



How to Deal with 5 Pesky Questions About the College Application Process

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By [Kayla Riley \(/kayla-riley\)](#)

As you work toward the glorious day when you will walk onstage with that polyester cap and gown to proudly accept your high school diploma, people may be asking a lot of annoying questions, ranging from how you plan to pay for school to how high your SAT scores are. The truth is, it's none of their business! Her Campus talked to etiquette consultant Melissa Leonard of [Establish Yourself \(http://establishyourselfny.com/index.html\)](http://establishyourselfny.com/index.html) to learn how to deal with five of those pesky questions about the college application process while staying calm, cool and collected.

Scenario 1: Money matters

Impressed by the top school you've just gotten into, a classmate asks — how are you going to pay for that?

It's no secret that paying for college is difficult. No matter what your financial situation is, the high cost of tuition at your school of choice can be a burden. It's only natural for people to be curious about how you plan to make it through your college education without signing away your first-born child, Rumpelstiltskin-style.

So how can you avoid this ultra-personal question without seeming rude?

"Say, 'Yes, college has become expensive these days, hasn't it? I am so grateful that I have the opportunity to attend [name of college or university] and quickly change the subject,'" Leonard said. "You certainly don't want to be perceived as privileged and ungrateful, nor do you want to get into the nitty gritty of the stresses of financial aid, partial scholarship or just plain racking up the debt with loans."

When a classmate asked Michelle King, now a junior at Emerson (and Her Campus editorial intern), if she could afford her school's price tag, she was quick to explain her decision in a short and sweet way.

"I'd explain that, while Florida State [her less expensive second choice] is a great school, I thought I could get a more specialized education at Emerson," Michelle said. She explained why Emerson was an investment in her future, so the focus was no longer 'how,' but 'why.'



Scenario 2: Judgmental Judy

While at a friend's house, your friend's curious mom shares a rumor she's heard about your school of choice — isn't that a party school?

There are hundreds of reasons to choose a certain school. Maybe you've fallen in love with the campus, or maybe your older siblings have gone there and loved it. Or maybe what you've heard or seen about the social life appeals to you. Despite what you've seen in brochures and heard on college tours, the social scene is a major part of college life, and it can make or break your experience.

While it's important that you choose your school based on outstanding academics and exciting extra-curricular activities, you want to make the most of your college years socially, too.

"I've definitely gotten the question, 'That's a big party school, isn't it?' which can get old after a while," says Jessica Salerno, a junior at Ohio University and Her Campus contributing writer.

For Jessica, the best way to deal with this tiring question is to talk to people about her major, and other reasons she's excited to be there.

"Sometimes even being a little sarcastic helps get people off your back. 'I sure hope so! Because all I plan to do is drink, drink, drink and never go to class,' with a smile on your face usually gets a laugh," Jessica says.

Scenario 3: Major minder

At your next family gathering, your aunt (who has always not-so-secretly wanted you to be a teacher) asks — what are you going to major in?



When someone asks you such a personal and difficult question, it's best to answer honestly but briefly. If you have a good idea of what your major will be, say so. Let them know what interests you about it and what the colleges you're considering have to offer you in that field. The person asking this might not realize that they're being nosy, but obviously they care enough about you to ask what you're interested in.

"There is no shame in saying, 'I am going to decide that down the road' or 'I have no idea just yet,'" Leonard said. "Many people change their major repeatedly in college."

Even if you have no idea which direction your chosen path is going to take yet, saying so will only open you up for more questions. Simply say that you're still figuring it out, and mention an area you're interested in. Doing so will show that you are motivated and curious, not a slacker for not having declared a major.



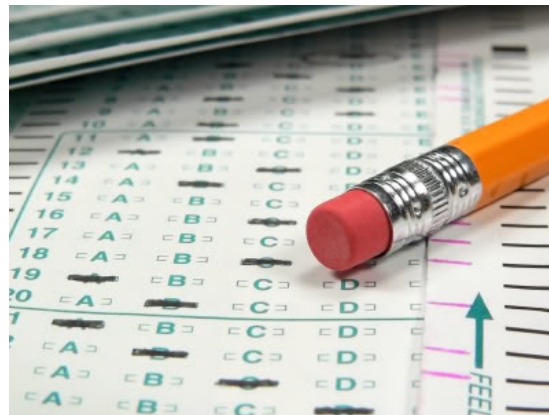
"Never feel like you have to make up a major to sound worldly or decisive," Leonard said. "This will just come back to bite you when they run into you in a year or so."

Scenario 4: Score scanner

Now that test stress is over and the results are in, a classmate asks you what you got on your SATs.

Whether you scored in the 98th percentile or your standardized test scores are something you'd soon forget, how well you did on these dreaded tests is between you, your parents and the admissions officer at your dream school.

Next time someone asks this prying question, you don't have to give a number. If you are happy with your results, say so. If not, you can admit you didn't do as well as you'd hoped, but know that SAT scores aren't the only thing that matters in the admissions process.



High school seniors are often eager to compare their scores with others, especially if they did particularly well or poorly. If you'd rather not share how you match up, you can reference this [ABC News article](http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/WhosCounting/story?id=98373&page=1#.TtBMmOenEw) (<http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/WhosCounting/story?id=98373&page=1#.TtBMmOenEw>), which questions the correlation between high SAT scores and overall success in college. It suggests that while SAT scores should not be ignored in the admissions process, they are a vague indicator of overall knowledge. A high SAT score doesn't always mean success in college, just as a low one doesn't mean you're doomed.

Scenario 5: Essay inquiries

If you've had your college application essay topic in mind since you graduated middle school and stopped publicly liking N'Sync, congratulations. But if you're like most high school seniors, you struggled a bit to write a stand-out essay that will earn you admission to your dream school. Getting started on an essay can be very difficult, read examples first and get great ideas on essay topics for a graduate school essay or [medical school essays from admissionsessays.com](http://www.admissionsessays.com/medical_school.html) (http://www.admissionsessays.com/medical_school.html)



. The road ahead will be less stressful when this is complete and your confident about your essay. When this common question comes around, you might not want to dredge up memories of long stressful nights writing and even longer, more nerve-wracking days of waiting for the final answer to your

application. In that case, try giving a brief, specific answer. The College Board suggests that you word your essays strongly and keep a personal focus. The same can apply to this question. For example, say, "I wrote about how the documentary 'Food, Inc.' encouraged me to pursue a career in nutrition." Answering the question clearly and confidently is key. "Many times, adults and peers alike forget their filter and ask intrusive questions that can put you on the spot," said Leonard. She recommends a discrete but forward approach to answering all tricky college-related questions. With these tips, you can finally deal with those awkward questions that are bound to come up over the next few months. How have you dealt with questions like these in the past? Let us know below!

Sources

Melissa Leonard, Etiquette/Protocol Consultant at [Establish Yourself](http://establishyourselfny.com/index.html) (<http://establishyourselfny.com/index.html>)

Jessica Salerno, Ohio University collegiette™ 2013

Michelle King, Emerson collegiette™, 2013

[The College Board](http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/essay-skills/9406.html) (<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/apply/essay-skills/9406.html>)

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2. [Jess and Katie to the Rescue! You can mess it up; we can work it out.](#) ([/love/jess-and-katie-rescue-you-can-mess-it-we-can-work-it-out](#))
3. [Diapers and Degrees: Moms in College](#) ([/life/diapers-and-degrees-moms-college](#))
4. [The Do's and Don'ts of the "Additional Information" Section on College Applications](#) ([/high-school/dos-and-donts-additional-information-section-college-applications](#))

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