



**REPORT OF THE  
NCAA COMMON GROUND II MEETING  
NOVEMBER 2-3, 2016**

**GUIDING QUESTIONS**

Participants who work in athletics from the LGBTQ and/or faith-based communities came together to have a dialogue that was guided by the following questions:

1. Is it possible to protect and respect the rights of a private faith-based school to set policy in accordance with their faith tenets and ensure that LGBTQ students and staff on such campuses are treated with respect, compassion and fairness? What actions can be taken toward this goal?
2. Is it possible to protect and respect the beliefs and rights of people of faith in public schools and protect the rights of LGBTQ students and staff on such campuses? What actions can be taken toward this goal?
3. What personal actions toward the goal of creating respectful and inclusive school athletic climates for LGBT people and people of faith can we establish?
4. What are the next steps toward identifying institutional policy and best practice recommendations for creating inclusive and respectful climates for LGBT people and people of faith?

**OVERVIEW OF MEETING ACTIVITIES**

1. **Introductions – Day 1.** The Common Ground leadership team and facilitator, Tanya Williams, were introduced. Dr. Bernard Franklin, the NCAA’s Chief Inclusion Officer, gave brief opening remarks that emphasized the significance of the gathering and the opportunity for it to be a positive model for not only athletics but all of society. Participants introduced themselves, which included identifying preferred pronouns. The Common Ground leadership team gave updates about what had occurred since Common Ground I in November 2014. The leadership team has been meeting over the past 18 months to continue meaningful dialogue and to create and engage in many of the activities that are a part of Common Ground II.
2. **Goals/Guidelines.** To ensure a worthwhile experience for all, participants committed to do the following:
  - a. Create a climate of trust and communication so that everyone feels comfortable to share their thoughts and stories, thus giving the opportunity to build relationships.
  - b. Practice respect and assume the best intentions from everyone involved.

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- c. Be open to the learning that can occur as experiences and ideas are shared.

### 3. Program

- a. **Icebreaker.** Participants engaged in a Rock, Paper, Scissors tournament. When a person lost, he or she cheered on the winner.
- b. **Pair Share.** Participants were asked to partner up and have small discussions with people they did not know very well. A series of prompts were given to “break the ice.” Each time the facilitator rang the bell, participants were encouraged to switch partners. The discussion prompts included the following:
  - i. Spend some time talking about your religious history.
  - ii. Discuss your experience with the LGBTQ community.
  - iii. Name one or more hopes and fears that you have for our time together.

Participants were asked to share their key take-aways from the Pair Share, which included the following:

- 1. When we disclose our personal stories, we realize that we actually have many shared experiences and common goals.
  - 2. The oppression that members of different communities experience can create an “us versus them” dynamic that leads to the idea that the other side is wrong and must change. We need to remain open to understanding our differences.
- c. **Join Me on Common Ground if...** Participants were asked to all stand in a circle and to remain silent while the facilitator read out specific statements beginning with “Join me on common ground if . . .” When participants identified with the statement and were comfortable with expressing that to the group, they stepped forward into the circle. This exercise created a visual representation of participants’ identities and experiences, providing perspective on who shared common ground, and in a few cases, who might be the only person who connected with a statement.
  - d. **Pair Share Part 2.** Participants were asked to have longer conversations using the same format as the first "Pair Share," but questions this time pertained to the participants’ reaction to the “Join Me on Common Ground if” activity. The reactions included these comments:
    - i. Finding common ground with others can help your singularity not be manifested as loneliness.

- ii. There is not always the space for individuals to be their authentic selves and that space needs to be established during Common Ground.
- iii. Those who come from non-marginalized groups seldom must explain their identity because it is understood, so it often feels unfair but is necessary for the marginalized group to do so.
- iv. People can disagree without offending each other. To create room for constructive dialogue, the following actions are helpful:
  - 1. Self-education must occur. Oppressed individuals should not always be the ones doing the teaching.
  - 2. Do not be afraid to ask difficult, uncomfortable questions that can lead to greater understanding. Ask questions in a respectful and caring way. Understand that a person has the right to deny giving a response.

