

# 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 students. 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 coaches 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 terms 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.

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 your swimming 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 a 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 Versus Athletic Scholarships

There is often 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-athletes 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 students academic ability. The vast majority of swimming student athletes receive 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.

## Visiting A Campus

One of the most important things a student should do is visit a college before deciding to attend. There are two general ways most students visit a college campus: Official Visits and Unofficial Visits.

**Official Visits** - You are limited to five official visits. On an official visit a school CAN pay for your transportation, lodging, and meals. The school can also pay for your parent's meals, and lodging. The school may also pay for their transportation provided you traveled by automobile.

Institutions may also provide a student host with \$30 for entertainment (\$20 in Division III) within a 30 mile radius of campus and may also provide you with and your parents with complimentary admissions to a campus athletics event. Additional tickets may be reserved and purchased at face value by other family members accompanying you on a visit. They cannot provide you with gifts of any kind including photos, t-shirts, etc.

Unofficial Visits - A school may provide you with three complimentary admissions to a campus athletics event on an unofficial visit. A school cannot pay for your meals, lodging, or entertainment on an unofficial visit, although you are permitted to stay in student housing with a student-athlete by paying the regular institutional rate (which is frequently nothing for short-term guests).

## Contacting A Coach

Once a student athlete has narrowed down the number of schools they are interested in they may decide to contact a swimming coach. One of the best ways to express your interest in a college program is to complete an athletic questionnaire. Most colleges have either downloadable or online request for information forms on their athletic websites. Most athletes begin completing athletic questionnaires during their Sophomore and Junior years in high school. Please be aware that college coaches have limitations as to how they may contact you.

**Mail** - With the exception of an athletic questionnaire and camp brochure, Division I and II schools cannot provide recruiting materials to you until September 1st at the start of your junior year. After that date, schools can send you general correspondence, attachments printed on white paper with black ink, business cards, wallet-size schedule card, and one media guide or recruiting brochure. Division I and II schools cannot send you recruiting or highlight videos, or CD-ROM's, though they may show them to you on campus. Division II has no such restrictions.

**Phone Calls** - Division I and II colleges and universities are prohibited from calling you prior to July 1st following the completion of a prospect's junior year. If you received a call prior to July 1st, that school broke the law. After that coaches may call you once per week. Exceptions to this limit are made a) during the five days prior to your official visit; b) the day of an in-person, off-campus contact; and c) subsequent to your national letter of intent signing. Calls may be made by most athletic staff, but not student-athletes. Division III has no such limits.

**Electronic Contacts** - E-mail and faxes are considered mail, so they are permissible to juniors. AOL's Instant Messenger and similar services are considered telephone calls and limited to seniors.

**Contacts and Evaluations** - Any face-to-face meeting between a college coach and you or your parents, during which any of you say more than "hello" is a contact. If no contact is made between a coach and you or your parents, this is considered an evaluation. For all divisions, a college coach cannot contact you off-campus and in person until July 1 prior to your senior year. During the academic year Division I and II institutions are limited to seven permissible recruiting opportunities (contacts and evaluations) with you, not more than three of them may be in-person, off-campus contacts with you.

**Contacts at a Meet** - A coach may not speak with you at a meet until the conclusion of your final event and clearance from your high school or club coach. If the meet takes place over a number of days, college coaches will have to wait until the final day to speak with you.

Please note that many coaches do not have year-round contracts and they may not immediately respond to e-mail especially during the summer months. If you do not hear a response from a coach don't assume they are not interested. Feel free to send a second follow-up email.

# Preparing For College Timeline

## Junior Year

### 1. September: Register for the PSAT/NMSQT

#### About PSAT/NMSQT

The Preliminary SAT<sup>®</sup>/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is a co-sponsored program by the College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC).

PSAT/NMSQT stands for Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. It's a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT Reasoning Test<sup>™</sup>. It also gives you a chance to enter National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) scholarship programs.

The PSAT/NMSQT measures:

- critical reading skills
- math problem-solving skills
- writing skills

You have developed these skills over many years, both in and out of school. This test doesn't require you to recall specific facts from your classes.

