

NCAA Division-I Athletic Equality Index

Launched in 2017, the Athletic Equality Index (AEI) measures LGBTQ+ inclusion policies and practices in NCAA D-I athletic departments. This third, and now evergreen, iteration provides a comprehensive snapshot of how NCAA institutions are supporting their fans, staff, coaches, and student-athletes. The AEI aims to:

- set a gold standard of LGBTQ+ policies and practices in collegiate athletics;
- provide feedback to NCAA athletic departments on how their LGBTQ+ inclusion policies and practices compare to other institutions across the nation; and
- offer resources and model LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and practices to departments hoping to update their policies and practices.

The Leaderboard

As of March 2021, institutions who currently have a score of 100 on the 2020 AEI include: The Ohio State University, Boston University, Kent State University, University of Miami, University of Southern California, University of Arizona, George Mason University, University of California at Davis, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Pennsylvania. The conference with the highest AEI scores as of March 2021 is the PAC-12 with an average of 68.8.

High Level Findings

- When LGBTQ+ educational resources are available, LGBTQ+ student-athletes and staff can seek resources and support without fear of repercussions. **Yet, 70% of Division-I athletic departments do not offer any resources.**
- Of over 9,000 sport fans surveyed, the majority believed spectator stands were the most dangerous and unwelcoming of all places for LGBTQ+ people in sports. **Still, a vast majority of D-I athletic departments (80%) do not have a fan code of conduct or guide for fan behavior of any kind.**
- Despite a growing number of athletes coming out as LGBTQ+ in college (and before being recruited), as of 2021, **only 2.8% of NCAA D-I athletes compete in departments that fully protect and support their LGBTQ+ identities.**

Why this Matters

In 2019, hate crimes against the LGBTQ+ community were on the rise, with the number of anti-LGBTQ hate groups soaring 43%, [according to the Southern Poverty Law Center](#). COVID-19 has also placed LGBTQ+ youth at [increased risk](#) of depression, anxiety, and suicidality as a result of social isolation, financial hardships, and increased stress around the pandemic. According to a [recent study on mental health](#) by The Trevor Project, when LGBTQ+ youth have access to sports, they earn higher grades and are less likely to have depressive symptoms. That access depends upon schools

proactively fostering an environment where students are safe, welcomed and accepted for who they are.

How the AEI Works

Our team performs a comprehensive audit of the student-athlete handbook, policy manuals, and official athletics website, to identify policies and practices of LGBTQ+ inclusion of every NCAA D-I institution. The following eight measurements have been empirically proven to positively impact the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community.

How many departments have an accessible nondiscrimination statement? 19%

How many departments have a publicly accessible trans inclusion policy? 8%

How many departments have a publicly accessible sexual misconduct policy? 23%

How many departments have a public LGBTQ+ inclusive fan code of conduct? 10%

How many departments offer LGBTQ+ educational resources? 12%

How many departments partner with their campus LGBTQ+ center? 16%

How many departments offer a LGBTQ+ training to athletics staff? 16%

How many departments offer a LGBTQ+ training to student-athletes? 15%

Every athletic department has the capacity to earn full points on the AEI by enacting and making publicly accessible each policy, resource, and training to staff, fans, and varsity student-athletes. Access to information is imperative and demonstrates a department's commitment to sustained LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Ongoing Work with Colleges & Universities

The AEI research process allows for ongoing conversation and collaboration with colleges and universities.

Throughout the research process, the Athlete Ally team conversed and consulted with athletic department leaders, and provided them with resources (sample policies, educational materials, etc) to help them seamlessly make changes to foster a more inclusive environment for the LGBTQ+ community.

Please note that all data cited is as of March 2021.

If you have any questions on the AEI, please contact research@athleteally.org