

Recruiting: Tips for Choosing the Right College

Finding the right fit for you

The process of selecting a college is both challenging and consequential. When forced to consider swimming as well, the task becomes even more daunting. While attempting to find the ideal fit academically and athletically, it is necessary to set certain criteria for potential colleges and swimming programs. Perhaps overwhelmed by the plethora of possibilities, high school swimmers must focus their college search by first assessing their abilities and desires. After reading this article, begin to formulate your very own college criteria and hopefully even find several matching colleges and/or universities.

College

Academics/Reputation

The most important aspect of a college is its academic program and philosophy. Students must find a college or university that best matches their academic abilities and goals. For instance, potential architects should seek colleges that provide an architectural program or the opportunity to explore this discipline. Many schools only offer a liberal arts education; thus, those pursuing unique degrees (like engineering) must find schools that cater to such interests. Furthermore, colleges provide statistical profiles of current students and admissions criteria. Compare your GPA and SAT scores to assess compatibility with these profiles.

Size and Location

Size and location are integral components of a school's character. State universities, for instance, tend to be rather large, while liberal arts colleges tend to be much smaller. Class sizes can range anywhere from a couple of hundred to several thousand students. Often, smaller colleges offer a more intimate classroom setting and a lower teacher-to-student ratio. Classes at larger universities are frequently taught in a lecture style.

A school's location is as defining as its size. Many students attend in-state colleges while others travel across the country each semester. Decide where you are most comfortable geographically. Furthermore, the potential college student must choose either an urban, suburban, or rural setting.

Price

Tuitions range from a few thousand to tens of thousands of dollars. Explore academic as well as outside, privately-sponsored scholarships. Furthermore, research the possibility of student employment, as many colleges offer work-study positions. Most importantly, though, many schools offer financial-aid through both grants and loans.

Swimming

Coaching

Much of a team's success relies on its coaching staff. Because each staff is different, be sure that their philosophies are compatible with yours. Ask coaches to describe a typical practice and week. Meanwhile, try to assess each coach's style and personality. Furthermore, some teams have the same head coach for both the men's and women's teams; others have completely separate staffs. Be sure that you are comfortable around and with each coach. After all, you are commencing a four-year relationship.

Program

All collegiate swimming programs are markedly different. A program consists not only of swimming but also of weight and dry land training. Some teams work exclusively with weights, yet others use various tools such as medicine balls, power racks, and stretch cords. Moreover, some programs completely separate men and women. Also, pay careful attention to a school's facilities. Are the pool and weight room adequate? Is there ample lane space? Is there a separate diving well? Be sure to comprehensively research each swimming program before assessing your compatibility.

Scholarship/Division

There are collegiate swimming programs of varied ability. By comparing best times, develop a list of colleges with programs that suit your skill level. Many swimmers are content to compete on the Division III level; others desire Division I competition. Whatever your ability may be, there is certainly a matching program. Remember, however, that only Division I and II schools may offer athletic scholarships. If college appears a financial burden or impossibility, contact programs that provide scholarships.

Begin to formulate a list of schools and programs that are compatible with your academic and athletic abilities.