



Guide for the College-Bound Student-Athlete

PLAYNAIA

THE NAIA ELIGIBILITY CENTER



Dear Prospective Student-Athletes,

Welcome to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, an association that boasts a proud tradition of intercollegiate athletics, academic excellence and character values.



The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), headquartered in Kansas City, Mo., is a governing body of small athletics programs dedicated to character-driven intercollegiate athletics. Since 1937, the NAIA has administered programs and championships in balance with the overall college educational experience. The student-athlete is the center of all NAIA initiatives. Each year more than 77,000 student-athletes have the opportunity to play college sports, earn over \$800 million in scholarships and compete for a chance to participate in 27 national championships.

Today, the NAIA is an association that, above all other things, cares about and is focused on student-athlete success – helping you to attain your education and athletic goals. Our members utilize athletics as a vehicle to transform lives to build better futures.

The NAIA is ready to assist you in taking that important first step in your college sports career. We invite you to register with the NAIA Eligibility Center at [PlayNAIA.org](https://www.playnaia.org).

Since the NAIA's founding in 1937, we are proud of the many accomplishments of our current and former student-athletes and we look forward to the legacy you will establish in the NAIA. Visit us at [NAIA.org](https://www.naia.org).

Jim Carr, NAIA President



27 National Championships

The NAIA offers student-athletes the opportunity to compete at the highest level in these sports.

Fall sports

Men's Cross Country
Women's Cross Country
Football
Men's Soccer
Women's Soccer
Women's Volleyball

Winter sports

Men's Basketball
Women's Basketball
Men's Bowling
Women's Bowling
Competitive Cheer
Competitive Dance
Men's Indoor Track & Field
Women's Indoor Track & Field
Men's Swimming & Diving
Women's Swimming & Diving
Men's Wrestling

Spring sports

Baseball
Men's Golf
Women's Golf
Women's Lacrosse (beginning 2021)
Men's Outdoor Track & Field
Women's Outdoor Track & Field
Softball
Men's Tennis
Women's Tennis
Men's Volleyball

Invitational sports

Men's Lacrosse
Women's Wrestling

Emerging sports

Beach Volleyball
Women's Flag Football (beginning 2021)

Find NAIA schools that offer your sport at [naia.org/sports](https://www.naia.org/sports)

NAIA participation experience

In the NAIA, a student-athlete can compete during four “seasons of competition” within the first 10 semesters (or equivalent) in college. A season of competition is charged when you participate in one or more intercollegiate contests whether at the varsity, junior varsity or freshman level, or in elite-level, non-collegiate competition. To compete, student-athletes must be enrolled in at least 12 hours every semester or quarter and be making normal progress toward a bachelor’s degree. They must also meet freshman and/or continuing eligibility rules.

What’s different about NAIA recruiting?

The NAIA recruiting process for both freshmen and transfers is less cumbersome, with few restrictions on the contact between a student-athlete and a coach. More frequent communication allows the student to become more comfortable with the school and athletics staff.

Once you have started your college experience by enrolling and/or attending classes, representatives from another NAIA school cannot initiate contact with you. This no-contact policy applies even if you have not started classes yet, but have drawn equipment and begun organized practice.

What if you’re interested in transferring to an NAIA institution? Because NAIA coaches cannot contact you, you’ll need to take that initiative by calling or emailing them. Once contacted, within 10 days the NAIA institution must notify in writing the athletics director or faculty athletics representative at the school where you are currently enrolled. They don’t need permission to respond to you, but your current school must be notified that the contact has been made.

Can I visit a campus for a tryout?

Students are permitted a maximum of two days of tryouts throughout their entire career. If a school has a policy for reimbursing all students for such visits, the same can be applied to you as a prospective student-athlete.

What about letters of intent?

As an association, the NAIA does not have a letter of intent program in which students sign a binding agreement to participate in athletics at a particular institution. Student-athletes may sign letters of intent with an individual NAIA school, however, they aren’t obligated to attend that institution. That said, some NAIA conferences require their member schools to recognize letters of intent that are signed with other institutions within the conference. Please check with your prospective school to see if any conference programs apply.

