

SPORTS SCHOLARSHIPS



There are many opportunities to play sports at universities in the US. University sports programs are offered at the varsity (organized competition between universities) and the intramural or club (participation-oriented, less competitive) level. Some universities offer sport scholarships at the varsity level to students who are academically-qualified and very gifted in a particular sport. However, no scholarships are offered for participation in sports at the intramural or club levels.

Overview:

The process by which a student athlete is considered for a sport scholarship is a lengthy and complicated one. Unlike academic scholarships, where one submits an application indicating interest in receiving funding to study at a university, students must engage in a highly-regulated recruitment process.

Sport scholarships are granted by the university or athletics association in which a university participates with athletic directors or coaches playing a central role in decision-making. Scholarships can be awarded for the following sports: baseball, basketball, bowling, crew (rowing), cross-country, fencing, football (American), golf, gymnastics, ice hockey, indoor track, lacrosse, skiing, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, track and field, volleyball, water polo, women's field hockey and wrestling. Equestrian, rugby, sand volleyball, and triathlon have been designated as 'emerging sports' and scholarships in these sports are often available to women only in an effort to achieve equality between men's and women's scholarships. Some universities offer martial arts, riflery, rodeo, rugby and sailing, but very few of those will offer these sports on a scholarship basis.

Scholarships are provided on a yearly basis and are generally renewable for four years, the normal amount of time required to complete a US undergraduate degree. If you enter university with transfer credit or advanced standing, you will still be considered a first-year student for sports scholarship purposes.

Award amounts vary and can be anywhere from a few thousand dollars to upwards of \$50,000 for one academic year, depending on the tuition for the individual institution. It is very important to keep in mind that sport scholarships do not necessarily cover the full cost of tuition and maintenance. Scholarships are often offered on a percentage basis (i.e. a 75% scholarship will cover 75% of the total cost for one year), and universities have strict limits on the total amount they can award each year. Therefore, a university may split a small number of large awards into a larger number of lesser-value awards. For example, a university that has three 100% scholarships to offer per year may split them up to award six 50% scholarships to twice the number of student-athletes.

It is important to note that while playing for a college team on scholarship can pay for the cost of earning an undergraduate degree, you do not attend university solely to play your sport. Students with sports scholarships must be working toward an undergraduate degree (in any field offered by the university). There are no degrees in sports themselves, but students whose main interest is in sports can often take a degree in exercise science, physical therapy or an allied field. For more information about choosing, applying for and other funding opportunities related to US universities, please visit www.educationusa.state.gov.

Athletic Associations:

Athletic associations govern college sports and set rules regarding scholarships and athletic recruitment. There are a number of associations that colleges or universities can join, most notably:

- 1) **National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)** – There are over 900 member universities and 250+ provisional members classified within three NCAA divisions with Division I being the most competitive. Athletic standards are high and the level of competition is intense. Only students with the very highest standard of athletic ability tend to be recruited. (<http://www.ncaa.org>)

- 2) **National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)** – There are around 350 smaller colleges in the NAIA, organized by districts. Many NAIA colleges have excellent sports programs and may offer some sports scholarships. The level of athletic ability is high, although the standard is not as high as NCAA teams. (<http://www.naia.org>)

- 3) **National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)** – Member colleges are accredited two-year institutions. The NJCAA is also comprised of three divisions, with scholarships offered only at the Division I and II levels. Division I colleges may offer full scholarships, and Division II may offer partial scholarships such as tuition or fees and books. There are not many Division I or II junior colleges, so an international student must have very competitive athletic and academic ability to receive a junior college scholarship. Students who attend a junior college with the intention of transferring to a four-year college must be certain that their course credits will transfer, as not all will. (<http://www.njcaa.org>)

Eligibility:

Students hoping to be considered for a sports scholarship must meet normal university/college entrance requirements (published on the university admissions page) and continue to obtain satisfactory grades at university in order to receive and retain their scholarships. As a guideline, various sporting authorities have set their own minimum academic requirements for competing students:

1) National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA):

- Students must complete 16 core courses within four academic years, collectively years 10-13. This includes 4 years of English, 3 years of math (Algebra 1 or higher), 2 years of natural or physical science, 2 years of social science (history, geography, economics, sociology, psychology, etc.), and 4 additional years of English, math, natural or physical science, social science, foreign language, comparative religion or philosophy.
- The NCAA applies a sliding scale for the minimum SAT scores that are required for acceptance to NCAA Division I colleges. This will depend on your average academic grade (or GPA). The higher your average academic grade is, the lower the minimum SAT score required (math & critical reading sections only). So, on the 1600-point scale, students who have achieved an average academic grade of Merit (B) must obtain a minimum SAT score of 620 points. A minimum SAT score of 820 is required to compete at NCAA Division II level.

2) National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA):

- Students must meet two of the following three requirements:
 - 1) Achieve a minimum of 18 on the ACT or 860 on the SAT (math & critical reading sections only)
 - 2) Achieve an overall minimum GPA of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale
 - 3) Graduate in the top half of your high school class

3) National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA):

- Talented individuals who do not qualify for either of the above may be able to gain admission to a junior college. Each college will set its own entrance requirements. Only 25% of scholarships at a junior college can be given to international students.
- NJCAA colleges in general do not have a minimum passing score for the SAT although individual colleges may set one.

