Rowdy Cents’ 8 Tips to Finding Cash for College

www.utsa.edu/moneymatters

The recession may be receding but some are finding it washing over them like a tidal wave. Parents, relatives, and guardians who supported their young adults’ college bills now have to shift the responsibility over to the college student. Even the donors of scholarships and grants are cutting back. What is a college-going student to do?

1. **Apply** for Federal Student Aid. Even if you don’t think you will qualify, apply. There are some non-need grants that are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. The FAFSA is online and free ([www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)). Also, if it’s close to a summer term, apply for summer aid through the UTSA Financial Aid and Enrollment Services office.

2. **Appeal** your financial aid if your circumstances change. For example, when you applied with the FAFSA both parents had jobs. Now, one parent lost a job or has had a pay cut. Parents have divorced. You now have childcare expenses. Go back to the Financial Aid Office and show a counselor how your circumstances have changed. Bring documentation with you.

3. **Apply** for scholarships and grants through local charities, organizations, and businesses. Contact everyone you know or friends of your parents for possibilities. Shrug off any feelings of embarrassment. If anything the recession has made it “okay” to need money. Do understand, though, that it usually takes a bit of time to cultivate these sources of money and you may have missed a deadline for the coming year. But always think ahead and work on it anyway.

4. **Search** web sites for grants and scholarships, such as FastWeb ([www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)), College Board Scholarship Search ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)), and Scholarships ([www.scholarships.com](http://www.scholarships.com)).

5. **Borrow** money to stay in college. You may say no at first but think about how much longer it will take to finish college if you drop out, and how much more expensive it will be when you can return. In any borrowing situation, only borrow what you need to get by. Be frugal.

   a. Always consider federal Stafford loans first. Preferably subsidized loans, if you qualify, and then unsubsidized. Either loan will get you the lowest percentage rates. Yes, the thought of carrying such a big debt when you do graduate is scary, but you can feel somewhat relieved by knowing about the new Income Based Repayment (IBR) plan that caps graduates’ payments at an affordable rate based upon family and income.

   b. Ask parents to apply through the University for a PLUS Loan, backed by the federal government. If they don’t qualify, the school may be able to increase the Stafford loan awards for you. Always work with the school’s Financial Aid Counselor for options.

   c. Investigate student loans through financial institutions. Many have pulled out of that lending market but there are a few still left. Go to bankrate.com and select College
Loans. You can select the state and city to see college money lenders in the area and their current interest rates. You may need a co-signer, too.

d. Investigate private loans through peer-to-peer lenders, such as Virgin Money (www.virginmoneyus.com), Lending Club (www.lendingclub.com) and Prosper (www.prosper.com). Utilize a peer advocacy group such as Graduate Leverage (www.graduateleverage.com) to help find the best rates for you.

6. **Cut back.** Find cheaper ways to do or get what you need.
   - You can always find something to cut back on. Eliminate the “I want” attitude for now. Go to Rowdy Cents for money-saving tips (http://www.utsa.edu/moneymatters/reach_savings.html)
   - If you have electives in your program, consider a CLEP exam, which is around $80, way less than taking the actual course.
   - If you have core curriculum courses or other common courses, take them at a local community college. (Always check with your UTSA advisor as to what actually transfers to UTSA and your degree program.)

7. **Ask** Grandma or Grandpa for a loan. They may actually just give you the money (with a few strings attached.)

8. **Work.** Check with the Financial Aid Office for work-study jobs. Check with Career Center for other part-time student jobs on campus. You may actually have an extra benefit from working on campus because these student workers tend to have a higher GPA than those who don’t work on campus.
   - Consider part-time military programs, such as the National Guard and other reserve units that offer pay and educational benefits.
   - Work in the private sector – seek an employer who will be flexible about you taking a course to continue your degree progress.
   - Consider signing up with AmeriCorps (the US “Peace Corps”) that offers a modest living stipend and a tuition voucher worth over $5,000 upon completion of service.
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**Whatever happens, don’t give up. There’s a degree in your future!**