

Creating an Inclusive Environment for Varsity Athletes - Group 14

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Executive Summary

Student-athletes are a unique population due to their intense commitments to both their academic and athletic endeavors. These commitments can lead to student-athletes feeling isolated and lonely (Joy et al., 2018; Slaten et al., 2020). Feelings of stress, loneliness, or isolation can hinder student-athletes from being able to produce their best results, both in their academic and athletic pursuits (Carter-Francique, 2018; Storey et al., 2010). Therefore, in order for student-athletes to be able to ‘bring their whole selves to sport’ they must feel that they belong within their school and athletic environment.

This project aims to identify what UBC student-athletes need and want regarding community building and inclusivity. Using these needs and wants this study then provides recommendations to UBC Athletics about what initiatives or opportunities they could provide student-athletes to better foster a sense of inclusion and belonging. Through this project we hope to enhance the overall experience for athletes, promote well-being and set a standard for inclusivity in athletic communities across the country.

Our methods involved circulating a survey that posed qualitative and quantitative questions to current student-athletes at UBC to gather insight into their perspectives on inclusivity and sense of community within UBC Athletics. The analyses of our data will focus on common themes expressed by athletes to inform our recommendations for fostering a more inclusive environment.

The survey received 52 responses from student-athletes, coaches and trainers who came from various genders, ethnicities, and faculties of study at UBC. The main outcomes of this study were that participants emphasized the importance of personal relationships in promoting inclusivity and a strong sense of community, noted their satisfaction with inclusivity within their team environments, and also noted that there could be room for improvement at the departmental level. The survey's qualitative responses revealed that participants requested more social events hosted within the UBC athletics community to enhance interaction between teams. These events consisted mostly of competitions, opportunities for achievement recognition, and community-building initiatives. These findings align with existing literature that demonstrates the importance of networking for student-athletes and the positive impact that results from a sense of belonging within a team.

Based on these outcomes we have provided the following recommendations to increase inclusivity and build a stronger sense of community in UBC varsity athletics. Our first recommendation is to organize “try another sports day” and more competitive gatherings. Our second recommendation is to create bi-weekly trivia nights at Koerner’s Pub. Our third is to provide a jumpstart program for first-year or transfer students. Our final recommendation is to highlight the diversity and backgrounds of excelling players in the UBC varsity community on social media and online platforms.

One of our main limitations was the limited amount of time that we had to acquire survey responses. While we were able to collect 52 total responses, we fell short of our goal of 100 responses. Additionally, reliance on online surveys may have resulted in rushed or incomplete answers, particularly in written responses. Future research could conduct in-person interviews which may lead to deeper engagement with student-athletes and more thoughtful responses.

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to provide UBC athletes with recommendations related to what student-athletes need and want in terms of opportunities to connect with other student-athletes. Our goal was to suggest ways to create a collaborative community while respecting and embracing each other's differences and uniqueness. We aimed to gain perspectives from UBC varsity athletes about what additional opportunities or services could be provided to foster a greater sense of community and inclusion within UBC varsity athletics. UBC Equity and Inclusion office defines inclusion as “an active, intentional, and continuous process to address inequities in power and privilege, and to build a respectful and diverse community that ensures welcoming spaces and opportunities to flourish for all (UBC Equity & Inclusion Office, 2023). This project will focus on identifying how the varsity community feels about inclusivity in the community and if they feel they are represented and respected appropriately. Using the data from student-athletes this study then provides recommendations to UBC Athletics about opportunities that could help grow these feelings of inclusion.

It is important to focus on the inclusivity of the UBC varsity community; having a non-inclusive community will have adverse effects on the culture of the community as well as the success of the teams. Student-athletes are a unique population which face a wide range of obstacles (Slaten et al., 2020; Storey et al., 2010; Pericak et al., 2023). Therefore their sense of belonging and inclusion must be studied separately from the general university population. If you are a member of the varsity community but you are not accepted and treated respectfully your mental health may be affected and you may not feel like you belong (Slaten et al., 2020).

Additionally, creating non-inclusive environments in teams leads to less cohesion between players and coaches and will lead to the team not performing as well as they could.

This project aims to provide several suggestions to UBC Athletics that contribute to a more enjoyable UBC experience for all varsity student-athletes. This project also envisions a strong and inclusive culture in UBC Athletics. We believe that targeting the varsity community allows us to get first-hand feedback about the initiatives that are put in place to create an inclusive environment for varsity athletes, coaches and trainers. We are striving to create an environment that is welcoming to student-athletes of various backgrounds and creates a sense of belonging within varsity athletics. Additionally, we believe a balanced campus experience will benefit varsity athletes and further enhance well-being and a sense of belonging. This balanced approach will focus on athletics, academics, and personal life, allowing athletes to grow into well-rounded individuals. We believe that the high standards and holistic approach that UBC Athletics follows will not only influence the same positive change in other organizations within the UBC community, but will also serve as a new benchmark for other athletic departments at other institutions around the country.

Partnerships

This project was done in partnership with UBC Athletics. UBC Athletics oversees the varsity athletics program and includes 13 sports across 25 teams and a total of 650 student-athletes. Our point of contact was Jayne Blank who is the Senior Manager, Athletic Services and Compliance in the UBC Athletics department.

Research Questions

The research questions that we addressed are: How do varsity athletes perceive their level of inclusivity within the UBC athletic community? What do UBC varsity athletes currently like about the services provided by UBC Athletics? What are some additional opportunities or services that UBC varsity athletes would like to see added to enhance their sense of inclusion in the community? Are there specific aspects of the athletic community, such as team events, training sessions, or social gatherings, that you feel positively or negatively impact your sense of inclusion? In your opinion, how important is diversity, equity, and inclusion in the overall success and performance of the varsity sports teams?

By discussing these questions with varsity athletes our project focussed on delivering recommendations to UBC Athletics that can address the needs and desires of varsity athletes to increase their feelings of inclusion.

Literature Review

In universities, sport is an establishment that contributes to both replicating structural relationships and defying relationships in society (Dashper & Fletcher, 2013). Inclusion can be defined as “an active, intentional, and continuous process to address inequities in power and privilege, and to build a respectful and diverse community that ensures welcoming spaces and opportunities to flourish for all” (UBC Equity & Inclusion Office, 2023). One of the main focuses of inclusion is ensuring that the actions and interactions between people do not lead towards an exclusive environment, demonstrating that diversity in appearance does not necessarily mean inclusivity is taking place (Sauder et al., 2021). Inclusion is also something that is interpreted through people's relationships with each other, demonstrating the importance that

all people are always welcomed in any environment (Sauder et al., 2021); in this project, that of a sporting context. One's inclusion and social belonging can be affected by their social identity, so it is important to take into account one's uniqueness when analyzing their sense of inclusion (Johnson, 2013).

