

Diversity at the University of Illinois:

A Closer Look into

Athletics and Music Bands

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Abstract

The main goal of our project was to discover whether or not diversity existed in athletics and the music program at the University of Illinois. In order to conduct our research, we used methods such as conducting interviews, handing out surveys, and observing places on campus to monitor diversity such as the Campus Recreation Center East. In order to obtain opinions from students on campus, we asked the questions in a short survey: For musical diversity, we also conducted interviews with Marching Illini members to know their opinion on the lack of diversity within the marching Band. We found in our research, and specifically in the survey, that most people believed that athletics were diverse and that the music programs were predominantly white. In the interviews, all three agreed that diversity is very small and it's hard to find diverse students to want to join music groups. Both groups of people agreed that diversity would be beneficial, but were not able to come up with a way to help spread diversity throughout the campus organizations.

Introduction

There has been speculation as to whether or not diversity is important to collegiate sports teams and the music program at the University of Illinois. It is evident that an organization with diversity will have many positive effects such as teammates working together and learning about each other's background. This institution of education houses many people from the four corners of the world; however, the University itself is not a true reflection of diversity within clubs on campus because not all races are equally represented. For example, the basketball team is predominantly African American and the University's music program is predominantly Caucasian. Consequently, this lack of diversity discourages future minority students from getting involved thus hindering the idea of a multicultural environment. Our combined research shows that diversity exists in certain sports teams, and diversity lacks in music programs at the University of Illinois due to the cultural differences and personal choices of minority students.

Literature Review

There are many themes that complement the lack of diversity that has been seen in the University of Illinois sports in past years. If one looks around on the website, or even attends a game at the University of Illinois, one will notice that the team more than likely has a predominant race. For instance, if one attends a hockey game, one would see a bench full of Caucasians. On the other hand, when one attends a football game at Memorial Stadium, one would notice the team consisting chiefly of African Americans. This issue has been brought up several times, but there really is not a perfect way to resolve it. According to Andrews (2008), "When looking at the U of I athletics, most people would assume that team members work together, communicate, and have strong unity. However, would anyone admit to seeing racial segregation within sports?" (p. 24). This quote essentially summarizes the thoughts of most people on campus, even nationally. Most people do not see diversity among sports teams to be a

big issue. However, the benefit that teams will receive is the different style and approaches from the diversity of the team. .

Some of the blame can be put on colleges for not looking for not actively reaching out for more diversity in music programs. Allen Clements (2009) goes more into depth about colleges' non-existing outreach for diversity in recruitment into their music programs. He explains that this mystery of the missing diversity boils down to a few reasons. The worst of it is just plain racism. Black students have been found to complain about their music professor's treating them like remedial students and white students expect minority students to act like stereotypes, therefore creating an uncomfortable environment (p. 7). Such overt racism is sadly found in the music field. Some fields are not as integrated with other cultures, and the music field is a prime example. Another recruitment policy noted by Clements (2009) is the swift cutting of music programs in minority dense regions. This does not give minority children the chance to try music out for themselves. Essentially the colleges then end up picking from students where these programs flourished: in a white majority area (p. 7). Therefore the colleges can be noted for not actively searching for diversity in their music programs, on the other hand diversity occurs inherently in some athletic teams at the university level.

Diversity occurs across the country in collegiate level sports for both basketball and football. These teams primarily consist have white and African Americans. The general genetic makeup of these races plays a role in their athletic performance allowing them to excel at sports such as these. In a study by Rebekah Andrews to see what students here at U of I felt about the player selection of the football team, she found that the majority of students felt that coaches did not care about race and based their decisions on talent (p. 12). The student population here is

large and diverse, thus the football and basketball teams here have a mixture of races based upon the skill of the players. According to Hiroko (2009), “The athletic identity of a student supersedes their racial identity” (p. 93), in other words, the skill of an athlete is more important to both the players and coaches than the racial background of the player. On the field players are indifferent to their ethnicity (p. 94). They share the common goal to be the best team and to win. “Winning is more important than their race” (p. 96). By having a common foundation in working together the lack of races overcomes the limits of diversity.

