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**BACKGROUND MATERIALS
Wednesday, June 21, 2023**

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|---|--------------|
| 1. DEI Strategic Plan Additional Material | Tab 1 |
| 2. NCAA Compliance Audit Additional Material | Tab 2 |

Culture & Climate Report

Youngstown State Athletics



Sheridan Blanford
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
INcompass Excellence, LLC.
sheridan@incompassexcellence.com

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Assessment Background & Overview

Assessing culture and climate allows the organization to center its backbone - the people. Members of a department have an array of experiences that are influenced by context, place, and time, as well as intersecting identities. With that, while culture and climate are easily seen and felt, both are hard to quantify. Giving the people of the organization the ability to share their perspectives and experiences helps the organization determine what needs to be done to contribute to the growth, development, and impact that it is setting out to have.

In the Fall of 2022, Youngstown State athletics partnered with INcompass Excellence, LLC to assess the culture and climate of the athletic department. To ensure that there is long lasting impact, this project was designed to support the department in assessing where it currently is from the perspectives of its various internal stakeholders. The feedback from the assessment serves as a baseline for Youngstown State to understand its current culture and environment, so that it can work to create and maintain an environment that reflects inclusion, belonging and social justice. In conducting the evaluation, Youngstown State athletics took part in a two-part process:

1. Culture & Climate Survey

- 397 members of the Athletic Department, including student-athletes, staff and coaches, participated in the culture climate survey. All survey results are anonymous allowing stakeholders to be open and honest about their experience, without fear of backlash or personal identification. The survey consisted of quantitative-based questions, as well as a few open-ended questions, creating the opportunity for participants to rank their experience and perspectives on various scales.

2. Focus Groups

- 42 members of the athletic department participated in the focus group sessions. Each focus group session lasted 60-minutes and created the opportunity for members of the department to provide further perspective and insight on their personal experiences, observations, and viewpoints related to the primary themes from the climate survey.

Both components of the assessment inquired about the INcompass Excellence 5 Focus Areas:

INcompass Excellence 5 Focus Areas

Department

- Department culture
- Values and Mission
- Policies, Reporting, Feedback Mechanisms
- Budget Allocation
- Crisis Management
- DEI Integration
- Training and Education

Student-Athletes

- Belonging & Community
- Access to Resources
- Recruiting
- Allyship & Inclusive Leadership

Staff & Coaches

- Recruitment & Hiring
- Retention
- Leadership Engagement & Accountability

Campus

- Department Engagement with campus
- Department Engagement with DEI leadership and resources

Community

- Alumni engagement
- Donors & Sponsors
- Community Leaders and Organizations
- Culturally Relevant Marketing & Branding

PARTICIPATION DEMOGRAPHICS

Survey

The data below showcases the demographics of the individuals that participated in the Youngstown State athletics culture and climate survey and focus groups. It is important to note that even with high participation from members around the department, that all members of the Youngstown State Athletics department did not participate in this process.

Student-Athletes:

Sport	Number of Participants
Baseball	6
Cheerleading	3
Football	62
Men's Basketball	13
Men's Cross Country	3
Men's Golf	13
Men's Swimming & Diving	20
Men's Tennis	6
Men's Track & Field	13
Softball	18
Volleyball	18
Women's Basketball	7
Women's Bowling	11
Women's Cross Country	5
Women's Golf	9
Women's Lacrosse	33
Women's Soccer	18
Women's Swimming & Diving	31
Women's Tennis	9
Women's Track & Field	18

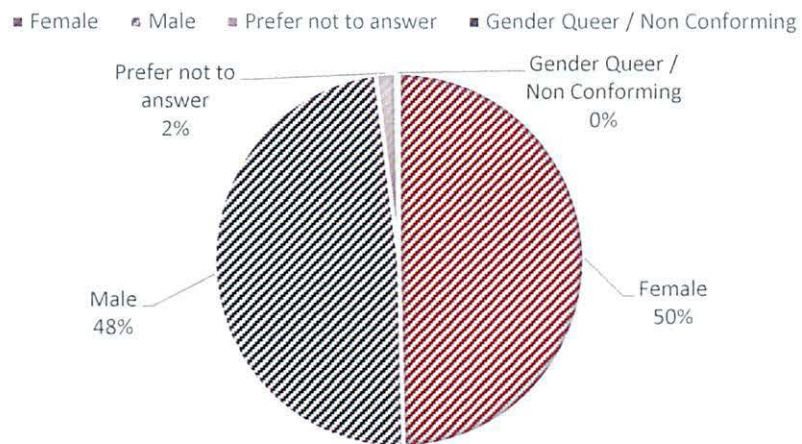
Class Standing	Number of Participants
First Year	94
Sophomore	65
Junior	74
Senior	59
Other	21
Not Disclosed	3

Staff & Coaches:

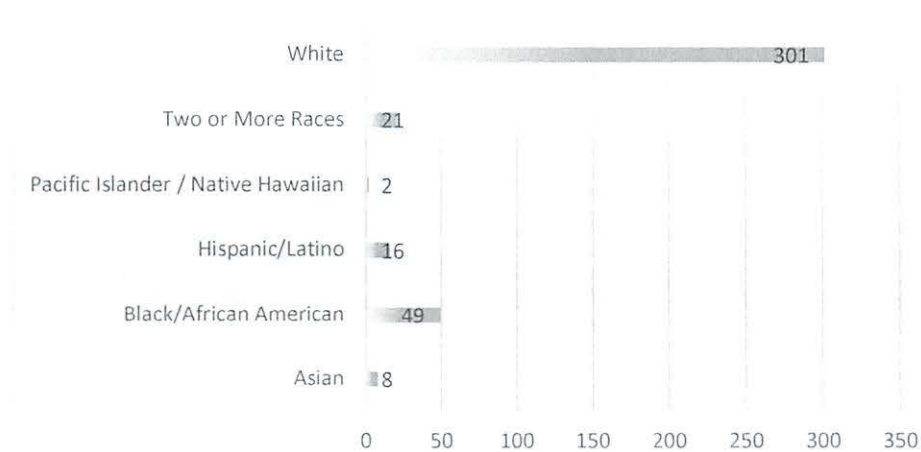
Title	Number of Participants
Assistant Coach	19
Athletic Administrator	21
Head Coach	11
Other	8
Staff Member	22

Total:

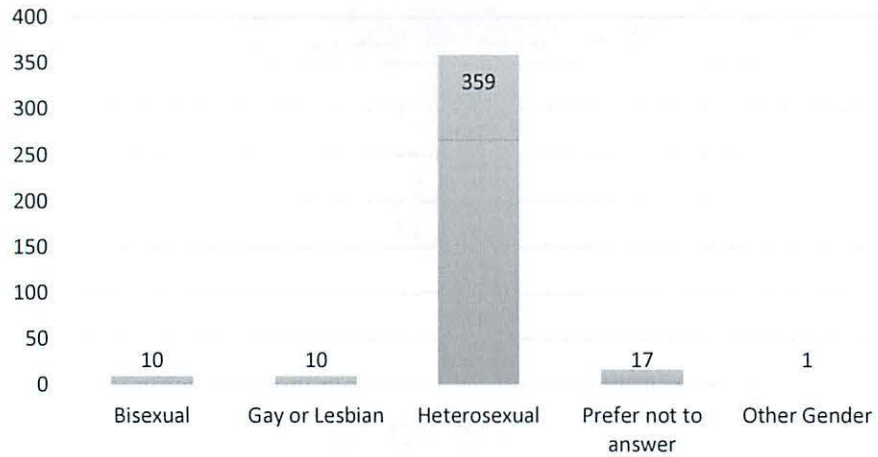
GENDER



RACE

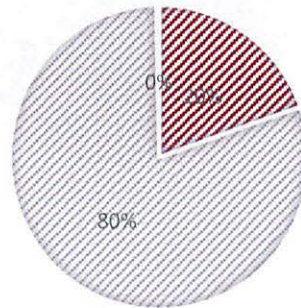


SEXUAL ORIENTATION



STUDENT-ATHLETE NATIONALITY

International US Native Prefer not to answer



Focus Groups

BIPOC Staff & Coaches	BIPOC Student-Athletes	General Body Staff & Coaches	General Body Student-Athletes	International Student-Athletes	International Student-Athletes
10	1	23	2	4	2

Important notes about demographics:

- In this report, underrepresented, minority (URM) stakeholders include members of the Youngstown State Athletics population who identify within the following areas:
 - **Race:** American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, or Two or More races
 - **Sexual Orientation:** Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual
 - **Gender:** Gender Queer/Non-Confirming, Transgender and Female identified staff *(while student-athletes who identify as female are considered an underrepresented, minority in the larger society, for the purposes of this assessment student-athletes who identify as female are not underrepresented in the athletic context based off of representation, therefore are not considered as a URM in this report).*
 - **Nationality:** Student-athletes that identify as international.

FINDINGS SUMMARY

The following report is broken down into three areas:



1. **Areas of Continued Growth & Impact:** Showcases areas that Youngstown State athletics can continue to reinforce and grow its impact for all stakeholders.

- Youngstown State Pride
- Alignment on Department Values & Mission
- A Culture of Feedback



2. **Opportunities for Improvement:** Showcases aspects of the department that with intentional focus can improve the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders within the department.

