

CASE SUMMARY

Violations occurred in Eastern Connecticut State softball program

Violations occurred in the Eastern Connecticut State softball program when a former softball volunteer assistant coach provided impermissible benefits to two student-athletes, according to decision released by the Division III Committee on Infractions. As a result of the violations, the softball head coach failed to promote an atmosphere for compliance.

The school, enforcement staff, head coach and assistant coach agreed that the violations occurred when the assistant coach allowed one student-athlete to live with her cost-free — including providing meals — for approximately one month and subsequently paid for round-trip airfare for both that student-athlete and a teammate. Because the benefits were not generally available to the student population, they constitute impermissible benefits totaling approximately \$2,100. As a result of the impermissible benefits, both student-athletes competed while ineligible.

The school, enforcement staff and softball head coach agreed that the head coach is responsible for the violations because she did not promote an atmosphere for compliance or adequately monitor the activities of the assistant coach, allowing the violations to go undetected for approximately five months. The head coach learned about the impermissible living arrangement and warned the assistant coach, but she did not report the potential violation.

The committee determined that the violations in this case are major and prescribed the following penalties:

- One year of probation.
- A \$2,500 fine (self-imposed by the school).
- Vacation of individual and team records for any games in which ineligible players competed (self-imposed by the school).
- A two-week recruiting suspension for the softball head coach (self-imposed by the school).
- A one-year show-cause order for the head coach, during which time she will be suspended from 10% of the softball regular season and be required to attend the NCAA Regional Rules Seminar.
- A two-year show-cause order for the assistant coach, during which time any employing NCAA school will suspend her from all athletically related responsibilities and require her to attend the NCAA Regional Rules Seminar.
- A two-year ban on serving on NCAA or conference committees for the head coach (self-imposed by the school).
- Disassociation of the assistant coach (who is also a school booster) by the school for a period of five years (self-imposed by the school).

Members of the Committee on Infractions are drawn from the NCAA membership and public. The committee members who reviewed this case are:

- Crystal Gibson, director of athletics and recreation at St. Mary's (Maryland).
- Ellen O'Brien, associate athletics director for compliance and senior woman administrator at Marymount (Virginia).
- Tom Simmons, director of athletics at Ohio Northern.
- Matt Tanney, director of athletics at Denison and chair of the committee.
- Angela Givens Williams, chief of the Civil Division in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Mississippi.



**EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
PUBLIC INFRACTIONS DECISION
February 27, 2026**

I. INTRODUCTION

The NCAA Division III Committee on Infractions (COI) is an independent administrative body of the NCAA comprised of individuals from the Division III membership and public. The COI is charged with deciding infractions cases involving member institutions and their staffs. This case involved the provision of impermissible benefits in the softball program at Eastern Connecticut State University (Eastern Connecticut).¹ Specifically, the volunteer assistant softball coach (assistant coach) provided cost-free lodging, meals and transportation to two student-athletes. This violation demonstrated that the head softball coach failed to promote an atmosphere for compliance.

The COI considered this case through the cooperative summary disposition process in which Eastern Connecticut, the head coach, the assistant coach and the NCAA enforcement staff agreed to the primary facts and violations as fully set forth in the summary disposition report (SDR). The COI proposed additional penalties for the head coach and assistant coach, and the head coach accepted the penalties. The assistant coach failed to respond to the COI's proposed penalty by the established deadline, thereby waiving her opportunity to contest the additional penalty proposed by the COI. Neither party may appeal.

The parties agreed that for approximately one month, the assistant coach provided cost-free housing and meals to a then softball student-athlete (student-athlete 1).² The assistant coach went on to provide cost-free airline tickets to student-athlete 1 and another then softball student-athlete (student-athlete 2). In total, the assistant coach provided over \$2,100 in impermissible benefits. Because these benefits were not generally available to the institution's student body, student-athletes 1 and 2 received impermissible extra benefits. Furthermore, due to their receipt of extra benefits, the student-athletes competed while ineligible. The COI concludes that the violations are major.

¹ Eastern Connecticut's softball program is a member of the Little East Conference. Eastern Connecticut has an enrollment of approximately 3,200 students. It sponsors eight men's and 10 women's sports. This is the institution's first major infractions case.

