



# Lawrence Academy

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## THE COLLEGE COUNSELING OFFICE

September 10, 2018

Dear parents of the Class of 2019:

We hope this finds you well. In this letter, we will address frequently asked questions about the final college list, application forms, and how applications are processed. This letter is extensive, so we thank you for taking the time to read it carefully. As always, we hope you will feel free to contact us if you have any questions or concerns. In addition, Lawrence Academy's College Counseling Handbook is available on the college counseling website at <http://www.lacademy.edu/page.cfm?p=660> this document explains many aspects of the college search.

During the first week of school we will start meeting with each senior and we will continue do so throughout the term. Many college representatives are visiting Lawrence Academy (please encourage your student to remain aware of the visits), and seniors, in turn, will be touring and interviewing at college campuses. Toward the end of October, we will be sending Early Decision and Early Action materials for the students who request that we do so, and of course, the time is here for all seniors to be putting together a final list of colleges.

### **FINAL COLLEGE LIST Q & A**

- **WHAT SHOULD THE FINAL COLLEGE LIST LOOK LIKE?**

We base our definition of the ideal list on the simple belief that most students, regardless of how they feel in the fall, would prefer to receive more letters of acceptance than denials in the spring. The final list should be so constructed that if things work out as we all hope, the student will be accepted at all or most of the colleges to which he or she has applied. If fate decrees otherwise, we feel that students should end up with at least two choices with which they are satisfied.

- **SPECIFICALLY, HOW SHOULD THE LIST BE BALANCED?**

It is essential to keep the list balanced with a selection of institutions where chances of admission range from unlikely to probable. Colleges in the "likely" (80% chance of acceptance) and the "possible" (where chances of admission are about fifty-fifty) category must be chosen with particular care. Our experience has been that colleges in the "reach" (3% - 20% chance of acceptance) and "far reach" (0% - 3% chance of acceptance) categories are very unpredictable with regard to whom they admit and why.

- **TO HOW MANY COLLEGES SHOULD MY CHILD APPLY?**

As you are probably aware, the trend these days is toward large lists—sometimes a dozen or more. The theory seems to be that if students apply to a large number of highly selective schools, the odds of admission to at least one school in that range are improved. With rare exceptions, this is simply not the case. Students who apply to too many colleges are often thinking only of prestige or "ranking" rather than finding a good

match. We still believe that a well-balanced list of six to eight colleges, including no more than two or occasionally three “reach” schools, serves the vast majority of seniors well. In addition, no student should apply to a school where, if that were the only school to which the student was admitted, they would not have any interest in enrolling. Each school on your child’s list needs to be one that they are interested in exploring further come April.

- **WHAT RECENT CHANGES HAVE OCCURRED IN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS?**

More and more we hear from colleges that they are looking closely at a candidate’s “demonstrated interest” in their school. If at all feasible, has the student made a point of getting to campus, going on an admission tour, and having an interview, if interviews are offered? Did the student meet with a representative who visited Lawrence Academy? As a way to make themselves look more competitive based on the number of applicants admitted, some colleges may deny students whom they perceive to have no real interest in attending their institution. Failure to express genuine interest has directly affected some admission decisions in recent years. Lawrence Academy has a long weekend in October (October 20 - 23), which is the perfect opportunity to schedule those last few visits. If your son or daughter is unable to visit a campus because of distance, we recommend that they be in phone or email contact with the admission officer overseeing the admission process for our area. This person’s contact information can be found on a college’s profile in Naviance Student, as well as on the college’s website. In addition, many schools host receptions and interview weekends in Boston and list these events on their website.

Over the past several years, it is also clear that there is a difference in many colleges early admit rates and regular decision admit rates. For example, the admit rate for students applying Early Decision to Bates College was 50% while the admit rate for students applying regular decision was 20%. Many of the selective colleges that offer Early Decision are filling close to, and in some cases more than, half of their class through Early Decision admits, which makes applying to these schools regular decision even more selective. Early Decision is a binding agreement where upon acceptance the student must attend that school (explanations of Early Decision versus Early Action are on the next page). Our office only advises students to apply Early Decision if it is their top school choice and they do not need to compare financial awards prior to enrolling. If your student cannot apply early for one reason or another, or if your family wants to compare financial aid offerings (most of which are not available until after early periods are closed), that does not mean your student has lost his or her chance to gain admission to a selective school. Other forms of demonstrated interest can show a student’s serious interest and potential to enroll.

