Master of Education

College Student Services Administration Portfolio

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Dedication & Acknowledgements

There are so many people I owe thanks to throughout the course of my graduate degree. I want to first express my gratitude for my athletic academic advisor Mandi Rodriguez. Without your support and guidance over the course of my undergraduate degree, I wouldn’t be the student I am today. The patience and empathy you showed me through times of transition and change when I needed it most, will be cherished forever. If not for your encouragement, I wouldn’t have even considered pursuing a masters degree. You believed in me from the very beginning and the direct impact you’ve had on me as advisor, is one of the reasons why I am pursuing this field of work.

Next, I want to thank my mentors Kimya and Lindsey. Words can not express how grateful I am for your wisdom and guidance as a student-athlete and young professional. If not for the two of you, and your commitment to the betterment of student-athletes, I wouldn’t be the woman or professional I am today. It is because of you that I want to help the next generation of student-athletes find their place in the world.

Thank you to my committee of such incredible women. I appreciate your support, commitment and input that has helped me across the finish line! To my amazingly selfless, patient and reassuring major advisor, Kim… I can’t thank you enough. Your presence and representation within higher education as a Black woman has inspired me more than you could ever know. It has been an honour to learn from you, and work so closely with one another in a space where I never felt I would belong. Your support and reassurance throughout my graduate journey has shaped the way I wish to work with my future students.

To my cohort, what a ride! Thank you for being the best and most accepting cohort I could ask for. I didn’t think grad school would bring me such an amazing group of humans, but I am so thankful it did. I’m so proud of us.

To the student-athletes I have worked with, trained with, competed with, and those I am yet to interact with, I dedicate my final portfolio to you. I pray that this program can be for you what I wish I had. We are more than just athletes and we are more than our athletic success. Don’t ever forget that.

Last but not least, my family. I can’t help but get emotional when I think about how much you all mean to me. You have all sacrificed so much to help get me to where I am today and there aren’t enough words to express my gratitude. Because of you I had the courage to pursue my dreams. I couldn’t ask for a more supportive and loving family to experience life with.

With love and so much gratitude,

Isis xo
Abstract

My focus for this portfolio is on the athletic identity development of student-athletes and how this correlates with their transition out of sport. Throughout this portfolio I will be discussing the course of my gymnastics career and how the transition into retirement, coupled with the CSSA program, led me to create a program tailored to near-retired and retired athletes. I describe my triumphs and struggles as a graduate student, the development of my intersecting identities as a biracial, Black woman, the development of my scholarly voice, course competencies and class influence. The CSSA program grew on me rather quickly, and from this I developed a passion for student-affairs based work in higher education. Towards the end of this portfolio I highlight key theories and concepts that have impacted my program, advising approach, and personal and professional development. As a former athlete, I subconsciously tied my self-worth and identity to my athletic success. I was an involved student and took advantage of the personal, professional and career development programming OSU athletics has to offer. When it came time to retire from the sport I loved, I found myself struggling to let go of my most salient identity: the identity that defined who I was for 16 years. These past two years provided me with the framework to develop a program that would bring me more pride than any championship. This project started as a way for me to mourn the loss of my athletic identity and begin to feel whole again. I had no idea that through this process, I would develop a program designed to serve as a one stop shop of resources, support and guidance for athletes who need help navigating life, Beyond the Athlete.
Background & Introduction

In order to understand *Beyond The Athlete*, learning the origins of who I am and who I came to be throughout the course of my athletic career, is essential. As you make your way through this portfolio, my hope is that you can understand why assisting athletes in their transition out of sport and their overall holistic development, is one of my deepest passions.

Since the age of seven gymnastics has been my core identity. For almost twenty years I have wanted to compete at the highest level and represent my country at the Olympics, World Championships and Commonwealth Games. I enjoyed recreational gymnastics, but it was boring for me. I took my gymnastics seriously and I wanted to be challenged. I had fun but I far had bigger goals than a weekly two hour class on a Tuesday afternoon. I was recognised as a young child with serious potential in this sport and progressed quickly through basic skills and the compulsory levels. By eight I was training twenty hours per week and by the time I was nine I was training thirty hours per week. At this stage, gymnastics was more than a sport, it was my full time job. I would arrive late to school from morning practice and right after school I would head back to the gym for afternoon training. On other days I would leave school early when we had longer practice days. We had Friday’s completely off school because there was only a four hour window between practices. During that time we had a tutor come in so we wouldn’t fall behind in school. I was soon known as “Isis the gymnast” at school, my friend group and even family. It was the first thing people asked me, “how’s gymnastics going?” Kids at school would know me as the girl who did gymnastics and wanted to go to the Olympics. I loved it. I trained so much I didn’t have time to pick up new hobbies or try other sports. I didn’t see this as an issue when I was young, but in the last two years removed from the sport, I realised just how much gymnastics consumed me when I couldn’t figure out what to do in my spare time. I was completely and utterly obsessed with
gymnastics and being ‘the gymnast’, a title I had immense pride in being. I say gymnast and not athlete, because I didn’t start referring to myself as an ‘athlete’ until I came to college.

College gymnastics was something I never imagined myself doing. Growing up in Australia, I was unaware that you could go to school for sport. My father was born and raised in the U.S and was familiar with the NCAA and collegiate sport. One day he had recorded the NCAA gymnastics championships for me to watch. Outside of European Championships and major elite competitions, elite gymnastics doesn’t get aired on national TV. I remember watching these young women in awe. I saw women of different shapes, shades and sizes, which is rare in the elite world of gymnastics I was used to. For the first time, I saw myself represented in my sport and thought to myself, ‘I could do that’. The elite gymnastics scene in Australia is vastly different from college gymnastics. The crowds are quiet, almost silent at some competitions and there is less ‘wow’ factor, for lack of better terminology. Less smiling, less dancing and less enthusiasm from both those competing and the spectators. Elite gymnastics, in my opinion, is robotic. At times you wonder if the athletes are even enjoying themselves. Gymnastics in general is an individual sport, aside from major competitions, but even still, each individual competes alone one by one on each event.

After watching the NCAA championships on TV, I wanted to be part of that environment. I wanted to compete in front of thousands of people and run towards a team. I never had a big team during my time in Australia. I was competing in the elite system so young, I didn’t have many teammates at my competitions as the years went on. I had a consistent training group, but girls would quit or move groups, until I was one of the last ones training. From age twelve, when it came to competition day it was just me and my coach.
When I came to college I was overwhelmed in the best way. For the very first time, I was training with over twenty women, my age or older. I was out of shape and recovering from an injury that set me back months, but I was still in an environment where I wanted to get better and be better. Not for myself, but for my team.

2015 was a year of major transition. In 2014 I received news after the national championships that I had stress fractures in my back due to overuse. I needed to take at least eight weeks off from physical activity, which meant no gymnastics. The following months gave me time to focus on my senior year of high school and rehabilitation. While I couldn’t do any gymnastics, I was still in the gym for over twenty-five hours a week. After I graduated highschool, I was still easing back into full training. The end of high school comes with celebration and I made sure to make as many memories with my friends as I could before everyone started university and went their separate ways. I took a gap year to focus on training in pursuit of the 2016 Olympics, something I had been dreaming of since I started my journey as a seven year old. However my back still wasn’t fully healed yet, which started to frustrate me.

More time off meant more time spent going out with friends. Since I spent my high school years dedicated to gymnastics, I rarely socialised or partied like most sixteen-eighteen year olds. I saw this rest period as ‘making up for lost time’ and soon I started living for the weekend. Because I had started to lose my athletic identity, I was experiencing what felt like an utter identity crisis. I started to spiral and a series of health complications arose. Because of my poor lifestyle choices, at eighteen I was told that I was on the verge of developing Type 2 Diabetes if something didn’t change. I was so ashamed and embarrassed, I could barely look at myself in the mirror. I was depressed, unable to perform at the level I used to (and needed to if I wanted to make an Olympic team), and was struggling to find anything outside of going out on the weekends that made me feel
happy. I had a meeting with my coach and my parents discussing the future of my gymnastics career and after an emotional meeting, I decided to switch gears and start preparing for college. No more Olympics… I was heartbroken. I started gymnastics because I wanted to go to the Olympics and just like that I wasn’t. I felt like I had failed myself, my coaches and my family. However at the same time, I felt a little bit of relief. What I was not anticipating, was for this switch in gears to bring back glimpses of the fire I once had. Things started looking up when I received an email from the Head Coach of the gymnastics team at Oregon State University.

I signed with OSU in November of 2015 and stepped foot on campus in 2016. For the next four years I would grow more than I ever thought I could. College gymnastics and my incredible team, helped me fall in love with gymnastics all over again. I was so burnt out before OSU, I didn’t think I could ever love gymnastics again. I competed every single meet from my freshman through to senior year and was a nominee for the 2020 NCAA Woman of the Year Award. I received Pac-12 and NCAA All-Conference honors, and was named an NCAA 2nd-team All-American on the floor exercise. I was able to use my platform and inspire people I didn’t even know. The impact this community had on me meant more to me than I can describe. I fell in love with Beaver Nation and it was reciprocated. I had found a home away from home and with the end of my career in sight, I knew it was going to be a tough goodbye. I helped leave a legacy for the generations of gymnasts to come through OSU and I will never take that for granted. My senior year was gearing up to be my best year yet. Riding the high of qualifying to nationals the year prior, our team was on fire. Unfortunately, that fire was put out well before we could make another run at nationals.

March 12, 2020, was the day my sixteen year gymnastics career came to an end. I will never forget this day and the following weeks, months and years to come. Two years later and I
still get emotional talking about the end of my athletic career. In fact, I am on the verge of tears as I write this portion of my portfolio.

Senior night is one of the most memorable experiences of a collegiate athlete's career. This competition marks an athlete’s final home meet, in front of friends, family and fans. My class and I had been waiting for this moment since our freshman year, but little did we know we would never get to experience this moment, due to the ramifications of Covid-19. The months and years to follow this end to my career, is how *Beyond The Athlete* came to be. While I still struggle to understand why my career had to end the way it did, I can only assume that it was to develop a program that can be utilised by athletes all over the world.

**Area of Specialization - Student-Athlete Development**

My area of specialisation is *Student-Athlete Development*. I was a very involved student-athlete, which is why I was surprised to still feel so unprepared for life after sport. Career development wise, I felt ok, I had a resume and basic cover letter, but I was most unprepared for the identity crisis and inner work that needed to be done in order for me to move on from my sport. In order to help other athletes who may be experiencing this too, I knew student-athlete development was the field I needed to pursue.

**Internships: Student-Athlete Development & Life Skills**

As a student-athlete, I took advantage of the tools and resources our student-athlete development team provided us with and it gave me the opportunity to find my passion outside of gymnastics. The most impactful program I took part in was called Real Talk. Real Talk is a group designed for Black student-athletes and student-athletes of colour to find community in shared experience and have the space to talk about issues related to social justice, equity and inclusion.
This space was also open to allies, as we wanted to help bring people together from all backgrounds to listen, learn and empathise. Real Talk changed the way I interacted with the Black community and helped me find my place in a space I never truly felt accepted. This is when I finally started to feel comfortable with my identity as a biracial, Black person. I wanted to be more aware of who I was and how I interacted with the people around me from all different backgrounds. Real Talk helped me find my voice, and develop a deep passion for social justice, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. Navigating my biracial identity was something I struggled with for years and when I was introduced to theories like Renn’s Ecological Theory of Mixed Race Identity Development (2004) and Cross & Fhagen-Smith’s Model of Black Identity (2001).

Renn’s Ecological Theory of Mixed Race Identity Development (2004), focuses on ecological factors and the various labels individuals with mixed heritages identify themselves as (Patton et al., 2016). With context to the college environment, Renn (2003, 2004) identified four settings that influenced the development of mixed race students. (1) Microsystems encourage face to face interactions with positive and negative racial overtones. (2) Mesosystems of campus culture that send positive or negative messages. (3) The exosystem which affected the student’s awareness of racial identity. (4) The Macrosystem and aspects of which were influential to the student’s development, including how they viewed race and culture, as well as their own roles in these systems (Patton et al., 2016).

Because I had such little exposure to Black people and the rich culture that is Black history, my race salience was extremely low. Race salience refers to the importance or significance of race in a person's approach to life (Patton et al., 2016). Cross & Fhagen-Smith (2001) discuss how those with a low race salience, or internalised racism, may never experience adult Nigrescence, a
term referring to the *process of becoming Black* (Cross, 1971). Renn (2004) suggests that orientation groups, peer facilitating, advising groups and course sections, must all be taken into consideration when thinking about catering to multiracial students and legitimising their lived experiences (Pattern et al, 2016). Real Talk was designed for this exact purpose and being able to connect with others within my community and fellow mixed race folks significantly helped me increase my racial salience and safely explore how my intersectionality affects the way I interact with the world.

I felt an overwhelming sense of belonging. Schlossberg's theory of mattering and marginality, highlights how students can feel marginalised if they fail to connect with other individuals or groups (Schlossberg, 1989). This is one of the main reasons why I found so much comfort in Real Talk. Having this sense of community was empowering, especially as a young person still figuring out who she was and how her identities intersect.

From this space, I started to find my voice. I started to learn what I was passionate about and why, and develop a stronger sense of empathy and understanding for others. Ultimately, when designing *Beyond The Athlete*, I specifically wanted to have it operate in a similar fashion. What makes my program stand out from others that may offer similar services, is that at its very core, this is a safe space to express emotion, engage in vulnerable conversations and heal through the power of shared experience.

Student-athlete development encompasses the holistic development, including personal, professional, career and leadership development, of student-athletes. Essentially, this field focuses on all areas excluding athletics and academics \(^1\).

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\(^1\) There are specific courses and classes offered that cater to personal, professional, career and leadership development. What I am referring to is academic related such as the development of course schedules, major advising, graduation tracking and other duties carried out by specific athletic and on campus academic advisors.
As an athlete I was involved in programs, events and clubs such as mock interviews, resume building workshops, financial literacy, student-athlete advisory committee (SAAC), networking nights, peer facilitated identity affinity groups (Real Talk), conventions and seminars. My hands-on experience as a student-athlete in these groups helped prepare me to better serve and assist student-athletes in these areas during my internships with Student-Athlete Development and Life Skills. In my new role as an intern and graduate student, I transitioned from participant to staff liaison.

Throughout my internships, I worked in two slightly different areas of the department. One focusing more on personal development through affinity program oversight, one on one advising and the ALS 199 freshman introductory class. The second part of my internship with life skills, focused on professional and career development, assisting with resumes, graduate school applications and job placement. Of the five CSSA competencies, competency (4). Delivery of Student Services was addressed the most throughout my internships.

(4) Delivery of Student Services

Student services is at the forefront of this work. We are in this field because we care about the students and want only to help them succeed in every aspect of the word. Student-Athlete Development (SAD) offers a range of programming opportunities for student-athletes to take advantage of. As previously mentioned, I utilised this programming myself when I was an athlete here, and it has been a rewarding experience seeing how other students are benefiting in similar ways as I did myself: During my time as an intern with SAD and Life Skills at Oregon State, I served as staff liaison and was the point of contact for multiple clubs and groups through this experience. I was responsible for job placement tracking and analysis and awards database oversite, conducting 1-on-1 meetings with freshman student-athletes to discuss future career goals
and aspirations, meeting with recruits and their families on official and unofficial visits to discuss the roles and responsibilities of student-athlete development, as well as grade work and facilitate discussion with athletes enrolled in our freshman course, ALS 199 Experience.

