Chapter 5: College Admissions Criteria
What Colleges Consider, and Your Admissions File

Before you send an application to a college you must, as best you can, determine if you meet its admission criteria. Take a hard look at yourself, your academic potential, and your accomplishments. The mere fact that you attend Lawrence Academy—or any other high school, for that matter—does not mean that your college of choice will accept you. Being at Lawrence Academy affords you the opportunity to get an excellent education. What you do with that opportunity is up to you. The more selective a college is, the higher its standards are for admission. The best gauge of how you will do in college is your performance in high school. If you have pushed yourself, colleges will note that. If you have combined SATs of 2400, but have only earned C grades, they will note that as well.

WHAT COLLEGES CONSIDER

1. Colleges will judge you on the courses you have taken and the grades you have earned. Simply meeting LA’s graduation requirements will not be enough to make you competitive in the admissions process at many institutions. Most selective colleges expect the ideal applicant to have taken the following courses:

   - 4 years of English
   - 4 years of mathematics
   - 3-4 years of natural science
   - 3-4 years of foreign language
   - 3-4 years of history and social science

While colleges like to see Honors and AP courses in a student’s program (if the high school offers them), you should not get in over your head. Accept your limitations as well as your strengths. Nothing is gained on the college admissions front by taking an AP or an Honors course and receiving a C or a D.

2. Make sure that you have taken the specific courses and tests required by the institution to which you are applying. For example, to apply to engineering colleges, you should take four years of math through Calculus, Physics (Honors if recommended), and the Physics Subject Test.

3. A stellar academic record alone will not ensure your admission to the most selective colleges. What else can you bring to the college: athletic, musical, or artistic talent, uncommon intellectual pursuits, research experience, diversity?

4. Although test results are only one factor in the selection process, they are important. As a rule, the more selective the college, the more important are the test scores. Do your scores fall within the
range presented by most successful students to an institution? If they are below that range, are you being realistic?

**YOUR ADMISSIONS FILE**

When an admissions committee opens your file, they will find the following in it:

**Your official transcript**
Your official transcript from Lawrence Academy will list all your courses starting with Grade 9 (or the year you entered Lawrence), and your term-by-term grade point average. If you entered the Academy after Grade 9, we will send a copy of your former school’s transcript as well. Standardized test scores are not included on the transcript. In assessing your success, colleges will consider the rigor of your courses within the context of Lawrence’s curriculum, time on the Honor Roll and other academic awards or distinctions. Improvement in the later years is helpful, but it will not remove the stigma of a poor record in the first three years.

**Completed application and essay**
The application will include all personal information, extracurricular and athletic activities, jobs you have held, and the like. Colleges look closely at your part of the application, particularly, at many schools, the quality of the essay. The overall quality of your application is one aspect of this process that you completely control; take advantage of the opportunity to help yourself. Neatness and spelling count!

**Required supplementary materials**
Supplementary materials may include a graded paper or an institution-specific essay. These will vary from college to college. Be sure you check with each institution to make certain you have fulfilled its respective requirements. Supplementary materials may also include LD documentation or information on special needs, if applicable.

**Two teacher recommendations**
You will ask two teachers who have taught you, usually in your junior year, to write on your behalf. Both letters should come from teachers who know you well. You should start to consider teacher recommendations from the first day of your junior year, because you will normally request them in May. Your approach to your daily life at Lawrence Academy will do much to determine the quality of your teachers’ recommendations. Unless you are pursuing a program in the arts, colleges may not accept a recommendation letter from an art, music, dance or theatre teacher. Be sure to research each college to familiarize yourself with their requirements.

**Counselor Statement**
Your folder will include a detailed statement from your college counselor about your work, growth, and involvement both in and out of the classroom at Lawrence Academy. Counselors will present a balanced view of you and your record in as positive a light as possible.
Independent Immersion Program

Students who are involved in the IIP are responsible for serving as the liaison between the College Counseling Office and the IIP Director (as well as professional sponsor). The IIP director must be made aware of application deadlines so that he can assist with the completion of the IIP contract and term evaluations. When evaluating the college application for IIP students, admission representatives will be looking for academic depth in the contract and program description. They are looking for specific authors, concepts, and terms so that they can understand the academic nature of one’s senior year at Lawrence Academy.

Interview notes

Many schools view your request for an interview as a sign of interest, and this interest can benefit you in their appraisal of your application. However, other college admission offices offer interviews as a way for you to evaluate the school rather than as a means to evaluate you. Regardless, the impression you leave in an interview may become part of your application folder.

Additional recommendations

You may wish to include additional notes or recommendations from coaches at Lawrence if you are an athlete or from an activity leader if you excel in another area outside of the classroom (music, dance, and the like). Never send extra recommendations without first discussing it with your counselor. Some colleges simply do not want them!

Lawrence Academy profile

The colleges will receive a profile of Lawrence Academy describing relevant aspects of the school, our curriculum, and our academic statistics (average SAT scores, grade distributions).

Test Scores

The SAT Reasoning Test is required by most colleges. Some also require certain SAT Subject Tests. You must always check with the colleges to find out which tests they want; do not rely on guidebooks or other “outside” sources for this information! Even the Naviance Family Connection, though generally very accurate in this regard, may contain a few errors.

Talk with your counselor about which Subject Tests to take and when. Math Level I, for example, should be taken near the end of Math 3. Others will depend on your individual strengths and needs and upon the requirements of individual colleges. Check with them early in the process!

The ACT (college admission test of the American College Testing program) is basically a competitor of the SAT, designed somewhat differently. It is accepted in place of the SAT Reasoning Test (and, usually but not always, the Subject Tests) by all colleges. For many reasons, not the least of which is that some students score higher on it than they do on the SAT, we very strongly recommend that every Lawrence Academy junior and senior take the ACT, more than once! It is given at Lawrence Academy in December and February and at Fitchburg High School and other local centers several other times per year. We also strongly recommend that students take the optional ACT Writing Section, as many colleges require this section if you submit the ACT rather than the SAT.

From the fifteen or twenty pages of your application folder, an admission committee will get to know you quite well in a very short time—well enough to decide whether to admit you, deny you, or place you on a waiting list.