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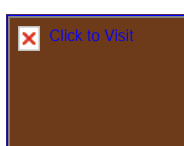
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How to manage your studies on a budget and make the most of your years away at college

PERSONAL FINACE By Linda Stern

WASHINGTON(Reuters) - By now, most incoming college freshmen have met their new roommates, spruced up their dorm rooms, and run out of ready cash. Going to college is expensive, and it's not all about tuition bills. There are textbooks and highlighters and midnight snacks. And for most new college students, this is really the first time they've had to manage their own money and living expenses.



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This year's freshmen are facing all of that, with less in their wallets than their predecessors. Skyrocketing tuition costs, coupled with parental job loss, debts or other money worries have constricted what's left for walking-around money.

Here's how to make it last.

— Get a credit card and manage it yourself. This is the last incoming class that will have easy access to credit cards without a

parent's co-signature. Get one that has no annual fee and caps your credit at \$500 or so. (You can find a list of the best student credit cards at http://www.studentcreditcards.com). This is a great convenience, especially if you're buying bus, train or airline tickets. And learning how to manage that bill every month is probably at least as important as English 101. Don't have the bills sent to your parents; pay them yourself out of your spending allowance or job earnings.

— Protect your debit card. Many banks are getting rich off young people going over limit on their debit cards. They'll accept the transaction and then charge as much as \$30 in penalty fees. Go out in one day and buy a pack of gum in one store, a pack of pens in another and a cup of coffee in a third and you can incur \$90 in over-limit charges before you even know you're overdrawn. So, go to the bank and ask them to flag your account and deny over-balance transactions. If it won't agree to do that for you, find a bank that will. Protect the physical card as well. Banks will make good on most losses due to debit card theft or fraud, but not before it makes a big mess of your checking account.

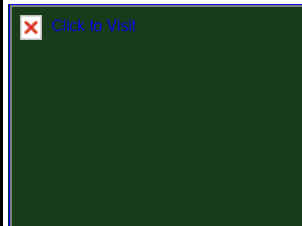
— Reduce your car insurance. If your school is more than 100 miles from home and you have not taken a car with you, your auto insurer is likely to lower your rates. If you pay your own bills, that saves you money. If your parents become the beneficiaries of the price cut, they might be nice and share the savings with you.

— Save on books. You can buy and sell used books on your own campus or at websites like http://www.textbooks.com, http://www.abebooks.com, and http://www.bell.com. You can compare prices for every book at http://www.allbookprices.com. You can rent books at http://www.chevy.com. Some books can be downloaded for free at http://www.textbookpulp.com, and http://www.library.com (which puts ads in the books.) Lit majors can find many of the novels they have to read are no longer copyright protected and can be found online at http://www.library.com or the local library. Many professors put large numbers of their required textbooks on reserve at their school libraries. Buying the book together with your friend who is taking the same course is NOT a good way to save on books. You'll both want it on the same day.

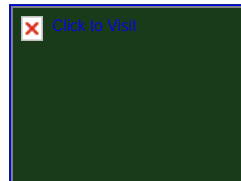
— Buy in bulk. If you know you'll want to walk around with a water bottle every day, the cheapest thing to do is refill your own bottle daily. Next up is buying a case at the grocery or superstore when they're on sale.

Published: September 5, 2009 09:35AM

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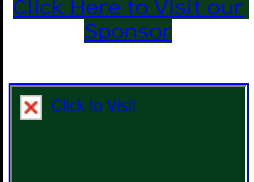
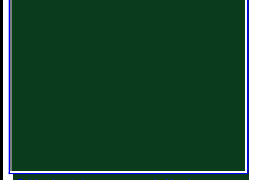
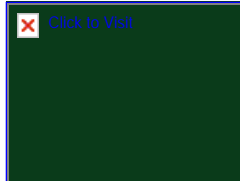
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Most expensive? Stopping in the convenience store every day for your drink. It's good to load up on those go-to snacks, too: popcorn, peanut butter, ramen, yogurt, cereal. That way you won't waste your money on boring mid-study snacks and have more left for outings with friends. And if you decorate your room with cases of water and soup, you won't have to spend too much on posters and other decorations.

— Save on software. Don't buy any computer equipment or software until you've checked with your campus technology help centre. Many offer free Microsoft and Apple software.

— Squeeze that student ID for all it's worth. You may not even know you're eligible for discounts until you try. Ask for student discounts wherever and whenever you shop. Look for additional savings at <http://www.studentsavingsclub.com>

— Work. A part-time job brings in extra cash, but that's only one piece of it. It will give you another identity besides student, expose you to different people and environments and teach you something about real life. It will cut down on the time you have available to spend money, too. Think creatively: College students can make good money tutoring high school students, coaching pre-teen soccer players or helping older folks set up their televisions and iPhones.

Linda Stern is a freelance writer. Any opinions in the column are hers. You can follow Linda Stern's financial notes on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/lindastern>

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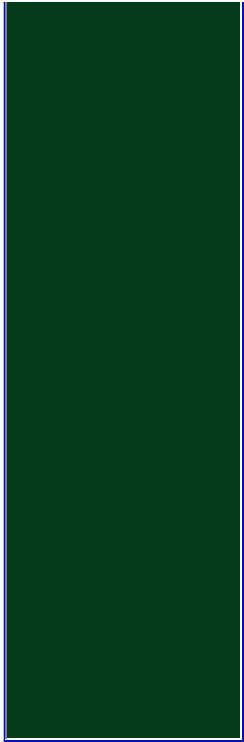
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