



# Your Bottom Line

Your go-to resource for timely information about personal finance, college planning and student loan management

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## Love and Money

Love and money are two complex topics on their own. When they're mixed without careful consideration, it can lead to relationship challenges. However, having a financially-compatible partner can help you move closer to your financial goals. It all depends on the ground rules, compromises and strategies that you use. Here are some tips to help you and your special someone create a more harmonious financial union.

**Bring it up early.** Don't wait until you're engaged to see if you and your beloved are compatible financially. Is this first date conversation? Probably not. But, when you feel like your commitment is becoming serious, that's undoubtedly a good time to talk to your partner about their financial goals and habits.

**Consider your money personality.** Are they a spender? Are you a saver? How do they feel about debt? How did their parents handle money? How did yours? These

are all important questions to ask if you're considering a long-term relationship. Opposites can work together to create a successful financial life, but without a real understanding of how your partner's mind works, financial disagreements could cause significant friction.

**Communicate openly.** Some people are very reluctant to talk about money, so don't expect to have that first financial conversation all at once. You may have to come back to it several times. Depending on how you and your significant other were raised, your ideas about spending and saving can be very different. Keeping lines of communication open and talking about money calmly and rationally are the biggest keys to success.

**Establish guidelines.** When you get engaged, set guidelines together for how you will manage your money. These may look like spending limits,

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deciding who is going to manage the money, and whether you will keep separate or joint bank accounts. Setting expectations early and reevaluating them often will ensure you stay on the same page about your mutual financial future.

**Set joint short- and long-term goals.** As a couple, you're a team - and like any good team, you must have shared goals. Maybe you want to pay off debt or they want to buy a house. It's important to set short-term and long-term goals together. This creates buy-in from both parties and helps you make collective financial decisions.

**Set a budget and stick to it.** The key to reaching any financial goal is having a [budget](#)—also called a spending plan. Just like those goals you set as a couple are important, having a budget that you create and stick to together is necessary to manage your financial life and to make sure you can reach the goals you've set.

With a little luck and a lot of communication, you and your love can work together to make your collective dreams possible. For more information and resources about love and money, check out the '[Love and Money](#)' [learning module](#) from [Oklahoma Money Matters](#).



## Energy Career Cluster

Whether you're a high school student researching career options or an adult considering a job change, career clusters help organize the many jobs that exist in the world. Each cluster contains careers that have similar features and responsibilities and require similar skills. Browsing the clusters as you explore careers can help you find jobs you didn't even know existed! There are 16 nationally recognized career clusters, and Oklahoma recently launched a 17th cluster to specifically highlight careers in the energy field.

Careers in the Energy cluster are responsible for the design, maintenance, and distribution of traditional and alternative energy. The energy industry is one of the largest in Oklahoma, with salaries averaging \$100,000 a year. The Energy career cluster is expected to have a shortage of skilled workers by 2025. This cluster includes positions in traditional electricity, oil and gas, solar power, wind energy and so much more. Education requirements for positions in the energy industry range from on-the-job training to advanced college degrees, so there's a job for everyone!

OKcollegestart partnered with Oklahoma CareerTech, Oklahoma Works, the Oklahoma State Department of Education and several Oklahoma energy partners to increase awareness of Oklahoma's new career cluster.

If you're interested in learning more about these in-demand careers in Oklahoma, check out OKcollegestart's new [Energy Career Cluster](#). Visit the [Explore Careers](#) page to investigate all the clusters.

Flyers highlighting each career cluster are also available on the [Educator's Resources](#) page of [OKcollegestart.org](#).

## *We Love Teachers*

To all the teachers working from home and at school, from pre-school to college, we appreciate you for everything you do!



Happy Valentine's Day  
from the  
Oklahoma College  
Assistance Program



# Student Loan Default

*Jaime Shelton, Sr. Regulatory Compliance Specialist  
and Systems Services Coordinator*

## Oklahoma College Assistance Program

Jaime Shelton is the Sr. Regulatory Compliance Specialist and Systems Services Coordinator for the Oklahoma College Assistance Program. In this month's Q&A, Shelton answers questions about student loan default.

### *What does it mean to be in student loan default?*

Defaulting on your federal student loan occurs when your loan is delinquent (past due) for 270 days or more, you fail to repay your loan according to the terms agreed upon in your Master Promissory Note, or you fail to submit on-time requests for a deferment or cancellation. At that point, your loan is purchased and can be collected on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education.

