

FINAL REPORT
Diversity and Inclusion in the Exercise Science Curriculum

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Purpose of the Grant

In the Exercise Science (ES) curriculum, all majors are required to take either Sport or Exercise Psychology (SEP). These classes have an emphasis on interventions to change behavior and how to work with people. As a field, SEP heavily relates its work to the biopsychosocial model. However, it has become clear that the “social” part of this model has been inadequately represented. Many organizations related to the SEP field (e.g., National Collegiate Athletics Association, Association for Applied Sport Psychology) realize to enhance the impact on those we serve (e.g. athletes, clients, patients), we need to consider social issues such as diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). For example, USA Swimming, the national governing body of the sport of swimming, has commented that topics of DEI are not just a “checkbox” topic for coaches but rather a lens through which relevant topics in the field should be viewed. These ideas are consistent with our most recent strategic plan, as well as that of the university; therefore, our plan was: 1) to determine where, or if, ES students are engaging with DEI issues and 2) to implement change in ES curriculum based on findings to help our students better understand DEI issues.

Methods

In order to do our work, we worked closely with faculty and students in our department to better understand where issues related to DEI are discussed and how we can continue to expand the reach and intentionality of these discussions. In order to better understand the experiences of students and faculty we:

1. Surveyed faculty about diversity and inclusion in the classroom
2. Created a diversity statement for the department
3. Surveyed students about DEI in the ES department
4. Conducted focus groups of students to better understand their experiences with DEI in the ES department
5. Evaluated two elements of Sport Psychology related to DEI: a singular class activity on implicit bias and a two-week class module on identity and performance
6. Began the exploration of engaging students-as-partners to expand DEI efforts in the classroom and co-curricular spaces in the ES department

The next sections will discuss specifically what was done and what was learned.

Faculty Survey

Prior to learning about the student experience, we decided to survey the faculty within the ES department questions about where they incorporate conversations about diversity and inclusion in the curriculum. As a result we created a Google form that asked the faculty in the department the following five questions:

1. In what ways have you brought Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) into the classroom (Exercise Science Courses) and/or discussion with students?
2. Where do you think you might be able to include DEI?
3. Where have DEI questions, topics etc. come up in your courses when you haven't expected it or addressed it intentionally?
4. What types of information/resources do you need to better include DEI into your work with students?
5. Anything else we should be thinking of as we work through our Diversity and Inclusion Grant this year?

All ten faculty members in the ES department completed the survey. From this we learned a few things:

- Every faculty member reported that they had tried to incorporate issues related to DEI in their course (e.g., discussion of health inequities; projects on diverse populations; how to work with clients, etc.)
- Many faculty discussed intentionality incorporating research examples with participants from diverse populations (e.g., race/ethnicity; gender; international); as well as, trying to show diverse representation in authors of research presented
- Some faculty specifically mention intentional discussion about issues around health inequities and disparities which address issues of DEI
- Faculty are interested in other ways to incorporate these issues into their specific classes and in curriculum as a whole

For more detail about this, please see Appendix A (Access to the Appendices can be gained from reaching out to Dr. Eric Hall - ehall@elon.edu; We have chosen not to make these public at this time).

Diversity Statement

Some of our initial work came about from drafting a diversity statement that could be used by the department. Our team drafted an initial statement and received feedback from our department. After much discussion and editing we developed a [diversity statement](#) which many

faculty discussed with students and incorporated into syllabi. Our department also decided that we wanted to bring attention to this and have also placed it on our [website for public view](#).

Student Climate Survey

One of the main goals of this project was to conduct a climate assessment of students who engage with the ES department. Therefore, we sent out a survey to 267 students who were exercise science majors or minors and dance science majors. This survey was first sent out in the fall semester (November) and then resent again in the spring semester (February) to reach more participants. The survey was created based on modified items from the [Higher Education Research Institute - Diverse Learning Environments survey](#). Our survey had questions related to the following topics:

- General Perceptions of Diversity and the Value of Diversity in the ES Department
- General Perceptions of the Inclusivity in the ES Department
- Discussing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Topics in the Classroom
- Factors Impacting Feelings of Belonging and Inclusivity in ES Department
- Personal Willingness to Engage in Discussions Around Identity

We had 70 (~25% completion rate) students take the survey, the demographics of our sample can be seen below.

Demographic	Number
<i>Major or minor</i>	
ES Major	58
Dance Science Major + ES Major or minor	5
ES Minor	4
Dance Science Major	2
Coaching Minor	1
<i>Year in School</i>	
First	13
Second	15
Third	18
Fourth	23
Did not answer	1
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	56
Male	14
<i>First Generation</i>	

No	63
Yes	7
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
White	53
Non-white	17
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>	
Straight/Heterosexual	64
Other	6
<i>Presence of Disability</i>	
Psychological disorder (depression, anxiety, etc.)	26
ADD or ADHD	12
Learning disorder	10
Mobility or dexterity disability	2
Speech or language disorder	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 42 reported 1 disability ● 10 reported multiple disabilities 	

