In February, Sheridan Blanford, Director of Inclusion and Engagement at the University of Wisconsin Athletic Department and former recipient of the NCAA DIII Ethnic Minorities and Women's Internship Grant, facilitated a diversity and inclusion workshop for over 80 student-athlete leaders of all 20 varsity sports and our Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) members. Students participated in Blanford’s *Becoming an Inclusive Thought Leader* Workshop. Blanford facilitated a safe space for student-athletes to have critical conversation about inclusion. She highlighted the concept of “vulnerability” as a member of a team and spoke about building trust as leaders.

Student-athletes discussed “what you wouldn’t know by looking at me” and social identities such as age, gender, race, national origin, religion, socio-economic background, and more. Throughout the night, Blanford guided student-athletes through conversations about how stereotypes can shape an individual's self-image in addition to the real and perceived advantages and disadvantages of certain social images.

Blanford’s interactive-exercises pushed each athlete to discuss difficult topics and break through individual comfort zones. Our student-athlete leaders were taught to recognize ways in which we classify people based on social image and stereotypes. Blanford helped us name and recognize social identities and stereotypes that we may or may not have been conscious of for ourselves or our team members.

The biggest takeaway from Blanford’s workshop was the realization of how vast and unique all people are. Through our discussions with peers, we practiced being vulnerable and we all heard about different perspectives and life experiences. Communicating with and especially listening to other student-athletes was an eye-opening experience, allowing us to take in different perspectives and open our senses to more than what meets the eye. Blanford’s facilitation shed light on the way various groups of people and individuals are viewed through stereotypical lenses, and how we as student-athletes and leaders on campus can practice getting to know others by their character and who they really are. This awareness fueled the importance for inclusiveness within our own teams and athletic department as a whole. The Hamline University Athletic Department standard, set by current student-athlete leaders, is that incoming freshmen and transfers are welcomed and included, differences and different abilities are celebrated between teammates, and teammates are resources for each other to talk about personal issues without judgement.

Thank you for considering Hamline University Athletic Department for the next Diversity Spotlight Initiative recipient. Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions!

Jared Deutch and Kaeli Stayer
Hamline University SAAC Presidents