due to employment, including internship, for 15-19, 20-29 or more than 30 hours per week³⁰. Could it be that the time spent is particularly problematic for students with weaker academic preparation? The earlier admissions discussion showed how those students are doing, including the effects of time spent on their sport; it's not a big enough effect to explain the bad graduation rates. Even more to the point, the amount of time spent by football student-athletes hasn't changed over the past five years, while the GSR has dropped significantly; other sports show similar effects. The evidence is that this is a manageable load under some conditions, and we have to continue our inquiry until we understand the conditions that cause students not to graduate.

The third preconceived idea is that the poor graduation rates are due to the "corrosive effects of hosting farm teams for professional sports"³¹. There seem to be two parts to the argument:

- Since "only 2% of student-athletes will go pro³²", prospects for professional careers are a false hope for Berkeley student athletes
- The poor graduation success rates can be explained by students leaving early in an attempt to follow this false hope.

Both of these need further examination, because neither is fully correct at Berkeley.

²⁹ <http://ls-advise.berkeley.edu/fp/36WorkVeri.pdf>

³⁰ Although please note that regular L&S students can drop to 10, 8 or 6 units respectively when working those hours, but student-athletes must stay in at least 13 units to be eligible to practice and complete.

³¹ Statement made by a faculty member to students during a Spring 2013 discussion over schedule accommodation for an exam scheduling conflict involving a trip to the national championship for a sport with no professional leagues, as reported to the Faculty Athletic Representative by three students present.

³² The NCAA has long used this line in their TV advertising; for more detailed statistics, see <http://www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/public/NCAA/Resources/Behind+the+Blue+Disk/How+D+o+Athletic+Scholarships+Work> but note that these are statistics across all schools, all NCAA Divisions.

First, there's no connection between professional sport careers and the GSRs in sports like softball and men's water polo. We have to look further for the explanation of those.

Further, the 2% statistic isn't directly relevant for Berkeley football and basketball. Those sports have sent a much larger fraction of student-athletes to professional careers. At the start of the 2013-2014 season, there were 34 NFL active players from Berkeley³³, the fifth largest alumni group. In the most recent 2006-07 GSR cohort, eight football student athletes from Berkeley got NFL contracts and played. It's way too soon to know how long their careers will last, but typically 1/3 are short, a year or less, and 2/3 are longer. The previous 2005-06 cohort sent nine to the NFL from Berkeley. These are 48% and 52%, respectively, of the full GSR cohorts. The five-year average is 45%. Although the cohorts are much smaller, the fractions in men's basketball are similar. Combining the last two GSR cohorts³⁴, there were six student athletes of whom four are playing professionally. In both sports, the large majority of the students who declared themselves eligible for the professional drafts, the first step toward a professional career, did manage to get a playing contract.

So, at least in football and men's basketball, professional sports are not a false hope. Not everybody who wants one gets a professional contract, but the success rate is better than for e.g. our grad students to become a tenured academic at a Research 1 school.³⁵

Does this result in students leaving early?

NCAA rules allow for a student to play for four seasons within six years, called their "eligibility". Either due to injury or by choice, a student may skip a year while still competing for four seasons. The vast majority of students complete their eligibility for competition within four or five years.³⁶ In the case of football, it's routine to finish competition after 4½ years, after the fall semester and football season starting the 5th year.

³³ http://www.calbears.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB_OEM_ID=30100&ATCLID=209252069 see also <http://espn.go.com/nfl/players?college=13>

³⁴ We redact numbers or combine cohorts when they are small enough to identify specific student athletes.

³⁵ The most recent Graduate Division survey indicates that, of the 2552 students responding 12-18 months after graduation, 501 (20%) had a tenure track position at any school, and another 27% had postdoctoral appointments. See

http://grad.berkeley.edu/publications/pdf/berkeley_grad_profile.pdf For an interesting commentary, see "Ph.D. students rethink the tenure track, scope out non-academic jobs" Berkeley News Center <http://newscenter.berkeley.edu/2013/03/20/beyond-academia/>

³⁶ The situation for students who transfer into or out of Berkeley is a little more complicated, but the basic trends are the same. For more on how transfers are accounted for in the GSR and how that affects comparisons of the numbers, see LaForge and Hodge, *ibid*.

