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Paying for College

Obtaining Athletic Scholarships at NCAA Division I Universities

Colleges and universities in Divisions I and II provide \$2.7 billion in scholarships a year to athletes, the NCAA says.



Tierra Jones, 22, received a full athletic scholarship at Tulane University to play NCAA Division I basketball.

By [Farran Powell](#) | April 28, 2016, at 9:30 a.m. [+ More](#)

Tulane power forward Tierra Jones, 22, had her sights on playing NCAA Division I basketball and an [athletic scholarship](#) when she was in the seventh grade.

"By the time I got to ninth grade, I had my first full scholarship offer to a college and knew I was going to play Division I sports – it was just a matter of where," says Jones. The Alabama native says she received

athletic scholarship offers from [University of Mississippi](#), [University of Alabama—Tuscaloosa](#), [Auburn University](#) and [Tulane University](#).

Jones participated in the Amateur Athletic Union for basketball starting in middle school and for high school, playing in tournaments where college coaches watch young talent.

On the court, Jones dominated, setting herself apart from the other players her age, the Tulane senior says.

"I was invited to a couple college camps and that's when I knew if I worked hard I could get a partial or full scholarship somewhere," says Jones, who made her selection based on location, athletics and academics.

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The forward received a full athletic scholarship at Tulane – an award amount of \$68,714 for the 2015-2016 academic year, the school says – for all four years of college.

High school athletes should consider the different NCAA rules for each sport when strategizing for a scholarships from a Division I school.

Each sport is governed by different bylaws for [financial aid](#) under the NCAA Divisions I and II. Basketball and football are considered head count sports, meaning a scholarship can't be divided among students. In Division I basketball, the head count is limited to 15 for women and 13 for men on a team at one time.

"You have limitations on how many scholarships you can hand out and it depends on how many have already been handed out on the roster," says A.J. Hodel, founder and CEO of Athletic Scholarship Corp., which works with high school athletes.

Football hands out more scholarships than any other head count sport, maxed at 85 awards annually at NCAA schools that compete in the Football Bowl Subdivision. FBS schools include well-known football powerhouses like Alabama's Crimson Tide and the [University of Texas—Austin](#) Longhorns, to name a few.

Winning teams at big bowl schools have the largest endowment to fund scholarships, Hodel says.

The [University of Michigan—Ann Arbor](#), known for its football coach Jim Harbaugh, hands out the most dollars in athletic-related student assistance after [Stanford University](#), according to ScholarshipStats, a

website that tracks athletic scholarships at NCAA, NAIA and NJCAA colleges.

"The typical scholarship will be above tuition and include room and board, travel and unlimited meals and snacks above your meal plan at school," says Kurt Svoboda, a spokesman for the University of Michigan athletic department.

UM—Ann Arbor provides the maximum number of head count and equivalency scholarships allowed by the NCAA and Big Ten, Svoboda says. A school may split a scholarship for an equivalency sport, such as baseball or water polo, among several players.

College football players in the Football Bowl Division – the higher level of NCAA Division I football – are either on a full scholarship or none at all, says Ross Tucker, co-founder and CEO of Go Big Recruiting, a recruiting firm that connects high school students with college coaching staff.

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The NCAA Division I conferences for the "Power Five," which includes the Atlantic Coast, Big 12, Big Ten, Pacific-12 and Southeastern, adopted a rule in 2015 that prevents schools in those conferences from reducing or revoking scholarships for athletic reasons.

But Tucker recommends student athletes to not pin all their hopes on the Division I dream and look at NCAA II Division schools. The former NFL pro, who played at [Princeton University](#), suggests football players to consider schools in the Football Championship Subdivision, the lower level of NCAA Division I.

"Those program are a catch-all for people when the top dream doesn't work out," Hodel says.

Only around 2 percent of high school student-athletes receive some form of athletic scholarship at the Division I or II level, according to the NCAA.

"There's a lot of potential to get money at the FCS level and at the Division II level – even if you're not a full-ride-caliber athlete," Tucker says.

And for students considering certain private colleges, athletes in Division III or those playing in the Ivies don't receive any athletic scholarships. But athleticism can earn a spot in admissions at a competitive private college such as an [Ivy League](#) school.

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"Division III are prohibited from offering financial aid on the basis of athletic ability – that's a defining characteristic of the division," says Michelle Brutlag Hosick, an NCAA spokeswoman.

But some Division III schools play in Division I for a particular sport. [Johns Hopkins University](#), a D-III school, has a Division I lacrosse team, for example.

And women playing in NCAA Division I are more likely to receive slightly more on average than their male counterparts. Division I women athletes received \$15,162 on average in 2014, compared with \$14,270 for men, according to ScholarshipStats.

TAGS: paying for college, college athletics, NCAA, scholarships, students, financial aid

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