Board of Visitors: Alumni Perspectives

Why did you join the BOV, and what do you most enjoy about the annual meeting?

I joined the Board of Visitors to preserve my connection to the school. Lawrence provided me an opportunity that changed my life and opened my eyes to the world and expanded the expectations I had for myself. Now, I’m able to share a perspective from historic, professional, and multi-cultural points of view. I learn about the policies of the school, absorb the campus atmosphere, and reflect on whether Lawrence is true to its mission statement. Many institutions have goals, objectives, and mission statements, but very few have a true commitment to actualize their aspirations.

As a local alumnus, I try to attend campus activities more than once a year. Meeting as many students as possible gives me the opportunity to answer their questions and provide a more informed perspective on today’s student experience. For me, this is especially important for LA’s students of color; they can be encouraged just by seeing me and knowing that someone like them made it. Besides the academic adjustments, they must also make tremendous personal and social adjustments. Supporting them at LA is necessary for the total development of the community, and as a BOV member, I’m able to be a part of that.

How has your view of Lawrence Academy changed since serving on the BOV?

Over the years that I’ve been on the Board, I have seen the administration think through its responsibility to the Lawrence Academy student and seen its mission in action through classroom participation. They have an environment where it’s good to learn. I envy the education that they receive. The students are comfortable with themselves and have a well-developed ability to express their thoughts from a personal and existential perspective.

Socially, I’ve observed that Lawrence has an open, honest campus, where students and staff are respected and, more important, appreciated for what they bring to the community. I appreciate the administration’s ability to make the tough decisions with personnel and students. There is a low tolerance for stagnation on staff and for students who disrespect the community, and that benefits everyone. Lawrence continues to look for ways to refine its ideals, analyzing itself to become a better community.

As a result of attending the BOV, what areas do you feel need attention to make Lawrence Academy a stronger school?

Lawrence Academy would be stronger if it was to define more clearly its codes, traditions, and values. Who does not remember their Girl Scout or Boy Scout oath? Great institutions have strong traditions and engender strong loyalties through their members participating in traditions. People want to belong to what is unique and special. In some ways, Lawrence has gotten away from its roots as an independent boarding school. We are more Lawrence and less Academy.

If the school does not have many traditions or has lost them, the community should create new ones. Otherwise, Lawrence is a pass-through institution with a nonsustainable identity, and its brand of education is never fully optimized. When students leave Lawrence Academy, they should know what it means to be a graduate and what that reflects to the world.

What has made you want to return to attend the BOV meeting? What would you tell alumni who have been invited to join?

At the Board of Visitors meetings, I listen, learn, and provide input and feedback to the administration. I enjoy my glimpse of the rich educational experience of the students, a chance to view the physical changes on campus, and time to connect with the faculty, who are wonderful people and who have had a significant effect on my life. As alumni, we have a responsibility to maintain and nurture an institution that has had an impact on us whether that impact has been positive or negative. If it was negative, make it right; if it was positive, make it better. By happenstance or choice, Lawrence Academy was on the path we walked, and I, for one, would not want my footsteps to disappear. Some see and do, others watch and do nothing. Participate and help define Lawrence Academy’s future.

As a result of attending the BOV, what areas do you feel need attention to make Lawrence Academy a stronger school?

Although I did not come away from the annual meeting with a specific issue that needs attention, certainly—in these uncertain economic times—maintaining financial-aid initiatives should be a priority to ensure that Lawrence Academy continues to draw families from across the income spectrum.

What has made you want to return to attend the BOV meeting? What would you tell alumni who have been invited to join?

I feel in the learning environment when I observed classes at the annual meeting was a highlight because it underscored the ideals of the school.

How has your view of Lawrence Academy changed since serving on the BOV?

I have a much better understanding of how Lawrence differentiates itself amid a very competitive group of schools in the ISL [Independent School League]. The students are coming away from Lawrence with skills that enable them to participate in global learning environments through their experiences with student-centered learning. It is impressive, and I am excited that the faculty at LA has embraced this style of teaching.
Why did you join the BOV, and what do you most enjoy about the annual meeting?