² The assistant coach is a former three-sport student-athlete at Eastern Connecticut, including as a member of the softball team. She joined the Eastern Connecticut softball coaching staff as a volunteer assistant in 2019 and remained with the program until the institution removed her from her position in May 2024.

The parties also agreed that the head coach is presumed responsible for the violations from April through September 2024, and that the head coach did not promote an atmosphere for compliance or adequately monitor the activities of the assistant coach.³ Despite having both actual knowledge and reason to question the assistant coach's activities, the head coach's failure to follow-up on red flags allowed the violations to go undetected for approximately five months. Her inaction failed to meet the membership's legislated expectations for head coaches. The COI concludes the violation is major.

The COI accepts the parties' factual agreements and concludes that major violations occurred. Utilizing NCAA bylaws authorizing penalties, the COI adopts and prescribes the following principal penalties: one year of probation; a \$2,500 fine; vacation of team and individual records; disassociation of the assistant coach for a period of five years; a two-year general show-cause order for the assistant coach; a two-week recruiting suspension for the head coach; and a one-year specific show-cause order for the head coach, which includes a 10 percent game suspension and required NCAA rules education.⁴ Apart from these restrictions, the head coach is not prohibited from engaging in other coaching or athletically related duties during the show-cause period.

II. CASE HISTORY

The violations in this case came to light on September 13, 2024, when the assistant coach informed the director of athletics that student-athlete 1 lived with her from early April until May 1, 2024. Further, the assistant coach informed the director of athletics that she purchased airline tickets for both student-athletes 1 and 2. Eastern Connecticut reported this information to the NCAA enforcement staff on September 17, 2024, at which time a collaborative investigation began into the conduct.

Eastern Connecticut, the head coach, the assistant coach and the enforcement staff reached agreement on the facts and violations. Given their agreement, the parties began pursuing summary disposition and jointly submitted a SDR on November 10, 2025. The COI reviewed the SDR via videoconference on December 12, 2025. Following that videoconference, the COI accepted the self-imposed penalties for Eastern Connecticut and proposed additional penalties for the head coach and the assistant coach with a response deadline of January 12, 2026. The head coach accepted the additional penalties on January 12, 2026. The assistant coach never responded to the proposed additional penalty, thereby waiving her opportunity to contest the penalty.

III. PARTIES' AGREEMENTS

The parties jointly submitted an SDR that identified an agreed-upon factual basis, violations of NCAA legislation and type of violations.⁵ The SDR identified:

³ The head coach is a former softball student-athlete at Eastern Connecticut and became the team's head coach in 2001.

⁴ The SDR does not directly address the assistant coach's booster status. However, given the self-imposed five-year disassociation, the COI presumes and accepts that Eastern Connecticut has appropriately identified her as one.

⁵ This decision provides the agreed-upon factual basis, violations and type of violations exactly as stated in the SDR, except for shortening references to the parties.

1. [NCAA Division III Manual Bylaws 14.10.1, 16.02.3, 16.8.1.2, 16.11.1.5, 31.2.2.3 and 31.2.2.4 (2023-24)] (Major)

The institution, the assistant coach and enforcement staff agree that from April through May 1, 2024, the assistant coach provided two then softball student-athletes with impermissible benefits in the form of free housing, meals and airline tickets. The approximate value of the impermissible benefits was \$2,177. As a result of the impermissible benefits, the two softball student-athletes competed in 27 contests while ineligible, including in three postseason contests, and received actual and necessary expenses while ineligible.

2. [NCAA Division III Manual Bylaw 11.1.2.1 (2023-24 and 2024-25)] (Major)

The institution, the head coach and enforcement staff agree that from April through September 2024, the head coach is presumed responsible for the violations detailed in Proposed Finding of Fact No. 1 and did not rebut the presumption of responsibility. Specifically, the head coach did not demonstrate that she promoted an atmosphere for compliance based on her personal knowledge of the violations detailed in Proposed Finding of Fact No. 1 and despite having knowledge of actual violations, she did not report any of these matters to the institution.

