



Your Bottom Line

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



Living on Last Month's Income

Most people create their budget based on what they anticipate earning in the future. While there's nothing inherently wrong with that strategy, an alternative budgeting method may help you stay on top of your expenses and allow you to plan ahead based on the income you've already earned and banked. It's called living on last month's income.

Wouldn't it be great to know in advance, without a doubt, that you'll have enough money to pay all of your expenses each month? By living on last month's income, you can do just that. The concept is simple. First, determine how much money you'll need each month for all your expenses. Then, whenever possible, gradually put aside money in a separate account until you've saved enough to cover one month's expenses. For

example, if you need \$3,000 to cover all your monthly expenses, and you bring home \$3,800 each pay period, save the extra \$800 in a separate account. Once you reach \$3,000, you've met your goal and can rest assured that you'll have enough money to cover your expenses for the upcoming month. Continue this process month-to-month and you'll always have confidence that your financial need will be met.

Even with this system, standard budgeting rules still apply. Don't make the mistake of omitting expenses like entertainment. While it's possible to live without spending money on entertainment, it's not realistic. When possible, reduce expenses, but be honest with yourself about your needs, wants and spending habits so you'll set goals that are achievable.

There are many reasons why this strategy is beneficial. For one, you already know exactly how much money you have to work with. For those with variable income, this eliminates the guessing game of whether or not you'll make it financially through the end of the month. It also gives you a clear idea of how much you'll have for variable expenses, like dining out. But most importantly, this method provides peace of mind and relieves financial stress. After all, who wouldn't sleep more soundly knowing they'll be able to pay their electric bill (and every other expense) each month?

So how can you easily implement this strategy? We've already established that you'll need to save "extra" money from each paycheck until you have enough money saved

cont. on page 2



College Savings Month
Money Talks



Q&A:
College App Week



ID Theft
Myths



UCanGo2
Counselor Kits
On Our Mind



Money-Saving Tips
Workplace Money
Matters



Pay Less for
These Items
Budget Treats



Partner News
and Events

to pay for one month's expenses. According to YouNeedABudget.com, this part of the process often takes 4-6 months to achieve, so don't give up hope if it takes a little while to reach your savings goal. Saving, like anything else worth doing, takes time.

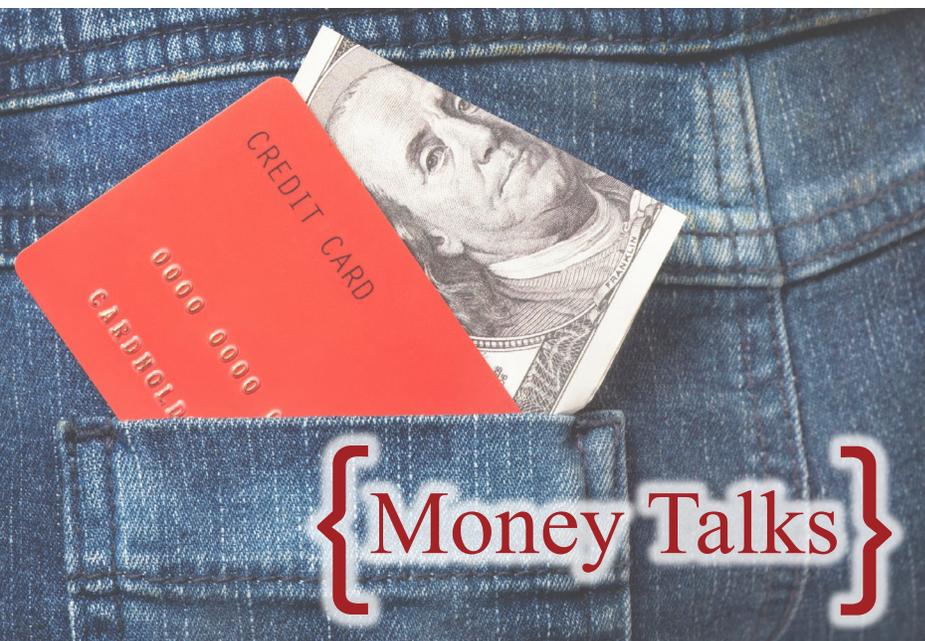
Once you have one month's expenses saved, bank your current paycheck and use your saved money to cover your current expenses for the month. As you earn additional paychecks, continue to set aside money in preparation for the next month. If you're paid weekly and you spend \$3,000 per month, then you'll aim to set aside at least \$750 per week to cover your monthly expenses. As long as you're not earning less money than you're spending, you'll already have enough money saved to cover your immediate expenses. All money you earn going forward will be used for future expenses. If you routinely end up with more money than you need to cover expenses, consider using it to reduce debt or build an emergency or retirement fund.



