

LOWELL HIGH SCHOOL
POST-SECONDARY PLANNING GUIDE
FOR
STUDENTS AND FAMILIES



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GUIDANCE SERVICES

The goal of the Lowell High School Guidance Department is to work closely with students and their parents/guardians to make programmatic decisions that prepare the student for appropriate post-secondary education and career choices. The Guidance program has a developmental focus. Counselors work with faculty and staff to encourage students to work to their potential and to assist them setting both short- and long-term goals. Guidance Counselors provide a wide range of educational counseling services which allow students to access a full spectrum of options that meet their individual needs.

FRESHMAN ACADEMY

Sandra Martin
Rithy Uong

Kathryn Griffin

B HOUSE

Yliana Figueroa
Vannorath Sarin

C HOUSE

Fotine McCarthy
Jose Soares

D HOUSE

David Robinson
Sherrie Vlahakis

E HOUSE

Hai Cheng
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COLLEGE AND CAREER CENTER

It is critically important for every student to have a post-secondary plan upon graduation. The College and Career Center at Lowell High School works to provide students and their families with enhanced information and services that lead to post-secondary success. In addition to providing information about how to prepare for college, the College and Career Center also offers information about a variety of career options, training opportunities and interest inventories.

College and Career Counselors:

John Silva
Mary Payne

POST SECONDARY PLANNING

In today's world, it is critically important for every student to have a solid post-secondary plan upon graduation. At high schools across the country, students have five options available to them after high school: *four-year college, two-year or community college, career/technical training school, military service or employment*. All too often, students fail to plan for life beyond high school and they find themselves making a last minute decision about the future, instead of a well-informed choice. The information contained in this booklet will help parents and guardians to support students as they begin to formulate their four-year and post-secondary plans.

As a comprehensive high school, Lowell High's mission is to ensure that all students are "college ready" upon graduation. While not all students will choose a traditional two- or four-year college pathway, it remains a school-wide goal to provide all students with an educational foundation that allows for flexibility as they grow and mature. The information on the following pages provides an overview of the college planning timeline and includes both academic and social recommendations for students as they progress from Grade 9 to Grade 12.

The Language of College Planning

The college planning process has a language of its own. The following list, while not exhaustive, has been included to help you understand the many terms associated with applying to college.

Academic Rigor: Academic rigor is a term used by colleges and universities to define a challenging and relevant academic transcript that indicates in-depth mastery of demanding curricular concepts.

Standardized Tests: Standardized tests are an important part of the college admissions process and are used by colleges and universities to verify the accuracy of the grades on the transcript.

PSAT/NMSQT: The Practice SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is a standardized test administered to Juniors and some Sophomores. The PSAT/NMSQT provides preparation for the SAT and is the qualifying test for the National Merit Scholarship, which is available to all students who meet the eligibility criteria determined yearly by the College Board.

SAT: The SAT is a standardized test which measures the critical thinking skills students need for academic success in college. Students typically take the SAT once in the spring of the Junior year and once in the fall of the Senior year.

SAT Subject Tests: The SAT Subject Tests measure achievement in more than 20 content areas. Subject tests are required by select colleges and universities and are used as a predictor of achievement in a particular area.

ACT: The ACT Assessment is a standardized, curriculum-based test designed to measure college readiness and academic achievement in English, mathematics, reading and science. Colleges and universities will accept either SAT scores or ACT scores. There is no need for all students to take both tests.

Accuplacer: The Accuplacer is a common assessment and placement tool used by colleges and universities to determine a student's competency in the areas of math, English and reading.

TOEFL: The Test of English as a Foreign Language measures the ability of nonnative speakers of English to use and understand English as it is spoken, written and heard in college and university settings.

Financial Aid: Financial Aid is money given, paid or loaned to students and families to help pay for college or vocational training.

EFC: The Expected Family Contribution is the amount of money that a family is expected to pay toward the student's college education.

FAFSA: The Free Application for Federal Student Aid is the form used by colleges and universities to determine the family's EFC. All students applying for need-based financial aid should complete the FAFSA.

