

The following information was graciously compiled and written by Kevin Anderson. His son started attending Notre Dame in the fall of 2013 after 7 years with CAST. It is fairly comprehensive and is full of information that should head any swimmer, looking to swim in college, in the right direction. ----Coach Dave

## **Guidance for College Bound Swimmers and their Parents**

### **Introduction**

I am writing this short guide at the suggestion of several CAST parents who are either curious or are about to begin the college search process with their children. Because they enjoy the competition and camaraderie associated with swimming at CAST, many of our children would like to continue swimming in college. The good news is that nearly 400 colleges have men's swimming programs and 500 colleges have women's swimming programs. 18,000 men and women participate in these programs. These numbers, and the fact that the level of competition varies widely from program to program, mean that **any CAST swimmer can choose to continue to enjoy the sport in college.**

With so many programs to choose from, how can families find the school that is the best fit for their child? In the pages that follow, I share some of the information and advice I learned during Tommy Anderson's search over the past few years that have worked to narrow the choices. Before getting into the details, here are some initial overarching thoughts:

- **Focus on the college first – and the swimming program second.** The college experience is a critical stepping-stone for all young men and women. It is the time when they learn to live and think independently, and when they prepare themselves for their future careers. Before considering swimming programs, sit down with your child and answer some basic questions: What sort of academic environment is the best fit for your child? Are their specific careers or areas of study that interest your child where this would be a critical factor to attend specific universities? Do you want to focus on large universities, small colleges or the many schools that lie in between? Is there an area of the country that interests you? Do you want to go to school near home, a couple of hours drive from home or across the country? Once you have answered these questions, **then** begin to research the swimming programs in the schools that meet your overall criteria.
- **Make your search for a swimming program an integrated part of your broader college search process** – Work with your high school's college guidance program as you investigate swimming at the college level. Let your college counselor know that your child wants to swim in college. Most counselors have experience in advising college-bound athletes and can provide useful information and assistance. In addition, they can

help make sure that colleges receive the admissions information they need on time – including information needed for NCAA eligibility.

- **Play an active role in finding a swimming program for your child** – Most swimmers won't be actively recruited unless families seize the initiative first. With more than 100,000 boys and girls competing at the high school level, most college coaches will only contact swimmers who show an interest in their programs. This means that you and your child must do the necessary research to identify programs that are good fits, **AND**, contact those programs to let them know you are interested. Nearly all college swimming programs have online questionnaires for prospective athletes on their web page. Fill them out for all colleges that your child has an interest. Contact coaches at your targeted colleges by email to learn more about their programs, and when you visit your top choices, arrange to meet with the coaching staff.
- **Put your child in the driver's seat . . . but be a back seat driver** – Work to get your child excited about the college search process and ask them to play a lead role in researching schools and swimming programs. And once you have identified potential colleges together, let your child initiate contact with swimming programs. Most coaches would rather communicate with swimmers than their parents.
- **Keep your options open in the early stages of your college search and don't focus on one school too early in the process** – Many college counselors suggest that high school students apply to five or six colleges, including both "stretch" and "safety" schools in the mix. To come up with this short list of colleges, most families begin by exploring a large number of schools – typically a dozen or so – and then narrow their choices over time. This approach has several advantages. Students often change their minds about what they want in a college during the search process so casting your net widely in the very early stages allows students to compare colleges and make a smart choice in the end. In addition, actively exploring a range of schools is a good hedging strategy in case your child is not admitted to their school of choice or the swimming program they have targeted loses interest.
- **Take advantage of the many online resources that exist for prospective college swimmers** – We live in the information age so use the many college swimming web sites to help you during your search. Some of the more important web sites are mentioned in the FAQ section below. A good place to start is [www.collegeswimming.com](http://www.collegeswimming.com). This site has the most extensive coverage of college swimming news, has links to colleges with swimming programs and their conferences as well as message boards on a variety of swimming-related topics. Your swimmer can compare their swim times to the current and past year or so recruits to get a good idea of what college might be interested in them and what potential times it might take to have a coach interested in your swimmer.
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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How can I identify college swimming programs that are good fits for my child?**

