

# Counseling Communiqué

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Counseling Department  
<http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/counseling/index/shtml>

## The Nature of Boys

A lecture review of Dr. Michael Thompson, author of [Raising Cain: Boys in Focus](#)

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It's true; there really are fundamental differences between boys and girls in how they think and act. All right, not an entirely groundbreaking revelation, but an important component for understanding boys in our education system. At a recent lecture, "The Nature of Boys," Dr. Michael Thompson painted a fascinating backdrop of some issues impacting boys' lives. Here is some of what I learned.

The United States leads all western countries in the amount of exposure our youth have to violence. The profile for violent children began to change at the time of the Columbine school shooting. Subsequently, schools have implemented more strict anti-violence policies to help protect students and put parents at ease. The public as a whole seems more in tune with violence in all its forms whether it is seen on TV, a breaking headline to a tragedy, or in the daily play of our children's youth, we are all on high alert. Dr. Thompson feels that this hyper-vigilance on violence may actually be negatively impacting what was once seen as normal or traditional male play. Where girls develop social and linguistic skills naturally at a faster pace, males develop more quickly in the realms of athleticism and dexterity. Boys naturally score much higher than girls on tests of competition and dominance tendencies. Historically, boys' play of aggression, hunting and wrestling fell well within normal limits of appropriate behavior in preparing them for traditional male roles.

So where do we draw the line? Are we being unfair in asking boys to change what has been instilled in them throughout history? Should we ban all violent video games and any toy resembling a gun? Dr. Thompson argues that there is no relationship between childhood make-believe fun play and actual adult violence, but this certainly will not calm the fears of the masses. Are we stifling boys' imagination and capacity to learn and engage in a way they are naturally intended? Where is the middle road of compromise in assuring the safety of all our children and the assurance that our sons will turn out "all right"?

Whether you believe in Dr. Thompson's theory of the origins of an innate quality of aggressive play in boys he does seem to be right on target in thinking of a logical solution. He proposes that teenage boys who seemingly choose not to communicate with their parents or do so only in short unintelligible comments are simply being asked in the wrong way. He suggests that boys often feel threatened by the questions being asked of them. When asked, "How was math today?" a boy may feel as if he is being evaluated, as if he needs to measure up. Instead, Dr. Thompson suggests asking questions that provoke answers that only your son can answer, where he is your consultant, the expert. Try asking, "Do you like your math teacher? How does he/she compare to your teacher from last year?" In this way, the boy is able to talk about some of his own experiences and thoughts without feeling as if he is being judged (and in the case of his father, by another man). Dr. Thompson encourages all parents to be authentic and relevant. All children need to know that they are being heard and have a say in their daily lives. Too often we forget to simply listen and respond in a way that our advice and wisdom can be heard. Have faith in your boy's capacity to learn and reason, and keep asking questions.

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### Dates of Interest April

- 3 Term 3 ends
- 4 ACTs administered
- 10 Good Friday—no school
- 15 Report Card distribution during homeroom
- 17 Health and Fitness Day
- 20 Spring Recess begins
- 27 School Reopens



### Coming in May

- 1 Senior Community Service Day
- 2 SATs administered
- 25 Memorial Day—no school



# Information for College-Bound Juniors

## The College Search



Finding colleges that are a good match for you, estimating your chances of being admitted and ultimately having to choose where to enroll is difficult but fun. There are no shortcuts to finding the answers to these questions, but it is worth as much time and effort as you can devote to this task.

Start out by setting aside some quiet time to reflect frankly on your strengths and weaknesses. Take a few minutes to daydream. Think about and visualize your ideal college. What does your vision of the “perfect” college look like? Remember, though there are thousands of schools out there, you may find that your “perfect” school does not exist. Identifying what characteristics make a place work for you will aid you tremendously. On a piece of paper write out a description of your college Utopia. Finally, focus on the results of your description. What are the things that stick out about your Utopia? What distinguishes your Utopia U from Run of the Mill U and Ain’t Gonna Happen U?

Although you may identify a first choice college, it’s a rare person for whom it can be said that there exists but a single best college. Your final list of colleges should include a number of colleges, any one of which you’d be happy to attend if admitted. Keep in mind that most students end up very much liking the college they attend, regardless of whether it had been their first choice when they applied. There is no such thing as the perfect college.

It is also a good idea to focus at least as much attention on the overall quality of a college as on the quality of the particular department or academic area in which you may now be especially interested. Experience indicates that a fair number of students ultimately major in an academic area other than the one they had in mind when entering.

If at all possible, you should visit (see article below) the campuses of the colleges in which you are most interested, attend classes, and talk with some currently enrolled students. Keep in mind the fable about the seven blind philosophers, each of whom, upon touching a different part of the elephant, described a different animal. So, too, is the same university likely to be perceived, at least in part, quite differently by its various members.

## Campus Visits

There are lots of ways to find out about a college, from web sites to college fairs, but nothing beats the test of going to a college and seeing it for yourself. Here are some ideas to help you make the most of a campus visit.