To estimate your Grade Point Average (GPA):

Grade	Translation	Numeric	U.S. Grade Equivalent	Quality Points	
E	Excellent	9-10	A	4	
M	Merit	7-8	B	3	
Blank/NG/A	Standard Achieved	5-6	C	2	(lowest passing grade)
NA	Standard Not Achieved	0-4	F	0	

For further information about admissions criteria and the SAT, please visit the Undergraduate Study in the US Application Process section on www.educationusa.state.gov.

Engaging in the Recruitment Process:

High school student athletes in the US are somewhat at an advantage to international students hoping to obtain a sport scholarship as they will likely have had some level of exposure to college and university coaches at local, regional and national competitions. Coupled with the fact that their coaches may have contacts within university programs and university scouts may be tracking their progress in the news or at competitions, engaging in the recruitment process to pursue their sport at the collegiate level can be somewhat more straightforward, and will certainly start earlier, than for an international athlete. However, every year talented international students are successful in receiving scholarships in a variety of sports at a wide range of US universities every year. The important thing to remember, whichever avenue you choose to engage in the recruitment process, is that the earlier you start and the more time you put in, the more likely you are to achieve your goal.

International student athletes have a few options available to them once they decide that they would like to be considered for a sport scholarship to study in the US:

The first option is the 'do-it-yourself' approach, contacting university coaches directly to inform them of your interest in their program and of your talent. To get started, you may wish to follow the steps outlined below:

- 1) Visit the NCAA website (www.ncaa.org), or that of one of the other athletic associations mentioned above, to view both the list of universities that offer your sport at the varsity level and the eligibility rules for being considered for a sport scholarship at their member universities. Determine whether you meet the eligibility criteria and make a list of universities to consider.
- 2) After identifying which universities offer your sport, you should then do some research into whether or not that institution provides scholarships for athletes and what the criteria for selection are, both of which should be readily available on the athletic department's webpage for each university. At this point, it is also very important to do some research into the qualifications and reputation of each coach as you want to ensure that you will be well-supported and receive good training within your sport during your four years at university. You may also wish to consider other factors that are important in choosing a university to help narrow down your list (see the Undergraduate Study in the US – www.educationusa.state.gov).
- 3) Compile a list of contact information for the coaches at each university in which you are interested.
- 4) Draft a sports CV that includes all of your accomplishments within your sport. Be sure to include teams played for and number of years, tournament results, championships participated in, and/or records/times/scores held.
- 5) Write a letter to the relevant coach at each institution that explains both your academic and athletic abilities in terms that can be identified by him or her (this is where the sport CV comes in as an easy reference tool for athletic accomplishments).
- 6) You may want to include a reference from a current or former coach in your correspondence with university coaches. (Make sure to provide the name and status of the coach providing the reference in your cover letter.)
- 7) If you are applying to a university that is a member of the NCAA, register in the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse. This is an agency that provides initial eligibility certification for prospective NCAA athletes, but is not a placement agency. It provides initial eligibility certification results to colleges and universities that request the information.
- 8) With luck, you should receive responses from universities within a few weeks. Some may invite you to submit a video of you participating in your sport, and others may send a recruiter to see you participate or invite you to visit their university.

- 9) Receiving notice of a coach's interest in you is a great start, but you still need to apply for admissions to the university through the same channels as other students. So you will need to register for and sit the SAT exam, as well as submit all required application materials by the deadlines set by each institution.
- 10) Throughout the process, keep in mind that students who are interested in pursuing sport at the varsity level in university should focus on the recruiting process towards becoming a university athlete rather than as a source for funding through a sports scholarship. Sports scholarships are often offered only late in the recruiting process. Furthermore, many universities cannot give athletic scholarships, but still boast top sports programs. This includes the Ivy League and many NCAA Division III universities. Additionally, because receiving a sport scholarship is extremely competitive, you will also want to look into other sources of funding and have fallback options for your undergraduate education, should you not receive a scholarship from the universities you've selected, or choose to attend a university that cannot offer a sport scholarship.

In addition to contacting universities directly, you may also wish investigate the opportunity to promote your sporting talent to university coaches via online recruitment sites (see the Additional Resources section below for some relevant links). For free or for a small fee, you can create an online profile for coaches to view that could include your sport CV and photographs and videos of you playing your sport. In his Wall Street Journal article 'The Do-It-Yourself Athletic Scholarship' (18 December 2008), Matthew Futterman, explains that '...coaches have grown more willing to scout talent on the Internet, especially since the sites don't charge them to view the profiles.'

The second option is to work with a sport scholarship agency or placement service to connect with US universities actively seeking international student athletes and offering scholarships. These organizations will charge a fee for their assistance, but generally offer a comprehensive service that can make navigating the often complicated recruitment process clearer. Students that choose to use an agency typically view paying their fee as an investment in their expertise and university contacts and, given the guarantees of scholarship offers, the savings made by obtaining a scholarship more than makes up for the initial out-of-pocket expenditure.

Additional Resources:

For Do-it-Yourself Promotion

www.berecruited.com

www.prepchamps.com

www.trupreps.com

www.ActiveRecruiting.com

www.Collegecoaches.net

www.SportsWorx.com