Every year, about a dozen Hackley students are recruited by college coaches as prospective college athletes. These student-athletes look to find colleges that are good fits for them, athletically, academically, and socially. Sometimes the coaches’ interest in these students gives them an advantage in the admissions process as well. For prospective college athletes the college search is often a little bit different – and a little more complicated – than for the rest of their peers; it requires more effort, communication and organization, and sometimes at an earlier point in their high school careers.

**Self-Assessment**

The first step in considering your future as an athletic recruit is assessing your interest. Are you sure that you want to play the sport in college? Could you make a commitment to a coach that you would play all four years in college? Would you be willing to make a year-round commitment to training (often required by college teams), or would you prefer to take some time off? Coaches are not interested in prospective athletes who aren’t firmly committed to pursuing the sport in college. The level of commitment you are willing to make should also inform your choice of NCAA Division (more on NCAA Divisions later).

**Talent Assessment**

If you are committed to playing a sport in college, the second step is to consider your athletic ability. There are three general levels of prospective athletes for a particular college athletic program. Keep in mind that you might be a highly recruited athlete for one particular college but not for another college, depending on the team’s strength and needs.

- **Highly recruited athletes.** These students are “star” athletes – athletes whom the college coach sees as among his or her strongest recruits. Coaches will often lobby admissions offices for applicants of this caliber.
- **Recruited athletes.** These students are of interest to the college coach but are not among the coach’s strongest recruits, even if they are among the best athletes at Hackley. A coach may encourage these students to apply and may expect these students to make the college squad, but generally these students are admitted based on their academic records and other personal qualities, without special help from the athletic office.
“Walk-on” athletes. These students are not strong enough to receive much attention from college coaches during the college search process, but they go to open tryouts for the teams, once they are attending college. Division III teams are more likely to take walk-ons in tryouts than Division I or II teams, since there is often less competition for spots on the Division III team rosters. Given that the competition is significant at almost all levels of college athletics, the average Hackley athlete is not likely to be recruited by college coaches; college coaches recruit only the very best high school players. The “walk-on” athlete applies to colleges with no assurance as to his or her chances of playing at the varsity level.

NCAA Divisions
The NCAA has three main Divisions, designated by Roman numerals, commonly referred to as D-I, D-II, and D-III. (Division I also has subdivisions for some sports.) Generally speaking, D-I teams are the most competitive and D-III teams are the least competitive. D-I and D-II colleges are allowed to offer athletic scholarships (though not all D-I colleges or teams do), while D-III teams cannot offer athletic scholarships at all (though D-III colleges may offer strong financial aid and/or academic scholarship programs). The different Divisions also have different rules and limitations regarding the recruitment of prospective athletes.

Most of the colleges Hackley students attend are either D-I or D-III colleges (some are D-II or hybrid colleges, but these are not very common). A common mistake for strong prospective athletes is to assume that they should aspire to D-I athletic programs, since those programs are “better.” In fact, since college athletics are so much more competitive than high school athletics, most of Hackley’s top athletes go on to compete at the D-III level. Whether a college team is D-I or D-III is usually not the most important criterion, since only the rare Hackley athlete is likely to have the talent for or interest in an athletic scholarship. Instead, students should choose athletic programs based on where they think their talent might allow them to have a good athletic experience, whether it’s D-I, D-II or D-III. Since few serious athletes want to attend a college where they sit on the bench for four years, they are more apt to pick a school where they are likely to make a significant contribution to the team and see a good deal of playing time.