After graduation in 2020, I was a co-founder of Dam Change, a social justice focused organisation on campus, founded by a group of Black student-athletes. Our mission is to use sport as a platform to bring awareness, education, and understanding as related to systematic racism in the United States. This platform was created to educate, empower and enhance the experience of Black student-athletes and staff at Oregon State University. This organisation is adamant about making our campus a safe space for Black students, student-athletes, and staff, in hopes of making our campus, and community a safer and more racially inclusive space. I was able to continue my work and collaboration with Dam Change throughout my internship, as we continued to plan and build, so the future generations of student-athletes will be able to carry on this important mission. Working closely with so many Black students and students of colour, opened up many doors for conversation, and intersectionality. As a Black woman, the intersectionality of both racism and sexism can be complex. One of my supervisors is a White woman and although we do not share the same racial privileges, we had multiple conversations this term about being a woman in this field of work, and what challenges she faces on a daily basis. Something I have really thought hard about over the course of the past two years, is how while so simple, so many organisations fail to acknowledge the populations of students who need additional support, let alone provide equitable services. Providing our marginalized students with a platform to voice what they need, is a great first step, but it is also the bare minimum. Being able to serve in an administrative role has been so eye opening and humbling. I learned so much from simply listening to the athletes share their experiences and what they felt they needed.
As mentioned earlier, I was an involved student-athlete who took part in multiple programs offered by our student-athlete development department. Throughout my internships, I had the pleasure to be re-introduced to some of these programs as a staff liaison. One of those programs was the Beaver Athlete Sustainability Team (BAST). BAST is one of our most self-sufficient student groups at OSU. They have strong student leadership as well as a clear group vision and direction. As staff liaison, I was the direct point of contact for pre- and post- meeting discussions between the group and the department, as well as the person they went to for additional guidance and support if needed. BAST had a goal to set up more sustainable practices within athletics and establish a better relationship with Levy Restaurants. With these goals in mind I helped set up a meeting with my supervisor, BAST’s group leader, myself, and the Levy Team responsible for catering and food services in athletics. This was a productive meeting that led to frequent conversations, and eventually volunteer opportunities for our student-athletes. I helped continue the chain of communication when things picked up for the athletes and oversaw different volunteer events between our departments.

As an international student-athlete, it was hard at times feeling like you don’t necessarily fit in with your fellow student-athletes. There were things that didn’t make sense to me, or things that were far harder to access, such as opening a bank account, getting a driver's license and contacting friends and family. Because of this, I found comfort in our international student-athlete club. Just being around other athletes from different countries made me feel like I wasn’t alone and I could talk to others about similar experiences. My internship supervisor realised how beneficial it would be for me to oversee this club in my role as a graduate student.

We have a lot of international student-athletes at Oregon State, many from countries where English is not the primary language. I loved getting to interact with the underclassmen and helping
them find community and camaraderie in this particular space, like I did. This group met 2-3 times a term where we would play games, share experiences and bond with one another to help build a sense of community. Marketing these events via social media and ensuring students knew about them were part of my responsibility as liaison.

One of the most beneficial experiences for our student-athletes outside of community, was having Emiko Christopherson, an International Student Advisor from the International Office of Student Affairs, come and speak with our international students. Emiko was born outside of the U.S and was able to relate to many of our athletes. She speaks to our athletes about services offered through the International Office of Student Affairs and the demands unique to international student-athletes. Emiko has joined us in previous terms and we find she is extremely helpful for this group as she is able to relate to these student-athletes when other members of our staff are not.

I was also in communication with the Office of National and Global Affairs during my internship and was working on ways to bridge the gap between the scholarship opportunities for studying abroad through this department and our student-athletes. Social media was an important tool to use, and I was able to connect with students interested in these opportunities, without meeting up in person. I communicated this with my supervisor, and he mentioned that the department has been wanting to bridge this gap for a while, and was excited to see what else we can do to make more opportunities outside of athletics available to the athletes. I continued pushing out jobs for student-athletes to apply to on our social media, which has been a great way to inform them of the many opportunities upon graduation and throughout their time as students.

Another one of my responsibilities this term was to conduct a series of 1-on-1 meetings with first-year student-athletes. This was my favourite part of the term. The SAD team meets with SA’s to discuss future career goals and aspirations, to best prepare them for their years after
college. This is one of the core pillars of our work, and we have been intentional about meeting earlier with students to build better relationships that will eventually help us, help them more efficiently in the future. I sat down and spoke with 24 freshmen this term. We discussed their adjustment to college, moving away from home, what they are passionate about, if they had declared a major, and informed them on what our department sets out to do. After meeting with each student I felt closer to them. It felt good knowing I could one day help this person find/cultivate their passion in life, or develop new leadership skills they’ll explore through our programming. I also sat down with a student-athlete applying to the CSSA program and helped provide her with some advice for the application process. This was a full circle moment for me! Thinking about the trajectory of these student-athletes and their time at Oregon State, reminds me of my own journey and how much I grew from my freshman year to a graduate student.

(3) Knowledge and Understanding of Student Populations and Student Development

In recent years we have seen such a need for spaces and resources for our diverse student populations. Within athletics, OSU has a large number of BIPOC student-athletes. As a biracial woman, born and raised in a foreign country, my intersecting identities have equipped me with a unique set of experiences that are relatable and enticing for a number of students. The more I work within this field, the more I see a need for BIPOC representation at the administrative level. Faculty and staff of colour are able to relate to diverse populations on campus, in a way that many white faculty are unable to do. The lack of critical mass — a rationale based on evidence suggesting that students are more likely to succeed when they are surrounded by a critical mass of peers who share their backgrounds (Museus et al., 2012) — at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), can be detrimental to their learning. Without it, minority students are more likely to experience racial isolation and tokenism, placing them at greater risk of dropping out (Museus et
al., 2015). When students of color build connections with substantial numbers of other students (and faculty) who share their backgrounds, make them more likely to succeed (Museus et al., 2015).

Because of this, many students of colour feel safer confiding in and seeking help from those who they feel will be able to empathise with them on a deeper level due to shared experiences. Seeing someone in a position of power such as a professor, or administrator, provides students with the representation that they are not alone. I experienced this first hand with my major advisor, Dr. Kim.

After undergrad graduation in 2020, I was able to continue my work and collaboration with Dam Change throughout my internship, as we continued to plan and build, so the future generations of student-athletes will be able to carry on this important mission. Working closely with so many Black students and students of colour, opened up many doors for conversation, and intersectionality. As a Black woman, the intersectionality of both racism and sexism can be complex. One of my supervisors is a White woman and although we do not share the same racial privileges, we had multiple conversations this term about being a woman in this field of work, and what challenges she faces on a daily basis. Something I have really thought hard about over the course of the past two years in the CSSA program, is how while so simple, so many organisations fail to acknowledge the populations of students who need additional support, let alone provide equitable services. Providing our marginalised students with a platform to voice what they need, is a great first step, but it is also the bare minimum. Being able to serve in an administrative role has been so eye opening and humbling. I learned so much from simply listening to the athletes share their experiences and what they felt they needed.
Towards the end of my internship experiences, I felt like a true employee in this department. Being a former student-athlete I had built new relationships with my supervisors as a professional vs an athlete. I was unsure about how I would transition from athlete to professional staff, and internally I struggled earlier on during the internship. While I was treated like a professional staff member, I felt as if I didn’t quite belong in meetings just yet. I felt uncomfortable at times talking about things I usually don't hear about, such as budgets, departmental collaboration or lack thereof, areas for improvement in the department and issues that arose on teams we needed to be aware of. Because I was such a recent graduate, I was still friends with many of the student-athletes I was interacting with. I found myself having to establish professional boundaries with friends so I would feel as if this was my legitimate job, rather than just ‘helping out’ where I was needed. As time went on, I started to take myself more seriously which helped with my confidence moving forward when communicating with athletes and administration.

One area that helped with this was my involvement with the introductory student-athlete course ALS 199. This class really opened my eyes to the possibilities I have in conjunction with the field of academics. As of April 2022, I have accepted a full-time position as the Assistant Director of Student-Athlete Enhancement at the University of South Florida! This class prepared me well for my current role in student-athlete career development at the University of South Florida where I will be overseeing career development for student-athletes and co-teaching the student-athlete career development course starting in the fall.

Prior to accepting this full time position, I wanted to sit in on these classes and see how my supervisors structured this class. I could see myself instructing a class similar to this in the future
and I also knew it would help in the creation of my own program which I would facilitate similar to that of a class.

Grading assignments and communicating with students proved to be a surprisingly difficult task for me, as I often took feedback and critique from students about their grades to heart. I felt bad giving students lower grades when they did not meet the standard, and was reminded frequently that this is part of the job. What helped me was knowing that this class is helping them learn how to appropriately communicate with professors and develop the skills to be successful in their other classes, future jobs and beyond. When developing my own program curriculum, I thought about the way skills like this need to be reiterated and taught with intention. Due to the demanding schedules of athletes, many don’t get the opportunity to interview or work in jobs that require a great deal of professionalism that is exhibited in the workplace. As I mentioned earlier, I experienced this myself when transitioning into an administrative role in my internship and I wanted to make sure I included the importance of professionalism in my program to help student-athletes be prepared as they can for a life in the workforce, outside of athletics.

As a department we met as a team bi-weekly to update one another on our work, and used this time to discuss goals, objectives and other issues/topics of concern that arise. These meetings are a collaborative space and I felt even more comfortable than my previous terms speaking on different topics and sharing my input.

I also had the opportunity to serve on multiple interview committees. We had a couple of positions open up this term in a different portion of the athletic department, and part of their interview was held by our team. My supervisor took the lead, but we all took turns asking questions and evaluating their responses. As a young professional at this point in time, I was yet to have my first formal interview. I learned so much from observing and co-conducting these
interviews that when it came time to interview for full-time positions, I felt as well prepared as I could be and a lot of that was because of my experiences sitting in and observing how interviews were conducted and what kind of answers were expected/desired. I also found the post interview debriefs to be helpful and I was sure to take down notes for future reference, which came in handy when writing up questions for the interviewees. We went over things as a team and my supervisors provided me with things they look for in employees in our line of work, which I firmly believed helped me make a good impression while going through the interview process.

I didn’t fully understand the amount of work that went on behind the scenes within student-athlete development. Being in a room full of professionals that encouraged and valued my opinions was extremely beneficial to my own development as a professional. In these meetings, I realised how much collaboration is required to function efficiently, and how lack of collaboration and poor communication can significantly impact our department and the services we provide. At first I was a little intimidated to be part of these meetings, but as the weeks went on I started to feel more confident and sure of myself and what I had to contribute to the conversations.

The SAD team opened up internship spots for ten student-athletes in the fall of 2021 across the athletic department. This is something they had been working on for a while and with Covid restrictions easing in the months to follow, they were looking for an in person experience. I organised interviews for all student-athletes who applied for positions and we began the interview process. I was part of this process, which was exciting because it was my first time administering an interview. My supervisors and I took turns delivering the questions and briefly met after each interview to debrief and discuss notes. Once we had conducted all interviews, we then had to decide which departments they would be rotating with. This part was harder as we had a lot of athletes to match up with preferred departments. I learned quickly that not everyone was going to
get their exact preferences due to high demand and staff shortages, however seeing how we worked through that as a staff was valuable for my professional development. Similar to what I explained before, I had to start shifting my mindset from student-athlete to professional. Realistically, as a department we can only do so much with the resources we have. There are times when we may not be able to provide student-athletes with certain things. While that is hard to accept, especially as someone who has designed a program that aims to do exactly that, realistically it is true. When we were unable to place everyone in their top preferences I felt as if we had failed the student-athlete. My supervisor reassured me that while our intentions are in the right place, sometimes we simply cannot cater to the needs of all 500+ students-athletes. Instead, we can make sure that we are communicating this with them so they can understand where we are coming from, and try to find something that they can still benefit from. Despite athletics being a billion dollar industry, athletics still struggles with the allocation of resources for support staff, and it is common for staff to be overworked and underpaid. I appreciated my supervisor being transparent with me about these types of issues within the field as it is important to know moving forward as a young professional wanting to change the world. More often than not, you don’t have that kind of power in support roles.

I was in frequent contact with many head coaches and support staff of our eighteen athletic teams. Each year we have a senior academic celebration brunch, where athletes are presented with their stoles and are recognised for their academic achievements. We were unable to do this last year, and had to make some changes in order to celebrate within the restriction guidelines. This year we had a virtual celebration in which I was responsible for getting in contact with teams, coaches and administration and passing along information to our marketing department. Through helping with these events, I was able to learn effective communication via email and had a chance
to improve my verbiage to sound more professional. My supervisor informed me that I had a tendency to be passive in emails, which I would do to avoid sounding rude or demanding. My supervisor helped me understand that most of the time people don’t take things as personally as I assume. She explained to me that people also appreciate shorter and more concise emails, as it helps them know what exactly is needed of them. This definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone, especially when communicating with department heads like the Athletic Director and executive staff, but towards the end of the term I was far more confident sending emails and follow up emails.

I was responsible for creating an awards database, which would house all awards and available scholarships specific to student-athletes. I was asked to organise and document student-athletes by sport, year, major, race, gender (for awards specific to minority student-athletes) and kept track of who qualified for each award as nominations opened. I then discussed with my team which student-athletes we saw fit to be nominated and I began the process for each nominee. This was the second year doing this type of work and while tedious, it is extremely important for the eligible student-athletes to be recognised and considered for just prestigious awards. The second year doing this was a lot smoother than the previous. I had implemented a system that was much easier to keep track of and share between units for others to contribute. Administrative things like this wasn’t something I knew came with this field of work, however I am glad I was able to have experience in doing so because my current full time position requires me to do this as part of my job description. I was able to clearly describe this in my interview which may or may not have contributed to their decision to hire me for this specific role.

Something I thoroughly enjoyed throughout my internships with SAD and Life Skills, was the opportunities I had for growth as a professional. I became a member of The National
Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) and The National Association for Academic Advisors of Athletics (N4A) in 2020. NACDA serves as the professional association for professionals in intercollegiate athletics administration. It provides educational opportunities, networking opportunities, the exchange of information and resources, workshops, seminars, forums and conventions to help further develop each individual (NACDA, n.d.). Through these organisations, I was exposed to various opportunities and companies that provided student-athlete specific services which I loved learning about. One of the more impactful companies I came across through N4A was Athletes Soul.

Athletes Soul was founded by retired athletes and designed to support athletes as they transition away from sports (Athletes Soul, n.d.). Their mission is to help athletes navigate their post athletic journey, raise awareness about the challenges of retirement, and encourage development beyond athletic identity (Athletes Soul, n.d.). Sound familiar? I had already started the process of developing Beyond The Athlete before I came across Athletes Soul. However when I saw something that was essentially my end goal, I got so excited. Why didn’t I hear about this? I needed something like this. How do they brand themselves? Who all knows about this company? These were the questions I had running through my brain before I signed up for a panel where former athletes would discuss topics varying from post retirement depression and mental health issues, to resources for coaches and administration to help their athletes navigate the transition smoother. My supervisors didn’t tell me to sign up for this forum, I found it on my own, signed up and absorbed information like a sponge. I knew I could create something like this and do it in my own way, but seeing it for myself and watching how people were responding to their panel, lit a fire under me to get my program up and running.
While I was excited for the future of my own program, I started to struggle with imposter syndrome and questioned whether or not the world needed another program like Athlete Soul. I will discuss this more in depth in *Myself as a Scholar-Practitioner*.

