

Novice FAQ

Helpful answers to frequently asked questions

October 2010 Edition



BERKELEY HIGH CREW

ESTABLISHED 1967

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What is Berkeley High Crew?

BHS Crew is a coeducational rowing team (men and women train and compete separately). Established in 1967, BHS Crew is the only public high school rowing team in the West. Our competitors are either private school teams, like St. Ignatius College Prep, or clubs that draw from many schools, public and private (like the Oakland Strokes, our arch-rivals and—at least until December 2010—boathouse-mates). That makes us the scrappy underdogs, and we're proud of it.

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Why Crew?

Crew is a sport and an experience a rower will never forget. Crew is a demanding, highly collaborative physical activity. Unlike other team sports, there are no “stars” on a crew team; a boat either wins or loses, and everyone is equally responsible for the outcome of the race. Glory-hogs and show-offs gravitate to other sports.

Crew is a genuine team effort, from beginning to end. Curiously, a large number of crew recruits (women in particular) have never participated in organized sports, only to find that they love the challenge of rowing. Many students have discovered the athlete within behind an oar. And many crew team members become rowers for life.

Colleges and universities are interested in recruiting rowers for their crew teams (this is especially true for women), so involvement in the team can [chart a course to college](#).

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What's the Registration Process?

Joining BHS Crew (the [application process](#)) involves a fair amount of paperwork—waiver forms and athletic code pledges and that sort of thing. Forms are *due the first week of October* (check the website for the exact date). As part of the package you will have to provide evidence of a doctor's physical and pass a swim test. If you get those early, you're ahead of the game.

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Why do I have to join US Rowing?

Before you can join the team and start the application process, you need to join [US Rowing](#), a national organization that sanctions the rowing competitions. The process costs \$45, can be [done entirely online](#), and is quick and easy. You will be assigned a unique US Rowing member number that identifies you. Renewal is necessary every year.

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How Does a Rower Get Started?

Spring: Attend BHS Crew's [Learn to Row clinic](#) which takes place in May at the Jack London Aquatic Center (JLAC). This is a great opportunity for middle schoolers and BHS students to meet the coaches, team members and families that make up the Crew community, try out an erg machine, and get hands-on experience rowing in the Crew training barge. If you think you might be interested in crew, this is a fun, easy way to find out with minimal commitment.

Summer: You've picked the perfect time for a head start; learn to row during two sessions of week-long [New Rower Camps](#) held at the Crew boathouse at Jack London Aquatic Center or one of the [Summer Youth Rowing programs](#) at Lake Merritt. Then hone your new skills by rowing twice a week with the

Varsity squad during Summer Mixed Rower Training. By the time school starts in the last week of August, you'll be ahead.

Just Before School Starts/First Weeks of School: Keep on the lookout (here on the site and on Berkeley High e-trees) for an announcement about the Novice Rower Orientation meetings. Men's and Women's teams meet after school on separate days to give prospective team members important information about Fall training.

Middle of the Fall semester: You're welcome to join the team and participate in conditioning throughout the Fall semester. Even if you missed the Summer or Fall intro to rowing activities, you should still come out. In fact, some athletes have played another sport in the Fall and joined crew in the Spring. It's not typical, but it's still possible.

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Do I Need a Doctor's Physical?

Yes. Crew is a physically demanding sport, so it's important (and Berkeley High requires) that your doctor check you out and confirm that you're eligible to participate. It's a good idea to get it done before school starts, when your doctor is less likely to be swamped with physicals. Children's Hospital Oakland also offers an athletic physical in August each year; check their website for details You can [download the physical form here](#).

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Do I Need A Swim Test?

Don't worry; no one is going to have to swim to shore. But Crew is an aquatic sport, so coaches must be sure rowers can take care of themselves in the water—in the unlikely event they end up in it. The swim test is required to enroll in the Summer rowing programs and before getting into a boat in the Fall and is very simple: If you can demonstrate an overhand stroke for 25 yards, a backstroke for 25 yards, and tread water for five minutes, you've aced it. It takes less than ten minutes.

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Where Can I Get the Swim Test?

Any lifeguard with Water Safety Instructor certification can administer the test and sign the form. King Pool, Strawberry Canyon (at Cal), the YMCA, and Oakland Temescal Pool (at Oakland Tech, not at Lake Temescal) all have WSI-certified lifeguards, although it is a good idea to call ahead to make sure a WSI lifeguard is on duty and can run the swim test. With the exception of the Y, most conduct the test free of charge.

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How Do I Get P.E. Credit?

