

So you want to swim in College.....What do I do??
written by John M. Schaefer in 2010

College Scholarships/Scholastic Swimming Awards

Since the information I am going to share with you seems to get better and more in-depth each year, I will try to expose the tools that are available and leave it to you to use them in their current stage of development- whenever you get to use them. If you think, even for a moment, that the process of preparing for and getting recruited is easy, think again. This will soon become a daily process not only for the athlete, but for the parents as well. The key is to keep in constant contact with all the schools that actually show an interest in your athlete. Don't pare them down too soon.

Swimming scholarships are not doled out in the same fashion as the larger, revenue generating sports. A women's Division-I swim team only has a maximum of 14.0 full scholarships available; while a men's Division-I swim team only has 9.9 full scholarships. Division-II schools have 8.1 scholarships available for both the men's teams as well as the women's team. Swimming is an "equivalency" scholarship sport- the scholarships are divided up amongst team members. There are even some schools that ask for "give backs" from the upper classes in order to create a stronger team, using the scholarships that have been "given back" for the current class of recruits. The NCAA has rules about teams' Academic Progress Rates (APR) as well. If a swim team's APR drops below a certain level (currently 925), then the team loses some of its available scholarships. (A "perfect" APR is 1000.)

Swimmers who are capable of competing and contributing in several events and strokes are valued more than the one- or two-event specialists. Versatility is the key in the NCAA dual-meet format where athletes can swim in numerous events and relays. Versatility is highly prized by smaller teams that struggle to fill lanes during dual meets. The larger teams are able to be much more selective and often recruit more stroke specialists.

If your swimmer is interested in swimming while attending a college or university, there is a program for them. With all of the NCAA classifications (I, I-AA, II, III) and the NAIA schools, there is quite a large spectrum of competitive swimming available for all, but not all of them offer scholarship assistance. The NCAA.ORG and NAIA.ORG websites offer valuable information in this regard.

NCAA and NAIA eligibility centers

To become an athlete at either an NCAA or NAIA school, you must have registered with the respective eligibility centers (formerly known as clearinghouses). To register for NCAA eligibility go to www.eligibilitycenter.org, and for NAIA go to www.playnaia.org. Both of these sites do a fairly good job of explaining their procedures. These eligibility centers do some of the work that each individual Athletic Department used to do to ensure that student-athletes meet the minimum NCAA/NAIA requirements.

Official visits/Unofficial visits/contact timing

The rules for contacts and visits are contained in the NCAA.org and NAIA.org websites. But, in a nutshell, here are the main rules.

Athletes and their families may visit any College or University at any time they want, as long as the family is paying for everything. Student-athletes may also initiate communications by phone, mail or email any time they want. An athlete does not have to wait to be contacted by a Coach- he or she may call the coaching staff anytime.

College coaches may not contact any prospective athlete by phone until July 1st following the athlete's Junior year. Aside from previous correspondence, being mostly questionnaires and information packages, this is when the actual courting begins to get serious. The schools are only permitted to call once per week, but remember, a student-athlete can always call the Coach. Hopefully, as time nears the end of October, the athlete will receive some invitations for "official visits". The NCAA permits a maximum of five (5) official visits to NCAA colleges or Universities. The NAIA also has rules regarding these contacts. Official visits are those visits where a student is invited to visit a school for no more than 48 hours. The school bears the entire cost of such a visit- Flights, room, food, etc. For current information on these rules, look in the NCAA or NAIA rules.

Sending letters

Letters are the best way to actually get on a school's swim team radar. You can find the Coach's email or street address on the school's website. You might consider using one of the websites listed below to gather current information about the school and their team to include in your letters.

Every contact with a school, be it an unofficial visit, a phone call, a letter, an email, etc. should be counted by the school's athletic staff so that they know who is truly interested in the school and who is not. If you unofficially visit a school, be sure to take a tour and fill out the student information card they'll probably give you. They will count this as a contact. If two or more athletes generate the same amount of interest to a coaching staff, the one with the higher number of contacts should draw the more serious interest.

Selecting schools- how to gather information

There are numerous ways to obtain information about a school. The SAT, ACT and NCAA sites have pages that contain schools' adequate yearly progress along with past recruiting violations and other items of interest. You can also visit schools' web sites for information on the past year's freshman class rankings and averages as well as all academic majors offered.

Important recruiting-related websites, especially for Swimmers

- 1. BeRecruited.com** is currently the largest and most successful online network connecting high school Athletes and college coaches. You can register for free or, you may choose to upgrade to a Deluxe Membership to gain featured exposure throughout beRecruited, particularly to coaches in their own sport, along with unlimited access to beRecruited's premium recruiting tools that will more easily connect the athlete to college coaches. The upgrade is well worth the price for access to serious tools and exposure.
- 2. CollegeSwimming.com** might actually be the largest source of news, results and rankings on college swimming. It's also one of the best resources for swimmers to learn about colleges and be discovered by college coaches.

Unlike most recruiting services, CollegeSwimming.com is always FREE to parents and swimmers. It has been reported that four out of five college swim coaches visit CollegeSwimming.com EVERY DAY. Creating your free account allows you to:

- Create your own "Recruiting Resume" that can be searched by coaches or sent directly to them;
- Read exclusive articles designed to help you navigate the recruiting process;
- Let coaches know that YOU are interested in THEM;
- Find the college that is right for you.

If you're a high school swimmer, you're most likely already listed and ranked, but registering a profile can strengthen your recruiting rank, let coaches know what schools you are thinking about and increase the likelihood of coaches contacting you.

- 3. TakeYourMarks.com** (not to be confused with TakeYourMark.com), can be used to track your swimming times and goals and to "see what you've qualified for". Take Your Marks, in association with Swimming World Magazine (<http://www.swimmingworldmagazine.com/tym>), brings you the College Recruit Rankings so that you can see where you fit in the world of competitive collegiate swimming. TakeYourMarks.com has tools to help you:

- record all your meet results including splits
- store and maintain your best times
- set goal times
- graph your results and splits
- convert times from one course to another

AMS and USA Swimming Scholastic All-America - qualifications, applications, deadlines
While still attending High School, be sure to apply for the Scholastic All-America awards! These look very good on your college and swimming applications. There are two separate awards, each with their own applications: USA Swimming Scholastic All-America, and AMS Scholastic All-America. Both of these awards have their own deadlines which are usually sometime towards the end of July each year. Search the USA Swimming website for "USA Scholastic All America application" for more information. Contact the AMS Office (office@amswim.org) for information regarding the AMS Scholastic All-America application deadline.