

# **PLANNING GUIDE**

## **FOR THE COLLEGE-BOUND STUDENT ATHLETE**



### **Urban School of San Francisco**

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Dear Student and Parents/Guardians:

This document has been created for your convenience to help guide you through an important time in your life. Urban School has been fortunate to have numerous graduates go on to play at the collegiate level. Most have played at the NCAA Division III level, some at the NCAA Division I level and many in college club sports. I've always felt that a graduate who is able to continue their athletic career in college proves that Urban has prepared them both academically and athletically. Our athletic alumni are a source of pride for our entire school community.

Continuing your academic and athletic career in college requires a tremendous amount of work. While the *Planning Guide for the Student Athlete* can assist you through the college recruiting and admissions process, you are the generating force to ensure that the necessary tasks are accomplished. The college counselors, coaches, and teachers at Urban are here to help.

The success of this process also depends upon realistic evaluations of your ability, both in the classroom and in the sports arena. Please use this information to help further your athletic opportunities beyond high school. There are many people to assist you along the way, so please reach out for help!

Sincerely,

Joe Skiffer  
Director of Athletics  
Urban School of San  
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P.S. Thank you to Ted Turkington, who created the original model of this handbook while at St. Ignatius in San Francisco. Our version has been updated and modified for students at Urban School by Jennifer "JT" Thomas.

## The Student Athlete College Pathway Process

Each year thousands of student athletes, with the help of parents/guardians, market themselves to college coaches. Some are very successful; many are not. Approximately 7% of high school student athletes will compete in college and 2% will have earned scholarships in the past. Most high schools never produce a full scholarship Division I athlete. To compete at the college level is a difficult and time-consuming process made easier if you have a road map and the basic resources to give you/your student athlete the best possible advantage. The process is similar for most sports, although a little more straightforward for athletes with times, rankings, and handicaps. Regardless of what sport you play, you have to get noticed to get recruited. You need to be your own agent!

The key to success is to remember that this process is not a sprint; it's a multi-year marathon and the journey starts with a common sense plan. Developing and working the plan as a student/parent team, spending a little time each month, can open doors you never thought possible. The goal? Leading you to a collegiate student athlete experience of a lifetime.

### Can I Compete at the College Level?

Let's be realistic. College sport positions and athletic scholarships aren't available to everyone. You should be aware that most student athletes will not be able to play Division I sports. It's important to cast a wide net and look beyond Division I into DII, DIII, NAIA, and College Club sports. You may be a "star" athlete at Urban School, but you will need to know how you match up with other high school and club athletes from around the country and even globally.

First and foremost, you need to realistically identify your athletic abilities. Talk to all of your coaches and others who know your game. Ask for an honest and candid evaluation. Ask them what they think of your potential athletic abilities and at what division level/association they believe you could compete.

Second, meet with your college counselor about your academic profile. Use your academic interests and strengths, course rigor, GPA, and test scores (if taken) to determine the best possible academic fit and college admission selectivity. With over 1000 programs in the NCAA alone, it's important to create a list that targets the right programs where you have the best chance of admission, competing, and living and learning for four years.

You may find that the truth hurts, or perhaps you'll be surprised to find that you have underestimated your abilities. This is a critical first step in the process. You may waste your time if you focus your efforts on colleges that don't fit your athletic and academic

abilities. This initial list of programs is dynamic and will change as you develop as an athlete and student. In the beginning, or if you are unsure of your level of play, cast a wide net of programs across all divisions, associations, regions, and levels.

## **Where Can I Play?**

### **NCAA Division I**

DI is the most visible, competitive, well resourced, and time-consuming division in the NCAA. Big budgets, state of the art facilities, and the significant athletic scholarship money equates to a massive commitment for student athletes. DI student athletes sacrifice a normal college experience to play. Depending on the sport and athlete, some academic majors are ill-advised, time spent at home on holidays/summer may be cut short, and study abroad is not recommended. There is a wide range of admissions selectivity among Division I schools. DI programs require registration with the NCAA Eligibility Center to confirm academic eligibility but no longer require standardized test scores.

