

News > Campus Life > My journey: Going to college while going into poverty

# My journey: Going to college while going into poverty

By Christopher Isaac 11:40 am EST March 20, 2013



SHARE TWEET



(Hemera Technologies)

In May of 2007 I stood before my graduating high school class delivering my speech as valedictorian, the first major achievement in my life. My pride didn't last long, though. As the ceremony concluded I watched my peers accept their diplomas and awards while I received nothing. Mine were held back because I owed fees to the school, which I couldn't afford. My family was struggling through a state of poverty at the time, and this was just one of many things we couldn't afford.

When talking about a student's financial difficulties, you might just think of scholarships and student loans. But poverty is a problem affecting many students. In

2009, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* reported that more than 47,000 students who applied for financial aid identified themselves as homeless. According to [the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty](#), 50% of homeless students drop out of school.

RELATED: [7 essential things to know about financial aid](#)

RELATED: [Pave: Alternative to costly college loans](#)

I never became homeless, but I came close. The fallout of my parents' divorce greatly upset the financial balance in my household, costing us more than just money. They would still work individually to contribute to the mutual goal of paying for my education, but they were too angry to cooperate on a daily basis to provide stability in the family. The divided finances made it necessary to wear a coat and gloves at home because my father's house had no heat in the winter. There were times we went without electricity. I had to get used to cold showers each day. Day by day I'd learn to survive on less.

Most difficult to accept was the loneliness. Adolescence is already a period rife with insecurity because teenagers want to shed their childhood and be the independent adult who has it all together. I was more awkward than the norm during my transition to college because I was afraid of revealing too much of my living situation. Every time I talked to someone, I was like a superhero donning his costume to protect his identity. I hid the true me, putting on an act to give everyone else what I thought they expected. I felt like if anyone found out the truth, they would use my shame as a weapon.

Clinging to my scant pride made friendship a foreign concept to me. How could I honestly respond to someone asking how my weekend went? "Pretty bad. I didn't do anything fun because I have no money. In fact, my family can't even afford food anymore, so we've started pawning our belongings. Everything I care about is being sold for a few dollars so I can have a bowl of soup tonight. My house is also being foreclosed on and I might be homeless soon. How'd your weekend go?"

The situation could have been, and eventually was, resolved by my parents putting their issues aside to help the entire family instead of trying to cut each other out of their lives. This sounds simple, but imagine how many people go without help just because others feel too busy with their own problems to devote time to assisting someone. Working through the emotions in my family since the divorce was the only way to create the security to accomplish anything. My parents working in unity provided not only the financial help I needed at home and for tuition, but also the advice for what schools and scholarships to apply for.

The details of my story might be unique, but the circumstances are not. According to the 2011 census, this is a problem affecting 46.2 million people. It's not just paying for college that can be a challenge, but also being mentally and emotionally prepared. Poverty, and the uncertainty of what tomorrow will bring, is exhausting. How many more students out there struggle with no one to support or advise them on the journey to higher education?

Those years trying to figure things out on my own left me paralyzed with depression, lacking motivation and my grades suffering. My classmates all had goals for life, but without stability in my life I never devoted the thought to it. How could I make career plans when I didn't even know if I'd have a home in six months? The experience has made me better appreciate the opportunities I now have, and how much difference the actions of an individual can make in the life of someone else.

**Christopher Isaac is a Philadelphia resident and a junior at Arcadia University where he is majoring in print communications. He plans to pursue a career in journalism.**

Arcadia University, campus life, Christopher Isaac, homeless, poverty, wealth, CAMPUS LIFE

SHARE TWEET

RELATED STORIES



JOBS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

- Marketing Coordinator**  
Posted in [Part-Time Jobs](#)
- Educational Programming Intern in San Francisco...**  
Posted in [Part-Time Jobs](#)
- Part-time or Full-time Valet Attendant at Hospital**  
Posted in [Part-Time Jobs](#)
- Digital Media Sales Development Role in NYC**  
Posted in [Part-Time Jobs](#)
- Systems Analyst**  
Posted in [Internships](#)

[See all Job listings](#)

GET TOP STORIES DELIVERED WEEKLY

Enter Email for News Alerts

WORK WITH US!

