

January 28, 2015

Dr. David P. Svaldi, President
Adams State University
208 Edgemont Blvd.
Alamosa, CO 81101

Dear President Svaldi:

The attached recent articles from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* describe occurrences where athletes were advised to enroll in distance education on-line and correspondence courses at Adams State University (“Adams State”), and were assisted inappropriately in their enrollment and completion of the courses. While the Commission is not reaching any judgment at this time on your institution based on the references in these articles, they do create cause for concern, especially since similar types of issues were raised two years ago about Adams State by the same publication.

In particular, we have concerns about the academic integrity, rigor and currency of your on-line and correspondence courses; the type and level of evaluation of students in these courses; and the reputation these courses have for poor academic quality and outcomes, which has led them to be difficult or impossible for students to transfer to other regionally accredited institutions. In addition, there are some Federal Compliance questions that are raised as they relate to your institution’s practices regarding student verification and security of their accounts; the oversight of proctors and monitoring of exams for the courses; and the appropriateness of the credit hours awarded for these courses given the questions about the quality of the courses. Finally, it has also been brought to our attention that the NCAA has contacted Adams State and is under review for these issues as they relate to the eligibility of the athletes involved.

These areas of concern raise questions about the University’s compliance with HLC’s Criterion Two (Integrity: Ethical and Responsible Conduct), particularly Core Components 2.A. (The institution operates with integrity in its financial, academic, personnel, and auxiliary functions; it establishes and follows policies and processes for fair and ethical behavior on the part of the governing board, administration, faculty, and staff); 2.B. (The institution presents itself clearly and completely to its students and to the public with regard to its program, requirements, faculty and staff, costs to students, control, and accreditation relationships); and 2.E. (The institution’s policies and procedures call for responsible acquisition, discovery and application of knowledge by its faculty, students, and staff.) In addition, the institution’s conformity with Assumed Practice B. (Teaching and Learning) 1.E. (Courses that carry academic credit toward college-level credentials have content and rigor appropriate to higher education) is also in question.

Lastly, the institution's compliance with Commission Policy FDCR.A. 10.020 (Assignment of Credits, Program Length, and Tuition), and Commission Policy FDCR.S.10.050 (Practices for Verification of Student Identity), which are policies that outline some of the Commission's requirements to ensure that its affiliated institutions comply with federal regulations, are also in question.

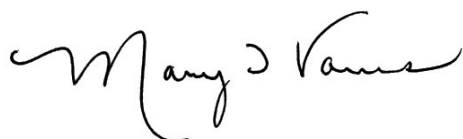
Commission policy 3.6(b), Special Monitoring, provides for the scheduling of special monitoring of an institution when a situation appears to threaten the integrity of the institution or the quality of the education it provides or raise serious issues about the institution's compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation and related Commission requirements. Special monitoring may take place through the filing of a report or through an on-site evaluation visit, known as an Advisory Visit to the President and the Commission. In line with that policy and in light of the concerns and questions listed above, the College should prepare a detailed report addressing the specific Core Components, Assumed Practices, and Federal Compliance Requirements identified in this letter as they relate to the online and correspondence discussed in the article.

In order to clarify the scope and impact of this issue, the report should detail the steps being taken by the institution to review and resolve serious concerns related to these courses. The report should also provide evidence of the institution's practices related to student verification and security of testing and evaluation protocols, proctor selection and test administration protocol; the academic content and integrity of the courses to ensure currency of the content and appropriateness of the evaluation protocols; the appropriateness of the credit hour assignments related to these courses; and a review of the quality of the on-line and correspondence courses and how they align with the University's policies related to transfer of credits and articulation with other institutions. Finally, include in the report information about any other inquiries or investigations being conducted by the state or any entity related to these particular courses, handling of student athletics, or related matters.

We would ask that you continue to keep the Commission apprised of the on-going investigation being conducted by NCAA as it relates the issues identified in this correspondence. This report should be submitted to the Commission office no later than February 27, 2015. Following receipt of this report, the Commission will determine whether further scrutiny, including the possibility of an onsite visit, is warranted.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mary I. Vanis". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Mary I. Vanis, Ed.D.
Vice President for Accreditation Relations

cc: Frank Novotny, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Adams State University
Margaret Doell, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs and ALO, Adams State University
Karen Solinski, Vice President for Legal and Governmental Affairs, Higher Learning Commission
Barbara Gellman-Danley, President, Higher Learning Commission

Attachments:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Confessions-of-a-Fixer/150891/>

<http://chronicle.com/article/What-One-College-Did-to-Crack/150893/>

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CONFESSIONS OF A HACKER

How one former coach perpetuated a cheating scheme that benefited hundreds of college athletes



A onetime academic adviser, tutor, and college-basketball coach says that for 14 years he has helped athletes obtain their NCAA eligibility through shoddy classes and fraudulent tests.

