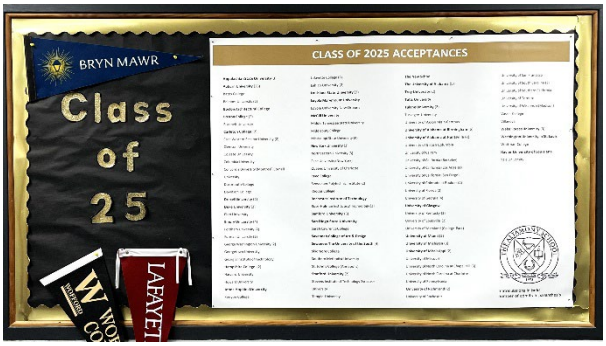
College Prestige: Is it Worth it?

By Mia Mayo

At Altamont, there are enormous pressures when it comes to college decisions and preparations. Students younger than fifteen are already working towards Ivy league acceptances, but … why?



Like college prep schools across the nation, Altamont offers a challenging course load, outstanding extracurricular activities, and of course, the potential to attend high ranking universities. In this environment, it's important to examine a key question: is it worth it? Worth the burnout, the stress of completing twenty college applications before January, and the disappointment that comes with rejection, not to mention the cost of college tuition.

For starters, let's define an Ivy League school. The Ivies are eight schools known for academic rigor, excellent career pathways, networking opportunities, and of course, low acceptance rates. Gaining admission to an Ivy League school is a nuanced process, with each candidate trying to stand out from the rest. Research from *Collegevine* suggests that a rigorous courseload, compelling CommonApp essay, and unique extracurriculars are marks of a good applicant, but to what lengths do students go to achieve this?

Burnout is a real struggle among high school students. As students place value on academic validation, their free time can begin to dwindle as stress rises — a phenomenon worsened by teens' general anxiety in this digital age. However, for some, acceptance to an Ivy League is not only manageable, but worth it. The return on investment from a prestigious institution can be rewarding, as it often provides success later in life, particularly for people with degrees in computer science and business.

Still, an Ivy isn't the only answer if you're looking for a prestigious school, and it's important to remember that success is not purely dependent on your college. Amanda Hardie, head of College Counseling at Altamont, says, "prestige for some students is very important, but for others it may be location, cost, or career development. What is most important at the end of the day is finding a place where a student will be successful academically and socially."

Countless people from diverse backgrounds and collegiate experiences thrive in their careers without attending Ivies or even top 20 schools. Tim Prince is President and CEO of Carpenter Media Group. He oversees the operation of local newspapers and digital news sites across the United States and Canada. His job involves frequent travel and meeting with leaders of local teams, small-town newsrooms, and national-level leadership development teams. According to Prince, a graduate of the University of Alabama, UA "offered a large, energetic campus, strong academics, and a sense that anything was possible. Alabama prepared me [for my career] by placing me in a large, dynamic environment where I had to learn independence, accountability,

and how to navigate different personalities and perspectives. Those skills — learning how to communicate, manage responsibility, and keep moving forward even when things aren't clear — are incredibly important in leadership and in life." Prince says and his example shows that what you gain from college can come from strengths besides academics and can arise in unanticipated ways; that's the beauty of college. Your experience will never be exactly what you expect, and with an open mind, college — no matter where you go — can be what you make it.

He offers one more piece of advice for high school students: "The pressure to pick the 'perfect' major, school, or career path can feel overwhelming, especially on a campus like Altamont, where students are talented and driven. But life isn't always linear. What matters most is learning how to work hard, stay curious, treat others well, and keep moving forward. Those habits will serve you far longer than any single decision you make at 18 or 19."

No matter what your college path looks like, one thing is clear. Your university does not define you, and every person's journey through high school and beyond will undoubtedly be different. A quote — currently trending across social media and often attributed to Theodore Roosevelt — is applicable in all aspects of life, but especially to students facing their application journey: "Comparison is the thief of joy."