In addition to Athlete Soul, I attended the first ever N4A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Virtual Summit in October 2021. The theme for the event was *Shifting into Action*. The summit was a two-day event that discussed current issues, best practices, research, and innovative programs to support professionals dedicated to the academic and personal development of student-athletes. My supervisor knew I had passion for DEI work and recommended that I sign up. At the end of each session we had opportunities to network and meet other like-minded professionals, which was a great opportunity to ‘pitch’ myself to what could be future employers one day. As an athlete, I attended the NCAA Diversity and Inclusion Forum in Atlanta, Georgia, where I met fellow athletes and staff from around the country. To be in the position I am now on the other side of athletics, connecting with professionals to help student-athletes, is a privilege.

I remember attending the NCAA Diversity and Inclusion Forum as a student-athlete being inspired to make change and use my voice to help make my experience, and the experience of all student-athletes better. I just didn’t have the same kind of resources to make change happen on an institutional level. That was, until Dam Change. Through conferences like N4A, and Athletes Soul, I feel better equipped as a professional to help make the necessary changes. I can now build relationships with professionals and start to develop connections all over the country with like minded individuals. I have already been in positions where I am referring student-athletes to different jobs, internships and forums, and feel more confident sending them somewhere that I am familiar with and or have connections. Networking is such a big part of this work and I am grateful.
for the opportunity my supervisors gave me to attend, travel and learn from such seasoned professionals.

Overall, my internship experiences provided me with so many valuable lessons and hands-on professional experience. From interviewing candidates to attending national conferences, I was exposed to professional development opportunities that helped me start thinking of myself as a true student-athlete development professional. Because of these experiences, my confidence increased and I felt prepared to start applying for jobs in my chosen field.

**Athletic Identity Development**

When I think about the power of sport and how sport has impacted my life on so many levels, I am fascinated by the way athletes develop such a strong athletic identity. Part of the reason behind wanting to develop *Beyond The Athlete* was because I noticed athletes who identified strongly with their athletic identity, having a harder time leaving that part of them behind. Once student-athletes have retired and are no longer part of their team, many lose their sense of belonging, resulting in feelings of marginalisation (Schlossberg, 1989). As a means for assessing athletic identity, an instrument known as Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) was established. Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder (1993) designed AIMS as a means to assess “the strength and exclusivity of identification with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 242). The questionnaire consisted of 10 items that were rated from 1-7 on likert-type scales. This scale was a uni-dimensional instrument that since has been modified to be multi-dimensional and was re-conceptualised into a seven-item questionnaire that consists of three dimensions: social identity, exclusivity and negative affectivity (Brewer & Cornelius, 2002).
### Table 2.1 – Items of the AIMS that evaluate the positive and negative self-perceptions of the athlete role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Positive Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I consider myself an athlete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I have many goals related to sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Most of my friends are athletes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sport is the most important part of my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Other people see me mainly as an athlete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sport is the only important thing in my life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Negative Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 – Brewer and Cornelius′ (2002) 7-item version of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Item #</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Old Item #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I consider myself an athlete.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I have many goals related to sport.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Most of my friends are athletes.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sport is the most important part of my life.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The questions in this 7-item version of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, set the foundation for the research I did via social media. I was not surprised when I received such overwhelming feedback and responses from people across the U.S and various countries around the world. I knew I wasn’t alone in these feelings, and I’m just glad I was able to find others who were able to validate my feelings through this loss identity.

For too long I suppressed the pain I was experiencing. I tried to figure it out on my own because I felt alone in what I was feeling. I had teammates who didn’t appear to be taking our retirement nearly as rough as I was experiencing, which I then let gaslight me into thinking I was overreacting. Is it overreacting to believe you no longer have a passion or purpose in the world anymore? Maybe, maybe not.

Chickering (1969) proposed that there are seven vectors of development that contribute to the formation of one’s identity. (1) Developing competence; (2) managing emotions; (3) moving through autonomy toward interdependence; (4) developing mature interpersonal relationships; (5) establishing identity; (6) developing purpose and (7) developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). He used the term *vectors* of development as “each seems to have direction and magnitude” (p.8). These vectors are considered to be “major highways for journeying toward individuation” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35). Chickering noticed that while students move through these vectors at different rates, they are also subject to dealing with issues related to more than one vector at a time.

I didn’t realise how much I depended on gymnastics, until I was done. Gymnastics was always there. It was my constant and I knew it would always be there. It gave me a strong sense of purpose, motivated me to push myself and work through adversity, kept me accountable and provided me with a consistent and rigorous schedule (that I didn’t know I would miss). I used to
hate being told what to do, but I didn’t realise that while I enjoyed going with the flow, structure helped to keep me grounded. I was conditioned to do everything I was told since I was seven years old, so when my career came to a halt, I didn’t know what to do with myself. Chickering (1993), mentions that the establishment of a secure identity will ultimately influence one’s life purpose. Hence, because I no longer had my secure identity, you can understand how I felt like I had no purpose. My purpose as an athlete and the thing that would keep me going when it got tough, was that somewhere out there, a young gymnast is looking up to me the way I used to look up to the ‘big girls’. Through my gymnastics, I was able to empower others to be the best version of themselves by embracing what makes them unique. I took such pride in this, that when it all came to an end, I felt like I couldn’t have this same impact anymore. All it took was a matter of realising what was at the core of my purpose and passion as an athlete, empowerment. While my athletic identity helped me discover my passion, I knew I could find a stronger purpose in life without having to rely on being an athlete. I just needed some help in order to get there.

Brewer et al. (1993) defines athletic identity as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role (p. 237). Before premature retirement, I didn’t realise just how much I identified with being an athlete. I knew I took pride in the title and enjoyed the way people admired athletes for a number of ways, but I thought when my time came I would be able to leave that life behind. When I was experiencing the height of my depression in the Fall of 2020, I decided that I needed to seek out a mental health professional for help.

When I met virtually with the counselor from CAPS, I felt like I could finally express myself without fear of judgment. I wasn’t expecting to, but I burst into tears just minutes into the call. I was embarrassed at first, but I was reassured that this was a big deal and I was not being dramatic. While I didn’t have anyone in my life explicitly say I was overreacting, having someone
outside of my immediate circle affirm that my feelings were valid made me feel heard. For months I was downplaying how hard this transition had been for me, so when I was able to express my true emotions, I felt a weight lift from my shoulders. I don’t like crying in front of other people because it made me feel weak, especially as an athlete. As an athlete you adopt the mentality of having to be tough and strong, which for many, means don’t cry, suck it up and keep going. Of course I would have moments (many moments) where I would get emotional in the gym, and while it happened less in college than when I was younger, I felt even more embarrassed showing that kind of emotion as a young adult, senior leader of my team and team captain. So I’m sure you can imagine the relief I felt when someone told me ‘it’s ok to cry’.

Prior to meeting with the psychologist, I was speaking to my mum about how I was feeling over the phone. She was the first person to mention how the loss of my athletic identity is similar to mourning a death. I gaslit her and told her that a comment like that was dramatic because it’s ‘not the end of the world’, even though a part of me felt like it was in that moment. It felt like a part of my soul was missing and I didn’t know how, or if I would ever be able to fill this void. After a defensive reply, she still reassured me that for some, losing an identity this salient can often feel like a death. The ideology behind the death of an identity, was explored by Blinde & Stratta (1992), in *The “Sport Career Death " of College Athletes” Involuntary and Unanticipated Sports Exits*. Their study examines the social psychological processes characterising the experiences of athletes, following an involuntary or unexpected removal from college sports (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). They conducted twenty interviews with athletes who were either cut from their teams, or were subject to a unique form of exit (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). For personal reference, student-athletes like myself who ended their careers early due to the pandemic, would fit into this category.
Blinde & Stratta (1992) conducted interviews that were designed to capture (1) the way athletes experience the unique form of sports exit and (2) identity factors which did, or did not, make the process challenging for the athletes. The athletes participating in this study reported results and equated their feelings with the trauma and disruption in their lives associated with death and dying (Blinde & Stratta, 1992).

Drawing on the conversation I had with my mum about feeling similarly to that of mourning a death, Kubler-Ross’s theory of death and dying (1969) was of particular interest in this part of my journey. Kubler-Ross (1969) developed the stage theory of death and dying, identifying 5 stages through which individuals experience grief after loss: (1) shock and denial; (2) anger; (3) bargaining, (4) depression, and (5) acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Taking into consideration what my mum mentioned, and applying this theory, I can say with certainty that I experienced these 5 stages of grief. I was in shock for the first couple of weeks, after hearing the news and it didn’t feel real. I still had hope that the NCAA would give us an extra year of eligibility and we could have one more chance. Once we knew that wasn’t going to happen, the anger started to set in. I resented my other teammates and fellow athletes that could keep training and competing and I was mad at my coaches for the way things ended. I felt as if everyone had moved on so quickly that no one really understood the enormity of what had just happened. Then, in Fall 2020, I started grad school and also started working a part time job, which I came to hate. It seemed as if I was in the middle of a perfect storm and during this time I experienced the height of my depression.

There were days I would just cry because I was so upset and other days I felt completely numb. I had sudden bursts of energy and days where I felt like the ‘old me’, followed by multiple days of barely eating or leaving my room. I isolated myself in addition to the mandated lockdowns and my depression started to impact the relationships with the people around me. I felt like it was
2015 all over again and I was in the midst yet again of another identity crisis. Full transparency, I truly believe I only just recently hit the fifth stage, acceptance. I am still not happy, nor over the fact that the 2020 class was the only class to not receive an additional year of eligibility. However, I don’t consistently cry myself to sleep at night anymore, or spend every waking second of the day plotting revenge against the NCAA… so I consider this to be acceptance.

Depression (stage 4) was reported in Blinde & Stratta’s (1992) study, as the most prolonged stage, which from personal experience I can attest to. Sixteen of the twenty athletes who participated in Blinde & Stratta’s (1992) study experienced depression throughout this time. This stage was also generally characterised as a period of unproductiveness. The athletes frequently indicated that they were "just existing" in life (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). This loss of belonging, relates directly to Schlossberg’s Theory of Marginality and Mattering (1989), that I will be explaining in more detail later on. One of the participants from the study mentioned that at the end of his career, he experienced feelings similar to that of a family member dying (Blinde & Stratta, 1992). He then went on to say that he felt like a part of his life had been taken away (Blinde & Stratta, 1992).

Comments like this are just another reason as to why I am so passionate about my program. While professional and career development competency are important for student-athletes to learn, they also need a space where they feel safe enough to be vulnerable and talk through feelings like this athlete mentioned. Athletes deserve a space where they can express themselves. Social support is an important resource for people experiencing stressful life changes (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Group therapy has the power to bring people together who have experienced mutual or similar trauma, transitions, or other experiences (Hall et al., 1986). By creating this program, it will serve as a variation of group therapy where these athletes will be able to build connections with people
who understand and have the ability to empathise with one another. While my personal experience with therapy was 1-on-1, having a space where I felt safe to vent and be vulnerable helped me so much. Part of me enjoyed that I had the opportunity to confide in just one person, but another part of me felt like I wanted my peers to know how I was feeling so I could lean on them for support, and vice versa. My hope is that athletes who partake in this program won’t feel alone in their journey, like I did. For two years I wished I had something like what I will soon be able to offer. It brings me so much joy to know that the pain I experienced will be able to help at least one athlete going through something similar. By coming together as a group, we can eliminate these feelings of isolation and build a stronger sense of community.

Following the discussion with my mum about mourning the death of my athletic identity really resonated with me. I started to think about whether or not other athletes felt this way too, and I took to social media to find out. Social media has been a great tool for me to gather my own ‘soft’ research over the past two years, from current and former student athletes. I had written out questions in relation to athletic identity and the transition out of sport. I received an overwhelming amount of feedback and had started conversations with people all over the world about something we all had in common. I started posting about this in the first term of grad school. By this stage, I was speaking with my advisor about potential topics for my final portfolio. After receiving the responses I did, coupled with the deep conversations I was having with friends, teammates and strangers, I decided that I needed to do something with this information. It was then, in the Fall of 2020, that I chose to dedicate my final portfolio to developing a program to help athletes with the transition out of sport – Beyond The Athlete.

Below are the questions I presented on social media, coupled with the number of responses and given responses.
### Current Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Yes:</th>
<th>No:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you take pride in being an athlete?</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you predict you'll miss your time as an athlete?</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you identify your sport or major first if asked why you are going to school?</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your sport have a professional league?</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your favourite part of being an athlete?</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you anticipate being the hardest part about not being an athlete anymore?</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Retired Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Common Answers:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If applicable, how long did it take for you to comfortably</td>
<td></td>
<td>being alone/loss of connection and support system, missing teammates and camaraderie, finding love in something else, too much free time, lack of structure/routine/adapting to new life, staying in shape/staying healthy, loss of motivation, loss of 'athlete label/identity', having goals, finding where you fit in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Number of responses</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accept the fact that you are no longer an athlete?</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you still bring up that you were an athlete into conversations?</td>
<td>Number of responses: 128</td>
<td>Yes: 105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you/have you felt ‘less than’ since being retired?</td>
<td>Number of responses: 123</td>
<td>Yes: 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you have an ‘easier’ transition? ie. a job lined up, finished your career on ‘perfect’ terms, you were ready to be done.</td>
<td>Number of responses: 104</td>
<td>Yes: 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardest part of retirement?</td>
<td>Number of responses: 55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are/have you ever been afraid you will never find something that brings you the same level of joy?</td>
<td>Number of responses: 117</td>
<td>Yes: 85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you have closure at the end</td>
<td>Number of responses:</td>
<td>Yes:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common Answers:
daily routine/structure/obligations, anxiety that my institution still had ‘control’ over me, uncertainty, poor body image, afraid of never making connections as strong as ones with teammates, psychical changes, lost sense of competitiveness, not doing what I love everyday, missing teammates/coaches/support staff/being on a team/lack of community, finding new passion and purpose, adapting to change, lack of motivation, seeing other athletes take their opportunity for granted, not feeling 'special/different' anymore/loss of identity/finding new identity, finding people who understand what you’re going through, sudden/drastic change
| of your career? | responses: 65 | 23 | 42 |
| Have you found something else you enjoy since retirement? | Number of responses: 84 | Yes: 64 | No: 20 |

As I mentioned before, the comments I received from these surveys only reinforced the need for a program like *Beyond The Athlete*. As well as affirming the need for a program, there was so much overlap with student-development theory and the CSSA course content. I finally started to see how relevant the CSSA program was to not only my program development, but also life and the way I was interacting and communicating with others around me.

**Beyond The Athlete**

In the coming pages of this document, I am going to share how specific courses in the CSSA program have helped mold me into the scholar I am today, and how some have influenced the development of my program, Beyond The Athlete.

Throughout the course of the CSSA program, I have grown exponentially as a scholar. Growing up, my focus as a young child and teenager was always gymnastics. It required a lot of sacrifice to train at the elite level at such a young age, but I was committed to my goals, which often meant missing class for practice. While missing class was challenging at times, part of me enjoyed it. I felt a certain level of pride, being able to miss something as important as class because I was good at my sport. Without knowing it at the time, this was further solidifying being an athlete as my most salient identity.

