


It's Cheaper to Live at Home While Attending College. So Why Are Fewer Students Doing It?

BY TERRI WILLIAMS ([HTTP://WWW.GOODCALL.COM/NEWS/AUTHOR/TERRIWILLIAMS/](http://www.goodcall.com/news/author/terriwilliams/))  POSTED ON OCTOBER 14, 2015 AT 1:20 PM

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For college students, living at home has always been one way to save substantially on room and board – in addition to free laundry and meals. However, a recent Sallie Mae survey shows that this option has become less popular in recent years.

Year	Percentage of College Students Living at Home
2015	48%
2014	54%
2013	57%

So – what's going on here? Survey after survey supports the theory that parents and students are worried about the high cost of higher education and looking for ways to reduce expenses. And yet, fewer college students are staying at home – or even staying close to home.

Year	Percentage of College Students Choosing a School Close to Home
2015	53%
2014	61%
2013	59%

Are students opting to leave the nest to gain more freedom and independence? Are parents electing to let their kids stay on- or off-campus – even though it may cost more – to make them more responsible and give them a true “college experience?”

GoodCall spoke with a variety of students, experts and parents to get their opinions on this subject.

A number of reasons for living at home

Aliya Brown, who graduated this year from City University of New York-Baruch College with a degree in Sociology, says she lives in New York and decided to stay at home because moving out was an unnecessary expense. “I am relatively free at home and very responsible, so I don't feel that not having gone away to school has had a major impact on my sense of independence.”

Brown says that she had the opportunity to interact with other students and form friendships through college clubs and other student activities. “I think that my upbringing has had the biggest impact on my decision making skills; I can't say that having gone away to school would have enhanced said skills any more than staying at home and growing into adulthood has,” says Brown.

Madison Jones, who attended San Jose State University and graduated from California Lutheran University in 2014, says she lived in the dorms and briefly in a sorority house. “It helped me to interact with a variety of students, some of whom I am still in contact with today.” She decided to transfer universities and moved back to Southern California after her sophomore year, where she lived at home for the last two years of college.

“While I have no issues living at home – I still do! – and am very close with my family, I do feel that I missed out on interacting with some of the students at my new university,” says Jones. Although she still made friends and had a great academic experience, she says she wishes she had chosen to live another year or even another semester on campus at her new school. “I think it forces you to be more social and interactive, and when friends get together for a study group or movie night, you don't have to say ‘Oh, I'd love to, but I have a long commute and need to head home,’” says Jones.

Victoria Wynne Phillips, who just graduated from Georgia Southern at twenty years old spent her entire college career living at home with her parents. “The main reason that I chose to do so was because I was sixteen at the time I started college,” explains Phillips. “When I turned 18, I was so close to graduating anyway, it seemed logical to just stay where I was until I found a job after graduation.”

Phillips believes it was the perfect decision for her but knows it might not be right for everyone. “I didn't feel like there was a point in spending money on rent when I had a perfectly good room at home. My parents are very chill and have always let me have space, as long as they know I'm safe. I don't think I missed out on any of the normal college social activities because of living at home.” Phillips joined a sorority in her sophomore year and was able to spend the night at her sisters' apartments if the need arose. “I actually think I'm better prepared now that I'm ready to start a life and career than I would have been living on my own then,” she says.

A parent's perspective

Katherine Gauthier says her son grew up always knowing the plan was for her to see him through high school and then hand the reins over to him – so he'd better have a plan before that day came. “Along the way, there were many discussions, along with guidance and opportunities for him to make decisions leading to independence,” says Gauthier. “That was my job as a parent – to prepare him, give him the tools and support he needed, then send him on his way. He knew that a free ride was not an option, so there was no decision to make except for where he wanted to live and how he was going to pay for it.”

Gauthier says her son attended Louisiana State University and lived in the Honors Dorm on campus for one year. He spent the following years living in an apartment near campus with roommates. “He earned scholarships and also worked in the chemistry lab on campus. He paid his own room and board, and for entertainment and incidentals.” Gauthier says he was also responsible for reimbursing her for his portion of the car insurance. “In return, I guaranteed his lease contract and provided him with all the free advice he could stomach – and the occasional home cooked meal, which was probably a con since I am a terrible cook.”

Her son graduated this year with a B.S. in Chemical Engineering. “We both enjoyed a less stressful 4 years and our relationship – and sanity – are soundly intact because of it,” she says.

Make a decision that's right for your student

April Masini, a relationship expert and author, who also has a popular relationship advice site, AskApril.com, says, “Not every college student has the same maturity level, and that's the reason it's important to make a living decision for your student that is right for them. For some students,

the lure of sex, drugs and alcohol is one that they can handle living alone at ages 17, 18 or 19 — but for others, it's wiser to wait for maturity to set in before sending them to live in a college dorm."

According to Mark Kantrowitz, Senior Vice President of Edvisors.com, "Most of the differences between colleges are not in the facilities or the faculty, but in the students. You learn as much from your peers as you do from sitting in a classroom listening to lectures. This is why it is important to visit colleges while classes are in session and students are on campus. Too often families visit during spring break, when all they get to see is a bunch of empty buildings."

(/) Kantrowitz admits that living at home can save thousands of dollars in college costs, but says, "Students who commute to college or take classes online will miss out on the peer interaction."

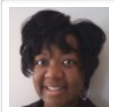
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However, Arvin Vohra, the author of "Lies, (Darn) Lies, and College Admissions," says, "Family support provides a shield against the highly toxic environments of most universities. [Drugs and alcohol] have become standard at college campuses, and living at home can be a partial shield against them."

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According to Vohra, "The 'living at college teaches you to survive on your own' mindset is absurd. It teaches you to do laundry, a skill that any reasonable adult can learn in 2 minutes. But it doesn't teach you to financially support yourself or make adult decisions."

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