
Swimming in College: Navigating The Recruiting Process



What's the difference between levels (divisions)?



Division 1- "the big division"

- Minimums – sectional finals or above, preferably Junior Nationals
- Mid-Major (CAA, AAC, WAC) vs. Big Five (ACC, SEC, Big 10, Big 12, Pac 12)
- Separate National Championships, sometimes separate conference champs

Division 2 – "Growing division"

- Minimums – sectional level or above, although girls can be slightly slower
- Can be state or private schools, and usually range dramatically in size
- Combined National Championships, includes the 1000 free

Division 3 – "no athletic scholarships"

- Minimums – Zone level swimmers, sectional and above will get an extra look
- ~~Usually~~ smaller liberal arts, academic schools with limited athletic budgets, but not always
- Combined National Championships

What's the difference between levels (divisions)?



NAIA – “Division 2 – Version 2.0”

- Wide range of ability – great for the late bloomer with some State cuts
- Looser academic requirements than the NCAA – separate Eligibility Center
- Combined championships

NJCAA – “Training Wheels”

- Also a great first step for late bloomers or swimmers academic issues
- 2 year degree program allows for easy transition into NCAA programs
- Combined championships

Club Swim Teams – “fun swimming”

- Great for any level of swimmer as well as any commitment level
- No recruiting needed, just contact the club president
- Yearly championship in Atlanta



NCAA RECRUITING FACTS

College sports create a pathway to opportunity for student-athletes.

DIVISION I

Division I schools, on average, enroll the most students, manage the largest athletics budgets, offer a wide array of academic programs and provide the most athletics scholarships.

PARTICIPATION

- **182,681** student-athletes
- **350** colleges and universities

ATHLETICS SCHOLARSHIPS

57% of all student-athletes receive some level of athletics aid.

ACADEMICS

2019 Graduation Success Rate: **88%***

OTHER STATS

Median Undergraduate Enrollment: **8,960**
Average Number of Teams per School: **19**
Average Percentage of Student Body Participating in Sports: **4%**
Division I National Championships: **26**

DIVISION II

Division II provides growth opportunities through academic achievement, high-level athletics competition and community engagement. Many participants are first-generation college students.

PARTICIPATION

- **122,722** student-athletes
- **302** colleges and universities

ATHLETICS SCHOLARSHIPS

63% of all student-athletes receive some level of athletics aid.

ACADEMICS

2019 Academic Success Rate: **73%***

OTHER STATS

Median Undergraduate Enrollment: **2,428**
Average Number of Teams per School: **16**
Average Percentage of Student Body Participating in Sports: **10%**
Division II National Championships: **25**

DIVISION III

The Division III experience provides an integrated environment that focuses on academic success while offering competitive athletics and meaningful nonathletics opportunities.

PARTICIPATION

- **193,814** student-athletes
- **439** colleges and universities

FINANCIAL AID

80% of all student-athletes receive some form of academic grant or need-based scholarship; institutional gift aid totals **\$17,000** on average.

ACADEMICS

2019 Academic Success Rate: **87%***

OTHER STATS

Median Undergraduate Enrollment: **1,740**
Average Number of Teams per School: **19**
Average Percentage of Student Body Participating in Sports: **17%**
Division III National Championships: **28**

Want to play NCAA sports? Visit ncaa.org/playcollegesports

*Graduation rate for student-athletes, including those who transfer from one school to another.

Revised August 2020: The number of schools for each division is current as of the 2020-21 academic year. This does not include reclassifying, provisional or exploratory schools. All other data are current as of the 2018-19 academic year.

Creating An Initial List (narrowing down 500+ schools)



A typical recruit will start the recruiting process mid -year (feb/mar) of Junior Year Vs. A Top 100 recruit will need to start this process mid -year of Sophomore Year

Next are 10 questions to think about when looking at schools

Creating An Initial List (narrowing down 500+ schools)



1.) What do you want to study?

- General areas of study are easy to work around & find schools Super specific majors require a more focused eye, and may limit spectrum

2.) Combined or Separate or Gender Isolated program?

- Combined Programs – one head coach & staff over men's & women's
- Separate Programs – one head coach & staff over EACH gender
- Gender Isolated – school only offers program for one gender (usually women's)

3.) Football or No Football?

- Affects Title 9 compliance as well as general athletic funding/facilities
- Can be indicative of community support of athletes

Creating An Initial List (narrowing down 500+ schools)



4.) Male or Female head coach?

- Some athletes work better with one gender or another

5.) Commitment Preference – year round, Sept-May or seasonal?