- Crisis Management
- Belonging & Community
- Resources & Support
- Recruitment, Hiring & Retention
- Experience on Campus
- Community Engagement
- External Presence



3. **Areas of Concern:** Showcases aspects of the department that need deliberate investment and action to further advance organizational culture, community engagement, support and belonging.

- Bias, Microaggressions & Discrimination
- Education
- DEI Integration & Accountability
- Budget Allocation
- Campus Connection
- Student-Athlete Alumni

**Areas of Continued Growth: Data that was representative of 80% or more of the participants that were aligned with the topic or question asked. Opportunities for improvement: Data is representative of between 60%-75% of the participants that were aligned with the topic or question asked. Areas of Concern: Data is representative of 60% or below of the participants that were aligned with the topic or question asked.*

AREAS OF CONTINUED GROWTH & IMPACT

I. Youngstown State Pride

- **Department Value:** The data from the survey and the focus groups showed that there is strong sense of pride for Youngstown State athletics, both internally and externally. The majority of student-athletes, staff, coaches and administrators shared that they are not only proud members of the athletic department, but also believe the department values them and what they bring to the table.
 - 85% of all participants believe that they belong and are supported with their identities.
 - 92% of student-athletes shared that they are proud to be a student-athlete in Youngstown State's athletic department.
 - 80% of student-athletes agree or strongly agree that the coaches were sensitive and respectful to their identities during the recruitment process.
 - 81% of student-athletes agree or strongly agree to feeling a part of the larger campus community

"We do not live in our own zones in the department, we always lend a hand when needed."

"Athletes support each other. We are a big family."

"There is strong pride in Youngstown, and the community is proud of this athletics department."

II. Values & Mission

- **Alignment:** Across the board, members of the athletic department have clarity and alignment surrounding the values and mission of Youngstown State athletics.
 - 80% of participants agree or strongly agree that they know what the athletic departments core values are.
 - 85% of participants believe that the athletic departments mission, vision and core values reflect a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - 90% of participants shared that the athletic department policies regarding its stance on hate, discrimination, harassment, and bias, are clear.
 - 93% of staff and coaches agree or strongly agree that their team is intentional about making sure that everyone feels that they belong.

III. A Culture of Feedback:

- **Measuring Impact:** The data showed that Youngstown State not only prioritizes creating various mechanisms to receive feedback but has created a culture where members of the department feel comfortable providing that feedback.

- **83% of student-athletes shared that they were comfortable giving open and honest feedback about their experiences as student-athletes.**
- **88% of all staff and coaches believe that they can give open and honest feedback about their experiences as an employee of Youngstown State athletics.**

"There is an initiative put on understanding people's experiences."

"We as student-athletes are not even aware of how much we can speak up. We don't use the power to speak."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

I. Crisis Management

- **Increasing Structure & Clarity:** Building a reliable structure and communication plan surrounding crisis management creates trust and reliability within the department. Over a quarter of the population lacks understanding about how crisis is handled in the department, so there is an opportunity to enhance processes and transparency.
 - 77% of participants know where to find the athletic departments policies on hate, discrimination, and bias.
 - 27% of the population is neutral or doesn't believe that when a crisis takes place, the athletic department responds promptly and intentionally to address issues both internally and externally.

"There have been many instances of hate on my team that has not been handled properly and makes people disagree with the fact that the athletic department actually believes in DEI."

II. Belonging & Community

- **URM Member Voice & Belonging:** It is essential that efforts are put in place to ensure the voices and perspectives of URM individuals are prioritized, as well as holding all members of the department accountable to creating environments that reflect belonging. The data reflects that there is an opportunity to increase support for URM student-athletes, staff and coaches.
 - 33% of all URM participants are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree that their voice is heard and taken into consideration when decisions are made.
 - Of the student-athletes who identify as URM, 29% are neutral or disagree that they feel a part of the community within the athletic department.

Referring to the international student-athlete experience: "We need to make sure that teammates are welcoming us and are really helping us to adjust to American society. Show empathy and patience to different cultures."

"We have been emphasizing BLM and mental health, but no events for the LGBTQ+ community for student-athletes."

- **Understanding the URM Stakeholder Experience:** While individuals of majority groups may never experience what individuals with URM identities experience, it is essential that the majority members take ownership of educating themselves, so that the burden does not always fall on those that identify as URM to

do so. An area of emphasis that emerged in the data was around the necessary action to truly support URM members by better understanding their experiences and needs.

- 30% of URM identified student-athletes are neutral or disagree that athletic administrators and coaches understand their unique experiences.

"Minority students will never be honest about how they feel as far as being accepted at Youngstown because you have to say everything is great and act fine and chill."

"It would be great to have support to turn to when experiencing microaggressions or situations. Especially with someone whose experiences are similar to mine."

III. Resources & Support

- **Mental Health:** The prioritization of student-athlete mental health and wellness is at an all-time high within the collegiate athletics space. The strong desire to improve both mental health resources and services was an apparent theme throughout the survey and the focus groups.
 - While 86% of student-athletes believe that the mental health services provided to them are accessible, only 72% of student-athletes agree or strongly agree that their mental health is supported by the athletic department.
 - 40% of all student-athletes, coaches and administrators do not believe that the mental health resources meet the needs/experiences of all student-athletes, no matter their identity.

"I think mental health resources need significant improvement, particularly in regard to access and representation in the mental health field. I'm pretty sure all of our mental health providers are cis, white, professionals. That doesn't mirror our student population."

- **Holistic Support:** Increasing holistic support outside of the playing field for student-athletes was a common theme shared in both the survey and the focus groups. The data showed that student-athletes desire more emphasis and energy spent on holistic development, particularly for the life after sport transition.
 - 28% of student-athletes were neutral or disagreed that the resources provided to them by the athletic department help them develop holistically on and off of their respective playing fields (personally, professionally, etc.).
 - 27% of student-athletes were neutral or disagreed that their coach is invested in helping them develop holistically outside of their sport.
 - 26% of student-athletes were neutral or disagreed that their coach is invested in helping them on their path to pursue their career of interest.

"We need life after sport resources - bridging the gap between college athletics and life."

IV. Recruitment, Hiring & Retention

- **Increasing Diverse Representation:** An organization comprised of a diverse group of individuals is positioned to not only gain an array of perspectives to drive innovation and success, but also support the various stakeholders that it serves. Members of the department shared the desire to have more diverse representation and to also have the necessary processes in place to seek out and recruit/hire individuals who are not only diverse, but positively contribute to the Youngstown State athletics department community.
 - 77% of staff and coaches agree or strongly agree that job descriptions reflect the departments commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.
 - 74% of staff and coaches agree or strongly agree that the department has a strategy to ensure that each open position goes through equitable and inclusive hiring processes.
 - 76% of all participants believe that the department is committed to seeking out diverse candidates to fill open positions for staff and coaches.

"The lack of minority employees in the department gives student-athletes nobody to turn to at times."

"DEI come up on every single search that I have been a part of which I think is a good indicator to me that it's a department value."

- **Professional Development & Mentorship:** Connection to community and the ability to advance and grow increases retention of employees. Answers from staff and coaches showcased the opportunity to continue investment into both professional development, mentorship.
 - 78% of the staff and coaches agree or strongly agree that as an employee, they have access to professional development that supports growth and development on their career trajectory.
 - While 83% of staff and coaches shared that they have a strong network of mentors outside of the university, only 64% of staff and coaches have a strong network of mentors inside of the university.

V. Experience on Campus

- **Engagement to Campus:** Increased student-athlete, staff and coach connection and engagement with campus personnel and resources will not only further the

ability to serve student-athletes holistically but will also establish community and connection on a larger scale. The data showed that there is room for improvement to ensure that student-athletes are having the same support and resources as their peers.

- 26% of student-athletes were neutral or disagreed that they feel they receive the same support as their peers who are not student-athletes.

"We have good connectivity and collaborative spirit with campus, but we have to be very intentional to collaborate more."

"I have experienced non-athletes and even staff on campus talking negatively about athletes when I am around. At the time they did not know I was an athlete."

- **Understanding & Utilization of DEI Resources:** In order to create and sustain impact within the equity and inclusion space, it is essential that the athletic department is aligned with and in partnership with the DEI practitioners and the DEI goals on campus. Data showed that that a large chunk of individuals are not aware of the DEI personnel or goals on campus.
 - Only 62% of total participants know who the DEI leaders on campus are, what the DEI goals are within the larger university, and believe that the athletic department models and is engaged with the campus DEI goals.
 - 77% of student-athletes shared that they have been exposed to campus resources, mentors, and faculty from diverse backgrounds.

VI. Community Engagement

- **Donors & Sponsors:** While there is a strong sense of pride in Youngstown State from donors and community members that are currently engaged with the department, it was reflected in the data that the department can be more intentional in connecting with and engaging with diverse donors, community members and fans. In addition, the data also reflected the need to hold all stakeholders that engage with the department accountable to be respectful and supportive of student-athletes from all identities.
 - 68% of all participants believe that a diverse range of community members and leaders support the athletic department, and that the department engages in outreach and engagement with a diverse range of community leaders and organizations.
 - 22% of participants were neutral or disagreed that fans and supporters are respectful of student-athletes from all backgrounds.
 - 34% of all participants believe that the Youngstown State athletics department engages with a diverse donor base.
 - 71% of the whole population isn't aware or doesn't believe that the department uses external funding to invest in department-wide DEI initiatives/efforts.