Admission standards for athletes

To participate in athletics in the NAIA, you must be admitted to the college or university under admission standards equal to or higher than those applied to the general student body.

What about financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans?

NAIA rules on financial aid are straightforward. Each school determines how much aid it awards to an individual student-athlete. Under no conditions may anyone else provide direct financial assistance to any student-athlete. Scholarships, grants-in-aid or student loans are controlled by each institution through the same committee that handles all student loans and scholarships.

Financial aid to student-athletes is limited to the actual cost of:

- Tuition
- Mandatory fees, books and supplies required for courses in which the student-athlete is enrolled
- Room and board based on the official room and board allowance listed in the institution’s catalog

Each sport has an overall limit on the amount of financial aid it can award as full or partial grants to students in that sport. For example, the overall limit in baseball is 12. Baseball scholarships can be awarded to any number of students (for example, 1 full scholarship, 10 half awards and 24 quarter awards) as long as the combined total does not exceed 12.

Limits on the total amount of aid that can be given to varsity athletes in each sport:

Football	24	Swimming & Diving	8	Soccer	12
Basketball	8	Baseball.....	12	Tennis	5
Volleyball	8	Softball.....	10	Wrestling	10
Track & Field.....	12	Competitive Cheer	12	Competitive Dance	10
Lacrosse	12	Golf.....	5	Bowling	5
Cross Country	5				

Academically gifted students can be exempted from these limits if they meet grade or test score criteria established by the NAIA.

Questions for parents to ask the NAIA institution about financial aid

- What types of financial-aid agreements does your school have?
- Which campus representatives have to sign off on the agreement for it to be valid?
- What will the financial-aid agreement cover? Housing? Food? Books? Tuition?
- How long will the agreement last? A quarter/semester? A full academic year?
- If my son or daughter signs a financial agreement with your institution, can she/he sign with another school within your conference without penalty?
- If my son or daughter quits the team after the season, will he or she continue to receive the scholarship?
- If my son or daughter suffers a season-ending injury, will the financial-aid agreement be honored?
- If my son or daughter becomes academically ineligible, will the agreement be honored?
- On your campus, who is responsible for checking the student-athlete’s eligibility?
- Is there an academic support program in place for student-athletes on your campus?
- Do you offer my student’s major?

Do I meet the freshman eligibility requirements?

If you will graduate from a U.S. high school this spring and enroll in college this coming fall, the requirements are simple. An entering freshman must:

- Be a graduate of an accredited high school.
- Meet **two of the three** following requirements. If as an entering freshman you do not meet at least two of the three standards.

MUST MEET TWO OF THE THREE

1. TEST SCORE REQUIREMENT	2. HIGH SCHOOL GPA REQUIREMENT	3. CLASS RANK REQUIREMENT
Achieve a minimum of 18 on the ACT or 970 on the SAT	Achieve a minimum overall high school grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale	Graduate in the top half of your high school class
<p>Tests must be taken on an international testing date prior to the start of the term in which you intend to participate in athletics and scores must be achieved on a single test date. The minimum SAT must be achieved on the Evidence-Based Reading & Writing and Math sections only; the Writing score cannot be used.</p> <p>Minimum score requirements for tests taken prior to May 1, 2019 varied.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For tests taken prior to March 1, 2016: 18 ACT, 860 SAT (reading, math) • For tests taken between March 1, 2016 and May 1, 2019: 16 ACT, 860 SAT (evidence-based reading & writing, math) 	<p>The NAIA accepts the grade point average determined by the high school, provided it is recorded and awarded in the same manner as for every other student at the school.</p>	<p>If a student's class rank does not appear on the transcript, a signed letter from the principal or headmaster, vice principal or guidance counselor written on the school's letterhead and with the school's official seal, stating the student's final class rank position or percent may be submitted.</p> <p>Exception: Completion of nine institutional credit hours prior to identification at any institution of higher education can be used if no class rank appears on the final official high school transcript. The credit hours must be completed with a grade of "C" or better.</p>

Mid-Year Eligibility Opportunity. If you do not meet requirements for an entering freshman, you can satisfy one of the initial requirements in addition to earning 12 institutional credits hours with a grade of "C" or better during your first term of attendance at your NAIA school to be eligible.

