



Recession-Proof Your Teen's College Plans



7 tips for scholarship success

The ongoing recession has adversely affected families on many levels. With job losses, weakened stock portfolios, and sliding home values, saving for college seems a grim task. Students are considering less expensive community college options or postponing college plans altogether. However, college scholarship expert Marianne Ragins says you can recession-proof college plans with this seven-step strategy for scholarship success:

Marianne Ragins knows something about offsetting costs for college. As a high school senior, she secured a record-breaking \$400,000 in scholarship funds. Ragins is the publisher of <http://www.scholarshipworkshop.com>, a college and scholarship information website. She shares this seven-step strategy for making college plans recession-proof:

1. **Start early** - Many of the largest scholarship programs have deadlines in the fall or winter. Students shouldn't wait until they actually get accepted to the school of their dreams to apply for scholarships. In fact, they don't even have to wait until senior year. They can win money for college as early as age six.
2. **Don't ignore the small stuff** - To be successful, students should explore scholarship treasures in their backyard. Even though local and regionally based scholarships may be for smaller amounts, they can add up, and ultimately wipe out a textbook bill or more. Some of these scholarships may be easier to win since the number of applicants is often fewer.
3. **Participate!** - One of the best ways to stand out among a crowd of other scholarship applicants is through participation in activities beyond the classroom. Students should strive to be well-rounded and get involved in several meaningful activities. A leadership role in some of the activities is also important.
4. **Community service is key** - Not only can some scholarships be won on the basis of community service alone, nearly all scholarship programs want to see students who get involved in activities that benefit others. They also love students who can recognize a school or community issue and successfully come up with a way to solve it.
5. **Don't consider limits** - Applying for two or three of the largest scholarships is not enough. The scholarship application cycle can be long. If students apply for a few large scholarships and wait to see if they win them before applying for others, they can miss out on other scholarship opportunities. If students prepare an application package that includes two compelling essays and a student résumé, they should be well-prepared to apply for every legitimate scholarship they find.
6. **Perfect essays** - Essays should reflect more than the information included in a student résumé or transcript. They should highlight and explain extracurricular activities and reveal how specific activities may have impacted them or positively affected someone else.
7. **Scoop up effortless funds** - Although they may not offer scholarships (though Upromise actually does) programs such as <http://www.upromise.com/> can also help with the tuition bill. These are no-cost programs that allow individuals to register credit and frequent shopper cards to earn rebates into a college savings account.

This information is excerpted with permission from www.scholarshipworkshop.com and the book Winning Scholarships for College by Marianne Ragins. See her website for more information.