Views of Inclusion Amongst Varsity Athletes

Perez and colleagues (2020) stated that when students enter university their views on inclusion are typically a result of their past and familial role model influences and the norms of the communities they come from. This idea can specifically apply to our project because we have the opportunity to understand what people know regarding inclusivity in the varsity community. People have the opportunity to learn about initiatives that not only address the well-known facets of diversity but also the less-discussed aspects to create a truly inclusive environment. Furthermore, when attempting to create inclusive environments, there should be a wide variety of people (races, ethnicities, genders, etc) that are being targeted to allow for various views of inclusion that athletes might experience. This also can help foster a sense of belonging as individuals can have a more diverse repertoire of experiences to draw from and relate to, allowing new relationships to be formed. This is important for our project as we can try to better understand ways to allow for these experiences to be shared and related to amongst athletes.

We also know that there are some differing opinions at UBC regarding inclusivity in the athletic community. Yu and colleagues (2015) performed a study at UBC to assess the levels of interculturalism within the varsity community. They found that “the majority of the athletes interviewed in this study reported that the varsity athletic environment being fostered at the university was inclusive and did not encourage them to discard their culture to comfortably exist

in this setting” (Yu et al., 2015). Others felt that “the majority of participants felt that they were able to contribute to their team culture in a meaningful way and did not feel that they had to abandon any of their traditional identities” (Yu et al., 2015). In regards to “whether the UBC Athletics Department sufficiently promotes intercultural values, diversity and inclusivity” (Yu et al., 2015), participants of the study disagreed. It was found that some individuals thought there was a lack of promotion of interculturalism, diversity, and inclusivity in the UBC athletic department (Yu et al., 2015). This is beneficial to know for our project because we are aiming to create an inclusive environment for all varsity athletes. Knowing that not everyone feels fully included means we can work to fix this and come up with ideas to include everyone.

Reasons For a Lack of Inclusion/Sense of Belonging

The term sense of belonging is connected to a sense of community, consisting of mutual feelings that individuals matter and that they are committed together as a group, as well as feeling as though you are respected and valued (Carter-Francique, 2018).

In an article by Joy and colleagues (2018), it is mentioned that due to demands placed on student-athletes' time they can experience isolation from their nonathlete counterparts. Networking opportunities that would otherwise provide them with connections to faculty and peers are also missed due to time constraints. It is also discussed how the majority of university athletes do not go on to play in professional sports leagues after university (Joy et al., 2018). As a result of this, academic institutions, as well as athletic programs, are more responsible for providing support programs and opportunities that will prepare student-athletes for personal journeys throughout their university experience (Joy et al., 2018). This relates directly to concepts of a sense of belonging and inclusion within university athletics, as this demonstrates

that these networking opportunities are important for the professional journeys of student-athletes after their university experience. Furthermore, this relates to our project as this will help our group understand the types of events or inclusion practices that should be held to benefit student-athletes the most both in and outside of the university.

Pericak and colleagues (2023) discuss how finding a sense of belonging through sport is important for international students or students transitioning into university from high school. They found that having positive relationships with people in the same sporting community had a significant impact on the overall amount of sense of belonging felt among student-athletes (Pericak et al., 2023). It was discussed how sports can be used as a way to build community and enhance one's sense of belonging (Pericak et al., 2023). This is important for our project as now we can understand that people from the same sporting community (ie. people on the same team) may have similar experiences. They feel a sense of belonging as everyone on the team is going through similar experiences as one another (Pericak et al., 2023). This can help us understand how each team might have a similar experience in terms of a sense of belonging within athletics (Pericak et al., 2023). It was also discussed that having relationships with other athletes who speak the same native languages is a way that individuals feel a sense of belonging (Pericak et al., 2023). This information is again important for us to understand as now we can see if there are any trends in terms of language barriers or differences and the amount of sense of belonging felt.

Storey and colleagues (2010) found that a sense of belonging can impact the relationship between stress and sleep in Canadian university student-athletes. The fact that sense of belonging can impact various factors in a student-athletes life, such as sleep and stress, shows that it is very important to ensure that student-athletes feel as though they belong. Negative effects of a sense of belonging can consequently affect both their academic and athletic performance, so the

university needs to take this into account (Carter-Francique, 2018). Slaten and colleagues (2020) also report that student-athletes can often experience a sense of isolation and lack of connection on their university campus, emphasizing the need for university student-athletes to have additional opportunities to form meaningful connections. Interestingly, female student-athletes in particular tend to feel a greater sense of isolation compared to their male counterparts (Carter-Francique, 2018; Slaten et al., 2020), perhaps because they are often not engaged in revenue-generating sports (Slaten et al., 2020). It was also discovered that female athlete's sense of belonging was primarily based on their experience on their team, rather than the university athletic organization as a whole (Slaten et al., 2020). This provides insight that UBC Athletics could help to broaden athletes' sense of belonging beyond their own team environment. Fostering a sense of belonging can promote a sense of community within a sporting environment (Carter-Francique, 2018), propelling teams toward greater success, as athletes can confidently bring their whole selves to the sport.

Methods

Research Design

Our research questions ask UBC varsity athletes if they feel included and that they feel a sense of belonging in the UBC Athletics community, and what opportunities or initiatives they would like to see implemented to allow for greater relationship building and a more inclusive athletic community. To answer this question our study design will be observational, using a survey to ask student-athletes about their current perceptions of inclusion in UBC Athletics and what opportunities, services, or events that they would like to see implemented to foster a greater

sense of inclusion and community. Our observational, mixed-methods study design suits our needs well as it allows us to ask both qualitative and quantitative questions, gathering information on how student-athletes currently perceive their inclusion and allowing them to provide examples of different opportunities they would like implemented to be able to ‘bring their whole selves’ to sport and foster friendship and community within UBC Athletics.

This study used the UBC Survey Tool, Qualtrics, to produce the survey that was distributed to participants. The survey (Appendix B) included questions relating to participants demographics, Likert-type questions where they ranked their current perceptions about inclusion and community within UBC Athletics, as well as open-ended questions where participants could provide recommendations or suggestions of how UBC Athletics could foster a better sense of inclusion and belonging within the varsity community.

The primary method of distribution of the survey was via a URL link and an online recruitment poster (Appendix A). The link to the survey was measured to group chats of UBC varsity sports teams as the primary method of distribution. As well as messaging team group chats, the recruitment poster was posted on the UBC Thunderbirds Instagram account story. Lastly, the recruitment poster and link were both posted to the UBC Thunderbird Student Athlete Portal on Canvas, which is accessible by all UBC varsity athletes. Collaborating with these community partners allowed us to reach a broader range of the UBC student-athlete population. Using these distribution methods we adopted a purposive and snowball sampling procedure. Snowball sampling is when you recruit participants from your acquaintances and people you know, who will then recruit others they know. This sampling procedure allows us to distribute our survey to the varsity teams we are familiar with, and allow those athletes to recruit their UBC

varsity athletics peers to also complete the survey. Purposive sampling involves purposely recruiting individuals based on specific characteristics that they have (see inclusion criteria).

