

Introduction

There are various ways to continue your competitive running career in college. It goes without saying that you should be looking at other factors besides the running program when narrowing down your prospective list of colleges. [Here is a list of questions you should be asking yourself](#) about your potential college choices: with these questions answered hopefully you can come up with a list of schools that you'd be comfortable attending. From that list, you can then determine which schools are a realistic option for running based on the descriptions below. Feel free to ask me about whether I think a school you have in mind would be a good fit for you athletically.

A Step Up

Remember that running for a college team is typically a lot more competitive than the no-cut experience you've had in high school. That being said, more and more colleges have running clubs (described below) that retain the inclusive vibe of a high school team if that's more your speed.

Note that in most cases cross country races are longer at the collegiate level. Championship level races for men are either 8 or 10 km in length, while women race 6 km in championship meets. Invitational races tend to be shorter, often 5 km for women and 8 km for men but it depends. For those unfamiliar with the metric conversions, 5 km is 3.1 miles, 6 km is just under 3.75 miles, 8 km is just barely less than 5 miles, and 10 km is 6.2 miles. As you might expect, longer race distances require more training (i.e. higher mileage in workouts).

Frame of Reference

Most of the examples I list in this document are schools located in New England, because that's the area I'm most familiar with when it comes to collegiate cross country and track programs. There are of course schools all over the country. Any school with an athletic program will have an online presence and that's the easiest way to do basic research on what a given school has to offer.

I've also included examples of athletes from Wayland who have gone on to run in college after participating in cross country at WHS. Most of these alumni show up on the performance lists for WHS athletes on the courses at [Wrentham](#) and/or [Franklin Park](#). From their performances on these familiar courses you can get some sense of what level they were at in high school before going on to compete collegiately.

Recruiting: Be Proactive. the worst they can say is "No"

- NCAA coaches have to follow strict rules about recruiting high school athletes, limiting the number of times they can contact a potential recruit. I don't pretend to know all the

specifics but be aware that NCAA coaches are restricted in how often they can initiate contact with you, even in writing. NAIA coaches have no such restrictions on recruiting.

- It's a big (huge) talent pool and most coaches will only notice athletes who have done something noteworthy at a fairly high level. This doesn't mean you should forget about contacting the coach at a school that interests you. It does mean that you have to be proactive and initiate contact with the coach. Be realistic and don't take it personally if you're rebuffed or don't even get a reply.
- When contacting a coach, explain your interest and give as much detail about your athletic background as you can. Include how many years of high school sports you've done for each sport you've been a participant. Most schools have a form on the team website that you can fill out and send to the coach.
- For cross country, know that college coaches don't put much stock in times unless they're run on well-known, established courses. In this area that would be the Wrentham Developmental Center course, perhaps Franklin Park. No college coach is going to care about your time on the Wayland home cross country course because they have no idea what that course is like. Track times are more helpful as a measuring stick because unlike cross country courses which vary widely in footing and terrain, track times are consistent no matter where the performance was done. For cross country results, college coaches would be more interested in how high you've placed in larger invitational or championship meets. In general, provide as much relevant information (including your track times) as possible.

Differentiation Among Levels

There are different levels of competition and it's important to take a clear-eyed look at what the requirements and expectations are for these levels. In broad terms the categories are as follows:

- NCAA schools (which compete at three different levels outlined below)
- NAIA schools
- collegiate running clubs

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1

- These are schools that offer scholarships (and the Ivy League, which doesn't offer scholarships but still recruits accomplished athletes with generous financial aid and/or grants). D1 is the highest level of intercollegiate sports. Scholarships can be given out in full or partial grants (half, quarter, etc.) The level of competition is quite high and facilities are typically top notch. If you follow college basketball or football, you're familiar with some of the high profile D1 schools in those sports.
- NCAA Division 1 athletes must meet academic eligibility standards in order to participate in college sports. While these requirements shouldn't be a problem for a WHS graduate, the proper paperwork must be filled out. Check with your guidance counselor regarding how to go about setting up an [NCAA student account](#).

