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## **MSU and NCAA Certification**

by

Michael L. Kasavana, Ph.D., CHTP  
NAMA Professor in Hospitality Business  
Faculty Athletics Representative  
Michigan State University

In 1997 Michigan State University was among the first Big Ten schools to be awarded NCAA athletics certification. NCAA legislation mandates Division I members be re-certified every ten years. In addition, each institution is expected to complete an Interim Certification Report, as a measure of progress, at the midpoint of the ten-year cycle. While most academic units on the MSU campus have periodically undergone certification and accreditation reviews for several decades, NCAA certification is comparatively new having begun in the mid-1990s. What is the NCAA certification process, what is MSU doing to prepare for a 2004-05 review, and what are the possible outcomes?

### **Division I Certification**

The NCAA is divided into three membership divisions based upon the size and scope of an institution's athletic program. Michigan State University is a member of Division I. NCAA athletics certification is designed specifically for and applied only to Division I member institutions. Certification guidelines specify that once every ten years an institution shall complete a prescribed institutional self-study, verified and evaluated through an external peer-review process as administered by the NCAA Committee on Athletics Certification. With slightly more than three hundred Division I member institutions requiring re-certification every ten years, the NCAA committee and its ad hoc peer review teams remain very active. MSU filed its Interim NCAA Certification Report in spring 2000, and is scheduled for its second full certification cycle during the next academic year.

### **Program Purpose**

The NCAA certification program is designed to ensure integrity in an institution's athletics operations and to assist athletics departments in improving programs. NCAA Bylaw 33 focuses exclusively on athletics certification policy and procedures. The process involves preparation of a self-study report, while the procedures include an external peer review. The purpose of the peer review is to verify and evaluate the self-study report and

process.

Legislation mandating athletics certification was adopted in 1993 as part of the NCAA reform agenda. It is important to note that the certification process is separate from the NCAA enforcement program, which investigates allegations that member institutions have broken NCAA rules. By being independent of the enforcement process, a school's certification status does not guarantee that an institution's athletic program operates without NCAA violations. In other words, a certification decision does not exempt an institution from concurrent or subsequent enforcement proceedings.

### **External Peer Review**

The central purpose of the athletics certification program is to validate the fundamental integrity of member institutions' athletics programs through a process of self-study and peer review. An external peer review team is responsible for reviewing the institution's self-study report, conducting a campus visit, and offering feedback and commentary relative to program improvement. Basically, the peer review team focuses on the methodology and results of the school's self-study and gauges its relative success against other Division I programs.

In addition, the peer review team must document that the self-study process included campus-wide participation and that the resultant report accurately reflects the operation of the athletics program. Peer reviewers are expected to evaluate the institution's athletics program in relation to NCAA operating principles.

### **Operating Principles**

The certification self-study document is grouped into four major topic areas: (a) governance and commitment to rules compliance; (b) academic integrity; (c) fiscal integrity; and (d) equity, welfare, and sportsmanship. Each Division I member institution is required to address a formal set of objectives designed to enhance college athletic programs. The certification framework involves each institution developing specialty sub-committees, in each of the four major topic areas, to measure the effectiveness of the intercollegiate athletic program against its objectives.

### **Governance and Compliance**

The concept of governance encompasses the areas of institutional control and rules compliance. Institutional control, which deals specifically with institutional responsibility, requires a strong rules compliance effort. A

commitment to rules education together with an effective investigative and reporting process, are important governance components. Another major focus is internal and external organizational structure and lines of institutional authority relative to the athletics program. Specifically, the self-study process attempts to discern the role of the Board of Trustees, President, Athletic Director, Athletic Council, Faculty Athletics Representative and others in athletic department operations and policy-making.

### **Academic Integrity**

Student-athletes are an integral part of the student body. The area of academic integrity includes an analysis of the admission policies governing regular and special admission of students and student-athletes. Such performance comparisons as: average academic admission profiles, classroom delinquency, continuing academic eligibility standards, patterns of course enrollments, and comparative graduation data (of student-athletes and non-student-athletes) are mandatory. Also, student-athlete academic and supportive services are included in the certification reviewed.

### **Fiscal Integrity**

A financial analysis of intercollegiate athletics involves an analysis of the sources and uses of athletics department funds. A study of athletic program revenues and expenditures, and the internal and external management of such funds, is an essential portion of the certification process. In addition, adherence to established accounting principles, policies, procedures and audit practices are important elements of financial integrity. A fiscal analysis should project control over all money matters.

### **Equity and Welfare**

Certification equity topics include gender-equity, minority-equity, and student-athlete welfare. Gender-equity includes adherence to legal and moral standards governing fair treatment without gender bias. Minority-equity specifically addresses the recruitment, treatment, and retention of minorities within the intercollegiate athletics community. Student-athlete welfare involves a comparison of student-athletes with the general student body and an evaluation of student-athlete welfare. The objective being to ensure student-athletes are treated in a manner consistent with the rest of the student body. In addition, there must also be an appeals process that provides a fair opportunity for student-athlete issues to be amicably resolved.

### **Certification Decision**

A certification decision is based upon the institution's self-study report, peer review team report, and judgment of the NCAA Committee on Athletics Certification. As an outcome of the certification process, an institution can be certified, certified with conditions or not certified. A designation of certified means that an institution has shown that it operates its athletics program in substantial conformity with NCAA Division I operating principles. A designation of certified with conditions means that a school generally operates its athletics program in substantial conformity but problems were identified that were serious enough that full certification is withheld until such problems are resolved. An institution given the certification status of certified with conditions or not certified must take corrective action, within a specified time, before its certification status can be changed. If an institution fails to make an effective effort to correct problems within its established timeframe, the institution may be placed in a restricted membership category or be reclassified.

### **MSU Steering Committee**

With second cycle certification rapidly approaching, MSU has formulated a steering committee to oversee preparation of a self-study report. The steering committee consists of a diverse array of faculty, staff, student-athletes, and administration from across campus. The group will meet with NCAA representatives in Winter 2004 to officially begin the certification process. Approximately one year later the self-study report, peer reviewer visit, and final certification decision will be rendered.