**e. Conversations about the Common Ground Journey.**

Two members of the Common Ground Leadership Team—an LGBTQ educator/advocate and an athletics director from a faith-based institution—joined each other at the front of the room to share their personal journeys. They described how they became involved in Common Ground I in November 2014 and articulated how they have grown personally and professionally from remaining engaged in meaningful common ground discussions over the past few years. Their stories demonstrated that leaders can develop respect and love for each other no matter their sexual orientation or religious affiliation. A significant outcome of finding this common ground is being able to better and more fully support the health and well-being of student-athletes and colleagues.

- f. Triggers Words and Phrases.** The leadership team led a conversation about trigger phrases for persons of faith and LGBTQ people, during which participants could identify some of their own triggers. A trigger is any stimulus either external or internal to the individual that may cause an intense, uncomfortable emotional and/or physical reaction. Triggers are experienced within a range and are different for each person. It is important to focus on both intent and impact.

Select members of the leadership team shared how they came up with the list and why it felt important to their process to develop the list. They also commented on the impact of developing the triggers together on the team and how it was important to trust each other throughout the process. The leadership team believes discussing trigger phrases can be a useful way to engage in a productive conversation if it is done in a compassionate way.

- i. Triggers that Impact LGBTQ People.** See Appendix A for some of the triggers that participants indicated are most harmful to members of the LGBTQ community.
  - ii. Triggers that Impact People of Faith.** See Appendix B for some of the triggers that participants indicated are most harmful to People of Faith.
- 4. Introductions – Day 2.** President Mark Emmert welcomed the participants and stated that Common Ground II was a significant NCAA event and a model not just for athletics but for all of society in the current often divisive national landscape. He emphasized that the NCAA administers athletics in the realm of higher education and has student development as its top priority. President Emmert thanked the participants for engaging in this important dialogue that supports both student development and well-being.

## 5. Program

- a. Mingle.** Participants were asked to mingle with each other and to have conversations that focused on these two questions:
  - i. What's on your mind after reflecting on our time yesterday?
  - ii. How do you want to show up to the conversation today?
- b. Caucus and Fishbowl Activity.** The facilitator asked participants to form groups based on their identities. Groups included: LGBTQA people, LGBTQ people of faith, and people of faith. Each group was given 20 minutes to caucus and to engage in dialogue on these questions:
  - i. What would a common ground vision look like in a faith based school? In a public and private secular institutions?
  - ii. Is it possible to protect and respect the rights of a private faith-based school to set policy in accordance with their faith tenets and ensure that LGBTQ students and staff on such campuses are treated with respect, compassion and fairness? What actions can be taken toward this goal?
  - ii. Is it possible to protect and respect the beliefs and rights of people of faith in public schools and protect the rights of LGBTQ students and staff on such campuses? What actions can be taken toward this goal?

Additional questions that guided the conversation:

- What is the current reality?

- What are the benefits of creating a common ground space?
- What are the drawbacks if a common ground space is not created?
- What are institutional hurdles? What are institutional supports and who are allies?

Following the caucuses, all participants gathered in one room and formed a circle. Each group was given the opportunity to gather in the middle of the circle and to recreate their caucus discussion for all in the room. Participants on the outside of the circle listened in silence, and then when the group in the circle finished, the entire room was invited to reflect on and to speak about what they heard.

**i. Individuals from Faith Based Institutions.**

This group discussed creating spaces on campus that are safe for all students. Participants acknowledged that actions to support LGBTQ students can pose challenges due to institutional views and policies. In addition, a few participants expressed fear of judgment and negative reactions for those who identify as LGBTQ allies.

This group indicated a need for creating refuge for discussions on campus regarding LGBTQ issues on their campuses. Student-Athletes who identify as LGBTQ need a safe place where their voices can be heard and where they know that they are loved and supported.