By [Brad Wolverton](#)

Photos by Benjamin Rusnak for *The Chronicle*


December 30, 2014

F

ifteen miles from his home, tucked in a corner of a 10-by-10 storage unit, under an antique table, is a gray filing cabinet. Locked inside he keeps the test answers for more than a dozen online courses.

Among his files is a pink steno pad of names, covering the front and back of 80 pages, that includes some of the biggest stars in college sports. Next to the names are credit-card numbers and PINs, log-ins, passwords, Social Security numbers, and addresses.

The handwritten notes, by a onetime academic adviser and college-basketball coach, are part of an elaborate scheme. Over the past 14 years, he says, he has used test keys to cheat for hundreds of athletes, helping them meet the eligibility requirements of the National Collegiate Athletic Association.


 For some players, he says, he did their work outright. For others, he provided homework answers and papers that the students would submit themselves. At exam time, he lined up proctors and conspired with them to lie on behalf of students.

Many times, he says, the players' coaches directed athletes his way. Sometimes, players' parents or handlers arranged the details.

He did most of his work in college basketball, but he has also helped football players, baseball players, and golfers, among others. The vast majority of his clients never made it big. But, according to records he shared with *The Chronicle*, his fraud reached the highest levels. A handful of the players listed in his notes were drafted to play in the NBA. At least two are the children of former professional athletes. One is a back-up catcher in Major League Baseball.

The fixer's name is Mr. White. He spoke to *The Chronicle* on the condition that his first name not be used, for fear of retribution. He is a married, 42-year-old father of two. Over a nearly 20-year career, he worked for four colleges, from the mid-Atlantic region to the South.

His side business was lucrative. One year, he says, he made more than \$40,000 arranging classes. But he says money wasn't his motive.


 Part of it was about the players. He believes that many would not have earned a major-college scholarship without his help.

The other part was about his career. He wanted a big-time coaching job, and he figured this could give him exposure to many programs.

He has met plenty of Division I coaches; he has three phones filled

with their numbers. He thought he was their friend, that they would return the favors. They gave him VIP tickets, he says, and paid him back through camp appearances. But when it came time to hire, they didn't want him in their club.

Two years ago, the NCAA investigated Mr. White and five colleges that had recruited his students. Former NCAA investigators say they knew his players' classes were a sham. But because the NCAA could find no wrongdoing by the colleges themselves, the investigation fizzled.

For Mr. White, the ordeal drove home the reality that he could be exposed. It also helped him realize the error of his way, he says, and made him want to atone for his mistakes.  Among his regrets is that many students he set out to help were the ones most hurt. He agreed to tell his story in part to expose flaws in the system.

The Chronicle contacted more than two dozen people with alleged connections to the fraud, including coaches, players, parents, and proctors. Many would not talk on the record, for fear of losing their jobs or harming their reputations. But many corroborated key details on which this article is based.

Mr. White may be an extreme example, but his breaches illustrate the ease with which intercollegiate athletics can be exploited, its

rules manipulated, and the inability of colleges and regulators to control it.

In the wake of revelations about [widespread academic impropriety](#) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, colleges are facing increased scrutiny over academic violations. Cheating and deception, including cases previously unreported, lurk throughout college sports. Last spring a former assistant basketball coach in the Southeastern Conference attempted to pass online test answers to a former colleague, according to a director of academic support with knowledge of the situation. A coach in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference told *The Chronicle* how he had helped players trick webcams set up to monitor their online exams. And a former Division I assistant described how he had spent years handing players the answers to online tests.

As for Mr. White, he says he is largely out of the business. But several months ago, he got a call from a high-profile basketball coach. A player needed nine credits in one week. Could he help?

T

hat's how it started: Someone needed a favor. In the early 2000s, Mr. White was working in student services at a community college and

serving as an assistant coach and tutor for the basketball team.

During the 2001-2 season, he says, he mentioned his tutoring job to an opposing team's coach, who asked him for an assist. Among the more than 100,000 athletes who land NCAA scholarships every year, many need help meeting [the association's academic requirements](#). The NCAA requires athletes to have certain test scores and high-school grades, in part to ensure that players can do college-level work. But when people cheat to meet the standards, they undermine the notion of eligibility.