### **NCAA Division II**

Division II is an alternative to the highly competitive DI and the non-scholarship DIII. DII athletic departments carry fewer teams and sports, athletic scholarships are more limited, and eligibility requirements are lighter. Most DII institutions have a higher rate of admissions.

DII programs require registration with the NCAA Eligibility Center to confirm academic eligibility but no longer require standardized test scores.

### **NCAA Division III**

Division III institutions try to create a more balanced experience for their student athletes. Regional competitions and a shorter off season allow athletes to engage in college life that resembles that of non-student athletes. DIIs do not offer athletic scholarships, but often provide strong merit and financial aid packages. Division III athletic departments place special importance on the impact of athletics on the participants rather than on the spectators. The student athlete's experience is of paramount concern. Typically smaller colleges, DIIs have a wide range of admissions selectivity. DIII programs do not require registration with the NCAA Eligibility Center rather each campus determines their own eligibility requirements. Check with your counselor regarding standardized testing requirements as they vary.

### **NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics)**

The NAIA is a separate athletic association from the NCAA. It is similar to DII in competition levels and athletic scholarships and like DIII in less restrictive recruiting

contact and a more regional travel schedule. Composed of many private and smaller schools, the NAIA has their own eligibility center and membership directory.

## Community College

JUCO or junior college, also known as community college, is an alternative for athletes who may not be ready for a four year college experience due to academic, financial, social, or athletic reasons. Some athletes may need a year to get “bigger, stronger, faster” and would benefit from more exposure to college coaches. Research community colleges to determine which ones offer your sport and have a successful history of placing athletes into four year programs. Some community colleges offer athletic scholarships.

## College Club Sports

Student athletes who are determined to continue playing their sport in college but may not want to sacrifice their “dream college” for a program that matches their athletic ability level should consider college club sports. Some college club sports are partially funded by the institution and others require fundraising. While national titles are offered in many club sports, competitions are more regional and training is more limited making the experience more balanced.

## What Do College Coaches Expect?

A very small percentage of high school student athletes receive college offers for roster spots, scholarships, or incentive packages because the coach “happened to find him or her.” Only the top elite athletes — the top 100 nationally — receive enough media coverage and recognition that they are automatically recruited without having to make an effort. The other 98% have to take the initiative to contact the colleges and coaches where they have an interest. Most schools’ recruiting budgets are small, and **coaches rely on you to contact them.**

College coaches are very busy; they don’t all have the time or budget to travel around the country to see student athletes compete. Phone calls, emails, profiles, resumes, stats, social media, videos, and references become key tools for the coach in the recruiting and evaluating process. You might think that it’s too self-promoting to make the initial contact with a coach and to “market” yourself/your student athlete. However, this is the norm. If you don’t do it, other student athletes will get the opportunity, get noticed, and get recruited because they and their parents/guardians have made the effort, gained exposure, and received the attention. These days, college coaches expect you to be your own agent — it’s a common and expected practice!

Coaches expect you to prepare academically. This means preparing in the classroom as much as on the field. As an example, since Division III and Ivy League institutions do not offer athletic scholarships, academic performance is just as valued as athletic performance in the recruiting process. Regardless of how talented you are in the athletic arena, your academic record will make the biggest difference in admissions (and, potentially, in merit aid) outcomes. Every college has academic scholarships or grant money that is awarded to student athletes who demonstrate academic achievement. High academic achievement means you will be accepted into more colleges, potentially earn more merit aid, and have greater college choices.

Keep in mind most coaches are working with limited budgets and very little time, staff, and resources. You have to be persistent, prepared, and polite to get noticed at any division. If nothing else, every coach wants players who can enhance their program. Character is a key component of integrity: show your character!

## **What Is the Role of the Athlete, Parent/Guardian, Coaches, and Counselor?**

First and foremost, **BE YOUR OWN AGENT**. Generally, college coaches do not want to hear from parents or counselors, unless they ask. Athletes need to drive the process and the communication with college coaches; college coaches can tell when a parent writes the email. High school and club coaches need to honestly evaluate and communicate their athletes' best fit level of play and then advocate for them with college coaches. Parents can help monitor the process, make sure their athletes are sticking to the Game Plan, and continue checking in with them about their athletic and academic goals. Counselors can guide student athletes toward the best fit colleges, manage the eligibility centers, and help students navigate the application process.