CSS Profile: A supplemental financial aid form used by some private colleges and universities to award private funds to students. The CSS Profile may only be completed on-line.

Common Application: The Common Application (informally known as the Common App) is an undergraduate college admission application that applicants may use to apply to any of 346 member colleges and universities in the United States.

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Post-secondary planning is a continuous process that begins in Grade 9. Students and families often think that planning for college begins in the second semester of the Junior year. In fact, students begin this process as they enter the Freshman Academy. Course advising and selection, which happens each Spring, is a student's first opportunity to make academic choices that will affect his/her future. In conjunction with guidance counselors and teachers, *students are given the opportunity to select courses that will help them meet their long-term career goals.* Parents are strongly encouraged to be active in the course selection process and to engage in frequent conversation with students about plans for the future. Goal setting is an important part of the educational process. Without long-term goals, students aren't able to connect their educational experience to their eventual success. Parents, teachers and guidance counselors must work together to ensure that each student sees the high school experience as relevant to future success.

GRADE 9

It may seem early to start planning for after high school, but 9th grade is the perfect opportunity to help your child develop good study habits and a sense of personal responsibility for his/her future. Here are some suggestions to help you get started:

Create a four-year high school plan

Once your child has settled into high school, introduce the idea of creating a long-term educational plan that relates to his/her career goals. Make sure your child understands what high school courses are required by colleges and suggest that he/she map out when these courses should be taken. Even if your child decides later on that college isn't right for him/her, a solid educational foundation will guarantee workplace readiness and personal success in a variety of settings.

Encourage career exploration

It is never too early to develop a career goal. Even if the goal changes, your child will be familiar with the process of setting goals. Ask your child's guidance counselor about Career Cruising, an online career exploration tool available to students at LHS.

Suggest extracurricular activities

Students who are involved in extracurricular activities perform better in the classroom than those who are not involved. With more than 40 student organizations and a top-rated athletic program, LHS offers students plenty of opportunities to engage outside of the classroom. Colleges are most interested in the depth of activity that a student pursues, not a laundry list of activities with no real involvement. Students should choose activities that they are truly interested in and look to take on a leadership role. Contact the Office of Student Activities or the Athletic Director for more detailed information

Meet with teachers and guidance counselors

Get involved in your child's education by attending Freshman Parent Night and the annual Parent/Teacher Open House. These are great opportunities to make a connection with your child's teachers and guidance counselor. Also consider joining the Friends of Lowell High School, LHS's parent organization. FLHS

meetings are an excellent forum for parent-to-parent communication and a way to share knowledge or concerns about issues at the high school.

GRADE 10

While the Junior year is often cited as the “most important year” in the college admissions process, it is during the Sophomore year that a student’s transcript takes shape. With that in mind it can not be emphasized enough that a student’s academic achievement on a day-to-day basis is the most important factor in whether or not that student is ultimately admitted to a particular college. Understanding that, here are some other things that can be done to continue post secondary planning:

Think critically about the future

A student should begin to take the results of the interest inventory taken in the 9th grade and incorporate those results with academic strengths, social and interpersonal strengths, and the goals the student has set for himself/herself. This is challenging work and the student will need help. Parents should be involved in this process and talk with your student about what they would like to see for themselves in the future.

Continue with academic rigor

In planning courses for Junior year the student should resist the urge to decrease the academic challenge in their schedule. Here are a few simple keys to maintaining academic rigor:

- Maintain a third year of a foreign language if you are able.
- If foreign language proves to be too difficult, substitute a second science or social studies course.
- Consider trying an Honors or AP course if you haven’t yet.

SAT Subject Tests

If a student already knows that one or more of the colleges they are interested in requires SAT Subject tests, it may be to the student’s benefit to take one or two at the end of Sophomore year if they are not going to pursue further study in that subject area while in high school. An example may be Biology if the student won’t be taking AP biology.