When I came to college, my focus was still gymnastics above anything else. I didn’t yet understand the enormity of a college degree, let alone a full-ride athletic scholarship. In college athletics you are only allowed to workout twenty hours per week, which was a big drop from elite
where I was training between thirty and thirty-two hours per week. While this rule is in place to ensure college athletes are still able to prioritise school work and remain at amateur level status, for athletes like myself who had such a strong athletic identity, sport was still the number one priority.

When I started the CSSA program I wasn’t sure what to expect. Starting a masters degree during the peak of a global pandemic definitely contributed to my hesitation, but regardless of the pandemic I was hesitant that obtaining a masters degree would be a waste of time and money. While I was excited about the CSSA programs’ focus on social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion, I was frustrated that I had to spend two more years in school working towards a degree that was *highly recommended*, but not *required*, to help me get a job in the future.

I am the first in my immediate family to obtain a masters degree. While I take immense pride in this, part of me felt like I wasn’t ready to study at the graduate level. I know I earned my spot in this program, but being the only former student-athlete in the class made me feel like I didn’t fit in with the rest of my cohort. I didn’t have the same passion for school as I thought my peers did. I spent my undergraduate degree focusing largely on my athletic career and I switched my major 3 times. Without knowing what it was called, I was experiencing imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome refers to an internal experience of believing you are not as competent as others perceive you to be (Cunic, 2021). This is very common among students, in particular students of colour in higher education. I was also the only woman of colour and Black woman in my cohort.

Andrew Martinez, a Ph.D. student at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education, draws on personal experience in an article referring to his relationship with fellow Latino professors and his aspirations as a faculty member (Martinez, 2018). He mentions that for many students of colour, the lack of representation in the field, solidified their beliefs that it may
not be the place for them to succeed themselves (Martinez, 2018). Hence why I am so grateful for the representation among faculty and staff within the CSSA program.

I didn’t consider myself a scholar before CSSA. In fact, I wasn’t even sure what it meant to be a scholar. Do I even want to be a scholar? Who cares? Will people think less of me if I’m not a scholar? They shouldn’t… To this day I still feel uncomfortable with the word scholar as I still associate it with prestige, entitlement and privilege.

**Myself as a Scholar-Practitioner**

I wanted to make sure I touched on the development of myself as a scholar-practitioner. I mentioned in my dedication that I never thought I would belong in a space like higher education. I was so focused on my career as an athlete I never identified myself with my studies. I thought people who went on to get their Master’s and PhD were students who loved school. I didn’t love school. I liked learning, but not enough to want to study and do additional reading or research than required. Again, I was a good student, I was just easily burnt out and was seriously doubting my place in this masters program with people who I stereotyped as being the definition of scholars. “I don’t talk like them, refer to the readings like them, or even understand the readings like them”. I was really self-conscious about my place in this program and was wondering how on earth I was going to be able to write a thesis or complete a project that reflects my learning, when I didn’t even understand what it was that I was learning yet!!

I remember meeting with Dr. Kim after deciding I wanted her to be my major advisor, to discuss my plans for my defense. I want to reiterate again that I had no idea what was expected of me. I was toying with the idea of this program, but didn’t actually think I would do anything with it after my defense. After sharing what would be *Beyond The Athlete* with Dr. Kim, she told me that I could turn this into a legitimate business and make this my full time job. I thought she was crazy. I
immediately started to question whether or not it would even work. “There’s already stuff out there like this”, what if no one even wants to do it?” “What if it doesn’t work and it doesn’t make an impact on people’s lives like I want it to?” My mind was racing with thoughts like this, but Dr. Kim reassured me that the difference between my program and other programs out there similar to this, is that no one is going to have the same experiences as me, and that shifted my whole perspective. From there I started to share my ideas with my teammates, family and friends and they proceeded to tell me that this could seriously work. I wasn’t sure how yet, but I was sure about my why, and that was all I needed to start seriously thinking about what this program could turn into.

In conjunction with this moment of realisation with Dr. Kim, throughout the CSSA Program, there were three classes in particular that continued to challenge me and influence my development as a scholar, and ultimately the development of *Beyond The Athlete*.

**CSSA 513: Research in Higher Education**

Professor Mills first opened my eyes to the world of research and *scholarly writing*. While I was not looking forward to a class dedicated to one of my least favourite activities (research), this class helped me gain confidence as a scholar, something that I didn’t think I would ever feel. What stood out to me about this class is how research, in particular scholarly research, is centered in whiteness (K. McAloney, B. Mills, J. Howard, *personal communication*, Fall 2020, Winter, 2021). When Professor Mills mentioned this, I was able to relate my personal experience to this class and it made it a lot easier for me to stay engaged.

This new knowledge sparked what would be the beginning of a journey, in which I would uncover my own bias, and internalised racism in the scholarly space. As a biracial Black woman, I am still peeling back the layers to my identity. Understanding how my intersectionality and biases overlap has been a confusing, yet liberating process. While I owe much of my scholarly
development to the CSSA program and its design to encourage critical thinking and life-long learning, this class was one of the first steps to breaking down the barriers that were keeping me from finding my place as a scholar.

I often felt less than in comparison to my CSSA peers, because I didn’t share, in my opinion, the same level of articulation and scholarly knowledge. I lacked confidence and often found myself struggling to make sense of the jargon used in many journal articles and scholarly sources we were assigned to. After discussing the ways in which research benefited and separated white people and BIPOC folks in education, I had a moment of realisation, and understood the sheer power of the access to education. As a white man, Professor Mills used his privilege to talk about the bias and racism that exists in scholarly research. Along with Professor O’Malley from my undergraduate degree, these two professors were the only professors I’ve had, identifying as white men, who spoke to the power of their privilege in respect to how they operate in higher education. As a Black woman, I respected their ability to recognise this privilege and use it to help others critically think about how their respective privileges benefit them.

Throughout our weekly discussions, I was able to dive deeper into the importance of dismantling typical research practices that cause power imbalances, while considering how our positionality and epistemology unconsciously affects the people we are working with. This was a pivotal point for me in relation to my future work with student-athletes, and understanding how important it is to be mindful of our conscious and unconscious biases.

I want to acknowledge that as well as my growth as a student and scholar, this program has provided me with space to grow and find my place in the world as a young, biracial, Black woman, and also helped me develop the confidence needed to develop Beyond The Athlete. I realised that I have a lot more to offer than I first thought, and that there is no one right way to be a scholar.
Looking back on this realisation, I underestimated how much I needed to hear that I could be a scholar and stay true to who I am, and do it in my own way: a way that was authentic, relatable and empowering.

As I reflect on my learning throughout the courses offered in CSSA program, I will also be referring to their influence on my own journey in relation to the salience of my intersecting identities.

**CSSA 548: U.S Higher Education**

U.S Higher Education was one of my favourite classes throughout the CSSA program. This was also the first time ever, I was being taught by a Black woman. Prior to this class, I had never been represented in the classroom. The first Black professor I had was during my freshman year in Multicultural Issues in Education Ed 219, with Professor Winston Cornwall. For the first time I felt heard and seen in the classroom on a deeper level that is hard to explain. I didn’t think I could ever feel like that in a classroom. From something as simple as taking the time to learn and pronounce every student's name correctly - my name being somewhat controversial - Professor Cornwall set the bar so incredibly high for the level of empathy and care a teacher should possess. I felt so safe in this class and comfortable in this class, and if not for Professor Cornwall, I wouldn’t have known what it meant to have a professor I could identify with, teach with such conviction. Fast forward to my first term in the CSSA Program, Dr. Kim and Professor Hughbanks created a space that brought me back to 2017 with Professor Cornwall.

Navigating my way through life as a biracial woman has been one of the most complex experiences, because it has been difficult to understand what that actually means. I have often felt like I had to choose between being Black or white, especially growing up and realising that I didn’t quite look like either of my parents. This carried on throughout my schooling years and the lack of
diversity among my peers and teachers definitely had an impact on the way I navigated being Black.

OSU has been the most diverse place I have ever been. Every day I saw people of different races, from countries all over the world, speaking in different accents and languages. For the first time ever, I wasn’t the only one all the time. Although Corvallis, OR, and OSU are both predominantly white, the student-athlete population on campus is far more diverse.

I found that as my race salience increased and I became more in tune with my identity as a Black, biracial woman, I realised how few Black folks there were here on campus and within the community. I notice this started to affect me in different spaces, in ways being the only Black person never did before. I started to see a divide between racial groups, including colourism within the Black community. This left me feeling like I had to ‘choose a side’ all over again, like how I felt when I was young. Imposter syndrome kicked in when I would hear comments like “I’m going to revoke your Black card”, if I said or acted ‘stereotypically white’. These were never meant to be offensive, in fact often it was friends just joking around. What they didn’t know was that I was already struggling with feeling like I didn’t belong within my own community. Speaking from experience, it can be hard to talk about certain things and be vulnerable with someone who you don’t feel understands your experience. Because of this, I am grateful for Dr. Kim’s presence in higher education and more specifically this class. If not for this class, Dr. Kim and Professor Hughbanks, I wouldn’t have been as receptive and eager to learn more about who I am and all those who paved the way for me to take up space in higher education.

There were less than 10 of us in this class, and the intimacy of our class size helped me find my voice in this new space. Dr. Kim and Professor Hughbanks created an environment where I felt
safe to learn, grow and be vulnerable in a space where I didn’t yet feel comfortable or worthy of being.

Each week we delved further in discussion about the history of higher education in America. As an international student, I was fascinated yet horrified by the truth behind the prestige that is higher education. I found myself questioning why I was part of a system like this, and why higher education was put on such a pedestal. The more I learned, the more I didn’t want to be part of this ‘elite’ world. Why do I have access to a U.S Master's degree as an Australian, when there are people who don’t have access to basic level education? That’s not fair… Why am I writing papers about how broken the system is, while perpetuating its very existence by paying fees and enrolling in classes? These questions would stick with me throughout the entirety of my graduate degree. The difference now being that I have a better understanding of how the system operates, who holds power, and how I can make a difference. Beyond The Athlete is something I will have complete control over as a business owner. I won’t have to worry about asking for approval from higher administration, or asking my department head to increase our budget to accommodate for resources. While I may anticipate other challenges as any start up would, I know I won’t have to report up to anyone or alter my content to suit the needs of the university, department or budget. Without this pressure from those in positions of power, I have the opportunity to create something for athletes that they may not have had the opportunity to experience during their time as a student-athlete.

While I struggled with the density of the readings in the beginning, I learned so much in such a short period of time. I chose to focus my final project in this class on the history of Black women in higher education. Something I appreciate about the CSSA program is its emphasis on tailoring assignments and research to the individuals interest, so long as it relates to the course
Running Head: CSSA Portfolio

curriculum. As a Black woman in higher education, I thought this would be a great opportunity for me to learn more about the women who fought for the right to be included in spaces that were originally designed for white, upper class, Christian men (Wilder, 2013).

**CSSA 520: Multicultural Issues in Higher Education**

This class pushed me outside of my comfort zone in a very necessary way. As a Black woman, I had become fairly comfortable speaking about controversial topics such as race, gender and privilege, from the perspective of a Black woman. I felt comfortable, because the majority of the conversations I took part in, were centered around issues where I did not belong to the majority who was being ‘called out’. I.e, discussing topics such as racism and sexism as a Black woman.

This class opened my eyes to a plethora of issues I was aware of, but did not consider or apply into my everyday life, like I do with issues affecting personal identities. This was another class where I felt comfortable in the environment to engage in dialog I was not well versed in, which made class conversation less intimidating.

The big concept for this class was understanding and recognising privilege in all its forms. I was so used to identifying and having conversations with people about white privilege, I had never considered what other privileges I hold. I come from a middle class, two-parent house hold, and I identify as a cis, straight, able-bodied person. I hadn’t thought about issues non-binary and trans folks experience, such as using a public bathroom. This also applies to faculty and staff. I am embarrassed to admit that I didn’t often consider faculty and staff when talking about issues affecting underrepresented communities.

My final paper for this class *Effects of Underrepresentation of Faculty and Staff of Colour in Higher Education*, explored how privilege and power affects staff just as much as it affects students. The lack of representation within administration, faculty and staff at Oregon State is
overwhelming, yet not surprising. It does not come as a shock to have such a low number of
BIPOC, women, and LGBTQ+ educators, and administrators, when the system was not intended
for these folks.

Settles et al., (2019) highlights tokenism and hypervisibility accompanied with the
experiences of being a faculty member of colour. They drew from 118 interviews with faculty of
colour, and identified six themes related to the complexities of their roles. Tokenism was a
common theme among the staff, as were feelings of hypervisibility in diversity work, and
invisibility when excluded by their colleagues and the department (Settles et al., 2019).

Privilege in higher education dates all the way back to its origin story, hence why being
aware of the history of exclusion in higher education, and who holds privilege in these spaces, is so
important. Personally, this class inspired me to find my voice and practice allyship in areas where I
hold privilege. Inequality and injustice is all around us, and being able to use one's positionality to
help dismantle systems of oppression is so powerful. Moving forward throughout the CSSA
program and everyday life, I carried with me the many conversations I had in this class with my
peers and professors, which layed out a framework I would refer to when interacting with my
future students and colleagues.

CSSA Course Influence

CSSA 599: Academic Advising

In CSSA 599, I quickly learned that active listening is an area for growth. Prior to this class
I would have said I was a great listener, which I still believe to be true in the sense that I provide
others with empathy and validate peoples feelings. Where I lack is being able to sit and listen,
without planning out what I am going to say in response, or interjecting when something I feel is
relevant pops into my head.
Academic advising as a profession offers an *individualised connection* (Campbell & McWilliams, 2016, pg. 66) to help students navigate their educational, career and life goals, through one-on-one interactions (Grites et al., 2016). Prior to this class I knew I was going to be learning skills required to offer better support to student-athletes in my profession. To my surprise we covered a lot more theory and history of the profession in this class that I was not familiar with. I didn’t think advising had such a detailed and structured framework. I assumed all you needed to be a college advisor was empathy, patience, good communication skills and knowledge of academic related resources. The three pillars of academic advising; The NACADA Concept of Academic Advising, the NACADA Statement of Core Values of Academic Advising, and the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), provide an overarching framework for this profession and those who work within the field (Campbell & McWilliams, 2016, p. 66). Similar to professors, doctors, and lawyers, academic advisors must apply such standards to their work in order to successfully do their job.

While different from careers such as law and medicine, advisors have a unique and challenging job in their own regard. They must demonstrate active listening and empathy, all while providing guidance and ensuring students understand what is required of them. In my opinion, academic advisors have one of the most important jobs on campus, and have the power to either positively or negatively affect the trajectory of students’ academic and personal lives.

Throughout this class, we discussed in depth the history of advising through the decades. To learn that there was once a time where students didn’t have advisors to help guide them through college, made me even more appreciative of the resources I utilised as a student. It never occurred to me what students did prior to having an advisor.
Between the years of 1970 and 2003, we saw the emergence of a more distinct role and stronger sense of the purpose, theories and methods used for advising in higher ed (Grites et al., 2016). During this stage women and people of colour had more access to higher education and this increase in students led to a higher need for student support (Grites et al., 2016). Because of this, we saw an increase in employment for primary-role advisors. Again, circling back to Schlossberg’s Theory of Marginality and Mattering (1989) we can see how important it is for students to feel a sense of belonging, in this instance, those who have been historically underrepresented. After seeing the role of advisors was having on student success, the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) was established in 1979 (Grites et al., 2016). By the early 2000s to present day, advising has grown to be a global network. Each institution and advising unit have distinct missions and values in place, to help ensure the best experience for the students.

