

US College Golf - Overview

College in the United States offers a tremendous mix of esteemed tertiary education and highly competitive sports programs, amidst a vibrant campus and community atmosphere. The United States has a long history of combining tertiary education with sport.

The first college, Harvard, was founded way back in 1636. Many of the Ivy League universities were founded soon after between 1701-1770 (Yale, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Columbia, Brown, and Dartmouth.) The first college golf tournament was won by Yale University in 1897. Since then individual winners include Jack Nicklaus (1961), Hale Irwin (1967), Tiger Woods (1996), and three-time champions Ben Crenshaw and Phil Michelson.

Since those early days, college golf has become an integral part of many college sport programs. Most golf teams at each university have a full time coach, an assistant coach, and a financial budget to cover touring/travel costs (flights, rental vans, hotels, etc), equipment and clothing costs (track suits, shirts, shoes, etc), and most importantly scholarships for selected team members consisting of university tuition fees, living expenses (room and board), an allowance for books, and other costs. Each team has an organised daily practice schedule, a specific weekly strength and fitness program, and an intercollegiate competition schedule of between 10-15 tournaments every year.

Each year there are more Australian student-golfers who are interested in pursuing college golf and education in the US. It is important that prospective college students are aware of what is required to be recruited by a US college and while the intent of Golf Australia is not necessarily to push young Australian golfers into considering a college education in America, it is important that anyone interested in going to the US understands those requirements.

If you are seeking a golf scholarship, be aware that they are not easy to obtain and academic achievements are as of equal importance to golf achievements in the recruiting process, and at college.

American colleges and universities offer a wide variety of educational and social opportunities. Campus locations range from the centre of the largest cities to suburban, rural or small town settings. More than 1200 of these institutions have competitive golf programs for men and approximately 750 for women and many schools offer golf scholarships to accomplished players.

The standards to compete in college golf are high. On elite college teams of NCAA Division I, a sub-zero handicap and regular scoring average below 72 for men or a two handicap and scoring average below 76 for women is expected. At other NCAA/NAIA Division I colleges, men need to be averaging around 74, while women need to be around 78-80 to secure scholarships.

At Division 2 colleges, women need to be shooting around 80-84, while men need to be around 76. At Division 3 colleges and Junior Colleges, players can be above these averages, however scholarships become harder to find the higher your handicap and scoring averages.

Some prospective students feel that the college system will be their preparation for professional golf. It is worth noting that while the best of the US Tour players are graduates of the US college system, this is primarily because that is by far the most common route taken for talented golfers in the US. It is unusual for more than one or two players per year to go directly from college golf to earning a PGA or LPGA Tour card via the Tour Qualifying Schools.

Some players will compete on the Nationwide Tour for men or Futures Tour for women, but most players find themselves competing on the various mini-tours or begin searching for other work to pay their bills. This is the reality of trying to become a professional golfer.

College golf is only a platform to allow aspiring golfers to work towards achieving their full potential. Like in any endeavour, success is based on an individual's ability to make the most of the opportunities presented to them.

On the other hand, the college system allows for daily practice and strong competitive opportunities for those who make teams. The depth of competition provided by intercollegiate matches and other amateur tournaments means that your game is constantly tested in the toughest amateur golfing environment in the world. Also, as a member of a college team, all of your golf expenses during college will be paid for. This can add up to tens of thousands of dollars, regardless of what type of scholarship you are on.

The other significant benefit of pursuing the college pathway is you are encouraged to complete a bachelor's degree in your chosen field of study. This enables you to pursue an alternate career with a solid educational foundation, if professional golf is too difficult or unrealistic.

What do I need to know?

College Sport Governing Bodies

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

The NCAA is the biggest and most recognised college sport governing body. The NCAA is broken down into three divisions: I, II, and III. The divisions are based upon the number of sports each college plays. To qualify for Division I, colleges must compete in a minimum of 6 men's sports and 8 women's sports. Divisions have no bearing on the quality of academics. In fact, many Division 3 colleges have higher academic rankings than many Division 1 colleges. Within the three divisions, and even within each division, the standards of golfer, facility, and athletic support can vary quite a lot. NCAA Division I colleges have the biggest athletic budgets and offers the greatest guarantee of quality support and opportunities to develop your game.

