

The Impact of JV Programs on Retention

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Demographic shifts limiting the number of college-aged individuals has forced many colleges and universities to diversify enrollment strategies in recent years¹. Within athletic departments, this includes the potential to expand junior varsity (JV) sport participation opportunities. A [2022 ROA research brief](#) indicated JV programs provide a positive impact on enrollment and, therefore, institutional revenue, as sport programs including JV participation realized a net return almost 100% larger than those that didn't offer JV opportunities.

Practical Considerations:

- ▼ Did your institution offer a new JV sport program in 2021-2022? If so, were there any noticeable differences in retention rate among athletes in that sport compared to the prior year? If not, was a perceived potential negative impact to retention a factor in your decision to not add a new JV sport program?
- ▼ Are net return and retention rate thought of as competing priorities when considering JV sport programs at your institution? How does that factor into your decision-making when thinking about expanding or contracting JV sports at your school?
- ▼ Do you foresee retention rate challenges being an impediment to offering more JV programs for sports at your institution? Why or why not?
- ▼ How do JV programs impact athletic department administration and support staff (e.g., athletic training, sports information, compliance, etc.)?

However, a common argument against the expansion of JV sport programs is the potential negative impact it may have on an institution's retention rate. This perceived "retention suck" by non-varsity level competition could cause institutions to disregard JV programming as a potential enrollment strategy. Given the lack of research in this area, an examination of this topic was needed, especially at a time when institutions are competing for new student enrollments.

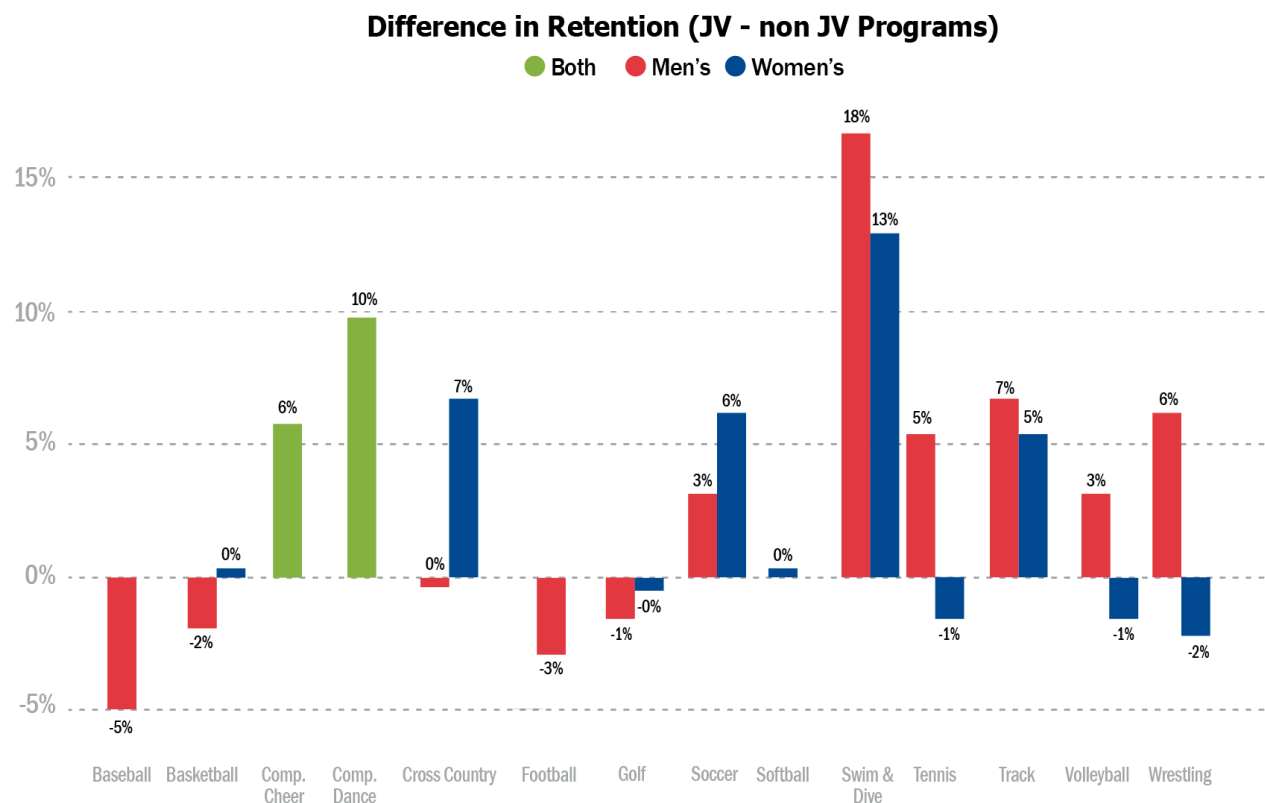
The 2022 [ROA research brief](#) on JV programs explored the impact of JV programs on student-athlete retention at NAIA institutions. These initial findings revealed most sport programs with a JV offering had a slightly higher retention rate than those without a JV program offering. Overall, sport programs with a JV team retained student-athletes at a 63% rate, which slightly outpaced the overall 2020-2021 student-athlete retention rate at NAIA institutions (62%).

This research brief provides updated information on the effect of JV programs on student-athlete retention at NAIA institutions for the 2021-2022 term.



The overall retention rate of student-athletes at NAIA institutions for 2021-2022 was 66%. Both institutions with JV programs and those without JV programs retained student-athletes at a rate of approximately 66%. Similar results were discovered when analyzing men's and women's sports separately, with both genders retaining at about the same rate (69% for women's sports and 65% for men's sports) regardless of JV competition.

The following chart provides an analysis of differences in retention rate, by sport, for institutions that offered JV programs compared to those that did not offer JV programs.



For example, women's soccer programs with a JV component had a 6% higher retention rate than women's soccer programs without a JV component.

For those sport programs with a relatively high frequency of JV program offerings (baseball, football, basketball, wrestling, and soccer), there were largely marginal differences in retention rates among institutions with and without a JV program in those sports. One sport to note is baseball, as it had the largest frequency of JV participation opportunities (62% of all baseball programs included a JV component), yet there was a 5% decrease in retention rate for institutions with a JV baseball squad compared to those that did not compete in JV baseball. Given the high frequency of JV participation within baseball programs, this is a data point worth monitoring going forward.



Key Takeaways:

- ▼ Overall, JV competition did not have a significant impact on retention rate. Both institutions with and without JV sport programs retained student-athletes at about the same rate and at a consistent level with overall NAIA retention rates.
- ▼ Like overall retention rate, retention rates for both women's and men's sports remained about the same for programs with and without JV participation.
- ▼ The majority (14 out of 25) of sport programs included in this analysis realized higher retention rates for programs including a JV component compared to those that did not.
- ▼ For most sports with a relatively high frequency of JV programming, there were marginal differences in retention rate between institutions with and without a JV team.

References:

- ¹ <https://www.cupahr.org/issue/feature/higher-ed-enrollment-cliff/>

