

College Admissions

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES AMONG SELECTIVE INSTITUTIONS

It is worthwhile to identify the various types of colleges and universities, and to learn more about their admissions criteria. **The six types of institutions are private colleges and universities (including the Ivy League), and state or public universities, the U.S. Service Academies, state and private military academies, and junior colleges.** While there are clearly differences among the various members within each group, understanding the common characteristics is beneficial to understanding the admissions process.

As a group, the private selective colleges, including the Ivy League, have the most freedom in pursuing any type of mission that they choose, and almost total freedom in choosing whatever students they wish to admit to achieve that mission. This freedom is occasionally curbed by athletic league affiliations, but more generally is curbed by faculty review of the admissions activities, usually by setting higher academic standards as a part of the admission policy. Although it is, extremely rare for faculty to be involved in selecting candidates, it does happen in some instances, and you need to be aware of this in researching schools.

Faculty members generally put more weight on academic indicators and objective test scores than admissions officers. Most admissions officers are very reluctant to admit athletes who are significantly less qualified academically than other candidates because of the negative opinion that will be formed. Be sure as well that your references include high school faculty who can vouch for your character, integrity, and academic accomplishments.

The Ivy League is an association of private colleges comprising a specific athletic conference: it is the only athletic association founded on the premise that athletes should not be given scholarships. While this may be important if you are looking for an athletic scholarship, it has even more important ramifications for admissions. As an athletic conference, each member institution is required to report the academic qualifications of recruited athletes to other member institutions such that all athletes are within certain guidelines for the general population of admitted and enrolled students.

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

Of all the selective institutions, **state and public colleges and universities** will typically have lower academic admission standards for residents of their state; however, they often have higher standards for those out-of-state applicants. Applying to selective universities in your state always make good sense. Applying to a public college or university out-of-state should be carefully evaluated since private selectives may be more generous in terms of admissions standards and financial aid. One way to gauge this is to look at the geographic composition of the members of the soccer team. If a large number of the players come from out-of-state you know the admissions committee has sufficient leeway

to give you reasonable consideration; if the converse is true you may want to place your bets elsewhere. Remember, too, that the number of public selective institutions is rather small. This is due to the fact that, by their public nature, tuition and admission requirements must be affordable for residents, yet still attractive to qualified out-of-state applicants. For this reason, your residence may be as much a factor in determining your chance for admission as your credentials. View this, of course, in light of the geographic composition of the athletic teams as indicated above.

The U.S. Service Academies differ from the other groups in several important respects, not the least of which is the fact that they are free to those student-athletes who gain appointment. While the Ivy League offers no merit scholarships, although they are very generous with those demonstrating need, the service academies offer all appointees a merit scholarship. Of course, the hitch is that applicants must be sure they want the discipline and lifestyle that these institutions offer, and are also willing to accept military service requirements after graduation. The other salient difference is that although these institutions are selective, they conduct their admissions business very differently from the rest. Essentially, almost everyone who is admitted attends. As a result, the number of students admitted is very small compared to the other institutions where (as a general rule) fewer than half of the admitted students will choose enroll. Since the general admission procedures are readily available, there is no need to cover them here. Be sure, however, that you understand the singular nature of these institutions, the unique environment and curriculum, and the difficulty of transferring to another college or university later if you find it's not for you.

State and Private Military Academies have the same characteristics as other state and private colleges and universities for admissions and available financial aid, but offer similar discipline and lifestyle as the U.S. Service Academies without the mandatory military service requirements after graduation.

Junior Colleges or Community Colleges

There are many paths to following your pursuit of high education. A junior college is often a viable alternative to beginning a college education at a four-year school. A student-athlete may make a more comfortable transition to campus life in a smaller, friendlier and more familiar setting. The junior college also offers an Associate Degree for those who are seeking to gain employment after only two years of study.

Most junior colleges build a solid academic foundation from students who wish to move on to a four-year degree program and for those who have not fully applied themselves in previous settings. They allow students to acclimate themselves more slowly to the rigors of college life relieving some of the academic pressure by adding a personal touch that may not be found at larger universities. This does not mean, however, that they are less demanding than the four-year institutions.

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

Junior colleges almost always offer a smaller student-instructor ratio than that of a larger school. And, because building the “academic foundation” is paramount, the junior college normally excels in support services. Resource rooms, tutoring, labs, mentoring programs, and academic counseling are staples of a junior college education.

When selecting a college, money may be the primary concern. Attending a nearby community college while living at home for the first year or two can significantly cut the cost of a four-year degree. The junior college offers a very affordable tuition that allows students and their parents some breathing room in the first two years. Moving away from home to attend a junior college offers the advantage of lower tuition; however housing, food and miscellaneous living expenses may match the costs for room and board while attending an in-state university.

Many junior college programs are serious about athletics, recognizing that they are valuable in the overall education of an individual. It is also widely recognized that through athletics an individual can increase his or her market value as a prospective student-athlete to a four-year school.

Junior college athletics are geared towards the continuation of skill development for an individual in a particular sport. Some athletes do not reach their full potential in high school. As in the academic areas, the junior college athletic program is also geared to improving the student’s physical abilities. NJCAA intercollegiate athletic competition is very keen, with the various conference, district, regional and national play-offs and tournaments providing a great proving ground and barometer for the student-athlete who want to pursue their sport at the NCAA Division I, II, and III levels, or in the NAIA.

Many student-athletes fall through the cracks of the recruiting process, while others simply unable to make a decision about their future in education and athletics. For some, the financial situation is appealing; for other, the need to develop academically is a priority. These are all reasons that may describe the cross section of student-athletes found in many junior colleges. Junior college affords them the opportunity to play soccer at the collegiate level. For the most part, these student-athletes continue their education and playing careers at four-year schools. Many are recruited from the junior college setting, and many receive scholarships. These are success stories that cannot be ignored or discounted.

Summary

Evaluate yourself and selective institutions on two dimensions- athletic and academic, then match them as closely as possible. Apply early and try your best to leave a good first impression both on the application and during interviews or visits. Understand the differences that exist in the general grouping of selective institutions. Use this information to your advantage as you attempt to choose the best match possible.

Above all, do not get caught up thinking this is a “life or death” decision, or that, only one college could possibly be the “right” one for you. The fact is, if a college can

provide the educational opportunities you want for your future and offer you an opportunity to play soccer, it is really hard to see how you can lose!

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