Mr. White's first client, who was being recruited by top Division I programs, was having trouble with an online mathematics class. Mr. White says he spent several days with the player, completing homework assignments and quizzes for an independent-study class at [Brigham Young University](#).

[They finished about half the course that week,](#) Mr. White says. He wrote down the player's online log-in and password, and completed the rest by himself.

The setup was so simple, Mr. White decided to use it again. Later that season he helped many of his own players pick up easy BYU credits. He began to wonder: If he could do this for one team, why not more?

By the summer of 2002, he was showing up at tournaments with a roster full of players for whom he had completed work. He was making a name for himself, says one longtime Division I assistant. If your kids' classes needed fixing, Mr. White was your man.

Before long, he got his first big-time referral: A coach in the Atlantic Coast Conference was recruiting one of the top junior-college players in the country, but the player was short on credits. The coach called Mr. White to "get him done."

W

hen someone finds an academic shortcut in college sports, word spreads fast. By his second year, Mr. White's records show, he was helping more than two dozen players. His main pipeline for referrals was the [Amateur Athletic Union](#), a popular grass-roots league.

From the start, he says, he tried to keep in mind how easily his con could unravel. To protect himself, he established clear ground rules with players.

"You fail the course by telling anyone I helped you," he says he warned the students. "You fail the course by ever mentioning my name. You fail by not doing exactly what I say."

His fear of being discovered, he says, led him to do much of the coursework himself, sometimes not even telling the players. He made some students believe they were completing the classes, handing them packets of practice problems he had picked up from the math lab at his community college and making sure they logged time in study halls as if they had done the work. After they finished the packets, he would toss them in the trash. Then he would log in to BYU's website to complete the real assignments.


That's how some coaches preferred it, he says, as it assured them there wouldn't be any slip-ups. That also meant that the coaches didn't have to worry about retaliation. If the players had no knowledge of the fraud, Mr. White says, they couldn't hold it against anyone.

To pay for the classes, Mr. White often used prepaid credit cards. He purchased them with cash he had received from players' coaches. His fee depended on how quickly the players needed the credits. A simple setup—three credit hours, six to eight weeks—ran a couple of hundred dollars. A more elaborate job could cost five times as much.

Those first few years, he did almost everything online, unaware of how easily his movements could be monitored. He arranged students' work on his employer-issued computer and proctored many of the classes himself. But after reading about other coaches

who were caught helping players take online classes, he began enrolling students in correspondence courses, figuring he could hide his fraud more easily through the mail.

O

ne day this fall, Mr. White showed *The Chronicle* how he had assumed a player's online identity, using as an example a student he helped two years ago in a distance-education program at  Adams State University, a public institution in Colorado.

When he tried to log in to the player's account, using a student-identification number he had established in 2012, he was denied. He called the university to request a new password, identifying himself as the player. He made up an excuse: He said he needed access to the site to get his transcript for graduate school.

The Adams State representative asked for his student-identification number, which Mr. White had in his steno pad, then gave him a temporary password. He was in.

Inside the Adams State portal, Mr. White could see the classes he had helped the player complete: "Communication Arts I," "Communication Arts II," "Integrated Mathematics I," "Major Themes in Lit," and "Finite Mathematics." The site also listed the

player's grades: B, A, B, C, C.

Mr. White says he varied the quality of work he did for the courses. "You never give them all A's and B's," he says. "That would raise flags."

 [View Documents](#)

ADAMS STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENDED STUDIES
ENG 102 – COMMUNICATION ARTS II
Final Exam

I certify that the student named on this exam did not receive assistance and did not have unauthorized access to books or notes. I have returned this exam to the instructor on 4/11/13 (date).

Proctor Name: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Part 1 – Writing Thesis statements

Select any 5 prompts and write an improved thesis statement, below. It must be a debatable idea.

Ease of entry into the system, not to mention ease of classes, made Adams State an easy mark. Mr. White showed *The Chronicle* test answers he had obtained for five Adams State classes, and his notepad includes the names of dozens of players who appeared to have been enrolled there.

Emails he shared with *The Chronicle* showed how he had instructed students to complete assignments.

“Copy the attachment handwritten,” he wrote to one player in January 2012, sharing eight pages of homework answers to “Finite Mathematics.” Another student, to whom he had provided the same answers, emailed Mr. White a PDF labeled “fintie math assignments,” with a note saying, “Coach this is all the work. Thanks.”

