

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD GUIDE FOR THE  
NCAA STUDY OF GROWTH, OPPORTUNITIES, ASPIRATIONS AND LEARNING OF  
STUDENTS IN COLLEGE (GOALS)**

Dear Faculty Athletics Representative:

The purpose of an institutional review board (IRB) is to ensure that the rights and welfare of human participants involved in proposed research are adequately protected. IRBs have the right to approve, disapprove or require modification of all research involving students on their campus. While the NCAA has received approval from its own Research Review Board (RRB), a federally recognized, national external board consisting of faculty and community representatives, it is important that you consult with your campus IRB to determine whether additional approval is required to carry out this research on your campus.

The NCAA's full RRB materials and approval letter are included in an accompanying document. However, to make the IRB process at your school as simple as possible as you administer this study on behalf of the NCAA, we have also included summary information below that may be of use in answering questions posed to you directly by your campus IRB.

Please contact the **NCAA Research Review Board Administrator** at [rrbadmin@ncaa.org](mailto:rrbadmin@ncaa.org) or **317-917-6409** if you have any questions or would like assistance in completing your IRB application.

Note that your local IRB may require changes to the standard study administration procedures as a condition for conducting the study on your campus. If this is the case, please contact the NCAA Research Review Board Administrator, who will work with you in implementing such changes. In most instances, study procedures can be modified in ways that will meet the requirements of a particular IRB while maintaining the integrity of the study's research methodology.

**Project Information**

**Project Title:**

2024-25 NCAA Study of Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations and Learning of Students in College (GOALS).

**Project Dates:**

Start Date (10-1-2024);

End Date (9-30-2025).

**Number of Participants:**

Previous large-scale NCAA student-athlete studies have included data from approximately 20,000 student-athletes surveyed at over 600 NCAA member institutions. We anticipate a similar number of respondents in the 2024-25 study.

**Project Description/Purpose:**

The 2024-25 NCAA GOALS Study will provide NCAA policymakers and member institutions with detailed information on the athletics, academic and social experiences of student-athletes across all sports and NCAA divisions. It will also provide objective and attitudinal data from student-

athletes on possible academic and social trade-offs and sacrifices they have made to participate in collegiate athletics. Receipt of optional information that student-athletes may elect to share will allow the survey data to be merged with available academic data (e.g., high school and college transcript data) to develop longitudinal models of academic and personal successes of student-athletes.

**Project History:**

This study is the fifth in a series conducted by the NCAA to analyze the attitudes and experiences of NCAA student-athletes. The initial GOALS study was conducted during winter/spring 2006. The study, with some modifications, was conducted again in 2010, 2015 and 2019. Those studies and the current study were designed by NCAA research staff in consultation with college presidents, faculty, coaches, athletics administrators, student-athletes and subject matter experts. Although the major topics and many of the underlying scales/items are not changing from the 2019 version, new items have been included to examine the student-athlete recruiting process, social media engagement and team connections.

**Prior NCAA RRB Approval:**

The study commenced on October 1, 2024, after it was approved by the RRB. The NCAA RRB is an external body composed of seven non-staff members who represent individual colleges/universities or the community and follows policies and procedures similar to a campus IRB. The RRB is assisted by an independent liaison who works with RRB members to communicate their decisions and concerns back to NCAA project staff and member institution representatives.

**Federal-wide Assurance:**

The NCAA is registered with the U. S. Health and Human Services Department, Office of Human Research Protections (IORG #0007717). The NCAA RRB is a registered IRB (IRB #00009263). The Federal-wide Assurance number is 00020028. Institutions interested in pursuing IRB Authorization Agreements are encouraged to contact the NCAA Research Review Board Administrator, at rrbadmin@ncaa.org or 317-917-6409.

