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Q: Should there be a special policy that addresses the safety of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender student-athletes?

A: Yes – as well as LGBT staff, parents and spectators. While athletics department and institutional policies commonly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, homophobia and harassment based on sexual orientation is too frequently encountered in the athletics culture. Thus, the athletics department should consider including the following specific elements as part of a LGBT Safe Environment policy:

- Zero tolerance for anti-gay slurs or jokes, pushing or shoving LBGT persons or property, graffiti directed at a particular person or LBGT group based on his or her sexual orientation or in other ways contributing to a hostile environment targeting LBGT individuals or groups.
- Removal of any spectator at an athletics event who participates in such harassing or threatening behaviors with appropriate sanctions applied up to and including permanent denial of admission to future athletics events.
- Strict prohibitions against negative recruiting including any suggestion or implication that a prospective athlete might not wish to attend an institution because of presence of LBGT coaches or athletes or a program that welcomes LBGT individuals.
- Policy and public statements by leadership of the athletics department regarding the department's commitment to ensuring a welcoming social and work environment for LBGT athletes, coaches and staff who choose to identify themselves – i.e., no fear of negative consequences such as loss of job, scholarship, starting position, negative performance evaluation, loss of team membership.
- Invitations to athletics department events should use inclusive language to acknowledge the possibility that same-sex partners may attend.
- Partnership benefits and events available to heterosexual coaches and other department personnel shall also be available to lesbian and bisexual coaches and staff.
- An equal opportunity statement specifying that a coach or student-athlete's sexual orientation shall not be a factor in determining eligibility for teams, coaching positions, or athletics or academic honors or awards.
- Transgender athletes shall have an equal opportunity to participate in sports and their legitimate privacy interests shall be protected consistent with NCAA policies.

- Athletics department staff and coaches shall consult with institutional and community-based LGBT groups who can provide assistance in addressing anti-gay incidents and the needs of LGBT athletes and their parents, including access to counseling, and LGBT social and educational groups.
- Staff and student-athletes shall annually participate in the It Takes A Team or similar education program conducted by the athletics department which addresses homophobia, other LGBT issues, and which shall also include discussion of the athletics department LGBT policy.

References:

1. Griffin, P. and Carroll, H.J. On the team: Equal opportunity for transgender student athletes. National Center for Lesbian Rights and Women's Sports Foundation, October 3, 2010. Retrieved on October 27, 2011 from http://www.nclrights.org/site/DocServer/TransgenderStudentAthleteReport.pdf?docID=7901
2. Lawrence, S. (2011) NCAA transgender policy approved. National Collegiate Athletic Association retrieved on October 27, 2011 from http://www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/public/NCAA/Resources/Latest+News/2011/September/Transgender+policy+approved

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