

# NACMA



## Jack Slavin

**UNC Pembroke**  
Associate AD/Athletics  
Marketing & External  
Revenue

Founded in March 1887 to educate American Indian teachers, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) was established to instruct those who were not welcome elsewhere. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are at the root of why UNCP was created – roots that run as deep as the North Carolina pine trees.

More than 135 years later, the Home of the Braves is recognized annually as one of the most ethnically diverse universities in the south by *U.S. News & World Report*. That moniker has been a great selling point for prospective students, but are empty words if necessary action is foregone.

From the “Lead Her Forward” wall during National Girls & Women in Sports Day which highlighted our more than 200 female student-athletes, to the annual Autism Awareness Series at softball, creating a diverse

and inclusive environment is at the forefront of UNCP athletics’ marketing strategy.

However, the events that place the most emphasis on DEI are American Indian Heritage Day and Never Walk Alone Day which was the winner of the inaugural NACMA Unity Award in 2021.

American Indian Heritage Day, a late-season celebration at Grace P. Johnson Stadium, was created to bring the elements of a traditional American Indian Powwow to a football game. Once the main gates open, all senses are immersed in the American Indian spirit, first by the sounds of the drums and the smell of collar wraps, and then by the bright colors of the regalia that more than 40 dancers are wearing.

Although everyone strives to create a unique fan experience, home events with a focus on DEI are further emphasized to create an educational and sensory-rich environment for all those who may come into touch with gameday. As Jennifer Nielsen states, “It is easy to hate what you don’t understand.” Our mission during these events is to create the opportunity for conversation and understanding. Although some fans do not agree with this additional focus, the mission is to impact one person in attendance so that understanding can be spread.

While the focus was on our history in establishing American Indian Heritage Day, the concept of Never Walk Alone Day was in response to the climate of the world that we live in following a peaceful student-led march through the town of Pembroke in the summer of 2021 that was met with extreme animosity.

Coordinated by two undergraduate student interns who collaborated with a total of 15 student organizations, eight varsity athletics teams, four university departments and two external organizations including the NAACP, the inaugural event drew more than 1,000 people (most-attended event of the semester) and garnered much more attention on social media.

The focus of the marketing campaign for Never Walk Alone Day honed in on the message and meaning to Never Walk Alone, while also serving a secondary purpose of drawing fans to the nationally-ranked men’s basketball team’s conference matchup.

Inclusion has always been the focus of UNCP, from its humble beginnings in 1887 as an institution to educate American Indian teachers, to its current status as one of the most diverse campuses in the nation. Campus athletics events have proven to reflect that characteristic, and our staff will continually strive to make it a focus for years to come.

@d3admins

# NADIIIAA



## Dave Ambrose

**University of  
New England**  
Assistant AD for  
Communications &  
Operations

College is a place where many people find their true selves. High school can be tough. You need to conform to fit in and may not feel comfortable showing who you truly are. When you’re in college things change. You may move away to a new city and meet loads of different people. The weekends playing video games in your friend’s basement may turn into nights at a poetry reading on campus, playing board games with people you met on your floor, or volunteering at a homeless shelter. College is where you begin to grow into an adult; the person you want to be. A university needs to be a haven where everyone is comfortable being who they are.

Like many universities, the University of New England (UNE) looks to foster an environment where everyone is welcome to be their true self.

One way we are doing this is through the Chosen Name Project. The UNE Chosen Name

Project allows students, faculty and staff to specify a chosen name that is reflected across all campus platforms.

There are a variety of reasons why someone would want to use a chosen name. Someone may have changed their gender expression, marital status, use a different name in English than their native language or country of origin, or who use their middle name. Unfortunately, a chosen name is not applicable everywhere. One space where the legal name is required is the NCAA Eligibility Center. While a student-athlete’s legal name may be required for the NCAA, the University of New England is taking other steps to ensure that everyone is identified how they prefer on a variety of platforms. At this time, the NCAA requires all student-athletes to use their legal name in all communications with the organization. This is an NCAA requirement but universities can enact their own policies to ensure student-athletes feel as comfortable as possible during their time in uniform.

At UNE, we require students to fill out a sports information questionnaire each year. Recently,

we’ve added a space for chosen name and pronouns. These athletes’ chosen names appear on our website, are announced during starting lineups, and are featured in any social media post for our institution. Legally it’s not their name, but at UNE and to the public, that’s who they are. Our hope is to ensure every student-athlete is comfortable with expressing their true selves while they are in college.

UNE prides itself on its medical programs. A legal name is required on diplomas for many of these graduates for the licensing bodies. UNE has a policy that it will reprint diplomas for students with a different chosen name for the students to display for their own use. The university wants to make sure students are comfortable representing their true identity. Chosen name is something that needs to be a priority at every institution. On the athletics side, rosters, announcements, and the website should reflect a student-athletes’ preferred identity. We all need to ensure that every athlete has a positive experience and is able to feel comfortable during their time in college. Universities are where young adults find themselves and it’s our responsibility to encourage that exploration and make the environment as open and comfortable as it can be for everyone.