

## College costs are stacking up

To afford books, housing and more, smart students should learn how to stretch dollars

09:47 AM CDT on Monday, August 14, 2006

By IEVA M. AUGSTUMS / The Dallas Morning News

Everyone knows college tuition costs have been soaring. If you're going to college this fall, presumably you've already worked out how you're paying for tuition.

What you may not have fully grasped is how much the other costs of college have risen – costs for things like books and supplies, travel, room and board, and other incidentals.

According to the College Board, in the last five years, for resident students at four-year public universities, tuition and fees have increased by more than 50 percent. At the same time, the costs for books and supplies have increased by one-fourth, and room and board and transportation have each risen by one-third.

Fortunately, savvy students know there are ways to save. And they know that successfully managing your finances in college is one of the most important lessons you'll come away with.

"When kids are living at home, they are used to certain things," says Cindy Bailey, executive director of education finance services at the College Board. "At college, things are different. ... There are standard-of-living costs."

The national average for personal expenses at four-year public colleges is about \$200 a month, not including books and supplies, according to the College Board.

You can spend more. Or you can spend less. But you have to live within your means.

"Think of it this way," says Steve Loven, director of the College Planning Center in West Des Moines, Iowa. "You want to live like a college student today so you don't have to live like one when you graduate."

The main decision that will have a big impact on your spending is where you will live.

Living in the residence halls with a seven-day meal plan is the most frugal move, because your basic needs are taken care of. But there's no point buying the meal plan if you're going to break down and order a pizza several nights a week.

Robert Alviar, a University of North Texas senior who lived on campus for his first two years, dealt with that issue.

"When people wanted to go out to dinner, I stayed in because of my meal plan," he said. "You figure out what works best for you."

If you live in a fraternity or sorority house, your costs are also fixed, although probably at a higher level.

If you live off campus in an apartment, it's possible to keep costs down by having roommates and cooking your own meals, but you also face many more unexpected costs and temptations to spend money.

Mr. Alviar experienced that, too. He lived in an apartment last year.

"Once we got that first electric bill for our apartment, our mouths dropped," Mr. Alviar said.

A plan

John Hoffmann, an 18-year-old from Keller, starts classes this month at the University of Dallas in Irving.

"I'm doing what I can to help pay for my college costs," says Mr. Hoffmann, who's received roughly 25 percent of his tuition in scholarships. "Some of it's being paid for, but not all."

Mr. Hoffmann will live on campus with a roommate in the residence halls. He plans to drive home once a week to do laundry and eat dinner with his parents.

"That's my plan for now," Mr. Hoffmann says. "We'll see how it goes with gas prices and how much time I have."

Mr. Hoffmann is responsible for his own gas money, but his parents have agreed to help him with his auto insurance and maintenance. He also has to pay for his own cellphone and any meals he wants outside of his meal plan.

A major cost

Other choices that will affect your costs are the location of your school and your choice of subject matter.

Some urban campuses have access to public transportation, while those farther removed from city life may not. And if you're really "going away" to college, you have to weigh the costs of flying vs. driving home for holidays and school breaks.

Your choice of major can affect your costs for a computer, lab fees and textbooks.

While college campuses have student computer labs, many students find it beneficial to bring their own computer to school, says Maria Ramos, director of financial aid at the University of Texas at Dallas.

"The newer generation of students are very computer savvy," she says. "With the prices of computers dropping, they don't find it really difficult to get a computer."

Textbook costs, however, are soaring.

Experts advise buying early to get the best deals. You can save by purchasing used books online or even from friends who already took a course.

"Buying early is a big problem for college students, who tend to procrastinate," says Steve Loyola, president and founder of BestBookBuys.com. "As soon as you get that course list, you should start looking."

One perk to look forward to – you get to sell the books back at the end of the semester. But don't expect to make a lot of money.

"The extra cash is nice," says Marcie Jenkins, a senior interior design major at UNT. "But you may be better off keeping them or selling them to your friends."

As you'll learn in Accounting 101, cash flow is important.

On the receivables side of the ledger, some students find getting a part-time job helps. A job also gives students an understanding of fiscal responsibility.

Credit

Too much fiscal accessibility can be a problem.

Ms. Jenkins learned the hard way. After spending her monthly allowance on books and supplies, she ended up maxing out her credit card.

"You can run out of money fast, but don't do what I did," Ms. Jenkins says. "The card is paid off, and I only now use it in emergencies."

The key is to understand that college is not about the present, says Paul Goebel, director of the Student Money Management Center at UNT.

"You're investing in your future," Mr. Goebel says. "The money decisions you make here will stay with you for the rest of your life."

E-mail [iaugstums@dallasnews.com](mailto:iaugstums@dallasnews.com)

TRY THESE TIPS TO LIGHTEN YOUR BILLS

- Watch your extra expenses. Keep your phone bill down by using e-mail and foregoing options such as call waiting and voice messaging; go to matinees instead of evening shows; do without costly cable options; and try not to eat out too often.

- Buy used books.

- Share expenses with a roommate.

