The Recruiting Process: Input from OA College Swimmers

Brooke Woodward: OA Class of 2010
College: Emory University

When I began my college search, I knew exactly what I was looking for and I thought that these criteria matched up with the schools that I thought I wanted to go to. Foremost, I wanted a school with excellent academics and my area of interest (which was limiting), where I could swim for a team with a strong team culture and continue to improve, and where I would have a balanced college experience.

In my opinion, the most important part of college is the education you receive, so don't just try to be recruited by the "fastest" school for which you are qualified.

In the end, you have to choose a school that feels right to you. It may not be the school you envisioned yourself attending from the time you were a toddler, or the school your parents attended, or even a school that many of your close friends have even heard of. Keep your options open and try to pick a school that would be a great match athletically and academically. Don't try to mold yourself to a school.

On your recruiting trips, really try to imagine yourself living along side the team. Notice the effort the team puts into trying to get to know you and listen to how they speak about their teammates. Pay attention to what they do for fun, if the team hangs out together aside from practice, how they speak about their coaches, how much they smile and enjoy each others company, and just how happy the general atmosphere is.

It is impossible to learn everything about the school, or even know if what you are observing about the team is a good representation of what it is really like. Remember that there are no guarantees that you will end up swimming for four years, so make sure you don't just choose a school because of a team or because of a coach. You have to like the school too especially when coaches change and even swim programs get cut.

On my recruiting trip to Emory, one of the main things I noticed was how large of an effort the team made to get to know each one of the recruits. I could immediately tell that they **cared** who their new team members might be and how they would affect the team dynamics.

The summer before I left for school I panicked. I was afraid I didn't want to swim anymore and I realized that I was scared to go so far from home when I had only spent 48 hours at the school. How could I possibly really know if I would like it? In the end, I decided to give it a try and now I really know how big a difference team dynamics can make. I can honestly say that I wouldn't be swimming now if I didn't absolutely love my college team and the athletic environment.

Rachel Cleak: OA Class of 2010
College: Cal Poly

My advice: When I was looking at schools my first priority was academics, then second swimming and third was location. The schools I was most interested in were UC Davis, UC Santa Barbara and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. All three have great swim teams with impressive academics, and all three are in California. But in the end I chose Cal Poly because I felt that it was a better fit as far as swimming goes than my other options. The only problem I had with deciding on Cal Poly is that I had to decide my major on applying to the school. How is an 18 year-old supposed to know

what she wants to study in college?? Well the truth is it really doesn't matter that much (sorry). For the most part as long as you get a college degree you should be able to find a job of some sort, whether it is related to your major or not. My brother majored in film at UC Santa Cruz and now is working at a bank. Don't be intimidated by having to choose your major, as long as you pick something you're interested in, you will have a great and successful college experience.

-Rachel Cleak

More from Rachel:

I was looking at a few east coast schools, but I didn't go on any recruit trips to the east coast. I honestly think I could be just as happy on the east coast, but Cal Poly is so close and affordable that it was a difficult offer to pass up. A lot of people don't consider Cal Poly to be academically challenging, but the people I know here are very focused on school and take their classes very seriously. I am taking four classes this fall quarter and all of my professors know my name and they are all very helpful and understanding (not to mention very funny). On top of having great academics, San Luis Obispo is the happiest city in the nation (it was actually given this title). The people here are super friendly and easygoing. Some criteria that I think everyone should look for in a college is location. Find out how close the school is to the downtown area, or movie theater or park. You're going to want to have places off campus to go to on weekends for a change of scenery. Also don't forget to consider meal plans for college... it is what you will be living off of.

For training regimen, all college teams (no matter what division) will have intense practices. Most will have some sort of weights, dryland or running. Don't be fooled, just because you are a sprinter, you will still have to work hard and go to every practice. Also don't expect to swim the same events in college that you swam in high school (just ask me, Brooke or Andrea).

As far as assistant coaches go, ours is amazing. He helps everyone on the team, even the people who aren't as fast. He is encouraging and will try to help me when he knows I am struggling with workout. Definitely ask about the assistant coaches and what coach deals with which group (distance, sprint, im, breaststroke etc)

You should also make sure that your coach is on the same page as you as far as academics. I really liked Tom because he was proud of the academics at Cal Poly and said that we go to college for education first, then swimming second (sorry Ronnie). He is super understanding about class conflicts and missing practice for study sessions or other academic reasons.

As far as drinking goes, remember that it is your decision to make. You don't have to drink to fit in, and nobody will judge you if you don't (at least none of my friends do). It is also your duty as a teammate and friend to not judge the people who do drink (after all they might be 21). Find out what the team does for fun, and see if you can picture yourself fitting in with them.

Shelby Luchini: OA Class of '09
College: Washington State University

Swimming in college for me was tough at first, but now that I have settled into it more, It really was a great decision that I made, and a stepping stone for my academic and swimming career. Here at WSU, there are people from all over the world, with so many different personalities and I am just now learning how to foster all of those different personalities into one productive and put together team. It really is a lot of fun because I get to experience so many differences in behaviors and just experiences of life in general. For example, last weekend, we competed in Princeton, and that was my first time ever to the East coast, which is one that I will never forget. I know that all of these teammates here at WSU, just like my friends on OA, will be with me throughout my entire life.

A couple things that I look at in a different perspective now is: "would I really want to be at this college if I didn't have swimming", and I think it's a big question that all college prospects should look at. Consider what weather you like, for example, if you like the cold and snow, come to WSU. It can really make a difference on your college experience and how happy you are. When being recruited by schools, really take into account the coaches' personalities...make sure they are honest and not just putting on a show for you, you want them to be real, and not a complete

360 from when you talked to them when you signed, to when you get to that school. Look at the people on the team!!! These are the people you are going to spend most of your college career with, so if you feel any hint of exclusion, that's probably not the best fit. Team Dynamics is a big part as well. Do they put character first? or is it all just about swimming fast?

I would say, don't be afraid to take risks and challenge yourselves...you can only go up from here. Good luck with your college searches!!!

Always,
Shelbi Luchini