

The Benefits of “Going D3”

The 2024 “Division III Week” runs from April 1st through 7th. Take a look at several students’ “why” behind their athletic careers.

As the NCAA-proclaimed “Division III Week” approaches, student-athletes are encouraged to celebrate the impact of Division III athletics on the campus community. I interviewed students at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania about why they recommend competing at the Division III level. The common themes? Community, balance, and growth.

COMMUNITY

Being a student-athlete on a small campus like Susquehanna University creates an unspoken bond. At Susquehanna, over a third of the student population participates in one of the twenty-three varsity sports offered. Student-athletes are given an instant sense of community between their teammates and peers when they step on campus, for those are the people they wake up beside for early morning practices or spend long weekends away at competitions. As one runner on the Susquehanna University track and field team claimed, “as a D3 runner, you become part of a community that values sportsmanship, teamwork, and the love of the sport as much as it does success on the track.”



BALANCE

Another student-athlete shared, “Division 3 running is the best way to balance school and athletics.” When given the chance to compete without an athletic scholarship, coaches become a support system for your education. Professors understand the time commitment their students give to their sport and are often gracious to help them make up any work missed for a competition.

A cross-country runner focused on balancing her courseload with practices noted, “It’s a lot of hard work, but the sport doesn’t overtake your life like it would at a D1 school.” The class schedules of a smaller campus have the flexibility to set aside “downtime” in the afternoon for extracurriculars to operate without educational conflicts.



GROWTH

Division III is “more competitive than most people think.” An athlete in her junior year noted that being an athlete at this level is “a unique experience” that benefits personal growth. The close-knit group provides a supportive environment where athletes can push their limits, set personal bests, and contribute to a team’s success, all while pursuing a diverse range of academic interests and engaging in extracurricular activities outside of their sport.

Any athlete on the Susquehanna varsity sports teams can have an array of other activities they participate in, something that would be uncommon in any other division. On the track team, there are pole vaulters serving as student government representatives, distance runners active in

fraternity life, sprinters working as teaching assistants, and jumpers who go from practices of their own to operate the livestream broadcast crew for another sport's event.

Participating in a Division III sport opens dozens of new doors for student-athletes. It allows students to gain valuable time management skills that employers recognize, and provides possibilities for hundreds of meaningful connections, whether it be with current students or alumni, that can lead to a potential job placement after graduation.

In a personal sense, sports are an opportunity to meet people you never would have crossed paths with in the classroom, enabling access to different perspectives and relationships that will last a lifetime.



Division III athletics might not have the scholarships or glory of larger programs, but the opportunity to play a sport in college can have a huge positive impact on a student's life. The community provides a safe spot, and the commitment teaches time management and other transferrable skills. At the smaller level, the students get to prioritize their academics while still growing athletically and interpersonally.