The most common reasons for taking the PSAT/NMSQT are:

- to receive feedback on your strengths and weaknesses on skills necessary for college study. You can then focus your preparation on those areas that could most benefit from additional study or practice.
- to see how your performance on an admissions test might compare with that of others applying to college.
- to enter the competition for scholarships from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (grade 11).
- to help prepare for the SAT. You can become familiar with the kinds of questions and the exact directions you will see on the SAT.
- to receive information from colleges when you check "yes" to Student Search Service.

### 2. Sept-Oct Test date: Review

Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT (Links go directly to college board PSAT Practice Exam)

If you plan to take the PSAT/NMSQT in the fall, pick up the Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT from your guidance office in September.

The Student Guide has three main sections:

1. Test taking help
2. Information about National Merit Scholarship Corporation scholarship competitions
3. A full-length practice test

Use the Student Guide to Do Your Best

- Review the section about scholarships with your parents.
- Practice now with sample critical reading, math, and writing skills questions.
- Get familiar with the instructions for each type of test question.
- Take the practice test like it's the real thing!

## [Return to the Top of This Page](#)

### PSAT Prep

Spending your school years taking challenging academic courses and reading widely is the best way to get ready for the PSAT/NMSQT.

The PSAT/NMSQT includes the same types of critical reading, math, and writing skills multiple choice questions as the SAT® Reasoning Test.

Ready to give the questions a test run? Pick a section below, and you'll find tips and practice questions with answers and explanations for each type of question.

#### Critical Reading

Sentence Completion questions measure your knowledge of the meanings of words and ability to understand how the different parts of a sentence logically fit together. Practice now.

Passage-Based Reading questions measure your ability to read and think carefully about a single reading passage or a pair of related passages. Practice now.

#### Math

The math section of the PSAT/NMSQT requires a basic knowledge of number and operation; algebra and functions (though not content covered in third-year math classes--content that will appear on the new SAT); geometry and measurement; and data analysis, statistics, and probability. You can use a calculator to answer math questions, but no question on the test requires a calculator.

Multiple Choice questions ask you to decide which is the best of the five choices given. Practice now.

Grid-ins, or student-produced response questions, require you to solve a problem and enter your answer. Practice now.

### Writing Skills

The multiple-choice questions on writing skills measure your ability to express ideas effectively in standard-written English, to recognize faults in usage and structure, and to use language with sensitivity to meaning.

Identifying Sentence Errors questions test your knowledge of grammar, usage, word choice, and idiom. You are required to find errors in sentences or indicate that there is no error. Practice now.

Improving Sentences questions ask you to choose the best, most effective form of an underlined portion of a given sentence. Practice now.

Improving Paragraphs questions require you to make choices about improving the logic, coherence, or organization in a flawed passage. Practice now.

Additional Information concerning the PSAT Exam can be found at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).

### **3. October- Take the PSAT and attend College Fair.**

During the last two weeks of October most of the area school districts sponsor a college fair where admission office representatives from various colleges will be able to answer general questions about their school as well provide you with literature about what the college has to offer. Gather as much information as you can while attending this event. Get on as many college mailing lists as you can.

### **4. November-December: Review your PSAT Scores**

Once you receive your scores review them and identify areas of weakness that you need to address/concentrate on in preparing for taking the SAT in May. Following the receipt of your scores sit with your guidance counselor and get the necessary information for signing up for the May SAT and sign up early so you can get your study guide for that test ASAP!

### **4. January-May SAT: Prepare for the SAT and plan to college visits.**

Visit [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) for study guides and practice tests.