- Year round – look D1 or top 10 D2 programs
- Sept-May Mid Major D1 (those without full funding) or D2 or top D3
- Seasonal – lower end D2, D3 or club swimming

6.) Size of School Preference? Under 4000, 4-10K, 10-20K, Super School

- Under 4000 – D3, D2, NAIA, NJCAA – this is generally HS sized
 - 4-10K – D2, D1 (private), NJCAA – some D3 fall in here too
 - 10-20K – most state schools fall in here • 20K + - Ohio State, USC, Georgia, NCSU etc. BIG schools.
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Creating An Initial List (narrowing down 500+ schools)



7.) Type of experience? Walk-on, Recruited Walk-on, Partial, Full

- Walk-on – zero contact with coach until admitted, then either tryout or JV team
- Recruited Walk-on – Official/Unofficial visit, guaranteed spot on team, can have academic \$\$
- Partial Scholarship – ranges from books (~1000) to 75% or more – guaranteed spot, expected to score at conference/NCAAs
- Full Scholarship – VERY VERY RARE. Must be the best kid in the history of the school. Usually expected to win/score high in multiple events at conference or NCAAs

8.) Finances

- Parents need to be VERY clear with how much they can spend/want to spend scholarships are NOT a guarantee – positives and negatives combining athletic & academic aid is not always an option.

Creating An Initial List (narrowing down 500+ schools)



9.) Location

- NOT to be used as a restricting agent, remind them to be open-minded
- Depending on career path, may result in their future residence

10.) Intangibles

- What do they value in their relationship with the coach?
 - What do they enjoy about their current team experience?
 - What type of living environment do they prefer?
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Narrowing Your Initial List (20-25 Schools to fill out questionnaires available on athletic sites)

Evaluate initial list of schools to swimmer fit

1) NCAA Results

2) Conference Results

3) Top Times Lists – individual colleges – if not top 3 in 3-5 events, it's not a fit

4) Rosters – where are swimmers from?
Local/foreign/out-of-state

5) Academics – does the school offer what your swimmer is interested in?

Narrowing Your Initial List



3-5 “Safety” Schools

- Usually local, where the athlete could attend without swimming

5 Big Money Schools

- Where the athlete would be the “big fish” and draw a lot of attention from the coaching staff

10-15 Scholarship/RWO schools

- Athlete would be recruited, but may need to meet specific athletic/academic criteria for participation with the team

3-5 “Dream” Schools

- Schools where walk-on status would be hoped for. Communication with these schools would hopefully result in time requirements and/or invitation to a JV squad.
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Narrowing Your Initial List



Evaluate responses from 20- 25 schools

Narrow to 8-10 schools to continue communication, and pursue visits

- 1-2 schools should be local/nearby – ask for unofficial trips
 - 3-6 schools should be schools where the athlete can contribute asap
 - 1-3 schools should be schools that may be more of an “athletic” decision for future performance goals.
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Recruiting Rules — When Can it Start?



Whenever YOU want! Take the initiative.

- Recruit the coach (a ton of student - athletes, go find the school you want)
- Do your research, show the coach you are passionate about school/program.
- Be persistent. Don't be afraid of getting a "No". Things change, rosters change.



Recruiting Rules – When Can it Start?

DIVISION	OFFICIAL VISITS	PHONE CALLS	EMAIL/TEXT	OFF CAMPUS CONTACT
I	August 1 of beginning of Junior Year	After June 15 preceding Junior year	After June 15 preceding Junior year	August 1 of beginning of Junior Year
II	After June 15 preceding Junior year	After June 15 preceding Junior year	After June 15 preceding Junior year	After June 15 preceding Junior year
III	January 1 of junior year	no start date restriction	no start date restriction	After completion of soph year

Narrowing List to 5 and Scheduling Trips



NCAA Eligibility Center

- Make sure to have your athletes enroll and get transcripts and test scores sent there at the conclusion of their Junior Year.

Narrowing List to 5 and Scheduling Trips



Standardized Tests

- To take trips, athletes must have standardized tests on file – PSAT, PLAN, ACT, SAT are all acceptable tests for taking trips. They will need to have ACT or SAT for enrollment
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Narrowing List to 5 and Scheduling Trips



Communication with High Schools

- Make sure the school understands the recruiting process – communicate with teachers and administrators prior to trip for homework & tests.

You've Decided!! Now What...

Signing a National Letter of Intent



Verbal Commitment

- A verbal agreement refers to a student-athlete verbally agreeing to play sports for a college before he signs a National Letter of Intent (NLI). The verbal commitment isn't binding for either the athlete or the college and the agreement can be made at any time – swimmers don't have to wait until senior year.

Signing a National Letter of Intent



National Letter of Intent (NLI)

- The NLI is a binding agreement between a prospective student-athlete and the college.
 - Before your swimmer signs a NLI, make sure he is completely sure of his decision as there are penalties for signing an NLI but deciding to attend another college, including losing a full year of eligibility and completing a full academic year at the new school before being eligible to compete.
 - At the time of the signing of the NLI, the athlete must receive a written offer of athletic financial aid for the entire academic year from the institution named in the document. The offer must list the terms, conditions and amount of the athletics aid award.
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Signing a National Letter of Intent



National Letter of Intent (NLI)

- After the NLI is signed, all other coaches have to stop recruiting the athlete and, in fact, are not permitted to have contact other than exchanging a greeting.
- The NLI is signed during the designated signing period. The early signing period is typically in November and the regular signing period follows the early signing period and goes until August 1.
- Walk-on athletes and other non-scholarship athletes do not sign an NLI, but there are other options.

In Closing...



There is a place for everyone to swim in college. Do your research to find the right fit.

The college swimming experience is worth it. The time/effort pays off in your academics, adjustment to college, friend and support group forever, resources, etc.