College Savings Month

September is designated as College Savings Month, where families are encouraged to make a dedicated effort to stash money for their children's future education. If you're like many parents, you agree that saving for college is a great idea, but you have no idea where to start or how much you'll need to save. Here are things to consider and steps to take when setting your college savings goal.

- **Schools and costs vary.** Schools, from community colleges to private universities, have different fee structures and costs of attendance. OKcollegestart.org is a great resource for exploring Oklahoma's higher education options and their associated costs, including fees, tuition, room and board.
- **Some is better than none.** Try not to get overwhelmed by the numbers. You may want to foot the entire bill for your children, but there's a lot to be said for asking them to contribute to the effort. When they're old enough to get a job, encourage them to save all or a portion of their income for college expenses. During their junior and senior years of high school they can treat applying for grants and scholarships like a full-time job.
- **Maximize your efforts.** Some saving vehicles offer more bang for your buck. Every state offers a 529 college savings plan, which is a tax-advantaged investment account that allows contributions and earnings to be withdrawn tax-free when used to pay for qualified higher education expenses. Learn more about Oklahoma's 529 plan at OK4Saving.org.



{ Money Talks }

Start a conversation with your friends or family about money. Ask them:

“If you found \$1,000, how would you spend it?”

Tell us at [Twitter.com/OKMoneyMatters](https://twitter.com/OKMoneyMatters)
or [Facebook.com/OklahomaMoneyMatters](https://facebook.com/OklahomaMoneyMatters)





College Application Week

Letha Huddleston, Outreach Specialist

UCanGo2

Letha Huddleston, UCanGo2's Outreach Specialist, answers our questions about College App Week, happening Nov. 16-20.

What is College App Week?

Oklahoma College App Week is an opportunity for high school seniors to receive hands-on assistance from knowledgeable volunteers while completing their application to college. While these events are designed to help all students, they're especially beneficial for those who've never considered going to college or will be the first in their family to attend college.

College App Week is part of a national initiative sponsored by the Kresge Foundation, the Lumina Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the American Council on Education. On the state level, the project is endorsed by the State Secretary of Education's office, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education's Chancellor Glen D. Johnson, the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the Oklahoma State Chamber.

In 2012 and 2013, Oklahoma GEAR UP piloted the program in the 24 school districts they serve. Last year, all high schools across the state were invited to participate.

As a result, 65 total schools hosted a College App Week event, resulting in the submission of over 6,900 college applications from Oklahoma seniors.

This year's College App Week efforts are looking great, too! With the help of the Oklahoma College Assistance Program (OCAP) and the Oklahoma College Access Network (OK-CAN), the effort has grown even more.

Is this event only for schools or can other organizations participate?

We've extended invitations not only to Oklahoma high schools, but also to libraries and career counselors at technology centers throughout the state. We've calculated that 44 new schools/organizations have jumped on board to support this effort by hosting an event. When you add these to the number of veteran organizations from last year and the participating GEAR UP school districts, we have the potential of reaching students in over 100 schools, libraries and technology centers statewide.

