



**REPORT OF THE  
NCAA COMMON GROUND V MEETING  
NOVEMBER 12 – NOVEMBER 13, 2019  
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN (AUSTIN, TEXAS)**

**GOALS**

The Common Ground initiative was established in 2014 to provide LGBTQ individuals and individuals of faith at public and private NCAA member institutions, LGBTQ organizations and faith-based organizations an opportunity to discuss commonalities and differences and learn how to work more cohesively within athletics. The main goal of the Common Ground initiative is to foster athletics environments that respect and support the dignity and well-being of student-athletes and those who teach and lead them. For Common Ground V specifically, participants agreed to the following goals:

1. To identify strategies and best practices for institutions, athletics departments and athletics conferences to ensure that individuals may participate in an athletics climate of respect and inclusion, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or faith perspective.
2. To identify personal and institutional motivations and challenges to establishing common ground.
3. To learn more about various identities, perspectives, experiences and beliefs and to break down stereotypes.

**FOCUS QUESTIONS**

The following questions framed the entirety of Common Ground V:

1. What does the term “belonging” mean for both religious and LGBTQ identities?
2. 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 people of faith and LGBTQ students and staff on such campuses are treated with respect, compassion, and fairness? What actions can be taken toward this goal?
3. Is it possible to protect and respect the beliefs and rights of people of faith in public schools and protect the rights of people of faith and LGBTQ students and staff on such campuses?
4. What actions can be taken toward this goal?

## **OVERVIEW OF MEETING ACTIVITIES – DAY 1**

- 1. Introductions.** The University of Texas at Austin (UT) Executive Senior Associate Athletics Director for External Affairs Drew Martin offered opening remarks and welcomed Common Ground V participants to campus. Martin emphasized that Common Ground could serve as a model for transformational understanding if participants open their hearts and minds and share their stories. Chris Del Conte, UT Vice President and Director of Athletics, described the pivotal role sport has played (and continues to play) toward equity and social justice. Del Conte shared personal stories wherein sports “opened his heart” to differing ideologies, beliefs, and identities. Chris Plonsky, UT Chief of Staff and Executive Senior Associate Athletics Director for Women’s Basketball and Women’s Volleyball welcomed participants and gave a brief historical overview of the segregated and problematic past of the university specifically and collegiate athletics broadly. Plonsky stressed the importance of student-centered change and impact through understanding diverse perspectives.

Katrice Albert, NCAA executive vice president for inclusion and human resources, welcomed Common Ground V participants on behalf of the NCAA and praised UT’s athletics staff as well as the Common Ground Leadership team for their conviction, commitment, and hard work in planning, hosting and facilitating the two-day program. Albert highlighted the history of Common Ground as an initiative that has led to a deeper understanding of faith and LGBTQ perspectives via vulnerability, courage, and intentional dialogue. Albert also noted the NCAA’s commitment to pursue common ground among LGBTQ people, people of faith, private faith-based institutions, private secular institutions and public institutions. Amy Wilson, NCAA managing director of inclusion, led introductions of the Common Ground Leadership Team and offered a brief history of the Common Ground initiative. Tanya Williams, social justice educator and consultant and Common Ground facilitator, offered a land acknowledgment for the indigenous nations native to the Austin, Texas area before participants introduced themselves to the group at-large. Williams then gave an overview of the goals, logistics, guidelines and agenda for Common Ground V.

### **2. Program.**

- a. Icebreaker.** Participants engaged in a rock, paper, scissors tournament.
- b. Concentric circles.** Participants created two concentric circles, and individuals from the outer circle paired with individuals from the inner circle. During four rounds, pairs of participants discussed one of the prompts listed below. After each round, new pairings were created to discuss a different prompt. The following prompts were used in the activity:
  - (1) Talk about a time you felt like you mattered. Talk about a time when you felt like you were marginalized.

- (2) What's hard about discussing LGBTQ issues in athletics? What's easy about discussing LGBTQ issues in athletics?
- (3) What's hard about discussing faith issues? What's easy about discussing faith issues?
- (4) What is the common ground that you seek from your perspective during this session? What are you willing to offer in service of seeking that common ground?
- (5) What is one hope that you have about our time together? What is one fear that you have about our time together?

