



Pocket Protectors

PART 2

Last week, **PAUL OWEN** and **CONAL PIERSE**, the *Gateway's* masters in passing the buck, explained how they manage to pay for dates on their piddling student newspaper salaries. Today, they'll tackle how to keep your belly—and your wallet—full.

Photos by Mike Otto

There are few certainties in life: SU tuition protests will be poorly attended; if you're chasing a roadrunner through the desert, it will stop on a dime and send you careening off a cliff; and, at some point during the day, you're going to get hungry. While it's impossible to stop the first from being a gigantic waste of money (and the second from hurting like a bitch), the third doesn't have to be. And when you spend 6–8 hours each day on a campus with a plethora of options to satisfy that hunger, you don't have to grab a Snickers to avoid waiting to fill your gullet. But doing so can be expensive, especially at campus eateries.

That's not to say there aren't some good deals around—it just means you need to know where to look. If you're in SUB, RATT's half pound of fries are still only \$2, even when everything else on their menu is skyrocketing.

While subs are generally too expensive to bother with, it's hard to turn down a good deal, and the Mr Sub in CAB is generally too busy and the cashiers too inattentive for anyone to notice that you've nabbed yourself a double meat and cheese. This ploy also used to work at Subway in SUB, but someone there caught on, and they've cracked down.

If you're in the mood for a burger, A&W's two-for deals are the best you can get on campus, and they're one of the few fast-food establishments that serves burgers that taste like cow instead of hockey puck.

That said, the cheap eating options around the U are few and far between, so if you're looking to save a few bucks on a meal, be it breakfast, lunch, or dinner, you're best off making it at home. That means you need to know how to do two things: shop and cook.

THERE'S A REASON THAT STUDENTS ARE stereotyped into eating ichiban noodles and mac and cheese all the time: they're cheap, and even

a goat could cook them without messing up—at least, if that goat had opposable thumbs and an understanding of how to turn on a microwave. But if you look past the red sea of Campbell's soup racks in the grocery stores, you'll find there are plenty of other cheap alternatives to getting a full and healthy meal.

First off, if you can get yourself there, always shop at Superstore. While customer service is non-existent, you're not paying for it either, and you'll save at least 5–10 per cent on every shopping trip. Just remember to bring your own bag or box to cart home your groceries. You'd hate to waste all those savings on some plastic bags—and besides, Al Gore says that they're bad for the environment.

One of the easiest ways to save money is to simply buy cheaper products. Most grocery stores have three tiers of every item: name brand, store brand, and no-name. While no-name shopping should be reserved for only the most basic of items (or the tightest of budgets), brand loyalty is only advisable on a few things—most notably cola products and personal hygiene.

But more often than not, store brands are a happy medium to settle into. They'll save you 15–20 per cent over brand name in a lot of cases, even if filling your house with President's Choice products makes you feel dirty for contributing to the wealth of the Weston family, already the second-richest in Canada. In fact, most store-brand foods are outsourced to major brand-name companies. Lays makes the chips; Nestle makes the ice cream; Heinz makes the condiments; Trojan makes the condoms.

When shopping, look for things that you can get more than one meal out of. If you can afford to spend more now to save later, and if it's something that won't go bad or you can freeze before or after cooking, then buy in bulk, my friend—that is, in large quantities, not piddling little samples out of those bins. Pasta and rice are good choices here, as they expand when you cook them, so you feel like you're getting more.

When looking for vegetables, try to buy fresh,

though frozen is good if you're into making corn or peas or mixed veggies as a side dish—plus that green giant is just so hard to resist when he tells you to buy his crop. Vegetables are relatively cheap, and work both as a side on their own or as a garnish in other dishes. Mushrooms and bell peppers, for example, work particularly well in rice and pasta. And of course, potatoes keep forever and you only need about one per meal, so they're also economical. In fact, you could probably subsist on potatoes forever: just look at what they've done for the Irish.

In the meat section, ground beef and chicken parts (thighs, drumsticks and the like) are the cheapest options. Buy warehouse packs if you can afford it—meat keeps well in a freezer, making it one of the few things worthy of the top part of your fridge.