Participants

The target population for this study is university student-athletes, with the study population consisting of UBC Vancouver varsity student-athletes. The study population consisting of UBC Vancouver varsity student-athletes works very well for our study, as everyone in our group is associated with a UBC varsity team, either as a student trainer or a member of the team; Will and Scott are associated with men's hockey, Jaime and Ella with women's soccer, and Stanley with men's volleyball. Having these connections allowed us to easily distribute our survey electronically throughout these teams, and the rest of the varsity community via our purposive and snowball sampling methods.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Our sample population consisted of individuals of any gender and age. The only criteria that must have been met is that they are a current student at UBC and a member of one of the 25 varsity teams. Therefore our inclusion criteria were that they are current UBC varsity student-athletes, and our exclusion criteria were the opposite (anyone who is not a current UBC varsity student-athlete is not eligible to participate in this study). The rationale for this sample population is that we wanted to investigate the needs and desires of UBC student-athletes only, so we needed to ensure that only UBC student-athletes were invited to participate.

Target Sample Size

UBC varsity athletics consists of 25 teams in 13 sports, summing to over 650 student-athletes (The University of British Columbia, n.d.). Due to our respective connections to multiple varsity sports teams, and our desire to provide the best representation of the population, our target sample size was 100 participants. Survey responses were collected from March 28, 2024 to April 2 2024. Upon closing the survey we fell short of our target sample size of 100 participants as our final number of responses included information from 52 participants.

Data Collection

During the data collection process, our study focused on using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The objective of this study was to understand and comprehend the idea of inclusivity among those involved in UBC Athletics, including student-athletes, coaches, and student trainers. Participants of this study were asked to disclose the team they're a part of, the role they hold, as well as their years of eligibility and school. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Finding the median, and mode of the results allowed for the examination of our study population and their responses.

Beyond descriptive statistics, open-ended questions were also asked for the respondent's opinions on how UBC Athletics can better emphasize inclusivity within the varsity community. Three Likert-type scales were used to gauge the extent to which they agree with statements on why inclusivity is important, how the department fosters inclusion, and what type of environment they feel more included in. In addition, open-ended questions were also asked on how social identity influences inclusion, experiences with exclusion due to self-identity, as well as suggestions for how UBC Athletics can better address inclusivity.

Following the completion of the survey, data was analyzed using descriptive statistics for quantitative questions, and qualitative descriptive analysis for qualitative questions. Using descriptive statistics, trends were able to be followed and information could be extracted for analysis. In terms of qualitative questions, the answers were compiled and grouped based on common themes.

Results

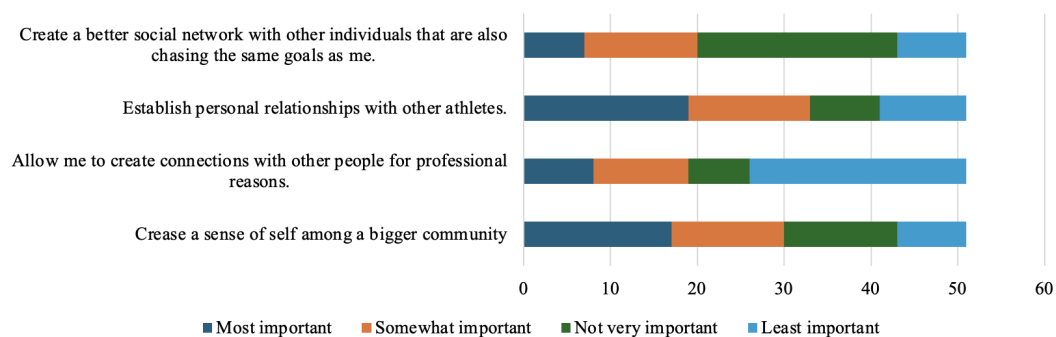
This survey received a total of 52 responses, with 1 response completing only half of the questions. The majority of respondents were student-athletes, with responses also received from student trainers and coaches (Figure C1). Respondents of this study were mostly in their second, third, and fourth year of studies, with some across other age ranges (Figure C2 & Figure C3). Due to the group member's affiliation with their respective teams, the majority of respondents were members of the men's volleyball, men's hockey, and women's hockey teams (Figure C4). The respondent's gender was mostly equally distributed, with males taking a slight edge over females (Figure C5). In terms of ethnicity, the majority of responses received were from caucasian respondents, with others from Chinese, Korean, Middle Eastern, South East Asian, and others (Figure C6). The majority of respondents were domestic students studying Kinesiology at UBC, while also disclosing that English is their first language (Figure C7, Figure C8 & Figure C9). Respondent's disability and ongoing medical conditions were also collected, with most reporting that there were no disabilities (Figure C10).

The first Likert-type scale question asked was on the importance of inclusivity. Of the four options provided, respondents were asked to rate the sentence with the following: most important, somewhat important, not very important, least important. The results revealed that

establishing personal relationships with other athletes was very important to most athletes while creating connections with people for professional reasons was the least important.

Figure 1

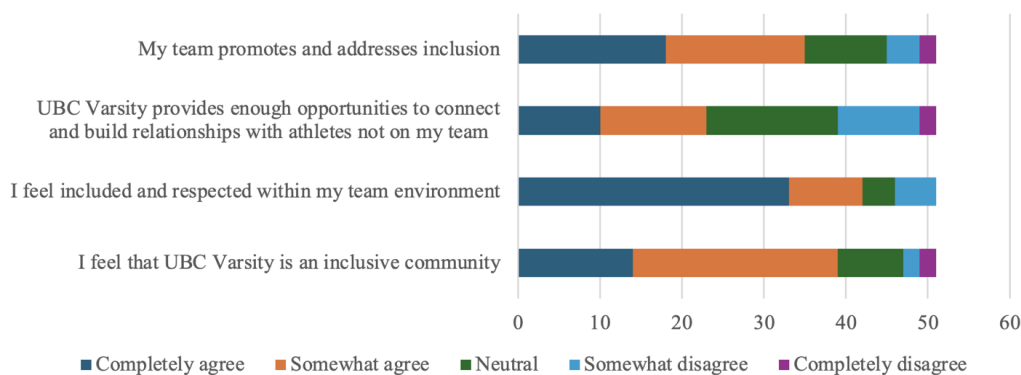
Importance of Inclusivity to Student-athletes



The second Likert-type question focused on how UBC Athletic and their respective teams foster inclusivity. It revealed that most athletes feel included and respected within their team environment, with a few respondents indicating that there is more work to be done to better promote inclusion both within a team and as a whole department.

