

NACAC

National Association for
College Admission Counseling

GET IN THE GAME

TIPS FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES
AND THEIR FAMILIES

A young man in a blue basketball jersey is smiling and holding a basketball. He is sitting on a bench in a gymnasium. In the background, other players in blue and white jerseys are visible, some standing and some sitting. The gymnasium has yellow lockers.

PLAYING COLLEGE SPORTS DEMANDS FOCUS.
GETTING THERE DOES, TOO.

FROM REGISTERING WITH ELIGIBILITY CENTERS TO SIGNING A LETTER OF INTENT, THE COLLEGE APPLICATION PROCESS IS DIFFERENT FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES. FOLLOW THESE 10 STEPS TO IDENTIFY A COLLEGE WHERE YOU CAN PURSUE BOTH YOUR ATHLETIC AND ACADEMIC INTERESTS.

01

SELECT COLLEGE-PREP CLASSES AND STUDY HARD.

Take the most rigorous college-prep classes you can and keep your grades up. Your academic record and ACT/SAT scores determine your athletic eligibility at many colleges, including member institutions of the NCAA and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA).

Athletes are subject to the same admission standards as all other applicants. Students with poor academic records can lose the opportunity to receive an athletic scholarship, and in some cases won't be able to practice or play during their first year of college.

If you choose a school within the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) you won't be required to take the ACT or SAT. But, like all collegiate athletes, once enrolled you must meet academic requirements to preserve eligibility.

02

REGISTER WITH ONLINE ELIGIBILITY CENTERS, IF APPLICABLE.

Both the NCAA and the NAIA require student-athletes to register through their respective online eligibility centers. Once logged in, enter information about your high school courses and the sport(s) you hope to play in college. There is no such requirement for institutions within the NJCAA, which doesn't have an eligibility center.

The NCAA encourages students interested in competing at Division I or Division II schools to register during their sophomore year. Division III schools set their own admission and eligibility standards. Athletes bound for NAIA schools must register with that organization's eligibility center by their senior year.

Both sites have resources to assist you as you prepare to apply to colleges. The NCAA eligibility center includes a list of core courses you must complete in high school. Users on the NAIA site can connect directly with college coaches.

Remember that registering with the NCAA and NAIA eligibility centers doesn't take the place of applying to college. You must follow all requirements for submitting applications, test scores, transcripts, and other documents for each school you want to apply to.

03

SEND YOUR HIGHLIGHT VIDEO AND RESUME TO COACHES. CHECK IN WITH YOUR SCHOOL COUNSELOR.

Only a small number of high school athletes are "discovered" by college coaches. In most cases, recruits get the ball rolling.

Contact coaches at schools you'd like to attend, and send them a highlight video and resume listing your athletic and academic accomplishments. How they respond depends in part on the recruiting rules of the NCAA, NAIA, and NJCAA.

Students who hope to play at a Division I or Division II school should ask their counselors to submit an official transcript to the NCAA following their junior year. (An updated, final transcript is required upon graduation.) If you attended more than one high school, or took courses from more than one program, the NCAA Eligibility Center needs an official transcript from each high school or program.

Consider attending a sports camp or showcase where coaches and college representatives can observe your performance.



04

TAKE THE ACT OR SAT.

College athletic associations use your test scores—along with your grades in core courses—to determine whether you’re eligible to compete as a college athlete. Learn about NCAA and NAIA requirements, and take (and retake) the ACT or SAT to meet target scores.

Enter 9999 on your ACT or SAT form to have the results sent to the NCAA. The code for prospective NAIA student-athletes is 9876. Students who plan to compete at a NJCAA school aren’t required to take the ACT or SAT. And don’t

forget to send your scores to the admission offices of the colleges you want to apply to. International applicants may also have to complete an English proficiency test, such as the TOEFL or IELTS. Those scores aren’t used by the NCAA, NAIA, or NJCAA when determining eligibility, but are often mandated by colleges as part of the admission process.

05

RESEARCH COLLEGES; CONSIDER A RANGE OF SCHOOLS.

Only a few students get into the best-known or most exclusive colleges whose teams play in nationally televised championships. Set your goals high, but also ask your counselor for a list of schools where you have a good chance of gaining admission.

Submit applications to colleges that interest you. Remember, athletic eligibility doesn’t guarantee admission. Likewise, just because a coach says you are coming to a school doesn’t mean you have gained admission.

While pursuing your goal to compete at the highest level possible, always remember to have a backup plan. Consider applying to a college that is a less-competitive school athletically. Another option? Check out colleges that offer the right “fit” in other ways. You may still be able to play the sport you love as part of a club or intramural team.

06

FILE THE FAFSA; APPLY FOR OTHER SCHOLARSHIPS.

Athletic scholarships are awarded by colleges that compete in the NAIA, NJCAA, and Divisions I and II of the NCAA.

However, such awards are rare. For example, only 2 percent of high school athletes receive NCAA athletic scholarships. And even among those students, few gain full rides.

Submit the US Department of Education's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as soon as possible during your senior year. Some colleges may also require you to file the CSS Financial Aid Profile from the College Board.

Work with your school counselor and with college admission officers to seek out additional aid opportunities. The money available to students through academic and need-based aid far outweighs scholarship dollars earmarked for college athletes.



07

FOCUS ON FINDING THE RIGHT FIT.

Sometimes the most stress comes from trying to make others happy—such as a tenacious college recruiter or a high school coach who'd like you to attend his or her alma mater.

Remember, the decision of where to attend college is ultimately yours.