Participants reflected on the activity and shared their thoughts. Participants pointed out the difficulties and challenges that exist within collegiate athletics for people of faith and LGBTQ people. One participant pointed out the importance of holding accountable those with harmful ideologies.

**c. Rules of engagement.** The facilitator guided the group to identify rules of engagement. These guidelines aimed to establish a safe space and build a community of trust in which all participants felt comfortable to share their thoughts and experiences. Participants committed to rules of engagement, which included but were not limited to the following:

- (1) Practice respect for participants and their lived experiences.
- (2) Speak from personal experience.
- (3) *Share the space* – pay attention to airtime.
- (4) Be open to the learning that can occur as experiences and ideas are shared.
- (5) Treat the experiences of participants confidentially.
- (6) Practice active listening, in which participants listen to understand rather than to respond.
- (7) Practice risk-taking, openness and compassion.
- (8) Embrace literacy moments by asking questions about the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and individuals of faith.
- (9) Assume everyone's best intentions. Participants noted there would be mistakes, and those mistakes should be addressed, unpacked and overcome.

(10) Be aware of what is happening internally (emotionally and physically) and within the group at-large.

**d. Join me on common ground.** 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 expressing that to the group, they stepped forward into the circle. After the facilitator read several statements, participants were invited to express their own statements to which the group responded. 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 identified with a statement.

**e. Pair share.** Participants discussed in pairs the following prompts:

(1) What impact did the “Join Me on Common Ground” activity have for you?

(2) What are you thinking about now?

Participants first partnered with someone with whom they perceived to share a lot of common ground. Participants then partnered with someone with whom they did not perceive to share much common ground. Lastly, the entire group of participants reconvened to reflect on the pair-share activity. Individuals noted the activity prompted a reflection on their own life experiences and privileges. Participants also stressed the importance of showing empathy in the interactions.

**f. Table conversations.** Participants engaged in table conversations regarding the following prompts:

(1) What is one hope you have about participating in Common Ground V and the conversations that will ensue?

(2) What is one fear you have about participating in Common Ground V and the conversations that will ensue?

Following those discussions, participants were asked to share parts of their table conversations with the larger group.

**g. Terminology activity.** The facilitator posted words and definitions on the wall grouped by topic pertaining to LGBTQ or faith-based communities (e.g., gender identity, Muslim, religion, sacred, sexual orientation, or transgender). Participants then formed groups of four or five and reviewed each grouping of words and definitions and discussed various interpretations of terminology. The goal of the activity was to discuss, explain and understand LGBTQ- and faith-related terminology by responding to the questions:

- (1) Which terms were new for you?
- (2) What questions do you have about any of the terms that are listed? Talk about them within your group and write them down to bring to the larger group?
- (3) Are there any terms that you feel like are missing from this group of words?

- h. A common ground conversation.** Three participants who had attended a previous Common Ground spoke about how the initiative has helped them build relationships with people who are different in some fundamental ways, yet who have become close friends and mentors. In addition, the Common Ground leadership team sat on a panel to model a common ground conversation from their perspectives. The panelists included LGBTQ people, people of faith, and LGBTQ people of faith who explained the importance of common ground while stressing the strong sense of community, collaboration and ally-ship that has characterized the Common Ground leadership team.
- i. Debriefing a common ground conversation.** Participants were given the opportunity to reflect on the common ground conversation at their tables and discuss the following question: what did you observe?

The facilitator asked participants to share reactions to the common ground conversation. Participants commended the vulnerability and authenticity of the panelists, their genuine ability to respect each other despite their differences, and their ability to speak directly to each other. Participants also commended the leadership team for modeling what ally-ship can look like in everyday interactions.

- j. Caucus group conversations.** Participants formed groups based on their identities. Groups included people of faith, LGBTQ people, LGBTQ people of faith and people with no LGBTQ or faith identities. Each group was given 50 minutes to caucus and to engage in dialogue based on the following guiding questions:

- (1) What has this day been like for you?
- (2) What do you need from yourself to deepen the conversation tomorrow? What do you need from others to deepen the conversation?

- k. Adjournment.** The facilitator closed the first programming day with general announcements about the next day.

