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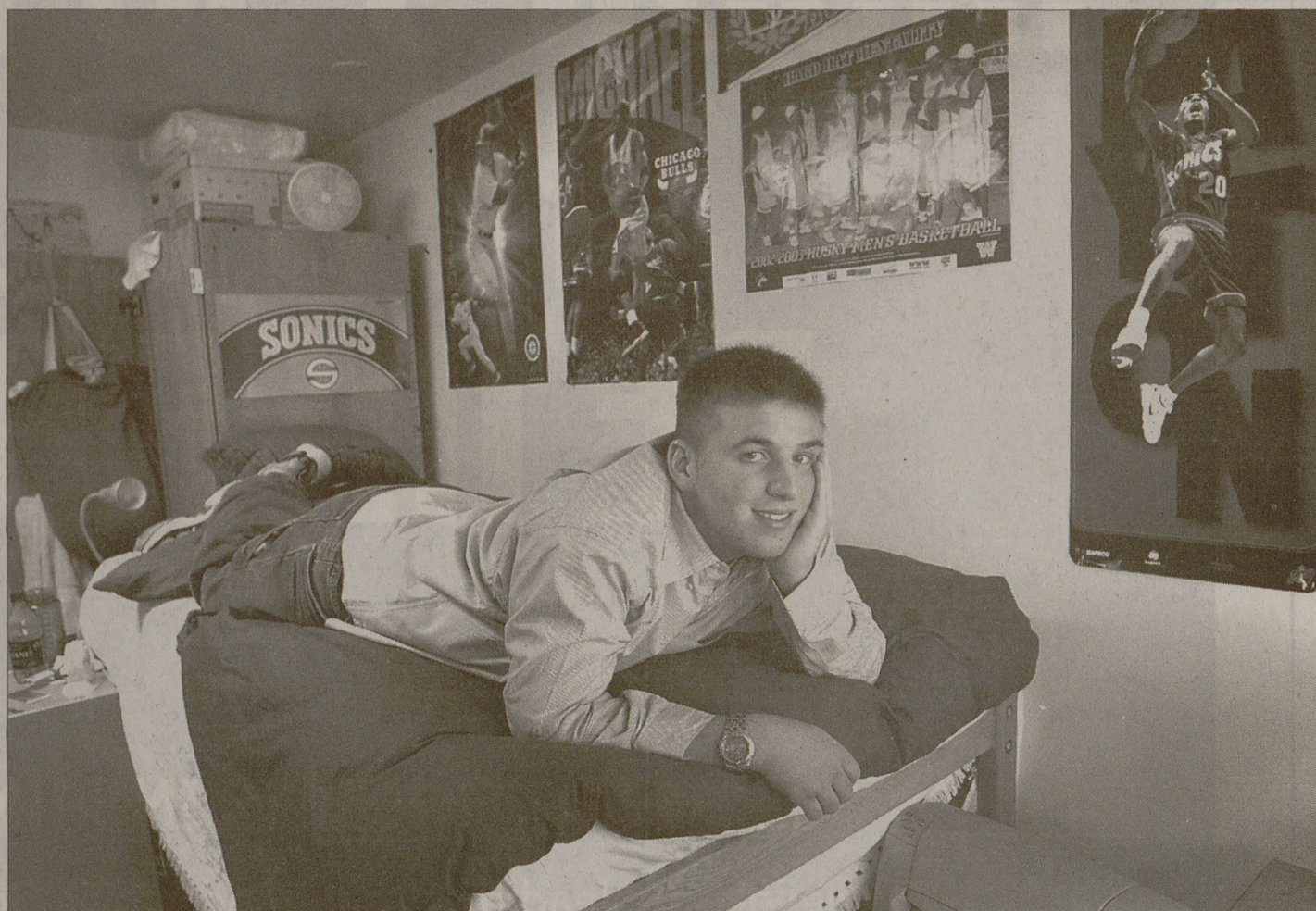
THE BATTALION

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The (real) costs of college

On-campus living costs take a chunk out of students' wallets

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KRT Campus



MIKE SIEGEL • KRT CAMPUS

Danny Tremblay, a student at the University of Washington in Seattle, lies in his dorm room in October. Tremblay shoulders many of the costs of his education.