- Teams at D1 schools are by their very nature exclusionary, not inclusionary as you've experienced in high school with the no-cut environment at WHS. D1 programs typically don't bother to have cuts per se; they simply don't allow people on the team who don't meet a rigorous entry standard. In fact, most D1 athletes are recruited, and only a small number typically make the team as non-recruited athletes, known as "walk-ons." Usually, making the team as a walk-on involves a tryout or time trial--if you can run a certain time for 2 or 3 miles, you can be on the team. The cutoff for walk-ons is typically quite demanding, like a 9:30 2 mile for men or 11:00 2 mile for women. Standards vary by school but you get the idea. It's no joke.
- Some D1 cross country and track programs are in D1 because of the school's participation in another sport, usually football or basketball. The other sports (not football or basketball) at these schools, while nominally D1, aren't funded at the same level. In other words, all the scholarships and most of the resources at such a school go to football and/or basketball and the other sports aren't as competitive as a D1 program would normally be. It takes some research to figure this out. Also, ask yourself if you'd want to compete at a school where the sport you do receives less attention (and funding).
- Examples of Division 1 schools in the New England area with established running programs include Boston College, Boston University, Dartmouth, Harvard, Providence College, UMass Lowell and Yale. Flagship state schools like UMass Amherst, UNH, UConn, URI, UVM, and UMaine Orono are also Division 1. Private schools like Bryant, Holy Cross, Merrimack, Quinnipiac, and Sacred Heart are also examples of New England D1 colleges with running programs. This is just New England of course, there are many other D1 schools in other parts of the country.
- WHS athletes who have competed at the Division 1 Level: None in the last 10 years. [Mike Stein '04](#) who was Wayland's top male finisher at the DCL and EMass meets in '02 and '03 ran track at UPenn (Ivy League), where he was most likely a walk-on. Going way back in the past, [Alberto Salazar '76](#) earned a full scholarship to the University of Oregon which had one of the top NCAA cross country and track programs in the country at the time. While at Wayland he was the state champion in cross country and ran two miles on the track in 9 minutes. Salazar has been in the news recently, and not for good reasons; I bring him up here just to give a sense of what kind of athlete gets a full scholarship in cross country/track. [Jon Mann '83](#) went to Stanford which is another high powered D1 program on the West Coast. He set the record for the Wayland home course at the time (which was a different course than today's), and was even better at track where he ran under 1:50 for 800 meters as a high school athlete.

NCAA Division 2

- These are schools that also offer scholarships but not to the degree that Division 1 schools do. The quality of D2 schools varies somewhat more widely than D1. D2 schools typically don't have quite the same caliber facilities as D1 schools, but it depends and schools with well-funded athletic departments have very good facilities.

- Similar to Division 1, athletes at the Division 2 level must meet course and grade requirements while in high school to play college sports. Check with your guidance counselor regarding how to go about setting up an [NCAA student account](#).
- Two Division 2 schools in New England that immediately come to mind for cross country and track are Bentley and Stonehill. In addition, schools like SNHU, Southern Connecticut, Assumption, and Franklin Pierce are D2 schools. There are many D2 schools in the Mid-Atlantic and the South.
- WHS Athletes who have competed at the Division 2 Level: [Kiersten Lippmann '98](#) ran cross country at University of Alaska Anchorage, and also competed in nordic skiing which is a Division 1 sport at UAA. [Greg Karpacz '12](#) ran for the team at Bentley. As a side note, I know the Bentley coach well as he also coaches the running club of which I'm a member. If you're interested in Bentley I'm happy to put you in touch with him.