IV. REVIEW OF CASE

The SDR fully detailed the parties' positions and included the agreed-upon primary facts, violations and type of violations. After reviewing the parties' principal factual agreements and respective explanations surrounding those agreements, the COI accepts the SDR and concludes that the conduct resulted in two major violations. Specifically, the COI concludes that, during the spring of 2024, the assistant coach provided impermissible benefits to two softball student-athletes when she provided student-athlete 1 with cost-free housing and meals and both student-athletes with round-trip airfare. As a result of the violations, the two student-athletes competed while ineligible and received impermissible actual and necessary expenses. Further, the head coach did not demonstrate that she adequately promoted an atmosphere for compliance and monitored the assistant coach's activities for compliance with NCAA rules. As a result, the conduct resulted in violations of Bylaws 16 and 11.⁶

Impermissible Benefits

Bylaw 16 governs benefits for enrolled student-athletes. Bylaw 16.02.3 defines an extra benefit as a special arrangement by an institutional employee to provide a student-athlete with a benefit not expressly authorized by NCAA legislation. Relatedly, Bylaw 16.8.1.2 specifies that an institution may provide actual and necessary expenses to a student-athlete to represent the institution in competition, provided the student-athlete is eligible to compete. When a student-athlete is not eligible to compete, Bylaw 14.10.1 states that the institution is obligated to apply immediately the applicable rule and to withhold the student-athlete from all intercollegiate

⁶ The full text of all bylaws violated in this case is at Appendix One.

competition. Furthermore, Bylaw 16.11.1.5 articulates that a student-athlete may receive meals on an occasional basis from an institutional staff member, consistent with institutional policy.

The parties agreed that the assistant coach provided impermissible benefits in violation of Bylaw 16. During the 2023-24 academic year, student-athletes 1 and 2 lived together. Student-athlete 1 moved out of their shared apartment in March 2024 due to relationship issues and began living on teammates' couches. Student-athlete 1 subsequently approached the assistant coach and asked if she could stay with her, to which the assistant coach agreed. Student-athlete 1 lived in the assistant coach's residence for a period of four weeks, beginning in early April 2024. During this time, the assistant coach provided student-athlete 1 with meals a few times per week. The assistant coach knew her provision of housing and meals to student-athlete 1 violated NCAA rules but stated she believed she was helping student-athlete 1 in a time of need. Nonetheless, the actions were impermissible. The total cost of the impermissible housing and meals was approximately \$700.

Around the same time, student-athlete 2 approached the softball coaching staff and conveyed that she wanted to visit Canada to see an ailing relative. Student-athlete 2 informed the staff she could not afford the cost of an airline ticket and that she did not want to miss practices or games to make the trip. When Eastern Connecticut's April 4, 2024, game was unexpectedly postponed, an opportunity arose for student-athlete 2 to visit the family member while only missing practice. The assistant coach unilaterally purchased an airline ticket for student-athlete 2, while also purchasing a ticket for student-athlete 1. The assistant coach understood that student-athletes 1 and 2 wanted distance from one another, but the assistant coach did not want student-athlete 2 to travel alone. The two student-athletes visited student-athlete 2's ailing family member from April 4 through April 6, 2024, missing softball practice to do so. The parties agree that the assistant coach's provision of the airline tickets, which were valued at \$1,477, constituted an extra benefit.

Eastern Connecticut suspended the assistant coach from her involvement with the softball program on May 1, 2024, unrelated to the impermissible benefit issues. Student-athlete 1 moved out of the assistant coach's house that same day.

The benefits provided by the assistant coach fall outside the scope of permissible benefits contemplated in Bylaw 16. As a result, the COI concludes that major violations of Bylaws 16.02.3, 16.8.1.2 and 16.11.1.5 occurred. Additionally, the benefits rendered the student-athletes ineligible to compete, and Eastern Connecticut failed to withhold them from competition in violation of Bylaw 14.10.1.

The COI has previously concluded that major violations occurred when coaches were directly involved in providing student-athletes with extra benefits and concluded that major violations occurred. *See University of Mary Hardin-Baylor* (2019) (concluding via SDR that a major violation occurred when, among other violations, the head football coach provided cost-free use of his car to an enrolled student-athlete and maintained liability insurance on the vehicle); *Thomas More College* (2016) (concluding via contested hearing that major violations occurred when a former assistant women's basketball coach provided a student-athlete with impermissible cost-free room and board, as well as use of his personal vehicle); and *Occidental College* (2013) (concluding via SDR that major violations occurred when the head women's volleyball coach

provided impermissible benefits to eight student-athletes in the form of travel expenses, lodging and the use of rental cars). Like these cases, the assistant coach provided benefits to student-athletes through a special arrangement not authorized by NCAA legislation. Thus, the COI concludes the violations occurred and that they are major.