Two of the most prominent advising approaches I have adopted into my work with the Beyond The Athlete program are strength-based advising and proactive advising.

Strength-based advising focuses on the talents and personal assets students possess, rather than focusing on the students' areas of weakness (Jordan et al., 2013). Advisors who use this approach work closely with their students to further develop competencies into strengths. This act not only boosts students confidence, it also motivates them to stay engaged, overcome adversity and succeed. I see a lot of benefit to this approach, especially within my work with student-athletes. As I mentioned earlier, student-athletes often associate more with their athletic identity and some have trouble believing they are more than their athletic success. This can leave some athletes feeling less confident in their academic endeavors, making them more susceptible to feelings of inadequacy and imposter syndrome. While this is an approach based on strengths, it does not ignore weakness. It simply addresses said weakness from a position of strength (Jordan et
al., 2013). It is important to understand that this approach is based on the assumption that clients possess the ability to grow, overcome adversity and succeed. I say this because students navigate their way through adversity at different rates and there are also some challenges unique to a certain demographic of students. Adversity can also be systemic and embedded into the fabric of the institution, making it a lot harder for some students to simply overcome with confidence and hardwork alone. For example, BIPOC students may experience feelings of stress and anxiety on top of completing coursework, due to something as simple as attending class if they do not feel comfortable or safe at their institution. Students from low income backgrounds may not be able to afford taking a certain amount of credits or specific courses due to high cost, or needing to work when those classes are offered - causing additional stress. Some international students may be struggling to adapt to new customs and an entirely new education system. All of these factors are important to consider when using this approach. Identifying one's strengths may not be enough to keep someone in school, if their obstacles are stemming heavily from financial hardship, discrimination, racism or homophobia from peers, professors and/or society.

One of the reasons why students don’t want to speak with a professor, advisor, or faculty member may stem from feeling intimidated or uncomfortable when addressing individuals in positions of power (Selzer & Rouse, 2013). As advisors we must understand how our identities, biases, privilege, and stereotypes can impact the way we engage with students who differ from us, and how our practice impacts success and achievement (Selzer & Rouse, 2013). Being able to apply a critical and multicultural lens in this field of work is really important as there is not a one size fits all approach. I see the strength-based approach being especially beneficial to students identifying as adult learners, at-risk, first-gen, BIPOC, international, LGBTQ+ and students with disabilities. It is easy for underrepresented students to feel lost or alienated on campus. Especially
when the white, middle-class culture is considered to be the norm on campus (Yosso, 2005), and underrepresented students are left contemplating their place at institutions that were not designed for them.

Proactive advising involves intentional contact with students, to help develop a stronger relationship between advisor and student, to achieve higher academic motivation and persistence (Varney, 2013). This is very much a preventative approach and involves a lot of hands on work and frequent check-ins (Varney, 2013). A great example of this approach being successful is from my own personal experience as a student-athlete. The time demands of a student-athletes schedule is full on. Balancing two full schedules can be overwhelming and as a freshman I really appreciated my advisor for how empathetic and proactive she was. Without babysitting me she helped me print out my schedule, plan my weeks ahead in advance around practices and competition and develop action steps to help me stay on track. I also was very indecisive throughout undergrad and switched my major 3 times. Being unsure of what I wanted to do was at times stressful, but because I had such a good relationship with my advisor, I wasn’t scared to sit down and have an adult conversation with her.

To say I would have been lost without her guidance would be an understatement. She provided me with so much love, support and much needed accountability, during a time when I needed it the most. I know many are unable to say they have a relationship as meaningful as the one I shared with my advisor, which made me even more appreciative of her. She set the expectation of what an advisor should do and how they should do it, incredibly high. Which would later influence the relationships I had with future advisors. My previous experiences with advisers, both good and bad, helped me interact with my peers during this class in our group facilitations and facilitated conversations in the rest of my classes. To summarize, the direct impact with my
own advisors has helped to shape *Beyond The Athlete* into a space where participants will be able to be vulnerable and form relationships that carry with them into life after this program.

**CSSA 558: Organization & Administration in Higher Education**

CSSA 558 was one of the classes that best prepared me for working in higher education. As a class we were assigned positions at an institution within specific departments and collaborated throughout the entire term. Dr. Jimmy Howard, another Black faculty member, taught a previous course our first year, so I already knew what to expect from a communication and class facilitation standpoint. I noticed early on that collaborating with so many people can be hard! As a group we collaborated on lab simulations, where we would be assigned tasks to complete as a group. There was a lot of ambiguity within the instructions, which left us unsure of the direction we were to go in. The ambiguous nature of these labs made it hard for us to collectively decide on a starting point. After the first lab we learned that these were specifically designed to help us communicate in spite of a lack of direction. These labs would prepare us for roles in the future and help us realise that although challenging, it is often the reality and we must be able to make deadlines and produce work without a detailed outline. This class was all about understanding the structure and inner workings of administration in higher ed. I was able to apply what I learned in this class to my internship and part time job, where I was managing during the school year. Understanding the hierarchical structure of higher administration helped me put into perspective the challenges that come with working within student affairs. Because this field does not function with the same level of power and money as other areas, things often get pushed to the bottom of the priority list and we cannot take it personally. I appreciate the transparency of the CSSA program and how we are informed that while we will be eager and ready to implement change upon graduation, rarely does that passion turn into immediate change. While this isn’t meant to discourage us, it is important to
understand prior to working in this field. The work we do is important, regardless of the allocated budget and resources we are given.

Key Theories

CSSA 552&553: Student Development Theory I&II

Over the course of two terms, I was exposed to what felt like enough theory to last a lifetime! Typically in the past, theory didn’t excite me, or encourage me to think so deeply and critically about my very existence. Theory is dense. While extremely fascinating and relevant, theory intimidates me. Combing through other peoples’ research, to then analyse, make meaning and apply pieces of this into my own research… It scared me. I was afraid I was going to get lost in the theory from course to course, but to my surprise - credit to the structure of the CSSA program, there was a lot of overlap. This overlap made it easier for me to carry knowledge across from term to term, something I have struggled with for the majority of my schooling. The information just never carried over, until the CSSA program.

In the two part student development theory class, I was fascinated by how much I actually enjoyed reading about student development theory. Going into the CSSA program, student-athlete development was already my chosen field of work. There was a great deal of overlap in these classes and my work, because student development theory applies to all students, including athletes. Again, while I was pushing myself to grow beyond my area of specialisation, I realised that when I can relate course content to my fields of interest, learning becomes a lot easier for me.

Erikson’s Identity Development Theory

Of the many theories we explored in CSSA 552 & 553, Erikson’s Identity Development Theory stood out to me early. Erikson proposed that our psychosocial development take place
throughout the lifespan (Patton et al., 2016). Erikson (1968) described eight stages of development, each distinguished by a crisis, or turning point (Patton et al., 2016). While said crisis doesn't necessarily refer to a negative experience, the term is more so used to describe an experience as a catalyst for development (Patton et al., 2016).

This theory stood out to me as it helped me understand more about my life experiences. While there have been many turning points for me throughout my own development, the most drastic have all stemmed from phases in my life where I was in the midst of a transitional period. The first being, post high school graduation when I was waiting to find out if I was going to be offered a college scholarship and I had to sit out from my sport due to injury. The second period of transition has been the hardest, being the end of my athletic career. While both of these examples were times of great sadness, anger and confusion, from them I grew. Just as Erikson predicted, these turning points, while difficult, forced me to grow. Whether that be growth through self-discipline and perseverance, when I was side-lined due to injury. Or forcing myself to look inward and get to know who I was without gymnastics as my most salient identity. Both of which I am so grateful for, because without those moments, I wouldn’t have acquired the skills needed to help someone else who may be experiencing the same challenges I was.

In contrast, a positive turning point in my life was moving across the world to pursue college gymnastics. I often think about how different my life would be if I hadn't chosen to pursue a college in the U.S. As a 19 year old kid, you don’t think that far ahead. I was just excited to have a fresh start. Looking back, I have learned more about myself in the past 6 years than I am able to fully conceptualise.

Given this theory, I wanted to include components of Erikson’s Identity Development Theory into the Beyond The Athlete program. I remember learning about this in the first year of
CSSA and was fascinated with the way I was able to draw on my own experiences and make sense of why I was feeling the way I did when it came time to retire. This theory validated my saliency of my athletic identity, and I want other athletes to feel this sense of validation too. It made such a difference in the process of transitioning away from seeing myself as only an athlete.

**Baxter Magolda’s Theory of Self-Authorship**


Phase one, *Following Formulas*, is defined as following the plans laid out for them by external authorities (Pattern et al., 2016). Gaining the approval of others is a critical aspect of this and after some self-reflection, I realised I have been craving the approval of others since I was a child. As a young child, I loved being told I was a ‘good girl’. I always followed the rules and would call out others who broke them. This progressed in more subtle ways as a young adult, and I never noticed how much I wanted it until I retired. As an athlete, you are constantly being critiqued, and praised. I have been striving for perfection since I was 8 years old and everytime I would do something in the gym, I was waiting for that positive reinforcement. I draw on this ideology in *Beyond The Athlete* and weave it into the program curriculum through concepts like self-sufficient and self-authorship.

Because gymnastics is a subjective sport, we are judged by qualified individuals' based on their own opinions, biases and beliefs. What you think was your best performance, may not be reflected by the score given to you by the judge as they saw it. The goal is perfection and anything
less than that means there is room for improvement. I thought so highly of my coaches, that what they said would stick with me, both positive and negative. I loved hearing my coaches tell me I did a good job. Even when I knew, I wanted them to affirm this so I could be sure I was right.

While striving for perfection was an aspect of gymnastics that I loved, chasing perfection and falling short of that – according to a score – 99% of the time, can definitely affect the way you navigate success as an athlete, and as a human. The constant need for approval took a toll on my confidence and ability to trust that no matter what score I got, or how a coach reacted, I was still a great gymnast, and a great person.

I have also seen the need for approval as a student. Even if I received a lower grade on an assignment, if I receive phrases like “you’re on the right track, you’re making great progress, I’ve seen so much growth this term” etc, I don’t feel as if I’ve failed, because I have the approval of my teachers. This need for approval is exhausting and something that I have really been conscious of as I enter adulthood and a full time career. As mentioned before, my program uses concepts such as self-sufficiency and self-authorship to combat one’s need for approval by living for themself as opposed to their coaches and teammates. It is important to me that this is reiterated throughout Beyond The Athlete, because I know athletes struggle with this when transitioning. Athletes obey their coaches, for lack of a better word. Whether it be out of fear or respect, what the coach says goes. This mentality can seriously impact an athlete's self-esteem and self worth. I have seen it happen first hand, which is why I want to make sure every athlete who participates in this program finds their voice and uses it to become the best version of themselves.

Phase 2 of Baxter Magolda’s (2001) Path to Self-Authorship is Crossroads (Patton et al., 2016). This refers to establishing new plans to better suit one’s needs and interests once they have discovered the original plan is not working according to plan (Patton et al., 2016). Individuals may
also become dissatisfied with how they have been defined by others and want to create their own sense of self. A general sense of unhappiness and lack of fulfillment is common when constantly having to deal with this, which I have experienced throughout my career. According to Baxter Magolda (2001), a clearer sense of direction and more self-confidence marks the end of cross roads. While the past two years have been a whirlwind of new experiences, struggle and triumph, I definitely believe I have made great strides in nearing the end of the crossroads I was experiencing for the majority of 2020-2021 amidst my retirement journey.

While a job does not define your success, or who you are as a person, I’m incredibly proud of my growth and perseverance it has taken for me to make my way out of the place I was in since my retirement. Within this position I will be teaching the career development course for student-athletes and overseeing the career and professional development areas of our department. As a student-athlete who benefited so much from programming like this, it has been my goal to work in the field to give back. I am so grateful to now be in the position to provide student-athletes with the tools, guidance and encouragement, to navigate their transition and next steps. A true full-circle moment! I will never forget how it felt to sit in a room with my academic advisor and have my feelings validated. I mentioned at the beginning of this portfolio that my relationship with my advisor inspired me to work within the field of student-athletics, and it is because I want to help impact student-athletes in this same way. In my new role at USF, I have already had the opportunity to start building relationships with athletes and in only a month, I am confident I will be able to make a positive impact on their overall development. There aren’t too many feelings more powerful than taking ownership of your own life. Self-authorship is critical in the development of a young person, and every student-athlete deserves to feel what it’s like to know who they are and be sure of the person they are becoming. My program is designed to help athletes
establish themselves without having to rely on one singular identity, which is why I believe

*Beyond The Athlete* has the power to influence so many lives.

**Conclusion**

As helpful as theory is, they are not perfect. Theory doesn't always consider the complexities of one’s identity. While frustrating at times, understanding this has helped me identify my own complexities and have more respect for the complexities of others. Throughout my time in CSSA, my eyes have been opened to the complexities of our identities and the power, privilege and oppression present in the world around us. As student affairs professionals, it is important to understand that we will never be able to relate to every student we cross paths with. We may share similar experiences, and hold similar views and beliefs, but our lived experiences are never going to be the same. As professionals it is our responsibility to provide our students with the space to feel comfortable while exploring their intersecting identities, and navigate their way through such confusing times. We need to be aware of our privileges, implicit bias, and internalized systems of oppression we uphold and perpetuate. Without the CSSA Program, I’m not sure when or if I would have ever thought this critically about myself and my internalised racism, biases and privileges. To look back on the two years I have had in this program, I am so grateful that I decided to persevere and stay on course. There were multiple times throughout when I questioned my place and whether or not I *needed* to have a masters degree. While multiple classes debunked this theory and shed light on the inequality within higher education, I knew that I was chosen to participate in this program for a reason. People told me that your masters degree is far more interesting that undergrad, and that used to really get to me. However as I started to come into my own and build confidence in myself as a graduate student and scholar-practitioner, I started to legitimately enjoy myself and what we were learning about. I started to make connections from course content to my
field of work and passion for student-athlete development, and suddenly everything started to feel worth it. I genuinely believe through this program I found myself when I needed it most. I started to believe in myself again and I have the CSSA Program to thank for that. I developed as a scholar and professional; gained knowledge on the history of U.S higher education and how organisation and administration functions in the institutional setting; learned best practices for the delivery of student services and applied this knowledge into a program I am proud to share with the world.

My hope for Beyond The Athlete is that I am able to positively impact athletes during what may be one of the most difficult transition periods in their young life. Through heartache and the loss of a salient identity, I was able to find joy in developing a program that could help those who are struggling to navigate their so called ‘freedom’. The CSSA program has been a pivotal experience for me as a human, scholar and young professional. This program opened my eyes to a world beyond athletics, a world I didn’t think I’d find interesting. However the CSSA curriculum and faculty helped me combine my passion for student-affairs and athletics, broadening my worldview and providing me with the tools I utilised to help drive the creation of Beyond The Athlete.

