

Swimming in College

By Bob Wood, Coeur d'Alene Swim Team

Introduction

The goal of this Swimming in College document is to give swimmers and their parents a starting point to search for colleges that have a swimming program and help match the swimmer to the school. I hope you find this information helpful and it makes the search for a college easier.

Ultimately there is one major point to keep in mind when looking for a college to swim at – **you are going to college to get the best education possible**. Never forget this when looking at colleges to swim at. Swimming can be a wonderful experience in college but it is not the main reason you are going to college. Your future success will be based upon the quality of your education, not how fast you swim.

Seeking the right college, a great education, and a college swimming program is a moving target with changes occurring in college programs every year. Compounding the problem are swimming programs being dropped, and a few added every year. A successful hunt for a good college match requires flexibility throughout your selection process.

I would ask everyone using this information to please take the time to inform me when they become aware of new information, or have anything to contribute to this resource. Please email me at www.strokespecific.net or call me at 208-699-8008 with any corrections or suggestions you may have for improving this information.

One thing that would be a great help to me is if you find any good Resources that you could relay to me so that I could include them in a revised edition of this paper.

Swimmers past and present: we would sincerely appreciate any help you could give us regarding your college experience. Hopefully a growing part of this site will include your ranking of the college you have attended. We will be asking you to rank your college experience on a zero through 5 star ranking on a number of different categories. This will include a ranking of the swimming program, a ranking of the academic program, and a separate ranking of the overall college experience for the college you attend. We would also like to ask you for any additional comments about your school experience so others may benefit from what you have learned.

Sincerely,

Bob Wood

Coach, Coeur d'Alene Area Swim Team, CAST Crocs!

208-699-8008

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Getting Started

When should you start looking at colleges?

Parents, its usually you that gets this ball rolling since you are the ones that typically start thinking about this first. The freshman year is not too early to start but typically the swimmer's sophomore year is when most start to seriously consider their college path and the part that their sport may play in college. Don't panic, whenever you start it is better than waiting until after graduation!

What is the first thing to do?

Contact the American Swim Coaches Association (ASCA) and buy their **Swimming in College Directory**. Every few years they update it to the best of their ability and it is a great place to get started. Read the Introduction a couple times to get a feel for what is and what isn't allowed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules. The summary on recruiting rules alone is worth the price of the book. In general this book will save you hours of on-line work.

Second. Start a list of colleges you would like to attend.

Sit down with your son or daughter and come up with a long laundry list of colleges you would like to attend that offer a major course of study that you are interested in and have swimming programs. Don't be too picky at this point BUT, every time you add a college to the list, there are three major filters that must be initially used.

- ✓ First, check out the Grade Point Average (GPA) needed to attend. This is one of the easiest college filters. If the college requires a 3.9 and you have a 3.1 don't bother putting it on the list – sorry. Even if you are a great swimmer the coach probably doesn't have the pull to get you into that college.
- ✓ Second, check the cost of tuition – if its way out of your price range it's not a good idea to add to the list.
- ✓ The third filter to apply are the majors offered by the college – do they have the major that you think you will want to study? This is a big one, education comes first and if a school does not have the major desired, eliminate it. If your major is undecided make a list of three or four possible majors that may interest you and apply these to the school.

By applying these three filters at the outset of every college selection made you can save yourself a lot of time and effort.

Third. Contact College Swim Programs

Start contacting swim programs on your list by email and request information about the school and the swim program. By directing these inquires to the coaching staff you are letting them know you are looking at their program. Starting your sophomore year you can make calls to coaches to ask questions and request

information about their program. **These calls and contacts PUT YOU ON THE RADAR of that program.** As a sophomore your times might not catch their eye too much, but you will be on their list and a good recruiting coach will make sure that they keep you informed about their college and they will check your progress to see how your times are progressing through the year using the SWIMS database at USA Swimming.

You CAN visit college campuses. These visits fall into the category of unofficial visits and cannot be requested by the college. Many families wisely use a few days of their summer vacations to visit colleges under consideration and check the campus and the swimming facility out. This is a great idea if you have the time and the money! Make notes during and after your visit about the school, your likes and dislikes regarding the school. Also when you attend travel meets take a few spare hours after the meet and visit the colleges close by with swimming programs, even if these schools are not on your list. You never know when a visit might change your mind about a school.

The “Conversation”

When it comes time to start looking at colleges the next step is to sit down and have the most important conversation you are going to have during your college selection process. **This conversation is about money and, specifically “How are you going to pay for college?”**

As most parents and swimmers know any conversation about money can be a very sensitive subject, especially when it comes to spending a lot of it, and a college involves a whole lot of it.

Parents want their children to get a great education and a great start to the rest of their life. Parents have a perspective that the student does not, they know that good jobs are hard to come by, money is hard to hang onto, and they want their children to do better than they, themselves, have done. The typical high school student on the other hand has a different perspective, they know they have their whole life ahead of them, they know that nothing is impossible, and they may not pay a lot of attention to long-term consequences of their actions.

Under many circumstances the swimmer needs to realize that their parents may have little or no money to provide to them for their college education. Under the best of circumstances parents may be able to provide most, or all, of the money needed for their swimmer’s education. In all cases, from a little to a lot, the swimmer is asking their parents to provide an investment in their future that they should be grateful for.

Try your best to keep your emotions in check when discussing money for college. Swimmers, be grateful for any amount your parents can help you with, and

understand that in many families it is eighteen and out – your parents may have no money to help with your college education.

