

About Us: The Lawrence Academy College Counseling Office

Though certain aspects of our work with you change with the times, our philosophical basis remains constant. We offer a brief description here.

First, we view ourselves as advocates of the student above all else. Just as we strive to help each one to choose appropriate colleges, we take care to present candidates to those schools as thoroughly and as honestly as possible, not gilding the lily, but emphasizing strengths and putting weaknesses in context.

Second, we take seriously our work with parents, understanding that the college application process is often as stressful for them as it is for students. We try to support, to inform, to be available, and to educate.

Third, we believe that the primary criterion for choosing a college should be “fit” rather than merely prestige or “name.” Is the level of academic challenge appropriate for this young person? Can a particular college satisfy his or her athletic, extracurricular and social needs as well as the academic? Is its human environment one in which she will feel comfortable, in which she will grow by being part of it? In short, will she be happy and productive there for four years?

Fourth, we believe that each senior deserves acceptance at more than one college which he or she would be happy to attend. To this end we work with both seniors and parents to ensure that each person’s list of colleges is of appropriate length and properly balanced between “reaches” and schools where admission seems relatively certain. Herein lies the importance of open-minded exploration and of the willingness to compromise where it is possible to do so.

Let's return for a moment to that central question of “fit.” As you will hear us say many times, it is relatively easy to find the academic program a student is looking for—there are plenty of good English or business departments—and it's not much more difficult to identify appropriate athletic or extracurricular programs. Furthermore, all of these can be found just about anywhere in the country. What really matters is harder to define, since it is different for each of senior. For lack of a better word we might call it “ambience,” which Webster defines as “a feeling or mood associated with a particular place, person or thing.” A number of factors create the ambience of a college: the attitudes and backgrounds of the students, their relationship with the faculty, the physical appearance of the campus, its political climate, the relative importance of athletics or the arts, and so forth. The list could go on forever, and each student's is different. One, for example, might be most comfortable in the company of other people from a background similar to his or her own; another would be happiest as the only New Englander or the only “preppie” on campus.

Obviously, the only way to get to know a college's ambience well is to live there long enough to become part of the place. Since that is not possible without parting with a year's tuition, it is important to help each family to make the best possible evaluation. To that end we strongly encourage visiting college campuses, and we show you several ways to find out more than can be learned from the usual tour and interview. We also teach you, however, that in the final analysis each senior will choose the college he or she will attend at least as much by instinct as by logic—but the instinct, if we have all done our job well, will be educated and refined to the point where it can be trusted.

There is some risk in every decision we will ever make. But when it comes to applying to college, the means—learning how to make a good decision—is probably as important as the end. It is a skill that, once acquired, will remain useful throughout life.

—*The College Counseling Staff*