Head Coach Responsibility

Bylaw 11 governs the conduct and employment of athletics personnel. Bylaw 11.1.2.1 covers the responsibility of head coaches stating that an institution’s head coach must promote an atmosphere for compliance within the program that the coach supervises. Additionally, the coach must monitor the activities regarding compliance of all assistant coaches and administrators involved within the program who report to the coach.

The parties agreed that the head coach failed to meet the standards of head coach control. The assistant coach informed the head coach during early April 2024 that student-athlete 1 lived in her home. On three separate occasions, the head coach instructed the assistant coach that the arrangement could be viewed as an extra benefit and that student-athlete 1 could not live in the assistant coach’s home. But her actions stopped there. The head coach did not notify school administrators of the living arrangement.

With respect to the assistant coach’s provision of airfare, the head coach stated she did not know about the airline tickets until the director of athletics asked about them in September 2024. However, the assistant coach claimed she informed the head coach contemporaneously that she intended to purchase airline tickets for the two student-athletes. Regardless, the parties agreed that the head coach did not ask questions about the two student-athletes’ absence from practice, which could have led to her detection of the impermissible airfare. The head coach’s lack of follow-up questions, coupled with her failure to disclose the impermissible living arrangement, allowed the violations to go undetected until September 2024.

The COI is particularly troubled by aspects of the head coach’s lack of action in this case. The COI expects a head coach with over two decades of experience—at one institution, no less—to understand her responsibility to report and address potential rules violations. While the head coach has previously maintained a compliant program, the facts are clear that the head coach *knew* of the assistant coach’s ongoing provision of benefits and did not report the violations to appropriate institutional personnel.⁷ Beyond that, the COI places great importance on maintaining a fair competitive opportunity for student-athletes and otherwise compliant programs. In this case, the

⁷ Eastern Connecticut identified unique circumstances and context for the COI to consider when reviewing the case (and presumably considering penalties). Specifically, Eastern Connecticut pointed to the recent death of a 2023 softball alumna, in addition to the “difficult familial dynamics” in which the two student-athletes found themselves during the time in question. Beyond that, Eastern Connecticut noted that the relationship between the two coaches was “frayed” in response to the aforementioned issues. The director of athletics noted that she was concerned about how to manage the team’s response to the death but did not give the coaching staff the same kind of attention. The COI is not indifferent to the difficult circumstances around the program at the time the violations occurred. However, the circumstances do not excuse the head coach’s admitted failure to disclose known violations.

head coach's lack of timely disclosure directly led to student-athletes competing while ineligible, including winning the conference tournament and competing in postseason competition in the NCAA tournament. The head coach's actions failed to meet the required legislated responsibilities under Bylaw 11.1.2.1 and the COI concludes the violation is major.

The COI has previously concluded head coach responsibility violations occurred under similar circumstances. *See Alfred State College (2021)* (concluding via SDR with expedited penalty hearing that the former track and field head coach failed to promote an atmosphere for compliance when he allowed two student-athletes to compete while ineligible); *Mary Hardin-Baylor* (concluding via SDR that the head coach failed to promote an atmosphere for compliance when he and his staff provided \$5,000 in impermissible benefits to student-athletes without first confirming that such activities were permissible); *Thomas More* (concluding via contested hearing that the head women's basketball coach violated head coach responsibility legislation when he failed to monitor the assistant coach and, after becoming aware of the extra benefits the assistant coach provided to the student-athlete, did nothing to determine its permissibility); and *Occidental* (concluding that the head women's volleyball coach violated head coach responsibility when he provided student-athletes with impermissible benefits and arranged for an athletics representative to provide three women's volleyball student-athletes with approximately \$1,650 worth of impermissible benefits.) This case is consistent with the COI's previous conclusions of head coach responsibility failures and, in each of the previous cases, the COI determined that the head coach responsibility violation was major.

V. PENALTIES

For the reasons set forth in Sections III and IV of this decision, the COI concludes that this case involved major violations of NCAA legislation. Major violations are not isolated or inadvertent and provide more than a minimal advantage. *See* Bylaw 19.02.2.3. Because the parties agreed to the facts, violations and additional proposed penalties—or in the case of the assistant coach, defaulted due to nonresponse—no party has no opportunity to appeal.