Please find relevant coursework that demonstrates an understanding of my learning in the appendix. Over the past two years in the CSSA Program I was shocked to see just how far my writing has progressed and changed as I grew into my own as a scholar. It is amazing to see the evolution of my writing from my very first term to the last, and I hope you can appreciate this growth as much as I do!
References


Appendix

**CSSA 557: Professional Development in CSSA, Student Affairs Philosophy**

My passion for student affairs stems from my own college experience. As a Black woman, international student and former student-athlete, I am familiar with the way one’s identity has the power to influence their college experience. It took me a while to realise who was in my corner, beyond my identity as an athlete and student. However when I did, I felt like a brand new person. Someone who felt safe enough to be their most authentic self.

My philosophy is focused on being student centered, and student driven. Empathy, authenticity, passion, adaptability and flexibility, are the values I hold most true in my work. I am committed to demonstrating these values everyday and plan on doing so with an open heart and open mind. We need more people in higher education who are willing to sit down with a student and truly listen without judgment.

Throughout my time in academia, I was influenced in particular by development theorists Nancy Schlossberg (1989), Mattering and Marginality and Arthur Chickering’s Seven Vectors of Identity Development (1969). The way I made sense of these theories influenced the way I wanted to interact with future students. I wish to act as a guide who students can trust to help them work through the messiness that is college and self-discovery. There is so much power in vulnerability, yet so many are uncomfortable putting themselves in these situations. Using my approach, students will have the space to embrace their vulnerability and have their experiences validated, a feeling many may not have experienced before.

Social justice, equity, inclusion and belonging are at the forefront of my philosophy. As student affairs professionals, it is our responsibility to help create spaces where students from all walks of life can feel safe and respected. We must consider the diverse nature of our student body,
and be mindful of how we can create equal opportunities for minority students. In this field we will be working with students from different cultures, backgrounds, socio-economic status, nationalities, ethnicities, races, genders, sexual orientations and abilities. In order to best guide and support the student body, these factors must be taken into consideration when communicating one on one. I am committed to the life-long learning process, and personal development required to be the best student-affairs professional I can be.

In conclusion, I wish to make a positive impact with all whom I have the pleasure of interacting with. Students and faculty deserve to grow and develop in spaces where they feel safe. Forming relationships based on mutual respect and authenticity is a top priority of mine. We need people in this field who genuinely care for the people they are working with. I believe our role as student affairs professionals is essential to the holistic development of the students. This is what motivates me to be in this field. I am committed to being an advocate for the students, in addition to someone who is willing to fight for them, inspire them, push them and empathise with them. We are all in this together. We have the power to change the world through this field of work. One day, one person and one conversation at a time.
CSSA 548: U.S Higher Education, Final Chapter - The History of Black Women in Higher Education

Abstract

I am exploring how black women have navigated their way through higher education. The racism and discrimination shown towards women of colour is evident across all areas of the institutional setting. I will discuss the history and importance of Title IX, and its impact on the black community and other communities of color. The history of black female athletes will also be explored in this chapter as we determine what challenges were overcome, and what many are still facing today. To be a black woman in higher education is a privilege that comes with many challenges. The fight is not over and this chapter will explore not only how far we have come, but how much further we need to go in order to provide a more diverse, inclusive and equitable environment.

Authors remarks

Growing up in Australia I spent 99% of my time in predominantly white spaces. It was hard for me to find others who looked like my sister and I, but I didn’t realize we were different until I was older. For the longest time I assumed it was ‘normal’ to have a white mum and an African-American dad, but I would question that when people asked if we were adopted or if that was our ‘real mum’. My mum did a great job of making sure we had books, dolls and characters to look up to who did look like us but it was still a challenge. It can also be hard talking about race when coming from the position of privilege held by a white woman, and for that I commend my mum for the way she went about making her two little mixed children feel comfortable to be themselves. This lack of representation carried over into my gymnastics career. I spent 16 years dedicating time to my craft, four of those years as a student athlete on the Oregon State Women’s Gymnastics team. For the very first time I was on a team with Black girls. I had only ever
competed alongside one other Black girl for 12 years of my entire career in Australia. To say there was an underwhelming lack of representation would be an understatement. I’ve experienced microaggressions throughout my life from teachers, classmates, friends, teammates and coaches. Although many of them I did not understand at the time due to ignorance, I am aware now. I had my first African American teacher in my 14th year of school. I was a freshman in college when I started to finally dissect what being Black meant to me, and it was all because I had a teacher who resonated with me and made me feel like it was ok to be authentic. For the first time I took pride in looking the way I did. Not because people thought it was cool, or because I was the token Black friend but because I had a teacher who saw me for exactly who I was and didn’t brush over the fact that I was Black.

**History of Higher Education**

Although I will be discussing the ways in which women have navigated their way through this complex system, it is crucial to understand the history of higher education and the initial plan for its use. Wilder (2013) highlights how this corrupt system was initially designed for white, upper class, Christian men. The purpose of higher education was to further advance the White Christian Man and his bloodline to ensure the dominance, superiority and longevity of their race (Wilder, 2013). The knowledge acquired by such men was used as a weapon and exploited Black and Indigenous lives (Wilder, 2013). Christian expansionism was a large driving force of the first colleges, and was used as a tool where they would assert dominance and power over the Indigenous people and their communities (Wilder, 2013). The difference between the African slaves and the Indigenous people, was that African slaves were seen exchangeables goods who lacked the morals and intelligence to those of the Indigenous. Black people were seen as "cut out
for hard labor and fatigue", words such as "artistry and intelligence" were used to describe the Indigenous (Wilder, 2013). The colonial settlers justified their wrong doings and mistreatment as they were instructed by God. The very small portion of Indigenous children that were allowed to attend school were completely stripped of their culture, language, and Indigenous identity (Wilder, 2013). They were seen as easy prey who could be converted without struggle or complaint and then return to their homes having been “exemplars of the benefits of English culture” (Wilder, 2013 pg 28).

Without the slave trade and the exploitation of Black people, there would be no higher education. The funding of colleges was made through slave trading and slaveholders, which lead to the development of nicer universities being built in wealthier areas, appeasing the ideal market of rich white men (Wilder, 2013). The most powerful slave traders soon became wealthy enough to be named university presidents. Colleges had become so dependent on slave labour they were confident in their methodology and showed no remorse for the damage and mistreatment of Black people (Wilder, 2013). It was completely normalized and considered to be a “pre-condition for the rise of higher education in the Americas” (Wilder, 2013 pg 114). According to Wilder (2013), colleges played a large role in the way dissect and understand race, racism and white supremacy. The “multiple relationships to slavery” discussed in the Ebony and Wilder interview reveals how the survival and success of these American colleges depended upon their ability to exploit that trade and when the African slave trade reaches its peak, colonial institutions tripled (Ebony & Ivy, 2013).

Race, gender and gynecological beginnings

It is important to understand that Black women have been abused and mistreated long before they were granted access to a college education through medical research and
experimentation of treatments and procedures. On top of being slaves, Black women were experimented on for the advancement of medicine that white folk benefited from (Owen, 2017). Once their bodies and labor were no longer required they were dispensable and this cycle went on for years, and can be linked to the continued mistreatment and diagnosis of Black women falling victim to the healthcare system. The “immutability of blackness” (Owen, 2017) was perpetuated by slavery as it created an environment in which Black women experienced more rigorous labour than white women, and were led to believe Black women could sustain the corporal punishment men received.

“Elite” white men formed a cohort of doctors that would perform their gynecological examinations on Black women. The reproductive medicine was essential to the maintenance and success of southern slavery, especially during the antebellum era (Owens, 2017). The antebellum era saw the largest migration and sale of Black women in the nation’s young history. The gynecological examinations affected the country’s slave markets, as each slave sold was examined medically so she could be priced (Owens, 2017).

Fast forward to today's society, we are still seeing how implicit biases are affecting Black women and minorities within the healthcare system (Bridges, N.D). The maternal mortality rate for Black women is three and a half times higher than that of their white female counterparts (Manke, 2020). The idea that Black women feel less pain, stems from the torture so many endured and survived as they were continuously experimented on. As I move throughout this chapter, you will see how important it is to know where it all started.

**History of Black Women in Higher Education**

The unique social contract faced by Black women as they navigated their way through higher education, was due to the intersectionality of their race and gender (Evans, 2016). The
double oppression Black women experience affected the way they were able to navigate their way through these spaces and left many Black women woefully behind in college access. The first Black woman to graduate with a bachelor's degree was Mary Jane Patterson, a teacher from Oberlin College (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2014). She is considered the first African-American woman to earn a bachelor’s degree in 1862. Twelve years prior in 1850, Lucy Ann Stanton received a certificate in literature from Oberlin College (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2014). Although she received a certificate and was a graduate, she did not receive a bachelor's degree. These two women opened doors for the rest to come, however it is also important to understand that Mary Jane Patterson graduated with her bachelors degree 200 years after a white male, forty years after a black man, and nearly twenty-five years after three white women received the B.A. from Oberlin in 1841 (Evans, 2016).

As the number of Black women grew on campuses, their options in curriculum did not. Black women were restricted to the Literary Course, regarded as the “ladies’ course” designed to be less academically challenging vs “gentlemen’s course” offering Bachelor’s degree programs (Evans, 2016). As encouraging as it was to have finally gained access to higher education, the gaps started to appear in areas that were still not just nor fair. At the time, the northern states were considered to be more liberal, so although most college students attended institutions in their home states, many families moved from the southern slavocracy to middle or northern states in hopes of their daughters having a greater chance to participate in college (Evans, 2016). The women who attended predominantly white institutions (PWIs) during the antebellum era did not always suffer the mob violence that would plague black students in the 1950s desegregation efforts, but they were not exempt from mistreatment. Schools who were integrated experienced an undercurrent of race antagonism as well as cases of overt hostility. On top of this, Black students were subject to
racism by students, staff, and faculty, or by institutional policies that regulated curriculum, housing, meals, and social interaction (Evans, 2016). Isolation was a significant part of the student experience, despite attempts to include black students in campus life and the lack of a critical mass also had a chilling effect.

**History of Title IX**

In order to understand how complex this law has been, we must acknowledge more ways that the lack of access has historically set Black women back. The first being that Black women have been disproportionately located at the lower end of the economic hierarchy and, therefore, have been unable to afford private lessons in the “growth” sports such as golf, swimming, or tennis (Evans, 1998). Overt racial discrimination is the other way we have prevented black women from gaining access to the sports participated in by white women (Evans, 1998). Historically speaking, Black women have been excluded from the image of women as weak and frail. Dating back to the gynecological beginnings explored earlier in this chapter, we have seen that Black women in America have never rested on the pedestal created to protect the supposed pre-determined timidity of women (Evans, 1998). Black women have been stereotyped from the beginning as they were not granted the access to sports like white women due to them being a necessity of work.

As Black women finally were granted access to the privilege of sport, and continued to make strides within higher education, we started to see how Black female athletes began navigating their way through this new system. According to the U.S Department of Higher Education (2015). Title IX protects people from discrimination based on sex in the education system or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. It states that:
“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

This applies to institutions that receive federal financial assistance from education including state and local educational agencies. These agencies include approximately 16,500 local school districts, 7,000 postsecondary institutions, as well as charter schools, for-profit schools, libraries, and museums (U.S Department of Higher Education, 2015). Also included are vocational rehabilitation agencies and education agencies of 50 states, the District of Columbia, and territories and possessions of the United States (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2014). This law helps predominately white women move throughout the system, leaving Black women behind yet again. Evans explains how Title XI can be seen as a vehicle of protection that only seeks to serve one class of discrimination; gender not race (Evans, 1998).

Until recently, Black female participation in interscholastic athletics has been limited to sports that are the least expensive for both the participant and the school (Pickett, Dawkins & Braddock, 2012). This is why we consistently see an overwhelming amount of Black female athletes partaking in sports like basketball and track & field. According to the NCAA, since 1995, other emerging sports appearing on NCAA member institution college campuses include ice hockey, water polo, rugby, and equestrian (NCAA, 2009). If you look at the statistics from a racial demographic, we see that the majority of these participants are white women. Title XI has done a great job of empowering women, but Black women suffer again due to the intersection of race, class and gender that continuously sets them back. The connection between the history of higher education, and the exclusion is evident in the NCAA. Although Black women have made strides, and are now able to attend universities, it is laws like Title XI that still do not fully welcome Black
women into this space. One example of how Title XI benefits white women over Black women, is deciphered through expanding the scholarship opportunities and increasing numbers of female athletes receiving awards, Black female athletes have not been proportionately represented in the awards granted (Pickett, Dawkins & Braddock, 2012). The Women’s Sports Foundation found that Black females have been consistently underrepresented in 20 of the 25 sports where the NCAA maintains participation statistics (Women’s Sports Foundation, 1988). Many colleges and universities have complied with Title IX by adding these “growth sports for women, such as golf, squash, and tennis (Evans, 1998). Note that these are played predominantly by white women and are far more expensive and less accessible to many Black people and communities.

To confirm the imbalance of reward regarding this law, we can see that from 1999 to 2006, the percentage of Black female basketball athletes had increased steadily from 35.7% to 44.6%, yet the percentage of Black female athletes as a whole only increased from 9.4% to 10.7% (Pickett, Dawkins & Braddock, 2012). This also begs the question, how does the lack of representation across NCAA sports affect young girls and their desire to play outside of Black dominated sports?

As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, as a gymnast of 16 years, I never felt seen as a Black girl in my sport until I participated in collegiate gymnastics. ‘Brown Girls Do Gymnastics’, is an organization that advocates for Brown Girls and helps to guide them through their acribating careers, promoting gymnastic and circus (Billman, 2020). Through this organization, there are camps, clinics and mentorship opportunities provided for young Black girls within this field. Programs and organizations like this are powerful ways to increase awareness and a sense of community and belonging in predominantly white sports such as gymnastics.

My experiences as a biracial Black woman have shaped me into the woman, and scholar I am today. As I navigate my way through both the higher education system and as a student athlete,
it continues to drive me to want better for Black women. Black women have been left out and held down for too long by both the system and the people around us. If history has taught us anything, it’s that Black women have provided us with more than they’ve been acknowledged for. The pain endured by slaves turned into the blueprint for modern day medicine and the lack of access to an education has led to some of the most renowned scientists, doctors, civil rights activists and culturally rich institutions the United States has ever seen. Black women deserve every success and opportunity, because without Black women, we have nothing.

**Discussion questions**

1. Are there currently any federal, state laws in regards to the protection of Black students in higher education? (like those for women - Title XI)

2. In what ways can we encourage Black faculty and staff to either apply or stay on board their institution.

3. For current professionals - What social justice and racial bias training are you required to do? If you answered yes, is this mandatory, and how often is it offered?

4. For current professionals - if you were granted the access to make institutional change, what would be your first item of action?


CSSA 520: Multicultural Issues in Higher Education, Final Paper - The Effects of Underrepresentation of Faculty and Staff of Color in Higher Education

Abstract

The lack of representation within administration, faculty and staff throughout higher education is overwhelming. However, it is not surprising. It does not come as a shock to have such a low number of BIPOC, women, and LGBTQ+ educators, and administrators, when the system was not intended for them. Faculty and staff of color are able to relate to diverse populations on campus, in a way that many white faculty are unable to do. Because of this, many students of color feel safer confiding in, and seeking help from those who they feel will be able to empathize with them on a deeper level. Seeing someone in a position of power such as a professor, or administrator, provides students with the representation that they are not alone, and they too can be in such positions one day. Unfortunately, many faculty and staff of color do not feel supported on campus, or within the institution. This results in higher turnover rates, unpleasant working environments, and also affects the students who need their support the most. This article will explore the effects of the ongoing underrepresentation of faculty and staff of color, as well as highlight key statistics, resources, and ways to better support and serve this population.

