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Paying through the Teeth

Fewer A&M students are relying on Mom and Dad to foot the education bill

By **STEPHEN WELLS**
Staff writer

In elementary school, a person's job was cleaning up their room to earn candy. In middle school, it was taking care of the yard for extra money to go to the movies. In high school, it was sacking groceries to pay for a car and clothes. In college, students may work for extra cash for the weekends, but for some A&M students, their job is paying for their education.

For students like Dean Piper, a senior mechanical engineering student, the decision to pay for their own schooling is a voluntary one.

"It's not that I have to pay for school," Piper said. "My parents would pay for it if I asked them to. I prefer to pay for my own education."

Piper said working his way through college is a matter of pride and independence. "Part of why I pay for college is just so I could say that I did it myself," Piper said. "Some of it is an accomplishment thing. Some of it is just not having to depend on my parents."

For other students, working while going to school is a financial necessity. Eric Alzafari, a junior history major, said working during school is the only way he can attend school.

"I've got a grant in addition to my money from working," Alzafari said. "Without the grant, going to school would be impossible. Including the total cost of going to school here and my living expenses, work pays for about 50 percent."

Working through school is not confined to rare individuals. Bob Lawson, Assistant Director of the Financial Aid office, said A&M itself employs many students.

"We have about 12,000 student workers on campus annually, about 600 to 800 of which are on financial aid," Lawson said.

Different students find different ways to make ends meet. Piper works during the

summer to save up for school, then works as a resident advisor during the school year to keep up an income. The amount of time invested is not as much as others may think.

"I'd probably say I get more vacation time during school than during summer," Piper said. "Being an RA isn't much of a drain on time."

Having a part-time job off campus can take up a lot of time, though.

"Where anybody else can go to class and study on their own time, you're taking these big chunks of time out for work that you can't study in," Alzafari said.

Alzafari schedules his classes to maximize the time he gets to work and study.

"I go to class for two days a week on Tuesday and Thursday pretty much the whole day, so I don't work on those days," Alzafari said. "Any other days I want off besides those, I just have to ask."

Sometimes having a job means compromising between what a student wants and what they need.

