

Increasing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Brock/OUA Athletics

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Overview of Project

This research project examined diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within athletic spaces in Ontario University Athletics (OUA). The purpose of the research was to find strengths in terms of DEI that could be recreated at Brock and beyond in order to spark meaningful change in terms of creating safe spaces for all students to engage in athletics and athletic programming.



Initial Research

All twenty OUA athletic websites were examined to determine the strengths and weaknesses in terms of DEI policies, practices and structures. From here, the top two OUA athletic departments were chosen for additional examination based on their strengths. These departments were Queen's University and the University of Ottawa.



Takeaways from Websites

The UOttawa Gees Gees' and the Queen's Golden Gaels' Websites featured the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths:

- 1) Well articulated policies.
- 2) Representation in both faculty and student leadership positions.

Areas for Improvement:

- 1) Increasing emphasis on non-BIPOC groups.
- 2) Updating policies on a yearly basis.



Literature Review

Academic literature was reviewed to establish connections between the websites and the academic literature. The pieces of literature were multi-faceted and covered many topics within the broader distinction of DEI, which allowed a wide knowledge base to be established. This gave a critical research perspective on how well OUA athletic websites and subsequently departments addressed DEI within their spaces. From here, **three major themes** were yielded that illustrated the University of Ottawa and Queen's to be examples to follow in the realm of DEI practices and policies.



Theme #1: Representation

Diversity is important in leadership positions as it not only allows for unique perspectives within decision making models, but also inspires underrepresented athletes by having them see people like them in positions of power. It is also important to have minority students in leadership positions to keep boards/leadership accountable and provide voices for student athletes who are minorities. This commonly comes through student-led advocacy groups.



Theme #2: Education

Viable education programs are important for all athletes, coaches, trainers, and other stakeholders or participants in athletic spaces. Many microaggressions that make student athletes who identify as BIPOC uncomfortable, happen because perpetrators are unaware that their words or actions are offensive so education provides insight on how to conduct oneself appropriately and helps create effective change through self-betterment.



Theme #3: Policy and Enforcement

Clear policies are needed to enforce and evoke actionable change. Policies that are vague may fail to hold people accountable and may perpetuate bad habits. It is necessary to enforce these policies through actions such as sanctions to ensure consequences are faced and behaviours are corrected to ensure real change occurs within athletic spaces.



Recommendations

Based on research into co-existing OUA athletic websites and the thorough review of related academic literature, Brock University and other OUA institutions can create positive change and improve DEI within their athletic spaces by adhering to the following recommendations:

- 1) Implementing hiring policies and encouraging the formation of student led groups to ensure diversity, perspective, and representation in decision making bodies and leadership positions for both faculty and students which can also inspire athletes.
- 2) Implementing mandatory training and education programs for all athletic stakeholders to help cut back on discriminatory incidents and foster the knowledge base necessary to create a safer and tolerant environment. This training should be built with both BIPOC and LGBTQ+ perspectives in mind.
- 3) Ensure the creation and visibility of articulate and strong policies to create actionable change which should be updated regularly. In addition, systems should be established to help ensure those policies are enforced. This can foster accountability and add legitimacy to DEI practices at any university athletic department.