Summer Programs

Many colleges offer summer programs for high school students. These programs can provide an enjoyable learning experience and help to build a student’s resume. Students can find out about these programs in the College & Career Center or through specific college websites.

GRADE 11

Junior Year is an exciting time when students begin to feel an increased independence while at the same time there is an increase in what they are responsible for. Increased academic responsibility and social expectations are things that students should take a lead role in. With your support, the college search process is another activity that the student should drive and take ownership of. Lowell High school has designed a series of activities for you and your student to help you throughout this process.

PSAT

In mid-October all Junior students will take the PSAT during school. This test serves as a preliminary SAT and is designed to give the student and parent an approximation of how the student will perform when they

take the SAT in the Spring. The PSAT is designed just as the SAT with two exceptions: there is no essay section in the PSAT and the total number of test sections is fewer.

My College Quick Start

As part of the benefit of taking the PSAT, students also gain access to My College Quick Start, an online SAT preparation tool from College Board. Through My College Quick Start students are able to view and sort their PSAT results, access practice questions in targeted areas of weakness, take a full length official practice SAT, and sign up to have an official SAT Question of the Day emailed to them.

College Search

By the time PSAT results are returned to students in early January each student should soon have their two and a half year GPA as well as their PSAT results. These two pieces of information can be used together to help shape the academic component of the search process. Students should look to find schools where their estimated SAT scores and their current GPA place them within the academic profile of the colleges they are considering.

While academic factors are a key component in the college search process, students should also be considering a variety of lifestyle and learning style factors:

- Do I want to be able to visit home or friends on weekends or would I be happy at a more distant school where I only come home once or twice a year?
- Do I learn better and do I prefer a smaller learning community or am I interested in a large university that may offer more options?
- Are there sports/club/activities or academic programs that are very important to me and without which I would not enjoy my college experience?

These and other questions should be considered when working to shape a student's initial college list. Then it is time to get out and visit campuses to see what a college truly looks like.

Standardized Testing Schedule

Once a student has reviewed their PSAT scores and completed an initial college search it is time to put together a standardized testing schedule, including SAT preparation. Students should review the standardized testing requirements of the schools they are considering and develop a schedule that will allow them to meet all of those requirements in time for the application deadline in their Senior year. Most students will take the SAT two times while in high school, once at the end of their Junior year and once at the beginning of Senior year. If any of the schools the student is interested in require SAT Subject Tests then these must also be factored in. Below is a typical standardized testing schedule:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| ▪ Feb-Apr | Prepare and Practice |
| ▪ May-June | SAT Reasoning (& Subject) Test |
| ▪ July-Sept | Review results and prep |
| ▪ Oct-Nov | SAT Reasoning (& Subject) Test |
| ▪ Dec-Jan | Last chance SAT |

SAT Prep

Between administrations of the PSAT and the subsequent SATs, students should plan to complete some for of SAT prep. This can come in the form of the free resources available online at collegeboard.com, using a book that can be purchased at any bookstore, or taking an SAT prep class either in school or after school.

While this can seem overwhelming the LHS Guidance Department and the College and Career Center have scheduled group meetings with parents and students beginning in March.

GRADE 12

Senior year arrives with great excitement and hope for admission to all of the schools that a student applies to. Unfortunately, there are two things that can bring down those great expectations before they ever take flight: disorganization and missed deadlines. Over the course of a student's high school career they should become more skilled in maintaining organization and meeting deadlines. These skills and your support will be essential as they proceed.

Finalize the college list

The Senior year is marked by a shift from college search to college application. The first step in completing the college search is to finalize the list of schools that the student will apply to. This involves comparing campuses, academic programs, cost and other factors that are important to the student and family. Attending the LHS sponsored Merrimack Valley College Fair and scheduling college visits are two great way to get additional information. College visits should be schedule on weekends but students are allowed three excused absences to visit colleges. Ideally the listed would be narrowed down to five to seven schools that are divided into three categories: Reach, Realistic, and Safety.

