Chapter 2: Beginning the Search
Self Evaluation, Criteria for Choosing a College, Evaluate and Balance Your List, and Naviance

SELF EVALUATION

One of the primary goals of the college process is to find the right fit. To accomplish this task you must have a strong understanding of your identity, skills and goals. You also must assess what types of colleges appeal to you. Through self reflection and research you will start to gain a stronger sense of what schools are the right fit for you.

As mentioned in Chapter One, helping you gain a better sense of your identity is a goal of the college process. If you are to find the right fit, you need to understand and appreciate who you are. This process of self reflection will not only help in the college process, but hopefully it will also help you mature as you start to think more carefully about who you are as an individual. To help facilitate this process, we use questionnaires, surveys and conversations. We ask that you complete a questionnaire on Naviance before they end of your junior year, and we have you complete the Do What Your Are personality indicator on Naviance during the winter of your junior year. We use this information to start having conversations with you about your personality, traits and skills. We also ask you to thinks about topics such as:

- your personality and relationship with others
- your learning style
- your involvement in school activities
- your concern for other people and the world
- your goals and values
- your favorite subjects and activities
- your goals for the future

Once you have undergone this self-evaluation you can start to better understand what colleges might best suit you. Although all of you will not complete the college process with a complete understanding of your identity, we hope that it will start you on a journey of self-discovery.
RESEARCHING COLLEGES

Researching colleges is an extremely important task that you must complete. There are over 3,500 colleges in the United States and Canada. You need to begin your search with an open mind. Your objective should be to find schools that fit with your interests and needs. There are several sources available to you as you begin your research. Hopefully, at the end of the research process you can start to construct a preliminary list of schools that will be balanced. Your preliminary list may well include institutions unfamiliar to you. Research them nonetheless. They are there for a reason! Never let yourself be guided by “name recognition” alone. Perhaps, in your counselor’s opinion, an unfamiliar school fits your academic and/or extracurricular needs well, or a recent Lawrence graduate with whom you have a good deal in common had a great experience there. It costs nothing to explore! Know that you will learn just as much about yourself as you will about the colleges. It is okay to change your mind (for example, you think you want a large campus, but after visiting you realize that a smaller student body might be a better match) and to explore ideas and places you have never thought of before.

Do not underestimate the importance of research! The goal of your research is to develop a list of colleges that you know a lot about—what makes them unique from other schools, and why each school on the list sounds appealing to you. You need to find out about each college from several sources. From this list you will choose institutions to visit over the summer. Those visits will allow you to choose where you will ultimately apply in the fall.

Researching colleges, as with any of your other subjects, takes time if you are going to do it well and thoroughly. You will need to take notes, so always have a pen and paper handy. When using the Internet, as you surely will, you might have to copy down a school’s URL. Here are possible avenues to explore:

General College Guides
Remember that these are someone else’s assessments and views of a given college; do not let one source make a decision for you. We recommend that you research each college in several sources, then move on to the next college. You should consider acquiring your own personal copies of at least one of these guides. A number of publications provide general information about America’s colleges. These include: The College Board’s College Handbook; Barron’s Profiles of American Colleges; Peterson’s 4 Year Colleges. Others provide a more subjective view, including: Edward B. Fiske’s The Fiske Guide to Colleges; and The Insider’s Guide to Colleges, from The Yale Daily News.

The Internet
The internet is an extremely useful source of information for anyone involved in the college search. You can search college databases, including the one found on Naviance, by location, size, major, and cost to find the right matches for you; you can request view books, and course catalogs; you can take a “virtual tour” of a campus; you can browse the curriculum.
As technology continues to expand, we in the College Office will do our best to stay current with information we think can help you. Here is a short, and by no means complete, list of useful websites. When you begin to “surf,” stay alert for particularly great college sites; jot down the
Internet address and let us know what you have found so that we can update our list. Have fun, but be wary of websites like College Confidential that regularly post inaccurate information.

Naviance:  http://connection.naviance.com
Peterson's Guide:  www.petersons.com
The College Board:  www.collegeboard.com
College Net:  www.collegenet.com
MyCollegeGuide www.mycollegeguide.org
Common Application:  www.commonapp.org
Google University Search:  www.google.com/options/universities.html
National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC):  www.nacacnet.org

Admissions Officers at Lawrence Academy
Many colleges send representatives to LA in the fall to answer questions about their colleges. An up-to-date schedule of these visits will be available online in Naviance, and will also be posted in the Student Lounge and in the Ansin Academic Building. You can also follow the visits via twitter. (twitter.com/LACollegeC)

Friends
You may have friends who are either in college or who have already gone through the college selection process. They are an excellent resource if used with care. Question them about their reasons for choosing certain colleges and avoiding others. See if those reasons fit your idea of preferred colleges; never cross a college off your list merely because a friend did not like it. Think for yourself!

Requesting Materials
You can often request materials directly from a college’s website. Admission officers will send appropriate materials and may also ask coaches, drama directors, orchestra conductors, and others to get in touch with you. The more information you provide the more specific the response is likely to be.

**CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A COLLEGE**

These are criteria that can be used to evaluate and ultimately choose a college, though some may be more pertinent than others in your search.

**Student Enrollment**

- **ENROLLMENT** – Small (1,000-3,000), medium (3,000-7,000), large (10,000-15,000). Freshman class size. % Undergraduate students.
- **RETENTION** - % of freshmen that eventually graduate or return for their sophomore year.
- **BACKGROUND** - Male/female ratio. % Commuter / resident. Geographic origin. % minority. % on financial aid.
Location and Surroundings
- LOCATION - New England, West Coast, Middle Atlantic states, the South, a foreign country. Distance from home. Travel costs and convenience.