**ii. LGBTQ Individuals of Faith.** Participants from this group noted that some students of faith who also identify as LGBTQ may seek out faith-based institutions thinking that they will be supported; others may discover their identities while on a faith-based campus. It is important to affirm that LGBTQ people are on every campus and to provide supportive environments. One way to create more inclusive spaces is to offer safe zone training that engages administrators, coaches, and student-athletes.

**iii. LGBTQ Individuals.** Participants from this group shared the frustration of hearing people outside the group claim to support LGBTQ student-athletes when the policies and practices of their institutions do not reflect that support. Student-athletes of all sexual orientations and religious backgrounds should feel safe and supported at their colleges and universities.

Many athletics departments have good intentions to support their LGBTQ students, but they need guidance on how to move from intention to meaningful action. Athletics departments need access to education/training on how to create policies and procedures that take all students' well-being into account.

**c. Brainstorm on Possible Action Items.**

- i. Continued Conversations.** Participants discussed the benefits of finding constituents on their campuses to share their Common Ground experience with and continuing conversations with individuals they met while at the National Office. Suggestions also included a reoccurring conference call amongst the participants.
  - ii. Campus Climate.** Participants noted the value of better understanding the climate at their institutions and organizations and then working to create inclusive environments.
  - iii. Inclusive Language.** Participants discussed the benefits of using inclusive language when speaking with campus stakeholders and constituents.
  - iv. Individual Press Releases.** Participants expressed interest in sharing the NCAA press release on Common Ground II with constituents. Many stated the importance of sharing the Common Ground II model with others.
  - v. Monthly Updates.** Some participants suggested a monthly update from the National Office about LGBTQ initiatives that occur within or impact the membership.
  - vi. Traveling Common Ground Team.** Participants suggested composing a “travel team” who would be able to host a condensed version of Common Ground on college campuses. This travel team would receive facilitator training in order to become more effective at maneuvering through the sensitive topics.
  - vii. Women Leaders in College Sports (formerly NACWAA) Summer Institute and Conference.** Participants from Women Leaders in College Sports suggested establishing programming during the summer institute and conference which would reflect some of the discussions that occurred during Common Ground II.
  - viii. Trigger Activity.** Participants expressed interest in sharing the Trigger Activity with their constituents and/or campus community. A knowledgeable facilitator and an environment of trust and respect are essential to the success of this activity.
  - ix. Visible Marker.** Some participants requested that a visible marker/logo be created so they can mark areas as safe spaces. Some also suggested that there be faith representation on the markers.
- d. Individual Action Plans.** Participants were given time to reflect on ways that they could take what they had learned and experienced back to their campuses and/or professional work. Participants wrote at least one action item on a worksheet that they took with them.

- e. Statement of Solidarity.** A member from the leadership team proposed the creation of a statement of solidarity to create a unified front moving forward. The participants reviewed a solidarity rough draft that was written by the leadership team. A subcommittee was formed to edit and finalize the document.
- f. Final Thoughts, Appreciations, Evaluations.** Participants were asked to form a circle to speak about their experiences at Common Ground, including for what or whom they were thankful. Participants indicated that they were very grateful to be a part of the event and enriched by it in many ways. They appreciated the relationships that they formed or renewed over the two days.

Many of the participants expressed that they gained a wealth of knowledge from each other and that they look forward to being more active and engaged in future conversations. The group consensus was there is a definite need for a Common Ground III. Participants were informed that they would be sent a survey to give them the opportunity to comment on their overall Common Ground experience.

<b>Common Ground II November 2-3, 2016 Meeting</b>	
<b>Attendees:</b>	
Schuyler Bailar, Harvard University	
Nevin Caple, Br{ache the Silence and LGBT SportSafe	
Larry Carpenter, Lee University	
Helen Carroll, National Center for Lesbian Rights	
Layshia Clarendon, Atlanta Dream	
Liz Darger, Brigham Young University	
Julie Davis, Wheaton College	
Clyde Doughty, Bowie State University	
Jess Duff, NCAA	
Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts, Amherst	
Debbie Haliday, University of California Los Angeles	
Ethan Hamilton, Point Loma Nazarene University	
Gloria Jenkins, St. Mary's College	
Ashland Johnson, Human Rights Campaign	
Jasmyn Lindsay, Queens University of Charlotte	
Donna Ledwin, Allegheny Mountain Collegiate Conference	
Skip Lord, Houghton College	
Eric Lueshen, LGBT Sportsafe	
Drew Martin, Texas Christian University	
Kristen Matha, NCAA	

