

Academic Considerations Summary:

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Academic Considerations:

Developing a list of Academic “Fit” Schools: some criteria to think about

First and foremost, find a college/university that offers the course of study you are interested in and find a school that you would want to be attending if, for some unforeseen reason, you were no longer able to swim. Certainly many high school students do not know what they want to major in but to the extent that you do know what you want or do not want, it makes it easier to narrow the search i.e. an architectural or engineering school or a liberal arts school. By the end of your Junior Year, the picture of who you are as a college applicant is virtually complete with your times, your GPA, standardized test scores, AP scores, activities, employment, etc. Now is the time to find a program that fits YOU. You now have most of the information that coaches and colleges will be basing their preliminary decisions on. Discuss potential colleges with your college counselor and research the academic reputation, programs and requirements of the various schools. This is easy to do with website (such as <https://www.princetonreview.com> “The Best Colleges”, www.forbes.com “America’s Top Colleges List”, College Board or NCAA.org. For the students’ perspective (“tell it like it is”), refer to social media sights like College Confidential (www.collegeconfidential.com). It is important that you fairly assess both your academic and athletic abilities up front and to also establish your specific college criteria ie what are your top priorities in looking for a college? With this, it is much easier to narrow the field and then focus on the schools that will be the right overall fit for you. Compromises and adjustments may need to be made but you will have a starting point and a roadmap through the process.

The recent trend has been that colleges have become more and more competitive resulting in applicants applying to more and more colleges. Just a few years ago, applicants applied to 5-7 schools, but the norm has increased to 10-12. However, keep in mind that filling out college applications and answering personal statements and essay questions is time consuming. Applying to 20 universities would be a very difficult thing to do well. Even if applying Early Decision, you will still need to apply to other schools as most admissions decisions occur after application deadlines for other schools. Due to the unpredictability of the acceptance process, more and more kids are applying to more and more schools. This results in very few students getting into what used to be called “reach” schools. Depending on your swimming abilities, it may help you a little but in order to improve your chances and hedge your bet for a good fit, you may want to consider giving more focus to “match” schools. Just as you ascertain where you want to fit in on a team athletically, also ascertain where you want to fit in academically at a college. For example, do you want to go to an “academic reach” school and struggle with your course load while balancing your swimming commitment?

In other words, look at academic fit first and only then overlay the opportunity to participate on their swim team and see what that might look and feel like. Ask yourself whether or not you could see attending that school and living in that specific environment for four years.

Criteria you might want to consider:

- Level of academics (after all, you are going to SCHOOL): median GPA and test scores. Where do you want to fit in academically? Top 25%, bottom 25% and what does that mean to you especially as both an athlete and as a non-athlete?
- academic reputation
- ability to get desired classes and the ability to graduate in four years
- Div 1, 2 or 3 (spectators perspective)
- Size of the school: small, medium or large (smaller, same or larger than your high school?)
- size of the classes
- Are classes taught by professors or by graduate students/teachers assistants?
- location: rural/suburban/urban
- proximity to airports or modes of transportation and time/cost required to travel home
- The feel and look of the school – how do you like it and the student body?
- community support i.e. proximity to stores, restaurants and support services
- weather
- majors offered
- acceptance rates
- Liberal arts school vs. research institution vs. Ivy etc.
- Housing availability and extent housing is guaranteed. What are the dorms like?
- social life and reputation
- presence or not of a Greek system (if interested and if allowed by the coach)
- ability to study abroad
- ability to do internships while in school
- strength of the alumni network for job contacts post graduation
- affordability and philosophy re: scholarship/financial aid (grants vs loans)
- school and team culture
- Types of students that you see on campus. Are they happy? Would you fit in?
- balance of social and academic
- school philosophy
- What else is there to do nearby campus?
- What kind of academic support is available? What is the cost?
- What do the students do for fun?
- What are the school traditions and is there school spirit?
- Is there an academic advisory system or academic counseling available?
- Could you live there for four years?

Begin to think about what you are looking for in your college experience.

Visiting college campuses in your own backyard/informal college visits:

When you are traveling around state or the country, drop by campuses not to determine if this is THE school for you but to fine tune what you are looking for and to get a feel for the entire process. As a freshman or sophomore, it is not as important that you take the formal tour but at least get an impression of each campus as it provides valuable feedback. This is important input as it is not practical or efficient or economical to visit every school nor is it likely that you will visit all of the schools that you are even applying to. With known criteria, it is easier to narrow down the list of potential schools. Ask yourself, “Would I like a school like this?” or “What things about this school do I like? Dislike?” You do not need to fall in love with a specific school but instead learn what your criteria as you can then overlay them over the entire country or geographic region you are interested in. However, it is highly

recommended that you do take formal tours of some campuses (especially your junior year) as it will help to further define your criteria and to differentiate one campus from another.

