



**REPORT OF THE
NCAA COMMON GROUND III MEETING
NOVEMBER 1-2, 2017
HOUGHTON COLLEGE**

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Participants who work primarily in athletics and represented LGBTQ and/or faith-based communities came together to talk, 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 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning 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 LGBTQ 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 LGBTQ people and people of faith?

OVERVIEW OF MEETING ACTIVITIES

1. **Introductions — Day 1.** Amy Wilson, NCAA director of inclusion, welcomed Common Ground III participants on behalf of NCAA President Mark Emmert and Katrice Albert, executive vice president of inclusion and human resources. Wilson emphasized that the purpose of the gathering was for the benefit of student-athletes and those who educate and guide them at NCAA membership institutions. She pointed out that Common Ground III participants shared a deep concern for student-athletes' well-being. The Common Ground leadership team and facilitator Tanya Williams then were introduced. Houghton President Shirley Mullen provided opening remarks that emphasized the significance of the gathering and the opportunity for it to be a positive model not only for athletics but for all of society. Participants introduced themselves and stated their pronouns. The Common Ground leadership team provided updates about what had occurred since Common Ground II in November 2016. The leadership team met via teleconference during the past 12 months to continue meaningful dialogue and to engage in and report about involvement in Common Ground activities.
2. **Goals/Guidelines/Rules of Engagement.** To ensure a worthwhile experience for all, the facilitator discussed communication guidelines and goals with participants. The guidelines aimed to establish a safe space and climate of trust in which all participants felt comfortable

sharing their thoughts and experiences. Participants committed to rules of engagement, which included but were not limited to the following:

- a. Create a climate of trust and communication so everyone feels comfortable to share thoughts and stories, allowing for the opportunity to build relationships.
- b. Practice respect, compassion and openness and assume the best intentions from everyone involved.
- c. Practice active listening.
- d. Be open to the learning that can occur as experiences and ideas are shared.
- e. Speak about your own lived experiences.

3. Program.

- a. **Icebreaker.** Participants engaged in a rock, paper, scissors tournament. When participants lost, they cheered on the winners.
- b. **Icebreaker.** Participants were asked to share a time when they felt like they mattered, as well as a time when they felt like they were marginalized. The facilitator used the experiences shared to begin a discussion about issues pertaining to LGBTQ people on campus, asking the following questions:
 - (1) What's difficult about discussing LGBTQ issues in athletics?
 - (2) What's easy about discussing LGBTQ issues in athletics?
 - (3) What is the common ground that you seek during this session?
 - (4) What is one hope that you have about our time together?
 - (5) What is one fear that you have about our time together?
- c. **Join Me on Common Ground If ...** Participants stood in a circle and remained 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. After the facilitator read several statements, participants were invited to express their own statements to which the group responded.

- d. Pair Share.** A series of prompts pertaining to the “join me on common ground if ...” activity was given to participants to discuss in pairs. Participants were asked to partner with someone with whom they shared similar lived experiences and common ground. Each time the facilitator rang the bell, participants were encouraged to switch partners. The discussion prompts included the following:
- (1) What impact did the “join me on common ground if ...” activity have for you?
 - (2) What are you thinking about now?
- e. Pair Share Part 2.** Participants were then asked to partner up and have short discussions with a person they did not know very well and with whom they have different lived experiences. Participants were asked to have conversations using the same format as the first “pair share.”
- (1) What impact did the “join me on common ground if ...” activity have for you?
 - (2) What are you thinking about now?
- f. Table Conversations.** Participants were asked to return to their seats and engage their respective tables in discussions using a series of questions provided by the facilitator. Following those discussions, participants were asked to share parts of their table conversations with the larger group. The discussion prompts included the following:
- (1) What is one hope for engaging with fellow participants in discourse at Common Ground III?
 - (2) What is one fear about engaging with fellow participants in discourse at Common Ground III?
- g. Conversations About the Common Ground Journey.** Four members of the Common Ground leadership team joined one another on a panel at the front of the room to share their personal journeys, perspectives and the impact the Common Ground program has had on them. Panelists included two LGBTQ educators/consultants and an athletics director and senior associate athletics director from faith-based institutions. They described how they became involved in Common Ground and articulated how they have grown personally and professionally from remaining engaged in meaningful common ground discussions over the past few years. Their respective stories demonstrated that leaders from faith-based communities and LGBTQ communities can develop respect and love for each, as well as engage one another in discourse while showing respect for their respective sexual orientations and/or religious affiliations. In addition, the panelists expressed their commitment to finding common ground with the goal of being able to better and more fully support the health and well-being of student-athletes and colleagues.

h. Group Share. Participants were asked to engage their respective tables in discussions about the panelists' stories and talk about their own experiences. The discussion prompts included the following:

- (1) What did you hear that most impacted you?
- (2) What questions arose for you when listening to the panel?

i. Discussion About Religion. Two members of the leadership team who are administrators at faith-based institutions provided an overview of some basic history of religion and associated vocabulary.

j. Terminology Activity. The facilitator taped flip-chart paper to the walls in the room. Each paper had a word or phrase pertaining to LGBTQ or faith-based communities. Participants were asked to gather in groups of two or more and write out definitions, comments and/or questions for each word or phrase on the flip-chart paper. In addition, participants were asked to engage with their groups about the terms they encountered.

k. Silent Gallery Walk. Participants were asked to walk around the room and review the various responses written on each piece of flip-chart paper while remaining silent. After the silent gallery walk, participants were assigned to Groups A and B. Participants in Group A were asked to move to a word or phrase posted on the flip-chart paper based on the following prompt:

- What word/term do I feel like I know the most about and would feel comfortable helping others understand?