In prescribing penalties, the COI evaluated relevant mitigating factors pursuant to Bylaw 32.7.1.3. As part of its evaluation, the COI specifically notes that once the issue was brought to the institution's attention, it responded immediately by investigating the matter and reporting the conduct to the enforcement staff. The COI also considered Eastern Connecticut's cooperation in all parts of the case and determines it was consistent with Eastern Connecticut's obligation under Bylaw 32.1.3. After considering all information relevant to the case, the COI prescribes the following penalties (self-imposed penalties are so noted):

Penalties for Major Violations (Bylaw 19.5.2)⁸

1. Public reprimand and censure through the release of the public infractions decision.

⁸ All penalties must be completed during the time periods identified in this decision. If completion of a penalty is impossible during the prescribed period, the institution shall notify the COI of the impossibility and must complete the penalty at the next available opportunity.

2. Probation: One year of probation **February 27, 2026, through February 26, 2027.**⁹
3. During this period of probation, Eastern Connecticut shall:
 - a. Continue to develop and implement a comprehensive compliance and educational program on NCAA legislation to instruct coaches, the faculty athletics representative, all athletics department personnel and all institutional staff members with responsibility for ensuring compliance with NCAA legislation. The program shall include education related to impermissible benefits and the duty of athletics staff members to report potential violations;
 - b. Submit a preliminary report to the Office of the Committees on Infractions (OCOI) by **April 15, 2026**, setting forth a schedule for establishing this compliance and educational program;
 - c. File with the OCOI annual compliance reports indicating the progress made with this program by **January 15, 2027**. Particular emphasis shall be placed on rules education provided to and monitoring related to volunteer coaches as well as extra benefits;
 - d. Inform prospects in the softball program in writing that Eastern Connecticut is on probation for one year and detail the violations committed. The information shall be provided as soon as practicable after the prospect is recruited pursuant to Bylaw 13.02.8 and, in all instances, before the prospect initially enrolls at the institution; and
 - e. Publicize specific and understandable information concerning the nature of the infractions by providing, at a minimum, a statement to include the types of violations and the affected sport program and a direct, conspicuous link to the public infractions decision located on the athletics department's main webpage "landing page" and in the media guides for the affected sport program. The institution's statement must: (i) clearly describe the infractions; (ii) include the length of the probationary period associated with the case; and (iii) give members of the general public a clear indication of what happened in the case to allow the public (particularly prospects and their families) to make informed, knowledgeable decisions. A statement that refers only to the probationary period with nothing more is not sufficient.
4. Eastern Connecticut shall pay a \$2,500 fine. (Self-imposed).
5. Vacation of records: Eastern Connecticut acknowledged that two softball student-athletes competed while ineligible as a result of the violations in this case. Therefore, pursuant to Bylaws 19.5.2-(g) and Executive Regulations 31.2.2.3 and 31.2.2.4, Eastern Connecticut shall vacate all regular season and conference tournament records and participation in which the

⁹ Eastern Connecticut proposed a one-year probationary period. The authority to prescribe NCAA probation rests solely with the COI. Periods of probation always commence with the release of the infractions decision. A one-year probationary period is consistent with past extra benefit cases. See *Husson University* (2023); *Mary Hardin-Baylor*; and *Thomas More*.

student-athletes competed from the time they became ineligible through the time they were reinstated as eligible for competition. (Self-imposed). This order of vacation includes all regular season competition and conference tournaments. Further, if the ineligible student-athletes participated in NCAA postseason competition at any time they were ineligible, the institution's participation in the postseason shall be vacated. The individual records of the ineligible student-athletes shall also be vacated.¹⁰ However, the individual finishes and any awards for all eligible student-athletes shall be retained. Further, the institution's records regarding the softball program, as well as the records of the head coach, shall reflect the vacated records and shall be recorded in all publications in which such records are reported, including, but not limited to, institutional media guides, recruiting material, electronic and digital media plus institutional, conference and NCAA archives. Any institution that may subsequently hire the affected head coach shall similarly reflect the vacated wins in her career records documented in media guides and other publications cited above. Head coaches with vacated wins on their records may not count the vacated wins toward specific honors or victory "milestones" such as 100th, 200th or 500th career victories. Any public reference to the vacated contests shall be removed from the athletics department stationery, banners displayed in public areas and any other forum in which they may appear. Any trophies awarded by the NCAA in these sports shall be returned to the Association.

