

From the Outside: The best things in life are resalable  
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By Rick Snee

There's another connotation when I call Radford University The Inside: prison. It's an almost too easy comparison: quality of food, free cable, plenty of time to work out, using Newports and cheap wine to buy sex and an inability to vote or carry weapons. But the overwhelming similarity regards the means to buy or sell goods or services, or money.

No college account is complete without tales of the broke college student. Like in prison, we had limited means to money. Some of us had sources on The Outside: family and friends who would send the credit card payment equivalent of cigarettes through the institution's mail office. Others had to scrape by as scroungers like Morgan Freeman in *The Shawshank Redemption*, using moxy, guile and subterfuge to stay afloat. And then there were the workers, who toiled part-time to pay for rock n' roll lifestyles.

Based on the stories I've received and my own experience, many of us were some combination of the three, especially when we overstayed our welcome and our parents (or grandparents or other benign benefactors) were also going broke to keep us in No-Doze and text books.

Those that had such benefactors were what I call the lucky ones. Most of us had this to some extent. The idea, like in prison, was that we would make the most of their patronage and leave The Inside as reformed professional adults. Deals ranged from paying for tuition and living expenses to a monthly allowance minus the compulsory yard work.

When I started attending RU in 2003, I had such a deal. My grandparents paid for my tuition, dorm and meal plan. I would pay for everything else with a monthly \$200 stipend.

By my first senior year, though, my credit card took up space in my wallet thanks to my newfound love of BT's. I needed a job and found one working as a table-setter-upper in the Heth Student Center and later as a section editor for *The Tartan*.

Workers were a special breed at RU. When we worked on campus, we (or at least I) looked at all the students we served as privileged yuppies. I started to sound like that uncle at every family reunion that complains about the new generation's sense of entitlement. Even though those other students were very possibly better off because of circumstances at home, or they—gasp—managed their money more appropriately, we felt superior, as if our polo shirts or cheaply published work kept RU running.

The idea behind working at school is that, according to most parental deals, the meager wage and tips we earned were ours to splurge. Unfortunately, our expenses often added up to more than \$6 an hour times 10 hours a week. So we convinced ourselves that we were preparing for future employment in the same way that convicts stamping license plates and standing in lines prepare for a career at the DMV.

Otherwise, workers were those people we knew would give us free drinks or food at their jobs. (Thanks, EJ!) And that's, partly, where scroungers (like me) play into this narrative of college economics.

In order to identify your nearest scrounger, look for the person in class who almost never has their book. There are varying degrees of this behavior: those that sold their books back early to pay for other things, and those that never bought the books in the first place, knowing they could get by with the Internet and people like you who bring the required text to every class.

Those are the obvious ones, but there are other scroungers surrounding you surreptitiously. There are the ones with older editions either loaned by friends or found in the library. Used books don't mean that person scrounges, but as Rock Star ('06) recounted on the condition of anonymity, peeling off the stickers and selling them back as "new" is a pretty good giveaway.

Other scrounger techniques include postponing haircuts indefinitely, familiarization with the pawn shop and asking others to swipe for lunch today with the promise to "gladly repay you next Tuesday" ... or next semester.

Okay, so you're on The Inside right now. Chances are very good that you are already one of the above three or well on your way. There's nothing wrong with doing those things (except when illegal or exploitative), but it's best to avoid them. After all, your focus should be on your grades and graduating in four years, and jobs and scrounging hurt those chances via distraction.

**Tip #1: Don't get the flex plan.**

You shouldn't starve if you have a meal plan, but it's possible to run out of meal dollars on the flex plan. That possibility is called Au Bon Pain. If you know you're bad with splurging, a regular meal plan means that you will have at least 2 meals a day for the entire semester at Dalton and Muse. Yes, there's the Dalton Dash and Muse Marathon to take into account, but the more you eat there, the quicker your digestive system will adapt like a good Marine. There's a time and a place for great food, and that's breaks at home. Tell your mom I said hi.

**Tip #2: Don't buy your books until the list is finalized.**

I had only one professor who stuck by his syllabus to the letter: Dr. Weiss. Unfortunately, he's retired, so 100 percent of your professors will cancel texts after the first day of class. Sell those books back right away, and you'll only get a fraction back of what you paid. Wait until the end of the semester, and you're only guaranteed **half** the original price. Instead, buy your books a week or two before they will come up in class.

However, the bookstores begin restocking a couple of weeks before the end of the semester, so try to buy those last books a month in advance. Otherwise, the book you need for your final will probably be sitting in a distribution center until the next semester.

All of this, of course, can be avoided by ordering and reselling online.

**Tip #3: When sinning, buy in bulk.**

It's the Costco/Sam's Club philosophy to consumerism: buying in bulk is a pain to carry, but there's less packaging, so it's cheaper. When buying alcohol, always buy larger cases or, better yet, kegs. At the bar, buy pitchers. Buy cartons of cigarettes to last two weeks instead of packs that will be gone in 6 hours. Buy large boxes of Trojans, or swipe them from the Health Center, which also gets them in bulk. I'm not sure if aborting twins or quintuplets is cheaper, but that should be more cost effective as well.

*NOTE: Concerned parents/the Bush administration have urged me to remind you that, in all of these situations, abstinence is cheapest option. But who wants to be cheap?*

**Tip #4: Don't use vending machines or buy snacks from the school.**

You complain about Dalton, yet you willingly overpay for sodas and candy. Repeating Tip #3, buy in bulk. Get a Food Lion MVP card or go to Wal-Mart and stock up for the month. At the very least, buy six-packs from the surrounding convenience stores. The City of Radford/Pulaski will thank you.

**Tip #5: If you have to work, do it as close to home as possible.**

Sure, Christiansburg and Blacksburg pay a little more, but you'll most likely spend that amount on gas, and let's not forget the nightmare called Radford parking when you get back. And no matter how lucrative it seems, nobody I know got rich selling knives. (Who are you going to sell them to, your roommates?) Try to work on campus, near campus or at home on breaks.

Katie Drummond ('07) wrote:

I saved up money from part-time or full-time jobs at home, but when I came to school I did not work. I was very fortunate not to have had to work while in school and I realize that not everyone has that opportunity, so I was very lucky in that way.

**Tip #6: Do onto others...**

Just like prison, you'll find that favors will increase your sway in the general population and make it easier to get what you need when you lack the means. Ashleigh Cadieux ('07) mentioned "[having] people over for a meal" with her roommate. Just be on the lookout for deadbeats; unlike prison, they don't get beaten with mop handles.

**Tip #7: If you don't need it anymore, sell it.**

Useless stuff costs more than you realize: moving or storage and a bigger apartment for it all. Besides that, it's wasteful because it could mean money for stuff that you actually need. Pawning goods and reselling clothes are a quick way to cash in, but you'll get better returns by advertising on bulletin boards around campus or online.

If you follow these tips and have a steady stream of cash, you shouldn't have to resort to our desperate means. The best result is to get your degree and start cashing in on bigger paychecks, rather than pay off collected debts, once you're on The Outside.

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