



November 2007

Seasonal Student Issues

There's a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month:

- ▲ Roommate problems/floor tension
- ▲ Academic pressures because of procrastination, workload and lack of ability
- ▲ Burnout
- ▲ Not feeling like they have the stamina to keep up the pace through finals
- ▲ Job search stress for holiday break
- ▲ Problems from increased alcohol consumption
- ▲ Lack of initiative to find new friends or activities because it seems social groups are already set up
- ▲ Concerns about going home at Thanksgiving—whether it's concern about seeing changes among old friends or how things will be with family members

How College "Credit" Can Become a Problem

The Credit Card Conundrum

It didn't always used to be this way. A generation ago, few college students had their own credit card. Yet, in 1998, 67% of students came to school with a card. And now at least 75% of college students have that piece of plastic in their pockets.

While many students contend with credit responsibly, it is also a mighty temptation for others, some who rack up serious debt. Top that off with appealing credit card offers in the student union accompanied by free T-shirts or iPod raffles, or Internet offers that seem too good to pass up, and you have a problem.



Watch Out for These Concerns

As a concerned parent, you can help your student steer clear of debilitating credit issues by increasing your own awareness. Here are a few of the lesser-known issues involved with student credit cards:

Universal Default. Some companies alter cardholders' rates when their credit scores change. So, if a student misses a payment or two, his credit score can go down significantly. Then, if he has two credit cards, paying one faithfully but missing a payment on the other, universal default kicks in, raising the interest rate on *both* cards to 30%!

Too-High Credit Lines. When a college student can access a \$10,000 line of

credit, something is wrong. And the potential for problems of living beyond her means is high.

A Lack of Information. Students can have a difficult time understanding the terminology and the mathematics of credit.

A Culture of Debt. When students have immediate needs, such as gas, food or books, they can easily get in the habit of charging these purchases. This can become a cycle, as the debt increases, along with late payments, leading to more charges just to make ends meet.

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Student Credit Card Protection Act

According to *Business Week* (9/4/07 and 9/7/07), the Senate is expected to hold hearings this fall to examine the credit card industry's practices. Representative Louise Slaughter (D-NY) re-introduced a bill, the Student Credit Card Protection Act, this August that would limit students' credit availability to 20% of their income if parents co-sign for the card or \$500 without a co-signer. Plus, credit issuers would be required to review students' credit history and proof of income before handing out a credit card.

How Parents Can Help

Now, how can you help your student?

- **Share the Dangers of Paying on a Card and Collecting From Friends.** It's a common practice among students: one will put



the whole dinner or movie charge on his credit card and friends will reimburse him with cash. This money, intended to pay the bill, can easily disappear, however, leaving your student with a large credit charge and no way to pay it.

- **Explain the "Grace Period."** A credit card statement may tout a 15-25 day "grace period" to pay your bill. However, this may only apply if students don't have a previous balance on their account. If they do have a balance, chances are that they'll be paying interest on their new purchases right away.

Being Upfront About Money

Does your student know how much spending money is available to him or her this semester? Have you discussed where this money will come from? Do you know what credit cards your student currently has? These are important conversations to have so that assumptions, poor choices and financial troubles don't take over.

- **Encourage Students to Pay Up.** Paying off credit card balances avoids interest accumulation while helping students prove to creditors that they are a good credit risk. An active, paid up account will make it easier for students to negotiate with loan officers in the future.
- **Talk About the Practice of "Living Off Your Credit Card."** It may seem convenient for students to use their credit card for everything but the benefit of cash is that it's much easier to keep accurate tabs on spending. Credit card purchases often don't show up on a printed bill for a month and by then, students may have gotten themselves into trouble.
- **Warn Them to Put the Charge Card Down and Step Away From the Mall!** Recreational shopping is a pastime of choice for many students. Encourage them to know their limits so that peer pressure and impulse buying don't lead them to poor money decisions.
- **Ease Into It.** Encourage your student to start with a low credit limit to avoid temptation. Make the card for emergencies only. His future credit card usage will probably be more prudent as a result.
- **Start the Practice of Paying on Time.** Your student can avoid late fees by paying on time. Encourage her to pay her bill as soon as it arrives so that it's not lost in the shuffle of her busy life. Making mistakes in this arena can be hard to rectify.
- **Don't Go Overboard.** Just because someone offers your student a credit card with low introductory rates doesn't mean he has to apply for it. Too many cards can get confusing and students are

