

College Q and A - Special Edition

Last week I was asked by a staff member at a large public university, to expand on one of my previous College Q and A questions. There were actually two similar questions, one dealing with a Mom filling out admission applications and the other asking whose responsibility it is to fill out the FAFSA. The issue with both being that students need to be the ones to take care of themselves and getting through the college application process.

Over the last nearly two decades, I have worked with literally thousands of high school and college students. I've seen students who actually enrolled in the wrong major because they were sent to the academic department listed as their major on their admission application — the one they hadn't filled out! Then there are the (college) students who go to meet with their advisor about what classes to take next semester, and when asked if they knew how to use the online enrollment system reply, "No, but my Mom does it for me anyway". There are the parents who make excuses for their child's lack of involvement in the college selection process. And there was the new freshman whose mother (I'm not sure where the Dads are in all of this...) made nearly 150 changes to her class schedule between enrollment in June, and the start of school in August.

What I've described above is called being a "helicopter parent" — always hovering around your child to protect them and fix things for them, do things for them. I doubt anyone actually thinks they are one, but these people are.

Here's an example of what happened to a student whose mother set up her campus computer access (something done online before school to activate the campus e-mail address and access campus networks). When she went to enroll she didn't know how to use the online enrollment system AND had no idea what her password was to get into it. She enrolled on one of the last enrollment days of the summer because she hadn't read the e-mails she'd been sent about enrolling earlier (enrolling late usually equals a bad schedule). She missed the opportunity to join a sorority (she had expressed an interest) because she didn't read the e-mail she was sent and missed the deadline. It's unclear if she missed anything else, like financial aid and scholarship information requests, housing issues, information from her academic department, etc. that were likely also in her inbox. Rest assured it took somebody a good deal of time to show her how to access her e-mail and campus networks, as well as answer all the questions she could have had answered if she'd only set up her own computer access.

Frankly, I'm always unsure who blame when I encounter a student who obviously hasn't done their part of the application/enrollment process — the student or the parent.

Students, I've heard lots of excuses, but not a good one yet. You're probably just being lazy or irresponsible (sorry). And don't try the "I'm too busy" routine — you may think you are, but you're not. If you're too busy to do the application process for college while you're in high school, you'll probably be too busy to study while you're in college. If you don't know what you're doing and are worried you'll do something wrong, I have two pieces of advice; 1. Don't worry about it. It's time-consuming, but not that difficult, and 2. If you run into something you don't know how to do or answer, ask a family member, high school counselor, or call the school whose application you're filling out.

Parents, you are either allowing or causing your child to stay dependent on you, and you are failing to recognize an opportunity for them to grow by figuring out how to do something they don't initially understand or want to do. You should definitely HELP them, but not do it for them. You hold all the power here. Don't let them convince you to do it for them, and don't you try to convince them it's okay for you to do it.

Send your questions to lance@collegeanswerguy.com and visit <http://www.collegeanswerguy.com> and <http://www.collegeprep101.com>.