**Scientific or Academic Merit of Current Study:**

Considerable care has gone into designing a study, survey instrument and sampling protocol that will lead to unbiased, generalizable results. From a sampling perspective, we attempt to minimize bias via strict stratified random sampling of teams, comparison of obtained demographic profiles of the sample versus known demographics of the student-athlete population and subsequent (as necessary) weighting of individual responses to create aggregate estimates that are likely to best represent the behavior of the national student-athlete population.

**Instruments:**

The only instrument in this study will be a survey taken by the participating student-athletes. The survey is comprised of seven sections:

1. You and Your Athletics Experience
2. College Academic Experience
3. Social and Team Experience

4. Recruitment
5. Time Commitments
6. On-Campus Support
7. Finances

Most survey items have been used in previous studies, were derived from standard scales or were designed specifically for this study by subject matter experts.

Testing of the survey indicates that it typically takes about 30 minutes to complete.

Based on a combination of variables being provided (e.g., sport, gender, zip code while in high school), GOALS data can be linked to high school and college transcript data that the NCAA already collects. This linkage will occur only with permission of the student-athlete participants. The following statement is included on the survey and will be noted in the scripted statement that the campus survey administrator reads to the survey participants:

*The survey you just completed is part of the largest study on student-athletes the NCAA has ever undertaken. Your responses will help us to better understand how participation in athletics impacts a student's college experience.*

*As part of our research on the student-athlete experience, we would like to link the results of this survey to other NCAA data on your academic performance. This will be accomplished through a combination of variables that may include sport, ZIP code and birth month/year. If you prefer not to have your data linked, please indicate below.*

*Neither your identity nor your school's identity will ever be connected to your survey responses in any publicly accessible data file, analysis or write-up of these data.*

### **Study Administration:**

After the sample for the current study was determined, an email was sent to the faculty athletics representative (FAR) at each member institution. The email solicited the FAR's participation in conducting the study and identified the athletics teams that the institution is being asked to survey. As in the 2015 and 2019 administrations of the GOALS Survey, both a paper and pencil survey and an online survey administration will be offered. The latter is in response to requests from FARs to make surveys available online to reduce the administrative burden of handling paper surveys and to provide an environmentally friendly option. Included in the email sent to FARs was a link to a brief online questionnaire asking the FAR for their preference in survey administration – a paper administration or an online administration. It was explained that both administrations must take place in a proctored setting. FARs not responding will be sent the paper version, but the online option will be made available at any point to interested FARs. Detailed study materials are provided to each FAR that highlight appropriate study protocols for producing scientifically useful data and protecting the well-being of student-athlete participants.

**Paper Administration:**

Detailed instructions for administration of the survey will be provided to the FAR. These instructions, and the instructions that are printed on the survey form, make it clear to the student-athletes that their participation in this study is completely voluntary and that their responses will be confidential. The FAR will be instructed to give the survey to all members of a particular team on the same occasion in a classroom-type proctored setting. All staff from the athletics department (e.g., coaches, trainers, etc.) will be asked to leave the room before the survey is distributed. The FAR will be provided with a pre-addressed, pre-paid envelope into which student-athletes are to deposit surveys upon completion. Survey serial numbers will be tracked to verify institutional response and eventually add institutional level variables to the analysis data file – institutional identity will be kept strictly confidential by NCAA research. The last student-athlete to complete the survey will be asked to seal the envelope in the FAR's presence and see that it is ready to send to the third-party vendor that will scan the survey forms and create a national database for analysis. After data entry, completed surveys will be securely stored with no information on the identity of schools accompanying the survey forms. After verification of the data, the surveys will be destroyed.