Figure 2

Inclusivity Within Team Environment and UBC Varsity

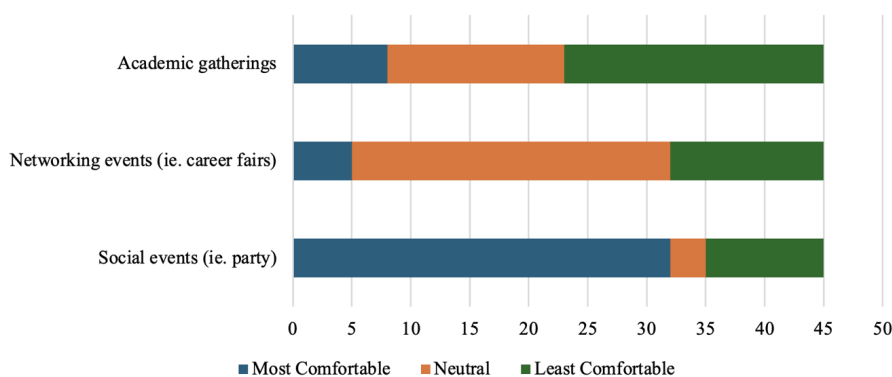


Lastly, respondents indicated that they feel most comfortable in social events (ie. parties), and least comfortable in academic gatherings. Along similar lines, the initiative that most

respondents were aware of was the Thunderbird Athletes Council (TAC), an athlete-run group that hosts social events and gatherings throughout the year for student-athletes (Figure C11).

Figure 3

Activities that Athletes Feel Most Comfortable In



Qualitative questions revealed that respondents suggested the overall increase in events hosted by UBC Athletics, with the focus being on involving all the teams to allow for crossover in student-athlete interaction. Most of the respondents reported that they have never felt excluded within the UBC Varsity community due to their social identity, and those that said they have previously felt excluded cited that it was mostly due to an unfamiliar environment and their personal characteristics (ie. being introvert) (Table C1). Suggestions provided by respondents included hosting achievement recognition, competition, community building, study hall, and others events to better promote inclusivity within UBC Athletics (Table C2). Lastly, respondents also provided some recommendations on initiatives that UBC Athletics can adopt to help student-athletes build relationships with one another (Table C3). One interesting suggestion provided was to host a “jumpstart-like” type event at the beginning of the school year.

Discussion

The descriptive results of this study show that UBC Vancouver varsity student-athletes believe that inclusivity is important in the UBC Athletics community to promote a sense of community and form relationships with other student-athletes. The vast majority of student-athletes believe that inclusion is promoted and addressed on their respective teams and that the varsity community is accepting, inclusive, and diverse. The majority of participants also indicated that they feel most comfortable in social environments, so future events hosted by UBC Athletics should attempt to be more social gatherings or networking events rather than academic gatherings.

Upon completion of the qualitative analysis, consistent themes were identified. Firstly, in regards to how UBC Athletics can better promote inclusivity some common themes were for UBC Athletics to host more events where individuals can interact with those on other teams, such as some of the events currently hosted by the Thunderbird Athletic Council. Secondly, in regards to additional opportunities that the UBC varsity community would like UBC Athletics to provide, suggestions followed a similar theme as the previous question. The majority of responses highlighted that participants feel that the best way to build new relationships is to provide environments where people can interact with those whom they usually do not get the chance to. Additional suggestions included a jumpstart-type day for first-year student-athletes, a try another sports day, and other competitive events where people can interact with one another in a safe and engaging environment.

Connection to Partner

The problem presented by our partner is focused on looking for ways to develop initiatives that would center around building relationships creating a sense of belonging and embracing the uniqueness of each student-athlete. Our partner wanted to develop opportunities for student-athletes to be able to ‘bring their whole selves’ to their sport while also creating friendships and enhancing a sense of inclusion in the varsity athletics community. This relates directly to what we found, as we now have more information directly from the UBC Vancouver varsity population regarding what kind of events they would like to have and what settings they feel most comfortable with. The results of the present study illustrated that members of the varsity community feel most comfortable in social events and want more events that pertain to networking. We can use this information to incorporate more of these types of events that UBC Athletics holds for athletes, trainers and coaches. By understanding and getting feedback directly from the athletes and coaches we were able to get a more specific understanding of their feelings about inclusion and their personal feelings of belonging in UBC Athletics. This way, we can use this information and address the problems that our partners have presented to incorporate directly what participants from this study have highlighted.

Connections to Literature

Our findings support the claims that are in the literature. In an article by Joy and colleagues (2018), they discuss the lack of networking opportunities for student-athletes because of their time commitments to their sport. The article said that some athletes feel they are isolated from their faculty and peers which provides them with fewer opportunities to connect and build

their networks (Joy et al., 2018). This is connected to our findings because the results of our survey showed that the varsity population at UBC feels the least comfortable in academic gatherings and networking events. This is most likely due to the lack of experience they have in these situations because of the lack of time they have to attend these events. In the same question, our results show that the varsity population feels the most comfortable in social events, which is most likely due to the higher amount of social events they attend and their familiarity with them. One suggestion that was made in our survey was to increase the number of events focusing on networking. This would help to increase the comfortability of the varsity population in this environment.

Another article by Pericak and colleagues (2023) discusses the sense of belonging you feel when you are a part of a team. It emphasizes the importance of finding a sense of belonging through your sport, especially when you are transitioning from high school into university or are a student from far away (Pericak et al., 2023). The benefits of having positive relationships and a sense of belonging on a team are very important as it has an overall impact on your time at university and your well-being (Pericak et al., 2023). This relates to the findings of our research as in one of our questions, we asked multiple questions about different aspects of inclusion and a sense of belonging in the varsity community. The question with the most ‘completely agree’ was “I feel included and respected within my team environment”. This connects to literature because it emphasizes how crucial it is to create a positive atmosphere in a team. UBC works hard to achieve this, and the results clearly show its effectiveness.

Based on some of the literature, we are aware that there is a mostly positive feeling regarding the inclusivity of the UBC varsity community (Yu et al., 2015). We are aware that most athletes who were interviewed by Yu et al. (2015) felt that UBC varsity fostered an inclusive

environment. This is reflected in our findings as the results of the question “I feel that UBC Varsity is an inclusive community” showed that the majority either completely or somewhat agreed. This reflects the previous literature regarding inclusivity in UBC varsity as Yu et al. (2015) had the same conclusion.

Enhanced Understanding of Research Question

Our research question asks UBC Varsity athletes if they feel included if they feel a sense of belonging in the UBC Athletics community, and what opportunities or initiatives they would like to see implemented to allow for greater relationship building and a more inclusive athletic community.

Our findings addressed our research question in the following ways. UBC student-athletes believe that inclusion is promoted and addressed on their respective teams. The majority of student-athletes believe the varsity community is accepting, inclusive and diverse. The majority of student-athletes are aware of services provided by UBC athletics such as TAC, Canvas and RAP. However, only a small portion (10 student-athletes) completely agree that UBC varsity provides enough opportunities to connect and build relationships with athletes outside of their team. Common themes for additional opportunities that student-athletes would like to see to enhance their sense of inclusion in the community included: activities and social events in low-stress environments, networking events, and opportunities for friendly competition among student-athletes.

