

Updated August 2008:

Your swimmer is now in high school, and everyone is beginning to wonder about the future. Are they going to swim in college? How does the recruiting process work? Essays, forms, clearinghouses, and choices, choices, choices. As one of only a few Shark parents with a child that has graduated during the last 2 years and another child still on the team, we are frequently asked questions regarding the process. As such, we did a little research, thought about our experiences, and decided to write them down.

According to www.berecruited.com there are 141 men's and 188 women's Division I and 50 men's and 67 women's Division II swim teams. About 7,000 men and 10,000 women swim in the NCAA, although about 60% of them are not on scholarship.

In Division I schools, at any given time 9.9 full scholarships are available to men; 14.0 to women. In Division II, both men and women swim teams can distribute 8.1 scholarships. Diving is included in that number of scholarships. Division III and Ivy schools (which compete in Division I) do not give athletic scholarships, and their aid is generally "need" based. A school does not necessarily have to make all of those scholarships available to a team, and most do not. According to USA Swimming, the average is 6.5 scholarships for men and 9.2 for women. Since a team generally wants a minimum of 16-18 swimmers and divers, it is easy to see that full scholarships will not generally be given. Instead, the swimmer, particularly the men, will usually be offered a partial scholarship. The average for swimmers who receive any sort of aid is less than one-half scholarship for men, and slightly over one-half for women. In Division II, the average number of scholarships per team is 2.5, and each swimmer on aid averages about one-quarter of a scholarship.

If they are a good student, the swimmer may get help from the college coaches in order to find academic scholarship money to help supplement their athletic scholarship. They can also combine academic and athletic scholarships. The student who receives an academic scholarship can receive one as long as the combination of the academic and athletic scholarships is not greater than the total cost of attending the school. A student with both an athletic and academic scholarship is still counted towards the team total of scholarships (9.9 for men and 14 for women) unless the academic scholarship is based entirely off of academic rather than athletic achievement. To be counted as an "academic scholarship only" the student must be either ranked in the top 10% of their graduating class, have over a 1200 verbal and math portion of the S.A.T., or a 3.5 core GPA or higher. Coaches also look at difficulty of classes taken in high school, GPA, standardized scores, and outside activities. With the new NCAA rule changes which penalize, through scholarship reductions, teams who do not maintain a high percentage of swimmers on schedule to graduate, academic strength is becoming increasingly important in the decision process. It is also important to them that their swimmers will be able to maintain their eligibility and bring leadership to their team. One thing that should be noted is that even if a scholarship is not available, coaches can support the admission of a student, helping to increase their chances of being admitted to their school of choice.

Athletic scholarships are available for 1 year only. Each spring the slate is wiped clean, and the money is distributed again. If the student has performed well, it is possible that the scholarship money may be increased. While it is unusual for a swimmer to lose a scholarship (unless they quit or have been disciplined), they are sometimes asked to reduce their scholarship “for the good of the team”. Money saved from current scholarships and from departing seniors is used to recruit the next freshman class. The swimmer will be notified on July 1st as to the status of their scholarship for the upcoming year.

So how can a parent help if your child wants to swim at the next level? The following material has been gathered from several sources, including USA swimming, www.berecruited.com, and the NCAA Clearinghouse.

Eligibility:

One of the first things that should be considered is eligibility. To swim in Division I, you need 16 hours of high school core courses, including 4 years of English, 3 years of math (algebra I or higher), 2 years of natural or physical science (including 1 year of lab science if offered by your high school), 1 extra year of English, math, or natural or physical science, 2 years of social science, and 4 years of extra core courses (from any of the above categories, foreign language, non-doctrinal religion or philosophy). Computer science is no longer considered a core course. You must take the SAT and/or the ACT, and the score needed for eligibility is based off a sliding scale dependent upon your GPA. In other words, the higher your GPA, the lower the test score needed. The writing component of the SAT is not considered in determining NCAA eligibility at this time.

