

USAT

Collegiate Triathlon



**Starting a Successful Collegiate
Triathlon Club**

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1. GETTING ORGANIZED

1.1. CREATE A CONSTITUTION

A constitution will establish rules for the club, set standards, and ensure the club is run properly. A constitution will also allow you to fall back on original club rules in case there is a problem with how the club is run. A good starting point in creating a constitution would be checking with other clubs that focus on athletics at your university. In addition, your student organization office or your local Collegiate Commissioner may have a template you can use and modify for your club.

1.2. BECOME AN OFFICIAL STUDENT ORGANIZATION

Many Universities will only approve a club as an official student organization after a certain number of people have expressed interest, which is usually around 10 members. If you fall short of the required number, see the “Increasing Membership” section below. Becoming a student organization is important as many Universities will give each student organization financial support every year.

1.3. FIND A GOOD FACULTY ADVISOR

In order to become a student organization, many Universities will require you to have a faculty advisor. It is best to find a faculty advisor who already competes in triathlon or at least has some experience with swimming, cycling, or running. Some good places to start looking for a faculty advisor are professors in your School’s recreation department, Exercise Physiology department or other similar programs. Often the faculty advisor does not play an active role in the club, and is just there to sign papers. This works for those clubs with very motivated officers, but if the officers need help, a good faculty advisor can step in and provide needed assistance.

1.4. REGISTER AS A SPORTS CLUB

Once you have become an official student organization, look to register your team as a “sport club” with your University’s campus recreation department. Unlike intramural teams, sport club teams participate in their sport against other Universities. University recreation departments often fund sport clubs, and they can provide you with excellent advertising and University resources. It is important to note though, that some schools have additional requirements to become a club sport, such as a formal application process.

1.5. REGISTER WITH YOUR COLLEGIATE TRIATHLON CONFERENCE

Contact information for each collegiate conference can be found at www.usatriathlon.org/content/index/1112. Email the Collegiate Commissioner for your region, and they will provide you with the steps needed to register with your conference. Being registered with your local conference allows your club to compete in triathlon events against other collegiate clubs in your region. Additionally, each collegiate club must be registered with its conference to be able to race at the USAT Collegiate National Championships.

1.6. BECOME A USAT CERTIFIED COLLEGIATE TRIATHLON CLUB

Register your triathlon team as an official USAT club at <http://www.usatriathlon.org/content/index/1104>. Being an official USA Triathlon club has many benefits such as getting club race discounts and being eligible to receive club grant money. Furthermore, collegiate triathlon teams must be USAT registered clubs to be eligible to race at the USAT Collegiate National Championships.

1.7. HAVE EACH INDIVIDUAL REGISTER AS USAT MEMBERS

In addition to being registered as a USAT Certified Collegiate Triathlon Club, each of your members should register to be an official USAT member. All USAT sanctioned races require you to be an official

USAT member to compete. For members who are new to the sport and want to just try a race out, they can get a one-day membership, but members who are looking to compete in more than one race should get a membership. In addition, in order to participate at the USAT Collegiate National Championships, you must be a USAT member. You can get a membership online at <http://www.usatriathlon.org/content/index/58>.

2. INCREASING MEMBERSHIP

2.1. INCREASING AWARENESS

Get the word out about your club.

- Hang flyers around campus that let people know about team informational meetings.
- Many schools have a day where clubs can set up displays in a common area. These are great for getting the word out about your club and meeting with prospective members.
- Setting up booths in your student recreation center is a great way to meet prospective members. When setting up booths, it's a good idea to stress fun and healthy lifestyle instead of competition. Tag lines like "Get involved and have fun!" and "Avoid the Freshman 15!" will catch prospective members' eyes.

2.2. PROMOTE PARTICIPATION

Triathlon is a sport for everyone. Many beginner triathletes are terrified of everything that goes into a triathlon, so keep everything basic. If you portray your club as a group of advanced athletes, you will get little response from the student body. It is better to portray your club as a group of individuals who are interested in the multisport lifestyle and an organization that anyone can join, regardless of athletic ability. These beginners will improve very quickly and you will have a strong team. Also, beginners should know that no special equipment is needed. A swimsuit, goggles, an old bike, a helmet, and running shoes are all that you need. Keep it basic.

2.3. PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Create learning opportunities for new members. New members will not actively participate in club activities if they feel lost. Beginner workshops that teach the basics of triathlon are a great way to get newcomers oriented to the sport. Because swimming is typically the hardest of the disciplines to master, holding a swimming clinic for new members will probably be a big stress reliever. Other good workshops include those that focus on cycling skills and transitions.

2.4. KEEPING IT INEXPENSIVE

Keep club dues low for new members. People might be afraid to sign up for the club if the dues are too expensive. Usually, collegiate athletes have to supply all their own equipment, so low membership dues help ease the financial burden for beginner triathletes.