Tips to Consider

Business Week offers "Tips for Staying Out of Debt" as well as "Tips Once You Are in Debt" at www.businessweek.com/bwdaily/dnflash/content/sep2007/db2007091_214837.htm. Some sample tips include:

- Go for a card with an APR no higher than 15%.
- Don't have more than one or two major credit cards; it could hurt your credit score if you have too many.
- Try to pay more than the minimum.
- Pay the most on your card with the highest APR.
- Don't pay by phone; many credit companies charge up to \$10 to process payments by phone.

bound to have a tough time keeping track of what they've actually spent.

In addition, parents can set up to receive duplicate statements or monitor their students' account online, if they want to help them stay on track with credit card care.

The "spend now, pay much later" temptation associated with credit cards is causing many students to get in over their heads. According to the Nellie Mae Corporation, 91% of students own at least one credit card by their senior year, with an average balance of \$2,850. With your guidance, your student can make safer, smarter choices.

Sources: www.businessweek.com, 9/4/07 and 9/7/07; www.cbs.com, 9/12/07



When Students Choose to Become Vegetarian or Vegan

Sometimes, students decide against meat. This may have happened to your student, a tip she shares just as the Thanksgiving turkey is thawing nicely. What does it mean when students become vegetarians or vegans? Here is a primer to make sense of it all.

Being a Vegetarian

Going meat-free is not a recent fad. A variety of people advocate or advocated for vegetarianism, from Albert Einstein to Mr. Rogers to Clara Barton, according to The Vegetarian Resource Group.



What Does It

Mean? Vegetarians abstain from eating meat, fish or poultry.

Why? Reasons vary for being a vegetarian, including compassion for animals; a belief in non-violence; and economic, health, religious and ecological concerns.

A vegetarian diet can meet people's known nutrient needs, according to the American Dietetic Association. The key is eating a wide variety of food from different food groups and limiting the amount of fatty, sweet substances. Check out the meal planning tips boxed here and the Vegetarian Food Guide Pyramid at www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/nutrition_5105_ENU_HTML.htm for more information.

Being a Vegan

Vegans go one step further by steering clear of animal products. This, too, is not a recent fad; it's just becoming more mainstream and recognized.

What Does It Mean? Vegans avoid using or consuming animal products. This includes items such as milk, cheese, eggs, leather, fur, wool, silk, down and products tested on animals (such as chemicals or cosmetics).

Why? Veganism is the touchstone of a cruelty-free lifestyle, plus it provides benefits to the lives of animals, to the environment and to individuals' health.

Students often choose to make a commitment to a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle during their college years. The reasons for this vary: their awareness is raised, they are able to talk with more people making similar choices, they are stirred to get active and this lifestyle choice is one part of it, and more. It's typically not intended as a desire to make family life more difficult or to disparage your pork chops. Your vegetarian or vegan student may just be testing her wings and deciding what is important to her.

Luckily, most college dining halls offer a variety of options that

provide adequate nutrition for vegetarians and vegans. Your student can also talk with folks in dining services about this lifestyle choice for assistance in planning nutritionally sound meals.

So, if you find that your student has decided to go meat- and/or animal product-free this holiday season, consider how he is growing and maturing into his own choices. Whether the decision to become a vegetarian or vegan "sticks" in the long run, for now it is about who he wants to be and how he wants to put his passions into action.

