Graduate School

Money Matters

OLIVIA HOPEWELL: We'll go ahead and get started. So hi, welcome to today's primer series session. Thank you, first of all, so much, everyone, for taking the time to be here. If you've been to any of the other sessions, you already know that the primer series is something that the team here at the graduate school puts together to help incoming first year grad students transition into the role of being a Cornell grad student. So I'm going to add a link in the chat really quickly so that you can see what other sessions we have coming up and get signed up for those if you haven't already. So we've discussed things so far like imposter syndrome, well-being, and today's session is going to be about finances. So the title is Money Matters. And before I turn things over to Jorge and Brendan with Alternatives Federal Credit union, I just have a couple of notes. So first I want to introduce myself. I did this yesterday, but I'll do it again in case we have any new faces. So Hi, I am Olivia Hopewell. I'm the new graduate student life advisor here at the graduate school. I work with Janna. And basically, I'm here for you all, all of the grad students here, as a resource for anything kind of student experience related. So if you need advice on working with a mentor, getting connected with campus resources, navigating a milestone, anything like that, you can always reach out to me or my colleague Janna, and we are happy to chat. I also want to quickly thank Zenobia Lee-Nelson and Sarah Day for putting together the primer series. It's a lot of work and they're doing an amazing job. So thank you. And then last kind of logistics note I have is that at the end of the session, we are going to drop a survey into the chat. Again, if you've been to other sessions, you already kind of know the drill there. Just so we can get some feedback on each session and know what's working for the future. So yeah, that's everything from me. So with that, I'm going to turn it over to Jorge and Brendan. Thank you so much.

JORGE CUEVAS: Thank you for having us. Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening, depending on where you're tuning in from. Thank you for joining us. My name is Jorge Cuevas. I'm the financial wellness manager. And I'm lucky enough to have my mentor, Brendan Wilbur, with me. He is the education and training director. He'll also be answering questions on the chat. So if you have any other questions that I'm not getting to, he will certainly be helping me. You guys had a lot of great questions and topics that you wanted us to cover. It's impossible to cover everything in one hour. So here is what I'm intending on covering if my-- there we go. So here is the agenda. And like I said, there's quite a few different things that we're going to cover. And hopefully we may get to some of your questions if we actually get through our presentation. But one thing that I want to stress is that don't worry about memorizing anything that's going to happen through our presentation, because we're going to share the slides. And also we have a lot of links of resources that we're going to share with you as well. So just let the information come in. See what resonates with you. And then you can certainly look up with the resources that we're going to share with you. So let's just get right started. So how are credit unions different from banks? So credit unions are not for profit. Earnings are returned to members through services like free ATMs, better interest rates, and lower fees. We are insured just like banks as well, but by the National Credit Union Association. And credit unions are democratically governed and elections are based on a one to one member vote philosophy. And something very important to us is that whatever money that comes in from the members, we loan it out and keep it in Tompkins County. We actually want to provide services for our members and keep the money locally as opposed to banks, which are for profit corporations. Earnings go to outside bond and stockholders in the form of dividends. They're insured by the FDIC, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporations, and banks are governed by paid shareholders. Voting rights depend on the number of shared owns, which is why, of course, we think that credit unions are a smarter choice. Because if you live in Tompkins County, you want better services and all the money stays right here in town. But there's another distinction that we want to make is that we are a CDFI. We are a Community Development Financial Institution. And what that means is that a minimum of 60% of the loans we approve must go to members that are earning less than 80% of the median income. So the median income is somewhere around 74 in Tompkins County. So people who are earning 57 or so thousand dollars a year, that's our target market. Of course we're going to loan to everyone, but we want to make sure that we are trying to help people who need the help the most. And that goes right to our mission statement, which is to help build and protect wealth for people with diverse identities who have been historically marginalized by the financial industry, especially those with low wealth or identifying as Black, Indigenous, or people of color. And of course, I always want to add that women have always been historically marginalized. But like I said, we're going to loan to everyone who qualifies for a loan who we think is going to pay us back. But we want to help people who need the most help, of course. And let's move on to the next thing. So here is a beginning of the topic of budgeting and savings is do you really know where your money goes? So I've been here only since September 15, so less than a full year. And I've been in human services most of my life, not earning a lot of money. And I thought I had a handle on where my money was going. But it's not until you actually start to track it. So let's start talking about tracking your expenses. So until you actually start writing it all down, writing it, typing it, keeping track of it, luckily you don't have to use a pen and paper anymore. There's so many different online applications. In the chat, we had a spreadsheet that we're sharing with you that will add it all up for you once you type in all the information. But it is so important to actually keep track of it. Track all your expenses. You're all going to receive a lump sum as a stipend, from what I understand. And you're going to have to divide that. And maybe I should have asked this ahead of time. Sarah or Olivia, you can tell me. Is a semester for four months or a whole year, six months? How long is this stipend going to last? Sarah or Olivia.