Golf scholarships are offered at all Division I and II programs. Division III do not offer athletic scholarships but academic and other type of financial aid may be available for Australian student-athletes, based on their grades and tests scores.

NCAA academic checks are conducted by the NCAA Clearinghouse. The NCAA imposes an increasingly strict set of requirements for all student-athletes to have achieved from Year 9 through 12 in high school. All NCAA student-athletes must have scored a minimum of 890 points on the SAT, achieved a minimum number of NCAA 'core classes', and maintained a minimum of a 'C' average in those 'core classes'.

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)

The NAIA is an independent college sport association, which currently administers programs of intercollegiate athletics at more than 280 fully-accredited four-year colleges and universities. The NAIA associated colleges believes athletics should be an important part of the overall educational program of their schools. The level of play at most NAIA colleges is comparable to NCAA Division II and III colleges. Elite NAIA golf teams can compete well against top NCAA Division 1 teams. 172 NAIA member schools have golf programs for men and/or women, and most offer golf scholarships.

The NAIA has its own recruiting and eligibility guidelines, less stringent than the NCAA. The NAIA writes in their official prospective student-athlete information as having "a recruitment process that is less cumbersome and with fewer restrictions on the contact between a student-athlete and a coach. And the process of establishing eligibility is streamlined since there is no (NCAA) Clearinghouse." To compete for an NAIA, student-athletes must meet two out of three requirements:

- 1) Minimum of a 'C' average in high school
- 2) Minimum SAT score of 860 or
- 3) In the top 50% of their graduating class.

National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)

The NJCAA manage two-year colleges with sports programs. Many players who have not meet NCAA or NAIA academic requirements, and/or are just below the ability level required to secure an NCAA or NAIA athletic scholarship have the option to start their college career at a junior or community college. The NJCAA is also divided into 3 divisions. Divisions I and II offer scholarships and financial aid to student-athletes. These colleges provide an excellent opportunity for students to establish themselves academically and attract the attention of coaches from four-year schools. Entrance requirements at most two year colleges are very achievable, and credit hours earned generally are transferable to other colleges.

How many schools have golf programs?

Schools Sponsoring Golf Teams		
Association	Men	Women
NCAA Division I	289	232
NCAA Division II	210	125
NCAA Division III	273	143
NAIA (4-year)	172	128
2-Year schools	264	121
Totals	1208	749

*Most opportunities are non-Division I

Allowable Number of Golf Scholarships		
Association	Men	Women
NCAA Division I	4.5 scholarships	6.0 scholarships
NCAA Division II	3.6 scholarships	5.4 scholarships
NCAA Division III	No athletic scholarships	No athletic scholarships
NAIA	5 scholarships	5 scholarships
NJCAA Division I	8 full scholarships	8 full scholarships*
NJCAA Division II	8 partial scholarships	8 partial scholarships*
NJCAA Division III	No athletic scholarships	No athletic scholarships*

*All women's NJCAA teams compete at Division I

Considerations

Some of the questions you need to consider when trying to figure out where you would like to go include:

- What schools can you and/or your family afford (in-state only, private or out-of-state?)
- What level of golf competition am I best suited for? NCAA Division I, II or III, or NAIA, or Junior College Division I, II, or III?
- What size of school feels comfortable? (Ohio State University = 50,000 students, University of Iowa = 18,000 students, Methodist College = 2,000 students.)
- Are you looking for a warm-weather school with year-round golf? In the northern states there are times during the winter when it snows and playing golf outdoors is not possible.
- Is it important to you that the college 'coach' is a professional who is qualified and capable of giving you advice on your swing and game? Unlike in Australia, the majority of college coaches in the US are not PGA qualified to coach.

Where do I start if I am considering US College Golf?

Let's start with clarifying a few myths and misconceptions that confuse or intimidate potential golfers from pursuing this very viable pathway.