**A. Make time to prepare for the exam. In January and February find 1-2 hours each week to focus on Increasing Vocabulary; Make 3 x 5 flash cards; buy a pocket dictionary; Increase reading of news articles and editorials. For example, spend time reading Time Magazine cover to cover and the Express-News Editorial Page, this will help improve vocabulary and aid in skill development for writing.**

**B. March-April, 8-10 weeks prior to test: Increase time review time to 2-4 hrs each week. Focus on writing skills. Know how to form paragraphs, proper structure of sentences, use of correct grammar and punctuation. Take an SAT Prep Course if possible. Utilize SAT study guides.**

C. March: Spring Break-Plan a family trip to visit a few colleges you have an interest in. A great time for parents and students to get a feeling of a college campus. The vast majority of colleges offer tours year-round. Contact the school in advance about getting a tour of the school.

D. January-May: Research potential colleges. Start completing prospective student athlete forms online or mail them to the school as soon as possible.

## 5. May:

A. Study for Semester / Final Exams

B. Take the SAT and report your scores to colleges of interest.

C. Enroll in NCAA Clearinghouses

Enroll in the NCAA Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse and the NCAA Amateurism Certification Clearinghouse (required for fall 2006). Your school will be required to submit official transcripts to the Initial Eligibility Clearinghouse. Please follow-up with your counselors immediately following the last day of school to make sure transcripts are sent.

## 6. June - August

A. Find a summer job or internship/volunteer in a potential major field. Log as many community service hours as you can during the summer. This will become more important when applying to colleges and for scholarships.

B. Summer Training: Most Division I colleges will be looking to make decisions on whether to recruit you off the results of your Long Course season after your Junior year. If you are considered one of their top prospects the college coaches goal will be to sign you in November.

C. Narrowing the field and visiting schools: From October-June you should start receiving mail from the various colleges. When mail arrives begin sorting the information into: Colleges of High Interest, Colleges of Moderate Interest, Colleges of Little Interest. Summer is great time to make visiting colleges a family vacation. However, try not to plan long trips away from training since most colleges coaches are looking at your Long Course performance as an indicator for recruiting. Try to narrow your schools of interest down to 10-12 schools and if possible try to visit about half of them during the summer.

[Return to the Top of This Page](#)

# Senior Year

## 1. August-September

A. Plan on retaking the SAT exam in November and adding the ACT exam in either November or February.

B. Review your previous test scores and work on areas that needed improvement.

## 2. September-October: College Matching

A. Compare your test scores, GPA, and class rank with the colleges of high interest acceptance rates.

B. Second look at your athletic performance/best times and do they mesh with needs of a college program.

C. Review for the SAT and ACT exams.

D. Conduct scholarship and financial aid searches.

E. Take Recruiting Trips

F. Complete early decision application: Some colleges programs will ask you to apply early decision meaning if you apply early decision and are accepted you are committing yourself to attending that school the following year.

## 3. October-December:

A. Complete college applications.

B. Recruiting trips.

C. November: Early signing period NCAA Div I athletic programs.

C. Begin applying for scholarships and grants

D. Parents start getting data for Federal Tax Return ready in order to apply for FAFSA program. FAFSA- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

You must fill out the FAFSA form in order to apply for federal and state student assistance. Many colleges and universities, especially public institutions, also require the FAFSA.

The [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) website section on the FAFSA contains a database of the Title IV School Codes needed to complete the form as well as instructions and tips for filling it out. The section also links to a variety of government sites related to the FAFSA, such as FAFSA Express (a PC version of the form) and FAFSA on the Web (an interactive online version of the form).

## 4. January-February:

A. Complete and apply for scholarships

B. Parents submit and apply for FAFSA program.

C. Last of Recruiting Trips.

D. Take ACT exam if not taken in November.

## 5. Late February-Early April:


- A. Receive acceptance, rejection, and waiting list letters from colleges.
- B. Receive Financial Aid information from FAFSA and package offers from colleges.
- C. Make a decision on which college to attend.
- D. Apply for campus related scholarships and student loans if necessary.

## 6. May-June:

High School Graduation - Congratulations!