Sources: American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org; Vegan Action at www.vegan.org/; The Vegetarian Resource Group at www.vrg.org/

Vegetarian Meal Planning Tips

From the American Dietetic Association

There is a Vegetarian Food Guide Pyramid available from the American Dietetic Association (ADA) at www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/nutrition_5105_ENU_HTML.htm. In addition, here are some meal planning tips they provide:

- Choose a variety of foods.
- Choose more foods from any of the food groups to meet your energy needs—those listed are for minimum daily intakes.
- Choose eight or more servings per day from the calcium-rich food group.
- Include two servings per day of foods that supply n-3 fats, like ¼ cup of walnuts, 1 teaspoon flaxseed oil, a tablespoon of ground flaxseed, or 3 teaspoons of canola or soybean oil.
- You can use servings of nuts and seeds in place of servings from the fats group.
- Get adequate vitamin D through fortified foods or supplements, or from daily sun exposure.
- Include at least three food sources of vitamin B-12 every day, such as 1 cup fortified soymilk, 1 large egg, 1 oz. of fortified breakfast cereal, 1.5 ozs. of fortified meat analog, 1 tablespoon of Red Star Vegetarian Support Formula nutritional yeast, ½ cup of cow's milk or ¾ cup yogurt.
- Consume sweets and alcohol in moderation. Get most of your daily calories from the foods in the Vegetarian Food Guide.

The Problem Procrastinator

Some students are procrastinators and some are not. That doesn't have to become a lifelong label, however. Students who procrastinate may be in trouble and need help dealing with their "wait until later" tendencies.

It's okay to put things off every once in awhile or to give yourself a break from a task and then come back to it. But procrastinating regularly can be a real problem.

Procrastination has both mental and physical impacts. Dr. Joseph Ferrari, an associate professor of psychology at DePaul University (IL) told *Psychology Today* that real procrastinators do five telltale things:

1. Underestimate how long it will take to get something done.
2. Overestimate the amount of time they have to get something done.
3. Overestimate how motivated they'll feel the "next time" when they expect they'll get something done.
4. Mistakenly believe that working when they're not in the mood is less than optimal.
5. Mistakenly believe that, in order to succeed at a task, they need to feel like doing it.

Where Does Procrastination Come From?

Procrastination is caused by:

- ✓ depression
- ✓ self judgment
- ✓ a desire to avoid negative experiences
- ✓ a need for love
- ✓ a low tolerance for frustration
- ✓ being overextended
- ✓ perfectionism
- ✓ a rigid identity
- ✓ fear of others' response/evaluation

- ✓ a lack of training
- ✓ hostility
- ✓ feeling like life is not fair

Helping a Problem Procrastinator

If you are really concerned that a student has taken procrastination tendencies to the extreme, confront the issue in a caring way. Share your concerns and why you are worried

by using "I" statements. Identify what you have noticed. Perhaps the student is just going through a rough spell. If not, and you think he needs assistance, direct him to the appropriate resource on campus, such as the learning center, a residence hall staff member, an academic advisor or another trusted adult. Addressing the problem early on will enable the student to develop better habits for the future.

Enhance Community Connections through Meetup Groups

Now that your student is in school, you may find yourself with a bit more time for yourself. And it's well deserved! If you'd like to spend that extra time pursuing a new or neglected interest within a community of others, then Meetup.com may be your cup of tea.

With the mission of "revitalizing community in America," the five-year old company gained widespread attention during Howard Dean's 2004 campaign. Now, close to two million people have joined Meetup Groups focusing on over 4,000 different interests. From Poker Meetups to Knitting Meetups, you can explore a hobby. Ghost Tracking Meetups, Investors Meetups and Writers Meetups allow you to discover something new. There are also Pug Lover Meetups, Scrapbooking Meetups, Italian Language Meetups, Book Club Meetups... the list is extensive! Finding something that strikes your fancy is almost guaranteed.

Meetup Groups can be a great way to expand your community connections. Simply sign up at Meetup.com and then group organizers gather people together in coffeehouses, restaurants and living rooms to share experiences. Enter your zip code to find out what groups are already established in your area. Or start your own! Meetup Group meet regularly in 55 countries around the world so, chances are that something interesting is happening in your neck of the woods.

Or, if your student is looking for a way to pursue an old passion or a new interest, there just might be a Meetup Group for him, too.

Here's to an enhanced, enlightened sense of community!

For more information about Meetup Groups, head to www.meetup.com.