Parents need to sit down and decide prior to this conversation, what they can afford, set an upper limit, and then **stick to it**. It is beyond the scope of this guide to go into all the details of what is and what isn't affordable. A four-year college education at its best is a lot like buying a new, very expensive car, every year for four years. Total cost can exceed that of a new home. While each individual situation is different parents need to consider some very important items;

- First, if depending upon a swimming scholarship to pay for some part of the education, everyone needs to accept the fact that the student may not be able to handle swimming and academic workload at college. Many swimmers, for a variety of reasons, do not swim a full four years. Burnout, injuries, disagreement with the coaches or teammates can all lead to a severely curtailed swimming career in college. While everyone thinks, "that couldn't happen to me!" it can, it does, and it might happen to you!
- Second, develop a fallback plan ahead of time and then stick to it! Swimmers and their parents need to discuss a plan in case their swimming in college career stops due to injury, poor grades or losing interest in swimming. Few parents and swimmers discuss this ahead of time, but everyone should. Should the swimmer come home and go to a community college? Transfer back to an in-state college to cut back on tuition? Get a job and go to school part time? Develop a fall back plan that everyone can agree to and everyone can afford! I strongly suggest that the swimmer and parents type up the fall back plan and ALL sign it! If it's in writing it's much easier to swallow when the time comes.
- Third, study the financial options you have for college. How are you the parents and you the student going to pay for college? Student loans? Second mortgage? Tap your retirement account? Split it 50/50? Again these details are currently beyond the scope of this paper, but they need to be discussed, decided and written down.
- Four, begin researching the potential of obtaining academic scholarships. While it is currently beyond the scope of this paper to fully discuss this option, understand that there are far more academic scholarship available than sports scholarships.
- Fifth, decide if post-graduate work is going to be a part of the overall college plan. If it is a possibility you need to plan for it financially prior to the start of college. This becomes an important part of your financial plan and must be considered when student loans and the debt load calculated.

Is College Worth It?

A question that needs to be discussed (and most parents don't want to hear) is; "Is college worth it?" In researching this work the most current studies that take into account current average costs are YES! But there is a big caveat to these studies;

college is definitely worth it if the majors fall into the STEM categories – Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math – other majors not so much.

The student and parents both must carefully consider cost of higher education against the income potential of the major that the student is considering for their career. Then consider the amount of debt the student will be saddled with when they complete school. Ask yourself - “Will the debt payments be manageable with they type of job that you can potentially land given your major?”

The classic example of this is a teaching career. Many stories are heard about newly graduating teachers getting their first teaching job and then not being able to manage their debt load given their low income and high student loans. It is extraordinarily hard for a graduating senior in high school to plan this far ahead, often a college student will change majors more than once during their college career. However many times plans change the net result is when graduating from college the student is going to have to get a job and pay back any loans accumulated. Spend some time thinking about it.

For the Swimmers – the Basics on Getting Started in your College Search for the Proper School

1. Am I fast enough to swim in college?

The short answer is “YES!” If you have the desire and drive there are colleges that want you on their program. You must be willing to work hard – harder than you have in your age group program. If you are willing to maintain a positive attitude – even during early morning workouts, hard dry land sessions, and brutal pool sessions you will fit into many programs. Not every program. No. Many elite programs are so brutally competitive that you just have to be drop dead fast to get into them, you and your parents need to face that fact. Many more programs want swimmers who can add something to their program – fast times sure! But they also look for leaders and swimmers who are willing to come in with a positive attitude and a great work ethic to support their team and grow their team.

We can’t emphasize enough the necessity of having a positive attitude, a great work ethic, and being on time to practice when swimming in college. Positive attitudes create a team dynamic that is **Winning!** A swimmer can be the slowest swimmer on a swim team and yet the most important individual on the team by having a positive attitude, hard work ethic, being on time to every practice, setting a great example and having that attitude wear off on everyone else on that team.

2. Show me the money – your responsibilities to your parents.

Your parents are going to say it, but you probably don’t listen to them anyway, so we are going to say it here for them; if your parents are willing to shell out a whole bunch of money for you to go to college – you owe them! Yep, plain and simple, you

owe them to go to class, pass, and thank them every time they write a check. Choke it down and smile while you thank them! Remember they have also been paying the bills that have got you to this point also; the swim club dues, the fundraising, the gas driving you to practice and the cost of all the meets you've gone to. So if you tend to get riled up when you talk to your parents about money issues – choke it down!

3. Show me the money – your responsibility to your coach and college team.

So, you worked your butt off, swam fast, and now landed big, fat scholarship offers. You're walking on clouds – Wait! **Reality check time.** Time to think about what that really means. There are a lot of responsibilities to a scholarship and it helps to have a clear idea of what the team, and especially the coach, requires in return. These responsibilities may be waaaaaaay different than your club coach required!

- ✓ Your coach and team will require you to be on time. Every time. Every day – all year long.
- ✓ Your team expects you to swim faster than you have. There is not a coach in any college swimming program that doesn't think they can make you swim faster than you have before. There's probably not a swimmer around that doesn't think they can swim faster, but are you still willing to put in the work – which will be much more than you're used to – to swim faster? Swimming in college WILL BE HARDER THAN YOU ARE USED TO!
- ✓ You are a part of a business. That business is college swimming. While doing age group swimming it's all for fun. In college your college coach's sole livelihood is his college team and the overall performance of that college team. He has pressure to perform and you will have pressure to perform – are you mentally prepared for that?
- ✓ Grades. You have to perform in the classroom too! You have to have passing grades to be eligible to swim. Grades not good enough – no swimming – potential loss of scholarship. 'Nuff said!

4. How far is far enough away from home?

"I can't wait to get 1000 miles away from my parents – they drive me crazy!" Is an often-heard refrain from swimmers leaving for college. But when you are making up your list of colleges think about what this means for a minute. The further you are away from home the less visits you are going to get from your parents (this could be a good thing!) but the chances of getting home for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Spring vacation – are also less likely. Are you going to miss your friends? Family dinners? Girlfriend? Grandparents? The list goes on and on. Think for a minute about how hard it's going to be to get home for a few days, and how expensive it will be. Think about the first time you are away and get the flu and have to spend five days sick in bed without anyone to fix you a meal, get tissues for you, and get you a warm drink....

One of the most common refrains from swimmers in college after the first 3 months of college is how hard it is to be so far from home. If it's more than a 4 hour drive or a 2 hour plane ride your college is a long, long way from home!

5. Hey. Your Actually There to Go to School and Study!?

There are a lot of extra distractions in college; the opposite sex, no one telling you to go to bed on time, no one checking your homework, teachers who don't care if you attend class or not, to name a few. If you always have been a marginal, undisciplined student are you going to become a good student when you go away to college? **Probably not.**

At college you have the extra responsibility of being expected to perform academically to remain eligible for swimming. Yes, your coach will get reports from your teachers on your performance and, yes, you will lose your eligibility if you do not perform academically. And, a warning, your coach will not like you very much if you cannot stay eligible. You are there to study and get a degree, not party, date and swim. {I put this section in here for your parents, so they will be able to say "See I told you so...". You, the swimmer already know this stuff, and its true!}

6. Slowest, Fastest, Middle of the Pack. School Selection Based on Your Swimming Speed.

One of the most important selection criteria for a college is how fast you are in relation to the other swimmers on the college team that you are thinking about attending. Most of you are very confident you will be getting a lot faster when you swim in college, and this is most likely true. However you must check the speeds of the other swimmers at each college you are considering in your stroke of specialty(s) to see how you stack up against them!

