

Athletic Departments and Student Electoral Engagement



At one of Central Michigan University's football games, something unexpected happened. The home team players all registered to vote, then held up their registration cards at halftime, announced that they'd all registered, and invited the 30,000 spectators to do the same. Meanwhile the Jumbotron flashed a link to the school's voter engagement website, a page that told students how to register.

This initiative had a major impact, one any school with a football team could replicate. The Miami Dolphins recently [registered all their players](#) as part of a broader initiative to get their fans to vote. But football teams aren't the only ones that can do this. You could do this with your basketball team, soccer team, track team, any team with a campus presence. And because athletic teams are such prominent campus symbols, having their members create excitement around voting can be a powerful way to increase student electoral turnout.



Here are some ways your athletes and teams can make an impact:

- Encourage team members to register and publicly announce their registration as part of pre-game or half-time events, while directing spectators to your campus election engagement website (which we can help you create). Make this part of the game time ritual. Tie in to events like [National Voter Registration Day](#). Count down the weeks to when registration closes.
- Give athletic team members a visible presence in campus voter registration drives, like Northern Illinois University football players who staff registration tables in the run-up to major elections.
- Hand out registration and voting information during Homecoming parades.
- Make voting a competition. Have members of different teams compete to register the most students.
- Encourage athletes to participate in off-campus drives, as when Virginia Commonwealth University students [partnered with a nearby public housing project](#) to register voters, help felons restore their rights and arrange rides to the polls. Coordinate these approaches with campus leadership programs for athletes, like those developed by the [Ross Initiative in Sports for Equality \(RISE\)](#) and by the [National Consortium for Academics and Sports \(NACAS\)](#).
- Have your teams create t-shirts for athletes to wear that say, "I play football and I vote!" Or "I play basketball and I vote!" Or "I play soccer and I vote!"
- Closer to Election Day, encourage students attending athletic events to sign pledges to vote. Highlight voting locations and times and the kind of ID students need to bring to the polls.
- Have athletes join parades to the polls or similar Get Out the Vote celebrations.

Students vote when schools make it clear in every way that voting is important, and when every possible campus stakeholder participates. As symbols for your school, campus athletes can play an important role in encouraging their peers to participate in democracy. The more ways you can help them do this, the more salient the election will be, and the more likely your students will vote.