We will say it again: It's your responsibility to market your talents, get your name in front of college coaches, and control your own college career!

# THE GAME PLAN

## 9th Grade Year

- Get to know your advisor and Grade Dean.
- Engage in the classroom, communicate with teachers, and focus on getting to know Urban.
- Add a “signature” to your email (in settings) with the following so coaches know how to contact you: name/graduation year, club team/position(s) or events/PRs, high school/GPA, cell phone, video link, and social media handles.
- Participate on a club, Summer, Fall ball team to get more exposure to college coaches, if appropriate for your sport.
- Talk to your coaches about your college athletic goals and how to increase exposure opportunities in your sport. Meet with your coach for a thorough evaluation of your athletic ability and ask for an honest assessment of your potential level of play in college. Which division, level and association would be the best fit. Ask them if they will be a reference for you and potentially make calls to advocate for you in the future.
- Attend summer camps, ID camps, and tourneys/meets/matches for exposure, to improve skills, and to compare your current skill with others. Select camps at colleges that you might want to attend so you can tour and get a feel for the school.
- Film games, meets, and matches and watch the film looking for good highlight clips.
- Create social media for this process. Post clips, photos, PRs and good clean fun images so coaches can get to know you on and off the field. Follow and like coaches and programs.
- Visit campuses and attend games for athletic, academic, and social fit.
- Keep your advisor in the loop!

## 10th Grade Year

- Ask your coaches, again, about your potential level of play in college and if they would be willing to be your reference.
- If Division I coaches have expressed interest in you, let the College Counseling office know (to be clear: this is if you have been proactively approached by coaches via phone or email. This is NOT the same as you expressing interest in their program).



- Use the [NCAA Membership map](#) / [NAIA Membership Schools](#) to see which colleges have teams at your level. Check out team rosters to better understand the type of players that get recruited and see playing time.
- Begin to develop an athletic resume/profile highlighting your athletic and academic achievements, honors, awards, PRs, ranking, handicaps, times, coach references, and contact information in addition to an up close action shot. Post on any free and appropriate sites.
- Create a highlight video: 3-5 minutes, 20-30 clips with music/fan noise and a circle/arrow and pause, and a front slide with your information (name, grade year, club team/position, high school team/GPA, email and references' contacts). Make sure the clips are organized from best to worst showing all parts of your game.
- Create an email cover letter to send to coaches. This needs to come from the player, not the parent! Make it personal by forming a connection to the coach, team, or college. No one likes to receive spam-type emails. Email all coaches on staff, and make sure your name, graduation year and club team are in the subject line. Include your athletic resume/profile and video.
- Fill out Prospective Athlete Questionnaires on college athletic websites so you start an electronic file in the college soccer offices, in addition to receiving all information about their program and ID/summer camps.
- Create a tracking spreadsheet to record your communication with and exposure to college coaches.
- Send email updates regarding new PRs, accolades, highlights, academic achievements/transcripts, test scores, and tourney/camp attendance.
- Familiarize yourself with the NCAA/NAIA rules and regulations governing recruiting, eligibility, and scholarship in your sport.
- Continue following and liking programs of interest in addition to humbly posting your athletic accomplishments and new clips on social media.

## 11th Grade Year

- Keep grades up in appropriate courses.
- Begin the formal process with the College Counseling office.
- If necessary, take standardized tests (ACT/SAT) early. The NCAA no longer requires them but some colleges do. Ask your college counselor to be sure.
- Continue contacting college coaches. One email or evaluation is not enough. Send updates to show interest: transcript, updated highlight video, test scores, accolades/awards/honors/stats, and tournament/ID camp updates. Ask coaches where they will be recruiting this year or if they will host an ID camp/clinic or combine.

