

From club to College

# COLLEGE PROCESS



DISCOVER YOUR CHOICES, BEST  
FITS, ACADEMIC, AND HOW TO  
SELECT.

20+ COLLEGES TO CHOOSE! HOW

2026  
JANUARY

TIMEFRAMES

WHICH CITY



## SCHOLARSHIPS & FITS

- SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM
- FINANCIAL AID
- GRADUATION RATES
- ENROLLMENT SIZE

HOW TO GET ORGANIZED

## How to Build Your College List

- Don't start with, "Where can I play?"
- Start with, "Where will I be happy and supported for 4 years?"

Use these categories to build and refine a list of schools.

### 1. Academics

- Majors offered

- Do they offer what you think you might want? (e.g., nursing, business, engineering, education, etc.)
  - If you're unsure, look for schools with lots of options and strong advising.
    - Academic level
    - Is this school a reach, match, or safety for your grades/test scores?
  - Do they have academic support for athletes (tutoring, study hall, advisors)?

Player task:

1. Write down 3–5 majors you might be interested in.
2. When you look at a school, check: "Does this school have at least one of these?"

### 2. Coaching Staff & Volleyball Program

- Coaching style

- Watch match videos on YouTube/ESPN+/school site: how do they coach? Energy? Communication?
  - Ask current or former players (if you know any) what the culture is like.
    - Program fit
  - Level of play (D1, D2, D3, NAIA, JUCO) and conference strength.
  - Are you likely to compete for playing time there by year 2–3?
    - Stability
    - How long has the head coach been there?
    - Is the staff turning over constantly?

Player task:

1. When you add a school, write 1–2 notes:
  - "High-energy coach, fast tempo offense"
  - "Defensive-minded, lots of ball control focus"
2. Ask yourself: "Would I want to be coached this way every day?"
  3. Graduation & Outcomes

## Graduation & Outcomes

- Graduation rates
- Look for 4-year and 6-year graduation rates on the school's website.
- Athlete success
- Do student-athletes graduate at similar or higher rates than regular students?
- After college
- Do they have internships, career services, alumni networks?

### Player task:

1. Search: "School Name" graduation rate student athletes."
2. If you can't find numbers, write down:
- "Ask coach about graduation and career support on next call/email."

### 3. Location & Environment

#### - Distance from home

- Be honest: Do you want to be a short drive away or are you okay with a flight?
- Setting
  - Big city, small town, suburban, rural?
  - Weather: snow and cold, hot and humid, mild?
  - Campus feel
- Would you be comfortable living there 9–10 months a year?

### Player task:

1. Circle your preference:
- Distance: In-state only / Driving distance / Anywhere in the country
  - Environment: City / Suburban / College town / Rural
2. Only add schools that match at least one of your top preferences.

### 3. Size of School

- Big universities (15,000+ students)
- More majors, more activities, bigger feel.
- Can feel less personal and more "on your own."
- Medium schools (5,000–15,000 students)
  - Mix of options and community feel.
  - Small colleges (<5,000 students)
- Smaller classes, more personal support.
- May have fewer majors and activities.

### Player task:

1. Decide your comfort zone: Small / Medium / Large.
2. When you add a school, note its approximate size.

## In-State vs. Out-of-State

- In-state
- Usually cheaper tuition.
- Easier for family to come to matches and visit.
  - Out-of-state
  - More options.
- Sometimes still affordable with scholarships or special tuition agreements.

### Player task:

1. Make two columns on your list: In-State and Out-of-State.
2. Try to have a mix unless you're sure you want only one.

## 7. Scholarships & Cost of Attendance

### - Types of aid

- Athletic scholarships (more common in D1/D2/NAIA, limited or none in D3).
  - Academic scholarships (GPA/test-based).
  - Need-based aid (based on family financial info).
    - Talk early about budget
    - Have an honest family conversation:
    - “What can we realistically afford per year?”
    - “Are we okay with loans? How much?”
    - Value over label

- A “smaller” school with good aid may be better than a “name” school you can’t afford.

### Player task:

1. Ask your family: “What’s a realistic yearly cost for us?”
2. When you research a school, write:
  - “Estimated cost after aid: \\_\\_\\_\\_\\_ (look it up on their net price calculator).”