These findings enhanced our understanding in the following ways. Student-athletes perceive inclusivity as an important part of the UBC athletic community. Additionally, student-athletes value initiatives that promote a sense of community and connectedness. Lastly,

student-athletes are seeking more interactions specifically between teams to enhance their sense of inclusion in the community.

Challenges and Limitations

The first challenge that we encountered was that the original version of the survey did not contain all of the questions, so anything submitted before March 28 did not contain the demographic information, and the questions about inclusion based on an individual's social identity. To deal with this we reopened our survey and made sure that it included all of the questions that the original version did not. We re-sent the link to all of the teams, apologized for the mistake, and encouraged them to fill it out again.

This led to one of the limitations of our research project, which was the limited amount of time that we had to acquire survey responses. The corrected survey was only available for 4 days from March 28th to April 2nd. In the end, we collected 52 responses, which fell short of our goal of 100 responses. Additionally, only 14 of the total 25 varsity teams participated in the survey.

An additional limitation of our research was that not all questions were mandatory to answer, and thus some questions included less than 52 responses. Qualitative data received 20 comments for suggestions to build relationships in varsity athletics and 22 comments for how to promote inclusivity. This is below half of the total number of responders who provided suggestions. To deal with this we took the suggestions that were given into consideration, as well as created some of our suggestions based on the scaled questions in the survey. These questions had a 100% answer rate and thus gave us insights into UBC varsity athletes' opinions.

Lastly, the use of online surveys can often lead to rushed and incomplete answers. Our survey included questions that require written answers and student-athletes who have limited free

time might not be willing to give thorough and thoughtful responses. This may be a reason for the limited number of answers to the qualitative questions.

Future research could conduct in-person interviews which may lead to deeper engagement with student-athletes and more thoughtful responses. While this may present challenges in recruiting participants, in-person interviews will present an opportunity to ask student-athletes to expand on their recommendations and explain why they believe what they do.

Recommendations

A recommendation that could lead to an increase in inclusivity in the varsity community would be hosting more competitive/fun social gatherings. This could include events where teams compete against each other for different prizes while in settings where they would be most comfortable. This could be at different varsity games as individuals might feel more comfortable in an environment that they are familiar with, around people (like their teammates) where they already might feel a sense of belonging. This way individuals will be able to work together with not only their team but potentially other teams, creating more meaningful connections and allowing for a more inclusive environment (Pericak et al., 2023). As it is known that individuals in the varsity population might feel more comfortable with their teammates around as they already have a bond from having shared experiences, having a range of events where these individuals can come together can further promote inclusivity in varsity communities (Pericak et al., 2023). The first two recommendations below are specific events that we recommend UBC Athletics should host based on respondents' suggestions.

Our first recommendation is “try another sports day”. This is also based on one respondent's suggestion of hosting “more competitive gatherings.” Organizing competitive

gatherings could bring athletes together and share a common passion for sports, while also getting out of our normal sport and social comfort zone.

Based on one respondent's suggestion, our second recommendation is a bi-weekly varsity trivia night at Koerner's Pub. We believe that creating more social events where varsity athletes can establish personal relationships with each other in low-stress environments is an effective approach. Having a night like this gives student-athletes a scheduled escape from academic and athletic pressures, and offers an inclusive environment to connect and create personal relationships.

Our third recommendation for UBC Athletics is to look at the potential of hosting a jumpstart-type program for first-year or transferring students of the varsity population. Student-athletes lead very busy and involved lives (Slaten et al., 2020; Storey et al., 2010; Pericak et al., 2023), and incoming students may not be able to attend the regularly scheduled program that other first years attend (such as UBC's Jumpstart). Providing a jumpstart-like opportunity for first-year student-athletes or members of the varsity population can help to reduce some of the feelings of isolation, loneliness, and stress that student-athletes may feel as they begin their university careers. Not only will an opportunity like this help to foster their inclusion and sense of belonging, but it will also help form relationships with athletes outside of their respective teams. This is important as our results showed that the majority of athletes' feelings of inclusion stem from their teams, not the broader UBC Athletics community. Providing this introductory, orientation-like event for student-athletes will help to bring people together, allowing them to be able to bring their whole selves to their sports, academics, and communities. If UBC Athletics were to put on an event for student-athletes during training camp, it would potentially allow student-athletes to meet each other that are in the same faculty. Not

only will this allow student-athletes to create a better sense of community, but it will also allow them to have someone to rely on throughout their education and athletic careers.

Another recommendation for increasing the promotion of inclusivity in the UBC varsity community is highlighting the diversity of our excelling players. One suggestion of what UBC athletics can adopt to promote inclusivity in our survey is to “highlight player profiles weekly that exhibit each athlete’s diversity. This can include showcasing the athlete of the week, highlighting the athlete’s background, as well as talking about the athlete’s story and career journey.”. This would be a great way to promote diversity in the varsity community and celebrate people’s backgrounds. UBC TAC posts an athlete of the week already so if we added on to the post to promote diversity this would help to increase the inclusivity of the community. This reflects the literature as well because although most athletes felt that UBC varsity creates an inclusive environment, there were feelings of a lack of promoting inclusivity in the community (Yu et al., 2015). If we implement celebrating people’s backgrounds weekly, we will be promoting and celebrating people’s differences.

Conclusion

In concluding this investigation into enhancing inclusivity within the UBC varsity athletes program, we revisit our initial objectives; to assess current inclusivity levels, understand athlete perceptions of community and belonging, and recommend strategies to improve inclusivity. Achieved through a mixed-methods approach, our study highlights the importance of inclusivity for the well-being and performance of not only student-athletes but the varsity population as a whole. Our study’s significance is underscored by its insights into the varsity population and their individual experiences, connecting theoretical inclusivity frameworks with

real-world contexts. Our findings revealed a positive perception of inclusivity within individual teams with a strong interest in initiatives that would allow for broader community connections. This research study enhances the already existing knowledge surrounding inclusivity in university populations by offering perspectives from the UBC varsity population on their own experiences with inclusion, while also providing strategies for improvement. Overall, this study demonstrates the need for inclusion efforts that would promote both a within-team sense of belonging as well as wider community integration efforts amongst UBC's varsity population.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

CALLING UBC VARSITY ATHLETES!