Many programs have travel squads made up of the fastest swimmers that go to all the meets and training squads of developing swimmers that are slower who do not go to travel meets. The general rule of thumb is; pick a school where you are not the fastest swimmer – you want to be pushed and challenged. And pick a school where you are not the slowest so you can make the travel squad.

It is a real bummer to train as hard or harder than anyone else on the team and be left behind because you are not yet fast enough to make the travel squad. We have heard many stories about how swimmers spent one, two or even three years on the training squad and not enjoying it one bit.

7. Fly, Back, Breast, Free, IM. School Selection Based on the School's Swimming Needs.

Another major consideration picking a college swimming program is figuring out the needs of the swimming program you are considering attending during your freshman and sophomore years. What swimmers are graduating from that program the year that you graduate for high school and what strokes do they do? College coaches need a balance to their roster so that they can be competitive in dual meets and championship meets. What types of strokes will that coach be looking to replace? **Your chances of getting a good scholarship are largely based on what stroke specialties the coach is looking to replace the year you graduate.**

If your specialty is breaststroke and the team has two sophomore phenoms in breaststroke your chances of being offered a big scholarship are non-existent in most cases. However if you're a fast breaststroker and you see that they have two senior breaststrokers graduating that year your chances of getting a scholarship offer improve dramatically. Look to the schools that have needs that match your stroke skills – this is “Smart Marketing of your Skills”.

8. School Selection Based on the “Real” Needs.

Never lose sight of the fact that the main purpose is to find a good college fit is based on your educational requirements. The education you get lasts a lifetime! A good college fit means the most important criteria is the quality of education you get. A correct match between educational majors and the student's desire to learn will yield the most beneficial results. Swimming is secondary!

9. I'm Not Very Fast but I love Swimming and I Really Want to Swim in College – Is There a Place for Me?

Yes! There are colleges where you will fit in beautifully and have a wonderful swimming experience. There are a great number of colleges looking for swimmers who can contribute to their swimming program who do not have a starring role. However, there are a few characteristics that you must have to be successful in finding a good college fit for you. First, and most importantly you must have a great attitude to bring to the pool every day. Second, you must have a great work ethic and be willing to work harder than everyone else on the team to achieve your goals. Third, you need to be supportive of all the other swimmers on the team that may be faster than you. Fourth, you have to be willing to seek out the programs that will be a good match for you. And, fifth you must be willing to swim without swimming scholarship money.

These programs are not typically in DI and DII schools, they are more typically found in DIII, community college, and NAIA schools although there are exceptions to that rule. Often they are in schools that are just starting a competitive swimming program and their rosters are short of experienced swimmers. In this realm currently there are more opportunities for women than men. And under these circumstances they are often looking for swimmers with good academic grades.

Basically these programs are looking for great Leaders! Swimmers who will set the standard for hard work, timeliness, and positive attitudes. College coaches are always looking for swimmers who can energize their team!

What to Do During High School – by Year

Freshman Year

1. Focus on Academics!!!
2. Re-evaluate and improve your club swimming performance. What could you do better to help yourself swim faster? Start showing up to practice on time. Pay better attention. Offer your coaches a little bit more respect. WORK a little harder. Make it a goal to be team captain by your senior year. Don't give your club coach any reason not to recommend you to a college swim program.
3. Begin a file with a list of your favorite colleges with swimming programs – if you have any.
4. Start attending “big” meets if you have the qualifying times and money to do so. These expose you to college coaches.
5. Complete a questionnaire that may be available on any of your favorite colleges' websites, and submit it to all colleges you might be interested in.

Sophomore Year

1. Focus on Academics!
2. Start preparing for SAT and ACT. Buy the study aids and start using them on a regularly scheduled basis. Make one weeknight a week an ACT or SAT study night and dedicate a block of time to that study.
3. Continue to add and develop your college list.
4. Email the coaches of these colleges and introduce yourself. ***Triple-check your spelling and composition before you hit “SEND”.*** Make sure you spell the coaches and colleges name correctly!

5. Continue to be on time to practice.
6. If possible, while on vacation or at away swim meets in college towns start visiting colleges you might like to attend (unofficial visits)
7. Begin your college selection spreadsheet.

Junior Year

1. Focus on Academics!
2. Carefully file and keep all correspondence with schools by school. Leave every possible option open.
3. Have THE TALK your parents. What can you and they reasonably afford.
4. Register with the NCAA initial eligibility clearinghouse.
5. Continue to stay in contact with all coaches that have shown and interest in you. Don't be shy! Show interest in the schools you would like to attend.
6. Take the SAT and or ACT.
7. Complete Core Classes necessary for college, and complete the core course worksheet.
8. In spring or summer coaches may contact you. Take notes during or immediately after every conversation.
9. Talk to your coach and discuss what you need to improve upon to become a viable swimmer in college. Also ask your coach if he has any college connections, coaches and programs he knows about, that might be a good match for your skills.
10. Talk to your school councilor about helping you get into the colleges on your short list, and ask them .
11. Begin researching academic college scholarships that you might be eligible for. Many resources are available to get you started down this path. (See the resources section for a couple of suggestions to get you started here.)
12. Early in the fall of your Junior year – before school starts if possible – arrange a meeting with your school councilor to make sure they help you review the your academic record to insure that all of the classes are taken in

- a timely manner to insure that you will meet NCAA academic requirements. Clearly state your intentions to your councilor, if in doubt about the councilor's knowledge about dealing with NCAA requirements you might want to talk to a different councilor who has experience in these matters.
13. Core classes, those that are absolutely necessary to compete should be completed if possible by the end of the first semester of your senior year. That way, if anything goes astray, like the swimmer does not pass a necessary class in the fall, there is time to correct the problem.
 14. During April or May of your junior year check your status with the NCAA clearinghouse, making sure that upon graduation all the requirements are met to be eligible to compete in college.