Research each school's athletic and academic programs, making sure the institution offers your projected major. Visit campus to talk with student-athletes and athletic staff about practice and travel schedules, anticipated playing time, and the coaching style favored by program members. If possible, attend a game.

Finally, consider the "broken leg" test: If you broke your leg and were unable to play, would you still be happy to attend the school?

08

FOLLOW ALL APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS.

Just because a college coach or athletic department has encouraged you doesn't mean that you have been accepted. You need to apply directly to all colleges you are interested in.

Follow each college's requirements, submitting all the documents—application, letters of recommendation, scores, transcripts, etc. Your counselor can help with this. Pay attention to each college's deadlines for application.

Remember that the final decision on your acceptance at a college comes from the admission office and not the athletic department.





09

UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE SIGNING.

For many college-bound athletes, the recruitment process culminates with the completion of official documents. Before you sign, review any paperwork carefully with a parent or other trusted adult.

Students who agree to join a NCAA Division I or Division II team are often asked to sign a National Letter of Intent (NLI). The process is voluntary and isn't required to receive financial aid or participate in sports. However, students who sign a letter but subsequently decide to attend another college lose one year of eligibility and must complete a full academic year at their new school before they can participate in athletics.

The NJCAA and some NAIA schools also have letter of intent programs. Check with prospective schools to determine their rules.

10

WORK WITH YOUR COUNSELOR TO FINALIZE DETAILS.

As you complete your final months of high school, check in with your counselor and keep tabs on your online eligibility center account.

Seniors headed for NCAA Division I and Division II schools can use the portal to request final amateurism certification beginning April 1.

All athletes should work with their school counselor to ensure that a final transcript and proof of graduation are forwarded to the appropriate college athletic association.

COLLEGE SEARCH TIMELINE

FRESHMAN YEAR: LEARN WHAT IT TAKES.

- ✓ Familiarize yourself with eligibility information from the NCAA, NAIA, and NJCAA; some requirements start freshman year.
 - ✓ Plan a four-year class schedule that meets core course requirements.
 - ✓ Explore college websites and talk with student-athletes.
 - ✓ Make initial contact with coaches at colleges you may want to attend.
 - ✓ Develop a resume highlighting your athletic and academic achievements. Create a highlight video to share with college coaches.
 - ✓ Consider attending a summer sports camp at a college of interest. The coach can see you play, and you'll have the opportunity to experience life on a college campus.
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SOPHOMORE YEAR: HONE YOUR SKILLS.

- ✓ Continue college exploration. Start to compile a list of schools you're interested in attending.
- ✓ Continue to stay focused on academics and keep your grades up.
- ✓ Register with the NCAA or NAIA eligibility center, if applicable.
- ✓ Update your resume and highlight video. Continue to contact college coaches.
- ✓ Consider attending a summer sports camp at a college of interest.



JUNIOR YEAR: REACH OUT TO RECRUITERS.

- ✓ Begin to narrow your college list. Visit schools you are interested in attending and talk with student-athletes.
- ✓ Take the ACT or SAT. Send the scores to the appropriate college athletic association.
- ✓ Check with your school counselor to ensure your senior year courses align with NCAA or NAIA requirements.
- ✓ Amp up your communications with college coaches. Continue to update your resume and highlight video.
- ✓ Consider attending a summer sports camp at a college of interest.



SENIOR YEAR: CHOOSE A COLLEGE SUITED TO YOUR ACADEMIC AND ATHLETIC INTERESTS.

- ✓ Apply to colleges. If applying Early Action or Early Decision, work with your counselor to meet deadlines and understand restrictions.
 - ✓ Retake the ACT or SAT if necessary.
 - ✓ File the FAFSA as soon as possible, and file the CSS Profile, for non-federal financial aid, if applicable.
 - ✓ Research merit- and need-based scholarship opportunities.
- ✓ Learn about the terms governing letters of intent, ask questions before signing official paperwork.
 - ✓ Request final amateurism certification beginning April 1. (Applies only to prospective NCAA Division I and Division II athletes.)
 - ✓ Contact coaches at the colleges you are interested in. Update them on when and where you are playing (such as in tournaments) to give them an opportunity to see you compete.
 - ✓ Work with your school counselor to make sure all necessary documentation—including final transcripts and proof of graduation—is forwarded to the appropriate college athletic association.

COLLEGE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATIONS

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (NCAA):

Roughly 460,000 student-athletes compete at more than 1,000 colleges and universities.

- ✓ Division I schools generally have more students and larger athletics budgets than schools in Divisions II or III. Athletic scholarships are available.
- ✓ Division II schools emphasize a life balance in which academically gifted students can compete at a high level while maintaining a traditional collegiate experience. Athletic scholarships are available.
- ✓ Division III teams have shorter playing seasons, emphasizing life balance and reducing students' time away from academic studies and other campus activities. Athletic scholarships are prohibited.

Contact the NCAA Eligibility Center at www.eligibilitycenter.org.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS (NAIA):

More than 60,000 student-athletes compete at more than 250 member colleges and universities.

- ✓ Competitive levels are comparable to the NCAA's Division II. Athletic scholarships are available.

Contact the NAIA Eligibility Center at www.playnaia.org/eligibility-center.

NATIONAL JUNIOR COLLEGE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (NJCAA):

Roughly 60,000 student-athletes compete at more than 500 two-year colleges.

- ✓ The level of competition varies from conference to conference. Students must transfer to another college to complete a bachelor's degree and may continue their athletic career at a four-year school. Athletic scholarships are available.

Contact the NJCAA at www.njcaa.org.

SOURCES: NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA



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nacacnet.org