NCAA Division 3

- Division 3 schools do not offer scholarships for athletics. This is not to say one can't get aid to attend a Division 3 school; such aid would come in the form of grants and/or academic scholarships. D3 is a mix of public and private institutions, including smaller state schools. As you might expect, of the three NCAA levels D3 comes closest to the high school "no cut" experience when it comes to roster composition. That isn't to say that no D3 programs have entry standards, some do. Such standards if they exist are usually more relaxed than D1 or D2. As there are no scholarships, there's typically an allowance for athletes who don't want to devote their entire college experience to either academics or running. In other words some take it more seriously than others.
- The quality of facilities at D3 schools varies somewhat, in general schools with a larger endowment or better funding have better facilities.
- Examples of D3 institutions in New England include Amherst, Bowdoin, Brandeis, Bridgewater State, Coast Guard Academy, Colby, Connecticut College (not UConn), Fitchburg State, Framingham State, Keene State, Regis, Roger Williams, Smith, Springfield, Tufts, UMass Dartmouth (not Dartmouth College), Wellesley, Wesleyan, Westfield State, Worcester State, and WPI. There are others, in fact there are many D3 schools in New England. A fair number of state schools in New York and Wisconsin are D3 as well.
- WHS Athletes who have competed at the Division 3 level: Vicky Shen '96 ran for Bowdoin in Maine. [Larry Athan '02](#) ran for Hamilton College in upstate New York. [Evelyn Dong '03](#) ran cross country for Middlebury in Vermont although her true athletic focus there was nordic skiing. [Joanna Lippmann '03](#) ran for Gordon College. [Brett Baker '11](#), who has run the fastest time of any WHS male athlete on the Wrentham 5k course, ran for [Washington University in St. Louis](#). [Phoebe Morss](#), who ran cross country at WHS in 2010 and 2011 before transferring to a prep school, ran for Bowdoin. [Sarah Tully '17](#) who has run the fastest time of any WHS female athlete on the Wrentham 5k course [ran for Williams College](#). [Matt Clayton '18](#) ran for Bates in Maine. [Billy Caddoo '21](#) runs for Springfield College. [Bella Thoen '23](#) runs at Swarthmore.

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)

- NAIA is a governing body for intercollegiate sports that includes schools which aren't part of the NCAA system. The NAIA is composed mostly of smaller private schools. NAIA schools can offer a limited number of cross country and track scholarships but not all do. Scholarships are usually divided up among team members with athletes receiving a partial scholarship if any. The level of competition at NAIA schools is most comparable to NCAA Division 2 or 3.
- Because most small private colleges in the New England area are NCAA Division 2 or 3, NAIA schools are almost nonexistent in this region. In fact there are only two NAIA colleges in New England, one in Massachusetts (Fisher) and the other in Maine (UMaine Fort Kent). There are a lot of NAIA schools in the Midwest and on the West Coast.
- As far as I know, there are no academic entry standards for competing in athletics at NAIA schools like there are for NCAA D1 and D2.
- There are no Wayland athletes that I'm aware of in the recent past who have gone on to run at a NAIA school.

College Running Clubs

- Running clubs are like other affinity clubs at colleges and universities. These clubs bring together students who share a common interest, which in this case is running. There are typically no other entry standards to speak of, making these clubs an inclusive experience. The coach might be a faculty member or another student. There are no scholarships just like there are no scholarships for the school newspaper, the outing club or the anime club.
- With very few exceptions, the members of a running club wouldn't make the varsity team at their school. The rare athlete who could be on their school's varsity team but runs for the club instead likely does so for the flexibility and ability to determine their own schedule or pursue other interests.
- Like most college clubs, running clubs typically have dues that members pay each year. Sometimes members also have to pay their entry fees into races as well.
- Running clubs participate in a variety of events including cross country meets, track meets, and road races. In the past members of running clubs from Northeastern and Merrimack have raced at the Wayland XC Festival.
- Some running club members focus on longer road races like half marathons or marathons, distances that aren't contested by NCAA schools.
- Local examples of collegiate running clubs include those at [Boston College](#), [Boston University](#), [Brown University](#), [Harvard](#), [Northeastern](#), and [UMass Amherst](#).