**Call the admissions office in advance.** When you call the admissions office, tell them the time of day and the date you’d like to visit. Also, find out about lining up an interview or attending an information session.

**Read up on the college and think about questions.** Go back through the information you’ve collected about the college. Check out the resources in the Counseling Center and visit the A-B web site ([ab.mec.edu/abrhs/counseling/index.shtml](http://ab.mec.edu/abrhs/counseling/index.shtml)).

**Talk to as many students as you can** and don’t be bashful about asking questions. Have a meal in the cafeteria and pick up a copy of the student newspaper.

**Prepare for the interview.** If you have scheduled an interview, take along your list of questions. You’ll probably be asked about your academic background, interests, hobbies, goals and why you’re interested in the college, so be ready to talk about that. As with any interview, be on time, or call ahead if you know you’ll be delayed. (See article on the next page.)

**Take time to look around on your own.** Take some time to explore the campus on your own and absorb the atmosphere.

**Write down your impressions** while they’re still fresh in your mind. Were the people you met friendly? Did they answer your questions fully and candidly? Did you like the social atmosphere?



# Information for College-Bound Juniors

## The College Interview



Most colleges do not require interviews, but many encourage them, and some even make them mandatory. Sometimes alumni conduct them; sometimes the interviewers are college admissions office staff, including undergraduate interns. But the routine is similar in most cases, and any college applicant who has a chance to be interviewed by a college high on her list should do so. An interview is not designed to help the college decide how smart the applicant is. It is a search for personal qualities that will assure that no matter how brilliant the student's academic record, he can deal with other people and create a congenial and productive atmosphere on campus.

Here are some tips and warnings. If you are going to be late for an interview, just call ahead and let the interviewer know. Dress neatly, but formal business dress is not necessary. What kind of questions do interviewers ask? There are all kinds, but they generally come down to inquiries about three personal characteristics—inquisitiveness, originality and demeanor. Many interviewers will ask what you have been reading outside of class and what you think about those works. They will also ask your views on current events, or teenage culture or even educational practices. They are usually not testing what you know of the details of such topics, but seeing if you have thought about such matters.

The ultimate point of the interview is to show that you are a good person—polite and honest and with a sense of humor about the unnerving admissions process. That means you have to be, as you have heard several hundred times, yourself! Lastly, have some of your own questions, a requirement for any good interview.

## Information for Seniors



## The Financial Aid Award Letter

Each college to which a student applies and is accepted for admission will send notification of its financial aid offer to students who have applied for financial aid. Most schools will show their full costs, the family's expected contribution and the difference between these two figures which represents financial aid eligibility or demonstrated financial need. The notification then lists a breakdown of the types of aid the school is offering: grants, scholarships, loans and college work study. If a college's notification letter does not include the total cost for the upcoming school year, they can be contacted to provide this information.

When a student has financial aid information from all of the colleges to which he or she has been accepted, the family can compare the kind of assistance and the bottom line costs. If the student's first choice college has offered an acceptable aid package, the student should sign the award letter and return it to accept the offer. Usually there is not a lot of room for negotiation in financial aid. If the college clearly is interested in having the student attend, it will probably give its best offer to be sure of getting that student. An award of more grant money from another college is not likely to make much difference unless the student is one they definitely don't want to lose. In most other cases they will have made their commitments of money to students and do not have the flexibility of making significantly more aid available to other students.

Money may be available for some special or extraordinary change of circumstances that may occur, such as the sudden death of a parent or loss of employment. If a family feels that something has been missed or ignored in the consideration process, an appeal can be made. A letter should be written to the financial aid director explaining the circumstances and indicate what you think the need is. Then follow up with a call several days after sending the letter to ensure it has been received and answer any questions.



## Yawkey Scholars Program

The Yawkey Foundation is offering a scholarship for students in eastern Massachusetts to help meet the rising costs of an undergraduate college education. This program is a need-based scholarship that will give preference to students with unique life circumstances that have made study and achievement challenging. The deadline is April 15, 2009. ([www.sms.scholarshipamerica.org/yawkey](http://www.sms.scholarshipamerica.org/yawkey))

# Bulletin Board

## Health Awareness and Physical Fitness Day

The ABRHS Physical Education Department will host the fifth annual Health Awareness and Fitness Day on April 17th during all lunches. There will be interactive presentations, information booths and exhibits on the importance of staying active and leading a healthy life-style. For more information, please contact Suzanne Hoag at [shoag@mail.b.mec.edu](mailto:shoag@mail.b.mec.edu).



## Boston Area National College Fair

Over 350 colleges and universities have registered for the Boston Area National College Fair, sponsored by the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, to be held at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in Boston on Tuesday, April 7th (from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.) and on Wednesday, April 8th (from 9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.). Students who think this may be helpful are encouraged to attend in the evening. Students will not be given field trip status for the day if they choose to go during the school day.

**Boston Gap Year Fair**  
Sunday, April 5, 2009  
1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
Noble & Greenough School  
10 Campus Drive Dedham, MA  
Sponsored by Dynamy  
[www.internshipyear.org](http://www.internshipyear.org)