Based on the demographics, we decided to statistically analyze (e.g., Analysis of Variance with $p < .05$) the data from our climate survey based on three different identities: gender, race/ethnicity and disability status (See Appendix B for full findings). From this data, we want to highlight a few findings we view as important:

- Overall the students in our department ***feel a sense of community in the Exercise Science department***
- Students are somewhat satisfied with the diversity of faculty and staff in the department, but less so with the diversity of their peers; however, ***non-white students reported much lower satisfaction of both faculty and students in the Exercise Science department***
- Overall students report being moderately satisfied that the department promotes an environment where cultural differences are appreciated; however, ***white students report much greater satisfaction in this than non-white students***
- Students reported being satisfied with how the Exercise Science department creates an atmosphere that addresses differences (e.g., political, religious, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) and respects diverse beliefs; however, ***men were less satisfied in atmosphere for political and religious differences and non-white student were less satisfied on these questions***

In our climate assessment, we also asked three open ended questions. The questions were:

1. How have you seen issues about DEI being integrated into the curriculum in Exercise Science? Yes/No If Yes - Can you give some examples?
2. What value do you see in these conversations related to DEI?

3. How relevant do you see discussions of DEI related topics to your future professions?

Some of the basic findings from these questions include:

- A majority of the responses either didn't report or state that issues about DEI had been integrated in the curriculum in Exercise Science
- Many of the students see value in these conversations and see how these discussions are related to their future professions

In summary, it seems that the Exercise Science department is doing a good job on creating an positive learning environment for our students, but there is definitely room for improvement, especially with our non-white students. Overall, it seems that race/ethnicity are primary drivers in this dissatisfaction, not gender or disability status, but we need to continue to monitor this and examine the intersection of these identities.

Focus Groups

When students completed the climate assessment survey, they were given the opportunity to engage in follow-up focus groups and discussion around DEI in Exercise Science. From this survey we had 18 respondents saying they would be interested in having further discussions; from this we did interviews with a total of 11 participants (2 with a student interviewer; 9 with a faculty member). The demographics of our focus group can be seen in the table below:

Demographic	Number
<i>Major or minor</i>	
ES Major	5
ES Minor	2
Dance Science Major	1
<i>Year in School</i>	
First	3
Second	0
Third	5
Fourth	3
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	8
Male	3
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	
White	6
Non-white	5

<i>Presence of Disability</i>	
No reported disability	7
1 reported disability	2
2+ reported disability	2

Overall, the demographics of our sample show a good amount of diversity.

For our focus groups, we had a prepared series of questions and follow-up questions. Those questions can be [found here](#). After giving an introduction about our research team and goals of our grant and the focus groups, we asked questions around the following ideas:

1. What is Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in their view?
2. Overall Atmosphere of the ES department related to DEI
3. How ES curriculum currently integrates DEI
4. Experiences in the classroom (e.g., personal or witnessed microaggressions)
5. Next steps for our department

Some key takeaways from these interviews/focus groups:

- Students had a good understanding of what the terms diversity, equity and inclusion mean and how our department and Elon can do better
- Students feel that as a whole the ES department is welcoming and inclusive, even if all members of the department don't share the students' multitude of identities
- Students feel that faculty should be intentionally discussing issues around DEI in their class

From these conversations a few other suggestions were made, that will be incorporated into our students-as-partners work in the future.

- Students would like faculty to think more intentionally about integrating DEI content into the course and not just making it a project because all students may not be engaging in the material the same way
- Faculty need to think about ways to make group work more inclusive; BIPOC students often end up working together and may not feel welcome taking advantage of group learning
- Faculty may need to show more support for neurodiverse students and the accommodations that come with this
- Students feel that faculty may need more training in how to incorporate DEI conversations in class

Overall, the conversations with the students highlighted that while they feel the ES department is welcoming and inclusive; they identified a number of ways in which our department can

improve. We hope to build on these discussions by working with students as partners to increase and amplify these discussions about DEI in the classroom.

Evaluation of Trusted Ten Class Activity and Sport Psychology Module and Course

During the spring semester, Dr. Walker identified two aspects of her sport psychology course that she would evaluate because she felt that they embodied the ideas of DEI. One was on an in-class activity she calls the Trusted Ten and the other is an assessment of a two-week long class module that examines the influence of identity in sport.

Trusted Ten Class Activity

The objectives of the Trusted Ten activity (see Appendix C for more detail of the activity and full evaluation results) include:

1. Introduce the concept of implicit bias.
2. Demonstrate concretely how limited our trusted circles/advice networks can be sometimes.
3. Identify strategies to expand our trusted circles.

The Trusted Ten Activity is designed to get students to realize how homogenous our close social networks can be and the implications of that homogeneity. As such, a common result for nearly all students is that their “trusted ten” social circle (those they would go to for advice, help with a challenge etc.) closely matches their identity demographics (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, age). As such, this finding helps to contextualize some general findings from the evaluation of this activity:

- Students largely enjoyed the activity exactly as it was designed: a mixture of personal reflection, small group, and larger group (whole class) discussion.
 - N = 29/41 “strongly agree” they liked this activity
 - N = 12/41 “agree” they liked this activity
- Students felt they learned something new about themselves and how diversity may be advantageous within their personal networks
 - “I learned it may be important to diversify your trusted circles, because other opinions and perspectives can help you grow as a person and be more considerate of others identities.”
- Students did not have many recommendations for improving the activity; however, several students wished the activity was made slightly longer and allowed for a further exploration of how to expand the diversity of the social networks.