Part of Mr. White’s success hinged on a series of Adams State lapses: For many years, its instructors had reused the same tests, Mr. White found, with lax oversight of exams. Even when instructors changed the tests, he says, they sometimes labeled the different versions.

The final exam for “Communication Arts II,” for example, included versions “A,” “B,” and “C,” written in small print near the bottom, according to examinations Mr. White showed *The Chronicle*. Once he obtained all three versions, cheating was a cinch.

Several Adams State classes were so easy, Mr. White says, he hardly needed the test keys.

One question on the final examination for Math 155, “Integrated Mathematics I,” a copy of which Mr. White shared with *The Chronicle*, asked students to find a pattern and then complete the blanks in this series:

5, 8, 11, 14, __, __, __, __

Another question said: “A farmer was asked by a passing stranger how many chickens and how many goats he had. He answered that his animals had 62 eyes and 90 legs. How many of each did he have?”

Mr. White says some players finished their classes soon after registering for them. He showed *The Chronicle* one player’s record, which indicated that every assignment and exam had been completed on the same day.

“I give you the homework, you copy it over, the school emails you the tests,” he says. “I could do the grade in 24 hours.”

A

As he directed more of his business to Adams State, Mr. White says, he sought to build connections on the inside. In 2003, while working as a tutoring coordinator at a community college, he attended a conference on distance learning and introduced himself to an Adams State employee.

The two kept in touch, Mr. White says, allowing him to stay on top of any changes the university made in its online policies. When one

instructor updated her homework assignments to protect against potential fraud, Mr. White says, he knew ahead of time. He says he also tapped his contact to get his players' grades posted faster. (His Adams State connection, he says, was not in on the fix.)

When told of the apparent violations, Frank J. Novotny, vice president for academic affairs at Adams State, acknowledged that the university has had difficulty monitoring its exams and ensuring the integrity of its online curriculum.

Two years ago, following an investigation by its accreditor, Adams State began to phase out its use of personal proctors and testing centers, Mr. Novotny said, moving toward an electronic-monitoring system for many of its exams. The university recently established new controls for detecting plagiarism in two introductory English classes. And the university has set up new protocols to help enforce a requirement that students take at least six weeks to complete a three-credit online course.


Adams State takes online security seriously, Mr. Novotny said. Mr. White's conduct, though, illustrates the continuing challenges that institutions with online programs face.

"I view this as a battle like you do with computer hackers," he said.


"Unfortunately, there are always people who can find ways to break

the security systems.”

W

hen he started out, Mr. White says, he saw his fraud as a way to gain a competitive advantage in the job market.  But it became his calling card.

He eventually realized his dream of coaching in Division I. But he had far more success doing the dirty work for big-time programs from the outside.

 As his reputation grew, he had a hard time saying no. In one 18-month stretch from 2003 to 2005, he says, he helped more than 75 players. For Mr. White, a self-described “fat, bald white guy” who didn’t play much competitive basketball beyond high school, the attention was alluring.

“Basically, I’m like a drug addict,” he says. “I get off on the excitement, about being able to get it done.”

Mr. White worked almost exclusively with junior-college transfers, but he also helped other academically deficient recruits. He says he rarely did work for colleges once players were on the campus.

Among the dozens of colleges where he worked to place players was the University of South Florida, where he tried to send four students (three got in).

The father of one South Florida recruit, who spoke on the condition that his name not be used, told *The Chronicle* that the Bulls' coaches had instructed his son to take two online courses during his senior year of high school.

Mr. White says the university's coaches referred the player to him through the player's AAU coach, and he helped enroll the student in BYU's independent-study classes. Mr. White's records include a current email address for the player's mother, log-ins and passwords for the BYU site, and the player's Social Security number.

Mr. White says he did all of the work for the courses, including coordinating with a proctor to complete the player's tests. According to information that BYU provided to Mr. White, the player received an A-minus and a B-plus.

The player's father denied that his son had cheated. When *The Chronicle* shared details of the records that Mr. White had kept, the father said he had no comment.

Doug Woolard, who served as athletic director at South Florida from

2004 until his departure, in January 2014, did not return several messages left on his cellphone. Stan Heath, the university's head basketball coach at the time, did not return messages left for his agent or through ESPN, where he works as a color analyst. In a statement, the athletic department said that the university takes its commitment to academic integrity and NCAA compliance "very seriously" and that any allegation of misconduct in those areas is promptly investigated.