SARAH DAY: I'm waiting to see if Janna pipes in here.

JORGE CUEVAS: Oh, OK, great. Well, Janna, thank you.

JANNA LAMEY: So sorry. Hi, everyone. I'm Janna Lemay. And so some of our students are paid by fellowships. And that would be a lump sum at the beginning of each semester. So fall semester, four months, five months for spring, and then three months for summer is how that's distributed. There are some students, and these are just PhD funded students, so I'm not sure all who's in the audience right now, but some of the PhD students are on assistantships. And that would mean that they get paid twice a month on the 15th and the last day. So we've got a broad range of folks in payment. But understanding that some of our students are not paid. That's just for the PhD students and not our master's students. And so there'll be some of those folks in this room, too.

JORGE CUEVAS: Thanks for the variety. I appreciate that. So we're always talking about use a spending plan. Give your money a job to do. Because we want to anticipate what our expenses are, what our core expenses are, and we want to make sure that whatever so-called the rest of the money, if you don't give it a job, it's going to end up being spent in a way that you may not intend on spending it. So we're really suggesting that you have an idea of what your core expenses are. We're going to go more into detail, of course, on that. But whatever may be left over, there's no such thing, I always say. But whatever may be left over, you certainly want to give it a job. And we'll talk about what those kinds of jobs are, the possibilities. But let's also talk about values based spending. What does that mean? So in the chat, I want everybody to start thinking about what your values are. You want to align your spending with your values. I'm going to start sharing some of mine. And Brendan, you can share the first 10 that come up after I explain what my values are, just to give them an idea of what we're talking about. Some of my values are I enjoy eating healthy. So there's a very expensive greenstar co-op, expensive relative to some other places, where they have fresh local vegetables. And that's where I get my chicken, my pork, my beef, and so forth. And those are my values. And then I buy packaged food elsewhere where it's less expensive. And there are many different values. And some people may say, well, you spend too much on that. Well, I want you to think that values based spending is not about anyone telling you what your values are. It's about being comfortable that you have these values. These values make you happy. They fulfill your life. And that's important to you. But we also want to make sure that you are aware of what those values are and that you are making a conscious choice of what those values are. So, please, if you haven't done so already, share a couple of your values. I mean, I'll keep sharing some until Brendan says we have enough. And what I want to say also is so I also enjoy dancing. So I take dance lessons. That makes me happy. It gives me joy to go out and dance, physical exercise. I'm also a musician. So I buy too many drums. So I have to stop myself at some point. OK, I already have 11 conga drums. I don't think I need any more. But those are my values. And whatever your values are, that's what's important to you, that's what's going to bring joy in your life, because what is money for other than to bring joy, of course, by not feeling stressed about money? Brendan, do you have enough you can start with?

BRENDAN WILBUR: Yeah, we got some great ones in here. Anywhere from some activities like gardening, gym, time with loved ones, climbing, faith, community, health and wellness, healthy food, savings, yoga, arts, season tickets to the Hangar Theater, animals, education, travel, social justice. There's some really great things in here that speak to what people value. And what I've learned over the years is it's not so much how we vote that has the biggest difference in our lives. It's actually where our money goes, who we're supporting with our own money. We're building wealth. When we spend money, we're building wealth for somebody. And we want to make sure our values lined up with who we're actually building wealth for. So looking at a lot of these things that are coming through, it's like when we track our expenses, are they lining up with these values? So whenever Jorge and I talk about budgeting, spending plans, it all starts with, well, what are your values? What are the things that are important to you? If you love eating out, great, that just means you have less money to do something else.