- We want to hear from you about your perspectives on inclusion in the UBC Athletics community, and what additional opportunities or initiatives you would like to see in order to connect with other student-athletes.
- Complete our 5-10 minute survey by scanning the QR code to help advance the UBC Athletics community!
- Enter for a chance to win a UBC Athletics prize pack or Lululemon yoga mat!
- Contact will.macdonald@brentwood.ca for more information



Group 14: Creating an Inclusive
Environment for Varsity Athletes

Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea Bundon (Assistant
Professor, School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education)

Project ID: H17-03560-A017, March. 1, 2024

Appendix B: Survey (Including Consent Form)

Default Question Block

CLASS PROJECT: Health Promotion and Physical Activity (KIN 464)

Participant Consent Form: Creating an Inclusive Environment for UBC Varsity Athletes - Group 14

Project ID: H17-03560-A017

Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea Bundon (Assistant Professor, School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education)

The purpose of the class project: To gather knowledge and expertise from community members on UBC student-athletes' current perceptions of inclusion within the UBC Varsity community, and what additional opportunities they would like to see implemented in order to foster a greater sense of inclusion.

Study Procedures: With your permission, we are asking you to participate in a survey. You may only complete each survey once. With the information gathered, students will critically examine how different individuals understand or engage in health-promoting activities or health-promotion initiatives.

Project outcomes: The information gathered will be part of a written report for the class project. The written report will be shared with campus partners involved with the project. Summaries of findings will also be posted on the following websites. UBC SEEDS Program Library:

<https://sustain.ubc.ca/courses-degrees/alternative-credit-options/seeds-sustainability-program/seeds-sustainability-library>. No personal information/information that could identify participants will be included in these reports or shared with campus partners.

Potential benefits of class project: There are no explicit benefits to you by taking part in this class project. However, the survey will provide you with the opportunity to voice your opinion on your experiences with health promoting activities or initiatives in a broad sense and will provide the students with an opportunity to learn from your experiences. Confidentiality: Maintaining the confidentiality of the participants involved in the research is paramount, and no names of participants will be linked to the data collected. At the completion of the course, all data (i.e. notes) and signed consent forms will be stored on a secure electronic drive by Dr. Bundon. All data and consent forms will be destroyed 1 year after completion of the course.

Risks: The risks associated with participating in this

research are minimal. There are no known physical, economic, or social risks associated with participation in this study. You should know that your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study and there will not be negative impacts related to your withdrawal. If you withdraw from the study, all of the information you have shared up until that point will be destroyed.

Contact for information about the study: If you have any questions about this class project, you can contact Andrea Bundon by email at andrea.bundon@ubc.ca

Research ethics complaints: If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca . or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time.

By proceeding with this survey, I am confirming I have read the above information and agree to participate in this research project.

Block 1

This survey is for current members of the UBC Varsity Community (athletes, trainers and coaches). Please select the varsity team that you are apart of:

What is your role within your varsity team?

- Athlete
- Student Trainer
- Coach
- Other

What is your age?

What gender do you identify with?

- Man
- Woman
- Non-binary
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to answer

What ethnicity do you identify with most?

- Caucasian
- Chinese
- South Asian
- Korean
- South East Asian
- Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- Phillipino
- Japanese
- Indigenous, Metis, Inuit
- African, Black, Caribbean
- Other

Please select your first language from the list below

- English
- French
- Spanish
- Mandarin Chinese
- Hindi
- Arabic
- Portugese
- Russian
- Japanese
- Punjabi
- Other

Do you have any of the following disabilities or ongoing medical conditions that have affected your everyday functioning?

- Physical disability
- Blind/visually impaired
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- Mental Health Condition
- Neurological (learning disability, ASD, Traumatic Brain Injury, ADHD, etc.)
- Chronic Health Condition (Crohn's, HIV, etc.)
- Other, please specify:

I don't have a disability or ongoing medical condition

Are you a domestic or international student?

- Domestic
 International

What year of school are you in?

- 1st year
 2nd year
 3rd year
 4th year
 5th year
 6th year
 Graduate student

What is your field of study?

- Applied Science
 Science
 Arts
 Commerce
 Education

- Land and Food Systems
- Kinesiology
- Medicine
- Law
- Pharma, Science
- Forestry
- Economics
- None
- Other

UBCs equity office defines inclusion as "an active, intentional, and continuous process to address inequities in power and privilege, and to build a respectful and diverse community that ensures welcoming spaces and opportunities to flourish for all." Please answer the following questions with that in mind.

Rank the following statements in order in regard to why inclusivity is important to you.
(1 for the most important, 4 for the least important)

It helps me create a sense of self among a bigger community.

It will allow me to create connections with other people for professional reasons.

It will establish personal relationships with other athletes.

It will create a better social network with other individuals that are also chasing the same goals as me.

Rate how you agree with the following statements:
(0 for I don't agree at all, 5 for I completely agree)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that UBC Varsity is an inclusive community	<input type="radio"/>					<input type="text"/>
I feel included and respected within my team environment	<input type="radio"/>					<input type="text"/>
UBC Varsity provides enough opportunities to connect and build relationships with athletes not on my team	<input type="radio"/>					<input type="text"/>



How do you perceive your social identities impact your sense of inclusion within the UBC varsity program? (Social identities refers to one's groups memberships on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, age, and other 'social categories'.)

- Yes (please describe)
- No (please describe)
- Prefer not to say

Have you ever felt excluded within the UBC Varsity community due to any aspect of your identity?

- Yes (please describe)
- No (please describe)
- Prefer not to say

When it comes to inclusivity, what type of activities do you feel the most comfortable in? (1 for the most comfortable, 3 for the least comfortable)

Social events (ie. party)

Networking events (ie. career fairs)

Academic gatherings

What one of the following initiatives are you aware of that promote inclusivity among student-athletes? (select all that apply)

- UBC Thunderbird Athlete Council (TAC)
- Student Athlete Portal on Canvas
- UBC Recovering Athlete Peer-Support Program (UBC RAP)
- I am not aware of any of the initiatives above

What initiatives or suggestions do you have for UBC Athletics to adopt in order to better promote inclusivity

among student-athletes at UBC:

What additional opportunities would you like UBC Athletics to offer in order to build relationships throughout UBC varsity athletics (ie. connect with individuals on other teams, share experiences, etc.)?

Additional comments

Block 2

Thank you for completing the survey. The following page will redirect you to a new survey where you can enter the draw for prizes (2 lululemon yoga mats and 4 UBC Athletics Prize Packs).