Standardized Tests:

PSAT, SAT (Subject Tests), ACT, AP and IB Tests

Many colleges and coaches pay a lot of attention to standardized tests as they “normalize” the various high schools throughout the country. While many students don’t focus on the PSAT, it is an important indicator. Many standardized test results are not available until late May of Junior year, therefore, coaches will use the PSAT (typically taken October of Junior Year) to preliminarily ascertain the academic suitability of a PSA (prospective student athlete) for their team. The test results will also give coaches an early indication of how an athlete might do on the SAT or ACT and where an athlete stands on the academic spectrum of their PSAs. You may want to consider either taking an SAT prep course or studying for the exams (many prep books with sample tests are available) or taking practice exams through the College Board website) during the summer after your sophomore year or prior to taking the PSAT. A good score on the PSAT will help to give you a leg up and differentiate you from the “pool” of potential applicants. Considering the typical rigor of Junior year academics, the importance of training and the timing of your swim season (spring), and cumbersome test schedules (potentially PSATs, SATs , ACTs, subject tests and AP exams), layering on school year standardized test prep classes may be difficult. Of note: only a very few colleges actually require SAT test scores and will accept the ACT instead. Many students score significantly better on the ACT as it tests you on material learned in the high school classroom making it difficult to “prep” for this exam. Either way, due to the time line of college recruitment, it is probably in a PSA’s best interest to take these standardized tests mid way during junior year to allow sufficient time for retakes of the test if needed.

Schedule of SAT/Subject Test Dates: <http://sat.collegeboard.com/register/sat-dates>

Schedule of ACT Test Dates: <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/dates.html>

Sending test scores:

Over the course of the application process, you will accumulate several separate test results from Standardized tests: ACT, SAT, Subject Tests and Advanced Placement exams. Each time you send official test results to a college/NCAA Eligibility Center, College Board will charge you a fee. You may want to wait until you see your scores before you send them. Therefore, unless there is a specific deadline, it is not recommended that you take advantage of College Board’s free test sends. This way, you can consolidate your test scores (send SAT scores + Subject Test + AP Test scores at one time for one fee instead of paying a separate fee each time. This will give you the option of specifying which scores you send. For the coaches’ purposes, you can print out the results from the website (albeit not the “official” score) and fax/send to them for preliminary review.

Letters of Recommendation from your High School teachers/Counselors:

Depending upon your high school, if it is feasible, request letters of recommendation from your high school teachers before summer break. Colleges typically request that these be your Junior or Senior year teachers in “core” subjects ie not art or woodshop etc. If this isn’t feasible, then make these requests either before school starts or during the first few days of the Fall semester. In your conversation, ask “Would you be willing to write an *excellent* letter of recommendation for me?” Unless the answer is “yes”, move on. Keep in mind, that depending on the school, there are teachers who severely limit the number of letters that they are willing to write each year and/or will write for the first but finite number of students to submit complete packets. At a minimum, know what information is required to be submitted to them prior to the teachers/counselor writing these letters. It may be that a complete packet of information is needed (samples of work, resume (not a sports resume), questionnaire, brag sheet, etc) including lists of/contacts and deadlines for all the schools you are applying to. They may request

addressed and stamped envelopes and copies of the required Letter of Recommendation form. It takes awhile to accumulate all of this information so allow sufficient time. This is one of the few things that you can do over the summer months: do it! The application process itself may be stressful and overwhelming; getting this out of the way is key to getting ahead of the application game and reducing your anxiety during the school year. Additionally, it is better to be one of the first students returning packets as the counselors and teachers are “fresh” and not pushing up against deadlines from all the other students. Make sure you let the writers know what your deadlines are and if stamped envelopes are required, provide them. **Always write a prompt thank you note to anyone who has written a letter for you.** The college Admissions office will typically ask you to list the providers of Letters of Recommendation and to provide their contact information/email addresses.

The Interview:

The recruiting and application process often provides several occasions for interviews whether it be with a college coach, the admissions officer on campus, a recruiter visiting your high school or special interviews set up at a centralized but more local venue ie a conference room in Boise. No matter the situation(s), always put your best foot forward and be on your best behavior as not only do you represent yourself but also Streamliner Aquatics. Always be honest and respectful and make a good impression.

First of all:

BE PREPARED. Read the college catalog and/or review the college website prior to your visit. Don't waste the interviewer's time asking general questions that could be answered by reading the catalog. Be familiar with the nuances of the school and their curriculum and be specific as to why you would want to attend that particular college. When you meet the interviewer, give her/him a **firm handshake** and **repeat their name** (Hello, Mrs. Jones).