Shown through sports, many factors involve what the college wants, such as talent, but there is also the idea of what colleges portray to the community. Though no college wants to be discriminating towards any race, which does not mean they are able to retain careers that may be desired. Allen Clemens (March 2009) points out, “No established college or university music program in the United States wishes to abandon the rich heritage of European classical music... many current college music faculty members, it is precisely this music that first motivated them to pursue a career in music” (section 4). For example, the University of Illinois is known for engineering, rather than music. Why should then a Hispanic or African American student who wants to pursue music as a career? The Department of Music should have a larger range of repertoire that pulls from all cultures to encourage other ethnic groups to play music at this University. It is imperative to examine the individual choices and general backgrounds of minorities in order to understand why it is that certain groups such as the Marching Illini tend to have fewer minorities, and yet Baseball and Basketball are more diverse. The most prominent argument for this reason is that sports like Baseball, Football, and Basketball present more opportunities for advancement economically. African Americans look to these sports as a way to escape their current situation and raise themselves and their family on the economic ladder as

described by Eitzen (2005). This serves as a huge force pushing more minorities to join major league sports. So when they get to college they want to achieve a dream and that is to become a professional sports player. This leaves other activities such as Marching Illini out of the picture because these activities are not seen as potentially high paying. Soccer Football is a more popular sport where recruitment is tough and it is potentially high rewarding.

The last possibility is to offer more outreach programs to help minority students. These programs should be designed to recruit minority students from a younger age. Depending on where the colleges are located, they may have distinct advantages at recruiting minority students into their music programs. For example, the University of Northern Arizona is relatively close to a Native American reservation and because of that they hold twenty percent of all music scholarships until June 15th (p. 8). They do this because most of the minority students apply late. Northern Arizona also runs a summer program to help minority students assimilate to campus life easier (p. 8). If the university wanted to get serious about recruiting more diversity in their music program, then they would adopt some of these tactics. The University of Illinois should find ways like that to bring diversity to their music programs and groups. Now, this explains the college's reason why there is a lack of diversity music groups and programs, but it's not entirely their fault. Minorities choose those other fields, they're not forced to them. So what's shying them away from music?

Methods:

In order to find out the lack of minorities within sports and music groups, each member conducted an observation, interview or survey. In relation to sports, Vince and Willy took a survey of 41 students, while Sean conducted interviews with the Ultimate Frisbee coach, asking the following questions:

- 1) In your opinion, do you think UIUC sports teams are diverse?
- 2) In your opinion, how important is it to have a diverse team in collegiate sports?
- 3) Do you believe athletes of certain races have been stereotyped into playing certain sports?
- 4) What do you think can be done in order to help diversity spread throughout collegiate sports?
- 5) Do you believe collegiate teams would benefit from being more diverse? If yes, what are the benefits of increased diversity in collegiate sports?

On the other hand, John Bond and John Byrd conducted interviews with Marching Illini members. Those questions were of the following:

- 1) Your opinion of the diversity in music groups here on campus?
- 2) As a member of the Marching Illini, does it bother you that is a lack of diversity and why?
- 3) Who is a fault and why?
- 4) What can be done to fix the problem?

Our goal was to find out how diverse these organizations were and if anything should be done about the lack of diversity if any existed here on campus.

Results and Discussion:

Does diversity exist in sports?

Vince and Willy's survey was created with intentions to obtain the opinions of students at the University of Illinois in regards to diversity lacking in athletics and was taken by 41 people. They were surprised by the number of students, 24, stated that diversity exists on the teams (football, basketball). Sean discovered but at the same time a little of diversity.

Why are some races attracted to certain sports/music groups?

Why is there a lack of diversity? Most people believe that certain races, such as African-Americans, have been stereotypically forced into playing basketball or football. On the other side, Caucasians tend to play baseball and hockey. This is where the root of the lack of diversity begins, and it is evident that students at UIUC have noticed. Though Sean reveals that on the Ultimate Frisbee Team, race has no difference. The ultimate team here consists of roughly 55 people. There are 3 Asians, 1 Indian, and 1 Middle Eastern, the rest are white. Possibly stereotypes are being washed away.

What should be done and the benefits of diversity?

Next Vince and Willy asked the question what should be done in order to help spread diversity throughout collegiate sports. We found that 42.6% replied that nothing should be done. We obviously did not find this answer surprising given the amount of students believing there truly is diversity on sports teams, but it is hard to believe that students do not think that recruiters and Universities could do something to help raise the number of diverse athletes. It seems as if recruitment is seeking students of the same race, not promoting racial diversity.

Finally, I asked whether or not students have had positive experiences with people of different backgrounds. Of those surveyed, 93.6% stated that they had positive experiences. The three that had negative experiences stated that some ethnicities "lack common sense" and "are hard to understand." This seems to me to be a particularly racist assumption to make. It is not easy to come from a different country and learn a new language and a new environment. While it is apparent that talent is a huge priority, diversity should also be a large part due to its beneficial effects.

