

Head Count vs. Equivalency Scholarships



The difference between head count scholarships and equivalency scholarships can best be understood as sports that are guaranteed full-ride scholarships (head count) versus sports that divide the scholarships as partial scholarships (equivalency). It is important you understand the type of scholarships offered for your sport.

Sports with Head Count Scholarships

Head count sports mean the team is restricted in the number of athletes that can be on scholarship. For example, an NCAA DI FBS Football team is allowed 85 scholarships per year and they are only allowed to have 85 athletes on scholarship. They can't divide that money up to give half scholarships to more athletes. Head count scholarship sports are Football (DI FBS only), Basketball (DI men's and women's), Tennis (DI women only), Gymnastics (DI women only) and Volleyball (DI women only).

Sports with Equivalency Scholarships

Equivalency scholarships mean there is no restriction on how many athletes can be on scholarship, but there is a limit on the number of scholarships a team can have. In this scenario, a team might have 30 athletes and 15 scholarships. Rather than have 15 athletes on scholarships and 15 athletes as walk-ons, a coach will divide the scholarships and all athletes could receive a half scholarship. This is an over simplification of how coaches divide scholarships, but it illustrates the point that for most equivalency sports, athletes are on partial scholarships. The following sports are considered equivalency sports:

- All DI sports not listed above
- All NCAA DII sports
- All NAIA sports
- All Junior Colleges
- NCAA DIII does not offer scholarships but does offer other forms of financial aid

Things to Consider About Head Count Sports

Head count scholarships are only available at the top level of college sports (NCAA DI). These scholarships, like all scholarships, are one-year contracts and there is no guarantee you will have that scholarship for all four years. Each year you need to resign your scholarship. Common reasons athletes lose their scholarships are injury, academic ineligibility or coaching changes. It is important to consider a school for more than just the scholarship, make sure you would be comfortable going to that school even if you weren't an athlete there.

Things to Consider About Equivalency Sports - Do the Math

When you are competing for equivalency scholarships, there is an added complexity of trying to determine how big your scholarship is going to be. Your "value" (i.e. – the amount a coach would be willing to offer) is going to be different for each program and how they use their scholarship money. When you are thinking about equivalency scholarships you need to compare scholarship offers based on the amount you are expected to contribute and not just the dollar amount of the scholarship. See the scenario below as an example:

- School A – Cost \$50,000/year, Scholarship offer of 50% (\$25,000/year), the amount you are responsible for is \$25,000/year
- School B – Cost \$15,000/year, Scholarship offer of 10% (\$1,500/year), the amount you are responsible for is \$13,500/year

While your scholarship offer at School A is \$25,000 (compared to \$1,500 at School B), School B is actually going to be much more affordable. This is why many athletes who play equivalency sports need to consider the cost of the school much more than if they were going to be getting a full-ride.