"Due to the surrounding area, we have the ability to take advantage of and connect with a diverse community."

"When I look into the stands, there are not a lot of people that look like us."

VII. External Presence:

- **Brand & Reputation:** The brand of an organization reflects its values and its priorities. Participants shared the need to improve the department's brand and external presence as it relates to its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.
 - While 84% of all participants believe that the athletic departments brand (website, social media, digital content, etc.) is both culturally relevant and respectful, 33% of participants are neutral or disagree that the athletic departments brand (website, social media, digital content, etc.) represents a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.
 - 30% of the population is neutral, disagrees or strongly disagrees that the athletic department uses its platform to support and advocate for social justice both internally and externally.

"It would be great to show the world what we stand for. We don't show it off."

AREAS OF CONCERN

I. **Bias, Microaggressions & Discrimination**

- **Community Member Experiences:** The success of an organization is not only based on wins and losses, but how people experience the culture, particularly those with URM identities. Participants shared various perspectives on bias, discrimination, and microaggressions. There was also a discrepancy between individuals who witnessed some form of bias, discrimination and/or microaggressions and those that chose to report it.
 - 15% of individuals that participated in the survey admitted to experiencing some form of bias, microaggression, and/or discrimination based off their identity.
 - While a small number, 6% of participants believed that they have been denied opportunities based off their identity
 - Of the URM identified staff members, 73% were neutral or disagreed that staff and coaches with underrepresented, minority identities feel a part of the community within the athletic department.

"At that same point URM people shouldn't have to be the only ones advocating for DEI and various social justice issues. Also, URM people don't always have all of the answers and shouldn't only be asked to speak/lead at only "DEI" events."

"Student-athletes get put on a watch list based off of assumption of academic ability because of their identity."

"Every now and then someone will make a comment, but it's not anything that needs some big intervention to fix."

"It's harder for them to come into spaces and automatically feel welcomed, especially contingent on where they come from. They have to adjust the whole way they interact with people to fit in."

- **Lack of Clarity & Trust on Policy and Reporting:** In order to keep track of the pulse of the department, there needs to be clarity and trust surrounding reporting processes. The data showcased misunderstanding, lack of clarity and limited trust surrounding policies and processes related to bias and discrimination.
 - While 82% of participants know what to do and how to report an instance of hate, bias or discrimination, only 53% of the population feel comfortable reporting an instance of hate, discrimination, or bias and believe that it will be handled appropriately.

- While only 23% of participants shared that they have witnessed microaggressions, bias and/or discrimination, out of those that have witnessed it, 68% shared that they did not address the microaggression/bias when they witnessed it.

“Why do problems reach the coaches last, often when it’s almost out of control? There is a strong fear of being discriminated from the team if “you tell on someone”. Trust me, I would not be addressing a problem if I hadn’t been thinking of it deeply for a long time. It takes big courage for a person to address a problem.”

II. Education

- **Continued Education:** While the majority of participants believe that they understand the experiences of individuals with diverse identities, the data showed that members of the department have not actively taken the necessary steps to increase their knowledge about diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, justice, etc.
 - While 89% of coaches and staff shared that they are comfortable leading a diverse group of people, and 84% of student-athletes shared that they feel confident that they understand the lived experiences of people that have different identities than they do, on average, 55% of all student-athletes, staff and coaches shared that in their own time, they participate in training and education to further their knowledge about diversity, equity and inclusion and the experiences of individuals with diverse identities.
 - 67% of participants agree or strongly agree that all members of the department are comfortable with discussions around difference.

“We should try not to just check a box. Either do it all the way with training and monitoring or not at all.”

“A lot of times in response to what is happening nationally, we have a conversation or go through a training, but you never feel like it’s enough. I think we have been able to create conversation, but don’t know if we can say that we have equipped anyone.”

III. DEI Integration & Accountability

- **DEI Integration:** For organizational transformation that serves and advances stakeholders across all identities; equity, inclusion, diversity and belonging must be integrated at all levels. Otherwise, the work can be deemed as performative, or “checking the box,” and will never have intended or longstanding impact.
 - Only 56% of student-athletes share that the athletic department’s commitment to DEI was made apparent during the recruiting process, and resources were shared with them and their families.

- **Creating & Sustaining Accountability:** Not only is integration of the upmost importance, but assessment and measurement of goals and objectives are essential to holding the department and members of the department accountable. There is a desire across the board to create more structure for all accountability measures.
 - 41% of staff and coaches are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree that performance reviews are structured to hold people accountable to creating and sustaining equitable and inclusive environment.

"I don't know if we have been able to appropriately define what the expectations are in total. We can't hold people accountable until we establish expectations."

"We all see the importance of it, but when its inconvenient, it gets pushed back. We would be seen as committed to it when we are making the initiative in inconvenience."

VIII. Budget Allocation

- **Investment into DEI Efforts:** Youngstown State has taken steps to invest in diversity, equity and inclusion efforts through engagement with INcompass Excellence, starting in the spring of 2021. Data showed that there is an opportunity to continue that investment into DEI programs, resources, and initiatives, and show transparency of that investment with the Youngstown State athletics community.
 - 55% of the population is unaware or doesn't believe that money is allocated to enhance equity and inclusion efforts within the athletic department.

IX. Campus Connection

- **Participation In Campus Events:** While many student-athletes and staff feel that they are a part of the larger campus community, data showed that about half of the population does not engage with campus outside of athletics.
 - Only 50% of student-athletes and 43% of staff and coaches shared that they participate in campus initiatives, groups, clubs, etc. outside of athletics.

"There is not a lot of engagement with campus outside of sport due to timing, schedule and opportunities."

IV. Student-Athlete Alumni:

- **Strategy for Connection:** Creating an intentional strategy around alumni connection has the possibility to create more opportunities for mentorship, life after sport connection, and overall support for the athletics department. In both the focus groups and the survey, data showed that there is an opportunity to increase engagement with student-athlete alumni.
 - 46% of staff and coaches agree or strongly agree that student-athlete alumni have a strong desire to stay connected with their programs after graduation.

- 36% of staff and coaches believe that student-athlete alumni are utilized to support student-athletes, and 42% of student-athletes believe that they are connected to alumni who actively support them.
- Of the alumni that are connected to the athletic department, 38% of the current student-athlete population shared that the alumni that support them do not have diverse identities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below reflect priorities that INcompass Excellence believes Youngstown State athletics can take to improve the culture and climate for all stakeholders. The recommendations below are based on the research and data collected.

I. Provide clarity and visibility of values and mission

- To ensure that all members of the department are not only aware of, but embody the values and mission of the department, it is essential that they are on display through multiple platforms. It is recommended that first and foremost the values are reviewed by multiple stakeholder groups to ensure that there is alignment with the current vision and mission of the department. Values should not only be placed physically inside of athletic department facilities, but also emphasized on a consistent basis in team and department meetings and gatherings with the ultimate goal that coaches, staff and student-athletes should be able to clearly articulate and define the values. Furthermore, to guarantee that commitment to the values is not only being stated, but that all stakeholders are being held accountable to them, structure to review commitment should be instituted through annual reviews (staff and coaches) and end of year meetings (student-athletes).

II. DEI integration

- To move the work beyond the job of one person or one council, it is recommended that the DEI task force develop a department-wide strategic plan that integrates specified diversity, equity and inclusion goals in each team/units' annual plans. This will create the necessary structure to increase department-wide buy in and will also hold individuals across the department to commit to the work within their own spheres of influence.
- Unfortunately, if individuals across the department are given the option or choice to engage in programs, initiatives, etc. there will be people who will not participate. As a department value, it is essential that administration mandates necessary standards via performance reviews, to hold everyone accountable to engage.
- It is recommended that athletic department fully funds a position to support diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. Often times when the person tasked with leading DEI is juggling additional roles and responsibilities (that often take precedent over DEI work), or the work is being fully managed by a DEI council, the desired outcomes are overshadowed by the lack of time and resources needed to do the work effectively.

III. Reevaluate and enhance the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Council:

- Reevaluate the Youngstown State DEI Council to include a more diverse range of individuals from across the athletic department, on campus, and in the community. Stakeholders that should be considered are: Johnny Ware - Coordinator of Student Enrichment and Diversity Programs, Jaysen Spencer - Director of Academic Services, an increased number of student-athletes, at least one staff member from the campus diversity office, one-two alumni, and one-two community influencers who are well versed in DEI work. In addition, it is recommended that the council subcommittees create specific goals that can be measured and shared on a quarterly and annual basis to ensure progress is being made.

X. 'Community Connection' working groups

- Develop community connection working groups that are made up of members from specified stakeholder groups (staff/coaches, donors, alumni, etc.) that are put in place to create meaningful and intentional interactions inside and outside of the department. Each group that is established will come together on a frequent basis as determined by the department, to get updates on the department and its progress, in addition to ideating and supporting the execution of programs, events, initiatives, etc. that bring people together to further Youngstown State's mission.
 - For example: Create a working group made up of a diverse range of alumni who get together quarterly to ideate how to create more connection between alumni with the department and alumni and with student-athletes.

XI. Evaluate feedback mechanisms

- It is recommended that department leadership and coaches audit all feedback mechanisms and processes, both formal and informal, to ensure that the structures to gather information are effective and are also inclusive of all voices. This will hold the department accountable to serve all student-athletes, staff, and coaches at the highest levels, ensuring that all individuals – no matter their identity, sport, background, etc. – are able to give open and honest feedback about their experiences. Often times people will not give open and honest feedback because they do not trust anything will be done with the information, so it is also recommended that feedback is readily reviewed and made visible to members of the department to show investment and progress.