## **OVERVIEW OF MEETING ACTIVITIES – DAY 2**

- 1. Checking-in and reconnecting.** Led by the facilitator, participants expressed appreciation for the respect, vulnerability, and stories shared during the first day of programming. Before

setting intentions for the day, the facilitator noted the importance of self-care when navigating triggers and engaging in deep conversations.

## 2. Program.

**a. Setting intentions for change.** The facilitator prompted participants to self-reflect and journal via the following questions:

- (1) Why did you want to attend Common Ground V?
- (2) What have you experienced and/or learned from Common Ground V so far? How can you use the information gained or benefit from the relationships already made?
- (3) What is your vision for Common Ground in your role? On your campus? In your arena? Why is that important?

The facilitator then asked participants to partner with another participant and share their intentions for the day. Participants encouraged fellow participants to be uncomfortable, seek commonalities, and listen to others regardless of their real and/or perceived differences and experiences. Once the activity concluded, participants filled out “permission slips” to give personal permission to feel or act in certain way throughout the day.

**b. Shame 101.** Participants watched a video by scholar Dr. Brene’ Brown about the difference between guilt and shame. This video was followed by a brief lesson on “shame shields” which are strategies for disconnection (i.e., ways we can react when we are feeling shame). The facilitator then asked participants to be aware of their usage of “shame shields” and to be vulnerable within this space.

**c. Trigger list activity.** Participants shared how they respond to triggers. The facilitator defined a trigger as any stimulus, either external or internal to a person, which causes an emotional reaction. Emotional reactions may include, but are not limited to, feelings of unexpectedness, disorientation or general intensity. Members of the leadership team shared the process of developing their own trigger list, which was distributed to participants. The facilitator prompted participants to partner with someone from their caucus group to review the list and identify additional triggers and their emotional and physical responses to those triggers.

After the initial conversation, participants partnered with a pair from another caucus group to review the trigger list and identify additional triggers and their emotional and physical responses to those triggers. Upon completion of group dialogue, participants discussed the personal and emotional impact this activity had on them. Participants also pointed out the need to be introspective when thinking about triggers and to remain in continued dialogue.

The facilitator concluded the activity by reviewing the “Triggering Event Cycle” and “Triggering Event Traffic Circle,” both of which were developed by Dr. Kathy Obear.

**d. Caucus group conversations.** Participants formed 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 50 minutes to caucus and to engage in dialogue based on the following guiding questions:

(1) How is it possible to protect and respect the rights of private faith-based schools and/or public and private secular schools – to set policy in accordance with faith tenants and ensure that LGBTQ and people of faith students and staff on such campuses are treated with respect, compassion, and fairness?

(2) What makes it easier to do? What are the challenges?

The following additional questions guided the conversation:

(1) What are the benefits of a common ground space? What are the drawbacks if common ground space is not created?

(2) What is the current reality? What would a common ground vision look like at a faith-based school? At a public and private secular institution(s)?

(3) What are institutional hurdles? What are institutional sources of support or allies?

**e. Fishbowl activity.** All participants formed a circle. Each of the four caucuses sat in the middle of the circle (i.e., in a “fishbowl”) for 15 minutes to re-create their discussions for all other participants to witness. Participants outside of the fishbowl listened to the caucus discussion in silence. After the members of each caucus finished their discussion in the fishbowl, participants outside the circle were invited to reflect on poignant moments witnessed.

(1) **LGBTQ People.** The group discussed the importance of understanding the generational differences of LGBTQ people and their experiences. Additionally, they discussed the struggles faced by LGBTQ individuals, particularly transgender people. Citing a 41 percent suicide rate among transgender youth, the group emphasized the need to provide support for LGBTQ individuals within athletics and on college campuses. In addition, participants discussed the need for cisgender and heterosexual people to advocate for and embrace each person’s holistic identity. Candidly, the group had a conversation about the reality of being a member of the LGBTQ community and urged everyone in the Common Ground space to be more welcoming to and accepting of members of the LGBTQ community by showing respect rather than a vaguely defined concept of “love.”

- (2) ***People of Faith.*** Participants within the caucus group spoke about their fear of participating in the LGBTQ fishbowl from a faith perspective. However, the group ultimately highlighted the importance of having these vital conversations. Moreover, the group cited the importance of not only implementing policies that protect LGBTQ individuals at faith-based institutions, but also holding accountable the leaders of faith-based institutions to enforce those policies. The group discussed the need for institutions to create “core-values” centered around respect and dignity for all people. The group also spoke about the struggles people of faith have when interpreting what is “right” and the need for faith-based institutions and people of faith to clearly define commonly used terms, such as “respect”. The group advocated for a more proactive approach to seek common ground through sustained, in-depth conversations, and by humanizing the concepts of LGBTQ inclusion and religion.

