10 Things Your College Student Won't Tell You
SmartMoney.com
By Kristin Kovner
August 14, 2006

1. "Sure, I've cheated. Who hasn't?"
Blame it on Enron or blame it on Martha Stewart the fact is that cheating has reached an all-time high on today's college campuses, with 70% of students now admitting to some form of it. Incidents involving unsourced material from the Internet in written work have quadrupled in the past six years, yet 77% of students don't consider it cheating or "very serious." "Some students have justified it to themselves," says Donald McCabe, founding president of the Center for Academic Integrity. "They'll say it's the faculty's fault if they're too lazy to stop it.”

Mobile devices exacerbate the problem; students can text-message answers to one another or use camera phones to post exams online. Spark-Mobile, a service from study-guide publisher SparkNotes, lets students send in text-message queries and get crib notes in seconds. But that's just one of many such services: GradeSaver.com grants access to sample essays for $6 a month, while RentACoder.com lets computer-science students outsource homework to India for around $20. The companies say their sites weren't designed to help students cheat, but "it's impossible to police," admits RentACoder founder Ian Ippolito.

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2. "Everyone knows that 'studying abroad' is one big party."
Congress recently passed a resolution dubbing 2006 the "Year of Study Abroad." "We want the next generation of adults to be in touch with their national and global citizenship," says Jessica Townsend-Teague, program manager at the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship.

But despite good PR, study-abroad programs are often less than rigorous, and underage drinking is rampant. "It's necessary for the image of study abroad to shift from a 'party hearty' experience to a very serious national priority," Townsend-Teague avers. It's also a matter of safety: "Students go from being unable to drink legally to countries where alcohol is free-flowing," says Gary Rhodes, director of the Center for Global Education at Loyola Marymount University. "Some students have died while abroad."

Schools are doing their part to protect students, requiring better orientation and urging them to avoid countries deemed unsafe by the State Department. But Townsend-Teague advises students to think before they act: "Take a moment to be very sober about what we can and cannot do to rescue a student overseas."

3. "I'd stay here forever if I could get you to pay for it."
Brian Bordeau graduated this spring from the State University of New York at Binghamton. He says it wasn't a big deal, but admits everyone else thought it was he'd been in school for seven years. "Honestly, I'd rather come to school again next fall," he says. "I really like it here."
Bordeau isn't alone: Just 53% of students enrolled in standard undergraduate programs get their bachelor's degree within five years. Changing majors, transferring schools and good old slacking off can all result in extended enrollment. One of the obvious downsides is the added financial burden of an extra year or two in school. But there are hidden costs too. "You lose a lot of money in loan interest and forgone wages by taking that fifth or six year to finish," says Jacqueline King, director of the American Council on Education Center for Policy Analysis.

If you plan to pay your child's way through college, King suggests setting a firm timetable. When Bordeau was forced to take out loans to pay for tuition during his sixth year, he began to buckle down and hit the books. "This year I paid for it," he says. "That motivated me to finish."

4. "College life can be hazardous to my health."
Parents of college students often worry about their children's well-being and for good reason. The university experience can be marred by physical and mental health issues ranging from anorexia and communicable diseases to depression. But the most serious concern for parents and educators is suicide, which accounts for an estimated 1,100 student deaths each year.

Fortunately, most schools now have counseling and intervention programs, but they differ widely. Some colleges ask those who've disclosed thoughts of suicide to withdraw a policy that can inadvertently keep students from seeking help. The University of Illinois has developed another approach: protecting a student's "right to be in school," but requiring those who have threatened or attempted suicide to attend assessment sessions. "If a student says he wants to take his own life, those statements should always be taken seriously," says Paul Joffe, chair of the Suicide Prevention Team at the University of Illinois. The program is aggressive, but it works: UI's suicide rate has decreased by 45% since it began 21 years ago and is around half that of other Big Ten schools.

5. "My roommate isn't the only thing I have posted on the Internet."
Social-networking sites are wildly popular among college students, providing a forum for meeting and chatting with friends, posting photos, and writing about their lives and interests. But search Facebook as some employers do to screen job candidates and you'll find photos of underage drinking, partying and scantily clad college kids. "There are students who work like crazy on their GPA, but don't think twice about what they're posting on Facebook," says Lauren Steinfield, chief privacy officer at the University of Pennsylvania.

College athletes have been particularly brazen. In a recent incident involving Northwestern's girls' soccer team, pictures on Webshots.com showed rookies blindfolded and in their underwear performing sexually suggestive acts. The team was temporarily suspended, and some members await further disciplinary action.

"It's hard for anyone over the age of 30 to truly understand what is going on at college
these days without seeing it for themselves," says Bob Reno, founder of BadJocks.com, a sports-scandal site. And these days, it seems, "seeing it" is just a mouse click away.