- Receiving texts, calls, DMs, unofficial/official visit offers, pre-reads, and personalized emails are all indicators that you are on the coach's radar. Moving from emails to more personal communications is the goal. Auto-generated responses and camp invitations could be spam.
- Schedule a call with the coaches of interest and have questions to ask that cannot be answered on the website. Ask them about their evaluation, recruiting, and offer/commitment timeline. The goal is to get away from email and on to texts, calls, and visits.
- Track responses and non-responses on the spreadsheet. Decide on which programs need more attention or need to be removed from the list. Add more colleges/programs, if necessary.
- When possible, visit campuses unofficially (unpaid) or officially (paid by the coach/program), attend games/practices and classes to demonstrate interest in the team and determine if you're a good fit for their program. Talk to athletes, admissions offices, professors, athletic advisors, and coaches.
- Learn about non-athletic college fly-in programs if visiting campus is cost prohibitive.
- Attend virtual recruiting zooms, virtual college fairs/nights, college rep visits, and continue researching rosters for players/positions that will become available your graduation year.
- Attend ID Camps/Prospect Camps and College Showcase Tournaments. Email every coach on your list to let them know you are attending. Ask your club/high school coach to email college coaches prior to tournaments and camps.
- Register for the NCAA and/or NAIA Eligibility Center to ensure that your coursework and grades meet the eligibility standards.
- Update your athletic resume, questionnaires, video, and spreadsheet.
- Prior to a call or visit, research their program using the website, roster, schedule, bios, and even watch a game, meet, or match if possible. Research the school, its academic programs, and social environment. Avoid asking questions that can be answered on the website.
- Keep your coaches in the loop so they can contact college coaches on your behalf. Continue asking your coaches about your potential level of play in college.
- Keep your counselors in the loop!

## Senior Year

- Have a conversation with coaches of interest about where you stand in terms of recruiting.
- Continue your email, text, call visit, and social media campaign and have strong backups rather than putting all your hopes on one school.

- Make sure the admissions office agrees with a coach's assessment of your academic viability.
- Prepare backup applications for submission.
- Ask the college coach if you should apply early. Athletes MUST complete college applications and do them well!
- Discuss scholarship, financial aid, and other merit aid options with the coach.
- Attend official visits to your top schools.
- Ask your counselor to send final transcripts to the NCAA and college. Submit test scores to the college, if applicable.
- After you're admitted and before May 1st, send in your deposit, Statement of Intent to Register, and housing information to secure your spot in the college.
- Fight off "senioritis" as colleges can, and will, rescind admissions decisions based on senior year grades.
- Celebrate your accomplishments, in addition to working on your game, so that you will be successful in your college sport. Ask your college coach for the summer workout packet and continue playing for your club team to prepare.
- Send thank yous to your club coach, high school coach, college counselor, and thank your parents/guardians for supporting you in this process.

\*Specific timelines will vary depending on sport, gender, division, conference, college and coach. The top athletes in most sports tend to verbally commit early to the top conferences and teams (Power 4 Conferences). Women's sports tend to have earlier verbal commitments than the mens. Many athletes don't commit until their senior year but have started the process much earlier.

# QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AND/OR COACHES

## Athletics

- 1. How many recruits are you looking for in my class? Transfers? Internationals? Positions?** Research this on the roster before asking as it's constantly changing. Most coaches want to be flexible, so you might not receive a definite answer.
- 2. What is the general timeline for offers and commits for my class/year?** This is valuable information so you have a better idea of when/how you can get exposure.
- 3. How would you best describe your coaching style?** Every coach has a particular style. You need to know if a coach's teaching style matches your learning style.
- 4. When does the head coach's contract end? How long does the coach intend to stay?** The answer could be helpful. Do not make any assumptions about how long a coach will be at a school. If the coach leaves, does this change your mind about the school/program?
- 5. What is your redshirting policy?** The school's policy on redshirting may impact you both athletically, academically and in terms of graduation.
- 6. What are preferred, invited and uninvited walk-on situations? How many do you expect to compete? How many earn a scholarship?** Situations vary from school to school.

## Academics

- 1. What academic support programs are available to student athletes?** Look for a college that will help you become a better student.
- 2. How many credit hours should I take in season and out of season if I want to graduate on time?** It is important to determine how many credit hours are required for your degree and what pace you will follow to obtain that degree.
- 3. How do you schedule classes and exams around practice and travel? What happens if there is a conflict?** It's important to know how the college supports its athletes academically.

