NCAA Issues Stiff Sanctions Against GSU for Unethical Conduct

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On July 7, 2016, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) issued a Public Infractions Decision against Georgia Southern University (GSU) in connection with allegations of academic violations involving two GSU staff members and three football players during 2013 and 2014.

The first instance of academic violations occurred in 2013 when an assistant compliance director gave a flash drive to a football student-athlete containing her coursework for a class she had previously completed, but in which the student-athlete was then enrolled. The student-athlete copied work from the flash drive and submitted it as his own. After the plagiarized work was discovered by the professor, the assistant compliance director and the student-athlete concocted a story that student had taken the flash drive without the assistant compliance director's knowledge. However, the truth came out when the student-athlete admitted his actions. The second instance occurred in 2014 when GSU discovered that an assistant director of student-athlete services had drafted and submitted five extra credit assignments on behalf of two football student-athletes in a course they were both failing, without the student-athletes' knowledge.

The NCAA Division I Committee on Infractions found that the staff members' actions constituted Level I violations, which are deemed severe breaches of conduct that seriously undermine or threaten the integrity of the NCAA collegiate model. The Committee noted that both of the staff members had engaged in unethical conduct by providing student-athletes with impermissible academic assistance, and that the assistant compliance director engaged in further prohibited conduct by influencing a student-athlete to lie during an investigation, and by failing to cooperate with the investigation.

Based on its findings, the Committee issued significant penalties against GSU and its football program including, among others, a public reprimand and censure, two years of probation, vacated all wins in which the student-athletes competed during the seasons in which they received impermissible academic assistance, a fine in the amount of $5,000 plus an amount equal to 1% of the football program's operating budget, the loss of two scholarships, and a reduction of the football program's recruiting visits and evaluations equal to 10% of the average for the previous four years.

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Client Tip: *Institutions should take action to implement comprehensive education programs for athletics staff and student-athletes concerning NCAA legislation and prohibited conduct as well as the Institution's commitment to compliance.*

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