So how does the prospective athlete assess his or her talent? We recommend that you start with your own coaches. Let your coaches know that you’re curious about playing in college and ask for their feedback. “Do you think I might play in college?” “Do you think I’m good enough to play D-I, or should I think more about D-III?” Remember that there may be little difference in competition between some strong D-III teams and weaker D-I teams. If you’re a runner or a swimmer, go on-line and see what times various college swimmers or runners are posting. In the long-run, only the college coaches themselves will be able to tell you whether or not you’re a strong recruit for their program. In the meantime, however, you can learn a lot from talking to your own coaches and doing a little investigation.
Showcase Teams, Tournaments, Competitions and Summer Camps
As most strong athletes already know, your athletic career doesn’t stop at the end of the high school season. Off-season training is important and outside or “travel” teams are common in many sports. Some sports hold tournaments throughout the year and have ranking systems based on age and performance. Other sports have competitions that give you an opportunity to post strong times and records among the best athletes of your age group. “Showcase” teams earn their names because they allow coaches to assess an individual’s talent when playing a team sport against strong competition. Summer camps help athletes work on their skills while also providing a showcase for their talents.

Camps, tournaments and the like serve three purposes. They help you improve as an athlete. They help you to continue to assess your own ability to play in college. And they allow college coaches to assess your ability. Some athletes have participated in outside athletic programs from an early age. Others start in high school. *In any case, if you’re serious about competitive college athletics, you should speak to your own coach about these opportunities by the winter of your freshman year.*

Communication with College Coaches
Once you have a rough idea about your talent level and potential to compete in college athletics, it is important to start a process of communication with college coaches. For the majority of Hackley’s prospective athletes, this process doesn’t need to start until the college counseling process begins during the winter of junior year. Once in a while, however, for D-I prospects and lacrosse players in particular, it may be wise to start a bit earlier. If your coaches think you have the ability and commitment to contribute to a D-I team, we recommend that you talk to your coaches during the fall of sophomore year, to consider showcases of various kinds and to ask them for suggestions of appropriate college athletic programs, so that you can start to let colleges know of your athletic ability and your interest in attending their universities.

The purpose of communication with coaches is to let them know of your interest and talent, your “recruitability” (i.e. your academic record), and to learn about the coach, the team, and your prospects for competing on the team. A good way to start communication with college coaches is to send them a cover letter or e-mail, expressing your interest in the college and desire to play your sport, along with an athletic resume. (See samples in this pamphlet.) This will let the coach know you’re interested and put you on his or her “radar.”

Giving coaches the ability to assess your talent may be easy or tricky, depending on your particular sport. The athletic resume is a good place to start. For athletes in “record” sports, such as swimming, track, or field events, it is relatively easy to provide college coaches with an assessment of your talent. Just provide them with your “numbers” (along with your age and grade level, of course), and they will be able to figure out your strength as an athlete. For athletes who play tournament sports, such as squash or tennis, your ranking will serve the same purpose.
For athletes who play team sports, it is a bit more complicated. Some coaches encourage you to send videos or DVDs, while other coaches don’t use them. In either case, it is always best to be seen playing live, by the college coach, one of his assistants, or another coach he or she trusts. For this reason, the showcases, tournaments or camps a prospective athlete attends are particularly important. Choosing a mostly-D-I camp, for instance, may not be very helpful to a prospective D-III athlete, while the opposite may also be true.

The NCAA Eligibility Center
For athletes who want to play at the D-I or D-II level, the NCAA requires that your academic record be approved in order for you to participate. Anytime during your sophomore or junior year, go online to www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org to begin the process. You will need to submit some information and pay a fee, then send an e-mail to Ms. Nadell in our College Counseling Office providing her with your name, grade level, and NCAA ID number. We will then send your transcript to the Eligibility Center once you’ve completed junior year. D-I and D-II coaches will be anxious for you to complete this process, as they don’t want to spend time recruiting students who may not be eligible to play. Don’t worry: for the vast majority of Hackley athletes, this is a mere formality. D-III athletes need not worry about the Eligibility Center. For more information regarding NCAA rules and regulations, go to the website listed above.

