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## Special Report: Campuses Hit Hard by Economic Downturn

Contributed by Michelle D. Anderson, Drew Daniels and Dante Mozie - Black College Wire  
Wednesday, 02 April 2008

### Tuition, gas, food prices shock HBCU students

As the country's sagging economy dominates the headlines, college students are being hit in their wallets along with other members of society. Students say they are struggling with higher tuition, gas and food prices and worry that they will be unable to repay student loans after graduation.

#### With Federal Reserve Board Chairman

Ben Bernanke admitting on April 2 that a recession is "possible," while many economists have declared that it has already arrived, many students are looking ahead with dread.

Dante Williams, a senior at Miles College in Alabama, is considering a change of plans. He has financed his education largely through student loans. "I've been thinking about joining the military -- that's still an option -- so that I can get my loans paid off."

Williams says money is tight. "I'm a full-time student, I have an internship, I'm taking 18 hours ... it's hard to put gas in the car ... tuition and room and board have gone up. It affects me negatively."

William Champy Jr., a 58-year-old graduate student at South Carolina State University, says higher prices have had a "very important, but depressing" impact on him.

"I find myself running short of money each month," the retired faculty member and public school teacher adds, noting that the economy may bring his education to a halt. "I am currently not receiving financial aid -- I'm afraid I won't complete school."

Tashana Francis, a South Carolina State senior, is concerned about her ability to repay student loans and says she's been spending less.

"The interest rate seems to be going up but salary does not seem to be," says Francis, 22.

Down in New Orleans, where residents are still recovering from Hurricane Katrina, Harold Mitchell, 21, a Dillard University senior, is also worried about the future.

"I'm concerned about the ability to repay my student loans," Mitchell says. "With the high interest rates suddenly rising, I'm not sure if I will be able to pay my loans back and still have money to live off of."

Mitchell's spending habits have changed. "I am using credit cards less now because of the interest rate. The interest rate is too high on credit cards right now, and if I don't have the cash, then I don't need [to buy] it."

Another Dillard student, Alaina Smith, says gas prices have caused her to change her driving habits. "If I don't have to move my car, I won't. If I can, I definitely try to carpool. It's a waste for everyone to drive to the store."

Smith, a junior nursing major, says she and her friends are attempting to economize. "We all try to clique together if we are going in the same direction. It will be like eight of us getting out of a five- passenger vehicle but, hey, it's a way to save gas!"

Denna Harrison, a senior at S.C. State, says the declining state of the economy has affected her life in a "major" way.

"If anything, the rise in gas prices has had a major impact on me," says Harrison, who drives an SUV.

Harrison, an elementary education major, added that she is concerned about repaying student loans after she graduates and begins teaching. She also says she has family members who are affected by inflation and unemployment.

"I hope the next president will focus a great deal on how bad our economy is suffering because it's getting a lot worse," Harrison said.

Like Mitchell, other students are limiting their use of credit cards. "I have one credit card and I never use it," said Brittini Dones, a senior at Prairie View A&M University.

Dones said she sees her friends struggling. "I notice my friends having a hard time finding jobs while in school. Since they don't have a part-time job or steady revenue coming in, they don't go places unless it is a necessity."

Clark Atlanta freshman Elizabeth Coburn says the unemployment problem is affecting her on a personal level. "It's really hard to find a job right now%85 I've been looking for a while," she said, adding that "there aren't any jobs to find."

Unlike some of the other students who have cut down on credit card use, Secret Spencer, a sophomore at S.C. State, admits she is using her credit cards more.

"The option to pay at a later date gives me more freedom to pay for other things with cash," said Spencer, 20.

She said that not only is she cautious about how much she eats, but her family is also becoming more cautious of how much they consume.

"They are definitely eating less and walking more, which may not be a bad thing."

Not everyone is feeling the pinch. Morehouse freshman James Rawls says the economy hasn't affected him, in part, because he has developed good spending habits, including not owning a credit card. "When you have a credit card you tend to spend money that you don't have and cannot pay back" Rawls said doesn't plan to obtain a credit card until after he graduates.

Rawls, a biology/pre-med major, also says he isn't worried about the future because he plans to become a physician. He points out that "people are always going to need doctors."

And Dervedia Thomas, a sophomore attending S.C. State, says her habits have not changed much. She says even though food prices are too high, she hasn't made any adjustments to her life.

"I still buy what I want," Thomas says.

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Posted April 2, 2008