Prevalence of Graduate Transfers in Division I

Division I student-athletes are earning their undergraduate degrees in record numbers and doing it more quickly than ever due to NCAA academic progress-toward-degree standards, expanded financial aid opportunities for summer coursework, and college credits earned while in high school. This has led to more student-athletes completing their undergraduate degree requirements before exhausting their athletics eligibility. These postgraduate students may continue to compete in NCAA sports if they enroll in graduate coursework or a second degree program. In 2018, 3,100 postgraduates—about 3% of Division I student-athletes—competed for Division I teams.

While most postgraduates remain at the same college, they are able to participate in athletics as a graduate student at another Division I college provided they meet certain criteria (NCAA Bylaw 14.6.1) or obtain an NCAA waiver. This so-called “graduate transfer” rule was intended to assist academically high-achieving students in pursuing a degree of interest that may not be offered at their undergraduate college. But it has become controversial in football and men’s basketball as data have shown that many graduate transfers in those two sports earn few graduate credits and leave school when their athletics eligibility expires.

How many graduate transfers are there? From 2013 to 2018, the number of such participants has more than doubled. However, there were only 599 graduate transfers identified in the 2018 Division I APR cohort out of nearly 112,000 Division I student-athletes, which equates to just over one-half of 1 percent.

Graduate transfers are most prevalent on a percentage basis in men’s basketball (2.6 percent of current players are graduate transfers), women’s basketball, football, and men’s and women’s track and field. Less than one percent of men’s football student-athletes were graduate transfers in 2018. However, the number of such cases has nearly tripled in the past five years. Trends across all Division I sports are shown in the full study results.

Changes in the Number of Division I Graduate Transfers (Men’s Sports, 2013-2018)

Changes in the Number of Division I Graduate Transfers (Women’s Sports, 2013-2018)

Download the full study results: Changes in the Number of Division I Graduate Transfers

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