Unofficial Transcripts
Starting in your sophomore year, Hackley can provide you with an unofficial transcript. Coaches often ask prospective athletes for transcripts, and you can copy and send this unofficial transcript to college coaches. (Official transcripts are sent only directly to admissions offices, when you apply to colleges.) College coaches may also ask for a copy of your SAT or ACT scores; since you receive these scores at home, you can make copies at will. We will also provide you with Hackley’s school profile, which you can send with your unofficial transcript. Our profile provides information about Hackley that coaches and admissions officers use in conjunction with our transcript to understand your academic record.

Your Academic Record
It is widely assumed that the strongest athletes don’t need to be strong students – that their athletic skills will be enough to gain them admission. Although highly recruited athletes indeed often get a “bump” in the college admissions process, it is crucial that prospective college athletes understand the importance of their grades and coursework. Often, the biggest challenge facing coaches at highly selective colleges is not finding strong athletes, but finding strong athletes who are also strong students. Hackley students, including student-athletes, are interested in attending colleges which will provide an excellent education, and these colleges are, in turn, looking for excellent students. While college admission offices have some flexibility in accommodating certain coaches’ top recruits, that flexibility is limited, and it varies greatly by sport. Some college leagues also have strict academic standards that teams must adhere to, including test score and GPA requirements.
Consider, for example, a team that has a limited number of recruitment “slots” and must meet a team-average GPA and SAT threshold. A strong athlete who is *also a strong student* may have a greater chance of being a recruited athlete because she helps the team in two ways: athletically *and* academically. Even the very top athletic recruits, at the most selective colleges, have to meet relatively high academic standards. In short, the stronger the *student* is, the more *athletic* opportunities he is likely to find at selective colleges.

**The “Recruitment Dance”**

Once you’ve found some colleges where you may be a good athletic “fit,” and once those coaches have a sense of your athletic ability, academic viability, and interest in the colleges, an odd sort of “dance” begins – usually during the late summer before senior year. At this point, coaches try to decide whom to recruit most heavily, whom to “push” for in the admissions process, and whom to invite to campus. Obviously, coaches don’t want to waste their time recruiting even the most talented player if the player is not *interested* in attending the college. On the other hand, the coach needs to focus on the *most talented players in the positions/events they need* from among those who do profess interest in the college. At this time prospective athletes need to reconcile their *interest* in attending various colleges with the interest the college coaches are showing in *them*.

The early fall may be both an exciting and confusing period for prospective athletes. Planning a strategy for this jockeying is very difficult; you have to “take it as it comes.” The two rules of thumb are 1) be sure you’ve already visited the colleges by this time and have assessed *your* interest in attending the college, and 2) keep in close communication with your college counselor. Also, be sure you understand the NCAA regulations: [www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org](http://www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org).

**Early Decision**

If and when a coach has established a strong interest in a prospective athlete and the athlete has expressed a strong interest in the college, the coach will often bring up the issue of an early application. Most colleges have an Early Decision (“ED”) application process, for students who are willing to make a *binding* commitment to attend the college. It is in the coach’s interest to have his top recruits apply ED, since the coach is then assured that these students will accept an offer of admission. In point of fact, the vast majority of athletic admits are made in Early Decision, and most coaches won’t go to bat for many athletes – or don’t have much influence – in the regular admission round. While not all colleges have Early Decision, some have Early Action or other special application processes that serve essentially the same purpose. Since an Early Decision commitment is *binding*, and since coaches and colleges vary in the sort of assurances they can give recruits regarding admissions, it is *very* important to keep in touch with your high school counselor.
A Word of Caution
Students who think they may be recruited by college coaches often end up with a few more academic “reaches” on their lists. Usually that’s okay, as these students often end up getting significant support from a college coach to help their chances of admission. But, at the same time, it is very important not to ignore the safer bets for admission. Sometimes, for a whole variety of reasons, students end up not becoming top recruits at particular colleges. Perhaps they’re just not strong enough or don’t “show well” in camps and showcases. Maybe they’re not interested in the colleges whose coaches are interested in them, and the colleges they’re interested in are not so interested in them. It could be that they play a position their favorite college doesn’t need. In any case, it is crucial to consider a number of colleges where the student would be admitted based on non-athletic factors alone. Perhaps the student might be able to play as a “walk on” at some of these colleges, or the student may not necessarily feel the need to play in college. Whatever the case, the most important goal of the college process is to be accepted to a college that the student will thrive in. And this is too important to leave to chance, or to the whims of college coaches. After the athletic recruiting season is over, it is too late to do a good job of finding appropriate colleges if the music has stopped and you don’t have a seat.