Mr. White's chicanery also appeared to help players at the elite level. His notebook contains the names and personal information of two basketball players at the University of Texas at Austin, including J'Covan Brown. Mr. Brown left the university in 2012, after three seasons, and now plays professionally in Russia.

Mr. White says he enrolled Mr. Brown in three BYU courses and did all of the work for the player. He says he had Mr. Brown's exams proctored by a friend who works for a prominent youth-basketball program. During an interview at his home in November, Mr. White called the proctor, and the two men discussed many players for whom they had cheated, including Mr. Brown.

In a text exchange with *The Chronicle*, Mr. Brown confirmed that he had been enrolled at BYU. He said he had several tutors but did not accept answers for tests or have anyone do work for him.

Mr. Brown discussed the challenges he had faced in qualifying academically, including spending a year at a Christian preparatory school in Houston.

“Really to tell you I was disappointed in myself for letting myself not stay focus in high school like I should have been but u live and you learn,” he wrote in October. “That was a dark time in my life.”

Christine A. Plonsky, a senior Texas athletics official who oversees academic affairs, said she was disappointed with the allegations that someone had cheated for Mr. Brown, and added that the university planned to investigate. “Whether our coaches were involved or not,” she said, “it’s pretty sobering.”

T

he highest-profile players sometimes required the most help, and Mr. White says he took extra care to make sure they got what they needed.

Dominique Ferguson, a top-ranked forward from Indianapolis who had offers from UCLA, Kentucky, and Duke, instead picked Florida International University, to play for Isiah Thomas, an NBA Hall of Famer.

When Mr. Ferguson arrived on the Miami campus, in June 2010, he was several classes short of meeting the NCAA's eligibility requirements, according to two former Florida International officials who worked with him.

On June 2 of that year, Mr. Ferguson was enrolled in three online classes at Brigham Young University, Mr. White's records show: "Earth Science, Part 1," "Plane Geometry, Part 1," and "Plane Geometry, Part 2." (The first geometry course was a prerequisite for the second, but that did not stop BYU from awarding the credits.) Records show that Mr. Ferguson finished the classes on July 20.

The classes raised concerns for some people at Florida International, says a former compliance official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of concerns about student-privacy law.

"I don't know how they would've put him in three summer classes at that point," says the former employee, who now directs the athletics-compliance department at a different Division I university. "That is not an accurate time frame to complete that work."

Hashim Ali Alauddeen, a former director of basketball operations who handled academic matters for the team, says he does not recall Mr. Ferguson's taking BYU classes that summer. He remembers seeing BYU credits on his transcript but thought the classes were

completed before Mr. Ferguson arrived on the campus.

Mr. Alauddeen says the university was concerned about the BYU classes' counting toward NCAA eligibility, so he suggested that Mr. Ferguson enroll in three Florida International courses. He says Mr. Ferguson completed those classes in the summer, receiving two A's and a B.

In September, Mr. White showed *The Chronicle* the BYU portal he had set up in Mr. Ferguson's name, indicating that he scored a B-plus in the science class and B-minuses in the math classes.

Records provided to Mr. White by BYU also suggest that Mr. Ferguson received improper assistance. According to the records, Mr. Ferguson took his tests at a learning center in Canada, nearly 1,500 miles from Miami.

Mr. Ferguson did not respond to several emails seeking comment. Mr. Alauddeen, who is in contact with him, said Mr. Ferguson declined to speak for this article. A spokeswoman for Mr. Thomas, who was dismissed in 2012, after compiling a 26-65 record in three seasons, said that the former coach denied knowing that anyone had cheated. She added that he had graduated 19 of 21 players during his tenure, and kicked two players off the team for not meeting academic standards.

In 2010 the NCAA [enacted a rule](#) limiting the core courses that players could use from certain institutions to meet the association's initial-eligibility requirements. University-level classes in BYU's independent-study program no longer meet the NCAA's criteria. But BYU's high-school-level classes—in which many of Mr. White's students, including Mr. Brown and Mr. Ferguson, were enrolled—may still be used to help prospective NCAA athletes graduate from high school.

Brigham Young has introduced several changes in recent years to protect the integrity of its online courses, including rotating its tests and requiring that exams be taken at certified testing centers, said Carri Jenkins, a university spokeswoman.