This takes a little legwork. Once you have a sense of what kind of colleges your child is interested in (big v. small, academically selective or less so, etc.) use [www.collegeswimming.com](http://www.collegeswimming.com) to navigate to the web sites for potential schools. All college swimming programs, from powerhouse Division I schools through the smallest Division III programs have team web sites. They all include results from recent meets. Compare the times from these meets to your child's times. You will pretty quickly get a sense of which schools your child can successfully compete. In addition, look at the results from the many college swimming conference championships that are held each year to see how your child fits. Coaches are most interested in swimmers that can bring success to their program. This is accomplished by scoring points during the year at dual meets, conference championships and potentially at the NCAA championship level. Supplement what you learn on line with conversations with other parents and coaches. Then contact the schools that look like reasonable fits to get more information. Talk with coaches and current swimmers to identify programs that feel comfortable to you.

### **Can swimming help my child get admitted to his or her schools of choice?**

The answer is generally yes – but only up to a point. Swimming can often provide college applicants with an edge in the admissions process. At many schools, coaches work with admissions officers on behalf of recruited swimmers. If the child can satisfy the academic rigors of the school, a coaches' support with admissions can make the difference of admission. Coaches are often straightforward in communicating academic requirements to prospective swimmers and their parents. This is good for all concerned since no school, coach or parent wants to admit student athletes who are unlikely to succeed in their course work. As an example, Tommy Anderson was given academic target goals of a 4.0+ GPA, 2000+ combined SAT for many of the Top 30 Division 1 swimming programs (Notre Dame, Princeton, Stanford, Cal, USC). Additionally, a couple of coaches 'leaked' out that if he could make the prior years' Top 8 Finals times in two or preferably three conference championship events, that they would support his application to the school. They said they would 'meet' or 'hand walk' their recommendation to their contact on the Admissions Committee. It was evident that where he had the college swim coaches' support, he was accepted. Once your child has decided on the final 5 or 6 schools, it is time to tell each of those swim coaches that you are serious and that you could see yourself swimming with them. Let your number one choice know that they are your first choice. Ask each of them to support your application with a recommendation to admissions. Listen closely to their answer and demonstrated follow-up on your request as it will often clue you in if they are interested in you or if you stand a chance of admission. This not only gives you early options but is critical at many colleges for an edge in acceptance.

## **Where can I get information concerning NCAA rules governing the recruiting process?**

The NCAA has issued complicated rules that govern the recruiting process. They include limits on the timing and manner of communication between coaches and prospective athletes, and are too lengthy to explain in this document. A table summarizes these rules and can be found at the following link:

<http://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/Other%20Sports%20Recruiting%20Guide2014.pdf>

Another lengthier and very useful source of information is the NCAA Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete. This document discusses eligibility requirements and recruiting rules and provides advice for student-athletes and their families. It can be downloaded in pdf format (for free!) from the following address:

<https://www.ncaapublications.com/p-4354-2014-15-ncaa-guide-for-the-college-bound-student-athlete-sold-as-a-package-of-25.aspx>

It is important that swimmers and their parents learn and follow the rules during the recruiting process to avoid putting coaches in an uncomfortable or awkward position.

## **What is the NCAA Eligibility Center (referred to as the Clearinghouse in the past) and how does the academic eligibility process work?**

The NCAA Eligibility Center evaluates high school students academic records to determine whether they are eligible to participate at the Division I or Division II level.

To register with the Eligibility Center, during the second semester of your junior year, you must complete the Student Release Form and amateurism questionnaire online and send the eligibility center the registration fee of \$65. This Student Release Form does two things: 1) It authorizes each high school you have attended to send the eligibility center your transcript, test scores, proof of graduation and other necessary academic information and 2) It authorizes the eligibility center to send your academic information to all colleges that request your eligibility status. The registration process must be completed on-line. Prospective athletes usually register during their junior year in high school. You must be registered for a coach to invite you on an "official visit" (paid for) recruit trip. The following link will connect you to the Center:

[http://web1.ncaa.org/ECWR2/NCAA\\_EMS/NCAA.jsp](http://web1.ncaa.org/ECWR2/NCAA_EMS/NCAA.jsp)

## **What steps should swimmers take during their junior year?**

- Train hard and continue to perform successfully as an athlete
- Do well in school and start noticing which academic areas interest you. Junior year academic performance is especially important