- **DOES AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS COLLEGES RECEIVE AFFECT THE WAY APPLICANTS ARE CHOSEN?**

Yes! When a college’s applicant pool increases significantly, the admission committee looks harder at “the numbers”—grades and test scores—to determine whom they will accept. The strong student with low test scores for that particular school’s range or one or two C’s may well be denied admission to a school that would have accepted him or her only a few years ago.

- **IS THERE ANY WAY TO ANTICIPATE CHANGES IN THE ADMISSIONS PICTURE?**

We wish! These days, it is not unusual for colleges to become more selective apparently overnight, without prior warning to their clientele or even to themselves. In some cases an admission office is seeking to admit students who will create a well-rounded class, not necessarily a class of well-rounded students.

- **WOULDN’T MY CHILD BE SAFEST JUST APPLYING TO LIKELY CHOICES, THEN?**

By no means! We believe it is important for every senior to “stretch” when applying to college. As we tell the students, we will always support a dream; however, common sense should prevail. Whereas the student who applies to too many easy choices may have trouble making a final decision in the spring, one whose

overly ambitious list produces a handful of denials ends up in a far more difficult position psychologically: “None of the ‘good’ schools wanted me, so the one or two that did accept me must be second-rate.” This situation is to be avoided at all cost!

- **WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE “STRETCH?”**

How far it makes sense to stretch depends on many factors, the most important of which is the student’s academic record. If his or her grades and scores are within the range of applicants a college usually accepts, then it may make sense to apply. But it is important to understand that at the most selective institutions, a superior academic record is only the starting point in the admission process. Because these institutions accept only a very small percentage of their applicants, sometimes as few as ten or fifteen percent, they look very hard at what else the student will bring to their campuses, especially since they receive many more qualified students (by the numbers) than they have room to admit. In short, the applicant with a 1600 SAT score (or 2400 using the old scale) and a 3.9 GPA who does nothing but study will usually not be accepted.

Conversely, neither an impressive extracurricular list, nor alumni connections, nor a friend on the admission committee, nor any other non-academic factor, will compensate for “numbers” that the college deems unacceptable.

- **WHAT DOES AN APPLICATION DEADLINE REALLY MEAN?**

Most applications are sent electronically. It is best not to wait until the last minute to send the application, because near the deadline many applications are being sent at the same time and you may experience difficulty getting your application through to the college. In the case of mailing, the published deadline is usually the date by which an application must be *postmarked*, not the date by which it must be received. There are exceptions, however, so read application instructions carefully and call the college if in doubt. Do not trust information in reference books! *We suggest treating every deadline as a receipt deadline.*

- **SHOULD I CALL THE COLLEGE MYSELF TO CHECK UP ON MY CHILD’S FILE?**

Most colleges will send a letter, postcard or email to the student indicating what is missing in order to complete his or her application. Don’t panic! **During peak season it often takes an admission office three weeks to record all the application materials they received, so it is possible, even likely, that your student may receive one of these “missing items” letters/postcards when the materials are in fact there.** If you receive one of these letters your son or daughter should call, since the student is the one applying to the school. The student should also let their counselor know so we can follow up as well.

In addition, we track each application packet we send. We also keep an updated computer file with information on every application packet we process.

## **EARLY DECISION/EARLY ACTION**

Most colleges offer two practices that warrant further explanation: Early Decision and Early Action.

**Early Action:** Students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the college’s regular response date. Students who are admitted under Early Action are not obligated to accept the offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1. Early Action deadlines tend to be November 1, November 15 or December 1. Under non-restrictive Early Action, a student may apply to other colleges. Please note that, currently, a number of colleges and universities have a restrictive early action policy: in that case, students are not allowed to apply to other colleges Early Action or Early Decision. Please be sure to check a college’s website to understand their policy.

**Early Decision:** Students make a commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, the student definitely will enroll. The student, parent and college counselor all sign an Early Decision Agreement form

assuring their understanding of this policy. While pursuing admission under an Early Decision plan, students may apply to other institutions, but may have only one Early Decision application pending at one time. Deadlines tend to be November 1, November 15 or January 1. Should students be accepted Early Decision, they must withdraw all of the previously submitted applications. We expect each student to honor a college's Early Decision policy.