Perhaps the most common mistake aspiring athletes make regarding college recruiting is waiting too long to learn how the process works and then not taking action on this knowledge. For example, most students usually wait until they are in Year 12 before seriously thinking about going to college in the USA or begin to search for a scholarship opportunity. This can be a costly mistake.

What is unknown to many people is that by the middle of Year 12 a large number of scholarship opportunities have already been informally offered to someone who started the recruiting process much earlier. This means that, even for the best players, the number of scholarships available at their appropriate level is significantly reduced.

If a good 'student-athlete' expects to have a chance to play at the college level on scholarship he or she needs to prepare, academically, athletically, and personally, for this opportunity as early as Year 10.

Another common mistake made by aspiring prospects is assuming you have to be a superstar athlete to be considered for a college scholarship. This is not true. The US College System has several different levels of competition that feature athletes from junior national teams to outstanding high school competition. Also your academic grades are a HUGE factor in the recruiting process, especially in golf. Most golf coaches will look first at a student's academic report cards before perusing their athletic resume.

What this means is that if you are an outstanding student and with a 3-4 handicap, you will be recruited as heavily as a 1-2 handicap golfer with average grades. Not only that but you may be eligible for an academic scholarship as well as an athletic scholarship.

Remember, you will be considered a 'student-athlete' in the US college system.

Historically, Australian athletes wanting to pursue US college scholarships have gone about it in two ways. The first method is to send a handful of letters or emails to college coaches. This can be successful if the athlete knows the level he or she is suitable for.

Sending letters to Stamford, Duke, UCLA, or Arizona State, for example, is a waste of postage if you are not suitable for the highest level of college golf competition. Many college coaches receive between 20-40 such letters or emails every day, so it is very difficult to know how to make yours stand out from the others.

The second method is for athletes to ask their local coach for contacts they may have in college. Again, this can be a successful method if the level of the player is similar to the level of play at the college and that college has scholarships available the year that player wishes to enter. The advantage of this method is the local coach may have a good relationship with the college coach and personal recommendations will carry more weight in the coach's decision making process because the local coach can express an accurate description of the player's skills and attributes. The disadvantage of this method, however, is that the player's choice of college is limited to the few colleges the local coach may know.

How do I maximise my chances of getting a college golf scholarship?

If you believe you are a potential college prospect, it is true that if you start the recruiting process at the appropriate time and promote yourself to ALL of the colleges at your playing level you will most certainly have a host of colleges recruiting you and you will have the greatest opportunity of being awarded the best scholarship possible.

The key to maximising your scholarship potential is being recognised as a prospect and included in an initial talent pool of recruits. Every program will differ on when they begin to build the talent pool and when they will stop their search. If you are not in that talent pool it becomes extremely difficult to be considered for scholarship on that team, regardless of your golfing ability.

In super competitive scholarship sport like golf, the earlier you begin to notify college coaches of your abilities the greater chance you will have of not only winning a scholarship but winning a scholarship on a college program that you select.

Another option is to employ a recruiting service to work on your behalf.

Professional recruiting companies specialise in guiding high school students through the college recruiting process with the aim of creating the most opportunities for scholarships as possible. Recruiting companies vary in the quality of their services and costs, so make sure you thoroughly assess their background, experience and knowledge of the college system, and Australian success stories before choosing the one that suits you best.

If you choose to try to get recruited on your own, the key is to be active. You will need to put together your resume, write letters to colleges you would like to be considered for, and constantly follow up with the colleges. Keep your good news in front of the coach. Let him/her know your SAT/ACT score; your recent tournament scores; where/when you are going to be playing (if in the US) so they might make time to watch you play or follow your progress on the internet. Try to keep the process moving forward with the coach. You should be able to sense a coach's interest or lack of interest.

International Student-Athlete Requirements

The NCAA has specific regulations for international students who wish to attend U.S. colleges and universities and compete in intercollegiate athletics. U.S. and foreign student-athletes are governed by the same recruiting guidelines; however foreign students have different steps in determining eligibility.