For me, the Board of Visitors is a great way to stay connected with Lawrence and, at the same time, to share some of my life experiences, hopefully adding value to the school as a whole. Equally important is that being on the Board allows me the opportunity to hear from others about their experiences. The annual meeting enables faculty, administrators, and staff to carefully consider the perspectives represented by board members and apply their findings, where possible, to the daily operations in ways consistent with the philosophy of the school.

How has your view of Lawrence Academy changed since serving on the BOV?

My view on Lawrence hasn’t changed since joining the BOV. Rather, my participation has reinforced for me the fact that Lawrence Academy is a unique community dedicated to developing the whole student.

As a result of attending BOV, what areas do you think need attention to make Lawrence Academy a stronger school?

I would like to see more continuing education programs for faculty, administration, and staff. The ongoing risk is that LA is a small community. Having the ability to step out of the community and gain a new experience or perspective is an invaluable tool. It keeps the community leadership stimulated and, as such, the educational development of the students directly benefits.

What has made you want to return to attend the BOV meeting?

Lawrence has always been dear to me, and rarely has a day passed since graduation when a life situation hasn’t drawn me back to my LA days. I actually didn’t know the BOV existed until a few years ago, and when I was asked to join, I jumped at the opportunity. I encourage participation on the BOV because it is a great way to give a little bit back to a place that has offered so much through the years. Your input can positively influence the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of young people.

Why did you join the BOV, and what do you most enjoy about the annual meeting?

Honestly, I joined because I was invited :) I loved getting a sense of the way the Ninth Grade Program works and seeing the kids so engaged in their school community. I also was pleased to see that the teachers and staff still carry the same passion for the students and their education. It was like I had never left—except that I didn’t have to worry about turning in any homework! Thank goodness!

How has your view of Lawrence Academy changed since serving on the BOV?

I was happy to see that LA’s philosophy, as supported by Mr. Wiggins, is as strong as ever. The visit was energizing, and I was happy to see that LA’s philosophy, as supported by Mr. Wiggins, is as strong as ever. The visit was energizing, and I was happy to see that LA’s philosophy, as supported by Mr. Wiggins, is as strong as ever. The visit was energizing, and I was happy to see that LA’s philosophy, as supported by Mr. Wiggins, is as strong as ever.

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I’m not sure if this is a result of attending BOV, but as a parent of a potential applicant (watching the tuition numbers—ouch!) as well as discussing the idea of private school education vs. public school education with my peers, a big concern that I have heard discussed is a private school’s ability to deal with various learning differences, challenges.

What has made you want to return to attend the BOV meeting? What would you tell alumni who have been invited to join?

It’s a great way to reconnect with Lawrence Academy—to get a sense of all that the school is accomplishing while remaining true to its core values.

Why did you join the BOV, and what do you most enjoy about the annual meeting?

I joined the Board of Visitors to allow me to keep a closer tie to LA. After our 40th Reunion and the fun we had in planning the event and then spending the weekend in Groton, I realized how important my years at Lawrence had been to me and how friendships made as a young man are important today. Aside from talking with alumni of many different classes and generations, I most enjoyed the opportunity to interact with current students, both in and out of the classroom. Being a college professor now, I had the opportunity to see where my current students came from!

How has your view of Lawrence Academy changed since serving on the BOV?

My brief experience with the Board of Visitors has changed my view of LA from that idyllic memory of the school 40 years ago to one of a great school facing everyday challenges to maintain that greatness today.

As a result of attending BOV, what areas do you feel need attention to make Lawrence Academy a stronger school?

Through my role on the board, I hope to be able to play a role in helping LA meet and overcome those challenges.

What has made you want to return to attend the BOV meeting? What would you tell alumni who have been invited to join?

The opportunity to become more involved with a school that was very influential in my development I view as a gift. In addition, it is a lot of fun!

NAIS VP for Leadership and Diversity Addresses Board of Visitors

Where do you go for a chance to create material for a modern dance, examine scenes in Othello, plot graphs in Algebra, debate the origins of the Cold War, or learn how to “read” visual art? If you are a teenager, go to Lawrence Academy. If you’re not that lucky, then hope to get invited to join the Board of Visitors and then attend the annual fall meeting.