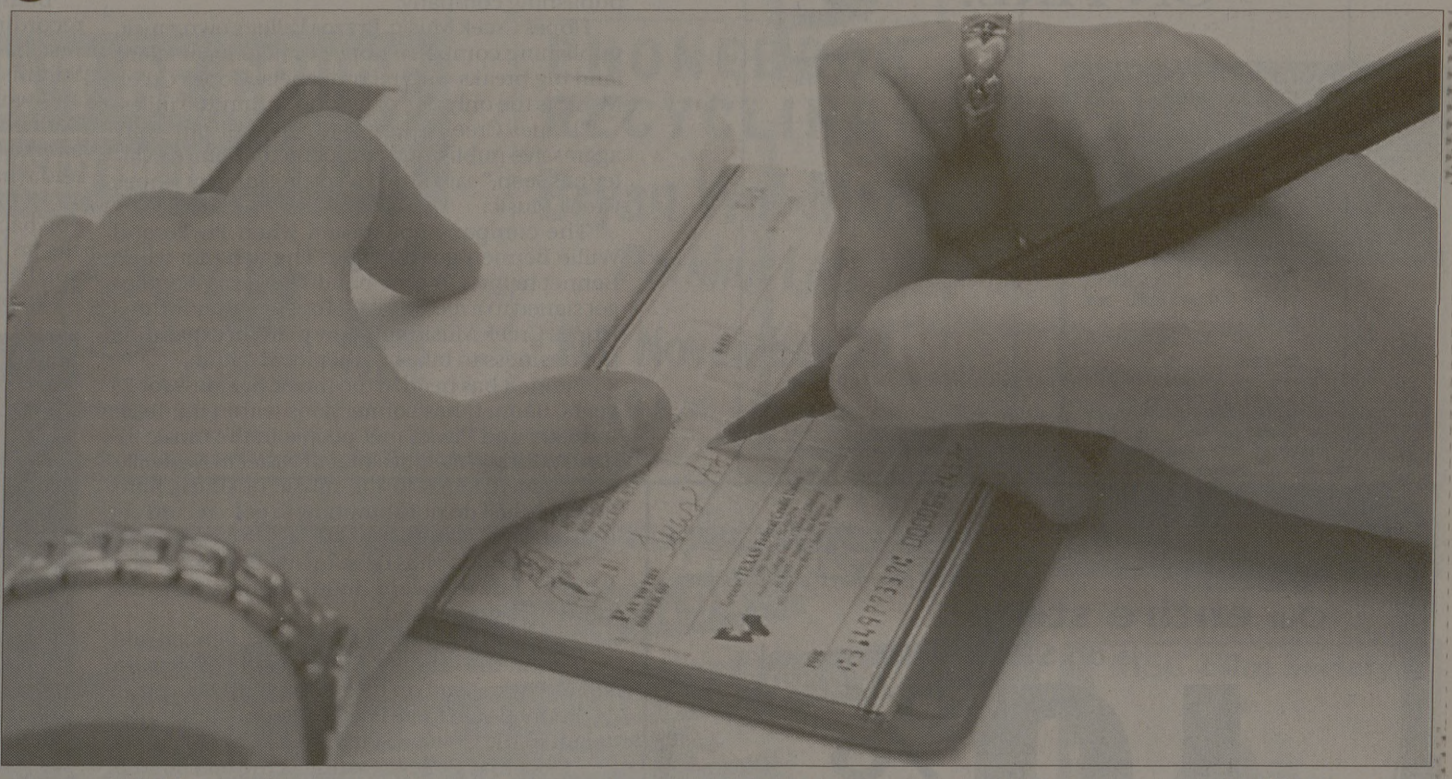
"What's bad is that when I want to do something like go to [Bonfire] Cut, I have to take the day off and not get paid," Alzafari said. "It actually costs me money to go to that cut."

The stereotypical poor college student is a reality for students who pay their way through school.

"The money is just like getting by," Alzafari said. "I'm not exaggerating at all — it's just enough to make it along. As opposed to other people whose parents may pay for them to go to school and they just work to make a buttload of money, I'm working just to go here."

Piper said students working their way through college just need to make good financial decisions.

"The major expense in my life is school," Piper said. "I try not to spend money on things I don't have to. I do things like living in a less expensive dorm, not going out to eat when I don't have to — things that cut down the cost of living."



A part time job is usually not enough to pay the costs of school. For those who need a little more, financial aid is available.

"There's a variety of ways a student can actually finance his college education," Lawson said. "I look at it like purchasing a car or a home or any other asset. You're buying an asset in education."

Sources are readily available for students seeking financial aid. The second floor of the Pavilion has a repository of over 5,000 sources for scholarships. The financial aid office has a Web site at <http://faid@tamu.edu> where students can find information about part time employment both on and off campus. They also have job listings for any

employer who wants a job opening posted.

"There is no central location off campus for students to find part time employment," Lawson said. "We've been providing a service for students where we post the job opportunities that are made known to us. We are greatly expanding this service."

Lawson has advice for students who are considering applying for financial aid.

"Assess your situation," Lawson said. "See what you can afford to do and what your expected income will be when you graduate and then do it. If you can't figure it out by yourself come in and get help from a counselor. I have seven counselors at your beck and call."

While it may prove to be difficult at times, Lawson insists that any student who really wants to go to college can afford to do it.

"If a student really wants to come to college and to come to A&M, he or she can," Lawson said. "The resources are available and the funding is available."

Piper believes any student can pay for their education if they apply themselves.

"Honestly I think that working their way through college is something the average student can do. I think part of why I do it is because I'm stubborn and don't want help from my parents. It's something everybody can probably do for whatever reason, but I wouldn't recommend that everybody try it."

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