

Theory Into Practice Strategies: Culturally Inclusive Participation in Sport

University Community

A culturally inclusive university is one where staff and students actively engage with one another, where similarities and differences are explored and valued, and where staff and students interact and learn through alternate cultures.

Participation in sport is an important part of university life. It is the responsibility of university clubs, associations and individuals who are involved in planning sporting events (whether they be social or competition) to aim for the range of activities to be relevant and appropriate for the diverse university community. Providing culturally inclusive sporting events and opportunities for participation in sport encourages staff and students to take part and helps them to develop contacts, make friends and enhance communication skills.

A website called 'Play by the Rules' is a useful resource offering guidelines on discrimination in sport, frequently asked questions, training courses, policies, networking opportunities and relevant links to further web resources. Endorsed by the Australian Sports Commission and the New South Wales Department for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, it is available at <http://www.playbytherules.net.au>.

Benefits of participation in sport for individuals

Many individuals are under great pressure to perform well academically and/or professionally and are hesitant about participating in any activity that they see as unrelated to their work. Frequently, sport is seen as a distraction from work and/or study and a 'frivolous activity'. Individuals are often unaware of the direct academic, professional and social advantages of participation in leisure and recreation activities.

'The skills learnt from socialising with Australian and other international students were a key factor in my employment success. These skills include introducing myself, listening, asking questions, maintaining a conversation and discussing contentious topics with someone with a different cultural perspective. Another important aspect of socialising is the network of friends and contacts one establishes on a worldwide scale.'

International student

For participants, increased involvement in sport can lead directly to improved physical and mental health. Participation also helps people to create and maintain wider social networks, which provide balance to a hectic work and/or study program. Such balance is important, as it is easy for busy individuals to become socially isolated by concentrating only on one area. A balanced lifestyle including physical activity can result in better concentration while studying and better success rates, and can lead overall to lower social, physical and mental health problems within the university community.



Benefits of participation in sport for clubs

Higher rates of participation lead to increased club membership and a greater range of sports being played. Clubs also benefit from a broader understanding of various cultures as well as an increase in the number of skilled players, volunteers and administrators.

For further information on the barriers to, and the benefits of, participation in sport, refer to the policies section of the Australian Government's sports website:

<http://www.ausport.gov.au/policies/sportforall.asp>.

Provision of sporting facilities

The diversity of the University of Newcastle community is reflected in a demand for a wide range of sporting activities. Opportunities exist for sporting associations and clubs to expand their services by encouraging people from diverse cultures to create clubs based on inclusiveness. Sporting associations could seek to ascertain (perhaps by survey) the preferences of all Newcastle staff and students on what types of sports they would be interested in. Inclusiveness can be promoted by offering sports such as badminton, table tennis and Tae Kwon Do, as well as the traditional cricket, rugby, tennis, netball and so on.

Additionally, there are opportunities for associations to enhance their inclusive practices for women, such as, offering 'women only' sessions for particular sports. Such initiatives can encourage women from particular backgrounds, who may feel restricted from participation for some of the reasons outlined in the 'barriers'.

The Forum currently has men's and women's teams in both soccer and hockey.

The Indigenous Games were held in Newcastle in 2005 and NUSport continues to provide financial support for athletes to compete in the Indigenous Games as and when they are held.

For further information about the facilities and sporting clubs available at Newcastle, see <http://www.theforum.org.au>



Functions associated with sport

Many 'after-sport' activities on campus currently focus on the easy availability of alcohol, as well as a party atmosphere. Many international students are uncomfortable with this form of entertainment and for some it is strictly against their religious beliefs and they therefore do not attend. Advertising which focuses on 'free beer, sausage sizzles and lots of fun' actively discourages attendance by some groups. Many international students have negative preconceptions of student alcohol consumption habits even before they arrive in Australia. Some students make a conscious decision to avoid social activities where alcohol is served.

Greater inclusiveness can be achieved by serving drinks that are popular in different countries. Examples include cooling herbal teas from China, yoghurt mixes from India and sweet syrups from Malaysia. Encouraging participants to contribute and share foods of their own choice also demonstrates inclusive practice.

See 'Suggestions for inclusive catering' in "Culturally Inclusive Social Events" for more information.

Barriers to participation in sport

Social barriers

- Some religious obligations and celebrations may limit the possibilities for participation on a particular day or at a particular time
- Financial costs associated with the activities - clubs could consider a variety of support options such as fundraising, grant opportunities and subsidising uniforms/fees. NuSport provides significant funding to subsidise its clubs.
- Access to transport can be limited - clubs could consider creating a 'buddy' system that links members who live near each other
- Previous experiences of unfair treatment or discrimination can deter people from participating. When people feel welcome, they are more likely to continue. Discrimination is unfortunately prevalent in sport and can manifest verbally, through actions and physical abuse and by exclusion. All university sports clubs can adopt and display equal opportunity policies, and be willing to address incidents of unfair treatment or discrimination
- Bias of participants themselves can create problems even within diverse groupings. People who share similar cultures may unintentionally place social barriers around themselves eg by all wanting to be on the same team in a mixed competition. In such situations, team leaders and/or the organisers could encourage adoption of their philosophy of inclusiveness, or consider providing opportunities for people to compete in distinct groupings, as long as everyone understands and expresses their reasons for doing so.