**Online Administration:**

The online administration will largely mimic the paper administration. Detailed instructions for administration of the survey will be provided to the FAR. All staff from the athletics department (e.g., coaches, trainers, etc.) will be asked to leave the room before the survey is distributed. Because the student-athletes will not have a survey form with additional printed instructions, they will be provided with a handout that includes the survey URL. The handout also will include basic instructions so the student-athlete can follow along with the FAR's script (paper administrations have the information printed on the front page of the instrument). The FAR will be instructed to administer the survey to all members of a particular team on the same occasion in a classroom-type, proctored setting. The FAR will post the unique institutional ID in the room during the survey administration and student-athletes will enter this code prior upon starting the survey. FARs may utilize existing campus computing facilities or computer-equipped classrooms, or they may allow students to use their computers or tablets to access the survey. If, however, sufficient space is not available to accommodate the entire team in one setting, the survey may be administered in shifts. It must, however, take place in a proctored setting and not via an email distribution of the Web link.

The online survey will be created using Qualtrics, SSL encryption, which is an optional feature of Qualtrics, will be employed to add a layer of security. Students first will enter the URL provided on the handout. After the FAR reads the scripted statement, the student-athletes will be asked to explicitly provide their informed consent by selecting a 'click to accept' box before they can enter the survey.

**Other Frequently Asked Questions****Describe the setting in which the research will be conducted (paper version).**

It is suggested that the administration of the paper survey take place in a classroom setting. The FAR on each campus is asked to administer the survey to the student-athletes. All staff from the

athletics department (e.g., coaches, trainers, etc.) will leave the room before the survey is distributed. The FAR will read the attached scripted statement to the student-athletes detailing the purpose of the study and the directions for completion of the survey. All student-athletes who are not yet 18 years of age (or the age of consent in the state the institution is located) will be excused from further participation and asked to leave the room.

**Describe the setting in which the research will be conducted (online version).**

It is suggested that the administration of the online survey take place in a classroom or computer lab setting. The FAR on each campus is asked to administer the survey to the student-athletes. All staff from the athletics department (e.g., coaches, trainers, etc.) will leave the room before the link to the online survey is distributed. The FAR will read the attached scripted statement to the student-athletes detailing the purpose of the study and the directions for completion of the survey. All student-athletes who are not yet 18 years of age (or the age of consent in the state the institution is located) will be excused from further participation and asked to leave the room.

**Is this a collaborative project?**

Yes. All 1,100+ schools participating in NCAA athletics are asked to participate. In studies conducted previously using similar methods, institutional response rates have tended to be 50-70 percent. The NCAA takes the lead in IRB review, but each FAR must submit to their campus IRB as required.

**What kind of training do NCAA Research staff have with regard to the protection of human subjects in research?**

All NCAA Research staff affiliated with this study have completed the Human Subjects Research Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE) Foundations training sponsored by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program. Certificates of completion are on file at the NCAA and can be shared upon request.

**Please explain how you intend to manage information obtained in multi-site research that could be relevant to the protection of research participants, such as reporting unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.**

In addition to reporting any unanticipated problems to their own campus IRBs, the survey administrators are instructed to also report any such incidents to the NCAA RRB. This will allow the NCAA RRB to track and correct unanticipated problems should they occur.

**Sampling**

**Explain your recruitment process and enrollment procedures.**

All active member institutions of the NCAA will be asked to participate and a sample of the student-athletes at each institution will be surveyed. This sampling plan was devised to achieve an appropriate representation of all NCAA student-athletes while minimizing the burden to institutions by asking that all student-athletes on not more than three teams be surveyed on any campus. The teams surveyed will be determined by a computer-generated random draw that is stratified by sport and NCAA competitive division. Schools may opt to replace teams only with the

assistance of NCAA research staff. The NCAA does its best to ensure that teams that have been recently sampled in other FAR-administered studies are not sampled again in this study.

The FAR will contact the coach and/or athletics department to arrange a time and place to administer the survey to all student-athletes on the sampled team(s).

### **Participants**

#### **Will the subject's identity remain anonymous, confidential or other?**

The identity of specific schools, teams and student participants will be strictly confidential. All results from this study will be reported in aggregate and in terms of national and subgroup (for example, sport, division, race/ethnicity, etc.) averages and trends. The identity of a particular school, team or student will not be made known at any point by the researchers.

