

Finding a College That's Right for You

There is a college swimming opportunity available for every swimmer who wishes to compete in college regardless of ability. A swimmer does not need to be the fastest recruit on the team or have national cuts in order to swim in college.

One of the most important things a student athlete should consider when looking at a college is not how good the swim team is, however, does the collegiate institution provide the student with the best education to meet the career interests of the student as well as provide an environment that will foster a student's academic, emotional, athletic, and spiritual growth. When a student athlete graduates from a collegiate institution will they have the skills necessary for success in our society today?

Top-Ten things that parents and student-athletes should consider when conducting a college search:

1. The institution academic rating. The US News and World Report publishes annual rankings of the best colleges across the United States based upon institution size, class sizes, degree programs offered, graduation rates, professors with Ph.D.'s, alumni support, rate of acceptance into post graduate schools, percentage of incoming freshman that graduate, percentage of students receiving financial assistance, and average SAT and ACT test scores of accepted students. Parents are highly encouraged to review the ranking of any institution their student athlete attends.
2. Student Academics: Does the student-athlete have the grades, course work, test scores, and skills necessary to be accepted into the institution as a non-student athlete? This is important to understand: if you are offered a college athletic scholarship, will the student-athlete be able to handle the college course work of your major and still be able to participate as a collegiate swimmer? A very large number of student-athletes have to drop out of college or lose their athletic scholarships because they failed to satisfactorily complete their required course-work.
3. Size of the institution. For many student athletes to find success in college they must consider the size of the school. "Size Does Matter." Are students going to be in large classes of 100 or more students where the professor will never know their name or will they feel more comfortable in school where the class sizes are at a very low ratio?
4. Location: Where is the institution located? Is the college in a small town, large city, suburb, close to an airport, close to home? How is the climate during the school year? Is the student athlete from San Antonio going to be able to adjust to life living in Fairbanks, Alaska?
5. Degree programs: Does the college provide a degree and major in a field of study that meets the students' interest. Does the college offer many majors? The vast majority of students' change their major at least once while in college.
6. Social Life: What kind of social life is available for the student? Every college has some form of residential life office that offers students a wide variety of social and entertainment opportunities.
7. Values: Does the institution create an environment that meets your values? Does the institution meet your worship needs such as churches, synagogues, mosques etc? How well is the student-athlete prepared to handle people from different cultures, values, races, and sexual orientation?
8. Does the College Swimming Program meet the needs as a student athlete? Are you going to be the best on the team? If so how do you feel about that kind of pressure? Will you just be average swimmer member on team and if so what is the coach's relationship with the average swimmer in the program? At what level does the program compete and will the athlete have an opportunity to be successful at that level.

9. What is the past history of the program? Is the team rebuilding or solid? How long have the coaches been at the school? How stable is the coaching staff in term of change? At what level does the program aspire to be? How many incoming first year students swim all four years of college and how many actually graduate?

10. What has been the relationship between the swimming program and college? Is it possible the program may be cut in the near future? Have members of the program had trouble with police or the college administration for failing to follow school policy? How is the teams overall G.P.A.?

Recruiting

Some student athletes will be actively recruited by collegiate institutions. However, the vast majority of student athletes need to be prepared to sell themselves as a potentially valuable member of swimming team and student body of a collegiate institution. Don't worry if you are not actively recruited to swim. There are plenty of opportunities to compete and get a great education at the same time.

Here are some important things to do:

1. In order for an NCAA Division I or II program to actively recruit an athlete the athlete must have been cleared by the NCAA Eligibility Clearinghouse. The NCAA requires that all prospective student athletes meet a base line educational requirement to be recruited. In a nutshell, your grades in your core classes and performance on national standardized tests do matter. The NCAA has developed a guide to help parents, student athletes and school administrators with the collegiate recruiting process including information on how to apply to the clearinghouse.

NCAA Student and Parent Information Site

NCAA Guide for the Parent and Student Athlete

2. Beginning the fall of 2006 the NCAA will require all prospective student athletes to also to have been cleared by the NCAA Amateurism Certification Clearinghouse. "Beginning fall 2006, the NCAA Amateurism Certification Clearinghouse will be the processing center for determining the amateurism eligibility of domestic and international freshman and transfer prospective student-athletes for initial athletics participation at NCAA Divisions I and II member institutions. [Note: In NCAA Division III, certification of an individual's amateurism status is completed by each institution, not the amateurism certification clearinghouse.]"

3. Create a resume which includes a swimmer's best times, swimming accomplishments and academic awards, community service projects, clubs, hobbies. You should also include a bio of your competitive history in terms of your swimming background. How long have you been swimming? Are you a year round swimmer? Best events?

4. During the spring of your Junior year of high school you should meet with your HS Guidance Counselor to make sure you have completed the appropriate coursework to graduate on time and have taken the correct number of classes to be cleared through the NCAA Clearinghouse.

5. A swimmer should begin making a list of schools that best fit the swimmers needs. Often this list can include dozens of schools. The hard part is narrowing your choice to between 5-10 schools to visit and apply to.

Academic Verse Athletic Scholarships

There is a misconception in the college search process that if you are not recruited or have not been offered a scholarship you must not be very good. That view is completely false. The fact is that most colleges just do not have the finances available to offer every good swimmer a scholarship. Another fact is that most colleges do not find out a student-athlete is interested in their program until that student has made "First Contact". Many families assume that colleges are going to call them first. The reality is that most collegiate swimming programs do not have the manpower to search for athletes. Most coaches rely on meet results from large meets such as Sectionals or High School

State, prospective student questionnaires, and through professional recruiters (not sports agents) whom a student-athlete pay a fee to have them send information to schools about them.

With the scholarship limits that are imposed by the NCAA, most college coaches are going to be looking at a student's academic ability. The vast majority of swimming student athletes receives financial aid through academic related scholarships, grants and student loans, not through athletic scholarships.

Athletic Scholarship - An athletic scholarship is a one-year contract between you and a Division I or Division II institution. A school can reduce or cancel a scholarship if you become ineligible for competition, fraudulently misrepresent yourself, quit the team or engage in serious misconduct. During the contract year, a coach cannot reduce or cancel your scholarship on the basis of your athletic ability, performance, or injury. An institution may choose to not renew a scholarship at the end of the academic term provided they notify you in writing and provide you an opportunity for a hearing.

Remember a coach cannot offer you a "four year full-ride scholarship". They do not exist! Each student athlete award is reviewed annually. It is important to ask current collegiate swimmers if they are still on scholarship. Parents, it is not uncommon for a college program to offer and renew an athletic scholarship for the first 2-3 years of college and then ask the student to pay full tuition for the remainder of their college career.

National Letter of Intent - The National Letter of Intent (NLI) is administered by the Collegiate Commissioners Association (not the NCAA). When you sign the National Letter of Intent you agree to attend the institution with which you signed for one academic year in exchange for the institution awarding financial aid, including athletics aid, for one academic year.