Participants in Group B were asked to move to a word or phrase posted on the flip-chart paper based on the following prompt:

- (1) What word/term do I feel like I know the least about and would need someone to help me understand more?
- (2) What word/term do I want to understand more about?

Once the people in Groups A and B chose a particular word or phrase, the facilitator asked them to engage in dialogue. The prompts were then reversed for Groups A and B, and another dialogue ensued.

l. Caucus Activity. The facilitator asked participants to form groups based on their identities. Groups included people of faith, LGBTQ people, LGBTQ people of faith and people with no LGBTQ or faith affiliations. Each group was given 60 minutes to caucus and to engage in dialogue based on the following questions:

- (1) What are the benefits of creating a common ground space, and what are the drawbacks if a common ground space is not created?
- (2) What would a common ground vision look like at a faith-based institution or at public or private secular institutions?
- (3) Is it possible to protect and respect the rights of private faith-based institutions 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?
- (4) Is it possible to protect and respect the beliefs and rights of people of faith at public institutions 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:

- (1) What is the current reality?
- (2) What are the institutional hurdles? What are institutional supports and who are the allies?

m. Caucus Report Outs. Each caucus was given 10 minutes to report out from its respective conversations in addition to addressing the following questions:

- (1) What was it like to meet in the caucus groups?
- (2) What are the benefits of creating a common ground space?
- (3) What are the drawbacks if a common ground space is not created?

n. Trigger Words and Phrases. The leadership team led a conversation about trigger phrases and words for people of faith and LGBTQ people, during which participants could identify some of their own triggers. In addition, participants discussed the importance of holding, validating and hearing others' 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 critical to focus on both intent and impact.

Members of the leadership team shared the process of developing the trigger list and determining which words or phrases to include. They also commented on the impact of developing the triggers as a team and how it was important to trust one another throughout the process. The leadership team believes discussing trigger words/phrases

on campuses is useful if it is done in a compassionate way by people who have established trust and respect in their relationships with each other.

- o. Trigger Words and Phrases Activity.** Participants gathered in groups of four or five to review the trigger list of words and phrases and discuss their experiences with and thoughts about the words and phrases provided. They were then asked to add their own trigger words and phrases if they were not already listed.

4. Introductions — Day 2.

5. Program.

- a. Mingle.** Participants were asked to mingle with other participants whom they had not engaged with yet and to share two words based on these two questions:
 - (1) How are you feeling after the various activities, sessions and discussions from Day 1 of Common Ground?
 - (2) How are you feeling about re-engaging in the various activities, sessions and discussions on Day 2 of Common Ground?
- b. Caucus Activity Part 2.** The facilitator asked participants to return to their respective caucus groups based on their identities. Groups included people of faith, LGBTQ people, LGBTQ people of faith and people not affiliated with LGBTQ or faith. Each group received 20 minutes to reconnect, caucus and engage in dialogue regarding the trigger activity. After reflection on what it had felt like to be in their respective communities during the Common Ground event thus far, participants brainstormed suggestions for action they would share for individuals to support their identities and communities, as well as to create practices and policies that foster common ground.
- c. Fishbowl Activity.** The facilitator asked all participants to gather in one room and form a circle. Those in each caucus were then given the opportunity to gather and sit in the middle of the circle for 10 minutes to re-create their caucus discussions for all in the room. Participants on the outside of the fishbowl listened in silence. They were given the opportunity to write down questions and submit them to the fishbowl. After the members of each caucus finished their discussion in the fishbowl, participants outside the circle were invited to reflect, sharing three statements that they heard from the fishbowl.
 - (1) **People of Faith.** This group discussed ways to create spaces on campus that are safe for all students regardless of the communities they are a part of. In addition, group participants acknowledged that actions to support LGBTQ students can pose challenges due to institutional views and policies, core tenets of their respective faiths and the institutions' commitment to core values and mission

statements. This group also discussed ways people of faith are marginalized and/or silenced due to their personal and/or institution's views.

This group recognized a need for advocating for LGBTQ student-athletes on faith-based campuses. It also recognized a need to create a refuge for discussions on campuses regarding LGBTQ issues, so that student-athletes who identify as LGBTQ feel supported and comfortable on campus and believe they have a voice that is being heard. In addition, some expressed concern about the status of their NCAA membership and the possibility of their institutions being rejected by other NCAA member institutions due to some policies and/or actions that are based on their religious convictions.