Organisational barriers

- Clubs may not be aware of the benefits associated with increasing the cultural diversity of the membership, particularly when the club is doing well and has a strong membership base
- Developing new networks, programs and procedures may be seen as too difficult, too expensive or too time consuming for already over-stretched volunteers/staff
- Being unaware of the needs and practices of specific cultural groups
- Being unaware of available support options and where to source assistance
- Unwillingness to become culturally inclusive

Barriers for women

These arise from both the sporting environment and from within their own cultural community. The Australian Sports Commission website offers information and guidelines regarding women and sport, including 'Frequently Asked Questions' at <http://www.ausport.gov.au/women/faq.asp>

Sporting environment

- Lack of appropriate facilities eg showers, privacy
- Difficulties in securing female coaches at appropriate times
- Lack of appropriate programs
- Some women need to participate in a female-only environment eg women who practise Islam
- Dress requirements of particular sports may restrict participation eg for women who observe hijab - the Muslim practice of covering the head and body

Cultural community

The cultural, religious or gender expectations of women from various backgrounds may create restrictions to participation. These can include beliefs that women should be less physically active than men and focus more on domestic responsibilities

Checklist for inclusive sport participation

Consultation

- Consult with people who have knowledge of various cultures, including staff of Wollutuka School of Aboriginal Studies, the Executive Officer at NuSport, staff from International Student Support and staff from Equity and Diversity
- Acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which the University of Newcastle campuses are located
- Consider inviting an Indigenous Elder to deliver the Welcome to Country at your event. A form for this purpose is available at: <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/equity/documents/WelcomeCountryRegForm1.htm>
- Include student representatives from a variety of cultural backgrounds in the planning and marketing, to benefit from their knowledge and networks
- Where possible, include their advice in the planning and timing of games and competitions
- Check with the University Chaplaincy for events and festivities around your intended sport function - to avoid leaving particular groups out, and to ensure that diverse cultural interests are considered in the planning eg dates of religious festivals

Venue

- Where possible, choose a venue with facilities that ensure comfort and accessibility for all students involved eg private change rooms for women and men
- Consider holding activities on-campus
- In large halls or sports grounds where more than one area can be used at the same time, try to avoid scheduling 'women only' team events at the same time as mixed gender or male team events on neighbouring facilities

Marketing

- When advertising events or sports, display signs and posters that encourage cross-cultural participation
- Create a newsletter that is handed out at home games to everyone who comes through the gate. It could inform people about what is going on in the club, giving examples of positive role models within the club and what they are doing
- Develop good-practice programs, and showcase successful examples of inclusive sporting clubs
- Use multilingual posters



Ground rules

- Conduct education seminars, focusing on behaviours and attitudes associated with sports, and include information about respecting culturally diverse behaviours and attitudes
- Clearly display expectations regarding behaviours and use of facilities ('codes of conduct') eg hygiene requirements, food and drink rules, social interaction. For example, see <http://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources.html>
- Where uniform or dress requirements are expected, be flexible so that cultural dress requirements can be accommodated
- Encourage staff and volunteers to become familiar with using appropriate terminology

Additional strategies to consider in promoting cultural diversity in sporting participation

- Create selection criteria and policies so that no-one is disadvantaged when joining a club, whether it is to play or to take up an administrative role
- Seek further guidance on how to improve Indigenous Australian people's participation in sport. See - <http://www.ausport.gov.au/isp/cca.asp>
- Consider equity issues eg access for people with specific needs, pregnancy and sport, facilities for children, groups for various ages and levels of ability, provision of female coaches/trainers
- Encourage equal gender representation in committees and coaching/administrative positions as well as building a culturally diverse membership



Reviewing inclusive sports participation

Use this exercise to help get a picture of your approach to inclusive sports participation

To what extent do I? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Highly evident <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Somewhat evident <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Hardly evident <input type="checkbox"/> 0 Not evident	What evidence do I have that my approach is effective?
Encourage people of diverse cultures to participate in the activities in which I am involved? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0	
Promote the academic, professional and social benefits of taking part in sporting activities? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0	
Encourage women to take part in the activities in which I am involved? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0	
Recognise the barriers to participation for particular groups of people? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0	
Evaluate the strategies implemented to remove barriers to participation? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0	
Actively promote non-mainstream sports? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0	
Organise inclusive on-campus social events in conjunction with sports participation? <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0	

References and further resources

<http://www.theforum.org.au>

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/aboriginal-studies/>

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/equity/index.html>

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/chaplaincy>

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/studentsupport/internationalsupport.html>

Australian Sports Commission:

<http://www.ausport.gov.au/policies/sportforall.asp>

<http://www.ausport.gov.au/women/faq.asp> and

<http://www.ausport.gov.au/isp/cca.asp> (enhancing Indigenous Australian people's participation)

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au>

Equal Opportunity Commission of SA and SA Office for Recreation & Sport:
<http://www.playbytherules.net.au/>

<http://www.fitnessnsw.com.au>

<http://www.women.gov.au>

<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org>

<http://www.dsr.nsw.gov.au>

Fox, K.R. (1999). 'The influence of physical activity on mental well-being', *Public Health Nutrition*, 2(3a), pp. 411-418.

Keogh, V. (2002). *Multicultural Sport: Sustaining a Level Playing Field*. Melbourne: Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues

Inclusive Language Guidelines

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000797.html>