It's rare for students to leave for professional sports before exhausting their eligibility to compete. In the past five years, only two students from football and one from basketball have left early. The vast majority of basketball student athletes spend a full four years here, and the vast majority of football student athletes spend four or four and a half years here, before attempting to go pro. So the bad GSR rates are not due to them leaving early.

So if it's not any of those preconceived notions, what is it?

An important clue can be found by considering women's basketball. The team's academic success, including their graduation rate, has been significantly above that of the men's basketball team. Although the professional prospects are not the same as for young men going to the NBA, women's basketball has sent students to the professional WNBA league³⁷.

The difference is that the women graduate at the same time they finish competition. Most recently, Layshia Clarendon was selected in the WNBA draft during her 2012-2013 senior year, joined the Indiana Fever team, got permission from her team to miss practice to continue her studies and finish her exams, and missed a game³⁸ to return to campus for the graduation ceremony. For another example, Tierra Rogers came to Berkeley as a highly-ranked basketball prospect, but she wasn't able to play due to medical issues. She continued with the team and graduated³⁹.

One of the most embarrassing things about the Berkeley graduation rates is that our football and men's basketball GSRs rank at the bottom of the Pac-12⁴⁰, and for football even at the bottom nationally. USC, for example, sends more football student-athletes to the NFL, but has a better GSR. Stanford puts together championship football teams with a higher GSR than Berkeley's; UCLA does the same in basketball. What's the difference? It's actually quite simple to explain this: Their students complete their eligibility to compete and graduate at the same time. Too many Berkeley students get to the end of their four or five years, have academic work left to complete, and don't graduate.

To correct the bad graduation rates, we have to focus on why students spend their full undergraduate careers here and aren't ready to graduate. There might be second-order effects from admissions decisions, how time is spent, and how students prepare for professional careers, but the fundamental problem is that

³⁷ One student was selected in the WNBA draft in each of 2009, 2010 and 2013.

³⁸ http://www.mercurynews.com/ci_23031849/cals-layshia-clarendon-ninth-overall-pick-wnba-draft

³⁸ <http://blog.pe.com/pro-sports/2013/08/16/column-future-seems-bright-for-wnba-rookie-layshia-clarendon/>

³⁹ <http://sports.yahoo.com/news/former-cal-basketball-player-earns-221927013--ncaaw.html>

⁴⁰ See comparison plots in <http://vcf.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/2013-10-GSR.pdf>

students get passing grades in full loads of courses for four-plus years yet don't complete their degrees.

To start, how is that even possible? These students work with professional advisors in their College, their major departments and the Athletic Study Center, who certainly tell the students what the requirements are and what they need to do to meet those requirements. The NCAA eligibility process requires that they pass appropriate courses with enough units to make progress towards their degrees at a consistent rate. What's going wrong?

In the specific case of football, a large fraction of the problem can be understood by looking at football student-athlete's final term, the Spring semester after their last Fall season of competition. In Spring 2010, 2011 and 2012⁴¹ a large fraction of football seniors⁴² didn't complete most or all of their courses. These students were generally enrolled in the last courses they needed, but they walked away from them. Most of them spent the semester preparing for the NFL draft by going to various camps and events, working out and practicing; classes were secondary. About half of these students succeeded in entering the NFL, and about half did not. None of the students who did this graduated at the end of the semester. Worse, those students put enough F's on their records that it will be difficult or impossible for them to complete their degree here at some later time.

This is largely a failure of coaching. Those students were not getting realistic advice about their NFL prospects, nor were they being encouraged to make the hard choice between remaining as a student or working on their professional football career during the Spring. The record over the last five years is that it's not possible to work toward the professional draft and be a full-time student.⁴³

Further evidence can be found in the Spring 2013 record. Under a new coach⁴⁴ students were given clear feedback on their NFL prospects. Only nine students tried out for the NFL, and all nine achieved professional contracts. Of the others, only three students failed to make substantial academic progress during spring, and some of that was rectified over the summer. This is a significant improvement over

⁴¹ These three years were the last under Head Coach Tedford and his staff.

