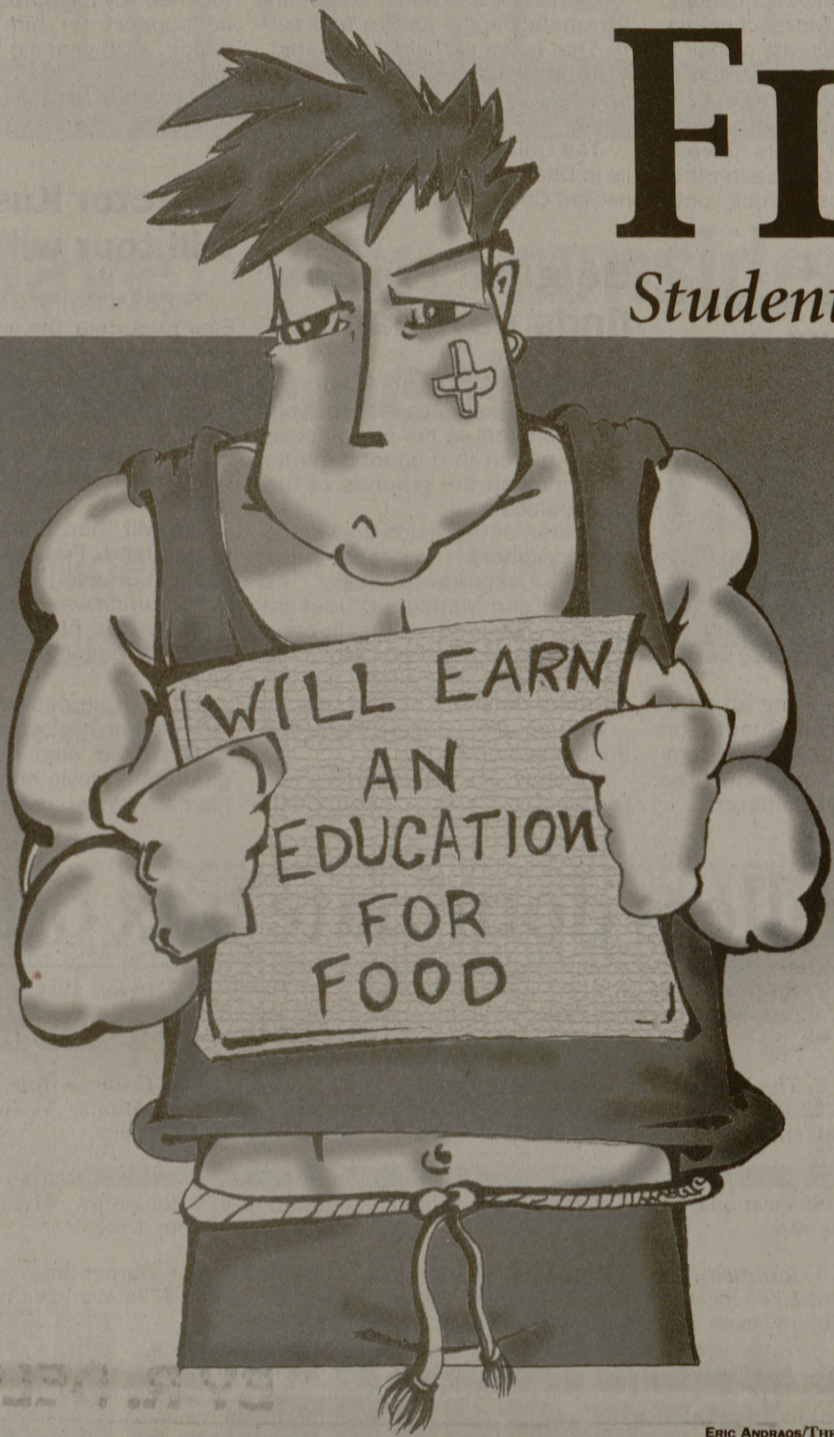


FLAT BROKE

Students feel money crunch as the semester progresses

BY EMILY PUDER
The Battalion



ERIC ANDRAOS/THE BATTALION

Is Hamburger Helper your main entrée each night? Do you charge everything to credit cards? Is donating plasma a source of income for you? Is the word "budget" foreign to you?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be experiencing the warning symptoms of acute college debt.

Texas A&M Student Financial Services estimates the cost of tuition, room and board for an on-campus Texas resident to be \$11,007 for a year. Expenses rise with the cost of living off-campus and being an out-of-state student.

Laura Beach, a junior horticulture major, said debt is inevitable if you want a degree from Texas A&M.

"Most college students can't avoid debt," Beach said. "School is so expensive, and we like to spend money. Everything that is fun is going to cost something."

Financial aid is available to students through grants, scholarships, loans and the college student's best friend — the credit card.

Beach said with so much help available, financial responsibility is not considered important to some students.

"My brother once told me that college is the time to have fun so I shouldn't worry about funds," she said. "Some people say that college is the time to live it up, but I don't want this to be the only time I can have fun. Loans have to be paid back eventually."

Beach said if students want to stay out of debt, they should get a part-time job to pay for extra expenses.

"I worked three jobs this summer. It was a little crazy and school started to

bog me down, but the summer is the time when a lot of students can make good money to last the rest of the year."

Peggy Carey, supervisor of student debt management services, said students should search for help when the cost of school becomes a problem.

"Some [students] may have a financial hardship and instead of seeking help immediately, they ignore it and hope the problem will fix itself," Carey said. "When the problem is ignored, it only gets worse."

Unless a student's parents are both brain surgeons, it is difficult for families to pay for all of their child's education without some form of financial assistance.

"Most students need to utilize loans to complete their college education," she said. "If they make it through college without acquiring a huge credit card debt on top of that, they should not have any problems repaying the student loans upon graduation."

Carey said college students' main challenge with money is not budgeting their money properly.

"A big part of some students' problem is not knowing how to make a budget and stick to it," Carey said. "They over-extend themselves and do not realize it until it is too late."

Beach said many students lack enough responsibility necessary to keep themselves out of debt.

"Sometimes students go a little overboard when they have the money to spend," she said. "Credit cards are dangerous. They are right there in front of you and you can use them so easily. That's when you get in trouble."

Beach said many students do not really value their limited funds or spend their money wisely.

"We take it for granted that money is there in the checking or savings account," she said. "My parents tried to teach me how to budget, but it is difficult because there is so little to budget with."

Elizabeth Barnes, a sophomore business major, said parents are often the main source of emergency funds for students.

"I owe my parents so much money it's crazy," Barnes said. "This summer I didn't get to work so I owe them more money than ever. Eventually I guess I'll pay them back."

Barnes said Aggie Bucks save her money by providing her a spending limit for a semester.

"With Aggie Bucks, you can't go over a set amount," she said. "If I go over [the amount], I have to use my own money. I look at it as my budget for eating."

Barnes said there are many creative ways to save money when a student is broke.

"Instead of going to the movie theatre, you can stay at home and rent a movie," Barnes said. "Or you can just hang out rather than going to a club. I think the weekends are when things get expensive. During the week all I spend money on is food."

Consumer Credit Counseling Service, offers tips for surviving on a limited budget. The agency gives basic advice such as never shop hungry, stop wearing clothes that require dry cleaning, selling used books and CDs, stopping smoking and having the phone company block all 900 numbers.

In the end, these small cuts in expenses for food, clothing and entertainment can save students from the humiliation of asking mom and dad for money.

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