### *What are the consequences of default?*

After entering default, you have 60 days to establish satisfactory repayment arrangements. Failure to make a payment, or enter into a satisfactory repayment arrangement within 60 days, results in a negative report to national consumer reporting agencies, thereby seriously damaging your credit. Defaulting on your student loans can also cause your paycheck to be garnished by up to 25%, loss of federal and state tax refunds, loss of deferment and forbearance eligibility, loss of eligibility for future student aid, addition of

attorney fees and collection costs to your loan balance, or even a lawsuit being filed against you.

### *What can I do to get out of default?*

If you're already in student loan default, there are a few things you can do to get back on track. The **Satisfactory Repayment Arrangement** gives you the opportunity to re-establish your federal aid eligibility. To participate in this program you must make six, consecutive full monthly payments voluntarily and on-time.

The **Loan Rehabilitation Program** takes your loan out of default and removes the default from your credit report. To participate in this program, you must make nine voluntary, on-time monthly payments during a period of 10 consecutive months. You will also need to complete and return a rehabilitation application to your servicer before they receive your ninth payment. You are only allowed to rehabilitate your loan one time.

**Loan Consolidation** gets your loan out of default and allows you to combine all of your student loans into one that's payable to the **U.S. Department of Education**. To consolidate immediately, you must agree to repay your new consolidation loan under either the income-contingent or the income-based repayment plan. To use

another type of repayment plan for your new consolidation loan, you must first agree to a repayment plan and voluntarily make at least three consecutive, on-time monthly payments.

### *How can I make sure I stay out of default?*

The most important thing you can do to stay out of default is to make your payments in-full and on-time. To follow the status of your loan history, visit [StudentAid.gov](http://StudentAid.gov), the U.S. Department of Education's comprehensive database for all federal student aid information. [StudentAid.gov](http://StudentAid.gov) provides your student loan balance, your loan servicer(s) and their contact information, your interest rates and your current loan status (in repayment, in default, etc.).

### *Anything else I should know?*

[StudentAid.gov](http://StudentAid.gov) can be a valuable tool for you in keeping track of your student loan data. Checking [StudentAid.gov](http://StudentAid.gov) and communicating with your loan servicer will give you the information you need to stay on track for your student loan repayment. Once you've used [StudentAid.gov](http://StudentAid.gov) to locate your loan servicer(s), contact them for assistance. If the Oklahoma College Assistance Program is listed as the holder of your defaulted loan, please contact [ECMC](http://ECMC) at 844.371.7100 or email [ocapservicing@ecmc.org](mailto:ocapservicing@ecmc.org).



# America Saves Week

America Saves Week is a nonprofit organization of the [Consumer Federation of America](#) (CFA) encouraging all communities to save intentionally. This yearly event focuses on something we all know — saving money is essential. Moreover, we need to save strategically in order to save successfully. America Saves Week provides the blueprint on how to do just that with the support of thousands of businesses, organizations and communities. Take the “America Saves Pledge” at [AmericaSavesWeek.org](#), and talk with your employer, school or community organizations about participating. This year’s designated savings week is February 22-February 26.

**Monday: Save Automatically.** The best way to make sure you don’t forget to save is to make saving an automatic action every time you receive income. America Saves encourages employers and employees to save through [Split to Save](#). This program aims to change the fact that although 82% of American workers use direct deposit for earnings, only 24% split a portion to add to a non-retirement savings account.

**Tuesday: Save for the Unexpected.** An emergency fund is money set aside for emergencies only. Financial experts recommend having three to six months of your monthly expenses saved for an emergency fund. Start saving now for what may be an emergency to you, whether that’s for an unexpected medication, car repair or some other unanticipated purchase. Visit our website, [OklahomaMoneyMatters.org](#) to learn more about emergency funds.

**Wednesday: Save to Retire.** With the rising cost of living, you may find that what costs five dollars today could cost about eight dollars in just a few years. Your savings for retirement may need an adjustment based on increasing living costs. Use an online retirement calculator, find out your estimated retirement amount on [ssa.gov](#) and use the retirement savings tips on [AmericaSaves.org](#) to determine if changes need to be made to your retirement plan.

**Thursday: Save by Reducing Debt.** Paying down debt can take longer than expected due to the growing amount of interest. You can save hundreds of dollars in interest by focusing on accelerated debt payments. Paying more than the minimum payment toward any debt reduces the overall amount you owe.

**Friday: Save as a Family.** Finances should be a regular topic in family conversations. Children who learn about money, its value and how it’s used enter adulthood with a foundation in personal finances. Moreover, families who save together are more likely to meet their financial goals.



The Oklahoma College Assistance Program, an operating division of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, provides college access and financial aid awareness, financial literacy and student loan management programs and services that benefit students, parents, schools and community partners.