We're so excited about the possibilities! Our vision is for Oklahoma's College App Week to grow steadily over the years. Wouldn't it be great if every

high school in Oklahoma could eventually be a part of this effort?

How can schools and organizations learn more or sign up to host a College App Week event?

Anyone who's interested can visit OKCollegeAppWeek.org to learn more. The Event Coordinator section contains a variety of planning materials and participation packets for students and volunteers. These materials provide valuable ideas and helpful tools for planning and conducting your event. You can register your school or organization for College App Week by filling out a short online registration survey. While supplies last, OCAP will send two free College App Week posters to each registered organization and "I Applied" stickers for participating seniors.

UCanGo2 also trains event coordinators via webinars and conference calls to introduce College App Week and step through the program materials and resources. It's not too late to get involved! There are two training calls scheduled for Oct. 7 and Nov. 4. To learn more about these training opportunities, call 405.234.4345 or email lhuddleston@ocap.org.

Don't Buy the Lie: ID Theft Myths Debunked

Myth #1: Identity theft only occurs online.

The Internet provides ample opportunity for thieves, but identity theft can occur anywhere. Methods are constantly evolving, but personal information is most often compromised through dumpster diving, mail theft, “skimming” credit or debit card information, third-party sources handling your personal information and even through others eavesdropping on your conversations.

Solution: Be very aware and guard how your information is handled and shared. Pay with cash or be vigilant about checking your bank and credit card statements. Use a crosscut shredder to destroy all unneeded documents containing personal information. Install a locked mailbox for incoming mail and send outgoing mail through secured postal receptacles. When sharing information in person, like at a doctor's office, type it on a calculator or cellphone or write it down and shred the paper later. If appropriate, decline the request for personal information.

Myth #2: Resolving identity theft issues is a quick process.

Unfortunately, the average time for resolving ID theft is 300 hours, or 7 ½ weeks of full-time work. Some people are fortunate and recover quickly, while others may deal with the repercussions for the rest of their lives.

Solution: Once you discover theft, immediately start the reporting process to prevent further damage. The Federal Trade Commission's step-by-step checklist at [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.ftc.gov/identitytheft) includes valuable information on the steps to take. The quicker you report an incident, the more control you have to resolve the problem.

Myth #3: My information is safe, if my social media profile is set to 'private.'

Your online life isn't secure. Even if you maximize security settings, your personal information can be exposed. Even those closest to you could use your information without your knowledge.

Solution: Remember that you're in complete control of what you share online. You're not obligated to provide information even if the social media or online site repeatedly suggests that you complete your personal profile. Be cautious with what you share online. Even the most innocent status update, home video or location check-in could put your personal information at risk.

Myth #4: There's nothing you can do to truly protect your information.

There are many resources available to limit your risk of identity theft, including theft of taxes, medical information and the misuse of your children's information.

Solution: Search the online resource clearinghouse at [OklahomaMoneyMatters.org](https://www.oklahomamoneymatters.org) and explore the Privacy & Identity page at [Consumer.ftc.gov](https://www.consumer.ftc.gov) for a variety of videos, articles and resources that can help you better understand how identity theft happens and what steps you can take to protect yourself and your personal information.

High School Counselor Kits Available



UCanGo2 supports efforts to educate students and parents as they plan, prepare and pay for college. The 2015-16 High School Counselor Toolkit is designed with an educator's specific needs in mind. Whether you have two hours or five minutes, this kit contains something that will help you educate families about preparing for college. The kits include:

- High School Student Workbook
- Instructor's Guide
- "A Plan of Action" to help you make the most of UCanGo2 tools throughout the year
- Student handouts
- UCanGo2 promotional materials
- Information about Oklahoma Money Matters, OCAP's financial education initiative
- *Are You Looking for Money?*, a popular publication about paying for college with scholarships, grants and federal student aid

If you received a toolkit last year, you should automatically receive an updated kit. If you would like to begin receiving this kit, email UCanGo2@ocap.org. For additional resources, explore the Educators and Publications pages at UCanGo2.org.