⁴² For simplicity, we're using "senior" to refer to students who are in their last semester, whether it's after four years or five, the so-called "red-shirt seniors".

⁴³ Although the case can't be proven precisely, this is anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of the NCAA 20/8 hour rule. Pre-professional practice via camps, etc, has no such restriction on hours, and it overwhelms the students.

⁴⁴ Sonny Dykes started as football head coach in December 2012.

past years. The net effect was an improvement of the APR⁴⁵ from 920 the previous year to an estimated⁴⁶ 969 for 2012-2013.

Aside from the special case of how the NFL draft timing effects the last semester of some football student athletes, what else causes students to get to the end of their senior year without graduating? The NBA calendar is quite different. With a few exceptions, students on other teams are not leaving early for their professional career prospects.⁴⁷

Examination of student records shows that most of the students who didn't graduate were missing only a small number of courses.⁴⁸ The most common deficit was a course for the Quantitative Reasoning (QR) requirement. Reading and Composition (R&C) requirement⁴⁹ courses and Foreign Language requirement courses were also common, followed by one or two specific courses for majors. Advising records indicate that students have been told about these requirements. The courses are tough, and students are choosing to defer them⁵⁰ until late in their undergraduate careers to reduce the chance they'll become ineligible to compete.⁵¹ Advisors can talk to the students about courses, but when it comes time to register on TeleBears these students clearly are making their own decisions.

Why does this affect some teams more than others? It's difficult to be systematic and numeric about this, but anecdotally it comes down to teams that have a culture of academic engagement, and teams that don't. Some of this is handed down from

⁴⁵ The APR is an instantaneous measure of academic progress that doesn't have some of the lag issues of the GSR. A football APR of 930 corresponds, on average and in the steady state, to a GSR of about 50%. An APR of 970 corresponds, on average and in the steady state, to a GSR of about 85%.

⁴⁶ The NCAA requires that we point out that this is just an estimate, and the number will not be final until the NCAA announces it in Spring 2014. It may vary by 5-10 points plus or minus during the audit and certification process.

⁴⁷ It's possible that the rise of Major League Soccer may be having an effect on the men's soccer team, but that's not certain yet. Better to deal with it early, just in case.

⁴⁸ The NCAA eligibility standards make it unlikely that students will reach the end of their undergraduate careers greatly short on units or with insufficient GPAs, unless their final semester is a failure.

⁴⁹ The recent change to requiring R&C by the end of the 2nd year, along with rigid enforcement, is rapidly making this deficit less common. See <http://registrar.berkeley.edu/RCFAQ.html>

⁵⁰ This avoidance of courses that have a high risk of reducing GPA is common in other cohorts, too. There are lots of stories of pre-meds waiting to take certain courses in their last semester, after transcripts and GPAs are sent for medical school applications. Pre-Haas and pre-economics students routinely defer certain courses until after the application semester.

⁵¹ The R&C requirement has been particularly important here. College Writing courses have a high chance of IP grades, which don't provide units toward eligibility. The course is eventually completed, but because of the NCAA rules & the timing of the credit, the student can become ineligible to compete. In attempting to take these courses early in their career, students risk going on probation due to poor academic progress. Many students will now accept this risk and take the courses early, but would probably not do so if probation means they are restricted from practice and competition in their chosen sport.

class to class of students, but much of it comes from the coach(es). There are coaches that know what classes each of their students are in and how they're doing, and make clear their expectation that students will progress through graduation. These coaches make those academic expectations clear from the start of the recruiting cycle on. Their teams do well academically. Others are more detached from the academics, and students pick up on that.

There are several examples in the recent record of how changes in coach's expectations can make a difference. We've already mentioned the APR effect of a new football head coach and staff. They also managed to get the team GPA in Spring 2013 to increase enough to set a new team record; the Summer 2013 GPA was also a higher than any recent year.⁵² Looking back further, the arrival of men's basketball Head Coach Montgomery in April 2008 caused an immediate increase in academic indicators⁵³.

What should be done? If a problem like this surfaced during the Provost's review of an academic department, the reaction would be clear: It's the department's responsibility, make a plan and get this corrected.

