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# The Berkeley Beacon

## Eligibility extension brings back Franklin for fifth season

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By Shruti Rajkumar (https://berkeleybeacon.com/staff\_name/shruti-rajkumar/) | August 30, 2020



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Austin Franklin (2) has scored 37 career goals. He will have the opportunity to add to that total this spring.

On June 26, men’s lacrosse team co-captain and recent graduate Austin Franklin posted a statement on Instagram ending with the words “I’m back.” It indicated his return to the team for the 2021 season, making him the latest athlete to take advantage of an additional year of eligibility.

The Division III Administrative Committee of the National Collegiate Athletic Association announced an eligibility extension in March for student-athletes whose seasons were cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic, opening the door for the college’s senior spring athletes to play another season.

“You train all year for the season, and then to not have the opportunity to put everything that you’ve worked for into action is just devastating,” Franklin said in a phone interview from Dartmouth. “I’m really excited just to get that opportunity to compete with my teammates and my best friends. It’s really exciting, especially after not having that sense of finishing what we started.”

The committee approved a two-semester extension of eligibility for student-athletes. It also approved a blanket waiver—a document that provides temporary relief from NCAA legislation because of widespread, extenuating circumstances—for participation in all sports that completed 50 percent or less of the 2020–21 season.

This blanket waiver will be in effect until fall 2021 due to the cancelation of fall 2020 sports, Athletics Director Patricia Nicol said. In the past, NCAA rules stated that student-athletes have four seasons of eligibility to be completed in up to 10 semesters.



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“Before the pandemic, if they exhausted their eligibility, they would not be eligible [to play during] graduate school,” Nicol said in a phone interview with the Beacon from Rhode Island. “The NCAA, however, put up a blanket waiver, so that this would allow a student-athlete to take advantage of an additional year that they would not ordinarily have.”

She said athletes who wish to return must be enrolled in college to be eligible for another season. Students who attend a different institution for graduate school are still eligible to play their fifth year at their new school.

Franklin said he will be returning to Emerson in fall 2020 to pursue his master’s degree in writing for film and television. He transferred to Emerson in his sophomore year and has started every game since, scoring eight points through the five non-conference games played in the short 2020 season. The co-captain finished second on the team in scoring with 34 points in the fall 2019 season.

“Wins and losses aside, I’m going to gain the ability to not only work on improving as a lacrosse player but [to use] sport as a vehicle to improve as a person and improve my leadership abilities and teamwork abilities,” Franklin said. “I think playing on a team is such a unique experience, especially in college, so being able to continue to do that, it’s a blessing in my opinion that I’m really looking forward to.”

Jack Fox ‘20, a former pitcher for the Emerson baseball team, is pursuing his master’s degree in science of management at Lander University, where he plans to use his fifth year of eligibility in spring 2021.

“Part of me is like, ‘Oh it’s another year not being a professional baseball player,’ which is what I want to be at this point in my life,” Fox said in a phone interview from Greenwood, South Carolina. “But I also see it as another year to work hard to develop and try to increase my stock in the baseball world. I want to develop myself as a baseball player, and make some good buddies for life.”

After he was not signed by an MLB team in the spring, Fox decided last minute to put his name in the transfer portal so he could play baseball for an additional year. Fox said 40 schools all around the country reached out to him the next day, but he was drawn to Lander University because of the higher level of competition at the Division II level.

“I wanted a change of scenery,” he said. “I love Boston, and I loved my time there, [but] I wanted to use this opportunity with the eligibility to see another part of the country. The head coach at Lander, he’s a pitching nerd, and he absolutely sold me on how he wants to work with me to get better and get that opportunity next year. And I talked to a few guys on the team, and it just seemed like it’d be a really good fit.”

Sarah Skeeles ‘20, on the other hand, played on the women’s tennis team but said she would not be returning to Emerson for a fifth year.

“They’re trying to offer the seniors who missed out the opportunity to finish up [the season], but I don’t really think that it’s that necessary for me,” she said in a phone interview with The Beacon from Boston. “When the season ended, I was like ‘Well, I saw that coming’ and it was kind of like. ‘Oh. there’s nothing I can really do about it.’ But I think it’s good that the option is



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there. I think there are people who would want to do it.”  
(https://secure.touchnet.com/C20723\_ustores/web/store\_main.jsp?STOREID=34&Skeele said she valued the experience she had on the tennis team but is ready to focus on

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Nicol said she agrees with the NCAA's decision and is glad that student-athletes can return for a fifth year.

“As a former student-athlete, I know it’s heartbreaking when a season is taken from you, especially if you’re a senior,” Nicol said. “But we live in some very unprecedented times and we welcome them back with open arms if our students decide to come back and participate.”

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