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## Lafayette's College Admissions Advisor Is Resistance Futile? - Avoiding Three Misconceptions in the College Application Process

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regard to athletics, minority recruitment, and donations. The more 'average' student should have scores at the upper end or above the range.

### #2. Applying for Financial Aid Won't Affect the Admissions Decision.

When a college says it is "need blind" it probably is - to a point. Need blind means that admission decisions are made without knowledge of a family's application for need-based aid. But the number of colleges that remain need-blind is shrinking and those who claim to be may resort to other ways to find applicants who can afford full tuition. They may admit more students, construct long waitlists, and then take need into account when pulling from these lists. If there is a choice between two virtually-identical applicants, the admit letter goes to the student who can pay full tuition.

How to resist: At the end of the day if you need or want financial aid you must apply for it. In that case the best strategy is to pick schools where the student would land in the top 25 percent of the incoming freshman class. If you want more money, apply to schools that find the student attractive. Regardless of what admissions representatives or stylish brochures say, the student with the higher test scores and GPA will get more money. Colleges like to attract higher achieving students ... remember, it's all about the rankings.

### #3. It's a Level Playing Field

One of the most frequent misconceptions is that colleges are looking for a well-rounded student. In fact they are generally looking for a well-rounded class. They want some real scholars to shine in academics, superb athletes, some wealthy applicants whose parents can build a library wing and legacy students to keep alumni happy. For this reason the applicant who is not special in any one category has a tougher time 'getting into' highly selective schools.

How to resist: This one is easy. Your kids are special to you and that's what really counts. Since students

Widespread misconceptions flourish in the college admissions world, providing advantages to colleges but often hurting applicants and their families. You can resist falling prey to these preventable and often expensive mistakes by becoming more well-informed.

### #1. Standardized test scores are not that important.

Colleges today increasingly rely on test scores when making admissions decisions because more kids are applying to more colleges each year. This due in part to intensive marketing by colleges - they purchase mailing lists from the testing industry and woo students by writing personal messages and offering "priority" applications with fee waivers - it is also due to growing anxiety students feel about getting into a good college, so they hedge their bets and apply to more schools.

Schools respond by using test scores to cut through large applicant pools. Of course, no college is actually going to admit this. They talk about holistic reviews and how they read every application. This is largely true, but only after they make the first cut. Colleges work hard to acquire huge applicant pools. In contemporary college admissions, colleges want to reject more applicants so their admit rates fall, making them appear more selective. More rejections lead to higher rankings.

How to resist: Students should prepare carefully for standardized tests, and see where you land. Then prep and test again if you think you can do better. Then, review the numbers realistically and resist the temptation to apply to schools where you are unlikely to be admitted. Nearly every college publishes the range of SAT scores that applicants in the last entering class achieved. These are often reported as a range of scores from the 25th to 75th percentile. So 50 percent of last year's entering class scored within this range. If the range is 1180 to 1340 (for SAT Critical Reading and Math), a 1250 score might look good, but in reality, the lower end of these scores are reserved for students with qualities that cater to the school's special interests with

naturally gravitate to activities they love, parents should not force them to intensively focus on extra academics, sports and many outside activities because it 'looks good on the college application.' Instead, encourage students to explore activities that are meaningful to them without making it a chore or tying it to 'getting in.'

#### Resistance Is Possible

There are right-fit colleges for every student. There are usually quite a few. But the right school will be hard to find if you focus on the most selective schools. This can be a costly mistake. The average student takes 5.6 years to graduate. So if your child attends a \$50,000/year college and takes an extra year and a half to graduate, that's an extra \$75,000. If they don't graduate at all, it's a bigger mistake.

Instead of relying on popular rankings which reflect the subjectivity of editors and statistics that can be manipulated by colleges, students and their families should engage early in smarter research. It takes more time and effort, but it's worth it.

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