

NCAA Division I Age-Based Collegiate Eligibility Model

Background.

The following document provides general background information on the current Division I eligibility rules as well as the age-based collegiate eligibility model. The age-based model provides predictable boundaries for eligibility that closely track the typical trajectory of collegiate athletics participation in terms of attendance and degree completion. Supporting the five calendar years of Division I collegiate eligibility, NCAA Division I Academic Performance Program data indicates that of the Division I student-athletes who earned their bachelor's degree in 2024, 98 percent did so within five years or fewer, while 72 percent graduated in four years or fewer. Further, although there are some individual sport outliers, the five-year average of APP data demonstrates that the average age of first-year Division I student-athletes is 18.7. (Source: APP data collection, 2023-24)

Aligned with the existing NCAA core guarantees, including scholarship protections, health care and medical services, degree completion support, academic support, career counseling and life skills education, the age-based collegiate eligibility model ensures consistent standards across Division I. Potential implementation scenarios for the age-based collegiate eligibility model are included for reference.

Current Eligibility Model.

Under current rules, after timely high school graduation, a prospective student-athlete is afforded a "grace period" during which they may continue to participate in organized competition prior to their initial full-time collegiate enrollment without any impact on their collegiate athletics eligibility. The grace period varies by sport. For sports other than tennis, skiing, and men's ice hockey, the grace period is 12 months. The tennis grace period is six months. For men's ice hockey and skiing, the grace period extends through the prospective student-athlete's 21st birthday. If a prospective student-athlete continues to participate in organized competition beyond the grace period, they may be subject to the loss of a season of competition for every year they continued to compete while not enrolled in a collegiate institution. The application of these rules is referred to as "delayed enrollment."

Once enrolled full time, Division I student-athletes are permitted to compete in four seasons of competition within a continuous period of five calendar years. The five-year period begins when the student-athlete first enrolls in a minimum full-time program of studies at any collegiate institution.

There are also various waiver provisions that either extend the student-athlete's five-year period of eligibility or restore used seasons when a student-athlete participates in a limited number of competitions due to medical or other extenuating circumstances. There are also several legislated exceptions that either pause the five-year period or allow a student-athlete to compete without using a season of competition.

Age-Based Collegiate Eligibility Model.

Under the Division I Age-Based Collegiate Eligibility Model, Division I student-athletes would have five calendar years of collegiate eligibility beginning at the start of the regular academic year immediately following, whichever occurs first:

- The student-athlete's 19th birthday;
- The student-athlete's actual high school graduation date; or
- The student-athlete's expected high school graduation date based on the first year of high school enrollment.

Notably, if a student-athlete enrolls full-time in any collegiate institution (e.g., international or domestic) before any of these events are triggered, their five calendar years of collegiate eligibility starts upon enrollment.

The age-based collegiate eligibility model would eliminate seasons of competition. Existing "redshirt" exceptions in football and wrestling would no longer be relevant because student-athletes would be permitted to compete in the maximum number of contests within the five calendar years of eligibility. The model also eliminates waivers previously used to extend

the period of eligibility (extensions and athletics activity waivers) or to restore used seasons (medical hardship and season-of-competition waivers).

The only legislated exceptions that would remain would be those that are narrow and clearly defined (e.g., pregnancy, religious missions, and active-duty military service). Further, all current rules regarding delayed enrollment would be removed, simplifying the eligibility process for student-athletes and member institutions.

Implementation Scenarios.

The following are potential implementation scenarios for the age-based collegiate eligibility model:

Student-Athlete Cohort	Which eligibility model applies?
Student-athletes who enrolled full-time at any collegiate institution prior to the 2026-27 academic year (e.g., two-year, international, Division II/III).	
Student-athletes with eligibility remaining (time left in their period of eligibility and seasons of competition remaining).	Either the current rules OR new age-based model (whichever is most beneficial). <i>*Any waivers based on the current legislation must be submitted no later than July 31, 2026, and will not be available for competition or extenuating circumstances occurring beyond the 2025-26 academic year. Waivers to establish eligibility for the 2027-28 academic year and beyond will not be prioritized or actively reviewed by staff.</i>
Student-athletes who exhausted eligibility in 2025-26 (no time left in their period of eligibility and no seasons of competition remaining).	Current rules; no longer eligible.
Student-athletes who used final season of competition during 2025-26 but have time remaining in their period of eligibility.	Current rules; no longer eligible.

2026-27 Academic Year Initial Full-Time Enrollees at any Collegiate Institution.	
Spring 2026 high school graduates who enroll full time fall 2026.	Age-based model.
Prospective student-athletes who graduated prior to spring 2026 and are subject to delayed enrollment conditions.	The prospective student-athlete’s eligibility would be evaluated by the NCAA Eligibility Center during the certification process, which occurs prior to enrollment. The Eligibility Center would apply either the current delayed enrollment rules or the age-based model, whichever is more beneficial to the prospective student-athlete, to determine Division I collegiate eligibility.
Prospective student-athletes who graduated from high school prior to spring 2026 and are <u>NOT</u> subject to delayed enrollment conditions.	Age-based model. (Five-year window would begin upon initial full-time enrollment in fall 2026 or spring 2027).

Fall 2027 and Later Initial Full-Time Enrollees at any Collegiate Institution.

<p>Spring 2027 high school graduates who enroll full time directly after high school graduation.</p>	<p>Age-based model only.</p>
<p>Spring 2026 high school graduates in sports other than tennis (including skiing and men’s ice hockey) who delay college enrollment for one year or in tennis who delay college enrollment for six months (regardless of whether student-athlete competes during the delay).</p>	<p>Age-based model applies; however, would receive the benefit of a one-year grace period in sports other than tennis (including skiing and men’s ice hockey) or the six-month grace period in tennis.</p>
<p>Prospective student-athletes who graduated prior to spring 2026 and are subject to delayed enrollment conditions.</p>	<p>The prospective student-athlete’s eligibility would be evaluated by the Eligibility Center during the certification process, which occurs prior to enrollment. The Eligibility Center would apply either the current delayed enrollment rules or the age-based model, whichever is more beneficial to the prospective student-athlete, to determine Division I collegiate eligibility.</p>