## **THE APPLICATION**

First and foremost, the student, not a parent or other relative, should be the one filling out applications. Admission counselors can tell when someone other than the student completes the application, which in the past has resulted in the questioning of the student's admissibility. As we recently heard from a Dean of Admission at a selective institution, admission directors are looking for "the tone of an 18-year-old" when reading essays and reviewing application materials. The presence of too many voices can muddle this tone!

Many colleges use the Common Application while others use their own institutional form. Regardless, all colleges will provide their applicants with a list of required application components. Enclosed is a copy of the "Application Checklist" that outlines which components the student is responsible for and which ones we will submit from our office. Please be sure your student reads this enclosure and all application instructions carefully, as it is the students' responsibility to know the specific requirements of each institution to which they will apply.

Once students have decided to apply to a particular institution, they must inform their counselor in writing, using the blue form provided for this purpose no less than two weeks before a college's application deadline. **We will not send materials until we have received this written notification.** The two-week advance notice is essential to ensure that all recommendations and other materials are in order.

We are normally able to send students' materials before their earliest deadline. *In all cases, materials will be sent in advance of deadlines.* Please understand that sending college applications is extremely time consuming. Even though we have developed a highly efficient and accurate system for sending and logging documents, there are times when we must operate on a first-come, first-served basis. The student who comes in two days before a deadline and insists that transcripts be sent immediately will probably be told that processing will have to wait a day or two. **The best way to avoid this problem and the upset it causes is to be sure that we are notified of applications at least two weeks ahead of a deadline.**

Our office submits the school forms electronically to all colleges and universities on the Common Application. Electronic submission has been very successful, and has allowed us to assist colleges in processing student materials more efficiently while saving resources. We will have hard copies of all documents should packets need to be mailed. Application materials will be sent via mail to those institutions that do not use the Common Application or an online system.

A note on class rank: Most applications ask either the student or the counselor to provide a class rank figure. Since Lawrence Academy, like many small independent schools, does not rank, the student should simply say, "Lawrence Academy does not rank." (As part of each transcript we send grade distribution figures to help colleges understand the context of your child's academic experience). In situations where a rank is absolutely essential (such as applications to the service academies and scholarship applications), the College Counseling Office will provide an estimated decile figure, which we make clear is unofficial and approximate.

## **Parent Questionnaire**

Last spring, we mailed home a Parent Questionnaire. If you have not yet completed the questionnaire, it would be greatly appreciated if you would complete it and return to the College Counseling Office at your earliest convenience. Please find a copy of the Parent Questionnaire on Naviance Student or you can call Kimberly Healy (978-448-1557) or email her at [kbohlin@lacademy.edu](mailto:kbohlin@lacademy.edu) to receive a hard copy of it.

## **PSAT Day**

On PSAT Day the seniors will meet with Campus Outreach Services for about two hours where they will discuss having healthy relationships in college. After the work with Campus Outreach we will offer two hours of workshop time that will allow the seniors to work on their applications, essays and supplementary materials.

## **AP Tests**

While Lawrence Academy no longer offers courses with the Advanced Placement designation, students are still able to take Advanced Placement exams at Lawrence. These exams, which are given in May, are administered through the Studies Office, and students are alerted as to when they need to sign up. Classes that are designated as Honors can often prepare a student to take an Advanced Placement test, but it is possible that the class will not cover all of the necessary material. Students who want to take the test should get a test preparation book, and then meet with their current teacher to find out how much the syllabus of the class dovetails with the exam and how they can work together in order to prepare the student to take the exam.

## **Financing a College Education**

Being able to pay for a college education has been a hot topic over the last year as tuition costs continue to increase and the economy remains stagnant. We have created a page on our website that contains materials that will hopefully aid you as you consider the cost of paying for your child's education. It is important to have honest conversations early in the process with your student about the financial realities of attending college.

Please look for our September College Update, which contains timely information for your student.

We hope you find this information helpful and that you will feel free to contact us with any questions you have.

Best Regards,



Sean Sheehan  
Director of College Counseling  
With the College Counseling Staff