

So You Want to Swim in College?

The best site to begin your search is the [Harvard University](#) website. It contains direct links to almost all of the major college swim teams. As you visit each college's swimming web page, look for things such as their Freshman Records or their All-Time Top 10 (or 20) list. From these times you can determine where you would fit into their program.

If there is a link to the college's conference or year-end meet, go there and look at last year's conference results. That will also help you get an idea of where you would fit into their program. Remember, most conferences have limits on the number of swimmers and divers that a team can take to the conference meet (typically 16-18 swimmers for each men's and women's teams). Thus, if the team is quite large find out about the conference limits unless swimming at a conference meet is not a concern for you.

From the conference meet, most colleges go to one of the NCAA Swimming Championships (Division I, II, or III), the NAIA Championships, or the National Junior College Championships. You can get the latest NCAA Championship Time Standards from the [USA Swimming website](#). Remember, the "A" NCAA standard does not necessarily guarantee you entry into the meet. Most NCAA championships are limited to a specific number of swimmers in each event. The fastest swimmers get into the event, and some may be left out even if they achieve the "A" standard. The "B" standard lets you into an event if you are in the meet with an "A" cut or entered as part of a relay. The [Harvard Results](#) site normally carries all of those results and you should look for them to find out where you might best fit. You can also find the latest NCAA Championship meet information and results by visiting the [All Sports Swimming Championship](#) website.

Another good place to check for college swim programs is the [Directory of American Colleges and Universities](#). Click on a State and then visit all the colleges from that state. At each college, look around for Athletics and see if they have a swim program. These general university and college sites might also help you get an idea of admissions requirements and scholarship opportunities. Remember, in Division I and II, schools can offer scholarships for swimming but the total amount of scholarship money available is limited to approximately nine (9) full-time out-of-state scholarships for each school. This money is often distributed among many swimmers. In addition, the money your child receives in academic aid will also count towards the university or college's swimming scholarship amount.

One place you'll want to be sure to check is the [NCAA website](#). You'll find answers to many of your questions regarding academic eligibility, financial aid, recruiting, and graduation rates, just to name a few. And as the president of the NCAA advises, start your college career by asking lots of questions. Find out if you're on track to meet academic eligibility and core-course requirements. See what the graduation rate of the athletics programs and the athletes in your sport are at the colleges in which you are interested. Ask what academic support services are available and how academic progress is tracked.

Choosing a college is difficult. Choose wisely to make that first step down the road a success.

Good Luck!

Recruiting: The Big Trip

Tips for taking official visits to colleges

Recruiting trips to universities are one of the best ways for you to find out where you will best fit in, and where you want to study. The rules regarding official visits differ from division to division. For Division I, II, and III official visits, the university can pay for your transportation and 48-hour stay. You are allowed to take official visits to five (5) different Division I and II universities or schools. There is no limit to the number of official visits you may take to a Division III school.

Plan Your Time Wisely

If you are going to apply early, make sure you plan your trips as early as possible, to leave yourself enough time to make an informed decision. You only have 48 hours to visit the campus, so make the best of every minute. Try to plan your trip so that your official visit starts on a Friday morning. This allows you to go to some classes and see what a typical weekend is like. If you plan your visit far enough in advance you should make sure you can sit in on some of the classes that interest you. Make sure to inform the coach which classes interest you.

Balance of School & Swimming

While attending classes, notice the size of the class. Notice the ability of the professor. Would you feel comfortable learning in this situation? Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions. Ask about which classes are interesting or fun. Ask about how difficult it is to balance academics, swimming, and social life. Ask the swimmers about the practices and about dryland and weights. Ask them if they have improved while at this school and whether or not they have enjoyed themselves. Ask what other schools they applied to and why they ended up at that particular school. Keep your ears open... you may learn something important.

Swim Smarts?

Ask the coach what the average GPA and SAT is on the team and the university as a whole, and see if you could handle the academics of the school. Try to see if the coach's style is compatible with your personality and with your goals. Make sure you see the pool and try to meet as many people on the team as you can. Look into how your times would put you on the roster and in the conference championship. Be sure to talk to your fellow recruits.

