



Unexpected College Expenses to Budget For

By JULIE RAINS | May 23, 2016

When I was getting ready to send my boys off to college, I expected to pay for their tuition, housing, basic meals and books. But I didn't realize that there are many less-obvious college expenses that can add hundreds and even thousands of dollars to the total cost.

Here are several of these expenses, along with tips for controlling and budgeting for them.

1. Parent Orientation

Many colleges and universities offer parent orientation at the same time as student orientation. Designed to educate parents on campus resources and the college experience, these sessions may be included with tuition or require a separate registration fee. In addition, lodging and meals away from home -- if you're not within commuting distance -- aren't cheap. For example, [parents are charged an orientation fee of \\$75 at the University of Washington](#) and could pay a significant amount to stay in a nearby hotel.

To save money on hotel stays and meals, investigate low-cost options, such as student housing and university dining that may be offered to parents. Or, if you're on a tight budget, think about skipping parent orientation altogether. Ask university administrators to point you to online resources or mail you the information.

2. Dining Out and Entertainment

Charlie Harriman, Certified Estate Planner (CEP) with [Cloud Financial Inc.](#) in Huntsville, Alabama, says parents are often surprised at the large restaurant and entertainment bills incurred by their children.

College students -- particularly those living away from home for the first time -- may not realize how much more expensive dining out can cost compared to a eating a home-cooked meal. In addition, they may spend freely on concerts, movies and

other forms of entertainment. Extra spending on meals and fun times can run [hundreds of dollars per month](#) or more.

Harriman says making students responsible for their spending is the key to controlling these types of expenses. Parents can consider equipping their children with practical money-management skills by following these steps:

- Educate your college student on what is reasonable to spend within various categories.
- Provide guidance on how to develop a detailed [budget](#).
- Offer a monthly or semester allowance aligned with the budget (perhaps funding your student's bank account with a certain amount each month).
- Require your student to spend within this budget.

When students receive a specific amount on a regular basis, Harriman says they typically learn how to adjust their habits to avoid running out of money.

3. Health Insurance

Your child's college or university may automatically enroll (and charge) eligible students for a health insurance plan as a way of protecting students and complying with recommendations or standards established by the [American College Health Association](#).

However, if your child is already covered under a family health insurance policy, this insurance provided by the school may be redundant and unnecessary. You or your child may be able to submit proof of coverage and avoid this fee.

For example, the University of Delaware allows students to [submit a waiver form by a certain date](#) in order to avoid automatic enrollment and health insurance charges, which can cost [\\$500 to \\$600](#) each semester.

4. Off-Campus Housing Costs

Living in an apartment or house off campus may seem like a cheaper option than on-campus housing when you compare monthly rental costs only. However, according to a Trulia report that scrutinizes [colleges' official estimates of housing costs](#), "off-campus may not pay off if students have to pay for a 12-month lease, and the extra three months of rent makes on-campus housing more affordable."

The cost of summer housing -- plus extra expenses for utilities and Wi-Fi if not included with an off-campus rental -- can make college expenses swell. Unexpected costs in this category could add up to thousands of dollars per year depending on the housing market.

Harriman says parents may want to consider having their children live on campus throughout their college careers to simplify their lifestyles and save money. In this way, you'll pay rent only when your student is taking classes on the main campus, not during the summer or when she's studying abroad.

If on-campus housing isn't available to your child and she's not planning on taking classes or completing an internship in her college town during the summer, she may be able to sublet her space. This extra income may allow you to recoup housing expenses.

5. Parking

If your child brings a car to college, you may not have counted the cost of buying a university-issued permit for campus parking or leasing a private parking space. This expense can vary; for example, parking permits at the [University of Northern Iowa](#) may cost about \$400 per year, but you'll pay [\\$500 per semester at American University](#) in Washington, D.C.

In addition, your child may not realize that having the right to park on campus doesn't guarantee a space in a particular lot. Some students may rack up fines because they can't find a place to park in the right lot without running late to class. Harriman says students should plan ahead as much as possible to minimize these expenses.

Your child may also be able to walk, ride a bike or take public transportation everywhere he needs to go. But if he has the pressing need for a car - perhaps he has an off-campus internship, travels home on the weekends or drives to a discount grocery store to save money on food - consider how you can control unexpected vehicle-related expenses such as parking.

6. Major-Specific Costs

Harriman says that earning a degree in certain majors may require students to incur costs they hadn't expected. For example, an international business degree program may require students to take an international trip or spend a semester abroad.

Similarly, internships may be required for certain majors, and travel to worksites could be expensive.

Though major-specific requirements may be reasonable, their associated expenses may not have been included in the college's [cost of attendance](#) figures. When developing a budget, remember to include any unique requirements of your child's major.

7. Legal Fees

Other expenses that may not be on your radar are legal fees. According to Student Legal Services at North Carolina State University, [common legal issues](#) include:

- landlord/tenant conflicts
- consumer rights and scams
- traffic accidents and violations
- criminal issues (often related to drug or alcohol use)

Though some universities offer free legal advice, certain situations may require representation by a private attorney. Harriman says parents should talk with their children about expectations for appropriate behavior, which may help them avoid legal problems. Attorney fees can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Bottom Line

There are many types of unexpected college expenses, so controlling these costs may involve a multifaceted approach. Setting a realistic budget may help your children spend responsibly. In addition, identifying extra fees may allow you to avoid unnecessary costs and budget for needed ones.