2.5. CATERING TO ADVANCED ATHLETES

Make sure you let advanced athletes know that being part of the club can benefit them as well. Team membership can provide them with sponsorship discounts, club funding and the opportunity to race against top-level collegiate triathletes.

2.6. KEEPING IT FUN!

If it's not fun, people won't want to do it. For the true beginners, don't stress competition. Concentrate on developing appropriate skills. When traveling to races, encourage others to spectate if they aren't racing. Cheering sections provide support and motivation for tri newbies racing while increasing team unity at the same time. Also, have fun competitions during practices. Example: Sprint to the county lines during rides, or have informal races or relays in the pool. See Section 5 on "Building a Community" for more ideas.

3. FUNDRAISING AND SPONSORSHIP

3.1. FINDING SPONSORS

Sponsorships usually provide the largest amount of money for collegiate clubs. Begin by creating a sponsorship packet and let sponsors know what you can do for them. Some good places to start are local bike or running stores. In addition, ask club members if any of their parents, relatives, friends, etc. own companies or are high-up in companies, as they will more than likely be willing to help out. Ask as many people as possible for sponsorship - the worst that can happen is they say 'no'.

3.2. ALUMNI DONATIONS

Try and keep track of old members of your club who have graduated. If your club did a lot for them, they will usually be willing to give back.

3.3. FUNDRAISING

Small fundraisers add up. Some ideas include:

- bake sales
- sell grilled cheese, hot dogs, etc. on weekend nights near campus bars
- car washes
- home football or basketball game day car-parking (if a team member lives close to a game venue)
- selling raffle tickets at football and basketball (check with your athletic department first)
- chili cook-off
- bagging groceries at local stores
- check with your student organization or sport club office for additional ideas!

3.4. SELLING T-SHIRTS

Selling club t-shirts to the general student body and the surrounding community provides both profit for your club and advertising. Some pointers:

- Keep the designs both triathlon and University-oriented.
- Check with your University for copyright laws on logo usage.
- Ask other sport clubs or University organizations to see where they get t-shirts made. Usually a local t-shirt maker will work with all student organizations to keep the prices low in exchange for lots of business.
- Try and pre-sell the t-shirts. This allows you to know exactly what quantities you will need. For example, the club can sell 5 shirts to each member for \$45. The athlete can have his or her shirt for \$5, and sell the others for \$10 once all the t-shirts come in. This generates needed profit for the club and puts the responsibility on the athletes to go out and sell the t-shirts to earn their money back, as well as earn money for the club. Order a few extra t-shirts to sell to fans and alumni at races.

3.5. RENT-AN-ATHLETE

Put up flyers around the community offering labor for a Saturday afternoon. Community members will pay your club to come do house chores, work in the yard, wash cars, etc. in return for club support.

3.6. STADIUM/ATHLETIC VENUE CLEANUP

Many Universities allow student organizations to go through and clean up the stadiums and other athletic venues. This usually involves picking up the larger items (hot dog wrappers, cups, etc) before the main cleanup people come and pressure wash everything else away. This can be extremely profitable and quick if you have a large group to help out.

3.7. ORGANIZE A TRIATHLON OR OTHER ATHLETIC EVENT

Many teams organize their own triathlon (e.g. the UCLA IronBruin Triathlon, Stanford Treeathlon, etc.). Not only do these events often become part of their conference race series, but they also provide the opportunity to raise significant funds (some schools make over \$10,000). These events are often well-attended by the local community and they will return year after year. Teams that chose to organize their own triathlon usually coordinate with their school's recreation department to produce a sprint-distance event that uses the campus pool. These are often done as "reverse triathlons" (run-bike-swim) because mass starts in a pool are not possible. Other schools produce events that are entirely off campus (proper permits must be obtained from the city, county, police, fire department, etc.) or are Olympic distance. If you cannot put on a triathlon, there are other options. Some teams put on 5K or 10K running events, duathlons, aquathons, or other multisport events. Here are some tips to get you started on producing your own event:

1. Elect a "race coordinator" as one of your team officers at the beginning of the school year. Planning an event often takes 6-10 months, especially if you have not done one before.
2. Look up the websites of races that other collegiate teams put on to familiarize yourself with has been done and what may be required.
3. Choose a course and format that best fits your situation. This may be a reverse triathlon on your own campus, a 5K, or an Olympic distance event by the local lake.
4. If your event is on campus, submit an event proposal to your recreation department (often through your club sport staff). Having a good relationship with the club sport staff will go a long way to getting your event approved.
5. If your event is off campus, there are various local and county agencies you will need to get approval or permits from: the county, the city, the fire department, the police department, local residences and businesses, etc.
6. Make sure your event has the proper insurance. USAT provides very affordable insurance (~\$200). If your event is entirely on campus, your recreation department may cover the insurance for free.
7. The race coordinator should choose a race staff as early as possible. A bike course coordinator, swim course coordinator, run course coordinator, transition area coordinator, volunteer coordinator, and sponsorship coordinator are indispensable.
8. In planning and organizing your event, make safety your number one priority.

