

March 30, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Grace Calhoun [Chair]
NCAA Division I Council
P.O. Box 6222
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Dear Ms. Calhoun:

This letter is to provide feedback to the NCAA Division I Council regarding Division I Proposal Number 2019-23 (Athletics—Eligibility—Seasons of Competition: Five-Year Rule – Waiver Criteria—Redshirt During Any Year). LEAD1 is the association that represents the athletic directors of the 130 member universities of the NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS). To best provide comment, we created a working group comprised of selected member athletics directors as well as other senior athletics staff.

We are very supportive of Division I Proposal No. 2019-23. Per current NCAA rules, a student-athlete must complete his or her seasons of competition within five calendar years, however, a five-year rule waiver may be granted. This waiver provides a student-athlete with the opportunity to participate in four seasons of intercollegiate competition beyond that five-year period (e.g., clock extension) if a student-athlete did not use a season of intercollegiate competition in his or her initial year of full-time collegiate enrollment due to an institutional decision to redshirt the student-athlete and the student-athlete lost another season for reasons outside his or her control. Proposal No. 2019-23 would eliminate the requirement that a student-athlete must be in his or her initial year of full-time, collegiate enrollment to satisfy the redshirt criteria of a five-year rule waiver.

We believe that all student-athletes should be allowed a redshirt year (where a student-athlete's participation is delayed or suspended to lengthen their period of eligibility) at any stage of his or her undergraduate career. The current rule incorrectly assumes that all redshirt situations occur during a student-athlete's initial year of enrollment.

In fact, often times, coaching staff decisions to redshirt a student-athlete are situational and made regardless of the student-athlete's year in school. For example, in one hypothetical situation, a coach could decide to redshirt (e.g., sit) a student-athlete in his or her sophomore year and that student-athlete could have been injured his or her entire freshman year. That student-athlete would not get a five-year rule waiver. If, however, the student-athlete was redshirted his or her freshman year and injured the following year (the opposite situation), he or she would have been granted the five-year rule waiver (when, in both situations, the circumstances were beyond the control of the student-athlete). In another example, a student-athlete could have played his or her entire freshman year and then the institution could make a coaching change before that student-athlete's sophomore year. The new coach could then decide to redshirt that student-athlete in his or her sophomore year to adjust to a new system. In this situation, proposal No. 2019-23 would allow that student-athlete, the same opportunity to get a sixth year (and thereby use his or her fourth year of eligibility), if he or she gets injured and misses another year during the five-year clock.

In addition, given that proposal No. 2019-23 would maintain the requirement that a student-athlete must have had a separate denied participation opportunity (non-redshirt year) to qualify for the five-year rule waiver, expanding the waiver criteria would have minimal budgetary impact, as it is unlikely that a student-athlete would have both a redshirt year and a separate denied participation opportunity. Further, while there are always possible unintended consequences of any rule change (such as a student-athlete attempting to manipulate his or her individual seasons of eligibility (i.e., a student-athlete refuses to play in his or her last season to get a redshirt year and then transfer)), overall, the benefits of this proposal still greatly support student-athlete well-being.

It is also worth mentioning that our working group is interested in exploring an alternative concept, which would permit five seasons of competition for all student-athletes (regardless of injuries or other situations;

which would effectively eliminate the redshirting concept and shorten the NCAA rulebook). We are happy to further explore this concept for the next NCAA legislative cycle. Regardless, we thank our co-chairs and their committee members for their effort on this issue, and, again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to the NCAA Division I Council.

Sincerely,

Tom McMillen
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