Finally, to ensure that all institutional and student-athlete vacations, statistics and records are accurately reflected in official NCAA publications and archives, the sports information director (or other designee as assigned by the director of athletics) must contact the NCAA Media Coordination and Statistics office and appropriate conference officials to identify the specific student-athletes and contests impacted by the penalties. In addition, the institution must provide the NCAA Media Coordination and Statistics office with a written report detailing those discussions. This document will be maintained in the permanent files of the NCAA Media Coordination and Statistics office. This written report must be delivered to the office no later than 14 days following the release of this decision or, if the vacation penalty is appealed, at the conclusion of the appeals process. The sports information director (or designee) must also inform the OCOI of this submission to the NCAA Media Coordination and Statistics office.

6. The head coach shall be suspended from all on-campus and off-campus recruiting activities for a two-week period.¹¹ (Self-imposed).
7. Show-cause order: The head coach violated fundamental NCAA head coach responsibility legislation when, under her watch, a volunteer assistant coach provided impermissible extra benefits to two softball student-athletes. Additionally, when the head coach learned of the impermissible housing arrangement, the head coach did not report the conduct to the compliance staff or other institutional personnel. The head coach's failure to report the

¹⁰ The COI notes, and accepts, that Eastern Connecticut will vacate student-athlete 1's NCAA Division III record of hit-by-pitches.

¹¹ Eastern Connecticut will identify the two weeks when this penalty has either already been served or will be served. If the penalty has not yet been served, Eastern Connecticut shall be required to ensure it is served during the one-year show-cause period.

volunteer assistant coach's conduct demonstrated that she did not promote an atmosphere of compliance within the softball program and did not monitor her staff. Therefore, the head coach shall be subject to a one-year show-cause order from **February 27, 2026, through February 26, 2027**. In accordance with Bylaw 19.5.2.2 and COI IOP 5-16-1, any institution employing the head coach during the one-year show-cause period shall suspend the head coach from the first 10 percent of regular season softball contests during the show-cause period. Additionally, the head coach shall be required to attend NCAA Regional Rules Seminars in 2025 and 2026.¹² Any NCAA member institution employing the head coach during the one-year show-cause period shall abide by the terms of the show-cause order unless it contacts the OCOI to make arrangements to show cause why the terms of the order should not apply.

Although each case is unique, this show-cause order is consistent with prior cases involving head coach responsibility violations. *See Fredonia State University (2022)* (prescribing a one-year specific show-cause order to the head coach requiring a three-month suspension, NCAA Regional Rules attendance and a five month prohibition on hosting or participating in youth camps for his head coach responsibility violation and involvement in impermissible athletically related activities); *University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point (2019)* (prescribing a two-year specific show-cause order for the head coach requiring NCAA Regional Rules attendance and ethics training for his head coach responsibility violation and involvement in playing and practice season violations, where the COI also noted that had the institution not self-imposed a 13-contest suspension for the head coach, the COI would have imposed a more stringent penalty); and *Thomas More* (prescribing NCAA Regional Rules attendance for the head coach who, although not involved in the underlying violations, violated head coach responsibility legislation when a student-athlete lived with an assistant coach and competed while ineligible).¹³ Given the head coach's admitted knowledge of the impermissible nature of the arrangement in this case, a minimal 10 percent game suspension as part of a one-year specific show-cause order is both reasonable under the circumstances and supported by past cases.

8. Show-cause order: The volunteer assistant coach violated fundamental and well-established rules regarding impermissible benefits. As a volunteer coach with the program for approximately five years, she received rules education from the institution and understood that her actions were contrary to NCAA legislation. Beyond that, the head coach informed the

¹² As part of its self-imposed penalties, Eastern Connecticut identified that it would require the head coach to attend an NCAA Regional Rules Seminar in 2025. The COI adopts the institution's penalty and directs that any employing institution require the head coach to attend an NCAA Regional Rules Seminar in 2026, as well.