With one simple act, Danny Tremblay could cut the roughly \$17,000 tab for his first year at the University of Washington by several thousand dollars. He'd rather not. It would mean giving up his dorm room and commuting from home in Issaquah.

"I really like living on campus and doing stuff in the city and making friends," says Tremblay, a ruddy-cheeked freshman with close-cropped hair and a football player's build.

He's certainly not alone. About 69 percent of the 4,060 in-state freshmen at the UW come from homes within commuting distance -- some within walking distance -- of the university. Yet the majority of the students who live nearby prefer living on campus. It's an expensive choice. Although Tremblay will spend more than \$4,000 on tuition -- money that pays for classrooms, libraries and professors' salaries -- most of his expenses go to things that have little to do with learning.

He'll dole out more than \$7,000 this school year for shared space in a cramped dorm room, a meal plan that lets him eat on campus, and a host of other items such as a computer, bedding, lamps, posters and the ubiquitous cell phone. Add up the expenses, in fact, and it turns out much of his money goes for the privilege of living on campus.

Why not cut costs and live at home? Ask students and you'll likely hear them say they want the "college experience."

"There's something about living on campus with thousands of other students that makes college click."

At a time when families are increasingly worried about how much money they'll have to scrape together to put their kids through college, The Seattle Times followed Tremblay around campus to see where his money goes and what he gets in return.

The UW has studied freshmen and concluded that those who live on campus seem to have a richer learning experience than students who commute. They're more likely to form study groups, meet with professors to help with research and forge connections that last a lifetime. Commuter students often "miss out on all that," says George Bridges, the UW's dean for undergraduate education.

Tremblay didn't make the choice to live on campus lightly. He knows how much his education costs, almost down to the dollar. He had opportunities to attend out-of-state universities but chose UW because it would cost less. His mother works two jobs to put him and his sister through college. He works summers to help out.

Yet Tremblay, like most students, believes living on campus enhances everything he does.

"So far," he says, "I think it's worth it."

Tuition and books: \$4,923. His single biggest expense, and one he'd pay whether he lived in a dorm or at home, is the \$4,458 tuition. This is the money that pays for the nuts and bolts of a degree. He's paid an additional \$465 for books, so far, including \$120 for one math book. About 40 percent of tuition goes to pay for faculty salaries and benefits at the university. The Seattle campus has about 1,700 full-time faculty members plus several hundred graduate teaching assistants.

Tremblay, who wants to be a dentist, is taking two tough classes in math and chemistry, what UW calls gatekeeper courses.

It's a big change from high school. Take his chemistry class at Kane Hall: It is held in an auditorium that looks like it belongs in a multiplex theater instead of a classroom building. It even has movie screens.

Tremblay files into the room at 9:30 a.m. and grabs a seat amid a sea of 520 students. The professor, James Callis, does several experiments, plopping materials in water that fizzle and pop. He jokes with the audience over the loudspeaker system. "If you in the front row catch fire, remember to stop, drop and roll." But the experiments lose some pizzazz magnified on movie screens with a black and white overhead projector. And the lecture isn't Shakespeare.

Callis acknowledges the class is large but notes comparable universities have larger lecture classes. The course he teaches is also hard, he says.

"We insist that students know their stuff. We grade typically harder than other departments."

Tremblay says he was a little shocked the first time he walked into the auditorium.

"There are so many students and the classes are so big."

Dorm life: \$3,887. This is where living on campus seems to play a key role, by providing students easy access to help and study partners.

"If you live off campus, you need to go home and it's going to take you an hour bus ride to get there. That means an hour later you start studying," says Harmony Schloer, a senior who lives on campus.

"Here, you're surrounded by people who are doing the same thing as you."