XII. Assess department-wide crisis management plan

- Establish or enhance a crisis management working group that is made up of key stakeholders in the department, who can evaluate all department crisis management policies, procedures, communication plans, etc. Following the evaluation, it is recommended that the updated plan/strategy is shared broadly

and emphasized on an occasional basis to all stakeholder groups, to diminish confusion about the departments processes.

XIII. Increase investment into URM stakeholders

- It is recommended that Youngstown State creates affinity groups for members of the department who identify as URM, to create intentional investment in community building, personal development, and community engagement. To ensure that these groups are successful it is imperative that once the group is formed, they gather on a frequent basis, members of the URM groups are able to lead the direction and priorities of the collective, and that the department invests the necessary resources (i.e., facility reservation, staff advisors for student-athlete groups, financial resources, etc.) to maintain continuity. Using affinity group spaces is also a unique way to gain perspective about the URM experience. However, it is important that there is structure around receiving feedback, so that individuals can be open and honest without fear of backlash.
- To move individuals beyond theoretical care for others, to the action necessary to create access, opportunity, advancement and belonging for URM groups, structure around continued education is imperative. To ensure that all stakeholders in the department are furthering their knowledge and understanding about how to contribute to an inclusive and equitable environment, it is recommended that (through the student-athlete education subcommittee and the staff education and professional development subcommittee under the DEI Council), the department institutes a continued education and engagement plan that requires all members to engage in diversity, equity and inclusion education on an ongoing basis. The data showed that several URM student-athletes and staff do not believe that members of the department understand their experiences and that they do not feel a part of the athletics community. Requiring education and engagement not only emphasizes the importance that the department places on supporting and enhancing the URM experience, but that it will also equip members of the department with the necessary tools and strategies to be inclusive thought leaders.

XIV. Enhance student-athlete resources

- While the majority of student-athletes believe that mental health services are accessible via initiatives like 'Refer a Penguin,' student-athletes desire more support and investment into mental health from athletic administration and coaches. It is recommended that the department enhances its current strategy to provide mental health support, by getting direct feedback from student-athletes and staff on what gaps or areas of improvement are needed to create more investment into the care and support for them and their mental health. In addition, it is recommended that the department hires mental health providers with URM identities and/or invests in a relationship with external mental health provider(s) that specialize in providing service to individuals with URM identities

to increase support and engagement for those stakeholders within the Youngstown State's footprint.

- It is recommended that the department evaluates and enhances its career services programs (reflected on the website) to include explicit life after sport programming for student-athletes. Data reflected the need to engage student-athletes starting as early as their freshman year and continuing throughout their time at Youngstown. This program can be inclusive of a structured mentorship, major and career exploration, continued utilization of the Game Plan app for ongoing education, etc.

XV. Investment into a recruitment and hiring protocol

- In partnership with the Human Resources/Policy Review Subcommittee, it is recommended that the department establishes a recruitment and hiring protocol that lays out the necessary steps to not only increase diverse representation, but to also ensure that anyone hired into the department has the cultural dexterity to lead and work with a diverse range of individuals. This protocol should begin before a position is posted with building a diverse network and continue all the way through the job is offered. As a part of that protocol, it is recommended that the committee also creates the necessary structure to hold individuals across the department accountable to the process and measure effectiveness on an ongoing basis.

XVI. Staff mentorship & engagement

- It is recommended that the department establishes a community connection and/or mentorship program that connects athletics staff and coaches with members of the larger Youngstown State campus. While the data reflected that the majority of staff has a strong network outside of the university, it also showed that there is limited connection within the university. Creating more opportunities to expand community and belonging will support retention across the board.

XVII. Increasing campus engagement:

- To build the bridge and breakdown barriers that get in the way of student-athletes, staff and coaches being able to engage with campus, it is recommended that Youngstown State creates some form of campus faculty/staff advisory council. This will create an avenue for the athletic department to continue to share the great work taking place, seek the necessary support and advocacy from individuals who have influence on campus, and create collaboration opportunities to engage student-athletes, staff, and coaches with all the great work that is happening across campus.
- Due to the limited knowledge that a large number of individuals have about campus DEI leaders, DEI goals and collaboration and engagement with DEI initiatives, it is recommended that the Athletics Diversity & Inclusion Designee has a direct report to both the Executive Director of Intercollegiate Athletics and

the Assistant Provost for Diversity & Inclusion on campus. This will not only create accountability for the athletic department to be in line with campus goals and objectives, but also create more natural paths to partner. It is also recommended that members in the department (athletic administrators and coaches alike) other than the ADID, build intentional relationships and connection opportunities with the DEI staff on campus. Since a little under half of the students agreed that commitment to DEI played a large role in why they chose to come to Youngstown State, it's essential to further those relationships and understand what is taking place on campus.

XVIII. Establish external brand strategy

- Celebrating, recognizing, and telling stories of individuals, athletic programs, department initiatives, etc. within athletics will continue to display the holistic investment that Youngstown State places on the student-athletes, coaches and staff. In the survey and focus groups, it was mentioned how much great work is happening within the department, so it is important to find unique avenues to tell the Youngstown State athletics story through multiple lenses. It is recommended that the department establish an external engagement social media strategy that not only tells the story of student-athletes outside their respective playing fields, but also showcases the department's work and commitment toward diversity, equity and inclusion (i.e., Heritage month/holiday engagement).

XIX. Bias, Microaggressions & Discrimination

- A small number of individuals shared that they had experienced some form of microaggression, bias or discrimination. While not a large number, the department should aim for no one to experience that type of treatment. In commentary from the survey, one member of the department stated that "we need to stop searching for a problem that isn't there" and others in the focus groups diminished the impact of microaggressions, by minimizing them to harmless acts or comments. However, research shows that overtime, subtle acts of exclusion (i.e. microaggressions) have the same impact that overt acts of racism and discrimination have, over time. That said, it is recommended to require specific education surrounding subtle and overt acts of 'othering', to create more inclusive spaces that reflect belonging on an ongoing basis.
- While a large majority of participants know what to do and how to report instances of hate and discrimination, close to half of that population doesn't feel comfortable reporting. To identify areas of discomfort and enhance reliability, it is recommended that the department evaluate and enhance its reporting structure surrounding bias, hate and discrimination.

CONCLUSION

In the words of Maya Angelou, “if you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you're going.” Youngstown State has taken a very strong, deliberate first step in assessing the climate and culture of the department from the various perspectives of the stakeholders that it serves. The department can take the information found throughout this assessment, to create meaningful and more importantly sustainable change, to impact the current and future community. With the proper time, dedication and intentional action, the department can continue to position itself not only as a national leader athletically and academically, but also as a national leader who centers equity, inclusion, and justice.

Areas of Continued Growth & Impact	Opportunities for Improvement	Areas of Concern
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youngstown State Pride • Alignment on Department Values & Mission • A Culture of Feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis Management • Belonging & Community • Resources & Support • Recruitment, Hiring & Retention • Experience on Campus • Community Engagement • External Presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bias, Microaggressions & Discrimination • Education • DEI Integration & Accountability: • Budget Allocation • Campus Connection • Student-Athlete Alumni

DEIAB Strategic Action Plan

Youngstown State Athletics



Sheridan Blanford
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
INcompass Excellence, LLC.
sheridan@incompassexcellence.com

YOUNGSTOWN STATE ATHLETICS

DIVERSITY, EQUITY INCLUSION, ACCESS & BELONGING (DEIAB)

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN - WORKING DOCUMENT

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Background & Overview

In order to move into a space that not only creates environments that reflect belonging and inclusion, but more importantly sustains them, INcompass Excellence worked with the Youngstown State Athletics Department (YSU) over the course of the 2022-23 academic year to evaluate and strengthen the department's efforts with diversity, equity and inclusion.

Following the department-wide climate survey and focus groups, INcompass Excellence provided YSU with a summary report from the data collected and recommendations in which the department could improve its culture and diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. From there, YSU administration worked with INcompass excellence to utilize the INcompass Excellence blueprint framework to take the summary and recommendations to guide the department in goal setting, establishing strategic objectives and

implementing ways to measure impact through the creation of a strategic plan. The Strategic Action Plan is divided into three sections:

1. **Youngstown State's Strategic Objectives**

The strategic objectives guide and direct the organizational strategy to meet YSU's DEIAB vision and mission

2. **Strategic Plan Progress Trackers**

The progress tracker keeps the organization on pace to accomplish goals.

3. **Strategic Action Plan**

The Strategic Action Plan includes explicit goals that identify what work is necessary to meet the strategic objectives, the action step(s) necessary to achieve the goals, deadline(s) to keep goals on track; responsible party(ies) to identify the leader of each goal and action step, and structure for the organization to measure impact.

The annual plan for year one was completed in partnership with INcompass Excellence and the YSU Leadership team. Throughout the planning workshops, the goals and action items were determined as top priorities by the YSU Leadership team for the upcoming academic year. To account for progress made on the plan, to make space for incomplete goals, to invest further into new initiatives, to add new priorities based on changes in the college athletics landscape, to evaluate budget and personnel, etc., the final annual plans for year two and year three will be completed by the YSU Leadership Team on an annual basis. This will be in accordance with the [recommendations from INcompass Excellence](#), in addition to the work done by the [YSU Leadership Team in the post survey workshops](#).