Learning disabilities. Students with diagnosed learning disabilities, who do not meet the freshman eligibility requirements, may have their academic profiles reviewed by the NAIA Learning Disability Advisory Committee at the request of an NAIA institution. The LDAC will then provide recommendations to the National Eligibility Committee to assist with a final decision.

What if I didn't attend a U.S. high school?

The criteria for alternative high school experiences and those outside of the U.S. are determined as follows:

GED Students — must meet two of the three

1. TEST SCORE REQUIREMENT	2. HIGH SCHOOL GPA REQUIREMENT	3. CLASS RANK REQUIREMENT
Achieve a minimum of 18 on the ACT or 970 on the SAT	GED students are recognized as having met the GPA requirement.	(Not applicable)

Home Schooled Students

TEST SCORE REQUIREMENT — Home school students who have a 20 on the ACT or 1040 on the SAT are considered to have met the freshman eligibility requirement.
If a home schooled student completes a home schooling program conducted in accordance with the laws of the student's state of residence, but does not meet the test score requirement, a home school waiver may be requested from the NAIA Home School Committee.

International Students — must meet two of the three

Graduates of high schools outside of the United States or one of the U.S. territories.

1. TEST SCORE REQUIREMENT	2. HIGH SCHOOL GPA REQUIREMENT	3. CLASS RANK REQUIREMENT
Achieve a minimum of 18 on the ACT or 970 on the SAT	Achieve a minimum overall high school grade point average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale	Graduate in the top half of your high school class
		Exception: Completion of nine institutional credit hours prior to identification at any institution of higher education can be used if no class rank appears on the final official high school transcript. The credit hours must be completed with a grade of "C" or better.
International students must provide their academic records in both the language of issue as well as word-for-word English translation.		

Note: For detailed information about the process for international students, please see the **NAIA Guide for the International Student-Athlete**.

NAIA Eligibility Center at PlayNAIA.org determines eligibility of all first-time NAIA student-athletes

The NAIA Eligibility Center, at [PlayNAIA.org](https://www.playnaia.org), is responsible for determining the NAIA eligibility of first-time student-athletes. Students must receive an eligible decision by the NAIA Eligibility Center prior to competing for the first-time in the NAIA, and all NAIA schools are bound by the center's decisions.

Every student interested in playing sports at NAIA colleges for the first time needs to register online with the NAIA Eligibility Center and receive an eligible determination. This applies to high school seniors and transfers from both two- and four-year colleges.

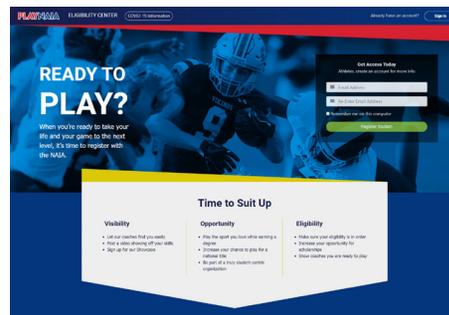
What information will I need to provide? You'll create a personal profile with the basic facts about your academic history and sports participation to date.

- You'll need your current contact information, previous residences and addresses, high schools attended and history of your sports participation during and after high school graduation.
- **9876** When you register for the ACT or SAT, include the NAIA Eligibility Center (9876) on the list of places test scores should be sent.
- Ask your high school counselors to send a final, official transcript that verifies high school graduation, class rank and cumulative grade point average to the eligibility center through the NAIA High School Portal.

What are the costs?