Senior Year

1. Focus on Academics!
2. Narrow down your college selection spread sheet to a Top Ten List of colleges you would like to attend. This list in many cases could be much smaller than ten and in other cases much larger than ten, but at some point early in your senior year you need to start narrowing the field of colleges you would like to attend.
3. Take official visits, if offered. Take Notes, pictures and ask questions!
4. The summer before your senior year, take any unofficial visits you feel you need to. Take Notes, pictures and ask questions.
5. Begin applying to schools in fall.
6. Complete ALL core courses, in the first semester of your senior year.
7. Continue to talk to coaches at schools you are interested in.
8. Request a report from the NCAA initial eligibility clearinghouse, if one does not come automatically.
9. Retake SAT and ACT if needed to get a higher score.

10. Make your college selection and write down and sign your fall back plan.
11. Apply for any and all academic scholarships that you might qualify for.*
12. If you are a highly coveted swimmer prepare on July 1st to receive phone calls from coaches during the early recruiting period.

* At this writing there is a type of scholarship that may “compete” with sports scholarships, these are some types of religious scholarships. Make sure you understand this section of the NCAA rules when applying for scholarships with religious affiliations.

1. focus On Academics

In case you haven’t noticed every year of your high school career begins with;
1. Focus on Academics

Without a doubt this is the most important thing to help your swimming career in college. We recently had a swimmer with a solid 3.7 GPA and blazing speed come up with her dream list of colleges. Admittedly, she had some lofty goals but after a brief review of her top 10 colleges three of her top picks had to be dropped from the list. Her grade point average was too low!

Eventually we found her a wonderful fit and a scholarship worth around \$30,000 per year but this is a case in point why grades really matter. No swim coach wants to risk a scholarship on a swimmer with marginal academics, and while the swimmer above didn’t have risky grades it prevented her from even applying to three of her dream schools. There are also very few college coaches that have enough pull to alter the grade point requirements of that institution. {I will not say that they don’t exist, it’s just that they are few and far between.}

Academics matter, and if you have a GPA below 3.0 GPA you are going to severely limit your scholarship opportunities, and eliminate many from your list. There are a lot of very talented, very smart, swimmers out there and you are competing with every one of them. In fact the sport of swimming has the second highest GPA of any college sport, so it’s not enough just to be fast – you have to be a good student too!

Official and Unofficial Visits.

You can only make five official visits your senior year (these are visits where the team invites you to come and visit), however you can make as many unofficial visits to as many campuses as you can afford or have time for.

Here’s what to think about when making a visit to a college campus:

1. Remember to contact the college coach to make sure they will be there and have time for you when you make an unofficial visit.
2. Try to make unofficial visits when the swim team members are there, you should try to talk to some of them. This may not be possible if making summer trips but often several of the team members may stay year round, ask and see!
3. Ask if you will be able to get a tour of the swim facility, or watch the team practice.
4. Items to take on every college visit: Assemble a copy of your medical and Academic records along with a current best times report. A cover letter introducing yourself to the coaching staff is a plus but make it specific to the school you are visiting! Take on every college visit a notebook, pen, and camera. Use these three items when on campus to record your thoughts impressions and use the camera to remind you of the campus, swimming facility, coaching staff and swimmers you have met.
5. **Take notes** at every possible opportunity during your visit include everything you really like about the school, and everything you don't like about the school.
6. Whether you are taking an official or unofficial visit **dress well** (modestly, don't wear your favorite band's concert shirt – the head coach might not like that band!). Talk to people and coaches politely. You are being looked at.
7. Make **eye contact** when talking to coaches, it's not a stare down, but looking someone in the eyes when answering questions sends a very positive message.
8. Also don't forget to smile!
9. **Be 10 minutes early for every appointment**, practice, and event you are going to attend.
10. If you are going to attend a practice be there even earlier than 10 minutes before practice time. Give yourself time to change, fill your water bottle, get your gear ready, and find the locker rooms.

First Impressions – Dress for Success

Ladies and gentlemen; when you meet the coaches shake hands with them and look them in the eye with a smile! You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. (Here's a good tip; if you have a hard time looking someone in the eye, look at their forehead.) When you are doing a workout with the team, always look at the coaches attentively when they are talking, often one coach will give instructions while another gages your reaction and watches you swim.

Guys if you wear a baseball cap all the time – take it off – and dress neatly, leave the Insane Clown Posse tee shirts at home. Ladies dress modestly but comfortably and neatly, you don't have to wear a dress but leave the designer jeans with holes, or the current fashion of the day at home. **For both male and female swimmers you are also making a first impression with the other swimmers** – remember this! Ladies, consider how you would feel if you were on a team and you saw a new girl show up on the deck dressed and made up like a fashion model. What would your first impression be? Probably negative, right? Don't look like you are high maintenance!

For workouts with the team

Find out what gear to bring ahead of time and don't wear the suit with 12 holes in it, your fins with fungus, or a swim cap that insults other swimmers (your club cap is fine). You absolutely must bring your own gear (suit, goggles, cap, water bottle) to a practice with the team – don't plan on borrowing anything except possibly a kickboard. You must find out before you go what equipment is required at practice prior to the travel trip. Fins? Snorkel? Paddles? Nose Clip? We know that this is a pain in the butt for airplane travel but college coaches are not in the habit (like your club coach might be) of loaning gear to visiting swimmers.

Also talk to someone that is familiar with the program if there are any peculiar requirements of that team, for example we know of at least two teams that start ten minutes before practice time, every practice! Their coaches expect every swimmer to be in the water and ready to go 10 minutes before practice, every practice, every day. If your late even a second– you don't train! Their philosophy is “on time is late – early is on time!” Imagine showing up to your first practice with the team 10 minutes early and finding out that everyone is already in the water. Embarrassing, right?

QUESTIONS [and why you ask them]

With careful research many of the questions asked below can be answered ahead of time. Do your homework and try to answer all the questions you can ahead of time. I would suggest not taking a list in with you to meet the coaches. Rehearse the

questions you ask the coach before hand and ask them in a polite manner. Have a couple standard questions ready as your first couple questions. If you have a couple ready you will be able to relax a little more with the others you need to ask.

Questions to ask the coaching staff.