YOUNGSTOWN STATE'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1

Recruitment, Development & Retention

- Recruit, retain and develop a diverse range of staff, coaches, and student-athletes that are supportive of and contribute to an inclusive and belonging environment

2

Ongoing Learning & Engagement

- Prioritize continued education surrounding DEIAB to build knowledgeable leaders/stakeholder to support a diverse range of people capable of creating and maintaining inclusion and belonging

3

Sustaining Impact

- Create and maintain outcome-based measures and channels to drive DEIAB accountability

4

Strengthen Connection & Community

- Create and maintain meaningful campus, community, and alumni DEIAB engagements to strengthen our initiatives to give back to our greater society

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN PROGRESS TRACKERS

Year 1 - 2023-24					
Strategic Objective	Goal	Deadline	Progress		
			Not Started	In Progress	Completed
Recruitment, Retention & Development	DEI Integration into Job Descriptions	July 1, 2023			
	YSU Affinity Groups	July 1, 2024			
Ongoing Learning & Engagement	DEIAB Steering Team	July 1, 2023			
	DEIAB Education Plan for Staff	Creation: September 1, 2023, Completion: July 1, 2024			
Sustaining Impact	Institutionalize Commitment to Internal Stakeholders	July 1, 2023			
	Staff, Coach & Administration Performance Reviews	July 1, 2024			
Strengthen Connection & Community	External Brand Strategy for DEIAB Efforts	July 1, 2023			
	Black Excellence Alumni Luncheon	July 1, 2024			

Year 2 - 2024-25

Strategic Objective	Recommended Goal (in addition to	Deadline	Progress		
			Not Started	In Progress	Completed
Recruitment, Retention & Development	Hiring & Recruitment Protocol				
	Student-Athlete Resources (Mental Health & Life After College)				
Ongoing Learning & Engagement	DEIAB Education Plan for Student-Athletes				
	Heritage Month Engagement				
Sustaining Impact	Crisis Management Plan & Protocol				
	Department Policies & Processes				
Strengthen Connection & Community	Campus Engagement Plan (DEI)				
	Themed Games & Engagement with URM Communities				

Year 3 - 2025-26

Strategic Objective	Recommended Goal	Deadline	Progress		
			Not Started	In Progress	Completed
Recruitment, Retention & Development	Onboarding				
	New Staff Mentorship Program				
Ongoing Learning & Engagement	Team & Unit Based DEI Action Plans				
Sustaining Impact	Department Progress & Impact Assessment				
	Evaluate & Enhance Feedback Mechanisms				
Strengthen Connection & Community	Community Connection Working Groups				
	Engagement with URM Businesses & Vendors				

ANNUAL PLAN: 2023-24

Strategic Objective	Goal	Action Step(s)	Responsible Party(ies)	Measuring Impact	Deadline
Recruitment, Retention & Development	DEI Integration into Job Descriptions				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate DEIAB as a primary value within the YSU athletic department through all job descriptions and job postings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Establish language/standard commitment <input type="checkbox"/> Revise job posting template and job descriptions to include recognition of the departments individual and collective responsibility and commitment to DEIAB <input type="checkbox"/> Add language to all job current postings for existing staff <input type="checkbox"/> Add language to future all job descriptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administration Human Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain feedback from new employees during on-boarding to measure recognition/awareness Increase the number of URM employees that work for YSU 	July 1, 2023
	YSU Affinity Groups				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish YSU Affinity Groups for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Determine which affinity groups will be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administration Jaysen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track attendance at each gathering 	July 1, 2024	

	underrepresented, minority stakeholders within the department to further connection, community and belonging.	<p>created (i.e. Women Coaches & Staff, International Student-Athletes, Black Student-Athletes, Black Staff & Coaches)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Select staff or student-athlete liaison for each group <input type="checkbox"/> Establish cadence for gatherings/meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Establish and allocate budget for each group <input type="checkbox"/> Create outreach plan for each group including engagement with coaches, sport administrators, academic advisors and directors of operations 	<p>Spencer, Director of Academic Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff or Student Liaisons 	<p>event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish quarterly surveys to gain qualitative feedback from participants to ensure that the group is having intended impact 	
Ongoing Learning & Engagement	DEIAB Steering Team				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore the YSU DEIAB Council to support the execution of the YSU DEIAB strategic plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create outline, mission, and goals, for the steering team's participation <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership will identify the DEIAB "Steering Team" ensuring diverse representation amongst coaches, support staff, student-athletes, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Determine breakdown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track subcommittee progress on a quarterly basis • Create annual report summarizing work completed by the steering team • Utilize annual surveys for student-athletes and staff to gain feedback on 	July 1, 2023

		<p>of work within the Steering Team (i.e. subcommittees)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Establish cadence of meetings</p>		<p>increased belonging and growth in understanding/knowledge on DEI related topics and initiatives</p>	
DEIAB Education Plan for Staff					
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all staff, coaches and administrators in the department are furthering their knowledge and understanding about how to contribute to an inclusive and equitable environment in a structured manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Create a continued education plan that requires all members to engage DEIAB education on ongoing basis <input type="checkbox"/> Establish a budget <input type="checkbox"/> Identify topics and speakers <input type="checkbox"/> Identify opportunities at YSU, in the community, the Horizon League, the NCAA, Women' Leaders in College Sports, NACDA, DIECE, Black Student-Athlete Summit, where YSU stakeholders can grow in their intercultural competence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEIAB Steering Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track engagement through attendance • Review student-athlete climate survey and staff/coaches reviews regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased belonging for URM groups ○ Growth and understanding about DEIAB related topics • Track engagement opportunities that take place outside of the athletic department (i.e. Women Leaders, NACDA) 	<p>Creation: September 1, 2023,</p> <p>Completion: July 1, 2024</p>

Sustaining Impact	Institutionalize Commitment to Internal Stakeholders				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the values and mission for DEIAB are known and embraced by all stakeholders within the YSU athletic department. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Review, revise and share the values and mission that will showcase the DEIAB commitments to all internal stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/> Add shared values and policies to student-athlete and staff code of conduct <input type="checkbox"/> Set up cadence/structure to integrate DEIAB into monthly administration, coaches, sport admin, staff meetings, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey staff and students about knowledge and impact of mission and values 	July 1, 2023
	Staff, Coach & Administration Performance Reviews				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold staff, coaches, and administration accountable to increase their knowledge and application of DEIAB through annual performance reviews. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Review current performance review structure <input type="checkbox"/> Establish criteria for staff, coaches and administration to meet on an annual basis <input type="checkbox"/> Add questions regarding DEIAB engagement and knowledge building <input type="checkbox"/> Establish follow up protocol for those that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create metric system to assess engagement Asses all staff, coach and administrative performance reviews on an annual basis to ensure that all stakeholders are participating in required engagement 	July 1, 2024

		do not meet criteria		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate questions about DEIAB engagement in annual student-athlete surveys and exit interviews to ensure that growth and development of coaches and staff is being translated to teams/units 	
Strengthen Connection & Community	External Brand Strategy for DEIAB Efforts				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publicly acknowledge YSU's commitment to DEIAB to external stakeholders by creating an external brand strategy. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Update YSU website to reflect DEI strategic objectives <input type="checkbox"/> Create newsletter/public announcement for alumni and campus/community partners <input type="checkbox"/> Create strategy to keep social media and website updated with new/ongoing engagements related to DEIAB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administration DEIAB Steering Team Communications Staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a mechanism to track increased engagement with fans, community members, alumni, etc. Integrate questions in student-athlete surveys to inquire about satisfaction with DEIAB presence on digital platforms 	July 1, 2023
	Black Excellence Alumni Luncheon				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase opportunities for student-athlete 	<input type="checkbox"/> Establish "Black Excellence Luncheon"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alumni Office Athletics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track attendance Post event survey 	July 1, 2024

	alumni from underrepresented groups to engage with YSU Athletics.	vision and structure <input type="checkbox"/> Create outreach plan for Black alumni and student-athletes <input type="checkbox"/> Set up all logistics for the event (i.e. meeting invites, location, catering, follow up, etc.)	Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jaysen Spencer, Director of Academic Services 	for alumni and student-athletes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess increased engagement with alumni and student-athletes at future events and initiatives 	
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ANNUAL PLAN: 2024-25

Strategic Objective	Recommended Goal	Action Step(s)	Responsible Party(ies)	Measuring Impact	Deadline
Recruitment, Retention & Development	Hiring & Recruitment Protocol				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish recruitment protocol to ensure that all hiring managers are reaching diverse populations and running inclusive search/selection processes. 				
	Student-Athlete Resources (Mental Health & Life After College)				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate and enhance student-athlete 				

	resources and programs that contribute to their holistic support, growth and development (particularly in the areas of mental health and life after sport transition for URM populations).				
Ongoing Learning & Engagement	DEIAB Education Plan for Student-Athletes				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the staff, coach and administrator DEIAB education plan to include student-athletes, to enhance their knowledge and contribution to inclusive environments. 				
	Heritage Month Engagement				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize Heritage Month's to meaningfully educate and connect with URM populations internally and externally. 				
Sustaining	Crisis Management Plan & Protocol				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a crisis 				

Impact	management plan and protocol to ensure that the department is prepared to respond crisis related to DEIAB.				
	Department Policies & Processes				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit all department policies and processes to reflect accountability toward DEIAB, and create a plan to make the policies digestible and accessible. 				
Strengthen Connection & Community	Campus Engagement Plan				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakdown barriers that get in the way of student- athletes, staff and coaches being able to engage with campus and understand the DEI related resources/ personnel on campus. 				
	Themed Games & Engagement with URM Communities				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase YSU's connection to URM communities and URM serving organizations by providing access 				

	and engagement opportunities to YSU events, matches and games.				
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ANNUAL PLAN:2025-26

Strategic Objective	Recommended Goal	Action Step(s)	Responsible Party(ies)	Measuring Impact	Deadline
Recruitment, Retention & Development	Onboarding				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly demonstrate the importance of DEIAB to our culture in the on-boarding of new staff, coaches and student-athletes. 				
	New Staff Mentorship Program				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a mentor program for new staff members to focus on establishing the cross connection between units, sports, campus and the community. 				

