

Divisions: I, II, III

What's the difference?

At some point, you may have to decide if you want to play division I, II or III soccer. We'll outline a few of the technical differences below. But suffice to say, if you want the best competition, you'll opt for Division I. Most division I schools recruit nationwide, if not internationally and offer the largest number of scholarships. It's not unusual for the best teams at this level to feature players who have competed for national junior teams and many of their graduates pursue soccer in the professional ranks. Division II programs offer some athletic scholarships and may play a few division I schools but the quality of play is not as high. Division III schools do not offer athletic scholarships and rarely play non-division III schools. But there's less competition for a playing time than in a bigger program; if you're strong player, you'll be on the field.

Division I

Division I schools must field at least seven sports apiece for men and women, or six sports for men and eight for women. There must be at least two team sports for each gender. Men's and women's teams must be active during the fall, winter and spring seasons. These teams must maintain certain roster sizes and play a specified number of games against other division I schools. There are also requirements for financial aid and practice time.

Division II

Division II institutions have to field at least four sports for men and four for women, with at least two team sports for each gender. Men's and women's teams must play during each season. There are requirements for roster size, and financial aid, although unlike division I schools, there are few limitations for scheduling. Division II teams usually feature a specified number of local or in-state student athletes. The student athletes may pay for school through a combination of scholarship money, grants, student loans and employment wages. Division II student-athletes may pay for school through a combination of scholarship money, grants, student loans and wages from employment. Traditional rivalries with regional institutions dominate schedules of many Division II athletics programs.

Division III

Division III institutions have to sponsor at least five sports apiece for men and women with two team sports for each gender. Men's and women's teams must compete in each season. There are few requirements for scheduling and roster size. Division III schools do not award athletic scholarships. Division III athletics departments try to create rewarding experiences for players; there is less emphasis on selling tickets or catering to alumni. Division III athletics encourages participation. Teams compete regionally and focus largely on conference play.