- (2) **LGBTQ People of Faith.** This group discussed the importance of affirming LGBTQ people and LGBTQ people of faith and acknowledging that these students reside on every campus, including faith-based institutions. In addition, the group discussed the need to identify allies on campus, empower these allies to advocate on behalf of these students, engage people in positions of power in dialogue and encourage them to build strategic plans of action to create supportive environments, programs and initiatives for students.
- (3) **LGBTQ People.** This group discussed the importance of supporting and empowering LGBTQ youth, citing statistics that reveal that young people who are LGBTQ are three to five times more likely to end their life than non-LGBTQ people. This group also shared deep concern for the growing number of LGBTQ students who take their own lives.

This group acknowledged the efforts of administrators/educators on campus who support these individuals but expressed the need to expand that community of supporters and the need to take action on the students' behalf. In addition, the group discussed ways to create safe spaces and inclusive environments, ways to advocate for those students, and ways to provide them with the needed resources.

- (4) **People Who Are Not LGBTQ nor People of Faith.** This group discussed supporting both communities on their respective campuses or at their respective organizations as allies, as well as advocates for issues pertaining to people of faith and LGBTQ people. They acknowledged the desire and need to be a bridge for both communities, facilitating discussions like common ground with the aim to create inclusive environments where both communities can coexist respectfully. In addition, they acknowledged some of the challenges that exist in this work as an ally and some of the potential consequences that may arise when advocating for both communities.

- d. Moving Toward Common Ground (Next Steps).** Participants were given time to reflect on what they learned and what the two-day event had meant to them. The facilitator encouraged them to think about their respective contexts and environments and to determine how they could and would move forward with meaningful actions in their organizations, their campuses, their communities and their personal lives.
- e. Individual Action Plans.** Participants wrote down action items to be carried out when they returned to their organizations and/or campuses.
- f. Bringing It to Your Campus.** Two members of the Common Ground leadership team shared their experiences and action steps at their respective faith-based institutions after Common Ground II. Each answered the following questions:

 - (1) What were your initial steps after leaving the Common Ground sessions?
 - (2) How did you engage campus leaders and those with institutional influence in the conversation?
 - (3) What has been the timeline of having meaningful actions happen on your campuses?
 - (4) What is your vision for the impact of the work on your campuses?
- g. Moving Toward Common Ground (Next Steps) Part 2.** Participants were asked to divide into “like-context” groups to have a conversation using the following questions:

 - (1) How can a common ground conversation be re-created on campuses or at organizations?
 - (2) What resources may you need to re-create those conversations or move forward with personal actions items?
 - (3) What contacts need to be made?
- h. Final Thoughts, Appreciations, Evaluations.** Participants were asked to form a circle to speak about their experiences at Common Ground, including for what and/or whom they were thankful. Participants indicated that they were very grateful to be a part of the event, engage with one another in dialogue, learn, grow personally, share their experiences, discuss challenges and solutions, and develop action plans to improve their respective communities for student-athletes. They also expressed appreciation for the connections made and relationships formed — and renewed — during the two days.

Common Ground III	
November 1-2, 2017, Meeting	
Facilitator:	
Tanya Williams, Authentic Coaching & Consulting	
Attendees:	
Schuyler Bailar, Harvard University	
Julia Beeman, Belmont Abbey College	
Gabrielle Cabanero, Dixie State University	
Nevin Caple, LGBT SportSafe	
Helen Carroll, National Center for Lesbian Rights	
Lawrence Chatters, University of Nebraska, Lincoln	
La Shonda Coleman, Pepperdine University	
Kiaira Cooper, Houghton College	
Liz Darger, Brigham Young University	
Jessica Duff, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	
Richard Eckley, Houghton College	
Ashlee Gaskins, Fayetteville State University	
James Gehrels, West Coast Conference	
Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts, Amherst	
Deborah Haliday, University of California, Los Angeles	
Connie Hurlbut, West Coast Conference	
Ashley Jennings, Bowie State University	
R. Brit Katz, Millsaps College	

Skip Lord, Houghton College
Resa Lovelace, University of Oregon
Courtney Lovely, Palm Beach Atlantic University
Drew Martin, Texas Christian University
Stephanie McMahon, Houghton College
LaWanda Miller, Fayetteville State University
Scott Moats, Crown College (Minnesota)
Karen Morrison, University of Central Florida
Chris Mosier, You Can Play
Emily Niemann, Rankin & Associates Consulting
Donna Noonan, Fellowship of Christian Athletes
Jean Orr, NCAA
Gary Pine, Azusa Pacific University
Sarah Pruess, St. Bonaventure University
Carolyn Reyes, National Center for Lesbian Rights
Alexiss Robinson, Immaculata University
Joshua Sanders, Los Angeles Dodgers
Bob Segave, Roberts Wesleyan College
Ben Schilaty, Brigham Young University
Lisa Thuer, Women Leaders in College Sports
Jonathan Tymann, Gordon College
Judy Van Horn, University of South Carolina
Neil Virtue, Mills College

Terilyn Walker, Concordia University Irvine
Chris Williams, Southern Wesleyan University
Amy Wilson, NCAA
Dan Wood, National Christian College Athletic Association
Other NCAA Staff in Attendance:
Craig Malveaux
Rachel Stark