



Your Bottom Line

Your go-to resource for timely information about personal finance, college planning and student loan management

September 2018

WHAT'S INSIDE

Page 2

- Emergency Savings
- Back to School Habits for Success

Page 3

- College Application Week
- On Our Mind: Volunteerism

Page 4

- Online Car Buying

Strategies for Successful Student Loan Repayment

There are many options for covering the cost of a college education, including grants and scholarships, work-study and student worker positions, personal savings and even paying your way through school each semester. Student loans are another tool that can be utilized once the previously mentioned options have been exhausted. For many students, a student loan is their first credit experience. If a student needs to borrow to pay for school, s/he should take steps to develop a positive credit rating and begin a healthy financial future by borrowing responsibly and then successfully repaying what is owed. Below are some strategies to ensure successful repayment.

- **Borrow smart.** Once a student has completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA](#)), s/he'll receive a financial aid award letter from the school they plan to attend. It's important to know that the student doesn't have to

accept all the financial aid that is offered. S/he can accept only what is needed to pay the cost of attendance and decline the rest. That way the student only borrows what s/he needs to pay for school without accumulating unnecessary student debt. To limit debt, students should always accept free money first. Pell grants, OTAG, and other grants and scholarships are considered gift aid that doesn't have to be paid back.

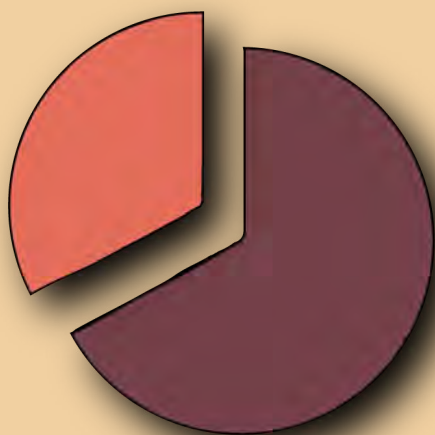
- **Understand borrower responsibilities.** Students should carefully read the Master Promissory Note (MPN). This is a legal document where the student acknowledges the commitment to pay back any money borrowed. Student loan repayment typically begins at the end of a student's grace period. The grace period ends six months after a student is no

Cont. on page 2

longer enrolled in school or drops below part-time student status. This will go into effect whether the student has completed a degree or not.

- **Plan for repayment.** It's best to craft a student loan repayment plan well in advance of the end of the student's grace period. Before the student graduates, s/he should review all the different repayment options available and decide which option best suits his or her financial situation.
- **Monitor the status of student loans.** It's important for students to be aware of how much s/he has borrowed. The [National Student Loan Database System](#) (NSLDS) houses all of the information students need to monitor federal student loans. NSLDS houses all students' loan servicer contact information, principal balances and the status of each loan.
- **Stay in touch with the loan servicer.** Students should notify his or her loan servicer if address or contact information has changed. It's also extremely important to contact the loan servicer if a student is struggling to make his or her loan payments. They may qualify for a repayment schedule that better suits their financial needs; or depending on their situation, may qualify for a deferment or forbearance.

For more information about successful student loan repayment visit [ReadySetRepay.org](#).



Two-Thirds of Americans say they would have difficulty coming up with \$1,000 to cover an emergency.
- AP-NORC Bankrate

Don't be another financial statistic!
Visit [OklahomaMoneyMatters.org](#) for resources to help you achieve financial success.

Habits for Academic Success

Success in school is not something that happens by chance, it takes some work. Developing habits that help you be successful will ensure you reach your academic goals. With these tips, you can be on your way to a successful school year.

- **Actively attend class.** Don't just go to class, *participate* in class. Take good notes and use color coded highlighters (blue for dates, green for terms, yellow for people or places, etc.) to quickly reference important information. Ask questions and don't be afraid to talk with your teacher if you're having a difficult time.
- **Schedule and organize.** Each student has different responsibilities, but having a routine will help you accomplish everything that's on your plate. Write down your schedule so that you know what you'll be doing next. Some studies suggest that using blue ink or eating peppermints can help you remember tasks and information better. To keep subjects separated, use different folders and binders for each class.
- **Plan ahead.** Prepare for school by gathering your backpack, packing a lunch, and laying out your clothes the night before to avoid morning stress. Put your backpack in a specific location where you can easily grab it on your way out the door.
- **Find a study place.** Choose a place to study that's free from distractions. Make goals for each study session to help you focus on one task at a time instead of cramming all of the information at once. To improve your retention, pretend you'll be the one teaching the subject.
- **Utilize technology wisely.** Instead of using technology to aimlessly scroll through social media, use apps to help you check your assignments for errors. Run your paper through [Grammarly](#) or [Google Translate](#) to see if you need to make corrections. Use apps like [Photomath](#) and [Khan Academy](#) to learn difficult math concepts.