Registration costs for students are as follows:

- U.S./Canada: \$90
- International: \$150
- U.S./Canadian freshman break: \$135 (effective May 1, 2021)
- U.S./Canadian Transfer: \$150 (effective May 1, 2021)



This is a one-time, nonrefundable registration fee and includes all services for the student type. Additional fees may be assessed if your student type changes.

The registration fee will be waived for U.S. students with demonstrated need. If you receive a fee waiver for the ACT or SAT test or qualify for the federal free or reduced-cost lunch program, contact your high school counselor, who can provide confirmation of your eligibility for a fee waiver to the NAIA Eligibility Center. Fee waiver confirmations are required to be completed by high school counselors through the online [NAIA High School Portal](https://www.playnaia.org) regardless of when you graduated high school.



Do I need to register with the NAIA Eligibility Center if I'm registering with the NCAA?

Yes, determining if you meet eligibility requirements for NAIA eligibility is separate from NCAA eligibility certification. The NAIA and NCAA are two separate associations, with two different sets of rules and certification processes.

Early decisions for high school seniors

Students, who have completed their junior year of high school and have at least a 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale (2.5 on a 4.0 scale midway through senior year) and the minimum test scores required, may obtain an eligibility determination before graduating from high school. Those students will need to request that their official transcripts after their junior year be sent to the NAIA Eligibility Center and contact ACT or SAT to have their test scores sent directly.

Register with the NAIA Eligibility Center at [PlayNAIA.org](https://www.playnaia.org).

NAIA Eligibility Center

Phone: 816.595.8300

Hours: Monday-Friday
8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Central
[Contact Us](#)

Address

NAIA Eligibility Center
120 W. 12th Street
Suite 700
Kansas City, Mo. 64105

What are the transfer student eligibility requirements?

If you have taken time off between high school and coming to the NAIA or have attended two- or four-year college, the NAIA considers you a transfer student, regardless of whether you participated in intercollegiate athletics.

If you're a transfer who has never participated in athletics at an NAIA school, you'll need to register with the NAIA Eligibility Center at PlayNAIA.org to have your eligibility determined.

Residency Rules if transferring from a four-year school — If you participated in an intercollegiate contest in your sport at your immediately previous four-year school, you must wait 16 weeks before participating in that sport unless you:

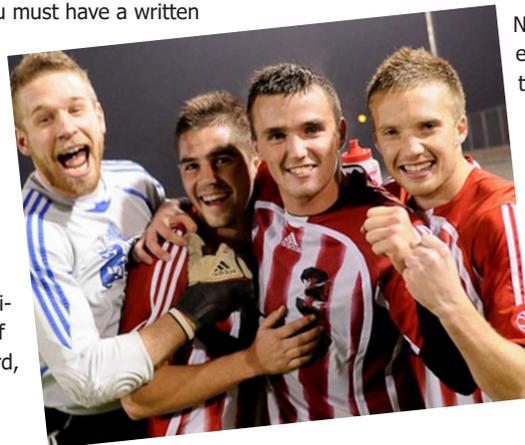
- Have a written release from the athletic department at your most recent four-year college
- Have a minimum 2.0 GPA from all previous colleges combined
- Meet all additional academic requirements and any conference-specific requirements for transfers

Residency Rules if transferring from a two-year school — A student transferring from a two-year school has no residency requirement. If, however, you have participated at a four-year college prior to attending a two-year school, you must have a written release from the athletic department of the four-year institution.

24/36 Hour Rule — Transfer students are required to have completed 24 semester/36 quarter hours of institutional credit in their last two semesters/three quarters of full-time enrollment prior to transferring.

Progress Rule — If you're a transfer student who has already used one or more of your four seasons of competition in college sports, you will need to show completion of the following before you can compete in your second, third, or fourth season:

- Second season: 24 semester/36 quarter total cumulative credit hours
- Third season: 48 semester/72 quarter total cumulative credit hours
- Fourth season: 72 semester/108 quarter total cumulative credit hours (including 48 semester/72 quarter hours in general education or your major field of study)



Who's considered a professional in the NAIA?