In Division II, you need 14 core courses, including 3 years of English, 2 years of math (algebra I or higher), 2 years of natural or physical science (including 1 year of lab science if offered by your high school), 2 extra years of English, math, or natural or physical science, 2 years of social science, and 3 years of extra core courses (from any of the previous categories, foreign language, non-doctrinal religion or philosophy) In Division II, you must have a 2.0 GPA in core courses, and earn a combined SAT score of 820 or an ACT sum score of 68.

The NCAA Eligibility Center certifies an athlete’s eligibility. During your high school junior year, you should begin the process of certification. Students must be registered before they may receive an athletic scholarship and/or practice or compete with a Division I or II school, and schools will request this information from the clearinghouse when they are recruiting you. Complete the Student Release Form (SRF) online at the website below during your junior year, and send the clearinghouse the registration fee (\$50). Print a copy of your completed registration form and both Copy I and Copy 2 of the transcript release form. Sign the transcript release forms and give both copies to your high school counselor.

All material must be sent directly to the clearinghouse. Your high school transcript, containing a minimum of 6 semesters of high school coursework, must come directly

from your school on their official stationary. In addition, your SAT and ACT scores must come directly from the testing center. Test score information on your high school transcripts is not acceptable. You can request for this information to be sent after the fact, but the easiest and cheapest way of doing it is to list the clearinghouse as one of the places to send your scores by writing the code “9999” in the appropriate box when taking the test. On, or after, April 1 of your senior year, you must sign the final authorization signature online verifying your amateur status. Once graduated, the senior must also make sure that their high school guidance counselor sends their final transcript with proof of graduation to the eligibility center. The eligibility center can be accessed at <https://web1.ncaa.org/eligibilitycenter/common/>.

Recruiting:

The NCAA guide, accessed at http://www.ncaa.org/library/general/cbsa/2007-08/2007-08_cbsa.pdf states the following about recruiting. You are allowed 5 official visits to recruiting schools, expense paid, although you can go to a particular campus only once officially. During your official visit (no more than 48 hours), you can receive round-trip transportation, meals, lodging, and complimentary admissions to campus athletic events. A student host can be assigned to you, and supplied with up to \$30/day to entertain you, although the money can't be used to purchase souvenirs such as T-shirts. There are specific rules governing the amount and type of contacts a prospective coach can have, and individual conferences may have their own regulations about recruiting. In general, under Division I, you may receive questionnaires from schools during your sophomore year and recruiting materials after September 1st of your junior year. You can call the coaches on your own at any time, but they can only call you one time a week after July 1st following your junior year. Unofficial visits (paid by the parents) are allowed any time, but official visits can only begin after the opening day of your senior year.

Fill out and return all of the questionnaires you receive from schools. One of our seniors a couple of years ago ended up at a school that she originally had no intentions of attending. She completed the questionnaire, however, and spoke with the coach on the phone - eventually deciding that it was the place for her. The Shark coaches can help you by supplying information on how to write a letter to potential schools when the time comes, usually during your junior year. Don't worry if you don't hear from the coaches immediately- they usually don't respond until after their championship season is over.

A Letter of Intent is the letter you sign to commit to a school for a year in return for an athletic scholarship or other financial aid. Once you sign the letter other schools stop contacting you. There are 2 signing periods for swimming; in November and April. If you are under 21, your parent will need to sign the letter. Prior to a signing day, there is a dead period where coaches are unable to contact you, although you can still contact them. Even if you verbally commit to one school, you are still allowed to sign with another.

Do your homework

How will you fit in with the team? Are you interested in being the fastest, slowest, or somewhere in between? What is the coach's philosophy? How much traveling will you be required to do, and will you be on the travel team? How do they train for your event? How

much independent training (ie dryland) is suggested/required? How do they train during off season and for how many hours a week? (Off season training cannot be required, but swimmers are generally expected to continue training) What are the facilities like, including dryland equipment? Do the athletes have different training facilities than the other students? What other swimmers do they have that specialize in your event? Do they intend to recruit another person in your event? What happens if you are injured? Do you like the coach (although remember they do leave)? What is his/her reputation as far as personality and ability? Does it match yours? The Shark coaches can give you insight into many of the college coaches. How much turnover has there been in staff over the last 5 years? Is winning important to you - both individually and as a team? Would a team win be more important than your actual participation in a meet? Remember that most schools only take around 16 swimmers/divers to away meets, including championship meets. Will you be one of those 16? Is it important to you to swim in their championship meet? What about retention of the swimmers? Do they keep their swimmers once they sign or walk-on? Do their swimmers improve? Do they have lifetime bests? One way to check this is to access a current freshman swimmer's times on www.USAswimming.org, click on time/time standards - then individual times. You can look at their times in '06 and '07, then compare them to that swimmer's times during the school's championship meet. Did they improve? Is the team getting better or worse in their conference?

