

College Swimming 101

It's that time of year again – the time when high school students begin to think about their collegiate futures. But where do you start? How do you become a student-athlete in the collegiate world of swimming? Searching for a university with a specific major, a certain geographic region, a certain athletic ability, as well as a team and a coach that will match your personality and skill can be daunting.

College Recruiting Timeline

Freshman/Sophomore Year

During your freshman and sophomore years, begin familiarizing yourself with universities at www.ncaa.org. Begin by looking at schools that have the major you want. Your diploma will be more important than your swimming times after graduation! Then research the academic reputation of the college.

After narrowing your search down by academics, you can begin to factor in swimming programs. Check out the team records and the coach's history with the team. Then, send the coaches of the programs you're interested in a cover letter, with an athletic resume that include the following:

- **Personal Information:** Your name, birth date, address, phone number, email
- **Education Information:** GPA and test scores
- **Training background:** How many workouts per week, yardage, hours per workout, dryland routine and years you've been swimming
- **Competition background:** Send them a record of your times/improvement
- **Extracurricular activities:** Any/all other activities you're involved in

**Be sure to send coaches updated letters and info annually!

During your first two years in high school, college coaches can send you a questionnaire in response, and general team info, but no recruiting materials. Also be sure to check initial-eligibility requirements because there are certain courses you will need to take to be eligible to swim as a freshman in college.

Junior Year

After you have begun your junior year, college coaches can begin sending you official recruiting material.

You should be sending updated information to them, and narrowing your list of universities to select from. During your junior year, you need to sign up for the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse. You can do it online at www.ncaachlearinghouse.net. It currently costs \$50.

On July 1 between your junior and senior years, college coaches can officially begin calling you. They are only allowed to speak with you once per week, but may send unlimited mailings and email.

Senior Year

Once your senior school year has begun, you may take five "official" visits where the university pays for any/all of your trip to college campuses. These five visits must be to different campuses. You may go to any campus "unofficially" (where you pay for all your expenses) as many times as you like, and at any point in the selection process...during any year of school.

When visiting campuses and meeting coaches, be sure to take a list of questions with you that you want to know about the team and university. Keep a journal of your visits, and write down your impressions of each place. List as many details as possible, so that you can compare the campuses after you've visited a number of them. Remember, you are choosing the place where you want to be happy for the next four years of your life!.

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If you decide you're really not interested in a particular school and the coach continues to call you, simply tell the coach you're not interested. It's a difficult thing to do, but it will save both of you time in the long run. If the coach gets mad or says mean things to you for not wanting to join his/her program, then it probably confirms that you didn't want to swim for this person anyway!

There are two "signing" periods for scholarships if you are offered one. The first early is in November and the late one is in April. There are pros and cons to both. If you take your visits early and are sure of your decision, then by all means, sign early! It takes a load of pressure off your shoulders in the spring semester!

Some college coaches may say to wait to sign, as they may have more scholarship money available in the spring semester to offer. While this is an attractive offer to consider, it is also a gamble because the scholarship money could also be depleted in the spring.

Some coaches may offer a full scholarship, while others may offer a partial scholarship, which can include any of those segments. Division I and II schools offer athletic scholarships, and Division III only has academic scholarships. If you are not sure about which college is right for you, then signing during the late period might be right for you. Give yourself more time to think over the decision, and make the one that's right for you.

Your high school guidance counselor can help you through this process, too. Your counselor can help you with financial aid information and getting your test scores sent to universities before your official visits. They may also have resources to tell you about the academic reputations of the schools you're looking at. Don't be afraid to ask questions and get help! The more informed you are, the more easily you're going to make the best decision for yourself!