

MoneySense

Budgeting

6 money-saving tips for post-secondary students

Knowledge is power, and by keeping a firm handle on your financial situation you'll free yourself up to enjoy your education and make memories that will last for the rest of your life.

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Aug 22, 2019



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For Canadian college and university students, the days of being able to rely on summer-job savings to cover the cost of tuition, rent, and maybe even

have some extra cash for food and books, are long gone. About [50%](#) of students are now graduating with debt, with their average amount owed approaching \$28,000.

Crunching the numbers, Ontario's minimum wage in 1989 was \$5 an hour. Assuming a university student clocked a 40-hour work week, for all 16 weeks of their summer break, they would earn \$3,200. At that time, the average cost of a full year of tuition was \$1,185 according to [Statistics Canada](#)—meaning university tuition would eat up just over a third of a student's pre-tax income.

Today, minimum wage has almost tripled to \$14 an hour in Ontario, but the average cost of one year of undergrad studies has increased by 477% to \$6,838. Assuming that same working schedule, a student would earn \$8,960, meaning tuition would account for about 75% of a student's pre-tax earnings. [Maclean's](#) found that the all-in cost of a full year of post-secondary education, including rent and other living expenses, is \$19,498.75, so even after working a full summer, students would have to work another 752 hours to be able to get through school debt-free.

"I often wonder what my summers would have been like if I had been studying 10 or 20 years earlier," says Sam Hiemstra, a third-year politics student at Queen's University in Kingston Ont. "My parents, who both attended college, both recollect part-time jobs as being enough to get them through the eight months of studying that were to follow. The past few summers I have worked two jobs in order to save enough to go to school, and there isn't any change this year. I was lucky this year to get a job in my field that pays enough to cover the grants and loans I have lost from [cuts to] OSAP, but I know it's not the same for everyone."

Short on options for increasing the amount of money you have coming in, students can look at ways of making the funds they do have go farther—and every little bit helps. Saving \$10 a week on food may not seem like a lot, but even a small win like that can add up to around \$300 over a school year. And

the more of these simple money-saving tips you add to your regular repertoire, the more you'll save.

Track your spending

The easiest way to start being more in control of your finances is to track your spending. This allows you to see where your money is going and help you spot areas to cut back if you need to. (Maybe you limit pub nights to Fridays and Saturdays, for example.) You can use technology to make this task almost effortless; financial apps like [Mint](#) connect with your bank account to track what you spend, and even remind you when to make bill payments. Or just make a note every time you spend money using good-old-fashioned pen and paper.

Make friends with the supermarket

One of the easiest ways to save money as a student is to spend less eating out and more at the grocery store. Forbes estimated that the average restaurant meal costs [five times more](#) than eating a meal you prepared at home. As a bonus, a lot of grocery stores near university campuses will also offer student discounts on one regular day each week, so by shopping only on that day, you can save 10% to 20%.

If you live on-campus in residence and have to buy into the institution's meal plan, make sure you're still being financially smart about the food choices you are making. Whether it's taking the time to select the best meal plan for you if there are a number of options, or being mindful about taking full advantage of the plan you've paid for, there are ways to ensure that your meal plan is worth the cost.

Be smart about textbooks

Textbooks are one of those costs that you don't often think about until your first week of classes—and, according to the Maclean's investigation cited above, they can add another \$500 to \$1,000 to your education bill each semester. Textbooks hold information you will need to get a good mark, so they're non-optional—but there are three easy ways to trim this necessary expense. First: buy used. Campus bookstores will often have pre-owned copies in stock, but you can also find cheaper alternatives listed on Facebook pages or through local used-textbook drives. Second: split each textbook with a friend. By sharing the resource, you'll not only save money, but you'll also be encouraged to talk about the material and deepen your learning. One friend can have the book from Thursday to Saturday and then send it back to you, their book buddy, for the rest of the week. Finally, if the two previous options are a no-go, a lot of university libraries will have copies of the text available for two- or three-hour periods at a time. By going to the library once or twice a week, you'll be able to get all the information you need without having to foot the bill for the book.

Travel home on the cheap

If you're going to school a few hours away from your hometown, the logistics of returning to visit family and friends can make what should be a relaxing weekend a source of financial stress. Instead of booking a pricey train or bus ticket, look into carpooling whenever possible. If a friend or classmate from the same town has a vehicle, ask when they're heading home so you can jump in the car in exchange for splitting the cost of gas. Friends don't have wheels? Check your university or college for public postings where people offer rides for a small fee to help cover the gas bill.

Seek out student discounts

You'd be amazed by the number of student discounts offered, especially by restaurants, retailers, grocery stores and entertainment spots near campus. You could easily save 20% almost any time you make a purchase. Make sure to check out your student union's website, as they often have all the best discounts listed.

Take your student status to the bank

Whether it's with a no-fee, unlimited-transaction [chequing account](#) or a specialized [credit card](#), financial institutions offer a ton of lower-fee services to try to entice students to their banks. Taking advantage of those financial products can help you save money on day-to-day transactions, and start to build relationships with a financial institution that you can later reach out to for your first mortgage, a car loan and more.