Outside Experts
Since many prospective athletes feel a little confused by the recruitment process, a small industry of “experts” has sprung up to offer their services to families. The watch phrase, as always, is caveat emptor – buyer beware. While some advisors may have helpful experience and advice, services that promise to market prospective athletes to college coaches may actually have an adverse effect on the process. College coaches often say that they want to hear directly from interested student-athletes, and that they discard materials received from professional “promoters.” Often, these promoters will tout their “connections” to various coaches and universities. What the coach really cares about is your interest in the school and your talent, and they can be skeptical of prospective athletes who use promoters. On the other hand, your Hackley coach and club sport coaches know you well and may indeed have good advice and recommendations about appropriate college athletic matches for you. Seek them out freely.

The Bottom Line
Like most things in life, there are up-sides and down-sides to being an athletic recruit. If you’re a strong athlete, you know about the pleasures of competing, and of contributing to a team. There is also an advantage, in admissions terms, if you’re one of a coach’s top recruits. On the down-side, the process can be a little more time-consuming and confusing. Sometimes athletic recruits can lose sight of their own educational and personal goals when they are in the midst of the “recruitment dance” with coaches. Fortunately, you have lots of help to navigate the process: your coaches, your parents, the college counselors. Please get in touch with us if we can be of any help.
Prospective College Athlete Timeline

**Freshman Year**

- Work on your skills and your physical training. Ask your coach(es) for help.
- Ask your coach(es) for advice about the possibility of joining club teams outside of Hackley.
- Start collecting performance data (goals, assists, times, RBIs…) for use in an athletic resume in future years.
- During January and February, think about summer programs, summer camps, tournaments or training to help you in your best sport(s). At this stage, these camps are not likely to be an important part of the athletic recruitment process, but they may help you become a better athlete and understand your abilities compared to other young athletes.
- Get the best grades you can! College coaches may not be interested in recruiting you if your grades are not strong enough for their particular colleges, and you may be interested in colleges where you can play, but where you’re not a top recruit.

**Sophomore Year**

- As you continue working on your skills, teamwork, and physical training, start thinking about your role on the team. If you were a coach, what qualities would you like to see in a player’s participation and attitude? What makes for a good team leader or captain? College coaches prize attitude and leadership, in addition to talent.
- If you think you may be able to play at the D-I level, make an appointment to have a chat with one of Hackley’s college counselors in the fall. Also make an appointment to talk to your coaches, to consider showcases of various kinds and to ask them for suggestions of appropriate college athletic programs, so that you can start to let colleges know of your interest in attending the university and your athletic ability.
- If you think you might be more of a D-III athlete, ask your coach(es) if they think you might play in college. If you play more than one sport, which one or two are most important to you?
- If your coaches think you might play a “team sport” in college, which camps, showcases, travel teams, showcase teams, leagues or tournaments would give you the best exposure to college coaches over the next year?
- If you play an individual sport, what competitions, ranking, or records should you aim for over the summer?
- What physical goals do you have: speed, strength, size, cardiovascular fitness, agility? Ask your coaches to help you establish goals and to suggest work-out and nutrition regimens to attain your goals.
Keep your grades up! Being a top athletic recruit could increase your college options to a degree, but not without strong grades.

If you think you might play at the D-I level, consider preparing for the SAT or ACT during the summer after sophomore year, so you can take the SAT or ACT in the fall. (Some D-I schools that recruit early may want early SAT or ACT results to consider.)