Introduction

In order to understand why there is such a lack of representation of color within higher education, we must first understand that higher education was not intended for folks of color, LGBTQ+, or women. According to Wilder (2013) higher education was initially intended for white, upper class, Christian men, to further advance his bloodline to ensure the dominance, superiority and longevity of their race (Wilder, 2013). This knowledge was then used as a weapon to exploit Black and Indigenous lives, through violence, destruction and manipulation (Wilder, 2013). Since the beginning, people of color have been excluded from higher education, which
made it hard for the trailblazers to earn their spots in this field. As students of color started to step foot on campus in greater numbers, we haven't seen the same jump in the number of BIPOC faculty.

A study done by the National Center for Education Statistics in the fall of 2018, showed that of the 1.5 million faculty in degree-granting colleges in the U.S, 40% were white men. White women accounted for 35%, Asain/Pacific Islander males, 7%, and women 5%, and Black and Hispanic men and women accounted for just 3%. Those who identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, and those who were two or more races, made up 1% of the full-time staff (National Center for Education Statistics). Students of color made up 45.2% in 2016 (Dedman, 2019), which is what makes the lack of diversity among faculty so disappointing to see. My intersectionality as a Black, biracial woman and international student in higher education, has significantly impacted my ability to connect with the majority of my professors and support staff. Prior to college, I was taught by just one teacher of color, my Indonesian teacher Bu. Sha, in years 7 through 10. I was taught by my first African American professor in the spring term of my freshman year of college, and since then, I have had 3 Black professors. The connections I was able to have with these particular professors is what made me realize how important it is for all students to have the opportunity to see themselves represented in the classroom.

Over the years, we have seen the need for diversity in the classrooms, as the student body begins to grow and the gap between student and teacher demographics increases. However, it’s not just the hiring of faculty, it's the retention (Barnum, 2018). In North Carolina, the turn over rates among Black teachers are high, and the schools Black teachers work at, receive less funding, access to resources, less effective mentoring, and lower quality professional development (Barnum, 2018). This leaves teachers of color leaving the schools with more diverse populations,
to teach at schools that are going to provide them with better working conditions, often the schools with more white students. This is a vicious cycle that doesn’t end up benefiting nearly as many people as it could if teachers of color would receive the support and resources needed to function at their best to help mentor as many students of color as possible.

**Literature Review**

The stress and pressure of being the only, or 1 of few, faculty members of color at a predominately white institution, increases tenfold as they are often left to mentor students of color. The responsibility to be the comfort for so many students, can be overwhelming for faculty of color, and they need support too. Oftentimes professors of color have been hired as tokens, and can feel invisible. Hiring minority staff can also be seen as compliance or risk mitigation, rather than a business (Williams, N.D).

Settles et al., (2019) highlights tokenism and hypervisibility accompanied with the experiences of being a faculty member of color. They drew from 118 interviews with faculty of color, and identified six themes related to the complexities of their roles. Tokenism was a common theme among the staff, as were feelings of hypervisibility in diversity work, and invisibility when excluded by their colleagues and the department (Settles et al., 2019). Hypervisibility can be linked back to tokenism. Institutions take pride in having faculty of color because it makes them look good on paper. When we take a look inside, and see how they are really being treated, we see a different story. 9% of faculty described that to address their experiences of tokenism and exclusion, they increased their engagement to be perceived as *legitimate scholars* (Settles et al., 2019). In response to working harder to prove their worth to others, one participant said:

“The biggest strategy that I've used is to publish as much as I can. I think that in a lot of senses, that's the only strategy that works if you're a person of color and if you're a woman. If you
don't meet and go beyond expectations then …you'll always be vulnerable to somebody suggesting that you haven't done enough or you're not doing the same kind of work. So the thing I've done is be very active publishing and very active doing grant funded research”.

Similarly, another described this strategy as a response to others' perceptions of them:

“There're some people who wonder why I'm here, why I was hired. Is it because they need a [racial minority] person here? …So I hold myself to higher standards to make sure people have nothing to say.”

According to Settles et al., (2019) (in)visibly is a strategic way for staff to blend in and stand out, depending on the situation. This can be extremely taxing for staff, as it hinders them from being their authentic selves in the department.

McCluney & Rabelo (2019), argue that the way in which Black women are seen, valued and treated in the workplace, are often reinforced through the white, male lens. Women in higher education are scrutinized and have large amounts of pressure to always be on their a-game. Black women face an additional set of barriers due to the history of race in America, and in the education system. The double oppression Black women experience affected the way they were able to navigate their way through these spaces and left many Black women woefully behind in college access. The pressure for Black women, in particular, to perform and succeed at work, likely stems from the history of Black women and the way they were treated. They were slaves, sexual property and lab rate for medical experiments and gynecological advancement. When they were finally granted access to work, they were in subservient, low wage roles such as domestic house work (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019).

Partial visibility is seen as high distinctiveness and low belongingness (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). They go on to discuss how this increases the stereotypes and prejudice Black
women experience in the workplace, and how a study showed that all Black women had reported being mistaken for janitors at work. This is a very serious and problematic issue. Students of color need to see themselves represented in positions other than manual labor, and supportive roles.

Dedman (2019), addresses the fact that although college students are more diverse than ever, University administrators and staff are not. The percentage of marginalized student groups on campus has been increasing since 1996, and in 2016 students of color made up 45.2% of the student population. Despite these strides among students on campus, there is an overwhelming underrepresentation among staff and faculty. The report showed that 42.2% of service and maintenance staff and one-third of campus safety personnel were people of color (Dedman, 2019). Among the offices on campus, student affairs was most likely to have a person of color as their highest ranking administrator, whereas other departments were more likely to see people of color in service roles (Dedman, 2019).

For the students of color conducting ethnic studies research for graduate programs, they are often looking for ethnic scholars and mentors to help assist them in the process. Due to the lack of representation and diversity among many institutions, many of these students terminate their research and studies because it becomes too difficult to find a mentor in their chosen field (Padilla, 1994). Mentorship contributes a great deal to the overall success of a student's college experience, and it is a shame that so many miss out on the opportunity to find that in a professor or faculty member at their chosen institution. This can also lead to imposter syndrome for the students who do not feel as if they belong in higher education, simply because they are unable to see it being done by others around them.

Imposter syndrome refers to an internal experience of believing you are not as competent as others perceive you to be (Cunic, 2021). This is very common among students, in particular
students of color in higher education. Martinez (2018), draws on personal experience to shed light on his aspirations as a faculty member. For many students of color, the lack of representation in the field solidified their beliefs that it may not be the place for them to succeed themselves. The power of having just one mentor who can relate to you on a personal level is one of the reasons why it is so crucial to ensure our faculty of color feels supported.

**Solutions**

Cultural centers on campus provide students with a community many do not have when attending a PWI. College is a time of great change, and development, and this is intensified when one feels as if they are doing it alone. Oregon State University is home to 7 cultural centers; Asian & Pacific Cultural Center, Lonnie B. Harris Black Cultural Center, Centro Cultural César Chávez, Ettihad Cultural Center, Native American Longhouse Eena Haws, Pride Center, and the Women and Gender Center (Oregon State University). [https://dce.oregonstate.edu/cultural-resource-centers](https://dce.oregonstate.edu/cultural-resource-centers)

These 7 centers provide marginalized groups of students with a safe space to express themselves and spend time with people who are able to understand and connect with one another on a level many do not understand. For many students of color, finding a sense of belonging on campus when you are the minority can be extremely difficult. Code switching, and constantly having to hide, or suppress certain identities is taxing, and everyone deserves the space to be free, and unapologetically themselves.

To combat the hypervisibility and invisibility of faculty of color, moving forward, institutions should be striving to create environments where faculty of color can experience positive visibility. Staff of color need to be highlighted for their hard work, merit and contributions, as much as their white counterparts. The more we can encourage Black faculty to be themselves and step into their authentic self, the less energy they spend on trying to fit the mold of
what the University wants from them, and they can start focusing on being the best person they can be for their students. The 2017-2018 Oregon State Final Report of the President and Provost’s Leadership Council for Equity, Inclusion and Social Justice, explores a range of topics, including recruitment and retention, faculty and staff recruitment and retention and bias incident response committees. The Oregon State work group has suggested key recommendations to ensure they are meeting the needs of their faculty and staff. These include; opportunities for dialog after critical bias incidents, develop skill building curriculum accessible to all students and staff in regards to bias incidents, and increase awareness and trust in the bias incident responses (Final Report, 2017-18).

**Conclusion**

Students need representation, but there needs to be as much emphasis on providing staff of color with the space and support in which they are able to thrive as well. Institutions must do better catering to faculty members of color so they can work in environments they feel comfortable. In turn, this will allow them to best help the students who need them most. There needs to be better support and resources set up for faculty of color, to avoid burnout and high turnover rates, as well as retention practices set up to ensure their longevity. It starts from within, and the students of color in this country need role models who look like them in positions of power. Representation matters to students, and faculty and staff need better treatment so they continue to break down barriers and inspire the next generation.
CSSA 554: Legal Issues in Higher Education, Research paper

Memorandum

DATE: March 3, 2022
TO: Vice Provost of Student Affairs
FROM: Isis Lowery, Chair, Board of Admissions at Oregon State University
SUBJECT: Developing a More Equitable and Just Admissions Process for Students of Colour at Oregon State University

Introduction

The Vice Provost of Student Affairs at Oregon State University has asked me, the Chair of Board of Admissions, to develop a more equitable and just admissions process for students of colour at the institution. The VP is trusting that the board can implement new and creative ways to recruit more students from minority backgrounds, without setting specific quotas. The VP believes that there is more we can be doing to admit students who do not have the same privileges as their counterparts. As a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) there has been talk circulating that OSU is not doing enough in the admissions process to make our campus a more desirable and welcoming environment for the growing diverse student population and current students of colour on campus. Throughout this memo I will be highlighting key milestones in the admissions process, as well as offering my unbiased opinion on the future for what an equitable and just admissions system looks like at Oregon State University.

History of Oregon

In order to understand the importance of a just admissions process, I believe we must first acknowledge the history of Oregon and Oregon State University (OSU). Oregon was declared the 33rd U.S state in 1859 (Marts, n.d). By 1883, following several conflicts with the U.S. settlers, most of the Native Americans of Oregon had been moved to reservations (Marts, n.d). The state had quickly become a whites-only utopia and was then the only state with laws specifically prohibiting certain races from legally living, working, or owning property within its borders (Marts, n.d). Such laws deterred Black, Chinese, Hawaiian (Kanakas), and Mulatto (those of mixed ethnic heritage) folk from residing in Oregon during this time (Rector, 2010). In 1844, Oregon’s
provisional government passed the Black Exclusion Bill, which included a section known as the “Lash Law”. This law prohibited African Americans from entering the state and required all former slaves who had settled in Oregon to leave (Strochlic, 2021). It wasn’t until 1926 that The Black Exclusion Bill was removed from the constitution (Nokes, 2022). By 1940 there were fewer than 2,500 Black folks among the 1.5 million residents in Oregon (Strochlic, 2021).

According to the 2020 Census, the racial and ethnic demographic of Oregon consists of 74.8% White; 2% Black or African American; 1.5% American Indian and Alaska Native; 4.6% Asian; 0.5% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; and 10.5% of the population accounts for two or more races (United States Census Bureau, 2021). As an institution, it is important to know the demographic of the state when taking steps to diversify their campus. In predominantly white areas like Oregon, it is going to be a lot harder as a school to appeal to POC (people of colour) students and faculty, without it seeming performative. At the end of this memo, I will share the board’s thoughts and ideas on ways we can increase diversity on campus and through the admissions process.

**History of Oregon State University**

Oregon State University was founded in 1856 and became a land grant institution in 1968 under the provisions of the Morrill Act of 1862 (Landis, 2018). The Morrill Act of 1862, provided land grants to states so they could finance the establishment of colleges specialising in agriculture and the mechanical arts (Landis, 2018). In 2019, the enrolled student population at OSU was 59.8% white; 10.1% Hispanic or Latino; 7.36% Asian; 6.61% two or more races; 1.44% Black or African American; 0.542% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.221% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders (Data USA, n.d). From this data, we can see that our student body is a fairly accurate representation of the state’s demographic. Personally, I do not believe the state of
Oregon is the ideal model of diversity, therefore comparing percentage ratios with an underwhelming diverse state, shouldn’t define our institution as successful in this area. Instead, I encourage you, the V.P, to actively work with the admissions office to help support our efforts to do right by our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) students, in creating an environment that is safe and equitable for all.

As an Oregon Public University, we the board understand that OSU is dedicated to the people of the state. While Affirmative Action policies have helped provide greater access to higher education for underrepresented students, we must be mindful of the potential backlash from non-BIPOC from students and families who do not belong to underrepresented groups. As a board, we are trying to diversify our campus without the setting of quotas and percentage targets. Instead, we are working to create an environment where students from all backgrounds and walks of life can feel safe and welcomed at OSU.

Eight states in the U.S have enacted laws banning the consideration of race in university admissions (Ballotpedia, n.d). As of March 2015, Oregon was not one of these states and of the seven, 4 year public schools in Oregon, just two of them reported the consideration of race in admissions (Ballotpedia, n.d). So the question still begs to differ, how do we acknowledge race in attempts to diversify campus, without it being a deciding factor for university admissions, violating The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964?

**The History of Admissions and Racial Segregation in Higher Education**

At Oregon State, we pride ourselves on the holistic admissions process we have in place, which looks at a broad number of considerations, with the goal of identifying and admitting students who have the skills, abilities, and drive to succeed at OSU (Oregon State University,
Although we are at a place now in history, where race alone can not lawfully deny someone the access to education, we must acknowledge that not that long ago, it was.

The history of higher education in the United States is complex. In its earliest beginnings, higher education was initially designed for white, upper class, Christian men (Wilder, 2013). The purpose of higher education was to further advance the white Christian man and his bloodline, to ensure the dominance, superiority and longevity of their race (Wilder, 2013). The explicitly obtained knowledge from higher education, was then used as a weapon to exploit Black and Indigenous lives, while asserting dominance and power over their communities (Wilder, 2013).

By the late 1800s, academic expectations were on the rise and according to James Jay Greenough, Harvard hopefuls were tested on:

“an elementary working knowledge of Latin and Greek ... French and German ... English classical literature ... algebra and plane geometry ... the laws and phenomena of physics ... descriptive physics and elementary astronomy ... and, last ... the history and geography either of ancient Greece and Rome or modern England and America” - as well as the ability to write and speak intelligently about those subjects. (Necklason, 2019).

Such literature was only taught at prestigious prep schools, that only wealthy, white Christian men had access to (Necklason, 2019). Requirements such as these excluded women and people of colour from having any chance of acceptance into universities. While a topic of debate in today’s society, in the early 1900s, standardising the admissions criteria allowed for low-income students from public schools, the opportunity to attend elite schools who historically were not designed for (Necklason, 2019).

