

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. Now an evergreen index that lives on aei.athleteally.org, the AEI provides a comprehensive, up-to-date snapshot of how NCAA D-I institutions are supporting their fans, staff, coaches, and student-athletes.

The aim of the AEI is 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 June 2022, 15 NCAA D-I institutions have a score of 100 on the AEI, including:

Boston University | Bowling Green State University | Columbia University
Dartmouth College | George Mason University | Lafayette College | Towson University
University of Arizona | University of California, Berkeley | University of California, Davis
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign | University of Massachusetts, Amherst
University of Massachusetts, Lowell | University of Miami | University of Pennsylvania
University of Texas, Austin

The conference with the highest AEI score is the Ivy League with an average of 77.5.

At the end of 2021, the AEI was expanded to include select D-II and D-III institutions, with Grand Valley State University becoming the first D-II school with a score of 100 and Rochester Institute of Technology becoming the first D-III school with a 100.

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

Why this Matters

2021 is widely considered the worst state legislative session in history for LGBTQ+ people, and especially for transgender youth. As of last month, 2022 is slated to be another record-breaking one for anti-LGBTQ legislation with at least 325 bills having been proposed so far. In 2021, anti-trans violence and rhetoric reached record highs across America. Meanwhile, we are heartbroken over the collegiate women athletes who have committed suicide this year. Studies show that LGBTQ+ athletes are at an increased risk of depression, anxiety, and suicidality; but according to a recent study by The Trevor Project, when LGBTQ+ athletes have access to affirming spaces, they are significantly less likely to have depressive symptoms. That access depends upon schools fostering an environment where students are safe, welcome, and accepted.

High Level Findings

- Despite growing support for, protections of, and attention to transgender athletes at the Olympic level and federal level, **88% of NCAA Division-I athletic departments do not have fully inclusive, public transgender athlete policy.**
- When educational resources are available, LGBTQ+ student-athletes and staff can seek information, education, and support without fear of repercussions. **Yet, 81% of Division-I athletic departments do not offer comprehensive resources.**
- Of over 9,000 sport fans surveyed, the majority believe spectator stands are the most dangerous and unwelcoming of all places for LGBTQ+ people in sports. **Still, a vast majority of D-I athletic departments (82%) do not have a code of conduct or guide for fan behavior that protects against abusive fan behaviors.**
- Despite a growing number of athletes coming out as LGBTQ+ in college (and before being recruited), as of 2022, **only 5.0% of NCAA D-I athletic departments fully protect and support their LGBTQ+ athletes, coaches, staff, and fans.**

How the AEI Works

Our Research Fellows perform a comprehensive audit of the student-athlete handbook, policy manuals, and official athletics websites of every NCAA D-I institution annually to identify policies and practices of LGBTQ+ inclusion. The following 8 metrics have been empirically proven to positively impact the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community:

- How many departments have an accessible non-discrimination statement? 23%
- How many departments have a publicly accessible trans-inclusion policy? 12%
- How many departments have a publicly accessible sexual misconduct policy? 25%
- How many departments have a public LGBTQ+ inclusive fan code of conduct? 18%
- How many departments offer LGBTQ+ educational resources? 19%
- How many departments partner with their campus LGBTQ+ center? 16%
- How many departments offer LGBTQ+ education training to athletics staff? 17%
- How many departments offer LGBTQ+ education training to student-athletes? 18%

Every athletic department has the capacity to earn full points on the AEI by enacting and making each policy, resource, and training publicly available to staff, fans, and varsity student-athletes. Access to information is imperative and demonstrates a department's commitment to sustained LGBTQ+ inclusion, while signaling to prospective employees, spectators, and athletes that they welcome all people into their department and spaces.

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.

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