On November 7, 2008, members of the Board of Visitors gathered in the Recital Hall of the Williams Arts Center to be greeted by BOV Chair John Lord ’80, who spoke with heartfelt appreciation about the long-standing benefits he has enjoyed from his Lawrence Academy education. Following John’s brief remarks, Gene Batiste, vice president for leadership and diversity for the National Association of Independent Schools, delivered a thought-provoking address about diversity and inclusion.

Keynote Address on Diversity

Beginning with two common myths—that conversations about diversity are only about race and that having those conversations will tear a community apart—Mr. Batiste explained that schools that are committed to being inclusive must progress beyond what he called a “minority” perspective. “Working for diversity isn’t about having others come in, but it’s about building a community to maintain what in fact you’re able to achieve.” continued on following page
Recital Hall of the Williams Arts Center.

Duke Adams ’56, Mark Roberts ’67, and Jim Barnes ’69 share a laugh during a question-and-answer session held in the closing plenary session, when the visitors were given the chance to offer their student-centered learning before toweling off for lunch. The school day ended with a experience of the Cold War, Board members were immersed briefly in the waters of Boston. Learning beside or from current students or teaching them from firsthand different as modern dance choreography, greenhouse gases, Latin, and the history of The students-for-a-day attended one of ten 70-minute master classes on subjects as discussions (student-centered learning; the Ninth Grade Program and student leadership).

In retelling a story told by Episcopal bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, Mr. Batiste illustrated the need for a school community committed to diversity to continue moving the fence that circumscribes that diversity so that the community becomes multicultural. “How often we are willing to move the fence to incorporate the experience of someone who is different is the work of multiculturalism,” he said, noting that the desired change should be institutionalized in the school’s policies, programs, and practices—and certainly in its curriculum.

With a strong enough commitment to diversity broadly defined to include such categories as race, gender, class, age, and disability, a school moves on to seek equity and justice in its community by incorporating all such considerations in its long-range strategic planning. At such a stage of development, he said, the leadership will “have goals, objectives, and strategies to build and sustain an inclusive school community.” Using Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs as a guide, Mr. Batiste explained that inclusive communities will not, like humans, be only at one level of development: “Our school could be in a self-actualized area when it comes to its mission, but it could still be at the foundational stage when it comes to building a faculty, staff, administration, and board that reflect the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of the student body.”

In concluding his remarks, Mr. Batiste, who addressed the faculty on this subject in the spring of 2008, broadened his focus to include how communities treat (honor, respect, empower) members whose bodies do not fit the image promoted by a commitment to competitive athletics, for example. Speaking personally, the keynote speaker explained how differently he is treated three years after having gastric bypass surgery. “I’ve lost 165 pounds and I will tell you that I had family members who treated me differently because of the way I look now. I’m the same Gene, the same person, but they literally treat me better because of the transformation I went through.” Similarly, how supportive are our communities of members who espouse political views not in step with the majority? That, too, is the work of a school committed to being inclusive.

Student Panels, Master Classes, Plenary Session

Following that address on the rewards and challenges of building and sustaining an inclusive school community, BOV members split up to attend one of two student panel discussions (student-centered learning; the Ninth Grade Program and student leadership). The students-for-a-day attended one of ten 70-minute master classes on subjects as different as modern dance choreography, greenhouse gases, Latin, and the history of Boston. Learning beside or from current students or teaching them from firsthand experience of the Cold War, Board members were immersed briefly in the waters of student-centered learning before toweling off for lunch. The school day ended with a closing plenary session, when the visitors were given the chance to offer their impressions of what works well and what needs some work at Lawrence Academy for the school to be more true to its stated mission.

For those with the time and inclination, student-guided tours of the campus capped off a day on campus. Any visitors remaining in Groton for the evening were invited to attend a performance of the student production of The Visit, written by the Swiss dramatist Friedrich Dürrenmatt.

History teacher John Carusos calls on a classroom visitor during a discussion in his BOV master class, “Debate: The Origins of the Cold War.” Of those students who can be seen seated behind John and waiting to take questions are Sam Feigenbaum ’09, Jess Lunt ’09, and Nate Sandel ’09.

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