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Harvard basketball team's academic performance hits low as play sees record success

Posted by Matt Rocheleau September 13, 2013 10:55 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The academic performance of Harvard University's men's basketball program has dropped dramatically over the past several seasons while the team has seen rising success on the court.

Harvard's latest progress rate score was its lowest since the NCAA grading system was implemented a decade ago, records released this summer show. It was the worst mark among the eight Ivy League schools and was below average compared to all other Division 1 teams at private colleges nationally, according to the [NCAA reports](#), which were released in June and show data for the 2011-2012 season.

[Bloomberg first reported Friday](#) that Harvard basketball's academic scores area nearing levels low enough that they may jeopardize the team's NCAA eligibility.

To compete in the 2013-14 postseason, teams must post either a 900 four-year average score or a 930 average for the two most recent years. Next season, the benchmark will increase, requiring a four-year score of at least 930 or a two-year average of 940.

The Crimson's four-year average score was 956, according to NCAA reports. Over the past two years, Harvard's average score is 919.5.

The NCAA defines a score of 930 as about the equivalent of a 50 percent graduation rate.

Teams that fall below the NCAA's minimum standard for academic performance can be subject to penalties beyond ineligibility to compete in the postseason, including restrictions on practicing and playing in games, reduced financial aid and coach suspensions.

Harvard's most recent four-year score was down from a mark of 991 just two seasons prior and a high of 995 for the 2007-08 season.

The university's latest four-year average was also 25 points lower than Columbia University, which posted the second-worst four-year average among Ivy League schools, and 11 points below the four-year average for all private schools in the country is 967.

Cornell led all Ivy League basketball schools with a perfect four-year score of 1000.

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Officials from Harvard and the NCAA did not immediately respond to requests for comment Friday.

Bloomberg reported that Harvard athletics spokesman Tim Williamson emailed a statement to the publication saying: "Harvard has maintained our high academic standards for all students and student athletes. The Ivy League has the most rigorous academic requirements of any athletic conference, and we are in full compliance with those standards."

Williamson told Bloomberg that Harvard has calculated that its basketball team will receive a perfect or near-perfect academic progress rate score this season

"This strong score will reaffirm the program's continued commitment to academic achievement and ensure the team's continued postseason eligibility," he told Bloomberg in the statement.

The recent [cheating scandal](#) at Harvard, which led to students withdrawing from the university including [two men's basketball co-captains](#), may account for some of the drop in the team's academic scores, though that is not clear.

Bloomberg also reported that the drop in the team's academic performance began at the same time as the arrival of Harvard coach Tommy Amaker, who has been criticized in recent years for recruiting players to Harvard with a lower academic standing that the university had traditionally brought.

In the 2010-11 season, Harvard was the Ivy League co-champion with Princeton. It was the first time the Harvard had ever even shared the title of league champion. The following season, Harvard won the league outright and made it to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1946.

Last season, Harvard won the Ivy League again and, in a major upset as a No. 14 seed, [defeated](#) the third-seeded New Mexico in the first round of the NCAA Tournament, before [falling](#) to the No. 6 seed, Arizona.

The university unveiled a 10-year master plan last fall that includes a [proposal to build a new basketball arena](#) at Harvard's campus in the Allston neighborhood of Boston.

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