Ongoing Learning & Engagement	Team & Unit Based DEI Action Plans				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate DEIAB related goals in each team/units' annual plans to intentionally integrate commitment and action. 				
Sustaining Impact	Department Progress & Impact Assessment				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the evaluation of the strategic plan progress, conduct a culture and climate survey to set new goals that sustain the department's intentionality and impact. 				
	Evaluate & Enhance Feedback Mechanisms				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit all feedback mechanisms and processes, both formal and informal, to ensure that the structures to gather information are effective and are also inclusive of all voices. 				
	Community Connection Working Groups				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop community 				

Strengthen Connection & Community	connection working groups made up of members from specified stakeholder groups (staff/coaches, donors, alumni, etc.) to create meaningful and intentional interactions inside and outside of the department.				
	Engagement with URM Businesses & Vendors				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultivate and steward relationships with businesses that are owned by URM groups to be partners of YSU Athletics. 				



Youngstown State University Athletics Department

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access & Belonging initiatives, and accomplishments for 2022-23 Academic Year

DEIAB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access & Belonging) Awareness

- We talked with staff and various student-athlete groups about DEIAB and discussed developing a DEIAB strategic plan working with Sheridan Blanford of INcompass Excellence.
- Various student-athletes participated in the Horizon League and NCAA Social Media Campaign
- Frequently sent emails to student-athletes, staff, and coaches on various DEIAB events occurring on campus and in the community.
- Provide a summary of DEI activities and events within the department and on campus during bi-weekly athletics staff calls.
- Updated SAAC on 2/5/23 the DEI Strategic Planning process and upcoming initiatives.
- Informational Television topics and announcements
- Stambaugh Stadium bulletin board activations
- Student-athletes, Caitlyn Jones, and Isi Sisic, did a SAAC Instagram takeover while at the NCAA Inclusion Forum

Education and Training

- Athletics department staff participate in DEIAB specific professional development opportunities.
 - Mid-American Conference DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Coach/Admin Certificate Program Sessions.
 - Jaysen earned 3 certificates on Religion, Reproductive Rights and Race
 - Monthly Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Council of Excellence (DIECE) Zoom meetings
 - Monthly Jen Fry Webinars
 - 1/18/23 - Attended Social Class on Campus Webinar with Youngstown State University Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - 2/7/23 - Participated in N4A Webinar on Cultural Dimensions
 - 4/20-4/21 - Attended NCAA ADID (Athletics Diversity & Inclusion Designee) Summit (Indianapolis, IN)
 - 4/21-4/23 - Attended NCAA Inclusion Forum (Indianapolis, IN)
 - We were able to take 2 student-athlete (Isidora Sisic & Caitlyn Jones) participants.
 - Had 1 student (Mike Voitus – FB) selected by the NCAA to speak during the Student-Athlete Voice Session of the Inclusion Forum
- Women's Lacrosse participated in a DEI/Leadership Development workshop (2/25)
- Student-athletes (through Student-Athlete Development) completed GamePlan Module on Cultural Competency.
- Tunnel of Oppression exhibition

Departmental Steps Taken

- Jaysen Spencer appointed the Athletics Diversity & Inclusion Designee (ADID) and Senior Minority Administrator (SMA)
- Johnny Ware is appointed as the Coordinator of Athletics DEIAB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Access & Belonging)
- Meet monthly with the Athletics Leadership team to provide updates on DEIAB Initiatives.
- Started work with Sheridan Blanford from InCompass Excellence on our Culture and Climate Survey as well as facilitate the process in developing our DEIAB Strategic Plan.
- Completed a Culture and Climate Survey with student-athletes, staff, and coaches.
- Completed 6 focus groups with student-athletes, staff, and coaches.
- Increased the number of DEIAB questions on the end of season student-athlete climate survey.
- Johnny and Jaysen reviewed data from the DEIAB questions from the Fall end of season student-athlete climate survey.
- In recognition of Black History Month, we played Lift Every Voice prior to the start of a men's and a women's basketball game.
- Created BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) affinity group, *For the Culture*.
 - First meeting 2/13/23
 - Had second meeting on 3/22
 - From this meeting, the students decided to meet bi-weekly.
 - Third meeting held on 4/4
 - Game night
 - Fourth meeting will be held on 4/18
- Completed DEIAB Strategic Plan Workshop 1 with Sheridan– First meeting 2/20/23.
- Completed DEIAB Strategic Plan Workshop 2 With Sheridan – 3/20/23.
- Completed DEIAB Strategic Plan Workshop 3 with Sheridan – 3/27/23.
- Received initial strategic plan for review from Sheridan – 4/14/23.
- Tory and Jaysen presented in the Spring Athletics Department in-person staff meeting on the Culture and Climate Report as well as the DEIAB Strategic plan.
- Shared the final Culture and Climate Report and DEIAB Strategic Plan to the Athletics Staff
- Solicited volunteers for the DEIAB Executive Steering Committee using the DEIAB Executive Steering Committee sign up form.
- Volleyball player, Isi Sisic, and Jaysen presented on the NCAA Inclusion Forum at the Spring Intercollegiate Athletics Committee meeting.
- Held BIPOC Athletics Staff Happy Hour at BJ's Brewhouse on May 18
- Johnny and Jaysen have begun scheduling meetings with head coaches to discuss DEIAB plans for each team.

Campus Collaboration

- Department staff attended IPO (International Programs Office) Coffee on 1/13/23.
- YSU Athletics provided gift baskets to the YSU Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to raffle off at their Gala.
- Johnny and Jaysen attended the YSU Office of DEI Gala on 2/11/23.
- Jaysen served as a mentor to AIM (Achieve, Impact, Motivate) Students through the YSU Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Johnny serves as a mentor to a Navaro fellow through the YSU Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Johnny and Jaysen met with the president of YSUnity on how YSU Athletics can partner with them to provide support and education for student-athletes and staff that are either identify as a part of the community or are allies to the community.
- Johnny and Jaysen met with Susan Moorer and Donquail Mims from The Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion to see how we can partner on programming as well as having them serve on the DEIAB Executive Committee.

Horizon League

- Jaysen created Horizon League ADID contact list to be able to connect with the ADID's in the HL to bounce ideas and thoughts with each other.
- Encouraged the HL ADID to participate in the monthly DIECE meetings.
- YSU was one of 2 Horizon League Institutions represented at the NCAA ADID Summit.
- YSU was one of 4 Horizon League Institutions represented at the NCAA Inclusion Forum.
- Jaysen led the first HL ADID peer group virtual meeting on May 4, 2023
 - Horizon League Commissioner Julie Roe Lach participated in the meeting.
 - Julie mentioned that she would like for each HL member to send a representative and some students to the NCAA Inclusion Forum. May have a pre-meeting in Indy prior to the Forum in 2024.
 - HL ADID Peer Group may end up some work with #OneHL.
- The Horizon League played Lift Every Voice before the conference Track & Field Championship Finals (5/7).

Youngstown State University
Athletics Compliance Audit



May 3, 2023
Kelly Brooks
Managing Partner
The Brooks Element

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INTRODUCTION

The Brooks Element was employed by Youngstown State University (YSU) to conduct an audit of YSU Athletics' Compliance Department within its Department of Athletics.

Review Outline

The Brooks Element performed a review of five distinct areas with respect to YSU's Athletic Compliance Department, including:

1. Written Policies and Procedures
2. Staffing and Structure
3. Rules Education Program
4. Culture and Communication
5. Other Topics and/or Recommendations to Note

Review methodology included virtual meetings with relevant parties (list of YSU staff members provided in Appendix A) and examination of documents provided by YSU (comprehensive list provided in Appendix C).

Summary

In general, the collaboration between the compliance staff and the rest of the athletic department support staff at YSU is impressive. However, based on the review of YSU's documents along with virtual visits with YSU staff, there are a host of recommendations outlined within this report. The recommendations range from minor items to more substantial topics.

The enclosed report is a culmination of The Brooks Element's review and contains numerous observations and recommendations for review and possible implementation. After reviewing various documents, virtual meetings with YSU athletics compliance staff, and drawing from experiences across the NCAA landscape, The Brooks Element has provided 21 recommendations for YSU's review. The recommendations have been broken down into five categories. YSU staff is encouraged to contact me directly at Kelly@TheBrooksElement.com for any clarification or required follow-up.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS



Section 1: Compliance Policies and Procedures

Overall, the YSU compliance staff has taken tremendous steps forward since conversations with the staff during the YSU academic audit conducted Spring of 2021 and the early discussion stages of this compliance audit. The progress made in such a short time to create a policy manual essentially from scratch is notable. In this section, outlined are the recommendations to further enhance and continue development of the YSU compliance policy manual.