The graduation rate of student athletes is fundamentally the responsibility of Intercollegiate Athletics. The Athletic Director has already announced that she's pulling people together⁵⁴ to create a plan to correct the situation. The situation is complicated enough that it's going to take multiple efforts to make progress, so that's the right thing to do. We have some suggestions for that group:

- First, the academic values of Berkeley put a lot of emphasis on students making their own choices. It will require careful thought before deciding to what extent, if any, students should be forced to take specific classes in a timely manner, either by coaches or by the advising organizations⁵⁵. Motivating them to do it is clearly better than compelling.
- Student culture, in this case team culture, has a lot to do with student academic motivation, hence engagement and success. Team culture is clearly within the remit of the coaches. They should be held accountable for it.
- This isn't just about football, or basketball, or any one sport. It's about how the culture of Intercollegiate Athletics that has to change. Student athletes

⁵² Page 2 of http://asc.berkeley.edu/rr/aps/aps-spring-2013/at_download/file

⁵³ Due to the long lag time of the GSR, Coach Montgomery's effect on recruiting and academic success is still mixed with the prior staff in the GSR results.

⁵⁴ http://www.calbears.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB_OEM_ID=30100&ATCLID=209294221

⁵⁵ Though there is precedent for this, including the recent change to the R&C requirement and the long-standing requirement that lower-division major requirements be taken before declaration, e.g. before the end of the junior year.

have to come in on day one hearing that part of being a Cal Bear is that you graduate. It doesn't matter if you go off to the NFL, NBA, wherever. Graduating is what you do for yourself, your team, and your school.

- We're really talking about better integrating student athletes into the academic life of the campus. Some teams, some coaches do this better than others, but on average there is a troubling disconnect between the student-athlete community and the larger academic community. Student-athletes are not alone in this. Similar comments have been made about the fraternity/sorority community, the co-op community, and other groups. That doesn't make it any more desirable. It should be the coaches' responsibility to make sure their student athletes are engaged.

At the same time, the faculty needs to do some soul-searching. We have student athletes in our classes, and too many of us prejudge them as not belonging at Berkeley. We say it in newspaper quotes⁵⁶ and tell them to their face that "you're not gonna make it through school here"⁵⁷. That's a common enough experience that some student athletes hide their status in class until they're sure that they've been evaluated on their own merits.⁵⁸ Some of these same critics turn around and compare us with Stanford and UCLA, but ignore the fact that the student athletes on our competitor campuses are respected by fellow-students and faculty alike. An important part of the solution to our problem is for the whole of the campus to treat student-athletes as full members of the academic community here at Berkeley. We cannot treat them as pawns in a political game. We all have to engage with them and treat them with the respect that every *student* deserves.

⁵⁶ <http://www.sfgate.com/default/article/Barbour-takes-the-blame-for-Cal-s-academic-woes-4929448.php> which says in relevant part: The poor graduation rate would imply that many of these students shouldn't be at Cal to begin with, something computer science Professor Brian Barsky believes. "It's important to re-examine the admission policies," he told The Chronicle last week. "The university is doing a disservice admitting student-athletes who are not adequately prepared."

⁵⁷ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/gameon/2012/10/24/rodgers-professor-never-succeed/1654723/> which says in relevant part: Rodgers went to talk to his professor about a rewrite and found himself on the other end of a lecture. "She went into this tirade about athletes and entitlements and whatnot. She basically picked on the wrong person in the class because I was probably the best student out of the 11 football players in there. I was second-team all-academic at Cal, if you do your research there," Rodgers explained. "She's looking at me, condescending, talking down to me. And she says, "What do you want to do with yourself?" I said, "I want to play in the NFL." She laughed. She laughed at me. It was a condescending laugh and she said, "You'll never make it. You'll get hurt. You'll need your education, and you're not gonna make it through school here." "

⁵⁸ <http://www.ischool.berkeley.edu/newsandevents/news/20131007markbrazinski> which says in relevant part: "Football players have a stigma attached to them," Brazinski said. "As much as you don't (want) to admit that, it's true. I would not wear anything with football on it for about the first five weeks of the semester"

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