But it is impossible to stop every dishonest person, she said: “We’re continually looking at how we can improve our program. But in any classroom, you have to rely on the integrity of the students and the professor.”



Jonathan Duncan, the NCAA's head of enforcement, says that his department has seen an uptick in allegations of academic fraud and that violations like those described by Mr. White are “very typical.” He says the association is investigating 12 to 15 cases of alleged academic impropriety, ranging from athletes who actively participated in fraud to those who appear to have been innocent

bystanders.

“We’ve seen some students who say, ‘I don’t know how I got that grade. I didn’t even know I was enrolled in that course,’” Mr.

Duncan says. The problems are “very concerning to us because they affect the eligibility of student-athletes and their preparation for life outside of athletics—the validity and integrity of their education.”

A

bout five years ago, Mr. White says, he started to wind down his business. His twin sons, who were in kindergarten at the time, were asking questions about his work, and  he didn’t want them to know about his shady dealings. He had also run into legal troubles that forced him to  rethink the risks he was taking.


In 2004, while working as the head basketball coach at a community college, he was caught misappropriating money intended for players’ meals. Then, in 2012, while serving as an academic adviser at a different community college, he got a call from an NCAA investigator. A player he had helped was having trouble transferring to a Division I program, and the player’s mother claimed that Mr. White had misrepresented work that she believed her son had done.

Figuring that the NCAA wouldn’t be calling about a single incident,

Mr. White says, he went online and dropped several players out of their Adams State classes. Days later, Mr. White says, an NCAA investigator showed up in his office and interviewed him for more than an hour.

According to a former NCAA investigator who was familiar with the case, five universities—Liberty, Morgan State, Oregon, South Florida, and Xavier of Ohio—faced questions about players with whom Mr. White had worked. (The inquiry at South Florida did not involve the player whose father spoke to *The Chronicle*.)

Several of the universities stopped recruiting or denied enrollment to certain players with connections to Mr. White. But the NCAA cleared some students to play.

 Investigators questioned Mr. White about his use of a credit-card number that had been provided by a player's mother to cover her son's online classes. The mother alleged that Mr. White had also used the card to pay for another player's tuition.

Mr. White eventually paid the money back, the player's parent told *The Chronicle*, but she did not authorize the card's use for any other purpose. Mr. White says he told the player about the extra charge and gave him \$500 in cash to cover his teammate's tuition.

The mother, who does not want her name used because of the negative publicity it might bring her son, says Mr. White sent her regular updates on her son's online grades, suggesting that he was on track to graduate.

"I had the document that said this was my son's grades," she says. "But when we got the transcript from the school, it said he got all zeroes."

Mr. White says the player failed the classes because he admitted to cheating.

The NCAA knew the classes were bogus, say two former NCAA investigators.

"I don't think there was any question about whether the classes were legitimate," one investigator told *The Chronicle*. "I remember thinking, 'This guy's got quite a scam going.'"

The NCAA found no links between the five athletics departments and Mr. White, a former enforcement official said. As a result, the universities faced no penalties.

"Unless you can prove a coach or someone in the athletic department has done something wrong to affect a player's

eligibility,” the former investigator said, “there is no rules violation.”

Following the investigation, the former NCAA officials said, they turned over Mr. White’s name to the [National Junior College Athletic Association](#), alerting the group to his fraud.

Several months later, in early 2013, Mr. White was forced out of his community-college job.



Mr. White eventually realized his dream of coaching in Division I, but he had far more success doing the dirty work for big-time programs from the outside.

S

ince then, he has patched together a series of odd jobs and volunteer positions, including scouting players, helping a friend in the construction industry, and coaching Little League baseball. He has three numbers for his state's unemployment services saved on his phone.

He has tried to reinvent himself as a consultant who can help players understand NCAA eligibility requirements at a younger age so they won't have to cheat. But other than work for a few friends, whose sons and daughters he has counseled, his business hasn't exactly taken off.

During dozens of interviews over the past few months, he insisted that he had stopped fixing classes. But according to text messages he has received over the past year or so, which he allowed *The Chronicle* to look at, he is not entirely out of the game.

"I want to thank you again for all of your help," one high-profile basketball player texted him in October 2013, after Mr. White sent him through his Canadian proctor.

"You r my man no prob," Mr. White wrote back.

"Hey Coach White this is a.d.," wrote another player in September that same year. "Me and my homeboy Earl was looking into taking

online classes and working out with you what all do we need?”