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NCAA Bylaw and/or Other Resource References

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Specific NCAA Bylaws should be linked or cited in all compliance-related policies. The recommendation is to cite the bylaw as a link to the actual full bylaw as opposed to adding the bylaw language to the policy. By linking the bylaws, less updating would be needed as bylaw language changes over time. Incorporating the NCAA Bylaws will also add ease of access should bylaw language need to be referenced when following or reviewing a policy. NCAA directive or guideline documents referenced in a policy or used as a resource for creating the policy should also be linked within the document. The same should apply for conference or university information relevant to a policy. For example, in a policy regarding initial eligibility, the relevant Bylaw 14 cites should be included as well as any NCAA Eligibility Center directives or guidelines.

.....

Compliance vs. Administrative Policies

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During the compliance manual review, there were many policies or processes managed by the compliance staff, however, are not directly tied to an NCAA Bylaw. The recommendation is to identify or distinguish which policies or which portions of processes are truly tied to an NCAA Bylaw. This would provide additional clarity for monitoring purposes but also assist staff with prioritizing direct NCAA compliance matters versus those that are administrative in nature. Also, with regular compliance audits being recommended by the Division I Transformation Committee, clear identification of direct compliance policies will streamline future audit processes as well.

Additionally, the tasks assigned to the compliance staff to oversee or complete should be distinguished between NCAA Compliance related tasks or YSU Athletics administrative tasks (non-NCAA Compliance related).

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Identification of Staff Positions and/or Areas

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Many policy or procedures within the compliance manual involve workflow steps from other areas within athletics or within the university structure. In some cases, specific staff member's names have been used in policies instead of his/her position titles, offices, or departments. For example, the *Donation Request* policy references Steve Pinciario in the process as opposed to Athletic Business Office or his specific position title. Other policies reviewed do reference titles or offices, thus the recommendation is to review to ensure consistency throughout all policies and procedures.

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Procedures versus Monitoring

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An additional layer to be captured in all compliance policies is stating how the involved topic or process is monitored. For example, the *Official Visit Request* policy includes the procedures for coaches to submit the request, the workflow, and how the request is approved. However, the policy does not capture the actual compliance task of monitoring. When drafting a process, the compliance staff should determine the NCAA rules monitoring component and if the monitoring process is captured in the procedure. It is also important to note for future audits/reviews where the compliance policies and procedures align with published best practices and for the YSU Compliance staff to compare policies with industry standards.

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"Compliance" Calendar

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During the review of policies and procedures, the compliance calendar spreadsheet developed by the YSU compliance staff over the recent 12-18 months was reviewed. The calendar is a comprehensive document of the tasks or processes the compliance staff tracks, monitors, or initiates throughout a calendar year. However, as referenced above in the *Compliance vs. Administrative Polices* recommendation of the report, this calendar includes tasks that are not NCAA Compliance related.

Therefore, the current spreadsheet is not appropriately titled. It is currently a YSU Athletics "Administrative Task Calendar" which includes compliance related tasks. To be considered a compliance-only calendar, those non-NCAA Compliance related items should be removed.

As stated previously, it is important to delineate between compliance versus administrative duties.

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Continued Policy Development

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The YSU compliance staff has done an exceptional job creating and enhancing policies and procedures as well as developing additional forms and workflows. However, it is recommended that every process which has a form or JumpForward workflow, also should be captured in a policy. While forms allow a task or process to be reviewed or monitored appropriately, there should also be a policy or a portion of a policy to govern the form or task. In many of the compliance forms, the involved NCAA Bylaws have been referenced, however, forms should "live" within a policy as well.

In addition, the compliance staff should continue to focus on "loading" additional compliance or other sport-related workflows into JumpForward. For example, while interviewing Mr. Steve Pinciario, Assistant AD for Business and Finance, he discussed how it would be helpful to implement the full Prospective Student-Athlete (PSA) official visit process into JumpForward.

Section 2: Compliance Staffing and Structure

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Staff Size and Efficiency

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Positive feedback was received from both coaches and other support areas, stating the efficiency and timeliness of this area has improved. In speaking with compliance staff members, they generally do not feel overwhelmed with the compliance-specific workload. Associate General Counsel Ross Miltner stated the compliance staff is currently “right-sized” and it is a major improvement that staff no longer feels swamped on an ongoing basis. When observing and working with the YSU Athletics Department, the overwhelmed feeling was the standard amongst the compliance staff in previous years. Compliance staff members feels they provide great service to the sport teams each person works directly with and there is adequate time to devote to their teams. Keirsten Kleckner-Alt, Assistant Athletics Director, stated the compliance department is staffed well which allows her to do a good job of supporting her assigned teams.

It was observed through interviews and policy review the compliance department has multiple processes it oversees or manages, but many processes are not truly a process related to an NCAA Bylaw. Examples include the textbook return process, championship ring process, international tax process, housing-related processes, various department reports, endowment or other financial tracking processes. While the workload appears to be balanced at this time, it is important to monitor how many additional non-NCAA Compliance processes the YSU compliance staff manages to determine if further prioritizing is needed. It is critical that policies and processes tied to an NCAA Bylaw or monitoring of NCAA Compliance related items are the focus of this staff to help avoid future compliance violations and oversight.

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Structure

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The YSU compliance staff is currently structured in which each compliance staff member is a liaison for his/her designated sports. In this structure, the compliance liaison handles all compliance-related questions or processes for the teams he/she works with directly. Based on the feedback received, this structure has been ideal for not only the compliance staff members but also coaches and other support areas. Director of Athletic Academic Services Jaysen Spencer focused on the compliance staff’s structure of having sport liaisons as a major strength of the department. He stated it is a huge advantage for everyone in the department to know who to go to regarding each sport. As a result of having designated team assignments, this structure has also allowed compliance staff to be more in-tune with the sport programs. Rebecca Fink, Senior Associate Athletic Director/SWA stated the Compliance staff is much more integrated with the teams than in the past and sees this as a current asset of the staff and the department as a whole.

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Workload and Professional Development

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Although the workload seems well balanced at this time and the YSU compliance staff has developed continuity, it is recommended to continuously monitor the staff size and workload. With over 500 student-athletes, there should be continual checks and balances regarding the workload and monitoring capacity of the staff. Additional requirements from the Transformation Committee recommendations and changing Division I landscape could quickly tip the scale.

With the relative limited NCAA regulatory experience of multiple members of the compliance staff and the fast-paced changes at the Division I level currently; it is recommended that professional development opportunities continue to be financially supported and prioritized. Attendance at the NCAA Regional Rules conference and the National Association for Athletics Compliance (NAAC) conferences should be a priority for this staff annually. In addition, continued engagement and participation in various conference peer-groups, calls, or in person meetings (if applicable) are great opportunities for the compliance staff to grow professional connections and share best practices.

Section 3: Rules Education Program



Monthly Education Meetings

The rules education presentations and materials reviewed were well done. The materials are informational yet digestible and cover a variety of topic areas. I recommend the YSU compliance staff reviews the topics being covered annually to ensure all relevant areas are being captured.

Feedback from coaches and staff indicated the rules education efforts have increased. Head Women's Tennis Coach Mickael Sopel stated he has recognized the increase in the number of rules educational sessions and this area is a strength of the athletic department. Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) Dr. Chet Cooper stated the current strength of the compliance department is the improvement of the continuing rules education initiatives.

Additionally, the rules education post-meeting acknowledgement required by coaches not only tracks consistent attendance and participation, but also allows proper monitoring of coach engagement. A similar process of acknowledgment should be in place for all rules education meetings with athletics support staff and rules education sessions with groups outside the athletic department.

The compliance staff must continue the strong efforts towards education. In addition, the innovative initiatives already present such as the "Compliance 101" online course is impressive. Further innovation such as the use of interactive case studies to increase the understanding of NCAA Bylaws, developing a compliance on-boarding process for new hires, and a developing a "Head Coach Responsibility Bootcamp" as recommended by Assistant Director of Compliance Tyler Burk will continue to support the improvement and integrity of the athletics department.

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Education with Other Athletic Support Areas or YSU Departments

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In order to further enhance rules compliance educational efforts, I recommend developing and implementing NCAA rules education with additional areas and groups within the athletic department and on campus. The compliance unit has taken steps towards this recommendation by establishing regular meetings and education with the athletic academic staff and annual education with the sport performance staff; however, all units within the athletic department should have a schedule for NCAA rules education. In addition, departments on campus such as the Offices of Financial Aid, Registrar, Admissions, International Services, Housing, and any other departments that provide direct support to athletic programs or student-athletes should have annual rules education sessions. This recommendation also aligns with the direction of the NCAA Transformation Committee's report and additional educational expectations.

Enhancing rules education with additional campus departments also enhances the department of athletics communication and relationships those areas. For example, Jaysen Spencer, Director of Athletic Academic Services, was clearly excited his academics staff meets with the compliance staff every month as a standing meeting. These developing relationships are critical when issues arise as well as when collaboration is needed.

