



## Journalism and the NCAA:

# Do we have all the write stuff?

*It sounded like a good idea: The NCAA set up a clearinghouse to study each high school's course offerings to ensure incoming freshman athletes really have what it takes to make it in college. But when some of the nation's top journalism programs were rejected for not containing enough English, JEA investigated further. The following includes an explanation of how initial eligibility and the clearinghouse work, a first-hand account of dealing with the NCAA, and some tips on how to make your courses acceptable.*

# NCAA questions content of journalism courses

"English core courses must have 75 percent of their work in grammar, vocabulary development, composition, literature, analytical reading or oral communication."

**NCAA Standards for Evaluating Courses**

by Candace Perkins Bowen  
*JEA President, MJE*

**H**igh school athletes are starting to take a closer look at their course selections, and what they're finding isn't good news for journalism teachers.

The students' new concern began when the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) started relying on its Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse (see following story) to check out high school courses for those who intend to compete at Division I or Division II colleges.

This new set-up, plus an increase in the number of core courses needed to be eligible for collegiate athletics, has journalism courses subjected to closer scrutiny. Do they meet the requirements of an English core course? Lately the answer from the Clearinghouse has often been, "no."

The real problem has come with newspaper and yearbook production courses because the NCAA Academic Requirements Committee believes these do not contain what's needed for an English Core Course.

Although information going to all high schools from the NCAA states, "The principal of the high school you graduated from decides whether a course qualifies as a core course," it adds, "The NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse is responsible for verifying that the information from your high school is valid."

What would make your journalism course "valid"?

According to NCAA

spokesperson Bob Oliver, who presented his group's rationale to the JEA Board at its meeting in Kansas City last November, English courses must have 75 percent of the instructional content in grammar, vocabulary development, composition, literature, analytical reading or oral communication."

Classes with names like English I or American literature in a school's list wouldn't be questioned, but journalism courses are, Oliver said. When the Clearinghouse questions a course, the school must then submit a course description, syllabus and table of contents from the text.

"At first blush, many journalism course descriptions don't appear to have 75 percent of their instruction in these areas," Oliver said. "When they list things like 'production' or selling advertising, the Clearinghouse doesn't count them as core English courses."

"Write your [course] descriptions carefully," Oliver warned.

**Y**et JEA Board members, presented with samples of both courses that were approved and those that were not, questioned Oliver further.

"How could you produce a publication without spending 75 percent of your time on English skills?" asked JEA vice president H.L. Hall, whose newspaper and yearbook production courses both were rejected by the NCAA. (See following story)

Their course titles are the names of the two publications, and Oliver conceded this probably had something to do with the Clearinghouse's decision to refuse to count them as English courses.

Even an appeal from Hall's school district, the next step in the process, did no good.

"Just because the Clearinghouse rejects a course doesn't mean it isn't valuable," Oliver said. He cited other high school courses frequently questioned.

**E**conomics with content covering traditional topics like GNP and the law of supply and demand would be approved with little question, but consumer economics, which teaches "such things as how to balance your checkbook" wouldn't fulfill a core course requirement, Oliver said.

"Administrators are under tremendous pressure to get their courses accepted," Dr. Jerry Kingston, chairman of the Academic Requirements Committee, said.

"The more information you send us [if you are appealing], the better," he said, suggesting a syllabus showing allocation of time, assignments, exams, textbooks, a complete description of the nature of the work.

JEA Board members also expressed concern about Clearinghouse members' experience in classrooms. Scholastic Press Rights Commission Chair John Bowen questioned their knowledge of what really goes on in today's high school journalism programs and urged they be encouraged to visit the sites of some journalism programs.

Educating members of the NCAA's Academic Requirements Committee is one of JEA's plans. Board members are preparing a packet of material to go to Kingston.

If his committee and its

Clearinghouse can't get into schools to understand the English skills students practice and master while working on publications, perhaps JEA can raise their awareness this way.

Another approach is educating JEA members about the problem. In addition to tips in the following article, JEA will offer a session on how to write course descriptions at the April JEA/NSPA convention in San Francisco.

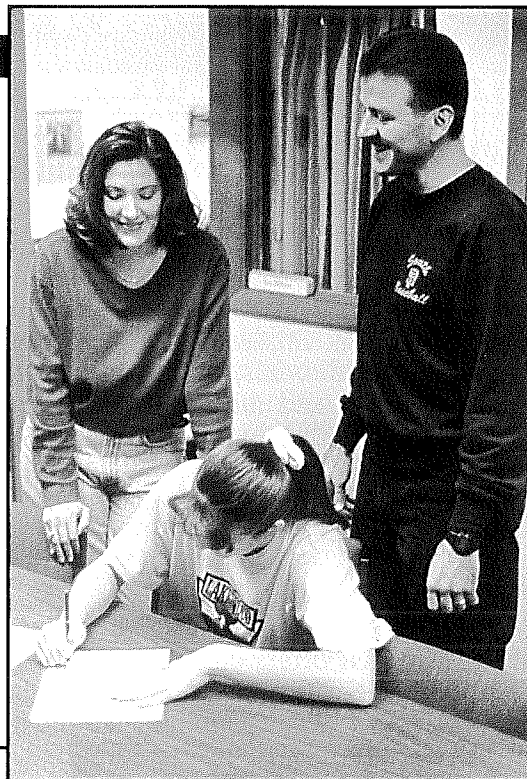
"It takes a long time to change this kind of thing in some districts," C:JET editor and high school vice principal Molly Clemons said.

That's even more reason

for journalism teachers to be sure they have described "all the write stuff" when it comes to their productions classes.

**SENIOR** Danielle Mueller signs a national letter of intent to Western Michigan as her father Joe Mueller and stepmother Renee Mueller look on. Mueller's English courses did not include journalism.

