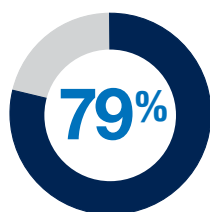


Facilitating and Supporting Student-Athlete Activism

STRATEGIES FOR COACHES AND ADMINISTRATORS

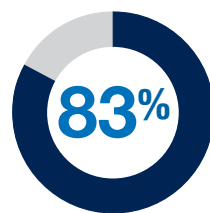
The Importance of the Student-Athlete Voice.

Student-athletes are more than just athletes. In fact, a [2020 study](#) conducted by the Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality (RISE) surveyed more than 2,000 student-athletes and found that:



*of respondents felt that student-athletes have an **obligation to raise awareness** about social justice issues.*

In addition,



*of the student-athletes surveyed **were willing to speak up and do more** about issues related to student-athlete activism.*

This data is supported by the powerful wave of student-athlete activism across all three NCAA divisions in response to national movements for racial and social justice throughout 2020 and beyond. Student-athletes are increasingly finding their voice for social justice and are looking for ways to use their platform for social causes – from racial justice, gender equity and LGBTQ+ inclusion, to environmental activism, sexual violence prevention, neurodiversity, immigration and mental health.



[Click here to read the Board of Governors' statement.](#)



It's vital to our community that student-athletes have the opportunity to use the platform that sport has given them to fight for justice. As administrators and coaches, we should value that our students have found their voice to stand up and break down the systems of oppression.

Resa Lovelace
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Action Strategies

Acknowledge student-athletes' holistic identities.



Athletic identities are often highly salient ones for student-athletes, which is why it is important to make conscious efforts for allowing student-athletes to explore and embrace other aspects of their identity. Make talking about student-athletes' various identities (social, academic, professional, etc.) part of your daily interactions with them, implement topics focused on their multiple identities into team meetings, and encourage their participation in activities outside of athletics.

Recognize the unique challenges of historically underrepresented and marginalized student-athletes.



It is sometimes difficult for members of privileged groups to see the need for activism, which is why it is important to elevate the voices of historically marginalized or underrepresented populations – regardless whether you agree with those voices. Student-athletes from historically marginalized or underrepresented populations, such as individuals of color, women and LGBTQ+ individuals, often face additional challenges navigating institutions of higher education. At the same time, these groups are more likely to participate in activism than their more privileged peers, given the barriers they have faced.

Educate yourself on the experiences of underrepresented groups by:

- Reading books, articles and academic journals.
- Watching media shows and programs, and listening to podcasts.
- Taking advantage of online training opportunities that allow you to “unlearn” behaviors and patterns that perpetuate social injustice (e.g., implicit association tests, bias training).

Assess student-athletes' needs when it comes to activism.



Regular climate surveys may already be a part of your athletics department's strategic plan. Consider adding a section specifically on student-athletes' needs when it comes to civic engagement and activism. If you cannot do a survey, think about joining student-athlete team meetings to find out what you can do to support their activism.

Gather and make available resources that can inform student-athletes' activism.



Most campuses have valuable resources that student-athletes can utilize to maximize the impact of their activism. There may also be resources in the surrounding community, such as nonprofit organizations or community action groups. Collect contact information for each of these resources and make them readily available for student-athletes (e.g., as part of the student-athlete handbook). Consider putting together a list of resources focused on activism that are available online.

The [NCAA office of inclusion](#) also provides a variety of resources on topics such as gender equity, racial justice, LGBTQ+ inclusion, disability and international student-athletes. Examples of campus resources: cultural centers, diversity offices, academic departments, faculty and staff committed to activist causes on campus.



Provide visibility for student-athletes' activist efforts.



Amplify student-athlete activist voices at your school or conference office while working with staff across the athletics department and on campus. For example, create a series of short videos highlighting student-athletes' activism, include such efforts in communication materials, and bring up student-athletes' leadership for activist causes in meetings with departmental and school leadership.

Engage student-athletes on topics related to activism.



Consider incorporating specific language that addresses activism in team documents. Dedicate time during each team meeting to discuss issues relevant to student-athletes' activism (e.g., racial injustices). Point out resources for activism on recruiting visits and engage athletics alumni who may have an interest in activism.

Work with staff at your school (e.g., chief diversity officer, athletics diversity and inclusion designee) to identify educational programming that may train student-athletes in utilizing their platform for activism. Conducting workshops on activism during team or SAAC meetings is a great way to engage student-athlete leaders on social issues while developing a social justice mindset.

Create an infrastructure for student-athlete activism.



One of the most effective ways to promote student-athletes' activism is to provide institutional support in the form of staff committed to the cause, funding and other resources that help student-athletes do activist work (e.g., providing meeting time and space). If you have budgetary power, dedicate a part of your budget to student-athletes' activist efforts and for their development as activists. For example, you could fund a number of student-athletes each year to attend conferences on a topic they are passionate about or provide financial support for activist initiatives they are passionate about.

Connect student-athletes with mentors in the activist space.



In addition to faculty (e.g., [faculty athletics representative](#)) and staff (e.g., chief diversity officer, [athletics diversity and inclusion designee](#), [senior woman administrator](#)), do you have alumni that are active in the activist space your student-athletes are engaging in? If so, make the introduction. Your school may also have alumni outside of athletics who are activists for causes your student-athletes are passionate about – these alumni can serve as great mentors for student-athletes.

Expect resistance and practice radical self-care.



Supporting activist work is often met with resistance, which can make it emotionally draining – especially for members of marginalized communities. Make sure to prioritize your mental and physical health when supporting (or 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 or feel emotionally taxed.

For more information on student-athlete activism, visit our [NCAA Student-Athlete Activism webpage](#).



I strongly feel all coaches should empower and engage with their student-athletes and talk about how each of them could use their voices to make a positive change. For some, it may start with themselves to understand a specific situation; for others, activism may mean addressing an issue within the athletics department or their local community.

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