Sport Psychology: Identity in Sport Mini-Module

Students were provided with a Qualtrics survey about class activities that may have examined issues of identity or DEI; specifically, they were asked to evaluate a two-week class discussion module focused on identity in sport. See Appendix D for more information about this assessment.

Twenty-one of 22 students from Dr. Walker’s class completed the survey. The demographics of these 21 students can be seen below.

Demographic	Number
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	14
Male	7
<i>Race</i>	
White	15
Non-white	6
<i>Ethnicity</i>	
Not Hispanic or Latino	17
Hispanic or Latino/Other	3
Did not answer	1
<i>Year in School</i>	
First	0
Second	13
Third	5
Fourth	3
<i>Presence of Disability</i>	
No reported disability	10
1 reported disability	7
2+ reported disability	4

Overall the results suggest that the students found the information enjoyable, meaningful, and felt it was presented in an effective way. Below are the findings from our survey.

Question	Mean (\pm SD)
Please rate your overall level of enjoyment with this unit:	3.8 \pm 1.0
Enjoyment aside, please rate the overall importance you feel this unit has within the content of this course (e.g. in comparison to other units/lectures in this course, how important is it for students to understand this information?)	4.5 \pm 1.0
Please rate the overall usefulness of this unit in helping you to further understand different identities and consider how biased, discriminatory, or microaggressive behaviors might appear in the field of sport and sport	4.2 \pm 0.8

psychology:	
Please rate how effective you felt the required article readings, videos etc. were in informing our class discussions on identity:	4.1 ± 0.9
Please rate how effective the discussion questions (provided on the class powerpoints) were in facilitating conversations on identity:	4.4 ± 0.7
Please rate how effective the required article readings, videos, class facilitate questions/examples etc. were in representing diverse experiences and identities in sport:	4.1 ± 0.8
Please rate how effective you felt Dr. Walker was in facilitating a conversation space that allowed for all views to be represented and respected:	4.6 ± 0.9
The overall goal of this unit was to make the argument that identity is strongly tied to the athlete's experience in sport and several sport psychology concepts of interest (e.g., motivation, stress/arousal, team cohesion). How effective was this unit of material in making this connection?	4.6 ± 0.9

*****Scores were out of 5; the higher the score the more favorable the response***

The overall findings from this survey suggest that this unit could be a model, or at least provide some useful insights, for courses in ES and how to integrate DEI into our pedagogy. We also asked some open-ended questions about ways in which the class sessions could be revised; while we did not do a complete analysis of these questions, the overall response was good in that the students enjoyed the content and organization of the sessions. This can be useful for us to consider as we move forward into Stage 2 of our grant next academic year.

Future Steps for Stage 2 of Diversity Inclusion Grant 2021-2022

As we conclude our work on Stage 1 of our Diversity Inclusion Grant, we have identified what our next steps will be for Stage 2. After collecting all of our data, we have identified that we would like to continue our work with a students as partners framework to help us with curriculum design (Bovill, 2020; Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Through our focus groups we have identified at least 7 students who would like to continue to work with us in the upcoming academic year. We anticipate that we will work with students in two different ways. First, we are going to recommend that our department create a DEI committee which will be made up of faculty and students in our department. Second, we plan on intentionally working with students in ESS 489 - Teaching and Learning Apprenticeship. For the latter, we have identified five rising seniors that may be willing to work with faculty as student partners to think about how we can build in more intentional conversations around DEI in our curriculum. Our current plan is that

we will match the five students with one of the five faculty members on our Stage 2 Diversity Inclusion grant. The goal is that the SEP faculty (Hall, Walker and Piepmeier) will implement and evaluate ideas into the curriculum in the fall semester and Madzima and Wittstein will implement them in the spring semester. In addition to thinking about ES curriculum; we will engage our student partners in discussions about our current diversity statement to think about if there are ways in which we might want to revise this.

Another activity that the faculty may be involved in order to prepare for the work next fall is to engage with other departmental faculty and students in a book club to discuss DEI issues. The ES department has a history of leading such conversations in the summer with undergraduate research students. This summer we will consider ways to expand the reach of this program.

The group will also investigate ways to incorporate DEI into introductory level classes (e.g., Intro to ES; Research Methods and Neuromotor Control) as part of this grant, but also hopes to secure some funding for this work through the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Grant that Elon has to integrate DEI into the classroom.

The last thing this group hopes to do is to work with Institutional Research to see if data from their office can be identified that might inform our work. Elon has previously used the HERI DLE items and we would like to see how our data might compare to their data. Also, Elon has used the College Student Survey which has a diversity theme and may be useful for us to examine and possibly compare in future data collections.