## Useful Links and Documents

(All are Web Site Links unless otherwise noted)

ACT, SAT, PSAT National Merit Scholar Testing	Collegiate Swimming - General	Achievement Testing Study and Preparation Links
<a href="http://www.collegeboard.com">www.collegeboard.com</a>	<a href="http://www.collegefortexans.com">www.collegefortexans.com</a>	<a href="http://www.actstudent.org">www.actstudent.org</a>
<a href="http://www.act.org">www.act.org</a>	<a href="http://www.ncaa.org">www.ncaa.org</a>	<a href="http://www.4tests.com">www.4tests.com</a>
Miscellaneous Information 	<a href="http://www.naia.org">www.naia.org</a>	<a href="http://www.number2.com">www.number2.com</a>
<a href="#">Guide to Finding the College That Fits</a>	<a href="http://www.njcaa.org">www.njcaa.org</a>	<a href="http://www.barronstestprep.com">www.barronstestprep.com</a>
<a href="#">Financing College - 101</a>	<a href="http://www.berecruited.com">www.berecruited.com</a>	<a href="http://www.powerprep.com">www.powerprep.com</a>
<a href="#">How I Did on the SAT</a>	<a href="http://www.collegeswimming.com">www.collegeswimming.com</a>	<a href="http://www.kaptest.com">www.kaptest.com</a>
<a href="#">Who Needs Harvard?</a>	<a href="http://www.utsystem.edu">www.utsystem.edu</a>	<a href="http://www.testprepreview.com">www.testprepreview.com</a>
<a href="#">Pre-Pay Your Way to College</a>	<a href="http://www.finaid.org">www.finaid.org</a>	<a href="http://www.princetonreview.com">www.princetonreview.com</a>
<a href="#">Free Tuition for Smart Kids</a>	<a href="http://www.savingforcollege.com">www.savingforcollege.com</a>	<a href="http://www.how-to-study.com/">http://www.how-to-study.com/</a>
<a href="#">Parents- College Work Starts Now!</a>	<a href="http://www.collegeapps.com">www.collegeapps.com</a>	<a href="http://www.varsityedge.com">http://www.varsityedge.com</a>

<a href="#"><u>College Bound Athlete Guide</u></a>	<a href="http://www.fastweb.com"><u>www.fastweb.com</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>NCAA Recruiting Regulations</u></a>	<a href="http://www.gocollege.com"><u>www.gocollege.com</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>Loan Calculator</u></a>	<a href="http://www.srnexpress.com"><u>www.srnexpress.com</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>College Search Sites</u></a>	<a href="http://www.usnews.com"><u>www.usnews.com</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.collegesofdistinction.com/"><u>http://www.collegesofdistinction.com/</u></a>	<a href="http://www.degree-directory.org"><u>www.degree-directory.org</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.justcolleges.com/"><u>http://www.justcolleges.com/</u></a>	<a href="http://www.lunch-money.com"><u>www.lunch-money.com</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.mycollegeguide.org/"><u>http://www.mycollegeguide.org/</u></a>	<a href="http://www.vault.com"><u>www.vault.com</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.collegelink.com/"><u>http://www.collegelink.com/</u></a>	<a href="http://students.panaticos.com/"><u>http://students.panaticos.com/</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.xap.com/"><u>http://www.xap.com/</u></a>	<a href="http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/"><u>http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.allaboutcollege.com/"><u>http://www.allaboutcollege.com/</u></a>	<a href="http://www.nchelp.org/"><u>http://www.nchelp.org/</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.fastweb.com"><u>www.fastweb.com</u></a>	<a href="http://www.campustours.com/"><u>http://www.campustours.com/</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>Minnie Stevens Piper Foundation</u> Texas Scholarships</a>	<a href="http://www.naicu.edu/"><u>http://www.naicu.edu/</u></a>	
<a href="http://matchcollege.com"><u>http://matchcollege.com</u></a>	<a href="http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml"><u>http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.simpletuition.com"><u>http://www.simpletuition.com</u></a>	<a href="http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/"><u>http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.college-scholarships.com"><u>http://www.college-scholarships.com</u></a>	<a href="http://www.beeducated.com"><u>www.beeducated.com</u></a>	
<a href="http://www.on-line-degrees-and-scholarships.com"><u>http://www.on-line-degrees-and-scholarships.com</u></a>		