¹³ Notably, in *Thomas More*, the student-athlete competed while ineligible, including in postseason competition where the institution won the National Championship which was subsequently vacated as part of the infractions decision. Specific to the head coach, the COI prescribed NCAA Regional Rules attendance for the head coach responsibility violation, specifically noting the head coach was not involved in providing the impermissible benefits. Similarly, in this case, the head coach was not involved in providing the impermissible extra benefits. Where the cases diverge, however, is that the head coach agreed, as part of the SDR, that she was aware the housing and meals benefit was impermissible, yet she did not report the violation to the Eastern Connecticut administration. In *Thomas More*, although the head coach became aware of the conduct, the head coach believed that the arrangement was permissible and, as a result, did not believe there was anything to report. A few months later, the arrangement came up in conversation between the head coach and director of athletics, who also believed the arrangement was permissible. Both parties maintained that position at the contested hearing.

assistant coach on three occasions that her actions could be viewed as rules violations. Instead of ceasing the provision of benefits and/or reporting her activity to the administration above the head coach, the assistant coach continued to provide benefits until she was suspended from the institution for reasons unrelated to potential NCAA rules violations. Her ongoing provision of impermissible extra benefits resulted in two student-athletes competing while ineligible, including in three postseason NCAA tournament contests—a significant competitive advantage. Due to her personal involvement in violations and disregard for fundamental NCAA rules, a show-cause order is appropriate. Therefore, the assistant coach shall be subjected to a two-year show-cause order from **February 27, 2026, through February 26, 2028**. In accordance with Bylaw 19.5.2.2.1 and COI IOP 5-16-1-1, any employing institution shall prohibit the assistant coach from all athletically related activities. Furthermore, any employing institution shall require the assistant coach to attend one NCAA Regional Rules Seminar at her own expense during the term of the show-cause order. Any institution employing the assistant coach during the term of the show-cause shall abide by the terms of the show-cause order unless it contacts the OCOI to make arrangements to show cause why the terms of the order should not apply.

Although each case is unique, the duration of the show-cause order is consistent with prior cases where coaches were involved in underlying violations. *See State University of New York at Brockport* (2022) (prescribing a three-year general show-cause order with required NCAA Regional Rules Seminar attendance when a head coach used his position as a physical education course instructor to engage in practice prior to the first permissible practice date); *York College* (2017) (prescribing a three-year show-cause order when a head coach failed to promote an atmosphere for compliance because he knowingly certified ineligible student-athletes and provided false and misleading information during the investigation); and *Baruch College* (2016) (prescribing a one-year show-cause order and required Regional Rules Seminar attendance to address a head coach knowingly influencing the awarding of impermissible aid and benefits to student-athletes). In this case, although a volunteer, the assistant coach was a veteran coach who was tremendously intertwined with the softball program.¹⁴ Beyond that, she was aware her actions were contrary to NCAA legislation and was informed as such in real-time yet continued to provide impermissible extra benefits to two student-athletes. The violations committed by the assistant coach directly led to ineligible competition, including in three postseason contests, providing Eastern Connecticut with a significant competitive advantage over its opponents. As such, a two-year general show-cause order with required Regional Rules Seminars attendance is appropriate.

9. The institution identified that the head coach shall be prohibited from serving on NCAA committees, including as an institutional or conference representative, for a period of two years. (Self-imposed).

¹⁴ The assistant coach attended Eastern Connecticut and was a three-sport student-athlete—including softball—prior to becoming a volunteer assistant coach in 2019.

10. The institution disassociated the then-volunteer assistant softball coach and representative of athletics interests (*i.e.*, booster), for a period of five years in accordance with Bylaw 19.5.2.6. The terms of disassociation require that Eastern Connecticut:
- a. Refrain from accepting any assistance from the individual that would aid in the recruitment of prospective student-athletes or the support of enrolled student-athletes;
 - b. Not accept financial assistance for the institution's athletics program from the individual;
 - c. Ensure that no athletics benefit or privilege be provided to the individual that is not generally available to the public at large; and
 - d. Take such other actions against the individual that the institution determines to be within its authority to eliminate the involvement of the individual in the institution's athletics program. (Self-imposed).¹⁵
11. Following the receipt of the final compliance report and prior to the conclusion of probation, Eastern Connecticut's president shall provide a letter to the COI affirming that Eastern Connecticut's current athletics policies and practices conform to all requirements of NCAA regulations.
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As required by NCAA legislation for any institution involved in a major infractions case, Eastern Connecticut shall be subject to the provisions of Bylaw 19.5.2.3 concerning repeat violators for a five-year period beginning on the effective date of the penalties in this case, February 27, 2026. The COI further advises Eastern Connecticut that it should take every precaution to ensure that it observes the terms of the penalties. The COI will monitor Eastern Connecticut while it is on probation to ensure compliance with the penalties and terms of probation and may extend the probationary period, among other action, if Eastern Connecticut does not comply or commit additional violations. Likewise, any action by Eastern Connecticut, the head coach or the assistant coach contrary to the terms of the penalties or any additional violations shall be considered grounds for prescribing more severe penalties and/or may result in additional allegations and violations.