The group discussed ways in which people can operate from love and not ridicule. Group participants noted that the actions of people of faith matter and can deeply affect LGBTQ individuals. The group called for more honest conversations about engagement around inclusion and diversity issues, and to move toward love and respect of LGBTQ individuals. Lastly, the group acknowledged that a student-athlete’s choice of institution is dependent on a variety of factors beyond LGBTQ and/or faith identities.

- (3) ***People who are neither LGBTQ nor of Faith.*** Group participants pointed out that although they are neither identify with a faith perspective nor as LGBTQ, they feel obligated to support both groups within this space and demonstrate what Common Ground looks like. Participants spoke about their need to be student-centered and advocate for those who are disenfranchised. Group participants also spoke of their affinity toward LGBTQ advocacy more than advocacy for people of faith advocacy. Group participants emphasized the need for coaches and campus leaders to engage in conversations of privilege, power, and inclusion for LGBTQ people within intercollegiate athletics.
- (4) ***LGBTQ People of Faith.*** The group discussed the importance of creating non-judgmental spaces for LGBTQ people of faith because they believe God created them as intended. The group discussed the importance of protecting the safety of all individuals, regardless of identity, noting “lives are in the balance”. Group participants emphasized the importance of love, courage, and inclusivity and noted the need to create cultures that embrace differences, allow all individuals to flourish, and condemn all forms of discrimination.

Group participants underscored the need to empower all student voices to be actively heard and not dismissed by institutional leadership. Group participants criticized that people of faith and those outside of the LGBTQ community for the hate that is often demonstrated. Participants agreed that inclusive language and listening is of utmost importance in creating cultures of belonging.

- f. Reflection time.** Participants were given time to reflect on what they learned and what the Common Ground experience had meant to them.
- g. Moving forward on Common Ground – next steps.** The facilitator encouraged participants to think about their respective contexts and environments when considering how they would move forward with meaningful actions in their organizations, their campuses, their communities and their personal lives. Participants developed a personal action plan toward inclusion by writing responses to a series of prompts, including but not limited to the following:
- (1) One thing I'm leaving today thinking is:
  - (2) One thing I'm leaving today feeling is:
  - (3) One thing I'm leaving today ready to do is:
- h. Bringing it to our Campus.** Past Common Ground attendees and Common Ground leadership team members shared their experiences and action steps at their respective faith-based institutions after Common Ground II - IV. Each answered the following questions:
- (1) What were your initial steps after leaving the Common Ground sessions?
  - (2) How did you get people with institutional power to engage with the conversation?
  - (3) What has been the timeline of having things happen on your campuses?
  - (4) What is your vision for the impact of the work on your campuses?

In answering these questions, past attendees and leadership team members encouraged participants to connect with attendees once they left the program. Participants were also reminded to identify allies at their respective institutions (within and outside their athletics department) who may help fulfill their inclusion action plan. In addition, participants were encouraged to become more visible on their respective campuses to build relationships, communities, and spread the mission of Common Ground. Participants were challenged to develop and prioritize a personal list of action items and to develop a summary of Common Ground that can be conveyed to others.

- i. Moving forward on Common Ground.** Participants were asked to divide into “like-context” groups (e.g., administrators from faith-based institutions, student-athletes, private secular institutions, public institutions, inclusion organizations) to discuss the following questions:

(1) How can a Common Ground conversation be re-created on campuses or at organizations?

(2) What resources do you need to re-create those conversations or move forward with personal actions items?

- j. Final Thoughts, Appreciations, Evaluations.** Participants were asked to pick one item from their personal action plan to share with other participants over the course of several rounds. The participants then offered ideas/advice on each of their action plan items. The facilitator encouraged participants to seek out individuals with whom they had made meaningful connections during Common Ground V and express gratitude for the experience. To conclude Common Ground V, the facilitator asked each participant to choose one word that they would use to describe their experiences. The words participants chose reflected participants' ability to be inspired by the experience, share compassion with others, be energized to do more work, grow through vulnerability, and appreciate newly formed and renewed relationships during the two days.

