

# Diversity in the Pipeline: Examining Racial and Gender Representation in NCAA Postgraduate Internship Programs

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## Abstract

“Early career experiences, encompassing internships and graduate assistantships (GAs), play a pivotal role in shaping the career trajectories of NCAA athletic administrators, serving as a gateway into the profession (Hardin et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017). These opportunities equip aspiring athletic administrators with valuable professional experiences, providing hands-on exposure to industry practices, facilitating skill development, and fostering networking across various domains and disciplines. The acquisition of an internship or GA position is instrumental in equipping future college administrators with vital skills for diverse careers in intercollegiate athletics.

Career-related work experience is commonly identified as the most crucial attribute for early career professionals by NCAA athletic administrators (Bravo et al., 2012). This underscores the pivotal role attributed to practical learning, emphasizing the importance of gaining hands-on experience and cultivating skills crucial for the development of early career professionals in college athletic administration. Furthermore, the pathway to NCAA leadership and executive roles is dependent begins with choices made in entry-level positions and early career decisions (Hoffman, 2011).

Scholars contend that early professional experiences are particularly beneficial for underrepresented individuals who often face challenges entering the profession due to the hegemonic nature of college athletics administration (Smith et al., 2017). White men have historically dominated the leadership ranks of college athletics, thereby limiting opportunities for individuals from racially minoritized groups. The underrepresentation of racially minoritized groups is pervasive within the NCAA organizational structure, encompassing the NCAA, member institutions, and conference offices.

Research has consistently illustrated the underrepresentation of racial minorities, particularly in leadership positions, while also highlighting the tendency to cluster them in non-leadership roles that are often critical for career mobility in the field (Lapchick, 2023, NCAA, 2023). The absence of racial minorities in influential positions indicates a systemic issue that requires attention and action, particularly at early career stages, which are integral to forging a career in college athletics administration. There is currently limited research that captures the representation of racially minoritized groups in early career roles, specifically internship programs.

Accordingly, this study will examine the racial demographics of the NCAA Postgraduate Internship Program to investigate whether the lack of diversity observed in top-level positions also manifests at the early stages of NCAA leadership careers. The NCAA Postgraduate Internship Program offers yearlong on-the-job learning experiences for college graduates aspiring to pursue careers in college athletics, with a focus on ethnic minorities, women, and former student-athletes. More specifically, this study will assess the racial and gender demographics of NCAA Postgraduate Internship cohorts over a ten-year period and determine if racially minoritized groups are clustered in certain departments. Race and gender variables will be gathered from NCAA postgraduate cohort press releases that include biographical

information and photos. It is important to note that biographies and photos are only available for 2019-2024 cohorts. Gender and race variables for cohorts 2014-2018 will be obtained from LinkedIn and academic and professional biographies.

Preliminary findings underscore a concerning underrepresentation of racially minoritized individuals in the NCAA postgraduate internship program, comprising only 36.9% of the cohort from 2014 to 2017. Additionally, a notable gender disparity exists, with racially minoritized women making up 23.3% of the cohort, while only 13.3% are men. These initial results emphasize that even at the early stages, it is well-documented that issues of underrepresentation persist, forewarning potential challenges later in career progression.”