The team competes in the Spring, but spends the Fall and Winter months training and preparing for race season. To get P.E. credit from Berkeley High, the rower must obtain and complete a P.E. Waiver form, available from BHS counselors. These forms are *due the end of the second week of school*, so it's important to get them signed and turned in on time.

1. Ask Head Coach Chris Dadd to sign the form and attach the BHS Crew letter,
2. Give the form to your counselor (who will also sign it).

Your counselor keeps the form on file until the end of the semester, when a crew coach signs it again vouching for your participation during the semester. A P.E. waiver is not necessary in the Spring.

What Does it Cost to Participate? Are There Scholarships?

The nature of the equipment makes rowing a more expensive sport than, say, ultimate Frisbee. Boats, oars, hardware, boat trailers, launches (coaches' motorboats) and the fuel to run them, not to mention rent at the boathouse all add up. The school supplies only a small stipend for two of the coaches, so it has always been the team's responsibility to raise funds to cover the rest of the operating budget.

BHS Crew tries to keep things affordable for individual families by organizing fund raisers (like the December Ergathon) throughout the school year. *We are also determined that no one will be turned away due to financial need, so we offer scholarships to qualifying students as the budget allows.*

There's another way to look at this. The intense, immersing, indelible BHS Crew experience builds a positive foundation of teamwork and discipline that can last a lifetime. Amortized from that perspective, the cost is an investment in the future.

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When Are Practices?

Fall: Practice is usually **4 times a week**, with the days and locations arranged according to Men's or Women's teams, Varsity or Novice. Because this is at the discretion of the coaches and the needs of the particular division, the times are subject to change. Always double-check [the calendar](#) on the website site.

Typically, two of the four practices are strength and endurance training held at Berkeley High, and the other two are rowing skills training held on the water at JLAC. Women typically take the morning hours, men the afternoons.

Spring: Spring is race season, and practices step up to 5 a week. It's always a good idea to check the [calendars](#) regularly.

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Where Are Practices?

When you're rowing a 60-foot boat with ten-foot oars, you need some space to stretch out, so the pool won't do. BHS Crew rents space in the [Jack London Aquatic Center \(JLAC\)](#) boathouse at the Southern end of Jack London Square (115 Embarcadero, between 5th Ave. and Oak St.). When the team is on the water, that's where you can find them. Otherwise, they're on the BHS campus near [Donahue Gym](#), running and training on erg machines.

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How Do I Get to JLAC and Back?

JLAC is easy to reach via car or BART (via the Lake Merritt station). See the [maps](#) for details. On water practice days, rowers typically leave BHS as a group and take BART from the Downtown Berkeley station after school. Some get home the same way, others take advantage of [carpools](#). If you know several rowers in your neighborhood, consider arranging a carpool. The [Carpool Coordinator](#) supplies a roster of rowers needing rides that allows families to contact one another.

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Do I Need Any Special Equipment?

Shorts, Shirts, Shoes: At first, all you'll need are some lightweight, close-fitting workout clothes—shorts and tops—and some comfortable running shoes (for pre-rowing running workouts). Choose quick-drying fabrics like nylon or polypropylene, and **avoid cotton**, which holds onto water and draws warmth away from the body. No jeans or flip-flops. Loose or baggy clothing runs a risk of snagging in the seat runners. Close-fitting, lightweight synthetic sweaters are welcome on chilly days.

Sport caps or visors, sunglasses, sunscreen: Sport caps or visors help keep the sun off. For those with sensitive eyes, sport sunglasses are a good idea. Sunscreen is a must. The coach has some **valuable observations** about proper clothing.

“Trou”: As you continue with your training, you'll probably want one or more pair of “trou,” which are form-fitting lycra or polypro shorts (resembling bike shorts, but without the chamois liner). The team places a large trou order in September and workout clothes can be purchased through the crew wear volunteers. You can also ask returning rowers about their favorite brands and stores

Gloves: It may surprise you to learn that BHS rowers don't wear gloves. For tactical and safety reasons it's important to have a firm and controlling grip on the oar at all times, so gloves are not allowed. This can be a little uncomfortable at first, but eventually calluses build up in the right places.

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How Does Crew Fit with the Many Other Activities I Plan to Pursue at BHS?

While it's great to get as much out of high school as you can, there are some limits. Between schoolwork and participation in Crew, many students find there's not much time left for other pursuits, so be realistic in the load you take on. While there have been some extraordinary individuals who have successfully managed to balance apparently mutually exclusive activities like Crew and theater, they are the exception. Take some time to get used to your course load and Crew participation before stacking on other activities.

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What is Expected of Parents/Guardians?