- Make sure you are taking tough courses – preferably college-prep courses as colleges prefer students who challenge themselves
- You should take the SAT’s in the spring – especially if you are applying early. Consider taking them more than once (Tommy took it 8 times starting in 9<sup>th</sup> grade!) since most colleges will combine the highest subject scores to give students the highest overall result in what is termed a “Superscore”
- Statistics bear out the improvement of taking the test multiple times (unless you ace it the first time!)
- Register with the NCAA Eligibility Center
- Start thinking actively about where you would like to go to school. Make a list of 10-15 colleges that interest you. Consult with your parents, friends and counselors to get their input
- Evaluate swimming programs from different schools. Research team and conference results to see where you would fit. Don’t be afraid to contact a coach to get more information about their program. Emailing a coach is a great way of both learning about and showing interest in a particular program. Don’t hesitate to reach out to a faculty member in your area of interest and mention this to the coach when you ask for their support to admissions on your application later.
- Make unofficial visits to schools in which you are interested. Keep a journal with notes about what you like or dislike about each college. Talk to the swimmers on the team if you have that opportunity

### **What about financial aid and scholarships?**

College costs continue to escalate and paying for college is a major challenge for many families. Swimmers and parents should get an early start in exploring opportunities for financial assistance. Some basic advice:

- Make use of your high school counselors, college financial-aid office and the web. Call the financial aid offices of your top-choice schools to let them know you are a prospective student. Ask them for the required forms. You don’t need to be planning to attend a specific school in order to call and ask questions or even set up a meeting with financial aid officers. It’s best to find out your options before applying
- The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is as important as filling out your college application. If you don’t fill out the FAFSA, you won’t be eligible for federal aid. Check in your counselor’s office for a form or apply online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)
- Scholarships are one way to cover the cost of education without getting into debt. Give yourself plenty of time to search for scholarships and write essays. You can get scholarships based on your ethnicity, academic achievements, extracurricular activities and special skills

- Due to the high cost of schooling, scholarships and grants often don't cover the cost of your education entirely. In this case, you may find yourself relying on loans. Federal loans, such as the Perkins Loan, Stafford Loan or PLUS Loan are examples. Both the Stafford and Perkins loans are taken out in your name. Your parents, on the other hand, can borrow through the PLUS loan program. Ask at your school's financial aid office to see which lenders they prefer. Shop around to see who can offer what you need.

In addition to the financial aid options mentioned above, many Division I and II swimming programs also offer athletic scholarships to talented swimmers. The NCAA allows each Division I swimming program 9.9 scholarships for men and 14 for women. In Division II, schools are allowed 8.1 scholarships for men and women alike. Not all swimming programs are "fully funded" however – some offer fewer than the maximum number of scholarships and some none at all. So you will need to explore the issue of scholarships with each of the schools that interest you. "Full ride" athletic swim scholarships are an extreme exception. Not surprisingly, the swimmers with the best times are most likely to receive scholarship assistance. To gauge your likelihood of qualifying for a scholarship, look at a team's times from the past year. If your times would score points at the relevant conference championship, you have a better chance. Talk to your targeted schools about swim scholarships during the recruiting process – but be realistic about your child's abilities and your finances.

### **Some last thoughts**

Swimming is a great sport from childhood through one's life. Swimming programs at the college level offer CAST swimmers an opportunity to continue their swimming careers while creating a new network of friends. While swimming in college requires dedication and an often serious commitment of time, swimmers often perform better academically than their fellow students – there is a competitive spirit that thrives in each swimmer. As noted in the introduction, every CAST swimmer who desires to swim in college can choose from a large number of schools that fit their abilities. It is my hope that this short guide will help these swimmers get started with their college search.

I encourage parents and swimmers to work with our CAST head coach Dave Kilmer during the search process. His knowledge is extensive and he has deep experience in assisting swimmers to match up with a good program. Recruiting questionnaires uniformly ask swimmers to provide contact information for their club coaches. Make sure you let Coach Dave know when you list them on these forms as they might get calls or letters about you. Dave will in turn let you know when he is contacted by a college coach.

I wish all of you the best of luck with the experience. I hope everyone gets in to his or her college of choice. While at times it seems very stressful, know that there is a program out there

that is a match for your swimmer! Remember that it is what you do after you get in that matters most!

Do not hesitate to call me (619) 248-7379 if you have questions or would like to get together anytime, Kevin Anderson.