UW has 6,600 students living on campus, with about three-quarters

of them in dorms and the rest in apartments. Costs range from about \$2,700 to \$4,500 a year, depending on where students live. Tremblay paid \$3,387 for a cramped room in Lander Hall he shares with a roommate. It has a fake fur rug on the floor, basketball posters plastered above his bed and a window overlooking Lake Union. And \$500 went for personal items such as bedding and a lamp. Tremblay spends most evenings, from 8 p.m. to midnight, in formal study groups organized by the university in which instructors help students with their homework.

He also spends a lot of time studying with other students who take the same classes.

"I feel like I'm working a lot harder than I did in high school," he says. "I think part of that is that you have to. Some of the concepts are more advanced."

Living at the university, he says, makes it easier for him to put in the hours he needs to study and connect with the right people to help him with the work. A bulletin board in the dorm hallway, for example, lists every resident and what classes each is taking so students can study together. The evening help sessions with instructors are a short walk away.

Food: \$2,994. Eating in, generally, means going to the cafeteria in the basement and grabbing a sandwich, Tremblay says. But the university has 22 places to eat, serving tons of food each year, including 77,180 pounds of bananas, 68,846 pounds of rice, 45,716 pounds of turkey and 1,207 cases of ketchup. Tremblay pays \$2,994 during the academic year for a "Husky card" that lets him eat anywhere on campus. One of his favorite places is about a 10-minute walk from his dorm at McMahon Hall, which has a new, \$10 million cafeteria designed by the same person who created the interiors for P.F. Chang's China Bistro, a national restaurant chain.

This isn't the cafeteria most people remember from college.

"They've got everything here," Tremblay says, wandering through the dimly lit restaurant with cushy booths and an open fireplace.

There are even Ethernet ports where students can hook up their laptops. The restaurant has eight "concept stations" ranging from a Mongolian grill and vegetarian fare to a Pagliacci Pizza franchise run by the university. Items on the various menus include chicken enchiladas, shrimp quesadilla and a "seasonal bruschetta plate with curried

shrimp and goat cheese." Only \$5.95.

One of the chefs, Tracey MacRae, says the cafeteria serves about 9,500 people a day. It may look like a restaurant, but "you see people in their pajamas and slippers" who come in from the dorm, she says.

The chefs also cater to student desires, cooking food they crave from home, MacRae says.

"This girl came in today and said 'I want peas.'"

Tremblay likes to eat here with his buddies and watch sports on the big-screen televisions hanging from the ceilings. For Tremblay, meeting people is almost as important as going to class.

"These are friends I'm going to have for life."

Personal expenses and student fees: \$5,520 Ask students what they like most about living at the university, and meeting people often tops the list. In 1999, the UW interviewed freshmen and asked what personal skills they wanted to develop while attending the university.

"Make friends/be more outgoing" was mentioned most often.

"When you live on campus, you are constantly surrounded by people," says Kristan Lorraine, a sophomore. "You have so many opportunities to get involved and to experience so many other things. They're just in your face all the time."

Tremblay budgets \$1,750 a year for discretionary spending, such as going out to eat at inexpensive restaurants or seeing an occasional movie with friends. He spent \$2,900 for a laptop computer, almost a prerequisite for students nowadays, and will spend \$360 during the school year for a cell phone to keep in touch with people he's met.

But most of Tremblay's social life is wrapped up in sports, playing on the intramural teams and using the newly remodeled sports facility on campus. All that is paid for as part of his student fees, which amount to \$510 this school year. Add up everything Tremblay is spending on his first year -- \$3,387 for the dorm, \$2,994 for food and hundreds more for things like a cell phone -- and it quickly becomes clear he's paying for more than learning to become a dentist. Attending college, of course, is more than classes, dorm life, eating in a cafeteria and working out in the gym. There are also the intangible things, such as protests in Red Square, animal-rights booths, Lyndon LaRouche supporters and the throaty sound of a cello filtering out of the School of Music. Tremblay takes it all in with the wide eyes of a freshman.

"It's a step closer to the real world," he says.



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