*photo by Chris Busta-Peck, Lakewood (Ohio) High School*



*It could happen to anyone*

## Vice president Hall's courses rejected

by H.L. Hall

*JEA Vice President, MJE*

**I**t was a shocking development! After years of students telling me they had learned more about writing on the *Call* (school newspaper) and *Pioneer* (school yearbook) than they had in any other class, the NCAA ruled neither class was acceptable as an English-core class.

I have since learned the NCAA apparently rejected both courses because the word "production" was included in the course description for each. Apparently, the NCAA had automatically assumed since design was part of each class, neither would have 75 percent of its content in grammar, vocabulary development, composition, literature, analytical reading or oral communication.

I can only assume this was why the NCAA ruled as it did, because it offered no written explanation for the rejections.

The Kirkwood School District

appealed the decision, but once again the NCAA rejected the courses. The district had pointed out all students on each staff are required to write -- even the photographers -- but that fact apparently made no difference.

After I learned several journalism classes around the country met the same fate, I asked JEA to take a stand. At the 1995 spring meeting in San Diego, I helped draft a resolution urging the NCAA to take a closer look at all journalism courses, including production courses.

Following that meeting, I decided to make my own appeal to the NCAA. I mailed copies of the newspaper and the yearbook to them, and I explained the heavy writing in both classes.

Once again, the NCAA rejected my request. This time, however, a spokesperson indicated an individual could not make an appeal -- only the school district. The NCAA had returned the publications without looking at them.

It was not until the fall JEA meeting in Kansas City that I learned the apparent reason the NCAA had

rejected *Call* and *Pioneer* as core English classes. To begin with, the course titles were the names of the publications. These titles alone were apparently a red flag. In addition, the course descriptions did include the word "production."

It seemed if the course titles were changed, and if the word "production" were dropped from the course descriptions, both courses might be accepted.

I really don't see the necessity to do either. I realize the NCAA probably does not have the manpower to observe journalism classes in every district in the country, but I do think it should listen to a school district when it makes an appeal.

There has to be some trust, and if a district says 75 percent of a course's curriculum does include a heavy emphasis on the development of writing skills, then the clearinghouse should listen.

I am rewriting the course descriptions for the classes at Kirkwood High School. If the NCAA approves them this time, it will be another shocking development!

## Course descriptions the NCAA rejected

**Journalism:** This course introduces students to the concepts and characteristics of journalistic expression. Students write, edit, revise, and proofread editorials, features, news articles, sports articles, and magazine articles. This course will also produce the monthly school newspaper. Word processing and desktop publishing will be integrated throughout the course.

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**Journalism:** This course is an advanced writing course that offers students the chance to gain practical, hands-on experience in publishing the school newspaper while gaining a general understanding of print journalism as a multifaceted medium. Students will be required to submit news, feature, sports, and editorial stories for publication. Also required will be advertising sales and a division of duties for the layout of the paper, both under close supervision of the adviser. Only those juniors and seniors with demonstrated aptitude for writing and recommendation from their English teachers will be admitted.

## Course descriptions the NCAA accepted

**Journalism** is geared to the highly motivated student who desires a firm background in journalistic technique. The course covers the essential ingredients of newspaper writing: the news story, the feature column, the review, the editorial. In addition, composing advertising copy, proof reading, editing and newspaper layout will be covered. Writing in this course is done on the word processor.

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**Journalistic Writing:** Familiarizes the student with the various fields of journalism and with journalism as a career. This course stresses techniques of observation, interviewing, reporting, and news writing. Students will learn how to write various types of news stories. The course will prepare those students who wish to write for the school newspaper.

## Clearinghouse: NCAA streamlines national system to check eligibility requirements

by **Ben Hutchinson**  
*Park College Freshman*

**T**he new National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse, in its first year of existence, has benefited several Mexico (Mo.) High School athletes in their quest to pursue college sports.

Registering with the new Clearinghouse is a required step for high school athletes to make the process of scouting prospects easier for the NCAA's Division I and Division II colleges.

The Clearinghouse is basically an information center to which high school seniors send material to prove their eligibility. As a central point for processing, the NCAA believes the Clearinghouse, operated by the ACT company, will eliminate duplication and streamline the certification process.

Students pay \$18 to get their names and personal information in the Clearinghouse. This pays for the work the Clearinghouse does to match the transcript with the school's core classes, a process based on information high schools submit.

Every U.S. high school sends a Form 48-H to the Clearinghouse, listing each course offering to meet NCAA core course guidelines. Transcripts of students seeking NCAA eligibility are then evaluated against their own high school's validated core course data.

As soon as the Clearinghouse receives all necessary forms from the student and school, it certifies eligibility, with final eligibility coming after high school graduation.

*This is a condensed version of an article Hutchinson wrote for The Bulldog's Growl at Mexico (Mo.) Senior High School, Feb. 11, 1994.*

## Teachers must read between lines

by **Candace Perkins Bowen**  
*JEA President, MJE*

**D**on't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting we lie and cheat so high school athletes will be able to use our journalism courses for NCAA eligibility. But we can do some things to help.

JEA's first step is to convince the Academic Requirements Committee automatically throwing out all production courses is wrong. We know how much English they contain, so we have to help them see that, too.

This education process won't happen overnight — if it happens at all. In the meantime,

studying what has and what has not been accepted as a core course reveals some tips for rewriting our descriptions.

- Don't emphasize "production" in your write-up.
- Don't mention the name of the publication and, by all means, don't use it as the course title.
- Do emphasize the writing. Be as specific as possible about all kinds of writing students will use.
- Describe such things as advertising in terms of their English skills — oral communication to sell ads, connotation to write them, etc.
- Name your course Journalistic Writing . . . after all, it is.