

## How to Go Into and Get Out of College Debt Free

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For a freshman entering college there are a variety of reasons to get excited. However, most students wouldn't be too excited to know that many individuals do not get through college without accumulating a substantial debt.

So how can this predicament be avoided? Well speaking from first hand experience as someone who got through college here in New Mexico without debt I hope to pass on some easy tips that can help lower or totally eliminate debt for anyone trying to sort through their own financial decisions concerning college.

#### · Make your high school counselor your bff.

This statement is not to be taken literally. But you should realize that your counselor is the one person who can explain and assist you with choosing the options that are available to you for going to college.

There are so many things to consider, like high school classes you should take to prepare for college, what kind of college or trade school you would like to go to and what scholarships are available to you. You really will be best friends with your counselor if they can find you the right scholarship that can save you from paying for college.

Here in New Mexico it is important to note that the NM Lottery Scholarship is a great scholarship for local residents. So there is a pay- off to getting good grades in high school, you do need at least a 2.5 to get the lottery. This scholarship, along with the

Bridge to Success Scholarship is what allowed me to get a bachelor's degree without owing any money on student loans.

## · Plant yourself here at home.

Staying in NM may not be the best option for everyone thinking about college, but it can save you a lot of money on your college education. In state tuition, for residences is much cheaper than leaving NM and going out of state for college. Many people fall victim to the urge to go somewhere new and feel that they will get a more reputable degree somewhere else. NM offers many great programs across the states that are more than adequate for obtaining undergraduate degrees. Even if you plan to become a great academic, you won't be known as the PhD from Yale who got a bachelor's degree at University of New Mexico. The point being that which graduate school you attend is more important for academic prestige than what undergraduate program you attend.

#### Know thyself.

This is not just words of wisdom. It is a good idea to really contemplate, meditate if you have to, on what you want to do with yourself before entering college. This in the end can save a lot of headache and lot of money. Students who change their majors every semester are going to be headed down a long path of taking unneeded classes and spending extra years trying to graduate from college. Keep in mind that each class does equal money and that by knowing what you are doing going into college will probably save you time and money.

If you don't know what you want to do think about taking a personal interest test, which is offered at most colleges for a small cost. The money and time spent taking a test like this could save you thousands of dollars.

Make sure to meet with your advisor at the

beginning of school and every 1-2 semesters after that to make sure that you are headed down the right track.

# · Tips for the campus market place.

The first thing that you have to realize is that most schools are also businesses that are going to want to sell you everything that you could possibly need and want, as well as things you don't need or want. To save money you just need to question everything that you are paying money for.

Here is a list of the main money saving tricks that I discovered while in college:

- o Credit Cards- All the major credit card companies will be at your campus waiting for you. For many people this is the first time in their life that they can get a credit card of their own. Don't be fooled by a salesman's pitch and a free gym bag. If you don't think you have the self control to carry easy plastic money pleasantly decline credit card offers on your college campus.
- o Books- While your college does have a bookstore; it is almost always cheaper to get your books online. Not to drop names, but used books on Amazon.com are very cheap in comparison to a bookstore. Also don't forget about your campus library, sometimes they do have that text book on hand.
- o Housing- Living with mom and dad may not be fun, but it is cheap. There are also better alternatives to living with the rents that still don't require you to pay for housing on campus. If you are able to find a place close to your campus that is off campus it will in the end probably be cheaper than living in a dorm room on campus.
- o **Parking-** My trick was parking far enough away from campus so that I did not need a parking permit and then walked. Also many people ride bikes to school. Not only will walking or

biking save you money but exercise is healthy.

o **Food-** Colleges are business and with them come all the choices of a food court. You can save a lot of money by bringing your snacks, lunch, water, tea or coffee from home. This suggestion may seem minor but these kinds of cost do add up over time.

### Selling yourself to academia.

Internships, work-study programs or other jobs around their campus. I was able to complete my Master's with minimal payment due to an Internship program set up for teachers between the University of New Mexico and the Albuquerque Public Schools. There are also a variety of jobs that are meant for students on campus and can help ease the burden of tuition and other expenses around campus.

The key to finding out opportunities around campus is to be social with students, professors, and advisors and always keep your ears open. Colleges have many programs that are willing to give opportunities to students who are smart enough to take them.

I hope that some of these tips can be helpful in your future success with college. It is a very rewarding feeling to finish school and not have any debts that need to be paid off. Trust me you won't mind not having to pay off more bills every month.