Visit one D-I college and one D-III college during the summer, just to see what they’re like. (You can ask a college counselor for suggestions.) Make sure to take the admissions tour and attend the information session.

Junior Year

If you’re thinking D-I athletics, consider taking the SAT or ACT in early fall, as some D-I coaches may want early results to consider.

Consider doing a small amount of preparation for the PSAT test – just to become comfortable with the exam and practice a little. That way, the PSAT will be a more accurate predictor of your potential on the SAT test.

If you play a team sport, consider making a video of your play that you can send to coaches who cannot see you play in person. Since coaches vary in their preferences, we suggest you include a highlights section and a whole or half game. Some of our coaches routinely videotape games and can often make these available to you.

Consider playing in showcases, tournaments and camps during the school year and/or during the following summer. Research camps and showcases early, so you have time to plan. See your coaches for suggestions.

Start compiling an athletic resume. (See samples in this pamphlet.)

Start the college counseling process in January. Meet with your counselor to talk about your academic, athletic and personal goals. Create a list of colleges, with the help of your counselor and your parents. Make sure the list includes some colleges where your admission would be very likely based on your academic record alone – whether you become a top athletic recruit or not. Contact the admissions offices on-line and ask them for information about the programs that interest you. Send your cover letter and resume to the coaches at all of the colleges on your initial list. (See samples in this pamphlet.)

Take the SAT in January or March.

Visit colleges over spring break of junior year. These visits are crucial, to discover your preferences early on in the process. (Coaches will start to ask about your college preferences by mid-late summer.) Be sure to make an appointment for a tour and information session in the admissions office. Call or e-mail coaches to make appointments to meet them before or after your admissions office appointments. Bring an unofficial transcript.

Meet with your counselor after spring break to discuss what you saw and learned and how you felt about your visits.
Plan more college visits for June. It is important to front-load your summer visits so that you know your preferences before the late-summer “recruitment dance” begins.

Before summer break, start the NCAA Eligibility Center process at [www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org](http://www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org). You will need to submit some information and pay a fee, then send an e-mail to Ms. Nadell in our College Counseling Office providing her with your name, grade level, and NCAA ID number. We will then send your transcript to the Eligibility Center once you’ve completed junior year.

Summer is very busy, with further college visits and athletic activities. Stay in contact with college coaches at your favorite colleges throughout the summer. Coaches may ask you to come on “official visits” in the fall of senior year (refer to the NCAA rules: [www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org](http://www.ncaaeligibilitycenter.org)). Coaches may ask you specific questions about your level of interest in their colleges. This is when the “recruitment dance” often begins.

**Senior Year**

- By now, you should have a short list of colleges and know which are your favorites. You should also have an idea of which of these colleges are very interested in you as an athlete. During September and October, you are likely to make a few more college visits, to meet team members and get to know the college and athletic program better. (These may be “official” visits for Division I colleges. Again, check the rules for campus visits at [ncaaeligibilitycenter.org](http://ncaaeligibilitycenter.org).) These visits are often the last chance for you and the coach to assess your interest in one another.

- Work hard on your college applications. Remember, it is always the admissions office that admits prospective athletes, not the coach. A coach may strongly support an applicant, but the admissions office may balk at an application form done without great care or an applicant who doesn’t communicate his “fit” for the academic institution through his application form, campus visits and/or interviews.

- College coaches may start making unofficial assurances … “if you apply Early Decision.” If your first-choice college starts making such overtures, you’re in luck! Remember, however, that some coaches are more reliable than others; be careful about promises and predictions and see your college counselor.

- By mid-December, Early Decision (“ED”) applicants hear back from admission offices and most of the college athletic recruitment is over. Athletic recruits denied admission in the ED round may apply to another college in a later, Early Decision II round. See your counselor if you were denied or deferred in ED and have a definite second-choice college.

