

**APC Task Force
Final Executive Summary Report
March 23, 2021**

The Athletics Policy and Culture (APC) task force was charged with examining the Athletic Department's organizational policies and practices contributing to the organizational climate in order to support WSU's student-athletes and athletics staff members. The charge required the APC task force to examine systems, policies, and structures in order to address individual well-being and organizational climate. The charge was given to the APC task force by Interim President Muma and executed by an interdisciplinary task force composed of members across the WSU campus community. Click [HERE](#) to see the full task force charge.

After operationalizing key concepts to better understand and address organizational culture within intercollegiate athletics, the APC task force adopted the Intercollegiate Athletic (ICA) Culture model (Schroeder, 2010) to guide its research and recommendations. The interdisciplinary group representing key stakeholders was assembled in late 2020, met weekly from January until March, 2021, engaged additional stakeholder groups not part of the ongoing APC task roster (e.g., PDC, SGA, SAAC, etc.), and examined the policies, procedures, and practices of WSU and the Athletic Department, athletic conference peers, and other NCAA institutional peers. Additionally, the APC task force examined self-reported climate study data from both athletics staff and student-athletes. After examining all data and comparing/contrasting their findings, the APC task force made numerous recommendations to the Athletic Department. Recommendations were guided by the ICA Culture Model and included categories relating to reporting procedures, policies and statements, and additional resources, trainings, and/or organizational best-practices. The APC Task Force recommendations are as follows:

Reporting procedures:

- Update, centralize, and include pertinent information within the WSU student-athlete manual relating to grievance or misconduct reporting and investigative processes.
- Develop an official employee manual defining employee's expectations of reporting misconduct and detailed information regarding processes for how to report and handle misconduct.
- Establish a system of internal and external reporting options that includes the university's Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR) and communicate that system to student-athletes and athletics staff regularly and within official manuals. Communication should include visual graphics, handouts, and be distributed or disseminated multiple times per year so that both staff and student-athletes are aware of the information.

- Consider adding a centralized system of reporting, evaluating, and investigating all complaints/issues, which includes the ability to anonymously report and track their grievance(s) throughout the entire process(es). Develop a formalized and external network, i.e., external to the athletic department, of faculty and staff that can engage and support student-athletes in a variety of capacities.

Policies and statements:

- Add clearly defined statements and policies on: student-athlete welfare, coaching misconduct, personnel/employee misconduct, and ethical conduct. Also, develop a whistleblower policy that defines protecting the reporting individual(s) who make good faith reports from retaliatory academic or employment action including discharge, reassignment, demotion, suspension, harassment, or other discrimination.
- Evaluate and update current grievance policy. Consider expanding the amount of time student-athletes have to file grievance(s), clarify how a student-athletes initiate any and all appropriate processes, and reviewing the participation, and inclusion of, student-athletes on the grievance committee.

Additional resources, trainings, and/or organizational best-practices:

- Regarding student-athletes, consider the following: Adding a comprehensive list of additional resources to the WSU Student-athlete manual/handbook; creating survey protocols ensuring trust, anonymity, and honesty while ensuring mandatory participation; expanding, integrating, and/or systematizing holistic student-athlete developmental trainings.
 - The outcomes assessment-oriented trainings should be focused on salient structural and interpersonal topics that are required for all student-athletes on all sports teams/programs. Topics should include appropriate reporting procedures/processes, microaggressions, leadership development, importance of social/personal identity & DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), interpersonal skills (such as communication and conflict resolution), and the importance of addressing mental health issues without stigma.
- Regarding athletics staff, develop and mandate a training program for all staff (including coaches, graduate assistants, office staff, athletic administrators, etc.) focused on salient structural and interpersonal topics. The training system should be outcomes-based and sustained as evaluation measures bring to light additional areas for improvement.
 - Topics should include leadership development, professional dispositions, importance of social/personal identity & DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion),

microaggressions, interpersonal skills (such as communication and conflict resolution), appropriate reporting procedures/processes (including expectations for proper documentation, systematizing processes and protocols), and ever-evolving industry best-practices or systems.

- Develop a culture of professional development and education. This system can be flexible with areas for development including new technical skills (e.g., learning new software programs), interpersonal skills (e.g., intergenerational mentoring), and/or securing additional educational credentials (e.g., certificates, graduate degrees, or badges).
 - System should apply to all athletics staff, regardless of title or position. Individual development goals should be identified as part of the annual review process.
- Conduct mandatory annual performance reviews of all employees using industry best-practices for consistency of application, evaluation, implementation, and feedback. Reviews must be completed using university or athletic department-developed system(s). Professionalism and collegiality should be a required dimension of all reviews.
- Evaluate the athletic department organizational structure to ensure it is set up to successfully elevate issues/concerns to the appropriate personnel. Consider adding staff to ensure compliance, communication, timely and appropriate follow up, and resolutions are accomplished; creating an athletic department staff member onboarding process, which explains policies, expectations, and options for reporting; and clearly articulating and formalizing the working relationship between the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) and the Athletic Department.
- Require (and encourage) all athletics staff, including coaches, to participate in some form of university service, e.g., serving on university, college committees, engaging with faculty/USS/UP senates, working with faculty (while maintaining appropriate NCAA compliance), working with administrators, etc. Such an approach would decrease perceptions of the athletic department as a closed network or separate institution and further integrate athletics staff into the larger university environment.
- Prioritize holistic student-athlete development and ensure that all athletic staff are aware of key student-athlete development initiatives, such as Shocker Life and the Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Council, as well as support services, such as mental health counseling.
- Consider professionalizing the Faculty Athletics Representative (FAR) position and/or office to include: Making the FAR role part of an employee's professional responsibilities and duties; providing the FAR with support staff and/or other resources;

instituting the FAR as a form of exogenous oversight ensuring fairness and appropriateness of grievance reporting and/or investigation(s).

- Develop and articulate an external accountability system that not only contributes to the implementation of recommendations in a timely manner, but also ensures annual oversight of continuing efforts.

Implementation Matrix

An Implementation Matrix (IM) was created by the APC task force to support the Athletic Department and the supporting departments/entities within WSU in the execution of the recommendations. The IM identifies work that can be completed in 2021, 2022, and 2023 and ranks the difficulty of implementing recommendations on a scale of 1 (easiest) to 3 (hardest). Finally, there is a brief note on the resources needed to implement each recommendation. The IM was part of the accountability system advocated for by the APC task force, which applies to both the Athletic Department and the larger WSU Community.

An overview of the key ideas or concepts, include:

- operationalizing key concepts and the ICA Culture Model
- guiding assumptions
- rationale for selecting both athletic conference and NCAA peers
- research process
- findings analyzing and comparing WSU-ICAA policies with conference and NCAA peers
- athletics staff and student-athlete climate study results
- fully detailed recommendations
- proposed implementation matrix

The APC task force thanks university leadership, athletic department leadership and staff, the participating stakeholder groups, and community members for their support and participation in this process and in making these recommendations.