Four Year Commitment

Most importantly make sure you are happy and you can see yourself living at the college for the next four years. Ask the coach what percentage of swimmers stay on the team all four years. Look around you and see if people are enjoying themselves. Some universities have completely separate men and women's swimming teams. See what the relationship is between the two and make sure it is appropriate to what you want.

Be Yourself

Don't feel pressured into to being someone you're not. Just be yourself and have fun!

Recruiting: What Coaches Want

Traits most coaches look for in a swimmer

To improve chances as a college applicant, it is important to consider the recruiting process from a coach's perspective. In doing so, potential recruits are able to understand a coach's desires and make themselves more attractive candidates. While not all coaches seek the same swimmers, talents, and characteristics, they do share common needs. The following is a list of traits (in no particular order) that NCAA swimming coaches might find desirable. Assess yourself in each of these categories and attempt to improve in weaker areas to enhance your appeal and attractiveness.

Success

Obviously, coaches pay close attention to a swimmer's past results. Certain coaches only recruit swimmers at the Senior National level; meanwhile, other programs seek swimmers of varied success. Past results are indicative of a recruit's talent and ability to compete and contribute in the NCAA atmosphere. In studying meet results, each coach attempts to fill the needs of his or her team and will certainly look to fill team weaknesses first. A team lacking a breaststroker might overlook a strong freestyler, hoping to build a strong and solid program overall.

Potential

Many coaches are attracted more to a swimmer's potential than his or her achievements. In addition to looking at a recruit's best times, coaches also track yearly progress in an attempt to assess a swimmer's development and potential. Coaches want to see that in the course of four collegiate years his or her recruits will improve and remain enthused and dedicated swimmers.

Versatility

Swimmers capable competing and contributing in several events and strokes are more attractive than one or two event specialists. Versatility is highly rewarded in the NCAA dual meet format where athletes are allowed to swim numerous events and relays (depending upon the meet's format). Additionally, versatility is more highly prized by smaller teams that struggle to fill lanes during dual meets. Larger teams are able to be more selective and recruit stroke specialists with greater ease.

Leadership

Coaches seek talented swimmers and leaders. Leaders are not necessarily the fastest swimmers; they are, however, important ingredients to a team's success. Team captains, for instance, are highly regarded for their leadership, dedication, and ability to motivate. Coaches recruit swimmers who exude such traits.

Work Ethic and Dedication

Similarly, coaches desire swimmers with strong, consistent work ethics. A dedicated swimmer is not only bound to improve and contribute, he or she will motivate others to train and compete with more intensity. Dedication and hard work are necessary ingredients for swimming success, particularly for distance and middle-distance swimmers.

Academics

Coaches seek recruits that are motivated both in the pool and in the classroom. Recruits must meet the academic requirements of a particular college or university. Furthermore, a coach wants to be sure that each recruit will remain academically eligible throughout his college-career. Thus, coaches' desire recruits who can succeed both in and out of the pool.

Recruiting: Narrowing the List

Going from many potential colleges to just a few

Narrowing a field of hundreds of colleges and universities into a list of five to eight schools can be a tough process for swimmers. Student-athletes must consider each potential school from both academic and athletic perspectives. There are few colleges that perfectly meet all the necessary personal criteria of a college-bound swimmer. Student-athletes are concerned with more than just academics, as the college must also provide a compatible swimming and diving program.

Five to Eight School List

College-bound athletes should compile a list of five to eight schools by the end of their junior year. All of the schools on the list should be well researched and meet the athlete's necessary criteria both academically and athletically. Consider the size, location, reputation, and cost of each university. Colleges provide statistical profiles of current students and admissions criteria. Compare your GPA and SAT scores to assess compatibility with these profiles.

Do Your Homework

Swimmers must also consider each program's coaching staff, history, size, and funding. Similarly, research each team's best swimmers and assess your ability to compete and contribute. Make note of those colleges that fulfill both your academic and athletic needs.