NCAA DIVISION III COMMITTEE ON INFRACTIONS
Crystal Gibson
Ellen O'Brien
Tom Simmons
Matt Tanney, Chair
Angela Givens Williams

¹⁵ The institution noted it would disassociate the assistant coach (booster) from the softball program for a period of no less than five years. NCAA legislation contemplates disassociations from the athletics program generally rather than a specific sport program. Therefore, to comply with Bylaw 19.5.2.6, the COI expands the disassociation to all Eastern Connecticut athletics programs for a period of five years.

APPENDIX ONE
Bylaw Citations

Division III 2023-24 Manual

14.10.1 Obligation of Member Institution to Withhold Student-Athlete from Competition. If a student-athlete is ineligible under the provisions of the constitution, bylaws or other regulations of the Association, the institution shall be obligated to apply immediately the applicable rule and to withhold the student-athlete from all intercollegiate competition. The institution may appeal to the Committee on Student-Athlete Reinstatement for restoration of the student-athlete's eligibility as provided in Bylaw 14.12 if it concludes that the circumstances warrant restoration.

16.02.3 Extra Benefit. An extra benefit is any special arrangement by an institutional employee or a representative of the institution's athletics interests to provide a student-athlete or the student-athlete's relative or friend a benefit not expressly authorized by NCAA legislation. Receipt of a benefit by student-athletes or their relatives or friends is not a violation of NCAA legislation if it is demonstrated that the same benefit is generally available to the institution's students or their relatives or friends or to a particular segment of the student body determined on a basis unrelated to athletics ability.

16.8.1.2 Competition While Representing Institution. An institution may provide actual and necessary travel expenses (e.g., transportation, lodging and meals) for a student-athlete to represent the institution in competition, provided the student-athlete is eligible for intercollegiate competition.

16.11.1.5 Occasional Meals. A student-athlete or the entire team in a sport may receive an occasional meal from an institutional staff member or representative of the institution's athletics interests under the following conditions:

- (a) The occasional meal may be provided at any location in the locale of the institution;
- (b) Meals must be restricted to infrequent and special occasions; and
- (c) Institutional staff members and representatives of the institution's athletics interests may provide transportation to student-athletes to attend such meals.

31.2.2.3 Participation While Ineligible. When a student-athlete competing as an individual or representing the institution in a team championship is declared ineligible after the competition, or a penalty has been prescribed or action taken as set forth in Bylaws 19.5.2 or 19.7 of the NCAA infractions program, the Committee on Infractions may require the following:

- (a) **Individual Competition.** The individual's performance may be stricken from the championship's records, the points the student-athlete has contributed to the team's total may be deleted, the team standings may be adjusted accordingly and any awards involved may be returned to the Association. For those championships in which individual results are recorded by time, points or stroke totals (i.e., cross country, golf, gymnastics, indoor track and field, outdoor track and field, rifle, swimming and diving

and skiing), the placement of other competitors may be altered and awards presented accordingly. For those championships in which individual results are recorded by advancement through a bracket or head-to-head competition, the placement of other competitors shall not be altered.

- (b) **Team Competition.** The record of the team's performance may be deleted, the team's place in the final standings may be vacated and the team's trophy and the ineligible student-athlete's award may be returned to the Association.

31.2.2.4 Institutional Penalty for Ineligible Participation. When an ineligible student-athlete participates in an NCAA championship and the student-athlete or the institution knew or had reason to know of the ineligibility, the Committee on Infractions may prescribe a financial penalty.