## 8. Putting It All Together – Simple College List Template

Please fill out

School Name:

Division/Level:

Location (city/state):

Distance from home:

Size (small/med/large):

Environment (city/suburban/rural):

Majors I like:

Coaching style/notes:

Graduation rate notes:

In-state or out-of-state:

Estimated cost after aid:

My interest level (1–5):

Encourage them to keep (pertaining to age):

15s–16s:

- 20–30 schools (very loose list, wide range of levels and locations).

16s–17s:

- 15–20 schools (more realistic based on feedback from coaches and their own preferences).

- 17s–18s:

- 8–12 serious options they're actively communicating with.

## How to Build Your College List (Age-Based Timeline)

- > The goal isn't "biggest name possible."
- > The goal is: right fit for you as a student, person, and athlete.

### 8th Grade – Early 9th Grade: Just Getting Curious

Goal: Start noticing what you like in a school, not making a list yet.

Focus on:

- Environment
- Big vs. small school
- City, suburban, or rural
- Close to home or far away
- Basic academics

- Schools that have a lot of different majors (because it's normal not to know yet).
- Notice terms like "liberal arts," "polytechnic," "research university."

Simple player tasks (low pressure):

1. Make a short list:  
"Do I think I'd like:
  - Big campus or small?
  - City, suburbs, or small town?"
2. When you watch a college game on TV, look up the school after and note:
  - Where is it?
  - How big is it?
  - Do I like that vibe?

No "official list" yet—just preferences.

### 9th Grade – Early 10th Grade: Learning What "Fit" Means

Goal: Connect school fit with who you are and who you're becoming.

Focus on:

- Academics

- Start noticing majors that sound interesting: business, nursing, engineering, education, sports management, psychology, etc.
- Understand that your grades now affect your options later.
  - Campus life
  - Do you care about:
    - School spirit and big games?
    - Smaller, tighter-knit community?
    - Religious affiliation or not?
    - Athletics (lightly)
  - Learn the difference between D1, D2, D3, NAIA, and JUCO.
- Understand that all levels have great athletes and real commitments.

Player tasks:

1. Write down 3–5 majors or fields that seem interesting (they can change later).
2. Look up 3 schools (any level) and answer:
  - Where is it?
  - Undergrad size?
  - Does it have any of the majors I listed?

Still no pressure to have a “final list”—this is exploration mode.

Late 10th Grade – 11th Grade: Building a Realistic College List

Goal: Start building an actual list with different types of schools.

Now we use these categories more intentionally:

Now we use these categories more intentionally:

1. Academics
  - Majors offered
    - Does this school offer at least one major you might want?
    - If you're undecided, does it offer lots of options and good advising?
      - Academic level
  - Compare your current GPA/test scores (or projected) with their average admitted student.
    - Think in terms of:
      - Reach: Hard to get into, but possible.
      - Match: You're right in their typical range.
      - Safety: Very likely to be admitted.

Player task (academics):

1. List 3–5 majors/areas of interest.
2. For each school you consider, ask:
  - Does it have at least one of these?
  - Is it probably a reach, match, or safety for me?

## 2. Campus & Social Fit

- Size & setting
  - Do you want:
    - Under 3,000 students (small)
    - 3,000–10,000 (medium)
    - 10,000+ (large)
  - Urban, suburban, or rural.
    - Community
    - Do you want:
      - A big sports culture?
      - Greek life, or not important?
      - Religious affiliation or not?
        - Support
        - First-gen support?
      - Diversity and inclusion efforts?
        - Mental health resources?

Player task (fit):

1. Rank these from most to least important:
  - Class size
  - Location
  - Campus feel (quiet vs. energetic)
  - Diversity/support
2. When you research a school, note:
  - “What about this campus would make it feel like home for me?”

### 3. Athletics

- Level & role

- Where do you realistically project: D1, D2, D3, NAIA, JUCO?

- Do you want to play right away at a smaller program or fight for time at a bigger one?

- Program fit

- Coaching style and culture

- Roster size and competition at your position

- How the team treats freshmen

Player task (athletics):

1. Ask your club/HS coach:

- “What levels do you think fit me if I keep improving?”

2. Watch a game from a level you’re interested in and ask:

- “Can I see myself at this pace/physicality/skill level within 2-3 years?”

### 4. Cost & Scholarship

- Total cost

- Tuition + housing + food + travel.

- Scholarships

- Athletic money is not the only money.

- Academic and need-based aid often matter more.

- Honest family talk

- You and your family should talk about a realistic yearly budget.