Appendix C: Figures and Tables

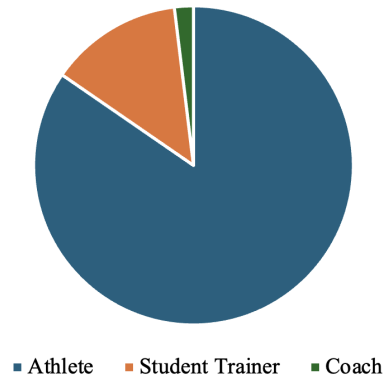


Figure C1. *Respondent's role within Varsity Teams*

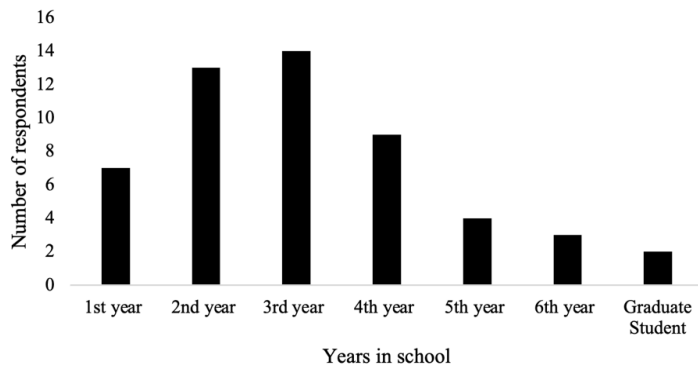


Figure C2. *Respondent's years in school*

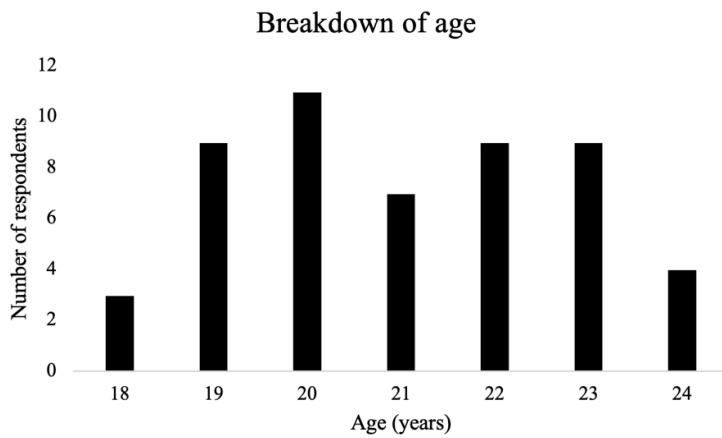


Figure C3. *Respondent's age*

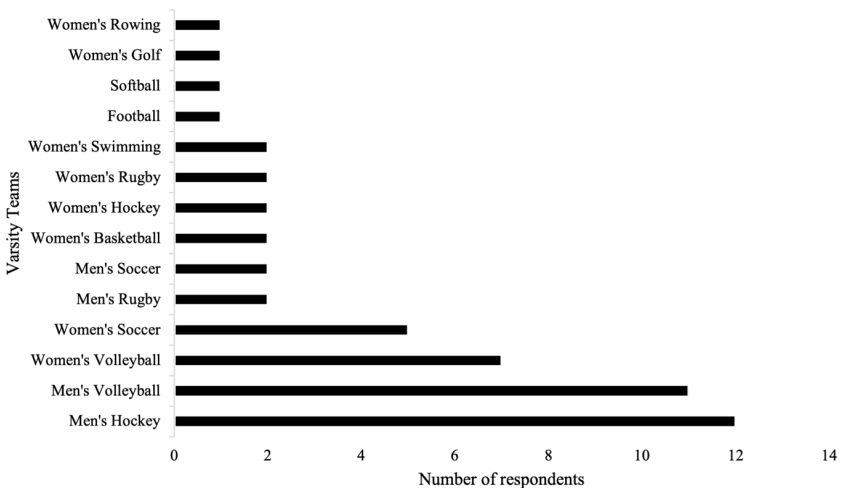


Figure C4. Respondent's team of affiliation

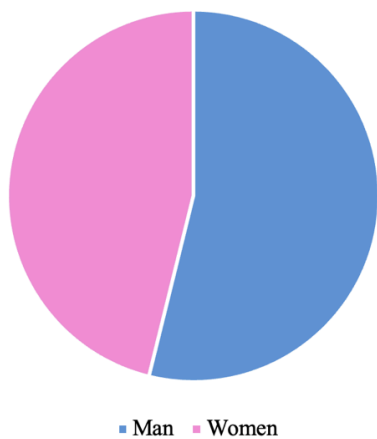


Figure C5. Respondent's gender

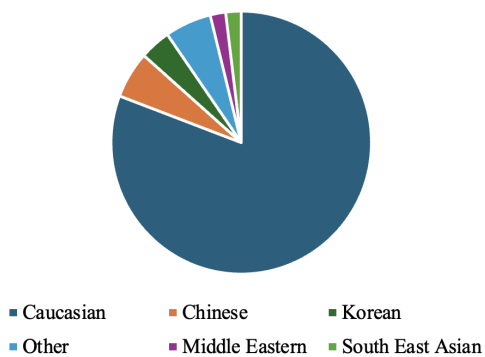


Figure C6. Respondent's ethnicity

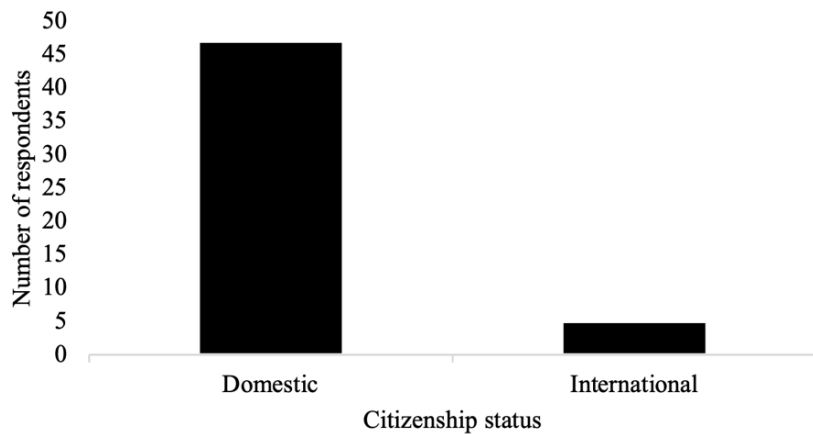


Figure C7. Respondent's citizenship status

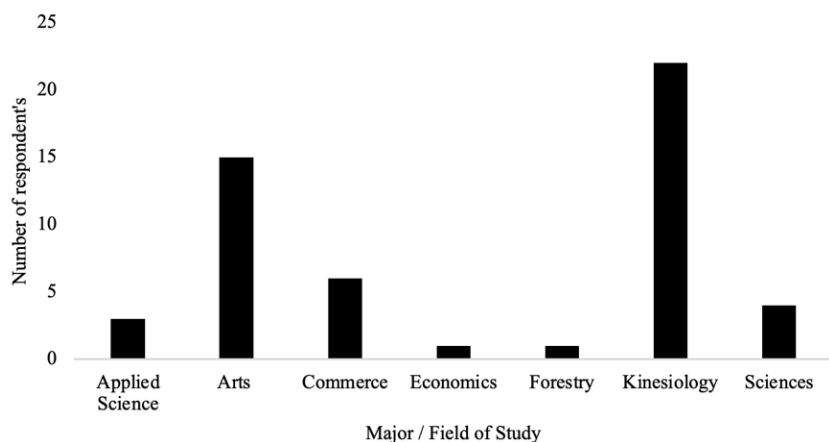


Figure C8. Respondent's field of study

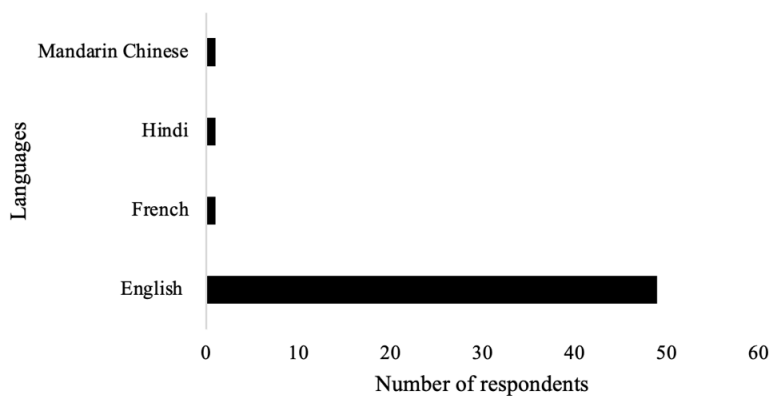


Figure C9. Respondent's first language

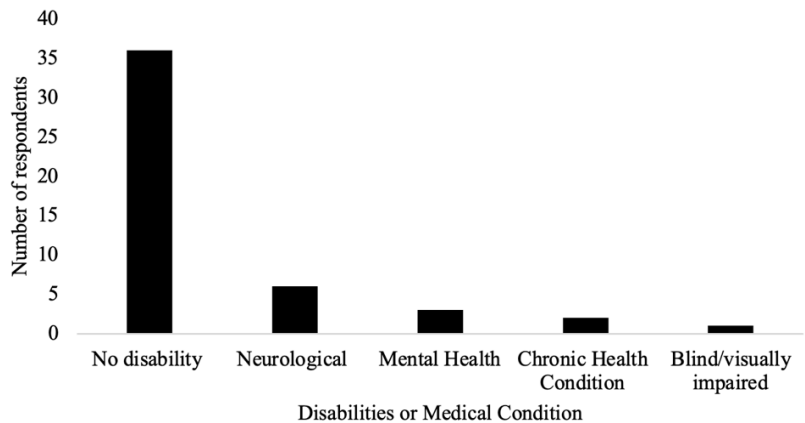


Figure C10. Respondent’s medical condition

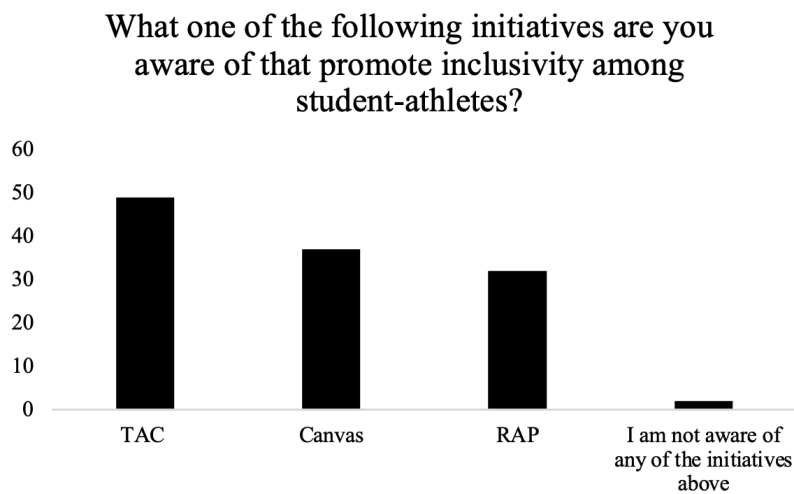


Figure C11. Respondent’s awareness of pre-existing initiatives

<u>Responses</u>	<u>Number of respondents</u>	<u>Description</u>
Yes	3	One respondent reported that the only time he/she has felt excluded was when they were placed in unfamiliar environment. He/she shared that as an introverted individual, it is hard to enter new groups. However, the respondent clarified that he/she had a positive experience with his/her team.
No	37	Most said that UBC Varsity creates a welcoming environment for everyone and that they feel included and provided with equal opportunity.
Prefers not to say	12	*no description given*

Table C1. *Have you ever felt excluded within the UBC Varsity community due to any aspect of your identity?*

Suggestions on what UBC Athletics can adopt to promote inclusivity	
22 comments provided	
Some respondents suggested that UBC Athletics should host more events that focuses on networking, achievement-recognition, and connection between student-athletes from different teams. Suggestions that were provided includes: community building events, networking events with companies.	Some respondents suggested that more social events can be hosted to enhance the experiences of varsity athletes. Suggestions included more activities that are beyond what TAC offers (ie. skit night, holiday events), more events that allow teams to interact with each other in a low stress environment, as well as initiatives to get teams out for home games to create more camaraderie (beyond the #Birds4Birds initiatives run by TAC)