Crew demands a lot from team members; running the team demands a lot from their parents/guardians as well. Berkeley High provides only a small portion of the support needed to keep the team afloat, so the rest of the effort has to come from rowers' families:

- *Administrative support* (through the Board of Directors)
- *Financial support* (directly, and through various fund raisers)
- *Logistical support* (driving the team, equipment, and boats to and from competitions), and
- *Emotional, moral and nutritional support*, on the cheering from sidelines and staffing the food table at races and regattas.

To put it plainly, rowers need active parental support behind them. Families are required to donate 20 hours of volunteer time per year—although some put in much more. If you are aware of, ready, and willing to accept the commitment, you will find the rewards are tremendous. Learn more about this on the [team info pages](#).

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How Do Parents/Guardians Stay Current?

There are several excellent ways to keep up with all Crew activities:

1. **Join the [Yahoo Group for Berkeley crew](#).** This is a listserv that allows a single e-mail to be sent to all group members; it uses your preferred e-mail address and does not require you to create a new one.
2. **Volunteer for a position:** You'll be in close contact with other crew parents and learn much of the inner workings that way.
3. Visit the website www.berkeleyhighcrew.org
4. Contact the Novice Coordinator.
5. Participate in the **Pasta Feeds** (team dinners hosted by parents the night before a race). This helps Crew families get to know one another.

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When Are the Races?

Although there are a few competitions in the Fall, Spring semester is the official race season. The first race is usually scheduled in February, and the last race falls in May. Check the [website homepage](#) for listings of upcoming events.

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How frequent are races?

Typically, Spring races occur every other week, although there are occasionally back-to-back weekend races.. You can get a sense of the timing and frequency of races by reading about each event on the [race page](#). The regional championships **always takes place on Mother's Day**-- but isn't that every mother's secret wish?

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What's a race day like?

Actually, there's a [procedure for the entire race week](#). Race days start at practice the night before (unless otherwise notified, there is always practice the night before), when the boats are loaded onto the trailers at JLAC, and carbs are loaded into the rowers at the **Pasta Feeds**. Everyone gets an early bedtime—by 8:30 or 9:00.

The next morning starts early; races can range as far afield as Sacramento. Races occur during the course of the day, with team families cheering on the racers, and staffing and stocking the food table to keep hungry rowers fueled. At the end of the day the boats are loaded up on the trailers and everyone heads for home. It pretty much takes up the whole day, so don't plan anything else.

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What about Spring Break?

Don't plan to go away for Spring Break. Team members are expected to practice during Spring vacation.

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What's an erg machine?

An erg machine—short for *ergometer*, the device that measures energy output—is an indoor rowing simulation machine. Outside of a boat, the erg is a rower's best friend. It accurately measures the corresponding speed and distance a rower would be traveling if s/he were actually on the water, so it's an invaluable training device. [Read all about it.](#)

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What Are the Crew Boats Like?

If you've ever rowed in a rowboat, you know that you're facing toward the rear ("stern") of the boat, with your back toward the place you're headed. But that's where the similarities with crew boats end.

Crew boats, called "shells," are long—up to 60 feet—narrow (about 2 feet), and surprisingly light; many are made of carbon fiber. They can carry 8, 4, or 2 or a single rower. The 8- and 4- person boats have a special, extra teammate, the coxswain (COX'un), who faces forward and "drives" the boat, through steering and commands to the rowers. The [boat page](#) and [glossary](#) are great sources of information on the elements that make up a boat.

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What's the Deal with the Oars?

Crew teams use two different kinds of oars. The first is a *sweep* oar, which is a large (10 foot), single oar rigged either to port (left) or starboard (right) that each person in an 8-rower boat works with two hands.

The other kind is a *scull* oar, which is shorter and used as a pair by each rower. Just to make things more complicated, if a 4-person boat is rigged with scull oars, it's called a Quad (and typically does not carry a coxswain).

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What's a "Novice"? Where's the JV?

BHS Crew consists of two divisions, "Varsity" and "Novice." Novice rowers are all first-year team members regardless of grade level; a senior rowing for the first time is still a Novice. "Novice" is just one of those terms unique to rowing. Varsity are returning rowers who have moved up through the Novice squad. There is no "junior varsity" in BHS Crew.

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I know someone who's interested in crew, but he/she is small, loud, and bossy. Can they still try out?

Grab your friend and drag them down to the next practice; it sounds like you've got coxswain material! The coxswain (*COX' un*) is the heart of a successful boat. She or he is the person small enough to squeeze into the dinky stern seat and look out ahead, deploying race strategies and exhorting the rowers to work harder. The cox runs the boat. In fact, the cox is an extension of the coaching staff, and every bit as important. The team is always on the lookout for potential coxswains.

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