

College life is no walk in the park

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Venture Magazine

College has never been easy, but research papers, group presentations and final exams are not the only obstacles these days between students and their diplomas.

Learning to live on your own, finding the balance between part-time jobs and academic classes, and learning to survive the weekend on \$3.55 can all make college more of a challenge than it looks.

"When I was 18, my family couldn't afford to pay for college," said Nick Dorrity, a student who said he had to wait six years to become eligible for financial aid. Dorrity said remedial courses were needed to get him "up to speed" for college after several years outside of academia, but that a larger drawback was found after finally receiving financial aid. He discovered that the grants and loans he was given were not enough to cover the standard costs of living while in school and said he still had to work about 30 hours a week to support himself.

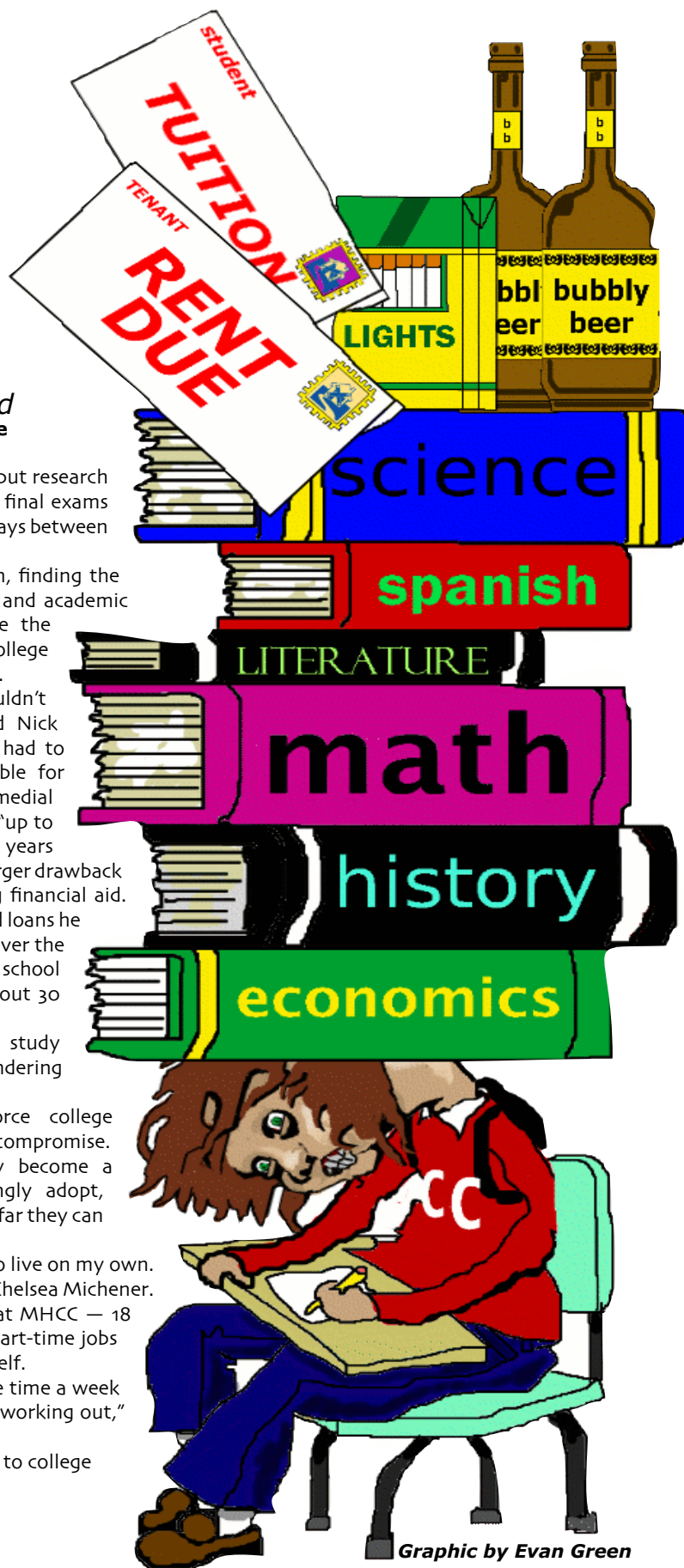
"This leaves me with little study time and a raised stress level hindering my academic potential," he said.

Financial struggles can force college students to major in the art of compromise. Time management can quickly become a minor many students unwittingly adopt, finding themselves learning how far they can be stretched and to what degree.

"I am still financially unable to live on my own. I still live at home," said student Chelsea Michener. She added that her course load at MHCC — 18 credits — is balanced with two part-time jobs that afford her little time to herself.

"I get about two hours of free time a week and spend most of it sleeping or working out," Michener said.

The financial burden of going to college



Graphic by Evan Green

goes well beyond tuition, fees and books. With gas prices closing in on \$4 a gallon, the simple decision of how to get to and from school becomes a major consideration.

If driving becomes unaffordable, then public transportation is the most logical alternative. But just getting to the Gresham campus can sometimes take several hours and might include catching two buses and a MAX train. While this may give a student time to read the next chapter in their history textbook, it can also add to stress and fatigue. And unless the TriMet board recently made a new policy decision, their buses don't always arrive at times that are synched with the beginning of MHCC classes.

Eating well on a tight budget and without culinary skills is yet another challenge. There is only so much ramen, mac & cheese and cold cereal a college student can eat without it affecting their energy level. And if a student gets sick and doesn't have health insurance, a new set of obstacles is thrown in the student's path.

These challenges would be formidable even for a veteran manager. For a young student learning how to juggle multiple demands, it can sometimes be overwhelming.

"It's really stressful at times when tuition is due as well, as my cell phone bill, and I need gas," said student Stephanie Ori of her balancing act of working and going to school. "Basically, I need to work on my time management skills."

The money crunch and time demands inevitably put the crimp on one's social life, since watching planes land at PDX is about the only free and entertaining venue Multnomah County has to offer.

"What makes life hard for me?" asked Kati Saindon, a full-time criminal justice major. "I work full-time. My personal life suffers and my friends complain that I don't see them enough."

Students like Saindon struggle to make something of themselves without losing who they are outside of the classroom and work environment, though Saindon said she can still see a light at the end of an exhausting tunnel.

"I struggle to enjoy these years and then to be independent," she said.

Independence is the brass ring many college students say they are reaching for — independence from ignorance, from economic roadblocks and from a lack of experience.

But what do these challenges teach them? The value of being independent, or the value of gas, textbooks, tuition, food, rent and stress? That lesson, it seems, it up to the students.

"There is no one here to tell you how to study or when to study," said student Sara Baerlocher, who is also a Rho Theta officer. "You're on your own."



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