

Fostering International Student-Athletes' Inclusion

Action Steps for Athletics Departments



INCLUSION



BACKGROUND

More than 21,000 international student-athletes are studying and competing at NCAA member schools today. This population copes with challenges that are often different from those domestic student-athletes face and also unique to their own national and cultural identities. Thus, integration of international student-athletes requires a nuanced intentional approach from athletics departments, administrators, coaches and teammates. Below are some considerations and suggested action steps for creating an environment that is supportive and inclusive of individuals from around the world. Please note that these are not exhaustive, but rather represent a living document created from input provided by NCAA membership during the [2021 NCAA International Student-Athlete Inclusion Think Tank](#). In addition, the feasibility of carrying these suggestions out varies, and depends, in part, on available resources.



ACTION STEPS

- Implement diversity, equity and inclusion training and education related to aspects of nationality and culture to increase cultural competence of coaches, administrators, staff and teammates. Basic understanding of cultural gaps and differences in communication styles will help generate cross-cultural leadership in your sphere.
- Host a comprehensive orientation, in collaboration with campus partners, for incoming international student-athletes to learn more about the athletics department, campus, local community, NCAA and more.
- Develop a handbook with relevant information for international student-athletes to navigate their athletics and academic experience in the United States. Evergreen information about campus resources, local social hubs and basic do's and don'ts can go a long way.
- Create a checklist with important items for international student-athletes to be aware of before they arrive on campus and when they are leaving for or returning from a holiday break.
- Create a mentorship program by connecting junior and senior international student-athletes with those who are incoming. Consider using international alumni as part of the program, as well.
- Identify ways to help establish or increase language competency by using campus resources and connecting international student-athletes with other students and advisors from their home country.
- Identify ways to increase or ensure academic competency by using resources on campus such as the library, writing center, learning specialists, academic advisors and more. International student-athletes may not be aware of all existing resources and opportunities available.
- Share information and background on the United States social context, sports culture, the local community and more. Avoid making assumptions about shared knowledge related to living and thriving in the United States.
- Designate a liaison within the athletics department (administrator, coach or staff) to serve as the point person for issues related to international student-athletes. Consider how you may use your [athletics diversity and inclusion designee](#) to better support international student-athletes.
- Strengthen and maintain relationships with the campus international services office by sharing a list of international student-athletes competing annually, and refer those students to individuals they can connect with on campus.
- Facilitate training, in partnership with the campus international services office, for athletics academic advisors, student life/career development staff and others to enable them to provide guidance to international student-athletes on decisions related to major selection, internship and employment opportunities, and optional practical training/curricular practical training.



- Incorporate accountability measures to ensure coaches, administrators and staff contribute to enhancing a sense of belonging for international student-athletes. This can be in the form of annual goals or part of a staff evaluation process. To be impactful, this expectation must be communicated clearly.
- Partner with career services, within the athletics department or on campus, to include companies that have an interest in or provide job/internship opportunities for international student-athletes in career fairs and other resources to support employment opportunities after college.
- Collaborate with your conference office to create a network of your member schools to share resources and exchange best practices for supporting international student-athletes.
- Create an international student-athlete group or organization to foster community and a support network. Monthly meetings and/or quarterly activities can enhance connectivity and sense of belonging.
- Be intentional about recognizing and celebrating all nationalities and cultures through gatherings around cultural food, a world trivia night, a flags parade at a sporting event and more.
- Share information about academic scholarships and workshop opportunities available on campus and through the NCAA, to support personal and professional development.

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Use inclusive language to make international student-athletes feel seen, empowered and valued. Use of accessible language allows clarity and transparency. For instance:

- Use plain writing rather than jargon and idioms (for example, avoid phrases such as “pass the baton,” “holding down the fort” or “in the trenches”).
- Spell out acronyms and abbreviations the first time you use them. If an acronym or abbreviation would not be recognizable on a subsequent reference, do not use it.
- Terms such as “citizen(s),” “American(s)” and the “American public” should be used only if these terms are referring to an individual or group identifying as such. For example, “citizens” should not be used as a generic term for people who live in the United States.
- Use “the United States of America” instead of “America.” Using “America” implies a primacy of the United States over the American continents and regions.
- Use “international” or “citizen of (nation/country of origin)” to describe an individual, instead of terms such as “foreigner” or “alien.”
- Use “world language” or be specific about the language being used (for example, “Spanish language” or “French language”) instead of “foreign language.”
- When referring to citizens of a country or a nationality, avoid using the nationality as a definite noun, such as “the Canadians” or “the Japanese.” Instead, use citizenship/nationality as an adjective, such as “the Japanese team,” or in a descriptive phrase, such as “people from Canada.”
- Use “undocumented” or “citizen of (nation/country of origin)” to describe an individual, instead of “illegal immigrant” or “illegal alien.” Such words dehumanize individuals by stripping their identity down to a legal status.



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