1. Do you need my skills as a swimmer? [This determines how much money you may be offered.]
2. With the times I have right now, will I make the travel team? [You do not want to join a team and then not travel with them your freshman year!]
3. Who would be my primary coach? [A head coach often delegates their workload, you need to meet the coach that will be your coach! What if he's the one you can't stand? The reason this question is repeated to the swimmers (below) as well as the coaches is to make sure the coaches are telling you the truth. Head coaches have been know to tell recruits that they will be your primary coach, and this is true, they are the Head Coach, but then the actual coach that coaches you is Conan the Destroyer, the coach that the swimmers hate.]
4. What percentage of your swimmers graduates with a 4 year degree? [Your there to get a degree, right?]
5. How well does the University treat the swim team compared to the other sports on campus? [It's nice to know that the swim team receives the same respect as other sports teams, but this is not always the case. Sometimes a frank answer by the coach is very telling, if the answer is "not very well" – watch out!]
6. What is your team's GPA? [If the coaches know this they pay attention to how their swimmers are doing academically, and not just whether they are eligible or not.]
7. What can I contribute to improve your swim program? [This is a big one, it will allow you to gage how much they need you. WARNING; coaches will ask **you** this question in one form or another – be prepared to answer it yourself.]
8. How do I become a team captain? [This question will impress them! You're not even on the team yet and your gunning to be a team captain!? Every

coach wants leaders in the pool! It's even better if you are able to preface this question with; "I am the Captain of my club (or High School) team, what does it take to be Captain of this team?" Your stock just went up by a mile, your scholarship offer might too!!!

9. Do the academic instructors work well with traveling athletes? [Sooner or later you are going to need help in a class, you're going to have to reschedule a test, or be gone for a big meet. You have to know if the professors will work with you.]
10. Is the food plan adequate for swimmers? [Eating and nutrition is a big deal, if the food plan is inadequate, are you going to have to spend an extra \$1000 or \$2000 a year on food from Costco?]
11. What do I need to do to maintain my scholarship for four years? [A scholarship is ONLY good for one year, know what the coach expects for you to keep it!!!]
12. If I am injured do I keep my scholarship? [Its better if you can preface this by saying, I've never been injured, but if it happens do I still get to keep the scholarship. (Parents this is a BIG one)].
13. What do you require of your swimmers in the summer? Christmas break? Spring Break? Thanksgiving? [Away from home, swimming with the college club team, travel to meets, Summer Nat's? All these things can drive the cost of college up, be prepared. Also there may be a rude awakening regarding the fact that you do not have time to go home for more than just a few days during Christmas, maybe not at all during Thanksgiving or spring break.]
14. Do you allow post-grads to continue to swim with the team? [As a swimmer you might be gunning for the next Olympic Trials while you work on your masters degree. Will you have a place on the team if you do?]
15. Is tutoring free for athletes? [Yep, you may need a tutor at some time. To make up for that important physiology lecture you missed or math class, you get the picture.]
16. How big is the class size? How big are the lecture classes? [The bigger the school, the bigger the class and lecture size tends to be, but there are a lot of

exceptions to this. Do you want lecture classes with 250-300 students? Can you handle that? Some colleges have 15 to 1 ratios, some have 150 to 1, what do you want?}

17. Do professors or graduate students teach classes? [A lot of bigger universities use graduate students to teach a lot of the undergraduate classes. Are you going to be OK with that?]

Questions to ask the other swimmers that you meet on the college team.

Swimmers here is **BIG TIP**. A smart head coach will make sure a swimmer is assigned to you during your recruiting trip who will help sell the team to you. This swimmer will not be a disgruntled swimmer. While you are on your visit talk to other swimmers on the team other than the one assigned to you, they can often give you more insight than the one who is assigned to you. Talk to Seniors on the team whenever possible!!! They can give you a much better insight as to team dynamics, and they tend to be less guarded than freshman and sophomores.

Be careful of the following; if the coach assigned a freshman to you and there are few, if any, graduating seniors ***there may be a big problem with the program***. It may mean everyone quits swimming before they graduate – not what you want, right?

Conversely if a coach assigns a senior or junior to escort you around, and they are not disgruntled with the program this is a great sign! It would indicate they have been in the program two or three years and they really are happy with the team.

Swimmers, here is an **even bigger tip**. Some coaches will test your behavior away from the pool. Your swimming escort may offer you a beer, or two, or three the first evening of your travel trip to see if you are a party person. Don't take it! Politely decline. When pressured, decline again. It's not always but it could be a test, assume the coach will find out if you drink. Decline. Always! Embarrassed by declining? Say you are violently allergic to hops. Say you projectile vomit whenever you drink. Make up a true excuse you can live with...

Questions to be sure and ask

1. Tell me about each of the coaches? [Is there a bad one in the bunch?]
2. What's your year? You like the school? [Be polite to the swimmers spending time with you. Get to know them, ask about what they like, show an interest

in them. They probably have other things they like to do rather than hang with someone they don't know.}

3. Is there anyone on the team with my major? [If there is, you want to talk to them!]
4. What's your major? How are the instructors in your major? [Even though they may be in a different major their answers are often insightful to the quality of education in the school. If they love it, chances are better you will like it.}]
5. Who would be my coach? [A head coach often delegates the workload, you need to meet the coach that will be your coach! What if he's the one you can't stand, the reason this question is repeated to the swimmer as well as the coaches is to make sure the coaches are telling you the truth. Head coaches have been known to tell recruits that they will be your primary coach, and this is true, they are the Head Coach, but then the actual coach that coaches you is Conan the Destroyer, the coach that the swimmers hate. It is a good idea to ask this question to a couple of different swimmers on the team.]
6. Do the head coaches just work with the very best swimmers? [Are you part of that group?]
7. How much are you enjoying swimming here? [Hopefully they will be honest.]
8. Is there a lot of drama on the team? How do you all get along? [You'll be living with this group of people for the next four years, maybe meeting your future husband or wife, you do not want to be part of a tragic soap opera.]
9. Anybody quit the team this past year? Why? [This tells you about how the team works.]
10. How's the food? What meal plan should I get? [Never met a swimmer that didn't like to eat, or need to eat. You will get bored of the food there – its not home cooking! But some schools have significantly better meals offered than others, try to find out. If you can, eat in the school cafeteria.]
11. How many seniors on the team? [None – there better be a good reason, like, the team just started 2 years ago. If the answer is only a couple – alarm bells should sound – “why aren't there a lot of graduating swimmers?” If the

answer is a lot of seniors – that’s the best answer – they are getting their swimmers through four years of college, swimming. YEAH!!!]

