



Financial planning for college students

Around the country, college students are in the midst of rising tuition and living expenses. Many college students are on their own for the first time and, for many, this includes being on their own financially. They are expected to earn money and manage their own finances along with their busy college schedules and social lives.

College financial plans don't have to be complicated, but they are necessary. Taking a few simple steps now to manage personal finances will lead to much more positive outcomes down the road.

Here are some financial tips for college students:

- Buy used textbooks or e-books when possible and compare textbook prices online.
- Don't be tricked by credit card offers that come with a bag of candy, free shirt or free pizza.
- Before signing a lease, be sure you understand the entire contract.
- Educate yourself about student loans — know what types of loans you have, how much you owe, your interest rate, and what your monthly payment will be. For information on your federal loans, visit: <http://www.nsls.ed.gov>
- Before turning to private loans to help pay for your education, visit your financial aid adviser to be sure you have exhausted all federal loan opportunities.
- Stay away from payday loans. They carry very high interest rates and can trap you in debt for years.
- Shop around for a bank account. Different banks and credit unions offer a wide variety of products — from free checking to low rates on loans. You also want to consider convenience — it is helpful if there is an ATM or branch on campus or close to where you live.
- Every time you are about to spend money, ask yourself if it would be better spent on something else or saved for a rainy day.
- Don't carry your Social Security card in your wallet, and don't give your Social Security number to people that don't need it. The only thing thieves need to steal your identity is your Social Security number.
- Watch your spending carefully on things like eating out, entertainment and clothes.
- Track spending to help avoid buying more than you can afford.
- Time is your best friend when it comes to saving for retirement — start saving now if you have a job and can invest a little for retirement.