Chapter 13. Commonly Asked Questions

When does the formal college counseling start at Lawrence Academy?
We start to work with the students formally in December of the junior year. We hold monthly college counseling classes and we meet with students individually.

How are students and counselors matched at Lawrence Academy?
In October of the junior year students are asked to submit their top two choices for their college counselor. We make every effort to honor the choices of the students. Many times the students’ choices are made on the basis of already existing contacts with one of the counselors—through classes, dorms, sports and activities, or previous counseling relationships with siblings.

What is the best curriculum to take, with college applications in mind?
Students should select courses that are appropriately challenging at every stage in Lawrence Academy career. Colleges consider each applicant in the context of the academic program he or she has followed, and give weight to the level of challenge a student has encountered as well as to the grades earned. It is always in the best interest of students to take as rigorous a program as they can handle. It can often make the difference between two candidates for admission. Colleges want broadly educated students. Students should be well versed in what the colleges are recommending you study.

Will colleges care if I drop a course after December or once I have been admitted early?
Yes. The colleges look for students who are consistent and committed. Colleges expect that you will continue with the course of study that you indicated on your application.

Are my grades the only thing that colleges will consider when they evaluate my application?
While grades are the most important part of your application, they are only a piece of your applications. Colleges will also consider the rigor of your courses, test scores, if they are required, activities, teacher recommendations and your counselor statement.

Can I hire an independent counselor to help me with the college process?
While there is nothing wrong with hiring an outside counselor, it is probably not necessary. The college one counselor, we meet each week to talk about the whole class, and we encourage students to speak with the other counselors, if they feel it will be helpful.

What is the Common Application?
The Common Application is a not-for-profit organization that serves students and member institutions by providing an admission application – online and in print – that students may submit to any of our 488 members.

Do colleges prefer their own application over the Common Application?
No, the college and university members that use the Common Application have worked together over the past 35 years to develop the application. All members fully support its use, and all give equal consideration to the Common Application and the college’s own form. Many of the members use the Common Application as their only undergraduate admission application.
How many applications does a typical Lawrence Academy student send out?
Over the past five years, the average number of applications Lawrence Academy students send out has been seven. If students do their research and take college visits, we have found that between six and eight applications is a desirable number.

What is the difference between Early Action and Early Decision?
Early Action (EA) is where you apply early to a school and if you are accepted you are not obligated to matriculate there. Early Decision (ED) is where you apply early to one school only. If you are accepted, you must go there. In short EA is non-binding and ED is binding.

What determines whether a student should apply as an Early Decision or Early Action applicant?
There are three major factors students should consider. First, have they visited multiple colleges to have a strong sense that a particular college is the right fit? Second, is there academic profile competitive for the school they are applying to EA or ED. Last, is financial aid a significant consideration? If it is, students need may not want to apply ED. Students will work closely with their counselor to make this decision.

Is it better to specify a major or program of study on the application or to simply write undecided?
If you declare Biology (or any science), Engineering, or Business, you should have the standardized testing and grades in those disciplines to back it up. These majors attract some of the strongest students in the country, so you will have stiff competition right away. If you are certain that those are the areas of interest or specialization for you, speak with your adviser before pigeonholing yourself. If not, declaring ‘Undecided’ or writing down more than one academic interest is fine. College admissions personnel understand that nearly every college student changes his or her mind about a major at least once – that is why many colleges do not require official declaration of a major generally until the junior year.

Do students have to report major violations that occurred early in their academic career?
If a college asks the question about a student’s disciplinary record, he or she must answer it honestly. If you have ever been placed on a Level IV contract, you are obligated to notify the colleges. Understand the question applies to your entire high school career - freshman year through graduation.

What are the differences between the SAT and the ACT?
The ACT is an achievement test, measuring what a student has learned in school. The SAT is more of an aptitude test, testing reasoning and verbal abilities.

The ACT has up to 5 components: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, and an optional Writing Test.

The SAT has a correction for guessing. That is, they take off for wrong answers. The ACT is scored based on the number of correct answers with no penalty for guessing.
Should students take both the SAT and ACT?
Yes, we strongly believe that in the junior year students should take the ACT and SAT at least once. They should try to identify which tests best matches their learning style and test taking skills, and then take that test at least once more.

Does Lawrence Academy offer test preparation?
Revolution Test Prep offers test preparation classes for the ACT and SAT. Information about their programs is sent home in mailings.

What does it mean if a school is test optional?
It means that students have the option of submitting standardized test scores. Students should consult with their counselor before making that decision.