Focus

This preliminary list should then be carefully focused and narrowed. The goal is to develop a list of five to eight colleges placed into two distinct tiers: reaches and safeties. Those schools that will most likely admit you based upon academic and athletic quality and skill are considered safeties. Reaches, which may or may not be stronger academically and athletically, are schools that have lower acceptance rates. Your list should include three or four safeties and four or five reaches.

Get Help

Be sure to develop this list in conjunction with your parents and college or guidance counselor. Remember, while each school on your list might be markedly different, you should be content attending and swimming for each one. Developing such a list is difficult, and perhaps burdensome, but it is a necessary step towards finding your ideal match.

Recruiting: Marketing Yourself

How to stand out from the competition

College-bound student-athletes often struggle to effectively market themselves academically and athletically. Even supremely talented and attractive student-athletes encounter difficulties in promoting their abilities. Two student-athletes of the same academic and athletic caliber might be separated by a strong initiative for successful self-marketing. This article focuses on how to stand out from the other swimmers.

Athletics

The first ingredient of successful marketing is an attractive product. Just as an automobile company spends years perfecting a new model, exert the necessary effort and time to better your swimming skills and results.

Do college research early and often and create a tentative list of probable colleges. Gather the email addresses of these colleges' swimming coaches and inform them of your interest and athletic and academic ability. Persistence pays off! If a coach does not respond, be sure to send a follow-up email. Many coaches will then send (via mail) an inquiry form; be sure to complete and return the form immediately. Start relationships with these coaches, but be careful to stay within the guidelines of NCAA regulations.

Inform the coaches of more than just your best times. Alert them of any progress you have made either in the pool or in the classroom. Between two comparable swimmers, a coach will find the one demonstrating marked improvement most appealing. Remember to constantly update coaches of recent results. When talking to coaches, sound interested and remain honest.

Having your club coach contact collegiate coaches is an excellent way to convey your interest and provide him or her with another useful source of information.

Plan and take recruiting trips. They are an excellent opportunity for you to learn about a particular school and for that school and swimming program to learn about you. Be attentive, aware, and interested. Be sure to interact with the coach and to reiterate your interest in his school and his program. Ask the coach if he has any questions for you.

Register with beRecruited.com. With over 100 registered college and collegiate coaches from Divisions I, II, and III, beRecruited.com does the marketing for you!

Academics

Colleges place great importance on and pay close attention to grades and standardized test scores. Prepare for standardized tests such as the SAT by hiring a tutor or taking a local course. You can also buy books and audiocassettes geared towards improving SAT scores. While training in the water, be careful not to neglect your academics.

Unfortunately, the SAT tends to overshadow the PSAT. The PSAT, however, is an excellent opportunity for students to market themselves academically. A high score on the PSAT not only generates interest and recognition from colleges and universities, it provides scholarship opportunities.

Many students overlook the importance of the college application. Take time and care when preparing applications; fill them out thoroughly. Write essays that admissions officers will find interesting and insightful. Get recommendations from those teachers who know you both (as a student and a person) personally and academically.

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.

Sample letter/email:

To: University of Alabama
Swimming and Diving Program

Dear Coach <insert head coach name>:

My name is <insert name> and I am interested in learning more about your swimming program. I have been swimming for <insert time> and am looking at different options for swimming in college. I have an interest in <insert school interests> as possible majors.

I have a <insert GPA> GPA and am ranked <insert rank number> in my class. Currently my SAT and ACT scores are <insert scores> respectively, but I plan to take these again next fall. I am a member of the <insert clubs and or honor groups> at my school.

I swim for the Birmingham Swim League in Birmingham, AL and my coach is Brian Wrighton. If you need to speak with him, his office number is 205-823-5512, and his email is b_wrighton@yahoo.com. I am a <insert level, i.e.-National, Jr. National, Southeastern> level swimmer right now and my times are listed below.

<List best times here>

In researching your school, I have found that you offer the academics I am interested in pursuing and a quality swim team. Please send me any information you have on your program and your school. Also, I would like to know what your criterion is for scholarships in swimming as well as your walk-on policy.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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