Shannon Minter, National Center for Lesbian Rights
Karen Morrison, University of Central Florida
Chris Mosier, You Can Play
Emily Niemann, Rankin & Associates
Donna Noonan, Fellowship of Christian Athletes
Gary Pine, Azusa Pacific University
Rosamaria Riccobono, Eastern Connecticut University
Josh Sanders
Charley Sullivan, University of California, Santa Barbara
Lisa Thuer, Women Leaders in College Sports
Amy Wilson, NCAA
Shane Windmeyer, Campus Pride
Dan Wood, National Christian College Athletic Association
Lee Workman, East Carolina University
Stephanie Zonars, Life Beyond Sport
<b>Facilitator:</b>
Tanya Williams
<b>NCAA Staff in Attendance:</b>
Emily Altier
Gail Dent
Mark Emmert
Bernard Franklin
Ashleigh Hazley
Julian Jones
Sonja Robinson
Richard Zhu



### **Appendix A: Trigger Words or Phrases for LGBT People**

1. Professing to “love the sinner, but hate the sin.” Status vs. Behavior: LGBT status is tolerated; LGBT behavior is not.
2. Use of “homosexual” instead of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer. “Homosexual” is an outdated clinical term that implies pathology.
3. “The gay lifestyle” – This phrase trivializes the complexity and diversity of LGBT people’s lives as well as their deeply rooted sense of identity.
4. Calling LGBT people sexual predators, a danger to children – A destructive stereotype.
5. Calling transgender women “men” and transgender men “women”. A refusal to honor self-affirmed identities that privileges one’s sex assigned at birth over one’s self-affirmed gender identity.
6. Using male pronouns to refer to transgender women, female pronouns to refer to transgender men – see above.
7. Assuming that LGBT people are poor role models for young people, are unsuited for leadership positions with young people solely because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
8. Assuming that all LGBT are Godless, that LGBT people cannot also be people of faith.
9. Using the phrase “promoting homosexuality” to dismiss efforts or initiatives that challenge discrimination against LGBT people or call for the inclusion of LGBT people.
10. Portraying Christians as a persecuted or oppressed group in the United States – Christianity is the most dominant religion in the United States. We celebrate Christian religion holidays over all others. The Constitution protects freedom of religion in the First Amendment. Individual people may be prejudiced against Christians, but all major institutions in the United States either support or protect Christians’ right to practice their faith.
11. Claiming that efforts to create an inclusive religion-neutral climate in the public square infringe on religious freedom.
12. Using “family” in an exclusive way that only recognizes only traditional heterosexual mom and dad families as legitimate and all others as inferior or unworthy of recognition.

13. “Religious freedom” used to justify discrimination against LGBT people in the public square.

**Appendix B: Trigger Words or Phrases for People of Faith**

1. The use of the words closeminded, homophobe, hater, bigot and anything “anti” to characterize or describe an evangelical Christian mindset.
2. Dismissal of the Christian sacred text (Bible) as ancient and/or irrelevant for today.
3. Separating and/or pitting the words of Jesus in the Bible against the Apostles' words in the epistles ... it's all God's word.
4. Discrimination against or the assumption of Evangelicals as being anti-intellectual
5. Assuming Christians lack empathy for the LGBT experience
6. That acceptance must include affirmation (is there a universal definition for acceptance)
7. Calling out Christians as hypocrites, the “you do it too” mentality, thus attempting to negate dialogue or personal attempts to aspire to a higher moral code.
8. Generalizing in ways that hold all Christians today responsible for historical atrocities committed by people who claimed to be Christians.
9. The lack of understanding that Christians are becoming more marginalized in the public square and especially in higher education.