College Type and Philosophy

Curriculum
- ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS - Proportion of study dedicated to core requirements/major/electives. Required freshman courses.
- ACADEMIC OFFERINGS – Majors/minors offered in your areas of interest. Breadth and depth of courses offered in your areas of interest. Interdisciplinary courses. Strong departments.
- INDEPENDENT STUDY - Individual tutorials. Seminars. Research opportunities.
- COURSE DESCRIPTION - Introductory/advanced/specialized courses. Courses for majors/non-majors. Number of courses required for major/Course availability

Academic Environment
- ACADEMIC DEMANDS - Workload. Course expectations. Type of assignments. Academic pressure/competition.
- INTELLECTUAL VITALITY - Student attitude toward learning. Flexibility/structure for learning. Exchange of ideas. Interest in political, social, or world issues.
• CAREER PREPARATION - Pre-professional programs. Career advising and information programs. % who go on to graduate school. Graduate school and job placement.
• INSTRUCTION - What types of teaching/learning situations exist? If I know my field of interest, what courses and faculty are available in it? Do full professors teach undergraduates? Is there an advisor system?

Campus and Student Life
• TYPES OF STUDENTS - Diversity and response to differences. Typical/offbeat student. Importance of money/material possessions/social appearances.
• CAMPUS ACTIVITIES - Activities related to your interests. Emphasis on social life, fraternities or sororities, sports, or other dominant interests. Clubs and organizations traditional/creative/competitive issue oriented. Presence of religious, ethnic or cultural groups. Cultural opportunities on campus or in community.

Admissions
• DEADLINES - Application. Notification of decision. Deadline to reply to offer of admission.
• SAT/ACT/SUBJECT TESTS - What are the college’s testing requirements?
• ADMISSION SELECTIVITY - % of applicants offered admission. Average SAT/ACT scores of freshmen. % of freshmen ranked in top 10% of high school class. Freshman class profile.
• FINANCIAL – Need blind or need considered?

Costs and Financial Aid
• COSTS - Minimum-maximum total costs per year. Student budget for tuition and fees/room and board/books and personal expenses/travel costs. Admission and enrollment fees.
• FAMILY RESOURCES - What can your family pay toward college expenses? Your earnings and savings.
• AWARDS - % of students receiving aid. Range of awards. Average award.
• FINANCIAL AID - Based on need/merit/or funds available. Loan and job expectations. Off-campus work opportunities.
• APPLICATION - Which forms are required? Deadlines.

Intangibles
• Does the atmosphere of the institution appeal to me?
EVALUATE AND BALANCE YOUR LIST

The ultimate goal of the college search is to create a balanced list of six to eight schools that fall into four categories, based upon likelihood of admission. The terms we use - likely, possible, reach and far reach - are relative, not absolute. In determining where a given school falls for you, we use our best judgment based on experience with recent Lawrence graduates (this information is recorded in college-specific scattergrams in Naviance Family Connection) and with trends we are seeing at that particular institution. Obviously, your academic record is important here as well. If we believe certain schools are unrealistic, we will tell you so. Changes in academic performance during the junior and senior year may well move certain colleges “up” or “down” on the list. We offer frank advice to help you evaluate your chances at a particular school, not as a judgment of your performance during your time at Lawrence. Ideally, your final list should be so constructed that you will be admitted to most of the colleges on it. If things don’t work out so well, you should still have at least two or three good choices.

We define the four categories of colleges on your list as follows:

**Likely**
Lawrence students with your grades and scores have been admitted in the recent past at about a 75% admit rate. These are schools where your credentials are very competitive, and we are confident that you will be admitted, assuming your application has been done well and your interest in the school has been well demonstrated through an interview, a campus visit when possible, and through your good and thoughtful answers to any supplemental essay questions asking why you are applying to that college. We consider it essential to find “likely” schools where you believe you can be happy and productive.

**Possible**
Some Lawrence students with your grades and scores have been admitted, and some have not. Chances of admission are roughly 50%. Your credentials are competitive and you are qualified academically. This may also be a school where factors beyond pure academics can influence admission. Many of the same principles of the “likely” schools apply here. Your application needs to be completed carefully; you should show interest by means of an interview, follow-ups, and so on.

**Reach**
Lawrence Academy students with similar grades and test scores are less likely to be admitted, except in cases where extenuating circumstances, such as strong coach support or active alumni connections, affect the decision. There is usually a 20 - 30% chance of being admitted.

**Far Reach**
There is virtually no way you will get in. Not only are your credentials not as strong as other students who have been admitted from Lawrence recently, but also the overall percentage of admitted applicants, in most cases, is extremely small.
**NAVIANCE**

One of the most important tools you will use in the college counseling process is the Family Connection tool called Naviance. Naviance is a database where the college counselors keep all of the academic and college information for each student in your class. At the beginning of the college process, we provide you with a registration code for you. These are just some of the things you can do on the Family Connection site:

- Fill out the **Junior Questionnaire**.
- Search for colleges using the **College Search, College Lookup, College Match, and College Compare** tools.
- View your college list.
- Search for scholarships.

You may also explore, with the help of your college counselor, our scattergrams, or graphs that display the admission statistics for all Lawrence Academy applicants to a particular college within a specified year or years. These graphs allow us to show you or your parents the anonymous grade point average and SAT scores for each student who has applied to a particular college from LA, and the decision rendered by the college. The scattergrams are a great tool when searching for colleges that are within the appropriate admission range for a particular student. The Family Connection website is: [http://connection.naviance.com/lawrence](http://connection.naviance.com/lawrence)