In the mid 1950s, Brown v. Board of Education 347 U.S. 483 (1956), was momentous in the desegregation of schools in the U.S. This Supreme Court decision declared state laws establishing
separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional (Weinstein, 2004). The *Brown v. Board of Education*, 1956 decision, prevented more black children being denied equal educational opportunities, and thus began the process of integration within public schools and affirmative action policies (Weinstein, 2004). This decision also led the way for The Civil Rights Movement not only for Black and African-Americans, but for other marginalised groups as well (Weinstein, 2004).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, affirmative action admissions programs were undertaken by both public and private institutions (Ballotpedia, n.d). Affirmative action is the consideration of race, gender, national origin or other identities protected under non-discrimination laws, to increase opportunities for underrepresented or disadvantaged groups (Kaplin & Lee, 2014). Historically speaking, affirmative action has taken the forms of quotas, additional outreach and racial and gender preferential treatment (Ballotpedia, n.d). The reason why myself and the board of admission are not suggesting quotas and percentage targets, is largely due to the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *The Regents of the University of California v. Bakke 438 U.S. 265* case in 1978. This was the Supreme Court decision that barred quota systems in college admissions but affirmed the constitutionality of affirmative action programs. Alan Bakke, a white male, was rejected twice from the University of California medical school and argued that the school's affirmative action policy to reserve 16 of 100 spots for qualified minority students, violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Natt et al., 2020) — The law prohibiting discrimination based on race, colour, or national origin in admissions to educational and/or academic programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance History (Natt et al., 2022).
While the university’s goal was to increase enrollment of minority students, in doing so, white students felt they were now the ones at a disadvantage. Cases like *The Regents of the University of California v. Bakke 1978*, are important to learn from so we do not make the same mistakes, no matter what the intentions of the admissions board are.

The board and I suggest that we develop more diverse scholarship opportunities for underrepresented community members. By diversifying our scholarships, we are hoping to appeal to more folks who have been historically underserved and underrepresented. We have also discussed the potential overlap of specific demographics. For example, creating a scholarship focused towards lower income students who live in areas that have been historically redlined. Redlining is the discriminatory practice of denying folks access to financial services such as mortgage lenders and insurance companies, to residents of certain areas based on their race or ethnicity (Perry & Harshbarger, 2019). The term ‘redlining’ comes from drawing red ink on maps, to clearly identify which areas would be denied specific access to resources and predominantly affected Black neighbourhoods and cities (Perry & Harshbarger, 2019). Even since *The Fair Housing Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601 - 3619* and its prohibition of discrimination by direct providers of housing and financial services (The United States Department of Justice, 2022), communities with high populations of BIPOC folk are still affected by redlining today. An example of modern day redlining, is the lack of funds and resources allocated to schools in certain areas.

So, by recognising this issue, a new scholarship directed towards those impacted by redlining will likely apply to more students of colour. Therefore, this scholarship would remove the explicit basis race from the scholarship, yet still target the intended demographic of BIPOC students, without violating the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and discriminatory policies at OSU.
The board and I also wanted to highlight that while Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. 1681 et. seq, sex discrimination is prohibited in educational programs and activities that receive or benefit from Federal financial assistance (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021), we must still consider the intersection of race and gender in higher education. Historically speaking, the unique social contract faced by Black women as they navigated their way through higher education, was due to the intersectionality of their race and gender (Evans, 2016). The double oppression Black women experience, left many woefully behind in college access (Evans, 2016). For some perspective, Mary Jane Patterson was the first Black woman to graduate with her Bachelor’s degree 200 years after the first white male, forty years after the first Black man, and nearly twenty-five years after three white women received the B.A. from the same school, Oberlin in 1841 (Evans, 2016).

As previously mentioned, The Morrill Act of 1862, provided land grants to states so they could finance the establishment of colleges specialising in agriculture and the mechanical arts (Landis, 2018). However, due to several states having segregated systems, students of colour were excluded from those land grant colleges (Museus et al., 2015). Because of this, Congress passed the second Morrill Act of 1890, providing funding for these states to establish separate land grant colleges for Black students (Museus et al., 2015). Unfortunately, while the expansion of the Morrill Land Grant Acts helped provide students of colour, who were previously denied access to the predominantly White colleges and universities, this also helped facilitate the segregation of Black and white public institutions (Museus et al., 2015).

**Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)**

When considering the impact Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs); Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs); Tribal Colleges and
Universities (TCUs) and Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AAPISIs), have had on these communities, I believe we can learn a lot from critical mass and its significance for underrepresented students. Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) are institutions that serve minority populations (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2021). According to the American Council on Education (ACE), in the fall of 2016 these institutions collectively enrolled over 5 million undergraduate and graduate students across the country (American Council on Education, n.d). Newly released data from the Equal Opportunity Project, reveal trends among MSIs that support the upward mobility of communities of colour where educational attainment is disproportionately low (Espinosa et al., 2018). The Equal Opportunity Project tracks the 1980–91 birth cohorts of young adults through 2014, via student and parent tax records from the IRS (Espinosa et al., 2018). According to this data HBCUs, PBIs and HSIs enrolled between 45 and 53% of first generation college students, and across all MSIs, these four-year institutions drive more students from the lowest income quintile to the top income quintile than four-year non-MSIs (Espinosa et al., 2018). These institutions also enroll minority and low-income students at far larger percentages than the national average (Espinosa et al., 2018), which allows students of colour to build connections with substantial numbers of other students who share their backgrounds, making them more likely to succeed (Museus, 2014). The lack of critical mass — a rationale based on evidence suggesting that students are more likely to succeed when they are surrounded by a critical mass of peers who share their backgrounds (Museus, Jayakumar, & Robinson, 2012) — at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), can be detrimental to their learning. Without it, minoritised students are more likely to experience racial isolation and tokenism, placing them at greater risk of dropping out (Museus, 2015).
Something we can use to our advantage, is our access to resources and funds that MSIs unfortunately do not have. The board and I are suggesting that we include programming and organised clubs and groups, that pertain to a variety of students belonging to underrepresented communities. For example, programming for first-generation students, BIPOC students, International students and DACA students. The first step is to ensure we as an institution are equipped to offer such programs. Once established, we can incorporate them into the admissions process to give students the option to join/sign up ahead of time, that way upon enrollment they have found at least one designated space they can take advantage of.

While the board acknowledges Oregon State University will not mimic the environment of a MSI, looking to these institutions as a guide is a great place to start if we truly value BIPOC students feeling a sense of belonging on campus and in the surrounding community.

Applicable Cases

Earlier in this memo, I mentioned The Regents of the University of California v. Bakke in 1978 and its implications on affirmative action policy in admissions., as well as Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 and its part in the desegregation of public schools. I would like to share with you several other cases that have played integral parts in the history of admissions and efforts to actively diversify higher institutions of learning.

Marco DeFunis Jr. v. Odegard 416 U.S. 312, 1974

Marco DeFunis Jr., a white man, sued the University of Washington Law School’s admissions committee and state education officials, successfully gaining admission after he was denied admission claiming his Fourteenth Amendment right had been violated (Skelton, n.d). He argued that he was denied access to University of Washington Law School because the school had prioritised admitting minority students who were less qualified (Skelton, n.d). As I continue
throughout the memo, I urge you to take note of who is suing and what they look like. The board and I encourage you to consider how privilege and entitlement operates in the admissions process and throughout higher education.


In *Gratz v. Bollinger* 2003, The Supreme Court ruled that the University of Michigan’s admission policy of awarding points to underrepresented ethnic groups is too formulaic and, hence, unconstitutional (Cornell Law School, 2003). Jennifer Gratz, a white woman, applied to the University of Michigan’s undergraduate College of Literature, Arts, and Sciences in 1994 (The Center for Individual Rights, n.d). Due to the university’s grid system for prospective students, Gratz was denied admission even though her combined GPA and ACT scores would have been acceptable if she were considered a minority student (The Center for Individual Rights, n.d). It is for this reason, that we do not advise adopting a formulatic system to select applicants into OSU.

In *Grutter v. Bollinger* 2003, Barbara Grutter, a white woman, was denied admission to The University Of Michigan School Of Law just 2 years after Grutz was denied admission to the University of Michigan (The Center for Individual Rights, n.d). Like the undergraduate program, Michigan School of Law used a scoring system that was heavily weighted in favour of minority applicants. A white female applicant with Barbara Grutter’s scores had less than a 9% chance of admission, yet, under the same system, a minority applicant with the same scores had a 100% chance of admission (The Center for Individual Rights, n.d). Both plaintiffs had the right to be frustrated, because race seemed to be the primary determining factor between being admitted. In this specific case, The Supreme Court upheld the use of affirmative action in admissions, as they understood its importance for underrepresented applicants, but did not agree with the points system, at the University of Michigan’s Law School (Kramer, 2019).

In Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin I in 2013, Abigail Fisher, a white woman, was denied access to UT Austin in the Fall of 2008 and felt the university’s decision violated her right to equal protection, under the Fourteenth Amendment (The University of Texas at Austin, 2020). In 2013, The Supreme Court held that colleges must prove race-based admissions policies are the only way to meet diversity goals for the race-based policies to be upheld and thus voided the lower court's ruling in favour of UT. The case was remanded for further consideration after a 7–1 decision (American Council on Education, 2012).

In 2016, Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin II, Fisher appealed against the Fifth Circuit's decision and the Supreme Court agreed to hear her appeal (American Council on Education, 2012). After a 4-3 vote, The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of UT’s admissions policy, as they had a compelling interest in pursuing educational benefits that stem from having a diverse student body (American Psychological Association, 2015). In addition, Grutter v. Bollinger 2003 and Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin I & II in 2013 and 2016, were both emphasizing the importance of a “critical mass” for underrepresented students which I mentioned earlier (Museus, 2015).

Hopwood v. Texas, 78 F.3d 932, 1996

Since the Bakke v. Regents of the University of California (1978) decision, Hopwood v. Texas, 78 F.3d 932, 1996 was the first successful legal challenge to a university's affirmative action policy, as Bakke (1978) only rejected racial quotas and not affirmative action programs (The University of Rhode Island, n.d). In 1996 Cheryl Hopwood and three other white law-school applicants at the University of Texas, challenged the school’s affirmative action policy after they
were rejected in what they saw to be unfair preferences compared to less qualified minority applicants (The University of Rhode Island, n.d). The 5th U.S. The Court of Appeals suspended the university's affirmative action admissions program and ruled the 1978 *Bakke* decision as invalid. In 1977, a “race neutral criteria” would be adopted by Texas public universities in 1977, as announced by the Texas Attorney General (The University of Rhode Island, n.d). I believe the phrase “race-neutral criteria”, is as equally ignorant to one claiming they ‘do not see race’. While I understand the intentions of terms like “race-neutral” and ‘colourblind’, it is still insensitive and irresponsible for an institution to pretend like systemic racism isn’t woven into the fabric of higher education and the United States.

**Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2014**

In 2014, Edward Blum, an anti-affirmative action activist, created an organisation called The Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) (Harvard Admissions Lawsuit, 2022). This organisation sued Harvard Law School, alleging the university discriminates against Asian-Americans and seeks to prevent Harvard College and others, from using a thorough admissions process considering the whole person (Harvard Admissions Lawsuit, 2022).

In January of 2022, The Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), announced it would hear arguments likely in October, in a lawsuit challenging the *race-conscious* admissions policies at Harvard and the University of North Carolina (Walsh, 2022). Harvard President Larry Bacow, said the Court’s decision to take this case threatens decades of legal precedent and he insisted Harvard will continue to defend its admissions process in pursuit of a diverse campus (Walsh, 2022). I agree with President Bacow, that if this lawsuit against Harvard succeeds, I believe it would diminish the opportunities presented to underrepresented students through years of affirmative action policy, and contradict the mission of cases like *Brown v. Board of Education*
and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As SCOTUS only recently decided to hear arguments this year, we are unsure of what it means for the future of race-conscious affirmative action policies moving forward. While this will make it even harder for admissions to find ways to increase diversity and promote equity among applicants, the OSU Board of Admissions is committed to innovating new ideas they see fit.

In these decisions, prior to the recent SCOTUS decision, the Court has reinforced the constitutionality of several race-conscious admissions, but only when there is a compelling interest and the university abides by race-conscious policies specifically tailored to achieve that interest (Museus, 2015). As we continue to move forward, we as an institution must hold one another accountable to uphold decades of hard fought freedom for diversity, equity and equality.

**Considerations for Next Steps**

So moving forward, what can we do? The board of admissions has compiled a list of viable next steps, should you agree to develop a more equitable and just admissions process for students of colour at Oregon State University. Given the history, prior cases and applicable law, we believe these suggestions would comply with the compelling interest ‘required’ in affirmative action to provide race-conscious policies just, in the admissions process, free of quotas and percentages.

1) Develop scholarships for those affected by redlining

2) Provide more programming for underrepresented groups such as first generation students, BIPOC students, DACA students and international students, and display this information in a format within the admissions application where students can sign up/show interest prior to enrollment.

3) Create an outreach team that focuses specifically on relationship building with highschools in low-income areas and cities with higher populations of underrepresented communities.
4) Review scholarships and search for criteria that inherently disregards members of underrepresented folks.

5) Reconsider mandatory standardised testing (SATs/ACTs) or wave standardised testing all together. Instead consider admissions essays, grades and verified letters of recommendation.

6) Discontinue legacy admissions - all students will be admitted on their own merit.

7) Establish relationships with Minority Serving Institutions to develop a cross campus exchange program. This program will allow all students to experience a term at a different institution, to gain perspective and broaden one's cultural competence.

8) Actively hire, onboard and retain qualified faculty of colour. For example, diverse hiring may look like taking advantage of specific job posting boards or doing specific outreach to MSI graduates/employees. Utilising social media platforms is also a great tool. As a PWI, students of colour are rarely represented among faculty and administration. By diversifying our staff, I believe we will start to see an increase in the retention and well-being of our students of colour.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for backlash to occur when advocating for equality and equity among the student population. We as a board want to be transparent in saying that there will be calls and emails from donors, sponsors and guardians wanting to pull funds, cut ties and/or remove their children from institutions who are actively working to level the playing field in regards to diversity, equity and inclusion work. As much as we want to avoid this from happening, it is inevitable and we must be prepared to stand strong for what we believe in. That being, an institution who puts students first and uplifts communities who have been historically underrepresented.
Conclusion

As well as increasing diversity and promoting a culture of inclusivity on college campuses, an underlying purpose of affirmative action has always been to combat systemic racism (Museus, 2015). We do not stand alone as a board when we say race is woven into the fabric of society. Members of the Supreme Court have reaffirmed that race continues to matter when determining people’s life chances (Museus, 2015) and OSU should continue to be part of the efforts to help minimise the effects of racism and oppression affecting marginalised populations (Museus, 2015). Moving forward, I hope this memo sheds light on the current issues and obstacles within the admissions process. In the words of penned poet and activist Audre Lorde, “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”. (Perry & Harshbarger, 2019). While we cannot rewrite the history of higher education, we can lay down a foundation that will benefit all who are to come. It starts with admissions, but it must carry on through the course of the students’ entire college experience. Diversifying the process is only half of the battle. We need specific, community based programming and equitable policies to achieve inclusive excellence at OSU. I hope that through this memo, the board and I have provided you with enough history to help you form your own opinion on the matter, and decide whether or not you want OSU to stand on the side of history that fights for equity among its current and future student body.

If you have any questions or comments regarding the information within this memo, don’t hesitate to contact me at isis.lowery@oregonstate.edu.

Thank you for your time,
Isis Lowery
Chair, Board of Admissions
Oregon State University

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