Thousands of Oklahoma students will soon take advantage of College Application Week (CAW) 2018 through college planning events across the state.

CAW is part of a national initiative sponsored by the Kresge Foundation, Lumina Foundation, and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the American Council on Education. Locally, CAW is proudly sponsored by the Oklahoma GEAR UP Program and the Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP). During CAW, the objective is to give every high school senior the opportunity to complete one or more college applications online at a high school, technology center, library or community center, with assistance from knowledgeable staff and volunteers who are present during the application process.

This year, Oklahoma's designated CAW week is Sept. 17-21. Schools and organizations that are unable to fit their CAW events into that week are free to hold their event any week during the fall semester, through the month of November.

Since the Oklahoma GEAR UP program piloted CAW in November 2012, thousands of Oklahoma students have submitted college applications during this special yearly emphasis. CAW has made a dramatic difference in the number of completed college applications, particularly for those students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education.

For more information and planning tools, visit OKCollegeAppWeek.org.

On Our MIND

What's on the mind of OCAP staff? This month, student portal coordinator Theresa Shaklee talks about the benefits of volunteering.



Did you know that volunteering is good for your emotional and physical health? Those who volunteer have been found to have lower levels of depression, less risk of heart disease and even tend to live longer. Volunteering allows you to connect to your community, meet new people and build new skills. There is an opportunity to fit everyone's interest and level of commitment. To make your volunteer experience truly enjoyable, consider these points to find the activity that will best suit you.

- **Time commitment.** Some volunteer opportunities require a long-term commitment and training. If the organization requires availability once a week for six months, be sure you can really follow through before signing up. If a long-term commitment doesn't work with your schedule, don't despair! There are many opportunities that are short-term or even one-time events. For example, one of my favorite places to volunteer is the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma. Volunteer opportunities are listed on their website, so I can review the options and select a time and date that fits my schedule. Many of their volunteer shifts are only two and half hours. No long-term commitment or extensive training necessary!
- **Location.** Think about how you enjoy spending your time and what you're passionate about. If you love animals, research volunteer opportunities at your local animal shelter. If you love working with children, ask your local school district about assisting in a classroom or with an upcoming event. If you're still not sure where to start, check out VolunteerMatch.org. This site allows you to search for volunteer opportunities in your area. You can customize the search based on age, location and the type of organization or cause you're interested in serving.
- **Support.** If jumping into a new volunteer experience seems a little daunting, ask a friend to join you. Getting your children involved early and modeling volunteerism is the best way to encourage a philanthropic spirit. As with adults, volunteering allows children to explore careers they might be interested in while learning the importance of helping others. Just be sure you ask about minimum age requirements ahead of time.



Online Car Shopping

Buying a car should be an exciting experience, but the flashy bells and whistles of your dream car often dim during the painstaking search and financing process. Unless you truly enjoy bartering and the limited options available at many car dealerships, you're probably inclined to start your search on the internet.

Online car-buying has advanced in recent years. Many car dealerships will post inventory on their website or other national car sites, which allows you to browse options before you ever leave the house. New sites, like [Carvana.com](https://www.carvana.com), will deliver the car to your house or one of their "car vending machines" for you to pick up later. Other sites, like [RelayCars.com](https://www.relaycars.com), have started using virtual reality technology so you can look around the car without going to a dealership.

Even with this new car-buying trend, many traditional car-shopping processes are still applicable to shopping for cars online. Below are some important steps to ensure you get the best deal possible.

- **Decide what kind of car you're looking for.** Will it be an SUV, truck or sedan? Determine which option fits your lifestyle.
- **Determine your price range.** It is vital to ensure you're being practical about what you can afford within your budget. While shopping online, make sure you look at any delivery fee or other charges that will add to your overall price.
- **Vet your vendor.** When buying anything online, whether it's a car or a pair of shoes, research to ensure that you're buying from a reputable online dealership and not an illegitimate site. You can do this by looking at their online reviews and contacting the company directly.
- **Take a test drive.** Once you've found the right car from the right site, you'll still want to test drive the car and schedule an evaluation by a trusted mechanic. Often an auto shop will do this free of charge. If you don't like the car, don't feel obligated to keep it.



The Oklahoma College Assistance Program, an operating division of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, provides college access and financial aid awareness, financial literacy and student loan management programs and services that benefit students, parents, schools and community partners.