Player task (cost):

1. Have a short money talk at home:

- “What cost range per year makes sense for us?”

2. When you list a school, mark it:

- Likely affordable

- Might need scholarships

- Probably too expensive

## 5. Building the Actual List (End of 11th Grade)

Aim for something like:

- 3-5 reach schools
- 5-8 match schools
- 3-5 safety schools

All should be:

- A place you'd be happy as a student even if sports disappeared.
- A place with at least one academic path that interests you.
- A place your family can probably make work financially.

## 12th Grade: Refining, Visiting, and Trusting Your Fit

Goal: Narrow down and commit to a school that fits you, not someone else's dream.

What changes now:

- You're not just building a list; you're prioritizing it.
- Visits (virtual or in-person) matter a lot more.
- Communication with coaches and admissions gets more specific.

Focus on:

- Deep fit check
- Can you picture your day to day life there?
- Do you like how the team interacts and how the coaches talk to players?
  - Backup realities
  - If you get injured, would you still want to be at this school?
  - If the coach leaves, is this still a place you could thrive?

Player tasks:

1. Take your list and highlight:
  - Top 3 "I could commit here and be happy" schools.
2. For each top school, answer honestly:
  - Do I like the school even without sports?
  - Do I feel seen and wanted here as a person, not just an athlete?
  - Is the cost realistic with/without athletic money?

## How to choose which school and deciding major

Let's break it into two parts:

1. Choosing which school to attend
2. Deciding what to major in

### # 1. **Helping Them Decide Which School to Attend**

A. Start with the big picture questions

Ask them things like:

- Do you want to play right away, or are you okay waiting and developing for a year or two?
  - How far from home do you realistically want to be?
  - Do you like big universities, medium, or small schools?
    - Do you want volleyball to be:
    - Your main focus (D1, high-level D2/NAIA)?
  - A big part of your life but more balanced (D2/D3/NAIA/JC)?
    - Just for fun/club/intramural?

Have them write down their answers. It helps them see what actually matters to them.

B. Teach them how to evaluate a volleyball program

Help them look beyond just “they’re good” or “they win a lot.”

Key questions:

- Role & fit
- Where does the coach see you playing?
- Are there many players in your position ahead of you (especially your grad year + 1-2 years above)?
- Do they truly want you, or just “another body” on the roster?

### Coaching style

- Is the coach more intense or more laid-back?
  - How do they handle mistakes?
  - Ask current players:
    - “What’s it really like to play here?”
    - “What’s the hardest part about this program?”
    - “If you had to choose again, would you pick this school?”
- Program culture
- Do the players genuinely like each other?
  - Is there drama or cliques?
- How do they talk about their coaches when coaches aren’t around?
  - How do they support each other after a loss?
- Time commitment
  - How many hours per week in-season and off-season?
- What’s a typical day like during season (classes, lift, practice, travel)?

Encourage them to visit practices if possible, not just games. Practice shows the real environment.

### C. Academics and support (not just volleyball)

Remind them: the ball stops bouncing someday.

Have them check:

- Academic fit
- Do they offer majors they’re interested in (or at least several options they’re curious about)?
  - Class sizes: would they do better in small classes or are they okay in big lectures?
    - Graduation rates for student-athletes.
  - Support systems
    - Is there a student-athlete academic center?
    - Tutoring, study hall, mentoring programs?
  - How does the team handle missed class for travel?
    - Schedule reality
- Can labs, clinics, or certain majors work with their practice/travel schedule?
  - Some programs are flexible; some are not. They should ask directly:
    - “Do athletes in [major] succeed here?”
    - “Do any players here major in [X] now?”

## D. Location & lifestyle

Help them picture their actual daily life there:

- Location
- Big city, small town, rural?
- Weather: can they handle snow, heat, or gloom?
- Travel distance and cost to get home.
  
- Campus vibe
- Do they feel safe there?
- Do they like the dorms, dining hall, and common spaces?
- Could they see themselves there if volleyball disappeared tomorrow?

This question is huge:

“If you had a season ending injury and couldn’t play again, would you still stay at this school?”

If the answer is “no,” that’s a red flag.

## E. Financial reality

Help them understand money clearly:

- Athletic & academic scholarships, need-based aid.
- Hidden costs: travel home, food off-campus, housing after year 1.
  - Length of scholarship:
  - Is it year-to-year or guaranteed for 4 years?
  - What happens if they get injured or their role changes?