On Our MIND



What's on the mind of OCAP staff? This month, OKMM outreach specialist Ava Doyle talks about fitness and finances.

I've always had a love/hate relationship with exercise. I enjoy the benefits exercise offers: increased physical strength, a more efficient metabolism, higher self-esteem and positive body image. Yet, I don't enjoy battling the lack of motivation, muscle aches, joint pain or the frustration of gaining a few pounds (even if it means muscle gain). Yet, I want to be more toned, experience improved health and run a 5K or lift weights without struggling and gasping for air. So, exercise is here to stay!

There are many reasons people choose not to incorporate regular exercise into their lifestyle, and cost is often one of them. Fortunately the expense doesn't have to be a barrier to physical fitness. Here are the steps that help me succeed on my fitness journey.

- **Make a plan.** Planning allows me to research and set achievable goals catered to my personality and lifestyle. I love research, so the more I learn about exercising (the how, when, where and cost), the better my chances of sticking with it. Planning gives me control and provides motivation throughout my journey.
- **Enlist support.** Support can come from numerous sources; some cost, some don't. My primary care physician and the staff at my fitness center are paid to hold me accountable and provide expert advice. But support through online groups, fitness websites and friends and family encourages me through challenges and celebrates my victories at no cost.
- **Use your resources.** Luckily, there are endless free or low-cost exercises to choose from. Did you know that gallon jugs of water make great weights? Ever time abdominal exercises, like planks or sit-ups, to the length of television or radio commercials? I've even found that online aerobic dance videos provide a great workout. Finding creative ways to incorporate fitness allows flexible options without bulking up expenses.

Even though exercise is often hard work, my goal is to stay healthy, prevent illness and overcome some of the negative side effects of genetics and the environment. Overall, the ample benefits of exercise are well worth the investment of time, energy and a little bit of money.

Money-Saving Tricks, Big Financial Treats

Trying to save money shouldn't be a scary endeavor. Often it simply takes a bit of creativity. We asked readers to share their fabulous money-saving tricks that always produce financial treats. Here's what they had to say.

- My bank offers a variety of cash-back opportunities each month. There are usually deals for places where I regularly shop, so I get a percentage back just for selecting the offer and using my check card.

Mary Heid, OCAP

- To save money on Starbucks' coffee, I bought a really nice Starbucks on-the-go mug. I typically fill it with my favorite home-brewed coffee. Then, once or twice a month I treat myself to the real thing. Same satisfaction for a lot less money!

Melissa Michie, Oklahoma Teacher Connection

- My husband and I auto-deposit a portion of our paychecks into a money market account that serves as our emergency fund. We make a habit of saving a little more than we need to so when it comes time to buy gifts or replace a household item, we have the funds available with no impact on our monthly budget.

Elizabeth Pressler-Henderson, Communications

- We buy Christmas gifts early in the year. Beginning in July, we buy a present each month for each of our kids. This prevents us from buying everything right before Christmas and helps us make sure that they receive presents they actually want instead of what we can afford at the last minute.

Audrey Breen, Records

- We trade services (or favors) with friends and relatives. For example - my uncle is going to install new ceiling fans in my house. In exchange, I'll let him borrow my garage to store furniture during his upcoming move. I save the cost of installation and he doesn't have to pay for a storage unit.

April Goode, OneNet



Workplace Money Matters

Employers who provide financial education for their employees are repaid up to three times the cost of their efforts through increased productivity.

Oklahoma Money Matters' free workplace financial education service, *Workplace Money Matters*, gives you and your employees access to money management publications and a variety of Web tools and resources, including self-paced learning modules, a searchable resource clearinghouse and a customizable budget calculator. In addition, OKMM staff will work with you to build customized money management workshops that fit your schedule and your employees' interests and needs. Session formats include lunch-n-learns, workshop series, all-day corporate training events and train-the-trainer programs.