Another wise investment is a loaf of bread. Not only is bakery-made bread dirt cheap, but it can help fill you up in a meal, meaning you can stretch a box of mac and cheese over a couple of lunches instead of just one. Also, it can be used to sop up any leftover sauce, so nothing goes to waste.

IT'S TRUE THAT BUDGETED EATING CAN START to limit your food choices, and after a while, you may start to feel like an orphan in a Charles Dickens novel, but that just means you have to get creative. No, this doesn't mean arranging your food so it resembles a smiley face or placing a sprig of parsley on the plate for class—it means that you're going to have to learn how to use spices and make sauces. Sometimes, all it takes is a little salt, pepper, rosemary, and bay leaves (which you remove after cooking unless having shards of leaf cut your mouth sounds pleasant to you) to turn something as simple as roast potatoes from a bland source of starch to a brief stopover in flavour country, and a meat spicer such as Hy's makes a delicious addition to any barbecue.

This might seem counterintuitive, as spices are an added expense to pay on top of your regular groceries, but a bag of oregano goes a long

way—plus, if times get tight, you can always sell it to your neighbourhood kids and teach them a valuable lesson in trust. Unlike vegetables, spices don't rot in your crisper, and often times, a single shaker is more than enough to last a lifetime (or at least a university career).

If cooking isn't your strong point, you might feel uncomfortable at first, but with a little creativity and experimentation, you can teach yourself how to turn something as bland as chicken and rice into several distinct and enjoyable meals. A teriyaki marinade is simply a matter of combining honey and soy sauce, and by combining salt, pepper, thyme, blackened cajun seasoning, a can of condensed chicken soup stock, and half a cup of water, you can make something I call "chicken sauce number two"—because when you're cooking, it's not the name of the dish that matters, but how it tastes.

While you're learning, be sure to slowly add small amounts of spice to a sauce and then see how it tastes before upping the dose—after all, if you fuck up, you're going to be forced to either choke down the garlicky mess you created or go hungry.

If you're unsure whether or not you should add a certain spice, take Toucan Sam's advice and follow your nose. Usually, by smelling what's on the stove and what's in the shaker, you'll get the general idea of whether or not they mesh.

It will take a lot of trial and error, but eventually you'll get the hang of it, and your tongue will thank you. If you have the strength of will to fight through the hard times of peppery spaghetti and chocolate Cajun chicken (editors' tip: an alliterative name doesn't equate deliciousness), you'll find yourself freed from the shackles of the same bleak gruel day after day and legitimately asking "please sir, can I have some more?"

On Thursday, Conal and Paul will complete their series on being a penny-pinching prick with a rigorous exploration of drinking for dimes—if they're sober enough after doing their "research."

frugalfests

We wouldn't expect you just to take our word for how cheap you can eat, so we took a trip to the store to pick up the food that we recommended throughout.

A half hour in Superstore proved that it's quite possible to shop for a week or more worth of food and keep it under \$30. While this is a little short on cheese—and rightfully so, since, while the stuff tastes great, it costs so damn much—and a few other more prevalent items (such as salt, pepper, and butter), many ingredients can

be swapped and substituted for in another week's shopping.

Additionally, different vegetables such as celery, tomatoes, and onions can be switched with the mushrooms and peppers for roughly the same price.

All in all, the food listed here should be more than enough to get your through a week of eating, with some to spare—though, as stated above, finding new and exciting ways to dress up chicken and hamburger will be the toughest part if your goal is to keep the prices down. Luckily, with what you save shopping like this instead of buying \$6 frozen pizzas that last a day, you'll be able to afford to mix it up.

2kg No Name spaghetti	\$1.98
375g No Name egg noodles	\$1.38
2kg No Name white rice	\$1.97
Pack of six chicken drumsticks	\$3.50
	(plus \$1 off coupon)
Package of ground beef (650g)	\$2.70
No Name frozen mixed veggies	\$3.98
450mL China Lily soy sauce	\$1.58
McCormick's Oregano (11g)	\$2.49
Loaf of bread	\$0.97
10lbs bag of white potatoes	\$1.97
Half a bag of mushrooms (450g)	\$1.95
One red pepper	\$0.43
One green pepper	\$0.81

Total (including GST): \$26.20