The NCAA Clearinghouse reviews each student's academic records and core curriculum according to specific criteria for each country for students who have completed all or part of their secondary education in a non-U.S. educational system. This determines eligibility only for athletics competition. Each institution (university) has its own published requirements for admission.

As mentioned above, ALL students who wish to participate in NCAA Division I or II athletics must be certified by the NCAA Initial-Eligibility Clearinghouse. NCAA Clearinghouse requirements for Australia vary state to state. However, the essential elements required include: Completed High School Certificate/Diploma; complete statement of results and reports for all classes from Year 9 through to Year 12; and a copy of your SAT scores.

A minimum number of NCAA Approved Core-Courses are also required. To guarantee you meet NCAA requirements it is necessary to take a minimum of 1 English subject, 1 Mathematics Subject, 1 Natural/Physical Science Subject, 1 Social Science/Humanities Subject, and 1 extra subject (in English, Maths, or N/P Science) in Year 11 and Year 12. In each class, you must achieve a minimum 'C' average to meet NCAA requirements.

To register for the NCAA Clearinghouse and more information, go to:

www.ncaaclearinghouse.net

Once you have completed Year 12, your records must be sent to:

NCAA Eligibility Center
PO Box 7110
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206
USA

Tel. 1-317-223-0700 (International Callers)

The records must include:

- Your original school reports from Year 9-12 and Year 12 Statement of Results or true copies as certified by your high school or notary.
- Copies of your application form to your selected college, including your birth date.
- Summary of educational history in outline form including names of schools, inclusive dates of attendance and names of all diplomas or certificates received in original language from the first grade on.
- Copies of your SAT scores. (Scores can be sent directly to the NCAA Clearinghouse when you register for the SAT test.)
- In situations where a core-course subject area is not represented in your high school reports, the NCAA Clearinghouse may request additional documentation (such as specific class syllabus, more detailed school reports, text books used, or curriculum guide).

All prospective student-athletes must achieve a minimum SAT score of 890 to meet NCAA requirements. 'The College Board' administers the SAT test. Please see: www.collegeboard.com for more information, including test dates and locations. The SAT is the national college admission tests for U.S. colleges and universities.

College Golf and Recruiting Services Links and Websites

National Scouting Report (NSR) is a US-based organisation with an Australian branch. National Scouting Report started in 1980 and is the oldest college recruiting service in the USA. NSR professional services include: 10 page personal website for each prospect, professional 4 page colour resume brochures, one page colour resume profiles, video editing, uploading, and promotions, internet exposure (averages 3 million hits per month), questionnaire service, special e-mail address, preferred college emails and mailings, college application and financial aid assistance, extended service during junior college, and experienced Australian college scouts and advisors who have played NCAA Division 1 college sport.

NSR Australia only looks after potential Australian student athletes. If you are confused about NCAA Clearinghouse requirements, NSR Australia provides free consultations and advice about core class selection, SAT test centres and dates, other academic related concerns, and information about the college system and the USA. NSR Australia Headquarters is in Melbourne, Victoria: www.nsrofaustralia.com

This used to be the Ping College guide and costs \$70 per year for a subscription. It provides excellent and up-to-date information related to US colleges and information about the process of applying to colleges as well as the differences between the various types of colleges: www.collegegolf.com

College Consulting:

Kylie Pratt is an Australian based in the US who attended a US College and can assist with placements.

Contact: kyliep@gmail.com

Phone USA (910) 658-6560, AUS 0427 588 022

Golfstat is a site which offers very comprehensive information and statistics on players, teams and colleges: www.golfstat.com

This is a Scottish-based recruitment organisation that is organising to have an Australian agency: www.prodreamusa.com

Another recruiting agency which is based in the US. It is run by a college coach with 13 years experience and has numerous informative articles to help answer questions you may have regarding the requirements to be successful as a golfer at a US college:

www.rednumbersgolf.com

This information was compiled and written by Peter Knight, Director of Elite Development Golf Australia & Blair O'Hara - Director of National Scouting Report Australia.