#### **Does your research involve an investigation into legal matters, illegal activities, admissions of guilt, breaches of duties or noncompliant matters?**

No. The survey does not ask about illegal activities.

#### **Describe the informed consent process in detail.**

Paper administration: The participants will be read instructions that will make clear that they are consenting to participate by filling out the survey. The instructions on the survey also state that, by filling out the survey they are consenting to be a participant. A waiver of documentation of consent has been approved by the NCAA Research Review Board.

Online administration: Before entering the survey, participants will be asked to check a box that explicitly states they are giving their consent to participate in the study.

#### **Do you intend to obtain a Certificate of Confidentiality?**

No.

#### **Please explain how you intend to protect the privacy interests of participants during the research.**

Paper administration: We have attempted to be sensitive to these issues in designing the suggested procedures for administering and collecting the survey forms. Only the participant will handle the completed survey form until it is deposited and sealed in the return envelope that goes to the third-party data entry vendor.

Online administration: The online survey will be created using Qualtrics, whose servers are protected by high-end firewall systems, with scans performed regularly to ensure that vulnerabilities are quickly found and patched. Additionally, Qualtrics uses Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption for transmitted data and its services are hosted by trusted data centers that are independently audited using the industry standard SSAE-18 method.

**Please explain how you intend to protect the privacy interests of participants after their involvement in the research.**

Paper administration: Once the data are entered and checked, survey forms and any resulting images will be destroyed. Only NCAA researchers will have access to a database that contains identifying information. The main analysis database will be stripped of identifying information once any linkages to other data are made. Any data shared with researchers outside of the NCAA will be completely unidentifiable at the individual, team and school level. The NCAA will only publish aggregate information, no individual, team or school-level data will be published.

Online administration: Only NCAA researchers will have access to a database that contains identifying information. The main analysis database will be exported from Qualtrics and saved on a secure NCAA SharePoint site with restricted access and password protections before additional identifying information are merged into the dataset and the data are analyzed. Any data shared with researchers outside of the NCAA will be completely unidentifiable at the individual, team and school level. The NCAA will only publish aggregate information, no individual, team or school-level data will be published.

**Describe the procedure(s) in place for research participants to ask questions and voice concerns or complaints to the research investigator(s).**

Participants can report concerns or ask questions to the on-campus survey administrator, to NCAA researchers or to the NCAA RRB administrator. The contact information for these individuals is provided on the first page of the paper survey and on the informational handout sheet that includes the URL for the online administration.

**How do you intend to minimize the risks to the subjects?**

If any questions asked are disturbing to the student-athlete, they may stop responding to the survey at any time. Student-athletes who experience discomfort will be encouraged to contact their college student-health offices or one of the national hotlines listed on a contact sheet distributed at each site. The campus survey administrator is instructed to provide information on local mental health resources at the beginning of the survey administration.

The questions contained in this survey are generally not expected to cause psychological discomfort or pose more than minimal risk. The primary risk in this study relates to the possible violation of student-athlete confidentiality if survey administration procedures are not followed as designed. This risk is minimized if on-campus survey administrators adhere to study protocols.

**What benefits to society may result from this research?**

The 2024-25 NCAA GOALS study will provide NCAA policymakers and member institutions with detailed information on the athletics, academic and social experiences of student-athletes across all sports and NCAA divisions. It also will provide objective and attitudinal data from student-athletes on possible academic and social trade-offs they have made to participate in collegiate athletics. Among student-athletes allowing us to link their responses to academic data, we will be able to determine how non-academic factors predict college academic outcomes. In total, this study will provide a highly comprehensive national picture of student-athlete experiences and well-being.

**About the NCAA.**

The NCAA is a membership-led nonprofit association of colleges and universities committed to supporting academics and athletics opportunities for 520,000 student-athletes at nearly 1,100 member colleges and universities. Each year, approximately 60,000 student-athletes compete in NCAA championships in Division I, II and III sports.