

The Difference in the College Division Levels (from NCSASports.org)

According to the NCAA, there are 351 Division I schools, 308 Division II schools, and 443 Division III schools. To give you a better idea of size and how they divisions compare, about 176,000 student athletes compete at the Division I level. A little more than 118,000 student-athletes compete in Division II and Division III has just under 188,000 student athletes on its various rosters. And that's just the NCAA divisions. There's also the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) with more than 250 schools and of course many options at the junior college level for high school athletes. While there are some similarities, you'll find each college option is somewhat unique.

Student-athletes and parents should note that for the small percentage of high school athletes that end up playing at the DI and DII level, only about 56 percent of DI athletes receive some type of athletics aid and DII athletes fare just a little better at 60 percent that get athletics aid.

Division I: Your sport, your life

For NCAA Division I athletes, the rewards are many. Competing at a large university in front big crowds against some of the best athletes in your sport. But just know the competition for your spot on the team is fierce and your time is not your own—that includes weekends and off season. Practice, training, travel, and study. There's also volunteer work. *You will be tired.* Internships, spring break getaways, even part-time jobs are pretty much out of the question. The DI athlete is truly dedicated to their sport for the next four years. For some, it can be overwhelming-even exhausting. But almost every one would say they would not trade their DI experience for anything.

Division I and the Ivy League 8

Some of the oldest and most prestigious schools in the country make up the Ivy League. Brown University, Columbia, Cornell, University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Dartmouth rank among the top 20 NCAA Division I schools. More than 8,000 student-athletes compete every year for these schools. Most choose the Ivy League for its ultra-high level of competition in both athletics and academics. If an Ivy League school is on your target list, just note that these schools do not award academic or athletic scholarships. Financial aid is based on need determined by the Financial Aid Office at each school.

Minimums Needed:

- Sectional finals or above
 - Preferably NCSA Junior Nationals
- Separate National Championships
 - Sometimes separate conference champs

Division II: A more balanced approach

Student-athletes who want a high level of competition but a more balanced approach to sports and academics are giving serious consideration to DII schools. It's also perfect for those who may prefer a smaller campus, or the opportunity to get playing time all four years. As one recruit put it, "I'd rather be a big fish in a smaller pond." There are still the demands all student-athletes face, but it is not as intense and rigorous as the year-round total commitment of a DI athlete.

Minimums Needed:

- Sectional level or above, although girls can be slightly slower
- Can be state or private schools, and usually range dramatically in size
- Combined National Championships
 - Includes the 1000 free

Division III: A well-rounded college experience

DIII programs offer a more well-rounded college experience where academics take more of the lead. Just like their DI and DII counterparts, DIII athletes also must learn to manage playing their sport while pursuing their education. The time commitment, however, for DIII athletes is not nearly as intense which gives them more opportunity to explore life outside of the classroom and outside of their sport. DIII athletes often feel they are more a part of the general college community where DI and DII athletes feel a little more separated from the rest of the college or university.

Minimums Needed:

- Zone level swimmers
 - Sectional and above will get an extra look
- Usually smaller liberal arts
 - Usually academic schools with limited athletic budgets (Not always however, so ask about financial assistance)
- Combined National Championships
 - Cuts usually falling near D1 B standards

Why an NAIA school might be your best bet

It may come as a surprise to some but the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) has actually been around longer than the NCAA. With about 250 mostly private, smaller schools, more than 60,000 student-athletes compete at NAIA colleges in a variety of popular sports. Many consider NAIA to be on par with NCAA DIII schools when it comes to life/sport balance and level of competitiveness. The NAIA awards close to \$500 million in athletic scholarships every year. That, along with more aggressive recruiting is driving more talent to these schools and bringing up the level of competition. Today, top-level NAIA schools are considered to be similar to competing on a NCAA DII team.

- Wide range of ability
 - Great for the late bloomer with some State cuts
- Looser academic requirements than the NCAA
- Separate Eligibility Center
- Combined championships
 - Usually cuts around the faster Sectional standard

Don't ignore junior colleges

Our focus here is on the three NCAA divisions and NAIA schools but that doesn't mean you don't have other options. There are many common misconceptions about what junior colleges can offer a student-athlete and that's why they often get overlooked. Today's junior colleges have a lot to offer when it comes to scholarships and other cost-savings. For some athletes, junior college is the best path to getting a four-year college roster. For others, it's a chance to stay close to home, earn college credit, and continue on with their athletic career.

- Great first step for late bloomers or swimmers academic issues
- 2 year degree program allows for easy transition into NCAA programs
- Combined championships – relatively easy time standards for participation

Club Swim Teams

- Great for any level of swimmer as well as any commitment level
- No recruiting needed, just contact the club president, similar to Master's Swim
- Yearly championship in Atlanta, occasionally some training trips

Helpful Links and Articles

College's pay attention to what you say and do

9 RECRUITING TIPS FROM SWIMSWAM READERS

HOW DOES SOCIAL MEDIA AFFECT COLLEGE RECRUITING?

5 Tips for High School Swimmers to Get Recruited

College Swimming Recruiting Sites

<http://www.ncsasports.org>

<http://www.collegeswimming.com>

<http://www.captainu.com>