12. Do you have to stay in athletic dorms all four years? [This can be a drag if no kitchens in the dorms. College food gets boring. You may want to get an apartment or rent a house with others but some schools require their athletes to stay in dorms with other athletes or swimmers all four years.]
13. How are the dorms? Noisy? Private? Semi-private? How many people per dorm room? [Like your privacy? Are you going to get it there? Maybe not. You will probably be assigned to another swimmer in a dorm, have a look around. How many people in a room? Kitchens? A common area?]
14. How many people share a bathroom in the dorms? [Ever had to wait in line for a toilet or a shower when you are in a hurry?]
15. Who else on the team swims your specialty? [You will be training closely with these swimmers. Meet them and get to know them.]
16. Does the team hang together much when not swimming and studying? [Even if you’re a loner who doesn’t like to hang with other swimmers this tells a lot about how solid the team is. One way or the other you are going to be with this team for the next four years, if they get along with each other, you will probably get along with them. The reverse of this statement is also true...]
17. Does the team bus or fly to meets? [Long bus rides are a drag – usually.]
18. Do they have tutoring available for tough classes? [You should be able to find this out from other sources, but its nice to hear how things work from a student’s mouth. Some schools really take care of their swimmers academically. And all sports programs have to watch how their swimmers do academically.]
19. How much work is expected away from the pool and practice? [At every collegiate level there are limits to the amount of hours that a swimmer can practice. Unfortunately there are many programs that direct (make) their swimmers participate “un-coached training” such as dry-land, weights, running, stretching, and cross-training which are in addition to the swimming. You need to know how many hours per week are really going to

- be required! Pre-med, engineering, and math students – watch out! While less prevalent than it has been in the past believe me this practice still exists!]
20. How much has your swimming improved over the time you've been here?
[You as a swimmer want to improve, right? How much have the other swimmers improved over their career? A program that has swimmers who continue to improve has probably got some pretty darn good coaches on staff.]
21. What do you do for fun? [Yes, it is OK to have some fun while you are in college.]
22. Is there much drinking and partying on the team? [But not too much fun!]
23. Is it safe to walk around campus at night? [Mom and Dad want you safe and sound. By the way, Mom and Dad, you can find this one out for yourself with a little research – I suggest you get this answer yourself!]
24. How does the school treat the swim team? [With respect? Good!
Transportation? Trainer? Massage therapist? Some schools treat their swim teams like Kings and Queens, at others they are treated like they are just there to meet Title 9 requirements with no frills at all...]
25. How is the parking situation for cars? [If you have a car...]

The Parent Section

Mom and Dad, your baby's leaving the nest! For some of you – it's party time! For others of you it's like the worst post-partum depression you could ever feel. For most of you, it is a mix of both. Hopefully you've planned ahead a little and can help your child out a little. For many families, college is going to be all at the student's expense and when your student gets done with college they are going to have amassed a debt the equivalent to that of a large house mortgage. It is, unfortunately up to you to make your son or daughter aware of this responsibility. If this is the case you might want to get ready for their return after college since many college grads come back to their hometown, get a job, and live with their parents for the next 6 to 8 years while they pay down their debt. Ouch, that bedroom you turned into a bar and entertainment room will have a bed in the middle of it!

In the section below are some things you can do to help ease the college search process and there are questions you need to ask of yourselves and others regarding

colleges. There are other questions that we cannot supply the answer for, you have to do it yourself. Also there are things you need to discuss with your son or daughter in a reasonable, rational manner. You are the one with life experience under your belt, share it with them whether or not they want to hear it.

If you are using this site and have found it to be of some help, please take the time to send me any suggestions you might have for its improvement. In a few years we would like to put together a resource that can help all of our region's up and coming swimmers have the most successful college experience ever, and to do so we have to have the suggestions and help of you parents so that we can continue to improve the information contained here.

To find the right college you have to start out asking questions, and then do all the work you can do to find the answers. Good luck to you, I've been through this three times myself, and it's not easy.

Questions Parents Need to Ask themselves, their swimmers, and the schools.

Can My Son or Daughter Swim in College?

Yes! But only if you as parents and your son or daughter are flexible about where they are willing to go to college and at what level they will swim at. Division I are schools that attract the most attention but are not the only option, they are just one of many options for college. Your swimmer might be better served, and be better served financially, by a number of other possibilities. One might be by attending a community college in their home town for a couple of years and continuing to swim with their local swim club and then transferring to a four year college after getting their core curriculum completed. Other options are Division II schools, Division III schools, or NAIA schools.

Many parents and swimmers believe that if their swimmer attends an elite DI college swim program their times will drop like gangbusters and everything will be rosy. It is possible that this is exactly what will happen but it doesn't always work out that way. Many consider anything but a Division I programs beneath their swimmers abilities, but this is not true. There are many outstanding programs in DII and DIII schools as well as NAIA and even in community colleges.

In every case remember - your swimmer is going to get an education first and swim second.

It is the education that gets the job that pays the bills at the end of the swimming career. Parents and swimmers need to remember this.

Some tough questions that we cannot help you answer:

Can your family afford to pay for your son's or daughter's college education even with a partial swimming scholarship? If so how much per year?

If your family is unable or only partially able to help with college expenses, will your son or daughter be able to afford the burden of assuming the student loans necessary to get a college education?

Also, another question that parents and swimmers rarely ask themselves;

Depending on the swimmers major, is the debt load parents and or swimmers will assume worth it for the jobs they will likely land in that major?

Even with a large scholarship, say a half ride, college is very expensive. Recent studies have shown that the areas of study that most frequently “pay back” during their career after college are the STEM majors; Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. Other majors have been shown to “pay back” at a much lower rate than these majors after an expensive college education.

If you are like my family, you have been raised to believe that college is always worth the investment in the future. And it may well be. But during research for this article we have found that a number of careers (most notably teaching in the elementary and secondary levels), fail to generate enough income to pay back student loans in a timely manner.

These are subjects that need to be frankly discussed with your swimmer and are rarely discussed before heading off to college. Compare the college major with the jobs that can be landed with that major and compare them to the average starting salary for those jobs.

A better question might be: should my swimmer swim in college?

Ask the swimmer if they are ready to make a commitment to swim another four years where the work will be harder, the demands both physically and scholastically are much, much more intense, and the maturity required is much more. Swimming in college isn't for everyone – it's very, very hard. The swimmer needs to think of swimming like a part time job, a 20 to 30 hour a week part time job, while they take a full scholastic load of 14 to 17 units.