JORGE CUEVAS: Wow, those are great shares and keep them coming. And again, it's not about anybody telling you they're right or wrong. It's what brings you joy. That's what money is for after you cover your core expenses and that you are safe. So the other thing is the needs versus the wants. Quickly in the chat, let me know what are some absolute needs? What are some of the core-- what are the core necessities that you need to save some money for or allocate some of the money for? What are some of the core necessities that you know you must have? Whenever you're ready, Brendan.

BRENDAN WILBUR: Some ones popping in. Food, rent, shelter, water, health insurance, utilities, transportation.

JORGE CUEVAS: Absolutely So there are some no brainers. There are certain things that you absolutely must allocate a certain amount of money to have the needs so you'll be safe, so you'll be able to get to work. So I'm going to throw in there, by the way, the winter's going to be pretty cold, so you may need some coats and some boots if you don't have some. So there are some specific needs. And then there are some other things that are not. They're more wants. And then that's where you have to decide where you want to allocate and how important are these wants. Anything else you want to add, Brendan?

BRENDAN WILBUR: My personal favorite one, which is ignored by so many and I know you're going to touch on a little bit, Jorge, is emergency fund. That's so often left out of the conversation of a core need or want. And Jorge has got some information to share with you on that in a bit. But it's just one that I was really excited to see in there. Lots of other great ones as well, but the emergency fund is one that's often forgotten.