CORRESPONDENT PROGRAM CONTACT US

Powered by **Uloop**  
COLLEGE CLASSIFIEDS ▶  
**USA TODAY**  
MORE INFORMATION ▲

Comments

0 Comments

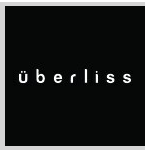
Sort by Oldest



Add a comment...

Facebook Comments Plugin

JOBS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS



Marketing Coordinator

Posted In Part-Time Jobs

#Uberliss

We're looking for a Senior Marketing Coordinator who'll be...



Educational Programming Intern in San Francisco, Spring 2018

Posted In Part-Time Jobs

826 National

826 National relies heavily on a strong core of community volunteers in...



Part-time or Full-time Valet Attendant at Hospital

Posted In Part-Time Jobs

ABM Healthcare

ABM Healthcare has some exciting new positions at St Thomas Rutherford...

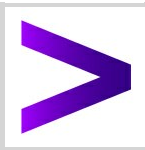


Digital Media Sales Development Role in NYC

Posted In Part-Time Jobs

AC Lion

In this position you will play a crucial role in helping our business...



Systems Analyst

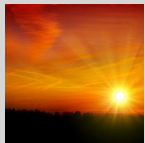
Posted In Internships

Accenture Federal Services

- Work with the Client, Accenture, and Teaming Partners on and across...



RECENTLY ON USA TODAY COLLEGE



USA TODAY College is closing

News · 5:51 pm EST September 18, 2017 · Holly Epstein Ojalvo and Taylor Maycan

Farewell from USA TODAY College.



How to choose a student credit card

News · 10:46 pm EST September 14, 2017 · NerdWallet

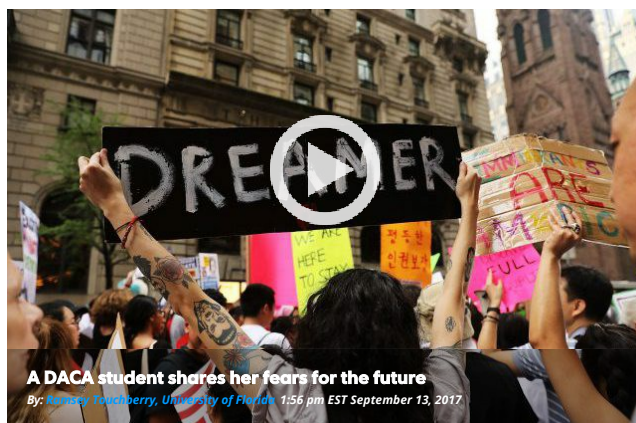
Pick the one that's right for you.



A new tactic to teach freshmen about sexual assault: theater

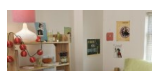
CAMPUS BEAT · 5:57 pm EST September 14, 2017 · Jeanine Santucci, Georgetown University

At some schools, the question of how to engage students on sexual assault is answered in the theater.



A DACA student shares her fears for the future

By: Kelsey Touchberry, University of Florida · 1:56 pm EST September 13, 2017





Awe-inspiring dorm rooms of Instagram 2017



Father bikes 1,400 miles to hear his daughter's beating heart again



Want Bon Jovi to perform at your graduation? Then get on this



## How I turned a healthy habit I dreaded into a part of my weekly routine

**CAMPUS LIFE** · 6:16 pm EST September 13, 2017 · [The Muse](#)

You can do it.



## A DACA student shares her fears for the future

**MULTIMEDIA** · 1:56 pm EST September 13, 2017 · [Ramsey Touchberry, University of Florida](#)

Ramsey Touchberry interviews a DACA student at University of Florida.



## Here's how much security costs when an incendiary speaker comes to campus

**CAMPUS BEAT** · 11:00 am EST September 13, 2017 · [Megan Schellong](#)

UC Berkeley is bracing for conservative speaker Ben Shapiro. They've been here before.



## Here are the highlights of the 2018 U.S. News & World Report college rankings

**COLLEGE CHOICE** · 12:01 am EST September 12, 2017 · [Susannah Hutcheson](#)

Where does your school stack up in the new U.S. News & World report rankings?