- Work while you are in college. Working students are generally better at managing their time and have an appreciation for the cost of their education.

- Balance your checkbook regularly. This will help you avoid costly overdraft fees. It is also a good idea to get in the routine of saving money each month – even if it's only \$5.

- Pay with cash whenever possible. This will help keep you within your budget.

- Take advantage of student coupons and discounts.

SOURCE: College Planning Center

CLICK IMAGE TO ENLARGE



NATALIE CAUDILL/DMN

Costs for books, supplies and more have soared, the College Board says.

The national average for personal expenses at four-year public colleges is about \$200 a month, not including books and supplies, according to the College Board.

You can spend more. Or you can spend less. But you have to live within your means.

"Think of it this way," says Steve Loven, director of the College Planning Center in West Des Moines, Iowa. "You want to live like a college student today so you don't have to live like one when you graduate."

Also Online

[Higher costs of higher education](#)

The main decision that will have a big impact on your spending is where you will live.

Living in the residence halls with a seven-day meal plan is the most frugal move, because your basic needs are taken care of. But there's no point buying the meal plan if you're going to break down and order a pizza several nights a week.

Robert Alviar, a University of North Texas senior who lived on campus for his first two years, dealt with that issue.

"When people wanted to go out to dinner, I stayed in because of my meal plan," he said. "You figure out what works best for you."

If you live in a fraternity or sorority house, your costs are also fixed, although probably at a higher level.

If you live off campus in an apartment, it's possible to keep costs down by having roommates and cooking your own meals, but you also face many more unexpected costs and temptations to spend money.

Mr. Alviar experienced that, too. He lived in an apartment last year.

"Once we got that first electric bill for our apartment, our mouths dropped," Mr. Alviar said.

A plan

John Hoffmann, an 18-year-old from Keller, starts classes this month at the University of Dallas in Irving.

"I'm doing what I can to help pay for my college costs," says Mr. Hoffmann, who's received roughly 25 percent of his tuition in scholarships. "Some of it's being paid for, but not all."

Mr. Hoffmann will live on campus with a roommate in the residence halls. He plans to drive home once a week to do laundry and eat dinner with his parents.

"That's my plan for now," Mr. Hoffmann says. "We'll see how it goes with gas prices and how much time I have."

Mr. Hoffmann is responsible for his own gas money, but his parents have agreed to help him with his auto insurance and maintenance. He also has to pay for his own cellphone and any meals he wants outside of his meal plan.

A major cost

Other choices that will affect your costs are the location of your school and your choice of subject matter.

Some urban campuses have access to public transportation, while those farther removed from city life may not. And if you're really "going away" to college, you have to weigh the costs of flying vs. driving home for holidays and school breaks.

Your choice of major can affect your costs for a computer, lab fees and textbooks.

While college campuses have student computer labs, many students find it beneficial to bring their own computer to school, says Maria Ramos, director of financial aid at the University of Texas at Dallas.

"The newer generation of students are very computer savvy," she says. "With the prices of computers dropping, they don't find it really difficult to get a computer."

Textbook costs, however, are soaring.

Experts advise buying early to get the best deals. You can save by purchasing used books online or even from friends who already took a course.

"Buying early is a big problem for college students, who tend to procrastinate," says Steve Loyola, president and founder of BestBookBuys.com. "As soon as you get that course list, you should start looking."

One perk to look forward to – you get to sell the books back at the end of the semester. But don't expect to make a lot of money.

"The extra cash is nice," says Marcie Jenkins, a senior interior design major at UNT. "But you may be better off keeping them or selling them to your friends."

As you'll learn in Accounting 101, cash flow is important.

On the receivables side of the ledger, some students find getting a part-time job helps. A job also gives students an understanding of fiscal responsibility.

Credit

Too much fiscal accessibility can be a problem.

Ms. Jenkins learned the hard way. After spending her monthly allowance on books and supplies, she ended up maxing out her credit card.

"You can run out of money fast, but don't do what I did," Ms. Jenkins says. "The card is paid off, and I only now use it in emergencies."

The key is to understand that college is not about the present, says Paul Goebel, director of the Student Money Management Center at UNT.

"You're investing in your future," Mr. Goebel says. "The money decisions you make here will stay with you for the rest of your life."

E-mail [iaugstums@dallasnews.com](mailto:iaugstums@dallasnews.com)

TRY THESE TIPS TO LIGHTEN YOUR BILLS

- Watch your extra expenses. Keep your phone bill down by using e-mail and foregoing options such as call waiting and voice messaging; go to matinees instead of evening shows; do without costly cable options; and try not to eat out too often.

- Buy used books.

- Share expenses with a roommate.

- Work while you are in college. Working students are generally better at managing their time and have an appreciation for the cost of their education.

- Balance your checkbook regularly. This will help you avoid costly overdraft fees. It is also a good idea to get in the routine of saving money each month – even if it's only \$5.

- Pay with cash whenever possible. This will help keep you within your budget.

- Take advantage of student coupons and discounts.

SOURCE: College Planning Center

Online at: <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/backtoschool/stories/0814dnbusperfi.1f2a3b4.html>