College Application

Once the list of schools has been finalized it is time to move toward completing the application. A typical application includes a number of pieces:

- The application form- This can be completed in paper or online and includes primarily demographic and descriptive data
- The essay- Many colleges require an essay or personal statement of one to two pages. The application will specify the topic to be written about. Each year, Senior English teachers work with students to refine their essay. Additionally, there are after school workshops to provide students extra assistance.
- Activities list- A resume style document listing a student's extra-curricular activities, leadership roles, and level of involvement.
- Letters of recommendation- Some colleges require one or two letters of recommendation, preferably from an academic teacher who taught the student in the Junior or Senior year. Occasionally a college will specify the subject area the teacher should represent, or will allow a non-academic letter of recommendation. In any case, directions should be followed precisely.
- Transcript- A school generated document that lists all courses, level, and grades students have received in high school. The transcript should be requested from a student's house office.

Admissions Programs

Whatever the elements of a completed application are for a school, the most important factor is meeting the deadline. Colleges set their own admissions deadlines and they fall into five general categories:

- Early Decision- Students apply early, often by early to mid-November, and If a student is admitted under this program they are contractually bound to attend that school.
- Early Action- Students must apply early, often by mid-November or early December. Students are informed early of their admissions decision but are not bound to attend.
- Regular Decision- Students are required to apply by a set deadline, often early to mid-January. All admissions decisions are mailed out at one time, typically early April.

- Rolling Admission- Students are allowed to apply as early as October and admissions decisions are mailed out within six to eight weeks on a rolling basis.
- Open Admission- Students are allowed to apply as early as October and all students are admitted contingent upon high school graduation.

Financial Aid

Once the elements of the admissions process have been completed, attention should be turned to the financial aid process. Financial aid can be comprised of three components:

- Loans- Money that must be paid back, typically after a student ceases full time enrollment.
- Grants/Scholarships- Money that is given to the student based on meeting certain financial or academic criteria. This money does not need to be repaid.
- Work Study- This is money that is set aside for the student to earn through an on-campus job. Students are responsible for working sufficient hours to earn the maximum amount of money allotted to them.

All schools require the FAFSA to be completed in order to be considered for financial aid. A small number of mostly private schools require a second form, the CSS Profile. These forms require financial information from the student and parent and should be filed as soon after January 1st of the student's senior year as possible.

Student Athletes

Students interested in participating in intercollegiate sports at the Division I or Division II level must register with the NCAA Clearinghouse by complete the application for initial eligibility at www.ncaaclearinghouse.org. This website also provides information about recruitment of student athletes, academic requirements for participation in NCAA sports, and a list of schools sponsoring NCAA sports.

College Board Fee Waiver program

The College Board provides fee waivers for eligible students to take the SAT, SAT Subject Test, apply to up to four colleges, and a reduction in cost of the AP Test. In order to become eligible, students and families must meet certain income guidelines or be involved in the Free or Reduced lunch program at LHS. (Fee waivers are also available for students interested in taking the ACT)

LHS Honors Night Scholarship Program

Each February more than 100 scholarships totaling over \$_____ are made available exclusively to Lowell High School Seniors. All students receive a copy of the listing of scholarships and are encouraged to apply. Awards are presented at the annual LHS Honors Night Program

Helpful Websites

www.collegeboard.com
www.fafsa.ed.gov
www.commonapp.org
www.fastweb.com

Important Dates:

Senior College Information Night	Fall
Merrimack Valley College Fair	Fall
PSAT	Fall
Financial Aid Night	Winter

Junior College Planning Night
Honor Awards Night

Spring
Spring

Please contact the College Relations Counselors, John Silva, at 978-937-8915 or Mary Payne at 978-275-6306 for specific dates and times.

While on the College Board website (www.collegeboard.com) students are also able to review preliminary college matches and career information based upon information they entered when taking the PSAT. This college and career information can be used as a starting point for a student's complete college search. While many students have a dream school for many reasons (they love the sports teams, a parent or sibling attended, they love the mascot, etc.) a student's college search should be based on more personal and relevant criteria.