

N4A



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As we look to usher in our 47th Annual National Convention in Las Vegas, our N4A Family has embraced the theme of Energy, Empathy, and Empowerment. However, our Association is committed to ensuring that we display boldly and confidently that DEI is in the fabric of everything we do. I am grateful to our Division Director for DEI, Shanika Mungin (University of Illinois), and the comprehensive vision she continues to provide our Association. This year, our plan is to weave in various branding elements, strategic music playlist (LGBTQ+ artist), and a bevy of other resources to uplift PRIDE month and celebrate members who identify within this amazing community. I am elated to see these plans come to fruition and there is no better time to uplift and celebrate the evolution of PRIDE from the Stonewall Uprising to constantly advocating for LGBTQ+ policy and legislation at the federal level. It is our goal to ensure all members feel heard, valued,

and seen throughout the National Convention experience. We will continue to provide gender neutral restrooms, PRIDE ally stickers, and Nevin Caple will conduct a DEI Ted Talk for our members.

Throughout the last several months, Nevin has taken us through an Association-wide journey to empower leaders from all 17 Affiliate Associations while utilizing her digital platform, "Return on Inclusion" (ROI). As a former higher education DEI enthusiast at Florida State University and the first ever Chief Diversity Officer for the Detroit Pistons, I cannot endorse this platform enough. I have grown immensely, and I would challenge folks to join the movement and learn more today.

The platform is simple to utilize, and you can leverage the modules at your own pace. They are great to curate DEI ideas within your department such as: Active Listening Sessions, Celebrating Days of Significance, Cultivating Affinity Groups and Teams, and a plethora of other ideas to strengthen and enhance DEI effective practices within your athletics department. It has been an amazing experience for Shanika Mungin (Illinois) and I to partake, and we look forward to activating what we learned for the years to come. As Verna Myers

eloquently states: "Diversity is inviting someone to the party and inclusion is asking them to dance!"

We cannot wait to dance with our members in Las Vegas and celebrate inclusive practices during our National Convention. We hope to see everyone soon. In the meantime, keep leading with Energy, displaying Empathy, and Empowering our members to be the best versions of themselves.

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Leslie Fields
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The best part about working in a smaller athletics department is the opportunity to get involved in administrative areas outside of compliance. At Xavier, Grace Falkenbach (a former NACDA intern) is not only our assistant director of compliance; she is also the assistant sport administrator for men's and women's soccer and women's lacrosse, she teaches a one-credit course for freshmen, and is the staff advisor for Xavier Athletics' PRIDE Group. On my end, I'm the director of compliance, sport administrator for track and cross country, NIL czar, and – most applicable to this issue of *Athletics Administration* – co-chair of our diversity, equity and inclusion committee.

Xavier's I.D.E.A. Initiative – Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Awareness – was born in the summer of 2020 when our senior staff decided

we needed to bolster our efforts in those areas, and commit a group to focus on advancing diversity and inclusion. Co-chaired by women's soccer head coach Nate Lie, the IDEA Initiative includes student-athletes, coaches and staff members. We created a mission and values statement with three primary goals: 1) Provide intentional education and facilitate conversation for the Xavier athletics community; 2) Empower Xavier student-athletes and employees to speak up and speak out against inequality and social injustice; and 3) Strengthen recruiting, hiring and retention practices to attract, develop, promote and retain a diverse athletics staff.

To date, the IDEA Initiative has implemented an enhanced recruiting and hiring process for all position vacancies in the department; provided monthly education and resources related to diversity, equity and inclusion for student-athletes, coaches and staff; provided platforms for student-athletes to speak out on social injustices; hosted Pride Games; and facilitated conversations surrounding inclusion for student-athletes, coaches, staff and season ticket holders. Our most notable event happened when we invited donors and season ticket holders to discuss the meaning of "Black

Lives Matter" and the "BLM" patches our student-athletes wore on their jerseys in 2020-21 as part of the BIG EAST Conference-wide initiative. Donors and season ticket holders heard from student-athletes and coaches, who explained why it was important for them to wear the patch, and shared their experiences as Black Americans. We certainly didn't change everyone's hearts that day, but it was a powerful day and I know our coaches and student-athletes felt supported by the rest of the athletics department. I have never been as proud of a student-athlete as I was of those who spoke that day.

We've done some great things in two years, but there is still so much work to be done. The work of creating a diverse department where everyone feels valued and welcome may never be done. Sometimes that thought gets overwhelming. But we keep pushing forward. Every step forward we take is a step in the right direction.

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