In the NAIA, only amateur students-athletes are eligible to participate in a given sport. An amateur engages in athletics contests for educational values, personal pleasure, satisfaction, and for the love of the sport, not for monetary or material gain. If you become a professional in a particular sport recognized by the NAIA, you will be considered a professional in that sport only and are ineligible for intercollegiate competition in that sport.

The following will cause a student to lose amateur standing:

- Signing a contract with any professional team or entering into an agreement to compete in professional athletics, with either a professional sports organization or with any individual or group of individuals authorized to represent the athlete with a professional sports organization
- Participating in any athletics contest as a professional or as a team member where you receive reimbursement, directly or indirectly, exceeding the actual expenses of travel, meals and lodging
- Receiving remuneration for any appearance or advertisement/promotion that references the student's collegiate institution or intercollegiate athletic participation.

Is there an age limit in the NAIA?

No, there is no age limit for participation in the NAIA. Instead, students are restricted to four seasons of competition in a given sport and have 10 university semesters to complete those four seasons of competition.

How long can I compete?

In the NAIA, a "season of competition" is charged when you participate in one or more intercollegiate contests whether at the varsity, junior varsity or freshman level, or in elite-level, non-collegiate competition. Student-athletes can compete during four seasons of competition within the first 10 semesters (or equivalent) they are in college. For transfers, seasons of competition at the previous institution(s) are determined under the rules of the association (such as the NCAA, NJCAA, etc.) under which you competed previously. Non-collegiate competitive experiences are assessed using the [evaluative criteria](#) to determine potential additional seasons of competition used.

What happens if I suffer an injury during college?

If as a student-athlete you suffer a season-ending injury or illness, NAIA rules provide for a way to deal with the loss of the opportunity to compete. Hardship requests must be verified by the medical doctor who treated you. The injury cannot have occurred in last regular season contest or during postseason, and you cannot have competed in more than a specified number of contests. If granted, hardships restore a season of competition but do not restore any terms toward the maximum 10 semesters/15 quarters.

What if I've competed in my sport outside of college?

Athletes who compete outside the traditional college setting can gain an unfair advantage, and the NAIA addresses this issue with its "competitive experience rule." To ensure that students are competing against those with similar levels of training and experience, the NAIA evaluates a student's competition outside of college. Participation in some leagues or levels of competition can result in a season(s) of competition charged.

Students are permitted to participate in non-collegiate competition during the 12-month period after high school graduation. However, starting on the first day of the 13th month following high school graduation, the "competitive experience rule" applies. The rule applies to students in three main situations:

- Students who take more than one year off between high school and college
- Students who go to college but don't play college sports for one or more years while enrolled
- Students who leave college for one or more semesters after first enrolling

A student can be charged one season of competition for each year of outside competition after the first day of the 13th month following high school graduation. A student will also be charged a season of competition for each year of intercollegiate competition regardless of the date of high school graduation. The NAIA Eligibility Center, supported by ongoing research into both domestic and international competition, determines which leagues or levels of competition in a particular sport are considered countable.

How do I remain eligible during college?

NAIA student-athletes have to be enrolled in a minimum of 12 hours at all times and be making progress toward a degree. When you reach junior year (either athletically or academically), you have to maintain a 2.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale. Your eligibility is reviewed at the end of every term you are in school.

Once in college, your best resource for eligibility questions will be your campus **faculty athletics representative**. The **NAIA Official Handbook** outlines all association rules governing eligibility and it's available online at NAIA.org

Check out your resources

PlayNAIA.org is the source for prospective students who want to learn more about the opportunities to play at an NAIA college or university. Check out the School Search and upcoming official NAIA Showcases where you can show your skills and connect with NAIA coaches. The NAIA Eligibility Center includes information for prospective students, parents, high school and club coaches about NAIA schools, sports and eligibility determination.

- Explore **NAIA Conferences**.
- NAIA Legislative Services provides resources on **NAIA rules and eligibility**.
- **National Federation of State High School Associations**
- International students are encouraged to explore **InCredEvals.org** to speed up their admissions and eligibility processes.



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