In recent months, one player texted that he was missing his Adams State transcript and needed it to start class. (It was in the mail, Mr. White wrote back.) The parent of another player wondered if the online courses Mr. White had helped his son retake were transferrable. (Of course, said the coach.)

A few months ago, while *The Chronicle* was interviewing Mr. White at his home, he got a call from a former player whose old teammate was in a jam. The teammate, who had helped lead his university to the NCAA tournament in 2013, wanted to transfer to another college.

He had one year of NCAA eligibility remaining and thought he had completed the credits he needed to graduate. He planned to enroll in graduate school at a higher-profile college, where he thought he would receive more television exposure.

The only problem, Mr. White’s contact told him, was that the player didn’t have the necessary credits and needed to complete several online classes before he could graduate. And he had only a week before fall classes started.

What played out over several days in September illustrated the lengths to which coaches were willing to go to gain the services of a

proven star.

Coaches in two of the biggest conferences made calls to Mr. White, according to phone logs he shared with *The Chronicle*. He says they discussed potentially impermissible visits, improper payments, and a plan to get the player's classes done that Mr. White did not think was possible.

When it was over, Mr. White says, multiple Adams State credits had made it onto the player's transcript and the transfer went through, thanks in part to a graduate assistant at a major university who had helped complete the classes. Mr. White provided guidance but says he didn't do the work himself.

In mid-October, Mr. White received a call from an NCAA investigator who was looking into the transfer. A few days later, two NCAA enforcement officials paid him a visit. They arranged to meet one night at a restaurant near his home, and Mr. White says they spoke for several hours the next day.

They talked about the fast credits and the big-name coaches, Mr. White says, and what he knew about the universities' complicity.

The situation gave Mr. White a chance to play a different role. The last time he met with NCAA investigators, he was the target. This

time, he says, they were looking to him as an informant.

“They basically want me to come in with a big mouth and expose all kinds of shit,” he said in late October. “I’m Henry Hill. I’m the snitch.”

After spending years eluding NCAA investigators, he’s not sure he wants to help them. His experience tells him that there’s no way to clean up the mess. If you shut down one online mill, another one just pops up somewhere else.

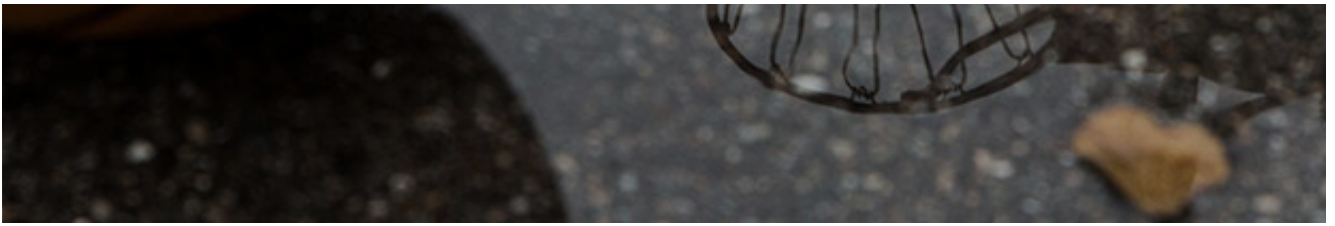
Even if he is out of the game, he knows that there will be other bad actors. Maybe, he says, the only redeeming act is to just come clean.

Brad Wolverton is a senior writer for *The Chronicle*. Follow him on Twitter at [@bradwolverton](https://twitter.com/bradwolverton).

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What One College Did to Crack Down on Shoddy Transfer Credits

By [Brad Wolverton](#)

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cademic advisers at Mt. San Antonio College, a prominent feeder institution for major-college athletics departments, had noticed a disturbing pattern among football players.

Many who had tested into remedial-level mathematics classes were skipping right to college algebra by going elsewhere for their credits. Their coaches were encouraging them to enroll in an online program at Adams State University, a four-year public institution in Colorado.

The Adams State classes cost about three times as much as those at Mt. San Antonio, a 60,000-student community college in California.

But to some players, the expense appeared to be worth it, as they could satisfy their community-college math requirements with one online course, often earning an A or a B.

Last summer Mt. San Antonio stopped counting the online classes. It found that several failed to meet the college's minimum math requirements. College officials also found that Adams State was lax in its oversight of examinations, according to emails obtained by *The Chronicle* in a public-records request.

“Their curriculum seems very weak, and they have testing standards that are not up to our level of rigor,” Art Nitta, chair of Mt. San Antonio's department of math and computer science, wrote to Matthew Judd, interim dean of natural sciences, in late June.