**4. Is it possible to double major or minor?** If you are interested in more structured majors like nursing, architecture, or engineering, you may want to ask how this works with athletes.

**5. If I have a diagnosed and documented learning disability, what kind of academic services are available?** Special academic services may help you achieve your academic goals.

## College Life

**1. What is a typical day for a student athlete?** The answer will give you a good idea of how much time is spent in class, training, studying, and traveling. It also will give you a good indication of what coaches expect.

**2. Describe the team and athletic department culture. What are the traditions? Do the teams support each other?**

**3. What are the residence halls like? Do athletes room together?** The response should give you a hint of how comfortable you would be in your room, in study areas, and in community bathrooms.

**4. Must student athletes live on campus? All four years? Where do they live off campus?**

**5. Are the players involved in extra and co-curriculars in and outside of the athletic department?**

# SAMPLE RESUME FOR BOBO BLUE

Bobo Blue  
1563 Page  
San Francisco, CA  
94117 415 555 7500  
bblue@urbanschool.org

## **Educational Background:**

GPA of 3.5/4.0 scale  
PSAT of 1200 (610 CR – 590 M)  
SAT score of 1210 (610 CR – 600 M)  
Will pursue degree in Communications

## **Extracurricular:**

Student Government 9-12  
Nature Club 10-12  
Chorus 10-12  
Jazz Band 9-12

## **Athletic Background:**

### *Basketball*

Junior Varsity 9  
Varsity 10-12  
Coaches Award 9  
Voted “Mr. Hustle” by coaches  
11 All Conference First Team  
12  
Most Improved Summer Select Amateur Athletic Union (AAU)

### *Soccer*

Junior Varsity 9-10  
Grade 9: center halfback, 8 goals  
Grade 10: left wing, 14  
goals First Team All-  
Conference

## **References:**

Mr. Barney Browning, Head Soccer Coach  
(bbrowning@urbanschool.org) Mr. Bill Blaster, Head Basketball  
Coach (bblaster@urbanschool.org)  
Mr. Barry Bucket, AAU Head Coach ([bbucket@urbanschool.org](mailto:bbucket@urbanschool.org))

## SAMPLE EMAIL/COVER LETTER TO COACH

*(Send with resume shown above)*

Dear Coaches \_\_\_\_\_ *(list all)*,

I am a 6'4" guard at Urban School in San Francisco, CA. I am interested in attending UC Berkeley after I graduate. As a 10th grader and \_\_\_\_\_ (grad year here), I started for our conference championship basketball team averaging 12 points per game, 8 rebounds, and 4 assists. This year, my junior season, I have been elected team captain and currently average 19 points per game. Please take a look at my highlights here. Our team continues to be successful and will look to repeat as conference champions. **{Paragraph introduces you and provides basic athletic details...in a brief manner.}**

Academically, I have a 3.5 GPA and have earned a 1200 on my PSAT. I plan to take the SAT/ACT this spring. In addition, my course load this year includes many Urban Advanced Studies courses: (list them here) (Urban's most challenging courses). I've attached a copy of my transcript. **{Academic information given in simple, brief form here.}**

I am very interested in attending UC Berkeley because of its academic excellence, social opportunities, and outstanding basketball program. I am particularly impressed with the graduation rate of student athletes at Cal, as well as the national reputation of the Data Science Program, my preferred major. (Mention something here about their program, season, recent win, or recruit signing to show you follow them and are interested). **{This paragraph is critical, as you communicate detailed facts of interest you know and desire from that coach and their program. Separate yourself from the perception of "spam template approach."}**

Please send me information on the Cal program at your convenience, and let me know what information I can provide to be evaluated by the basketball coaching staff. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

*Signature:*

*Name/Grad Year*

*Team/Positions/Stats*

*High School/GPA*

*Cell Phone*

*Video Link*

*Social Media Handles*

## RECRUITING SERVICES

Recruiting services will not help you if you are not good enough to play in college. If you follow the advice of this packet, you may be able to get the attention of a college. However, there are no guarantees! That being said, following the steps in this packet can do for you what many expensive recruiting services offer. But the one thing they do not have is your character or your voice. **Coaches need to hear from YOU!**

**GOOD LUCK AND GO BLUES!**