

Study: Ongoing gender imbalance in varsity sport

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Researchers at the University of Toronto have released the second in a series of reports, the most comprehensive analysis to date, of gender equity in Canada's interuniversity sport system, finding that the country has actually taken a marginal step backwards since the first report was released in 2011.

The report uncovered that sports and elements of sports leadership at CIS universities are less equitable than two years ago, with the notable exception of an increase in the number of women athletics directors.

Athlete participation data were analyzed based not only on the number of opportunities across all Canadian universities, but on the gender split in the student body. Researchers found that although 56 per cent of post-secondary students are female, male athletes make up 57 per cent of varsity athletes (up one percentage since 2011).

There has been some progress in leadership equity since 2011 when women made up only 17 per cent of athletic directors. Today, almost one in four university athletic directors are women. Yet, there are now seven fewer women head coaches, dropping their representation from 19 per cent to 17 per cent of all head coaches. More men are now also coaching women's teams, up two per cent to 68 from two years ago.

"Great strides have been made in the last 30 years in terms of female participation in interuniversity sport, but the progress toward equity appears to have stalled in the majority of cases," says Professor Peter

Donnelly, director of U of T's Centre for Sport Policy Studies and one of the lead authors of the report.

Professor Bruce Kidd, a long-time international advocate for equity in sport, was a co-investigator on the project, along with PhD candidate Mark Norman. "Canadian universities should be setting the bar in terms of equity, not scrambling to keep up," says Norman. "Women deserve opportunities proportionate to their participation in university – and they also need to be better mentored and prepared to take on leadership roles down the road."

The study's authors are tasking Canadian Interuniversity Sport and its four regional counterparts with three challenges: to revamp their [gender equity](#) policies based on these results, to create an immediate 50 per cent target towards proportional female participation, and to develop a plan for improving leadership opportunities for [women](#) in coaching and senior administration.

Provided by University of Toronto

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