Spending Smarter and Stressing Less!

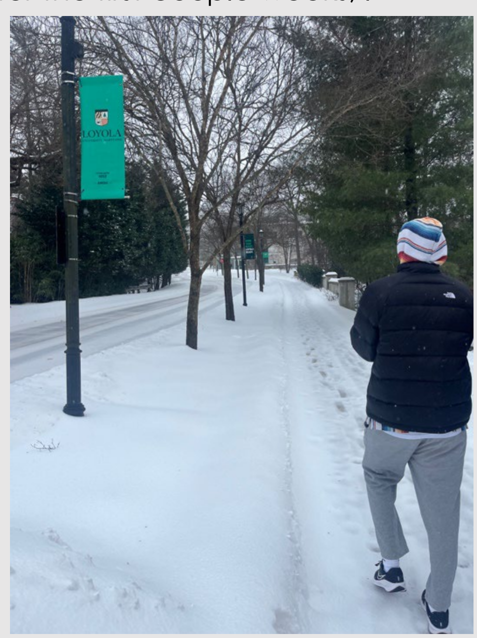
By Michael Liddy

The Reality of Financial Independence

The first couple days on campus can be nerve-racking and exciting. For many students, Loyola serves as the first place where you will experience real independence. Along with attending classes and making new friends, you also suddenly become in charge of responsibly managing your own money without parents constantly giving reminders to save money and make smart, responsible spending decisions. Everyday choices like buying a snack off campus, ordering late-night food and buying things just because they're convenient may seem small, but these decisions quickly build up. Although they seem small and insignificant in the moment, these choices can add up and hurt your finances.

Small Spending Gets Out of Control

I arrived at Loyola with a full bank account from my summer job and the first couple of weeks were full of spending with no thought. I would routinely grab food off campus, order late-night snacks, and tap my card whenever and wherever without a thought. After the first couple weeks, I checked my bank account, and I realized how fast everything had added up. If I spent $10 on some snacks during the day, $15 on some late-night food, and $30 on a couple of deliveries, that totals $85. That's not a small amount of cash for a college kid. At that moment, I realized I needed a plan if I wanted my money to last. That didn't mean I couldn't enjoy myself or treat myself occasionally, but rather that I needed to become aware of my spending.



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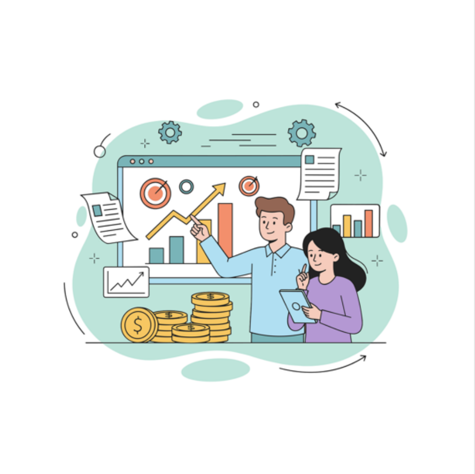
Creating a Budget that Works

After this realization, the first step I took involved making a simple budget. I had never needed one before Loyola. My spending had always been lightly monitored by my parents, but now I managed it on my own. I began by calculating how much I would spend per week and identifying where most of my money went. My budget didn't restrict me very much, but instead, it helped me understand where my money went each week. The budget showed my spending on Ubers, food delivery, and unnecessary items and allowed me to set limits to make my money last longer.



My budget was simple and easy to follow. I set a spending limit for each week based on how much money I had and how long it had to last. I had lots of flexibility within this budget. I still could order food and enjoy myself without feeling restricted. I just had to slightly cut down on these things. At the same time, by checking my spending, I don't feel the same stress I once did.

Why This Happens to So Many Freshmen

The issue of overspending is a common one. One of my good friends Kevin Sokolowski, a freshman at Loyola, described his similar issue: "By mid-October of my first semester I began stressing about money. Thankfully I have a more structured way of spending now." This happens to a lot of incoming freshmen. It's easy to underestimate the impact repeated small purchases can have on your bank account.

Another student I spoke to also had an overspending issue. My club basketball teammate, Dylan Jennsen, a freshman, and I used to order food for delivery, often after our basketball practice. We were tired and didn't feel like walking over to the dining hall where we could use our meal plan to get free food. These deliveries and DoorDash orders happened only a couple of times a week, but when I asked Dylan about the impact they had on him, he said, "It adds up way faster than I thought. Looking back, I spent a couple hundred dollars on food delivery alone." Dylan's experience highlights the common spending issue many college students face: Small, seemingly insignificant repeated purchases quickly turn into large expenses. You probably won't make huge irresponsible purchases, but smaller ones build up. That's what makes managing spending in college so difficult. The damage to your bank account happens with purchases that feel small and unimportant.

Recognizing this pattern became a turning point for me. I started questioning my spending choices. Should you use your meal plan instead of wasting money on delivery? Should you stop buying daily small snacks at Bowman Market? I began asking myself small questions and my habits started to change. Although I didn't stop spending, I became aware and intentional with the purchases by checking myself before every purchase. This slight change in my thinking has allowed my money to last longer.

Another thing you'll realize is that keeping a budget gives you more financial freedom. Instead of worrying or stressing out about your daily purchases, you can now spend without constantly worrying. A budget allows you to stay in full control of your money. You will understand where you're spending and how much you're spending. You won't just be checking your bank account every couple of weeks and hoping for the best.

Other students also had similar experiences. A sophomore student, Jake Kurilla, explained that "It's not that you have to stop spending money, it's just that you have to be more aware of it" when I asked him for advice on budgeting. Jake's insights reinforce the fact that being financially responsible is less about restricting yourself and more about awareness. You can't be in full control of your money if you don't have a plan.

Keeping it Simple

Even beyond creating a simple budget, creating key habits can make freshman year much more manageable. My financial management professor, Sam Adams, gave me advice on keeping personal finances simple: "The more moving pieces you have the harder it is to get a sense of what is actually going on in your finances and the easier it is to be overwhelmed and give up on your budgeting and saving journey." This is especially true when you're managing your own money for the first time. When finances are simple and easy to follow, it is much easier to see how often you're grabbing a snack from Bowman Market or ordering delivery. Simplicity is key to staying in control of your finances. By simply setting a spending limit per week, staying in control of your finances becomes easy.

Taking Control

If you're an incoming freshman, this is one of the most important things to learn early. College will bring new freedoms that you've never felt before, financial freedom being one of them. Without structure, this freedom can quickly turn into stress and anxiety, but you can easily prevent this issue from arising with some planning and budgeting. Managing your personal money doesn't need to be perfect, you just must be aware of your spending.

Looking back to my first couple months at Loyola, I wish I had started budgeting earlier. Budgeting would have saved me lots of stress and money. Even a simple budget would have saved me from the anxiety my money problems gave me, and I would likely have a couple more dollars in my bank account. Going to college gives you new independence, and with that new independence also comes new responsibilities. By staying aware of your finances and spending habits, you can enjoy your college experience to the fullest without unnecessary financial stress.