March Diversity Spotlight Recipient: New Jersey City University

Implemented in fall 2018, The Rising Knight Institute (RKI) set out on a mission to support the growing needs of our underrepresented and diverse Division III student-athlete cohort. RKI is centered in holistic leadership programming such as financial literacy, emotional well-being, career preparation, student-athlete identity, service learning and civic responsibility.

New Jersey City University’s unique population of first-generation, low-income, and multi-cultural students makes it plausible to predict these students are ill-equipped to handle general college expectations, let alone athletics. Furthermore, various demographics of our Division III student-athlete population (low socio-economic, minority, first generation, commuter) continue to work part-time jobs to help with family needs, in addition to being enrolled as full-time students and continuing to participate in a sport program. These considerations all propelled the introduction of the RKI.

RKI is dedicated to developing these essential areas for our student population. Offerings such as financial literacy, FAFSA application introductions, leadership and identity workshops and stress management serve as a foundation for leadership growth. Other offerings included service learning opportunities and attendance at a variety of off-site workshops and presentations connect our athletes with the greater Jersey City community, recently named the most diverse city in the country.

As a subset of RKI, the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) has taken the helm to highlight and support the diverse student-athlete population. The peak of this year’s diversity and inclusion campaign was a video showcasing the various countries represented on our soccer teams as they relate to the national soccer teams (see video here).

NJCU’s National Girls and Women in Sports Day event bolstered 200 female attendees from public middle schools and high schools in the Jersey City area. The event welcomed 1976 Olympic Basketball Silver Medalist Gail Marquis, Sky Blue FC general manager Alyse LaHue and NJCU women's wrestling head coach and former two-time U.S. Olympian and World Champion Elena Pirozhkova on February 5 at NJCU. The event offered a platform for successful female leaders of all backgrounds to address and interact with the diverse youth of Jersey City and provide insight into leadership, achievements and goal setting.

Watch the Recap of NJCU’s National Girls and Women in Sports Day

RKI’s impact on athletes who are a part of other unique cohorts such as first generation, low socio-economic, minority students are a crucial component of their holistic development as well-rounded members of society, furthermore as individuals who strive to be leaders in all facets of their lives. These cohorts of underrepresented groups will soon be the majority of the students entering the post-secondary phase of education in the United States.