Look as closely at academics as you do at athletics. It is, after all, what you will be doing for the rest of your life. Does the school offer your major? What is the reputation of the school in your major? Are the professors recognized as experts in their field? How many classes have actual professors teaching vs. video or teaching assistants? What is the average class size? What sort of academic support do they offer the athletes - and for that matter - the other students? What is the graduation rate and GPA of the team? How do the coaches assist the athlete if there is a conflict between a competition and an important exam? Do the athletes get preferred choice in college courses? Do you want a small or large school or something in between? What is their rate of employment after graduation? What percentage goes on to post graduate work, and what is their acceptance rate? What are the admission requirements of the school, and how would you fit in academically?

Don't forget the student life. Is this a town/city that you feel comfortable in? Do you want a small town or a large city? What is the safety risk in the area? What is an average swimmer's day like? Do they live with swimmers - and are the rooms assigned by the coach? What are the dorms like? How many to a room/suite? Do you have to live on campus for all 4 years? How about the food? College food is actually rated in satisfaction - how is your school going to measure up? What is the satisfaction rating of the school for the general population? Magazines such as *Newsweek* and books found at the library and bookstores rate colleges for things like satisfaction. Is it a party school, conservative or liberal, quiet or rowdy? Are athletics important to the culture of the school? Does the team seem to be a family? Do they like each other? Is the chemistry good? Is there an atmosphere of team or competition? All these things should be considered.

Another suggestion is to take your child to the championship meet of the conference they are interested in during their high school junior year. We did this and it turned out to be invaluable. Our daughter was able to watch the swimmers and the coaches - as well as their interaction - and I was able to sit down next to some of the parents and get an insider view of the different schools, teams, and academics. She actually decided against applying to one

school she had been considering and chose another after this experience. Also, keep in mind that Shark swimmers don't have much time off. If you plan on doing any visits to schools as a way to prescreen schools, you might want to start between their sophomore and junior years during your off time. The only problem with the August visits is that the coaches are frequently on break during that time - but it will give you a feel for the school and facilities. Contact the coaches before you go and try to set up a meeting.

Get your questions for the coach ready for the call, but don't be the first to ask about financial information. It is a "feeling out" period for both parties. Some sites that might help in your selection process are:

- www.berecruited.com gives a lot of free advice to prospective athletes and parents.
- www.collegeswimming.com has message boards and results from all Division championships.
- www.ncaa.org/conferences provides links to schools by sport, and you can choose to list all schools, or schools by division, conference, or region.
- Look up the team on the prospective school's web site. You will find results, rosters, recruiting forms, contact information, and records. This information will help you see how you will fit in with the team.
- You can also access on the USA swimming website, a list of the top times for each conference. Go to:
<http://usaswimming.org/usasweb/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabId=1054&Alias=Rainbow&Lang=en> and type in the conference you are interested in.
- Harvard swimming has links for all the college swim programs in the country.
www.hcs.harvard.edu/~swim/links/college.html
- This government site lists all colleges that field athletic teams. You will find the number of participants in each sport, the revenue and expenses (including operating expenses per participant and coaching and staff salaries) as well as an accounting of all athletics for the school so that you can evaluate the financial strength of their athletic programs. Individual schools can be accessed at:
<http://ope.ed.gov/athletics/GetOneInstitutionData.aspx>
- The same government site will give you aggregate data for groups of institutions so you can compare schools within states or conferences.
<http://ope.ed.gov/athletics/GetAggregatedData.aspx>

Hope this helps. Good luck and happy hunting! - Ginger Clark