

The Power of the Student-Athlete Voice: Activism for Social Impact

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES

What is activism?

Activism can take many forms, but often relies on a strategic, organized and action-oriented approach to address persistent systemic issues in society with the ultimate goal of bringing about social change.

Examples of activism include:

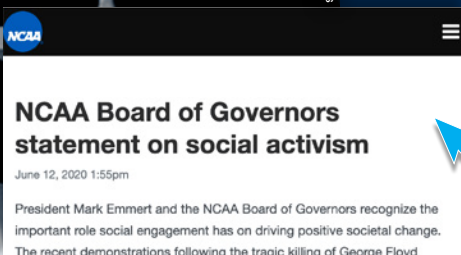
- Campaigning for (or against) a cause.
- Participating in protests and demonstrations.
- Developing and advocating for (or against) policies and legislation.
- Launching groups or organizations to promote a social cause.
- Participating in community building.

Activism is driven by specific goals or objectives and is often connected to broader social movements. As leaders in their respective campus communities, student-athletes have a powerful platform to drive positive social change on topics ranging from racial justice, gender equity, LGBTQ+ inclusion and environmental activism, to sexual violence prevention, neurodiversity, immigration and mental health.



I use my platform for activism because I know that I can help change the stigma attached to LGBTQ+ identities in sport. I want to create a space where everyone, especially those who identify as LGBTQ+, can feel safe and welcomed to be who they are. All it takes is to speak up and be true to yourself — and others will follow.

Jaden Vazquez
football student-athlete at Fordham and one of the few openly LGBTQ+ student-athletes in the sport



Click here to read the Board of Governors' statement.

Action Strategies

Identify your role in activism.



While we often picture activists as outspoken and persistent, know that all personality types have a place in activist movements. Reflect on your own strengths and unique personality to identify how you can best contribute to activist causes. Roles in activism range from those providing a vision for a cause and those serving as points of connection between different resources to those raising funds and providing emotional support to peers.

Become knowledgeable on the topic you are passionate about.



Activism starts with education on the cause you are fighting for — but it should not end there. Continue to educate yourself on the topic you are passionate about and use that knowledge to drive your actions.

Be vocal and show up.



As a student-athlete, you have visibility on campus. That visibility can be a powerful tool to promote your activism. Show up to events that promote your cause. Organize meetings to connect people who share your passion for your cause. Utilize social media to call attention to your cause and amplify the voices of those fighting for your cause.

Establish clear lines of communication.



If you are participating in community building and want to mobilize your community to support your activism, establish lines of communication that help you disseminate information quickly and efficiently. For example, if you are launching a group of student-athletes to advance racial justice, identify a strategy and technologies that can be used for you to communicate with group members. Communicate with your coaches, administrators and peers about your views and discuss how they can best support your activism.

Utilize resources in the athletics department, on campus and in the community.



Your athletics department may have resources available to help you promote your activist causes. For instance, every athletics department has an **athletics diversity and inclusion designee** (ADID) who may be able to help you support your activist efforts. Many athletics departments are launching diversity and inclusion task forces and committees that can also support your activism. Most college campuses have resources available that you can utilize to amplify the impact of your activism.

Resources may include cultural centers on campus, diversity offices, academic departments, faculty with expertise in areas of your activism, or staff committed to the cause (e.g., chief diversity officers). There may also be student groups on campus that you can join to support your activism. Community resources that can support activist efforts include community action groups, nonprofit organizations, city governments and human relations commissions.

One of my coaches always said, ‘Use your platform, use your voice, to make a change.’ After losing a teammate to suicide, I wanted to utilize the influential platform of sport to end the stigma around mental health. With the support and initiative from coaches and athletics department staff, our idea was brought to life and continues to change the narrative around mental health in sport across the country.

Taylor Ricci
former Oregon State gymnast
and co-founder of the Dam
Worth It Initiative aimed at
ending the stigma around
mental health



Form a collective voice.



While your individual voice has immense value in itself, there is power in establishing a collective voice for your cause. Work with your campus and conference **Student-Athlete Advisory Committee** (SAAC) to align the messaging and initiatives for your activist cause and make sure affiliated campus, conference and athletic groups are aware of your plan prior to launching the initiative.

Create an infrastructure for your activism.



Your time on campus is limited, so make sure that you create the infrastructure for current and future student-athletes to support your cause. This infrastructure can be created by forming an official student organization or launching a SAAC task force/committee dedicated to your cause. As an official student organization, for example, you can often request funding and meeting space from your school. If your activism is relevant to the mission of the athletics department, ask for the cause to be anchored in the department's strategic plan. In addition, review the college/university strategic plan or mission statement to see where there might be alignment.

Find allies, mentors and sponsors.



Allies are members of the dominant group that advocate for the less privileged group. Mentors provide guidance and support for your activism. Sponsors are individuals who have the power to push your cause when you are not in the room. For your activism to have the most impact, you will need all three. Identify members of your community (e.g., coaches, senior administrators) who buy into your vision. Make sure you address what you may want from each group/individual and how they can assist with the plan.

Every athletics department has:

- **An Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Designee** (ADID).
- **A Senior Woman Administrator** (SWA).
- **A Faculty Athletics Representative** (FAR).

Expect resistance and practice radical self-care.



Activist work is often met with resistance. Strive to seek common ground with those you may not agree with or who may not have a similar lived experience to you. This work can be emotionally draining — especially for members of marginalized communities. Make sure to prioritize your mental and physical health when participating in activism. Take frequent mental health days and utilize your school's counseling center or office to identify coping strategies for when you face resistance to your activism or feel emotionally drained.

For more information on student-athlete activism, visit our **NCAA Student-Athlete Activism** webpage.



Think about why you want to be an activist. That should be your foundation for everything you do going forward. Let your why drive you to do research, specifically one that centers vulnerable communities. Let your knowledge inspire you to empower those communities. Get teams and teammates involved. Show support for organizations on campus that already do the work. If there is no organization in place, start your own group with the help of administrators and teammates!

Kyle Richard

former football student-athlete and captain at SUNY Cortland, and nationally recognized sports activist, speaker, and advocate for sexual violence prevention