

Eye on Our Generation

Think Twice Before You Swipe

Special to The Lion's Eye

It seems like everybody's doing it. Going into debt that is. Americans are so deep in debt that none other than Oprah Winfrey has made it a mission to force America on a "Debt Diet" with a series of shows featuring families that overspend to the brink of bankruptcy.

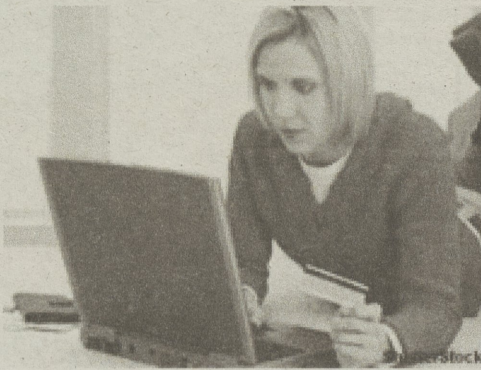
For the recent graduate, going into debt is a clear and present danger. Out of school with their first real "grown-up" job and paycheck, new graduates are at high risk for overspending. According to Dr. Robert Berg, chair of Argosy University/Atlanta's College of Business and Information Technology, the temptation begins the day after commencement - if not earlier.

"Banks shower graduates with offers since their research shows that once people open an account, and are initially satisfied, they are reluctant to switch banks," says Dr. Berg. "Students discover credit card financing early on, leading to the notion of looking in a wallet and knowing you have the power to charge more than you should. Graduates know that bankers have the money they need, and often the loans they have taken out to pay for their education. But, bankers and accountants aren't responsible to pay back the loans - the graduate is."

So what can a recent grad do to stay on track and be a smart earner and saver? "Set up a budget," says Anna Kelly, director of student financial services of The New England Institute of Art. "It's simple, easy to do, and serves as a guidepost to help young people learn to pay off debt, not accumulate more debt, and learn to save too."

The budget, she says, should include everything from rent, transportation, food, utilities, school loan payments and credit card payments to entertainment and miscellaneous expenses. "Put some money away each month into savings," says Kelly. "No matter how small the amount, you will be better prepared for emergencies." Any big purchases you have to make, pay cash, says Kelly, to avoid credit card interest charges.

Amy Shaver, a loan coordinator for The Art Institute of Seattle, says that many students now try to pay down or pay off credit card debt before graduating so "they can focus on paying off school



Getting yourself out of debt is a lot harder than getting yourself into it.

(photo courtesy of ARA Content)

loans as soon as they begin to get a regular paycheck." If a student does run into problems paying off a loan or credit card debt, Shaver recommends contacting the lender immediately to begin to work out a payment plan.

This is a smart strategy says Larry Lipner, director of administrative and financial services at The Art Institute of New York City. "Students should pay off credit card debt first as they incur the highest finance charges, and school loans, after as they tend to have much lower interest rates," he says. "By paying off debts monthly without being late the student is actually establishing a good credit history with the credit bureaus which will serve him/her well in the future translating into a better credit score."

Debt has become such a looming issue for all Americans, not just recent graduates, that many schools are devoting whole courses to it. "The Art Institute of New York City offers a freshman level course that includes consumer debt and how to handle it," says Lipner. "It's important because many students come to school without the basic knowledge of how to manage their personal finances."

For students who have problems with credit card debt, there are places to go for help. Two that Amy Shaver recommends are http://www.debtadvice.org/aboutus/aboutus_01.html and http://www.debtadvice.org/PersPlans/guidelines_credit-counselor.html

To sum up, Dr. Berg defines the clear choice that graduates should make: "The choice is to make more than you spend, or spend less than you make - a simple rule that is sometimes hard to follow."

WHAT DOES COLLEGE REALLY COST?

Special to The Lion's Eye

Everyone knows that college is expensive -- tuition costs alone can make your head spin. According to numbers from the College Board, most students and their families paid, on average, from \$112 to \$1,190 more in tuition and fees for the 2005-2006 school year than for the previous year, depending on the type of college.

But tuition isn't the only cost of attending college. There are the obvious costs, like room and board, which are also skyrocketing. There are other expenses that you may anticipate, like airfare for visits home, and some which you may not think of, like extra money for a semester abroad.

CollegeDirectoryNetwork.com, the largest online directory of post-secondary educational opportunities in the United States, is also a great resource for helping to budget for college expenses, especially in that first year, where everything is uncharted territory.

Here are some of the items listed in the Web site's cost calculators:

- * Airfare or rental car for visits home
- * Gas, insurance and repair costs if the student owns a car

- * Moving expenses (renting a trailer if necessary)
- * Books
- * Lab and other fees
- * Internet service or connections
- * Telephone or cell phone
- * Entertainment



If these numbers are starting to make you nervous, visit CollegeDirectoryNetwork.com for other valuable information, including tips on finding and applying for financial aid, and hints on how to save for college.

The Web site is also a valuable source of information on colleges throughout the United States. It is a great resource for high school students and their parents, as well as for non-traditional students, such as adults returning to pursue their degree.

Simply visit CollegeDirectoryNetwork.com, sign up for a free membership, and take advantage of the wealth of information you'll find there.

Eye on Our Generation is a new section of *The Lion's Eye* that features information and investigative reporting pertinent to the college-aged student. Submissions and ideas for story content can be sent to kab44@psu.edu.

Coping With Test Anxiety

By: Debra Tullis

Special to The Lion's Eye

Today is the day for an important examination. Your skills at taking this test will help determine how well you do. Academic anxiety can be a significant problem affecting many dissertation students. Many students may have physiological responses such as a rapid heartbeat, elevated blood pressure and shallow breathing. The body prepares itself to deal with stress by reacting in predictable ways. Behavioral patterns may affect your performance as well so you can focus on the task at hand. If so, there are effective techniques that can help you.

First, it is important not to underestimate your coping skills. Developing a calming self dialogue is helpful. Watching your self talk is critical. The next time you find yourself listening to that discouraging voice that is blinking like a neon sign in your head stand up to it! Think of yourself as a close friend. The more you imagine the best the better your life will be. Having determined your ultimate mission of having academic success is non-negotiable. This means that in spite of difficult times you remain committed to obtaining your advanced degree.

Be ready to adapt. The negative thoughts may be habitual and it is important that you develop strategic coping thoughts to keep firmly in your mind. An example could be, "I can do this, I have done well before on other tests". Remember to relax by seeing yourself truthfully and that includes acknowledging and af-

firming your strong qualities. Rejoice in your academic gifts and your uniqueness. You are in control and need to trust in your talent and your experiences. Remember what your personal motives are for getting your degree.

Identifying the behavior that you want to change is critical. Describe on paper the behavior you want to change. Develop specific separate steps that can be taken to ease your anxiety. You have the power to control your stress responses. How you feel about yourself going into a test situation can affect your future!

It now becomes important to visualize your desired results. Do not let the face of fear define you. It is important to remember that fear is irrational. It is not based on reality. It becomes crucial to trust yourself and have courage. Do not let the fears keep you from doing your best and be there for yourself when the times are difficult. The what-ifs are the children of fear. They almost always never come true. They are a way of trying to control an unknown future. Focusing on what is rather than what if will keep you focused on the here and how.

Make a true commitment to change the way you react to performance anxiety and test taking. You have within you enormous untapped resources of talent and ability. Illuminate the road of your personal journey toward obtaining your advanced degree.