As parents you have to be careful to control our impulse to “want it too much for our children”. The student-athlete needs to want it for themselves. Make sure that your son or daughter’s desire to swim in college is THEIR goal, not you, the parents’ goal. Sure, as parents you are proud of them, you want it for them, they have been successful age group swimmers and have made you happy throughout their swimming career. But it’s your son or daughter that has to do the work, do they still have the passion for it? Usually the answer is; “Yes!” Thank goodness...

There are stories about how swimming in college turned out to be a nightmare for some. If the swimmer is too tired from the effort swimming takes, not dedicated enough to their academics, or too unorganized to achieve a balance between academics, sports, and their new “independent” social life, their college career can lead to academic failure and end their swimming career. Ask yourself as a parent; is my son or daughter mature enough to handle all the demands of college. You will not be there to make sure their studying is done, or they go to bed on time, or they eat right, or they hang with the right crowd

On the flip side the “job” of swimming in college can be the most fun, most exciting experience they will ever have in their life if the college and the team is a good fit. A vast majority of the swimmers I have met who swam through college have memories, experiences, and friends they will never forget, and would not trade the experience for anything.

There is one big advantage we have found to be true to being on a college swim team; the team helps keep the swimmer focused on college. A college swimmer soon realizes that they can’t let their team down, that they have to be focused on both swimming and academics to succeed. Also, frankly, they are also way too tired at the end of the day not to go to sleep at reasonable hours. Academically collegiate swimmers are consistently the first or second highest rated sports in grade point average at most colleges.

The secret of swimmers success in college seems to reside in the discipline that is instilled by swimming and the sort of person that sticks with swimming during their age group years. Swimming is regimented and task and time specific. Swimmers tend toward letting this carry over into their efforts and school and studying.

Parents keep things in perspective – you can’t want it for your son or daughter – if they don’t want it enough for themselves. Be careful and avoid putting too much pressure on your swimmer to swim in college. If you have to pressure them and convince them to swim in college they will more than likely stop swimming during their college career.

How fast Does My Swimmer Have to Be?

To get a large scholarship – really fast! To swim in college with a partial scholarship or without a scholarship - not very fast at all if the school is not a top ranked swimming college. Many schools with swimming programs are looking for

swimmers that will cost them little or no scholarship money to complete their roster and could potentially blossom into being a really good swimmer.

If you think your swimmer has had coaches that left your swimmer with a lot of undeveloped potential – this is probably true. The level of coaching at the collegiate level is generally much better than a majority of age group programs due to the resources they have available. And, in many instances, the level of coaching is higher, and better generally. Many swimmers really blossom in a college setting and there is not a college coach alive that doesn't believe they can't make any swimmer swim faster.

In many ways a full ride scholarship is a myth. "Nonsense you say?" You've known a lot of swimmers who got full ride scholarships! Believe it when I say for any family even a full ride scholarship still has substantial costs associated with it. Plan ahead for it! A full ride doesn't pay for that swimmer to come home at Christmas or Thanksgiving, it doesn't buy all their clothes, it doesn't pay for all their food, telephone bills, computer, study materials, medical bills, eyeglasses, dentist appointments, car, or gas. You get the idea.

Right about now you're saying what help is this swimming in college site? And the real answer is: to help your family find a good educational and swimming fit for your future college student. Your son or daughter is there to GET AN EDUCATION, any sport is just icing on the cake!

Earlier we presented a table of things that you should do each high school year to prepare for swimming in college. The FIRST thing in every year is FOCUS ON ACADEMICS. Far, far more academic scholarships are available than sports scholarships. Collegiate swim coaches love to see swimmers apply who have good grades for several reasons

- They can be counted on to not become ineligible for academic reasons.
- They can help the athlete obtain academic scholarships that will sweeten the overall scholarship package without using up too much of the coaches allotted sports scholarships.
- They have higher graduation rates and schools must meet NCAA minimum requirements for athlete graduation rates. The high graduation rates that collegiate swim teams have often helps other sports with traditionally low graduation rates meet the NCAA academic quotas. Swimming is often used by colleges to increase the overall graduation rate and grade point average of their school and allows their other "money" sports to have lower Grade Point Averages.

Parents, if you want to help your swimmer get scholarships focus on the academic first – focus on the sport second.

Can My Swimmer get a Scholarship?

Here's the bad news: 1% of student athletes in high school for all sports get a sports scholarship. We suspect that for swimmers this number is much higher, the reason, swimmers tend to be much better academically than the national average, which leads to more academic scholarship support.

Can My Swimmer lose Their Scholarship?

Yep! Here are the reasons a swimmer can lose their scholarship;

- Not being eligible due to poor academic performance.
- Not following the team's or school's rules and regulations.
- Fraudulent misrepresentation on an application.
- Voluntary withdrawal from the team.
- Failing to make a satisfactory effort during practices.

These are all reasons that a scholarship may be revoked. Division I and Division II schools must warn you in writing by July 1 of each year if they are not going to renew a scholarship.

How many scholarships does a swimming program have to offer?

It depends upon the school and whether or not the swimming program is fully funded. Division I swimming men's programs have 9.9 and women's 14 scholarships. Division 2 schools have 8.1 for men and 8.1 for women. Division III offer no athletic scholarships. NAIA schools may offer 8 scholarships combined for men's and women's swim teams. Remember these are the maximum total allowed, due to financial situations a school may have less to offer. Also remember these are the totals for all the swimmers on the team, NOT just for incoming freshmen.

Are two-year colleges a viable option for swimming in college?

Yes. The National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) has three divisions DI, DII, DIII and may be a wonderful, low cost option for swimming in college. It also allows transferring into traditional four-year colleges for your final two or three years of swimming eligibility.

Community colleges usually have much lower than normal GPA requirements than traditional four-year colleges. For students with low GPAs this allows them time to get their grade point averages up to an acceptable level. Also many colleges allow upper division transfer students to have lower GPA's than incoming freshmen.

Another reason to consider the community college route is for student athletes who are “late bloomers” or have had some maturity problems. Many young people mature late and grow well beyond high school and do not achieve their full athletic potential until they are much older. Community college swimming programs offer a two-year reprieve for your swimmer to mature physically or emotionally in many cases. And these swimmers can still be eligible for scholarships for swimming.