On the other hand, Sean's research shows that there is some diversity apparent on the Ultimate Frisbee Team, but still has its shortcomings. As Sean states, I interview Walden Nelson who played on the team the past five years and is now the coach this year. Walden was actually born in Japan and lived there for ten years before moving to Chicago. W. Nelson started by saying, "The game of ultimate around the country is not very diverse as a whole. It is still a new up-and-coming sport." But as the season progresses more people in general and those of different races drop out because they either don't enjoy the sport or they want to be with people of their own race." But those who enjoy the sport will stay around to have fun, to meet new people, and to play Ultimate. Ultimate Frisbee was only created 30 years ago; it is still "new" compared to other sports. From what W. Nelson said it sounds as if the main reason for little diversity on the ultimate teams not only here but also on teams across the nation is because of public awareness. Every year the team advertises call outs for newcomers to join the team, and all are welcome. The ultimate community is open and friendly to all primarily because there are not many people who play.

Is there diversity in music?

Although many sports teams and activities are slowly becoming diverse, this diversity does not seem to exist in the music groups at the University. Though the controversial evidence reveals diversity does or does not exist in certain sports, the lack of diversity within music groups is true, shown by an interview conducted by John Bond with a former Marching Illini member and John Byrd's interview with current members.

An interview with McNeill, longtime member of the Marching Illini (MI), answered the critical questions as to why the diversity in the University of Illinois is poor. He responded by saying he does not believe the diversity in the Marching Illini does not reflect the amount of diversity on campus. He also notices the amount of diversity this campus truly contains, and yet it's not being reflected in the Marching band or the music program. But why? How can a University be diverse in some areas and only slightly in other areas? I asked McNeill next about if the university was to blame for this: I feel that musical/arts schools like Julliard are more accurate when you look at diversity in music. Illinois isn't known for music, it's more known for the band programs instead. This university is known for majors like accounting, business, and engineering which are all fields that are highlighted a lot more here. (McNeill, personal

communication, 2011)

This university is renowned for many areas, but music is not technically on the forefront of this university's strengths. This also would make sense because a good portion of our diversity comes from international students who would know mainly about the university's strongest programs. I questioned him on the main results of his research to get a better idea of what his stance was on diversity in bands: "The band isn't looking for diversity, but the campus is. We select people who make the band sound and don't base choices on diversity. They just have different motives (McNeill, personal communication, 2011)." This illustrates that music groups are different than other groups in their selection process. People have to audition and be talented to get in, which goes back to Allen Clements's thoughts on music programs in low-income areas. I finally asked McNeill if there is anything the University can do to help encourage more diversity in music, but he like me, feels like it's something that may never change: "I really don't think it can ever be changed. Differences in cultures and other ridiculous changes would have to occur. That is just the way it is." This shows that having diversity in music may never truly be balanced as other fields. Music does not attract many minorities because of these differences in our cultures.

The interview with an experienced MI member brings to light that diversity integration is a problem. What do current members believe? John Byrd's participants discussed that the lack of diversity in the Marching Illini was troubling considering "the school itself was diverse". Though through personal experiences, the lack of diverse students doesn't really bother them, they had "been in this type of situation before". But as one stated "I wish there were more diversity in the band itself, could possibly be a better group with more differences." The participant sees that there is an issue within the Marching Illini but doesn't actually see a way to solve the problem. Another member believes why less minorities join the Marching Illini because the "style of music doesn't connect with the students of a minority. I see orchestra appeal more to Asians for example". He goes on to further explain "minority groups connect to styles that they now of, whites seem to prefer marching but that appeal isn't shared openly with other races".

So what are the problems?

Maybe it's a natural, cultural difference that does not allow for minorities to think of

music as a viable career option. Marching bands are more of a European and parts of Japan and Thailand type of thing. It's just not as integral to other cultures like it is around here. In Europe there are more festivals for marching bands, they are more apart of their culture, discussed by all three. So, marching band is not some transient activity that is practiced everywhere, but mostly in more European countries. This could be a factor as to why minorities generally are not attracted to the music field, or to pick up an instrument.

The Next Step?

One key point that was brought up during all the interviews is what needs to be done by the University to create more diversity. The results show that the University should be able to and it is their right to incorporate and show the correct representation of different races within its sports and music organizations. But even though there is a lack of race diversity, why are there still some students who join these groups, when they themselves are not white?

Conclusion

We have concluded that while diversity exists in some capacity in Sean's research, it simply does not in music and most other athletics. In the case of athletics, minorities are usually pushed to stereotypical sports and good portion of people surveyed believe that diversity exists on athletics. The music field yielded a poorer outlook on diversity solely due to cultural differences among minorities. To most minorities, a career in music is not a viable option and their cultures do not have the prevalence of marching band. All in all, the University of Illinois is a relatively diverse school but some of their organizations don't reflect what diversity it has on campus.

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