Encourage them and their family to actually write out a comparison:

- School A: \$’s per year
- School B: \$’s per year
- Debt after 4 years?
- Is taking on that much debt worth it for what they’re getting?

## F. Decision framework you can walk through with them

You can sit down with them and make a simple table:

Columns:

- Volleyball fit (role, coaching, culture)
- Academics (majors, support, flexibility)
- Cost (scholarships, long-term debt)
- Life fit (distance, campus feel, city)

Rate each school 1–5 in each category and talk about:

- “Where do your eyes light up when we talk about it?”
- “Where do you feel most at peace?”
- “If you had to pick today, what would your gut say?”

Sometimes just talking out loud with a trusted adult clears it up.

## #2. Helping Them Decide What to Major In

They don't need their entire life plan at 17-18. But you can guide them toward a good starting point.

### A. Start with strengths, not just “likes”

Ask them:

- What school subjects feel the most natural? (Not just easiest, but most interesting.)
  - What do coaches/teachers/parents always compliment them on?
    - Leadership?
    - Communication?
    - Problem-solving?
    - Working with kids?
    - Tech skills?
  - What do they enjoy outside of volleyball?
    - Helping younger players?
    - Designing graphics or editing videos?
    - Math, science, writing, debate, art?

Help them see patterns. For example:

- Loves biology + caring for others → look into nursing, PT, OT, pre-med, exercise science.
- Loves math + business side of sports → finance, accounting, sports management, data analytics.
  - Loves working with kids + teaching skills → education, child development, psychology.
- Creative + social media savvy → marketing, communications, graphic design, media production.

### B. Match majors to lifestyle & athlete schedule

Some majors are very time-heavy (labs, clinicals, studio time). That doesn't mean they can't do them, but they need to know reality.

You can help them ask:

- “Do any athletes here major in [X]?”
- “Is [X] compatible with our practice and travel schedule?”
- “How does your staff support athletes in demanding majors?”

Good “exploration” majors if they’re unsure:

- Business or business administration
  - Psychology
  - Communications
- Undeclared/Exploratory Studies (if the school has a structured program for that)
  - Liberal studies/general studies (with a plan, not as a default forever)

C. Remind them: a major ≠ locked-in career

Important points to reassure them:

- Many people don’t work in a field that perfectly matches their major.
- Skills they build as athletes—discipline, time management, teamwork, resilience—matter a ton to employers.
  - They can:
  - Change majors.
  - Add a minor.
  - Pivot in grad school.

So instead of “What do you want to do for the rest of your life?” try:

“What are 2–3 areas you’d be okay learning more about for the next 4 years?”

D. Combining volleyball experience with career ideas

Help them think how volleyball could connect to future paths:

- Coaching, club director, or athletic administration
  - Sports psychology, athletic counseling
- Strength & conditioning, athletic training, PT
- Sports marketing, social media for teams, media production
  - Event management (tournaments, leagues)

Then connect those to majors:

- Coaching/admin → sports management, education, business
  - Sports psych → psychology, kinesiology, then grad school
- AT/PT → exercise science, kinesiology, biology, then certifications/grad school
  - Media/marketing → marketing, communications, digital media

#### E. A simple activity you can do with them

You can guide a short exercise (20–30 minutes):

##### 1. Have them list:

- Top 5 classes they've enjoyed most.
- Top 5 things they like doing outside of class/volleyball.
- 3 things people say they're "really good at."

##### 2. Circle what shows up more than once (patterns).

##### 3. Look up 3–5 majors that connect to those patterns at each school they're considering.

##### 4. For each major, answer:

- "Could I see myself excited to learn this for 4 years?"
- "Could this lead to more than one possible career path?"

This shifts their mindset from panic to curiosity.

#### How You Can Practically Help as a Coach/Parent/Mentor

Here are a few concrete ways you can support them:

- Host a "college talk" night
- Invite former players who are now in college to share honest experiences.
- Include players from D1, D2, D3, NAIA, and JUCO so they see different paths.

- Teach them to ask good questions on visits

Help them prepare a written list for coaches and current players.

- Talk about identity
- Ask: "Who are you besides a volleyball player?"
- Help them see they're more than their sport.

- Normalize all levels

- D1 isn't "better" than D2/D3/NAIA/JC.

- The best choice is where they'll grow, play, be supported, and graduate.