Even an out-of-state community college might be an option. Tuitions for out-of-state residents in community colleges are much lower than a traditional four year college in most cases. We recently talked to one of the coaches at Golden West College in Garden Grove, California which currently has an outstanding swim program and found tuition was a relatively low \$12,000 per year for out of state residents.

Are there any other options?

Yes, one more the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) is an association of 300 smaller Universities and colleges many of which offer swimming and may have swimming and swimming scholarships available.

What is the NCAA Clearinghouse?

If you intend to swim for a NCAA DI or DII school you must register with the NCAA Clearinghouse. (www.ncaaclearinghouse.net). This checks the swimmers eligibility to swim in college and supplies this information to colleges that request it. You need to do this and fill out the Student Release Form (SRF). Apply for this after your junior year in high school. Talk to your school councilor early in your high school career (usually by your junior year) and read the information on the site to insure you meet all eligibility requirements. Core classes must be completed, ACT and SATs taken, minimum GPA, and **accurate information** must be given on the form to insure eligibility to college.

A quick note about school councilors. These people are a wonderful resource to use to help track down scholarships, schools and obtain quality advice for your son or daughter – use them. Also some councilors are more familiar with sports related college issues than others, seek them out and ask to be transferred to this councilor’s care. Experience matters in sports scholarships seek one with the knowledge and experience to really help your student.

My swimmer is home-schooled. Does this present a problem?

No. However you must insure that all classes for core requirements are met just like a public school student. Work with your home school support group to insure all requirements are met, SAT’s and ACT’s taken, minimum GPA met and accurate information presented. Read the info carefully on the clearinghouse web site and complete all information accurately.

My swimmer is legitimately fast – how does this change things?

Not much with one exception. In the sport of swimming, much like Track and Field, the numbers don't lie. Fast is fast and you may be lucky enough to have a swimmer who will be offered a full ride or a partial ride to a number of schools. The main difference is you are going to see mail from colleges start to accumulate in your mailbox their sophomore year. Start a file and **don't throw anything away**. Fill out any questionnaire included and be polite in all cases – you never know how things might change. You must remember that an injury or bad grades could derail everything and change completely the colleges in your selection criteria.

If your swimmer is truly fast count yourself among the lucky ones. Please never assume that the college that your son or daughter wants to attend is the college that wants them - keep your mind and your options open. I strongly suggest never limiting your college picks to just a couple schools early in the selection process.

The pressure that you, as loving parents, put on your child may cause him to quit swimming or your swimmer may lose the love of his sport and decide to play basketball instead. Things rarely go as planned.

But my swimmer has always wanted to go to Auburn, and my swimmer is the fastest in the nation in the 50 free, goes a 19.8, why wouldn't they offer a full ride???

Simply put the good fit for colleges goes two ways. What if Auburn has 5 swimmers already on scholarship who are faster (they often do)? If the school doesn't need your swimmer's skill set they may not be willing to offer them anything in the way of scholarships. The other reason a scholarship might not be offered is that this year they only have 1.6 scholarships to offer and 1.2 the following year, and they are in desperate need of breaststrokers while your swimmer is a 50 freestyler. Poor fit. And a poor fit results in low chances of a scholarship.

My swimmer is legitimately fast – but has bad grades - how does this change things?

Simply put this hurts. You are competing for scholarships with swimmers not only from the United States but from all over the world. They all come to the USA to get an education and the best swim coaches in the world and having poor grades is a risk for any college program. A typical good Division I college program gets a couple hundred applicants every year. Going through the stack the first time to weed out the applicants usually consists of three filters;

- The teams needs.
- The swimmer's speed.
- And Grades!

While every college coach believes they can improve a swimmers speed, few, if any believe they can improve a swimmer's grades. This is why some very, very fast swimmers get into some college programs that are – shall we say – less than stellar.

We recently knew a swimmer who was more than legitimately fast- he had the speed to qualify for NCAA finals as a senior in high school but had a GPA of well below 2.0. He received no offers to swim in college. Ended up going to a community college and dropped out. It's a shame to see talent like that wasted, but it happens all the time.

But we hear about swimmers who are fast with low GPAs who get picked up by colleges even when they don't meet the minimum GPA of that college...?

Yep. There are a few college coaches with the influence to get a swimmer admitted to the school even if they don't meet the minimum requirements – we won't deny that! But they are few and far between! Better to just study hard enough to get into the school you want.

What are formal visits and how do they differ from informal visits?

Formal visits are invitations to the swimmer to visit the college campus, at the expense of the school. Swimmers are limited to five formal visits during their senior year. These are an indication that the swimmer is needed at that school and in all probability if a DI or DII school the swimmer will be offered at least a partial scholarship to that school. During the visit the swimmer will be under a microscope, by the coaches and by the other swimmers, to see if they will truly fit in to that program.

Informal visits are made at the swimmer's expense and are unlimited by the NCAA. Whenever on vacation or at swim meets during your swimmer's high school career always take time to visit local college campuses with swimming programs. Don't be afraid to give them a call and see if you can get a tour of the swimming facility. Talk to the swimmers if you can. Get a feel for the school and the campus.

If the school turns out to be one you might like to attend, send them a thank you note and ask to be added to their contact list. No reason to be coy, its fine to tell them you are interested in their program. Most programs will have their recruiting coach add you to their list and keep an eye on you, and chart your progress as a swimmer. If this college even remotely might make your list of schools you would like to attend, don't be afraid to drop them a note every few months and let them know you are still interested in their program.

Let these schools know about:

- Significant time drops.

- Honors you have received not related to swimming
- Honors you have received related to swimming (Team Captain, Swimmer of Year, swimmer of month, newspaper recognition).
- Meets you will be at in their area.
- Invitationals, Zones, Regional Championships, State High School Championships, Sectional, Junior Nationals, Opens and big travel meets you will be attending.

If they are interested in you they will maintain this dialogue and they will update your file and, in a way get to know you. Even if they don't seem to be interested, continue to keep them updated. You never know if this will pay off, but it could. One thing for sure this will show them; you are dedicated, persistent, and never give up – all great characteristics to have if you are a swimmer in college.

Good luck! I hope you find this information of some help!

Cheers! Bob Wood strokespecific@earthlink.net 208-699-8008