### **PROGRAMMING SURROUNDING COMMON GROUND V**

- **UT Austin campus engagement.** In addition to the Common Ground V program, the Common Ground leadership team participated in the following activities to engage with the UT campus community:
  - a. Coaches meeting.** The leadership team met with UT coaches and administrators and facilitated an educational session focused inclusive language, LGBTQ identity and inclusive team cultures.
  - b. Student-athlete event.** Members of the leadership team conducted a workshop with UT student-athletes, many of whom served on the university's SAAC committee. The workshop covered topics such as student-athlete identity and inclusive language.

<b>Common Ground IV November 12-13, 2019, Meeting</b>	
<b>Facilitator:</b>	
Tanya Williams, Authentic Coaching and Consulting	
<b>Participants:</b>	
Braeden Abrahamsen Vanderbilt University.	
Noor Ahmed, University of Nebraska.	
Elise Alexander, Wheaton College.	
DaWon Baker, University of Nebraska.	
Janie Black, the University of Texas at Austin.	
Marie Brown, Bowie State University.	
Nevin Caple, LGBT SportSafe.	
Helen Carroll, National Center for Lesbian Rights.	
Chad Cooper, Widener University.	
Becky Crandall, Ohio State University.	
Cody Cupit, University of Texas at Austin.	
Liz Darger, Brigham Young University.	
Peggy Davis, Virginia State University.	
Carlo Deason, University of Houston.	
Jess Duff, Bates College.	
Natalie Fahey, Southern Illinois, Carbondale.	
Anthony Francois, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY.	
Chandler Frumin, the University of Texas at Austin.	
Emma Gee, Brigham Young University	
Ethan Good, Bowling Green State University.	
Pat Griffin, University of Massachusetts, Amherst	
Emmanuel Guillory, United Negro College Fund.	
Amanda Hall, Saint Joseph's University.	
Shawn Heilbron, Stony Brook University.	
Matt Hill, University of Northwestern-St. Paul.	
Jessica Huntley, Atlantic East Conference.	
Daphnie Johnson, Elizabeth City University.	
Janet Judge, Holland & Knight.	
Megan Kahn, WeCOACH.	
Yannick Kluch, Rowan University.	
Kyrstin Krist, Methodist University.	
Harold "Skip" Lord, Houghton College.	
Resa Lovelace, University of Maryland, College Park	
Courtney Lovely, Palm Beach Atlantic University.	
Monique Marsh-Bell, Baylor University.	

Drew Martin, University of Texas at Austin.
Annette Martinez, University of the Pacific.
Emet Marwell, Mount Holyoke College.
Laura Mayfield, the University of Texas at Austin.
Meghan McDonogh, Catholic University.
Kisha Middleton, Lincoln University.
Dustin Miller, the University of Texas at Austin.
Jen Miller, Saint Mary's University of Minnesota.
Shannon Minter, National Center for Lesbian Rights.
Laura Mooney, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.
Karen Morrison, University of Central Florida
Chris Mosier, Team USA Athlete.
Joy Mosley, Council for Christian Colleges & Universities.
Krissy Ortiz, Lynn University.
Monica Paull, the University of Texas at Austin.
Jessica Poole, Florida Atlantic University.
Amanda Pulido, University of Incarnate Word.
Holly Roepke, Grinnell College.
Dawn Rogers, Baylor University.
Steve Sandberg, Brigham Young University.
Anika Simpson, American University
John Square, George Washington University.
Todd St. John-Fulton, University of South Florida.
Shannon Strahl, Gonzaga University.
Taylor Stuemky, University of Wyoming.
Cece Telfer, Franklin Pierce University.
Aaron Thompson, the University of Texas at Austin.
Angie Torain, University of Notre Dame.
Kerrie Turner, Bowling Green State University.
Mike Vienna, Emory University.
Jordan Wheeler, the University of Texas at Austin.
Marie Worsham, Southwestern University (Texas).
<b>NCAA Staff in Attendance:</b>
Katrice Albert, Leland Brown, Gail Dent, Aaron Hernandez, Whitney Johnson, Jean Merrill, Shay Wallach and Amy Wilson.