

SIUE Task Force Will Focus On Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Called 'Cougars As One'

by Joe Pott

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EDWARDSVILLE - Striving for equal opportunities for all and dedicated to building a more inclusive culture, the SIUE Department of Intercollegiate Athletics recently announced the formation of a task force focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion called "Cougars As One" (CAO). Athletic Director Tim Hall appointed Katie Zingg, Associate Athletic Director/SWA and Chris Wright, Assistant Athletic Director for Annual Fund and Ticketing to serve as co-chairs for the task force.

The COA Task Force is a collaborative effort between student-athletes, coaches and staff who are all dedicated to ensuring SIUE Athletics remains a safe and inclusive

environment for our student-athletes, staff and fans. The COA Task Force is also focused on integrating policies and practices that address systematic racism and inequalities while reflecting on our department's commitment to further developing and maintaining a diverse and inclusive culture in the Athletic Department, SIUE campus and the surrounding community. According to Athletic Director Tim Hall, "the creation of the Cougars As One Task Force was to acknowledge our commitment to creating an athletic department where differences are embraced and open dialogue is welcomed. By working collectively as a unit, we can facilitate positive changes in our department, campus and community. Each day we will strive to be better and provide an inclusive environment where all individuals feel heard, seen and valued."

The mission statement of the CAO Task Force is, "We are committed to building a diverse culture that is inclusive of people of all races, genders, orientations, ages, religions and identities. We will empower our student-athletes, coaches and staff to stand up against injustice and hate in order to shape an ever-changing world." The COA mission statement aligns with Chancellor Randy Pembroke's campus wide Anti-Racism Task Force's work. Associate Athletic Director/SWA Katie Zingg said, "I look forward to the positive impact the Cougars As One initiative can have on our staff and student-athletes. Our differences in identity can unite us to be stronger as one unified group, so all individuals feel supported and valued within our department."

Four subcommittees have been established to guide the work of the Cougars As One Task Force. Each subcommittee is charged with creating initiatives, education and policies that support the overall mission of CAO. The four subcommittees include Oversight, Evaluation, Education and Communication and Engagement and Outreach. Assistant Athletic Director for Annual Fund and Ticketing Chris Wright said, "I look forward to being a part of real change and proving accountability for the betterment of our student-athletes, coaches, staff, and supporters of SIUE Athletics."

The Cougars As One Task Force includes the following staff members and coaches: Brian Barone (Head Men's Basketball Coach), Gabby Blevins (Lead Compliance Specialist), Destiny Bramblett (Assistant Women's Basketball Coach), Derek Burton (Head Women's Soccer Coach), Jason Coomer (Deputy Athletic Director), Jaci DeClue (Associate Athletic Director), Marcus Evans (Head CC/Track and Field Coach), Tim Hall (Athletic Director), Payton Haslam (Graduate Assistant), Mark Jamison (Assistant Athletic Director for Athletic Performance), Jessica Jones (Head Softball Coach), Charlie Kennedy (Assistant Softball Coach), James Mayes (Associate Head Athletic Trainer), Tad Middleton (Director of Development), Caitlin Opp (Marketing Assistant), Kendall Paulus (Head Volleyball Coach), Ty Prazma (Assistant Wrestling Coach), Mackenzie Rombach (Volleyball Graduate Assistant Coach), Dr. Lindsay Ross-Stewart (Director of Mental Performance), Todd Schultze (Associate Head Women's Basketball Coach), Alexis Smith (Assistant Women's Soccer Coach), Jeremy Spates (Head

Wrestling Coach), Madison Weilbacher (Marketing Assistant), Chris Wright (Assistant Athletic Director for Annual Fund and Ticketing), Erin Wykoff (Assistant Track Coach) and Katie Zingg (Associate Athletic Director/SWA).

There are 12 SIUE student-athletes also serving on the Cougars As One Task Force. They include Brooke Allen (Freshman – Women's Track and Field), Mikala Hall (Junior - Women's Basketball), Maria Haro (Sophomore – Women's Soccer), Catherine Jakich (Senior – Women's Track and Field), Oskar Lenz (Sophomore – Men's Soccer), Rob Parks (Senior – Baseball), Victor Perez (Junior – Baseball), Natalia Rodriguez (Sophomore – Women's Cross Country/Track and Field), Nicolas Roes (Junior – Baseball), JJ Schoch (Senior – Women's Soccer), Zaria Whitlock (Senior – Women's Basketball) and Kelsie Williams (Junior – Women's Basketball).