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Other Education-Related Items

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There are two additional rules education-related recommendations for the YSU compliance staff. The staff should explore integrating rules education and the acknowledgments process into the JumpForward software. Acknowledgments are currently completed using an outside form but could potentially be integrated into the JumpForward software coaches are using for other daily tasks.

Similarly, Kiersten Klekner-Alt, Assistant Athletic Director, stated a primary goal and department need is to educate the athletics department staff on the use of JumpForward. It is recommended the compliance staff continue to educate athletic support staff on the uses and benefits of JumpForward to further integrate the software into other departmental electronic workflows.

Section 4: Culture and Communication

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Culture Around Compliance

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Culture is debatably the most critical piece of creating compliant environment. Athletic department coaches and staff must feel welcomed and supported by the compliance staff to effectively work together and have a trusting environment. At YSU there is not only a healthy working dynamic with coaches and staff, but also a very collaborative and innovative dynamic within the compliance staff members. It became apparent members of the compliance staff enjoy working together. Rebecca Fink, Senior Associate Athletic Director/SWA, stated the current YSU compliance staff is innovative and does a great job of collaborating to accomplish staff goals and tasks. There is a high level of trust which lends well to working together successfully. This staff loves YSU athletics and is devoted to supporting the coaches and student-athletes.

The compliance staff is seen as welcoming and supportive to coaches and staff. For example, Football Assistant Coach Troy Rothenbuhler stated the department has added administrators willing to provide the answers needed and feels the staff is approachable. He stated the football staff loves Kiersten Klekner-Alt attending football staff meetings and has been impressed with her work. From observations, the football staff feels comfortable communicating with Kiersten as football's compliance liaison and views her as part of the team. Head Softball Coach Brian Campbell enjoys the open-door approach when working with the compliance staff. He gets answers in a timely manner and the staff has been transparent. Women's Tennis Head Coach Sopol stated there is a culture of trust when working with the compliance staff. Trust is critical between a head coach and the compliance staff; thus, this speaks to the relationships the compliance staff has worked to establish within the department.

The compliance staff must continue to foster, build, and maintain healthy and trusting relationships with the sport staff. In addition, it is recommended to incorporate sport administrators where appropriate and ensure those administrators are informed on compliance matters as well.

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Communication

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The most evident strength of the compliance department is the open communication. The compliance staff has established regular and consistent avenues of communication with the coaches through regular meetings, educational sessions, check ins, and open-door availability. This allows many opportunities for coaches and staff to ask questions, but also compliance staff to be informed and integrated into the sport staff. The compliance unit should continue to focus on active communication and maintain the high level of access for coaches and staff. Timeliness of response should continue to be an emphasis in the fast-paced athletics environment.



An area of communication requiring improvement is with other units on campus such as the Offices of Financial Aid, Registrar, Admissions, and other offices directly related to NCAA compliance or eligibility processes. Financial Aid Office processes and policies appear to be an area the compliance staff does not have a solid foundation. It is recommended the compliance staff explore additional training on the use of the YSU Financial Aid system, processes, and the workflow of the financial aid staff. This will improve efficiencies when working with the Office of Financial Aid. It is encouraged that the compliance staff continue making casual or informal connections with these nonathletic units on campus but establish formal meeting opportunities as well.



Section 5: Other Topics and Recommendations to Note

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Compliance On-Boarding for New Staff

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During interviews, compliance staff shared concerns related to volunteer and part-time staff, specifically in coaching roles, and the difficulty of educating these groups due to those individuals' limited time on campus. The idea of developing a compliance on-boarding course was mentioned to improve on-boarding education for all positions regardless of employment status to ensure the same base level of knowledge. This is a fantastic and innovative idea to educate in the ever-changing staffing of college athletics; however, it must be used consistently with all staff positions including a completion certificate or acknowledgment of completion. The materials in the course should be evaluated annually, at a minimum, to ensure the materials are accurate and up to date.

With the change in NCAA personnel limits and legislation, it will be critical for all staff (full time and volunteer) to understand the responsibility and liability. From an NCAA standpoint, there is no relief for violations occurring at the hands of a volunteer staff member. This concept should be communicated to and well understood by head coaches.

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Pace of Athletic Compliance

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Modernization efforts and Transformation Committee recommendations are pushing change at a pace many compliance staff have not experienced in this industry. It is not only critical for the compliance staff to stay up to date, but to also, in turn, communicate changes to coaches and athletic staff quickly. The compliance staff is obligated to determine the best ways to communicate these changes within the department. How do we keep coaches and staff updated? Are email updates the most efficient or are communication via apps such as Microsoft Teams or group messaging platforms more effective? The information must be easily digestible yet informative for all.

With changes at the NCAA national level, there is also a potential for numerous institutional or conference modifications in regulations or policies. Compliance staffs and department leadership will need to continue to be innovative. To succeed, coaches and athletics department staff should continuously be encouraged to be open-minded and think critically in this new Division I compliance landscape.

Adaptability is about the powerful difference between adapting to cope and adapting to win.
-Max McKeown

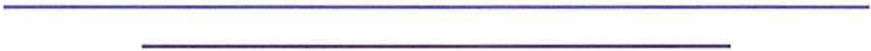
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Potential Blind Spots

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The collegiate athletic landscape is evolving and changing at a pace never seen before. It is important to encourage the YSU compliance staff to track the topics below meticulously. The staff must stay in tune with best practices in these areas to ensure proper monitoring and education practices are in place.

- Future use of the Transfer Portal - How will the use of the portal continue to evolve? Will current monitoring practices continue to be adequate or will processes need adjusting?
- Mental Health - How will compliance staffs engage with mental health education and support the mental well-being of student-athletes moving forward?
- NIL and Athletics Boosters - YSU seems to excel in the NIL education thus far and should strive to continue to stay ahead of the curve. Continue to think critically and utilize industry NIL resources to shine.



APPENDICES

- **Appendix A: YSU Staff Interviewed by The Brooks Element**
- **Appendix B: Background on The Brooks Element**
- **Appendix C: Documents Reviewed by The Brooks Element**

APPENDIX A: STAFF INTERVIEWED BY THE BROOKS ELEMENT

The Brooks Element met with the following YSU staff during virtual meetings:

1. Ms. Rebecca Fink, Senior Associate Athletic Director/SWA
2. Ms. Kiersten Klekner-Alt, Assistant Athletic Director
3. Mr. Tyler Burk, Assistant Director of Compliance
4. Mr. Tyler Mettill, Assistant Director of Compliance
5. Mr. Ross Miltner, Associate General Counsel – Athletics Liaison
6. Mr. Jaysen Spencer, Director of Athletic Academic Services
7. Ms. Rebecca King, Senior Athletic Academic Advisor
8. Dr. Chet Cooper, Faculty Athletic Representative
9. Mrs. Jessica Smith, Manager Scholarships and Special Programs – Financial Aid
10. Mr. Patrick Hoffman, Director of Financial Aid
11. Mr. Steve Pinciario, Asst. AD Business Operations and Finance
12. Mr. Mickael Sopol, Head Coach Women's Tennis
13. Mr. Troy Rothenbuhler, Assistant Coach Football Defensive Coordinator
14. Mr. Josh Green, Assistant Coach Women's Soccer
15. Mr. Brian Campbell, Head Coach Softball

APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND ON KELLY & THE BROOKS ELEMENT

Kelly Brooks founded The Brooks Element in 2019. He has over twenty-five years of experience in higher education and athletics. Kelly is passionate about facilitating opportunities for individuals and organizations to produce positive transformation in their lives and the lives of others.

Kelly dedicated eight years of his career at the NCAA national headquarters in Indianapolis, IN. In his role as NCAA Director of Academic and Membership Affairs, he managed the waiver process of NCAA Bylaws in NCAA Divisions I, II and III. He also provided research and analysis of current NCAA Bylaws to recommend rule changes.

Kelly spent time as the Associate Commissioner for the Southwestern Athletic Conference office, an NCAA Division I conference located in Birmingham, AL. There, he provided daily management for the conference office's internal operations. Additionally, he was the conference sport administrator for football, baseball and men's and women's basketball, as well as responsible for coordinating the conference championships in those sports.

As the Director of Student-Athlete Development at Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH, Kelly coordinated the opening of Xavier's first Student-Athlete Academic Support Center and supervised the center's staff and student workers.

Prior to his tenure as an administrator, Kelly spent time as an Assistant Basketball Coach at Mississippi University for Women and the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.

Kelly received his B.A. in Mathematics at Mississippi University for Women and his M.A. in Higher Education Administration at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Kelly is a native of Starkville, MS, and enjoys his role as a Graduate School Adjunct Professor at Alcorn State University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in his native state.

More information can be found at www.TheBrooksElement.com.

APPENDIX C: DOCUMENTS REVIEWED BY THE BROOKS ELEMENT

The Brooks Element reviewed the following YSU documents:

- YSU Compliance Calendar
- Student-Athlete Handbook – compliance sections
- Annual NCAA Probation Report
- YSU Compliance Staff Coverage Breakdown
- YSU Compliance Policy Manual – See full list of policies with review notes in shared folder
- Beginning of Year Compliance Attestations – Student-Athlete and Staff
- Camp Forms
- Official and Unofficial Visit Paperwork
- Coaching Staff Designation
- Sport Club Form
- Outside Competition
- Title IX and NCAA Sexual Violence Prevention Documents
- Roster Addition and Removal
- Intent to Transfer Form (SA completion)
- Occasional Meal Request
- Scholarship Request Process