Rejecting classes from an accredited institution is an unusual step (Adams State is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, a regional accreditor). Even when colleges spot problems with courses on other campuses, they have incentives to let the credits count. Big-time athletic departments [rely on places like Adams State](#) to help them get players academically eligible to compete.

Plenty of overseers could insist on more rigor in the system. Accreditors have stepped up their oversight of colleges, but few have dedicated the resources to monitor the fast growth of online classes.

(The Higher Learning Commission would not comment for this article, saying that it could not discuss specific institutions.)

Of all the people equipped to catch shoddy online classes, admissions directors would appear to have the most tools. They can tell when students take courses out of sequence and detect other suspicious patterns in transcripts. But they don't always have the time or inclination to challenge the abuses. Athletics-compliance directors, whose jobs include certifying players' eligibility, say they sometimes spot questionable credits but often can't do anything about them.

Ryan Squire, a top athletics-compliance officer at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, says he raised concerns this year about the grades that certain community-college transfers had received in online Adams State classes. He says he approached his admissions staff and was told that the university didn't have the ability to reject the credits.

"They sort of shrug and say, 'Well, Adams State is an accredited school, and it's not for us to say we can't accept those courses because you guys think there's some issue,'" Mr. Squire said. "They obviously don't understand our world quite the way we do."

'I Really Need the Class'

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t. San Antonio's crackdown led to complaints from football players, some of whom were relying on Adams State's classes to transfer to major universities. Over the past two years, Mt. San Antonio players have transferred to play at more than a dozen big-time football programs, including Boise State, Texas Tech, and Utah.

In early July one player emailed Mr. Judd, seeking a variance from the new policy.

"I am worried about running out of time or missing the opportunity at Nevada," the player wrote. "I've also moved out here and am missing practices so I really need the class approved."

Another player said he had paid \$700 for an Adams State algebra class, which he said he had completed in early June. He, too, needed the class to earn a scholarship to a four-year institution.

"I will no longer be able to transfer and play football if this math class is not accepted," the student emailed Dean Judd. Adding to his confusion, the player continued, the university he planned to attend said it would accept the Adams State course as part of a general-studies degree program.

In an interview Mr. Judd said he was not sure if his students were earning high marks in Adams State courses because of inappropriate help or because the classes were just easy.

“My sense is that the classes are just too easy, and they’re not watching the kids very closely,” he said. “When you’re not watching them closely, you don’t really know what’s going on.”

Adams State officials say they have increased their scrutiny of exams, moving toward an electronic-monitoring system. They have also established new protocols to prevent players from completing courses too quickly.

As online classes have grown in popularity, Mr. Judd said, it has become increasingly difficult to know which colleges offer rigorous courses and which don’t. But, he said, that should not deter academic leaders from investigating.

“How do you sift through the ones that are completely legitimate and the ones that are kind of a cash cow for the college, or a Mickey Mouse class for athletes?” Mr. Judd said. “It would be a lot easier if there were more legitimate programs out there.”

After Mt. San Antonio stopped accepting the Adams State courses, a member of the California college’s governing board expressed

concerns, according to emails *The Chronicle* reviewed.

In late July, David K. Hall, who is now president of the college's Board of Trustees, emailed Mr. Judd about a player whose National Collegiate Athletic Association eligibility appeared to hinge on Adams State credits.

"So what do we do?" Mr. Hall wrote. "Is there anything that can be done to help the kid save his scholarship at his new college?"

Mr. Judd explained that a Mt. San Antonio policy allows faculty members to determine if outside classes meet the college's graduation requirements.

The Adams State math classes, he said, had "significant topics missing from the syllabus" that were important parts of Mt. San Antonio's math curriculum. In addition, he wrote, Adams State's "lax proctoring policy" does not meet Mt. San Antonio's standards.

Days later, Mt. San Antonio denied variances to the two athletes, according to Mr. Judd's emails. But since Adams State is an accredited institution, Mr. Judd wrote to one student, Mt. San Antonio would count the units; they just couldn't be used to satisfy the college's math requirement for graduation.

Mr. Judd says the college plans to be clearer to students in the future about which online classes will count and which ones won't. He says he has also encouraged athletes to listen to their academic advisers—not their coaches—on academic matters.

“Your coach tells you how to block; your academic counselor tells you what classes to take,” he said he tells players. “Stop listening to your football coach about your academics.”

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