

The following is not meant to be a comprehensive account of all collegiate running, but rather a summary of experiences I have had working with past athletes. Before considering much of the process, I think you need to start by asking yourself “*why am I looking into running in college?*”

Scenario #1- Financial Assistance: This is probably the most difficult to navigate, as you will need to find a school that meets your academic and social needs, while also offering you money. The quick rundown is that Division III schools do not offer athletic scholarships, but Division II and Division I can. That being said, there are opportunities at Division III schools to acquire financial assistance, it just might be from a different area (i.e. an athlete receives an academic scholarship).

Scholarships can be tricky to come by. Obviously if one is on par, or more accomplished than the runners currently at the school, they are in prime position to get a scholarship. But, it all ultimately depends on what money is available within the program. Programs get a certain amount of money to spend on runners, and when that money is gone, they can't distribute any more funds. Sometimes this money is locked up with young runners in the programs, sometimes it is locked up with older runners. Sometimes, it is evenly disbursed among all age groups. I have seen runners get accepted to schools with full, partial or no scholarship. And, some of the athletes who came in with no scholarship, work their way into having their full tuition covered by the time they graduate.

Scenario #2- Getting into a More Competitive School: Not a difficult concept to grasp. Some runners simply use running to set themselves apart from the field and get into a better school, or the school of their dreams. This can work for runners at any ability level and at schools of differing levels of competitiveness. Running can, at times, help one get into a school that is highly competitive.

Scenario #3- Just Want to Run, or have a Community to Join: Also easy to understand. My advice, however, is to look at a Division III school, or lower performing Division II, or Division I, as the pressure to focus on running, will probably not be as apparent.

Quick Overview of Divisions: Accessing the right division for you is difficult, but important. I would typically say that the runners who are looking at Division III schools, could easily look at lower performing Division I schools (Atlantic 10 conference, etc.). I am always happy to sit down and discuss the different conferences with you. Division II is a bit of an enigma to me, and I do not have a lot of experience with them. What I tend to find is that most of our runners are naturally interested in a Division I, or Division III school.

That being said, if you come across a Division II school you are interested in, you should definitely check it out. They do have money to distribute and there are some good schools here. If you find one you like, give it a shot.

General Timeline: While all of your running seasons are important for attracting the interest of running coaches, there are a few that stick out. These tend to be the Indoor and Outdoor seasons of your junior year and XC of your senior year. Any official visits a runner is offered will be during their fall season of their senior year. And, you will make your final decision about where you will be attending during your senior year. I will mention that we have had runners wait to sign their letter of intent until April of their senior year, and while I do not suggest you wait too long (because the college might fill out their roster while you are), it is possible to find a good fit late in the year. All of this also depends on whether you are offered a scholarship, or are “walking on,” as well as the Division of school involved.

What You Should Do: I suggest that a runner fill out online questionnaires at their leisure, if interested in a school. If it is a school that you are very interested in, you might want to visit and meet the coach (always nice to meet the athletes as well as they will be a large part of your social circle), or email the coach directly to let them know you have an interest in their program. Some coaches are better than others at responding to email, so do not get discouraged if you do not hear back from them. I would star all of this any time after July of the summer leading into your senior year.

I would also suggest that you spend time looking up what the runners at various schools run, and meeting the runners. I have found over the years that many schools publish what they expect from incoming runners, and that these “requirements” do not match what their own runners can run. So, ask questions and consider where you will be on the team. Will you be alone at the top with no one to push you to improve, or alone at the bottom “in over your head?”

An easy thing to do is look at where our past runners have run. This is posted on the website on the XC page. I suggest this because I can probably reach out to the coaches of these programs more easily, or offer insight about the program, if you are interested in it.

And, always feel free to ask me to email a coach for you. I am happy to reach out and let the coaches know about our program and who you are and how I can see you fitting in with their program.

Closing Points: The last point I will make is that it is very important for you to remember that throughout this entire process you are interviewing the schools you visit, just as much as they are interviewing you. You are making a decision to attend a school, so be prepared to ask questions in interviews or through email. And, as always remember that the academics are almost always the most important aspect to consider in this entire process. While we have had some runners attend premier running schools, not one has become a professional runner yet. All have had to happily rely on the degree they earned in the process to ensure a livelihood going forward. So, never become focused solely on the running program at a school, realize it is the entire college or university you are considering.

Good luck, let me know if you have any questions.