6. "Just because I was a straight arrow in high school, doesn't mean I will be in college."

the statistics are pretty scary: Each year 2.8 million college students drive drunk, and 1,700 die from alcohol-related injuries. Nearly half a million engage in unprotected sex, and almost 100,000 students are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape. But alcohol isn't the only substance that's a problem. Use of narcotics other than heroin is back up to record levels among college students, and there's a newer trend causing concern: 29% say they have used prescription drugs recreationally. These include pain relievers like Vicodin, which can lead to respiratory and liver failure, and amphetamines such as Ritalin and Adderall, which can result in cardiac arrhythmia and coma and can lead to harder drugs. Students using these stimulants are 20 times more likely to try cocaine.

Ironically, while drug use in high school is also up, drinking there is at an all-time low. According to the latest UCLA survey, fewer than half of last year's incoming college freshmen say they drank beer as high school seniors. And while that's surely good news, it remains to be seen whether the trend holds once these students hit campus.

7. "My grades are none of your business."

Even though parents may have taken their child on campus visits, helped her move into her dorm and are now picking up the tuition bill, they could be denied access to their child's college records. Want to see if your son failed math? Wonder if your daughter has been ill? Depending on a given school's policy, you may have to get your college kid to sign a consent form.

Some schools grant access to parents of students who are claimed as dependents; there's also an exception permitting disclosure in the case of a medical emergency, such as a suicide attempt or testing positive for tuberculosis. "Nobody should get the impression that anything is absolutely confidential," says Steinfeld, at the University of Pennsylvania. Each school's approach to these exceptions is different, and the policy is usually detailed on the university's web site.

8. "I'll do just about anything for money."

It's no surprise that college students are strapped for cash, but what they'll do to earn it can be shocking. From being poked and prodded in lab tests to handing over their DNA, students will do almost anything that pays.

Participating in research studies and surveys is one way to earn cash without committing to a steady gig. Fliers advertising participation in an experiment worth anywhere from $7 to $80, depending on the task and time commitment adorn campus bulletin boards and psych-department web sites. "I have to get my money somehow," says Yale senior Elizabeth Friedlander, who averages three experiments per month so far including two MRIs.
For an even bigger payout, young women have begun donating their eggs to infertile couples: An "elite" ovum harvested from a healthy female at a top university can fetch anywhere from $10,000 to $35,000. "You'll see ads in all the Ivy League newspapers," says Debora Spar, a professor at Harvard Business School and author of The Baby Business. "Some women donate for money, some out of a sense of altruism, and most for a complicated mix of both motives." But the process is relatively new and virtually unregulated. "In other medical fields, we know the long-term effects," Spar says. "Here there's less information."

9. "I'm up to my ears in credit card debt..."
No one said college would be cheap tuition is up 95% from a decade ago at four-year public institutions and 74% at private schools. The cost of books, room and board is also on the rise. But many students who graduate with debt have only themselves to blame: Experts say the idea of living within one's means now seems alien to many students and cite growing pressure to keep up with classmates by purchasing expensive clothes, cars and gadgets. The average college senior now has six credit cards and a $3,200 total balance.

The effect is profound: 11% of college students frequently pay less than their monthly minimum, which can make it difficult to rent an apartment, obtain a car loan or even get a job. "Debt strangles their ability to become adults and make good career choices," says Tamara Draut, author of "Strapped: Why America's 20- and 30-Somethings Can't Get Ahead." In fact, 17% of young adults significantly alter their career path because they're so far in the red so early; Draut says that often "the door is locked" to fields like teaching and nursing, since salaries are too low to support young grads carrying heavy debt.

10. "...so I'll be moving back home after graduation."
On graduation day students are ready for the real world, and parents are finally off the hook, right? Not necessarily. Currently, in 13 million households up 70% from 2000 parents are financially supporting children 18 and over, whether they live at home or not. It's a trend that experts don't expect to end anytime soon.

What's more, even working adult children are struggling to make ends meet and they're moving back home in droves. They're called "boomerang kids," and eight million homes currently house them, according to MacroMonitor, a market-research program operated by Consumer Financial Decisions. "They're not dependent according to taxes, but they're sleeping on the couch, running up the utilities and using the ice box," says Larry Cohen, director of CFD. "The nest isn't quite empty."

Experts cite rising rents, the difficulty of finding a well-paying entry-level job and debt as the primary contributors to this national homecoming. It's not all bad moving home may give young adults a leg up, since they can use salaries to pay off debt and won't have to jump at the first job they're offered just to pay the bills. "If your parents live somewhere where you can find a job, do yourself a favor and live rent-free for a year or two. It makes a big difference," Draut says.