Interview Guidelines:

- 1) **ASSERT YOURSELF DURING THE INTERVIEW.** Make sure the interviewer knows not only who you are but what you have done in high school, the courses you have taken, your sports, extra activities, hobbies that have intrigued you. Be enthusiastic about the studies and activities that have interested you and that you have done well in. **Try to convey your enthusiasm about school and swimming for that school.**
- 2) Use the interview process to probe the nature of the educational and social experience at that specific college. What are the advantages of this school compared with others?
- 3) Ask analytical questions. What is the classroom faculty to teacher ratio. What is crime like on campus? Is it safe to go to the library late at night? Are students really involved in decision making on campus?
- 4) Find out about your interviewer. Try to develop some sort of personal relationship with the interviewer. Is he/she a graduate of this school? What did he/she like most about going there?
- 5) Make the match between you and the college. You should show not only your interest in attending the college but your ability to contribute to it. You can give them a copy of your high school transcripts and many interviewers will give you a frank assessment of your chances for admission. You can also give them a copy of your data sheet which includes athletics. Let them know if you have been talking to the swim coach. Colleges are looking for citizens, not just athletes and students.

Tips for being a good interviewee:

- 1) Remember that the interview is not designed to stress you out. It is designed to focus on your credentials both as a person and as a student.
- 2) Prepare for your interview. Know yourself, know the college. This is a chance to show what you know and learn a lot more. Most students don't prepare for the interview so you will stand out if you do.
- 3) Be honest.
- 4) If the interviewer looks bored, change the subject and ask the interviewer a question.
- 5) Remember eye contact. Speak with confidence.

Always shake hands and thank the interviewer as you depart. Immediately follow up with a thank you and reiterate something specific about the interview and/or emphasize why you feel you are a good fit for the school.

Financial Aid:

What are some Financial Aid Questions to Consider?

- What type of financial aid packages does the school offer?
- Are there a variety of options?
- What kind of work opportunities is available?
- Are any tuition increases planned in the next few years?
- What has been the average tuition increase in years past?
- What are the deadlines for submitting financial aid forms?
- How will outside scholarships affect my aid package?
- Where can I find more sources of financial aid on campus?
- Are there any departmental scholarships available?
- What state financial aid programs do I qualify for?
- What sort of alternative financial aid programs are available?
- Ask about installment plans or state tax credits.

Detailed Financial Aid Time: Timeline

Early Action/Early Decision:

What about Early Decision?

Schools with Early Decision options may pressure swimmers for Early Decision applications. If accepted, a swimmer is obligated to attend that school and formally accept the “acceptance” a few weeks later, withdrawing all applications at other colleges/universities. Acceptance of an Early Decision acceptance is binding subject to a satisfactory financial aid package. Therefore, during the Acceptance Period, families must confirm their most likely Financial Aid package with the Financial Aid office.

Some competitive schools which do not offer an Early Decision option may offer something similar to a “likely letter”. This requires applying to their school very early in the process (early September?) so that a response is received before the deadline to submit an ED application. As they can’t offer ED, they will offer a “likely letter” based on a completed application so that a swimmer will not apply ED at another college. In this case, make sure you have discussions with the Financial Aid office to confirm, even preliminarily, what aid may be available to you.

It is very flattering to be a sought after recruited athlete. Despite this, really listen to the responses to your questions. Some coaches have limited “tag” opportunities available to them. Some coaches are better able to anticipate Admissions office decisions than others. Be careful as to what you want to hear them say vs what they actually are or are not saying. A good coach has an excellent handle on what types of student-athletes their admissions department will accept.

What are the differences between Early Decision (ED) and Early Action (EA)?

ED and EA allow you to both apply and learn the college’s decisions earlier than a regular admission decision. Many ED or EA deadlines occur in the fall or there may even be two separate ED or EA decision

deadlines. Verify with the college whether you are allowed to apply EA to other schools. Speak to your school guidance counselor and ask your prospective school for information. **Early Decision is binding.** This means that if you are accepted, you must attend that school and withdraw any applications submitted to other colleges. You will not be able to compare financial offers. Be comfortable with the financial aid package that your ED school preliminarily gives you. **Early Action is not binding.** This means that you will hear their decision early and if accepted, you may compare admissions and financial aid offers and are not obligated to accept admission until a later date in the year. **Some schools now offer Single-Choice Early Action.** This is similar to EA except that you agree to not apply early decision to other colleges (though you may apply regular decision to other colleges). Before applying via any of these options, make sure you are fully informed as to the rules and restrictions. These are contracts that you make with the college.