- While coaches have less influence on admissions decisions in the “regular” admissions round, it’s not too late to consider how you communicate with coaches about your commitment to a particular school. Again, see your college counselor.
March 1, 2013

Joe Shmoe
Head Men’s Lacrosse Coach
Fred’s University
Fredville, OH 11234

Dear Coach Shmoe,

I am a junior (class of 2014) at Hackley School, in Tarrytown, NY, and I am very interested in attending _________________ and playing on your lacrosse team. I am a “B+” student in this very competitive prep school. My SAT’s are 1970 combined, but I expect to improve upon those scores later this spring.

I have started on Hackley’s independent school state-champion (NYSAIS) varsity lacrosse team since my freshman year, playing both offensive and defensive middie. Last year (my sophomore year) I scored 23 goals and had 12 assists as an offensive middie, averaging about two points per game. I have also gained some valuable experience outside of school, in a variety of summer lacrosse camps, including the No Limit Lacrosse Camp, Brown University’s camp and Powell Brothers’ camp. This summer, I will attend the Brown camp again, 205 Lacrosse Camp and the New England Top 150, among others. I have played lacrosse year-round since my sophomore year, in the Turf City Indoor Lacrosse League during the fall and winter seasons.

I would be very interested to learn more about your lacrosse program and what contribution you think I might make to your team in the future. Of course, I will contact your admissions office as well, to learn more about your school’s educational opportunities.

I look forward to hearing from you soon (or whenever NCAA rules will allow). In the meantime, I am enclosing my athletic resume to date (before this spring’s lacrosse season). Later, I will send an edited DVD of some highlights and a full game from this lacrosse season.

Best of luck with your own season as it gets under way.

Sincerely,

Robert “Bobby” Smith

Attachment: athletic resume
Jack Frost  
666 Icicle Dr., Snowflake, NY 10556  
213-600-5555  righty@aol.com

Personal Information
DOB: 7/4/1996  
Height: 6’3”  Weight: 180 lbs.  
Throw right; bat right

Education
Hackley School, Tarrytown, NY  (CEEB Code: 335540)  
Graduation: June, 2014  Grade average: B+ in college prep and AP courses  
Unofficial transcript and Hackley School profile available upon request  
January 2013 SAT: CR630, M670, W670  
Academic Interests: English, business/economics

Baseball Teams
Hackley Varsity Baseball, Grades 10-12  
Coach Steve Frolo  sfrolo@hackleyschool.org (914-366-5555)  
Starting Pitcher, 1B, OF  
2012 (Sophomore) Statistics:  
Games/Innings pitched: 4/20  
ERA: 3.42; 21 SO; 15 BB  
Games/Innings played: 17/110  
Batting avg.: .423; 50 AB; 2 HR; 18 RBI; 12 BB; 9 stolen bases

Police Athletic League Baseball (Westchester Suburbanites), 2011-2014
Coach Robert O’Mally  romally@aim.com (914-222-5555)  
Relief pitcher, 1B  
2012 Statistics:  
Games/Innings pitched: 20/32  
ERA: 2.11; 22 SO; 11BB  
Games/Innings played: 40/221  
Batting avg.: .317; 87 AB; 1HR; 17 BB; 12 stolen bases

Baseball Camps
Summer, 2012:  Mickey Mantle’s Baseball Hell (Senior Division) (2 weeks)  
Joe Pepitone’s Remember Me? Camp (1 week)  
Summer, 2011:  Mickey Mantle’s Baseball Hell (Pee wee Division) (2 weeks)  
Joe Pepitone’s Remember Me? Camp (1 week)  
Year-round training, 2008-current:  Frozen Ropes, Coach Lou Gehrig (914-333-5555)

Other Sports, Activities
Hackley Varsity Basketball, Grades 11,12; guard; 12 PPG, 2013; Coaches’ Award 2013  
Co-President, Hackley Ambassadors (tour guides)  
Production Manager, school newspaper (The Dial)  
Co-President, Hackley’s Blythedale Children’s Hospital volunteers