We can also help with marketing and promotion by providing value-building materials to support your employee education efforts, such as:

- paystub inserts
- customized email blasts for employees
- educational content for your website, staff newsletter or employee portal

To learn more about *Workplace Money Matters*, call 800.970.OKMM or email OklahomaMoneyMatters@ocap.org.

12 Items For Which You Shouldn't Pay Full Price

Does paying full price mean better quality? Sometimes, but not always. It's quite possible to get top quality products and services at a lower cost. If you're in the market for any of these items, some patience and a little research may help you negotiate lower prices. Happy hunting!

Credit Reports

Groceries

Restaurant Meals

Travel

Prescription Drugs

School Supplies

Cars

Cellphones & Plans

Houses

Clothes & Shoes

Books

Insurance



Healthy Halloween Treats on a Budget

If you're entertaining spooky guests this October, skip the expensive bags of candy and prepackaged goodies. With a little imagination, you can spend less money on healthier treats. Here are a few ideas:

- **Edible jack-o'-lanterns.** Buy a bag of tangerines or oranges and use a permanent marker to color a fun face. Or peel them and stick a small piece of celery on top for a super sweet "pumpkin."
- **Roasted pumpkin seeds.** When carving pumpkins, save the seeds! Rinse off the pulp, spread them on a baking sheet, sprinkle with salt and toast them in a 400° oven until they turn golden brown.
- **Tasty ghosts.** Peel bananas and cut them in halves, strategically placing chocolate chips for eyes. Remember to dip the peeled bananas in diluted lemon juice so they don't turn brown.
- **Bootiful fruit.** Fill a bowl with diced cantaloupe and whole blackberries for a festive mix of orange and black. For a fancier twist, alternate ingredients on skewers and serve on a platter for a striped effect.
- **Wickedly sweet witches.** Forgo sugary dough and instead use Halloween-themed cookie cutters to cut fruit into fun shapes, like honeydew witches or cantaloupe pumpkins.
- **Monster mouths.** Apples are a fall classic on their own, but they look extra spooky when you remove a wedge to create a mouth shape and use slivered almonds to make fangs. You could even add a slice of strawberry for a tongue!
- **Scream cheese ball.** Make a traditional cheese ball to serve with crackers and veggies, but shape it into something creepy, like a skull.

For other creative ideas, and for pictures of some of the ideas listed above, search online for "healthy Halloween snacks."



Partner News and Events



Member Meeting:
Wednesday, October 28
11:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.
Oklahoma City

For more information, email Melissa Neal at mneal@ocap.org.

Financial Empowerment Teacher of the Year Award 2015

Oklahoma financial education teachers (grades 7-12) are eligible to apply for, or be nominated for, this \$1,000 award.

Entries due Oct. 31

Visit Tinkerfcu.org for more information.

Plan Spend Invest
Earn Protect Save { FINANCIAL EDUCATION
Grow Budget } IN OKLAHOMA CONFERENCE

Wednesday, November 4

Moore Norman Technology Center - S. Penn Campus
Oklahoma City

For registration and conference information, visit the Events page at
OklahomaJumpstart.org.

Have News to Share?

Let us feature it! Do you have a contest, educational workshop or other event you'd like us to highlight in a future edition of the newsletter? Send a note to mneal@ocap.org today; space is limited.

OKMM™

OKLAHOMA MONEY MATTERS

Oklahoma Money Matters (OKMM), an initiative of the Oklahoma College Assistance Program and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, is a personal finance education program that helps K-12 schools, higher education campuses, businesses and community partners develop or expand educational services that empower Oklahomans to make positive financial choices.

Visit us online at
OklahomaMoneyMatters.org.

To ask questions or share comments regarding this newsletter, call 800.970.OKMM (toll free) or email OklahomaMoneyMatters@ocap.org.



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OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS
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