4. TRAINING ACTIVITIES

4.1. MAKING A SET SCHEDULE

Have a set schedule of workouts at a variety of times throughout the week. This will allow for planning and a sense of consistency in training from week to week. Collegiate athletes do not have normal jobs and may have to fit in workouts whenever they can. It is a good idea to have an advanced athlete or officer at each of the workouts to supervise and help newer athletes.

4.2. MAKE PRACTICES FOR EVERYONE

Have different pace groups at each workout for athletes of different abilities. When new members show up to events, make sure they don't ever end up alone. There is nothing more discouraging than getting dropped on your first couple of rides or runs and ending up alone.

4.3. COMBINE PRACTICES WITH OTHER CLUBS/TEAMS

Combine your practices with other community and university clubs. Many cities have masters swim groups, cycling clubs, and track clubs. By combining workouts with local clubs, you can double and triple the number of athletes participating and have a wider variation of pace groups. Likewise, for universities with single-sport clubs such as swimming, cycling, and jogging, combining groups will increase your numbers and add a greater variety of pace groups.

4.4. CREATE SOCIAL PRACTICES

Include a few social runs/rides on the practice schedule. Advertising rides as 'social' might take the pressure off of new members. State that everyone will go the speed of the slowest rider.

5. BUILD A COMMUNITY

5.1. COLLEGIATE TEAM COMMUNITY

Community equals success. The most successful triathlon clubs have built a community around them. Have many social events outside of training and racing. If all the members become good friends with each other, they will be more likely to participate in the club activities, both training and social. Collegiate triathletes are not in school with the sole purpose of racing, they also want to experience the typical social activities offered during college. This is also a great selling point for freshmen interested in joining the club because freshmen want to get involved to meet people.

5.2. HAVE A SOCIAL CHAIR

Create a social chair position as part of the club officers. This person will be responsible for organizing all social activities and promoting team unity. Remember to always include everyone on the team!!

5.3. TEAM DINNERS / GET TOGETHERS

Have weekly team dinners. Have a set time and night every week for a get together at a local restaurant (perhaps a club sponsor). Or try meeting at different restaurants each week so everyone gets the types of food they like.

5.4. SPECIAL DINNERS / EVENTS

Have end of the semester, Thanksgiving, and Christmas/New Years parties. This is a great time to relax, reminisce about the year to date, view slide shows, and plan for the future.

5.5. MOVIE NIGHTS

Many student unions will allow student organizations to use their movie theaters. Show a triathlon (i.e. Hawaii Ironman videos) or Endurance-related movies (i.e. Dean Karnazes movies) as it will help bring attention to your club, motivate the current members and attract new members.

5.6. TEAM STUDY HALL

One of the first things many athletes will sacrifice when their grades start slipping is their training. Have a volunteer study hall once or twice a week for a few hours in the evening can give the athletes motivation to get their studying done. If athletes are around others who are doing school work, they will also be more likely to get their own work done. Additionally, this also promotes team bonding as the athletes spend more time together.

- Keep the study hall locations on campus to deter from unwanted distractions
- Locations could include a study room in a library, unused classrooms or empty conference rooms

6. OTHER IDEAS

6.1. PARTNERING WITH OTHER SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Look for opportunities to partner and combine programs/activities with other departments on campus.

Some examples include:

- **Physical Therapy:** Some university recreation departments will allow sport clubs to use the University physical therapists for free.
- **Massage Therapy:** Many schools have physical therapy programs and athletic training programs whose students need to practice giving massages. They usually do this for free. Also, check with local schools that specialize in massage therapy.
- **Performance Testing:** Check with the athletic training programs to see if they need people for performance testing. They need subjects for their research and you might need VO₂ Max or Lactate Threshold testing.

6.2. RACE ALL TYPES OF RACES

Don't only race the biggest and most popular races. Racing smaller local races helps take the pressure off of new members to race. You should also look into participating in local 5K or 10K road races or local bike tours in the off-season. These can be used as a training session and are great opportunities for team bonding.

6.3. VOLUNTEER

Volunteer as much as possible throughout your community. This can be a great way to get the word out about your club and can lead to potential sponsorships. If you volunteer at masters swim meets, community cycling races, and community running races, the community members will be more willing to help out when your club puts on your own events. As a sport club, you may also be required to do some community service anyway.

6.4. WALKABLE CAMPUSES

Many Universities are pushing for a more "walkable" campus to eliminate cars and promote health. This means there will likely be an increase in bicycle use, as well. To help the University in their efforts, offer to host bicycle safety seminars in accordance with your University recreation (or other University programs) to go over the rules of the road, encourage the use of helmets, etc. You might also do free bike repairs to make sure people's bikes (brakes) are working properly. This will get your club great publicity and help the general student body at the same time.