One respondent suggested that UBC Athletics can host study halls for all athletes. This would align with other respondents' suggestion on hosting events that includes athletes from all varsity teams.	One respondent suggested the hosting on <i>"more competitive fun social gatherings. We're all athletes, we like to compete."</i>
One respondent suggestion that UBC Athletics can work on an initiative that promotes inclusion by highlighting player profiles on a weekly basis that exhibit each individual athletes' diversity. This can include showcasing athlete of the week, highlight athlete's background, as well as talking about athlete's story and career journey.	

Table C2. *Respondent's suggestion on what initiatives UBC Athletics can adopt to promote inclusivity.*

Suggestions on additional opportunities UBC Athletics can offer to build relationships throughout UBC varsity athletics	
20 comments provided	
Most respondents believe that the best way to do this is to connect with individuals and athletes on other teams, putting them in unfamiliar environments.	A few respondents suggested that UBC athletics can try and offers programs that allow athletes to try a different sport on campus. It was referred to by one respondent as “sports try it night”. 3 respondents suggested that this can promote team building and relationship building.
Suggestions for events that can be hosted include: UBC Athletics trivia night (@Koerners), Thunderbird Study Space, “Try Another Sport Day”	One respondent suggested that a educational seminar can be hosted to provide information about inclusivity at UBC, specifically catered to the varsity community.
One respondent shared that what UBC Athletics currently offers is sufficient, but the department should look into providing more opportunities and hosting more events throughout the year.	One respondent suggested that UBC Athletics can host a jumpstart-like event for first year student athletes in same faculties. The respondenet reported that due to season schedule, most athletes don’t/can’t do jumpstart, but it will be useful for first years to meet other athletes who are in the same faculty. This would also build relationships.

Table C3. *Respondent’s suggestion on additional opportunities that UBC Athletics can offer to build relationships between student-athletes.*