JORGE CUEVAS: Absolutely. Thank you so much. So know your monthly expenses. This can't be overstated. The only real way to know your monthly expenses is by literally keeping track of all your anticipated expenses. And then after you make a budget with your anticipated expenses, maybe after a month or two, do another budget with your actual expenses, because you don't really know how much it's going to cost you in Ithaca. You may not know the utilities. The utilities will go up and down depending on the weather. So I always suggest that you start out with maybe after the first month or two, you have your anticipated expenses and then create another budget with your actual expenses. Because that's where the real eye opener comes. So this is just an example of what are the details that you need to look at in any spreadsheet or in any app that you're going to be using. Like I said, we added one in the chat that you can use that will add it up all for you. But the most important things are income, what comes in. I love that it has an arrow right towards savings. Don't forget about savings. Expenses, of course, and debts. And all these categories, you can add, change, delete, however you want. You're going to personalize it for yourself. And on our website, we have a financial partnership with a couple of different companies. One of them is Balance and one of them is Budget. I'm sorry, Bonsai. And I'll talk more about those at the end of the presentation. But they also offer a lot of great tools, and we have links to all of them as well. So there are many tools out there. And just see which one resonates with you. What looks good to you? How is it that you want to keep track of your income and expenses, savings, debts, all that. And it's all a matter of inputting the numbers, inputting the categories, and then inputting the numbers. And like I suggest, do it more than once. So like I said, I've only been working at this job since September 15. And if I'm going to ask people to put a budget together, then I was forced to do one myself. And this is some of the things that I want to share. And these are some of the real numbers. So I remember reading all the topics that you wanted us to cover and you were asking about rent. So rent can be anywhere from, if you live outside of Ithaca, which that means you're going to deal with transportation, but if you live outside of Ithaca, then that means that you're going to get lower rent. It's going to be cheaper. But then you're going to have transportation to deal with. But it could be anywhere from I've heard from $800 to depending on how much you want to spend on your apartments, it could be like 2,700 a month, including or not including utilities. So it really depends on where you're looking and what you feel comfortable with. So I live a little bit outside of Ithaca. And yes, I know, you're all going to be very jealous once you start looking for rent. This is a great value. And it includes utilities. I know. I'm sorry, you can't have my apartment, but that's the reality. I hope you find something that works for you. But it's the whole range out there. Phone is costing me $50 a month. These are my monthly expenses. And I know Brendan has something way cheaper than that. I think he's spending, like, $20 or $25. So shop around. I don't have the latest phone. I know that if you want to get your latest phone, it's always going to cost you a lot more. And that may be put into the monthly expenses. But it depends on what type of phone you want and what type of plan. And 50 is pretty good. Cable and internet cost me $40. Auto loan. I have a car that I was leasing for three years, and all of a sudden, I decided to buy it after that. So it cost me 375. Supplements, 50. Groceries, groceries. Again, it depends on where you buy. And for me, that was the biggest shocker. I thought it was going to be something like 200 a month. And realistically, depending on when I have my kids over and when I have company over, it can go anywhere from $300 to $400, 450 depending on what it is. I don't eat out much because that's where I save a lot of money. Every now and then, I like to go on a date and at the very least, once a month it'll cost you at the very least $80. I used to live with somebody, and she used to have three pets. And I don't know if any of you are planning to bring in your pets, but they can be very costly, as you may know. Daycare. Oh my gosh. I hear people telling me about their daycare is astronomical. And don't know if you're going to be bringing your children, but that's something to keep track of, of course. Everything you spend your money on is something to keep track of. My retirement account. I could be giving a lot more. At the moment, or back when back when I started and I created this, it was $50 a month. Gas. It can vary depending not only on the prices. But for me, I also do other work. Should I say I perform in bands and DJ and I travel further during the summer, because that's when we do more outdoor performances. So that also fluctuates quite a lot. I told you I value dancing. So dance lessons, $100 a month. Entertainment usually involves dancing, so $80 a month when I go clubbing. Thank goodness I don't smoke. But if that's one of your values, I would say change it only because of health, but if that's one of your values, that could be very costly. Same thing with alcohol. You may all know about coffee by now that if you want to buy a cup of coffee at Starbucks or Dunkin' it could range anywhere up to $5 to $10. Yeah, I do it at home. I save a lot of money that way. Some people enjoy going to the health club. That's fabulous. And it could be a huge range depending on which health club you join. And I think on campus there are many, many options. And of course, books. I didn't put that-- I don't buy books generally, because I go to a library. But I put that in there for you guys, because I'm sure you're going to have to buy some textbooks. So anyway, so my monthly expenses were 2,375. But then we want you to remember that there are some irregular expenses. Add your yearly irregular expenses, like auto, homeowners, or renters insurance, taxes, et cetera. Divide these expenses by the 12 months of the year or however time frame that you're going to be here and that stipend is for, that fellowship, however much money you're receiving. So some of those look like this. Renters insurance for me was 130. Auto insurance. I unfortunately hit a deer. So that's going to go up. And that's relatively a pretty good price. But the way auto insurance works is that you either pay more ahead of time. And then if you hit a deer, they will cover more. If you get cheaper insurance, if you hit a deer, you're going to have to pay more later on. So it's just one of these situations I keep mentioning deer because it's happened to me twice. And hopefully you won't have that happen to you. I do have two children, so I do have health insurance. So that costs me 540 a year. And I have quarterly taxes, because I'm self-employed besides my day job. So I do pay quarterly taxes. And if I add all those up, comes out to 2,560. And divide that by 12. And then we're going to add that later on. Because as Brendan mentioned, we want you to also prioritize emergency savings. 70% of Americans have less than $1,000 saved for emergencies. Should I say when that deer hit me, it damaged one of the tires really bad. And I had to get four new tires. It was over $1,000 easily. So even if you've covered all your core expenses, it is highly recommended to have emergency savings in case you lose your job, get sick, or unable to work for any reason. In your case, you'd want to save for what some people call unexpected expenses. So I'm going to challenge people out there. And maybe quickly type it in the chat. Tell me what your unexpected expenses may be. Because honestly, I'm going to tell you that there's no such thing as unexpected expenses. So hit me up with a couple of what you may think are unexpected expenses.

BRENDAN WILBUR: So, Jorge, there's some really good ones coming through. There are some sad ones. Vet bills, medical leave, funerals, traffic tickets, travel, taking care of aging parents, medical procedures. I always like to throw some happy things in there like vacations and gifts. I don't know about the rest of you, but I celebrate Christmas. But Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Solstice, they all come around the same time of year. And I used to not plan for these things. They used to happen and I'd wonder why I was in debt at the end of them. And it's looking at them as something that we know is going to happen and plan for them. We've also got conferences, faulty devices, fraud, kids. I've got kids. You start to plan for all their expenses as well. But the idea is as we start to lay these out and start to look at them, we can start to make a plan and anticipate them actually happening.

JORGE CUEVAS: And the reason why we don't believe there's such a thing as unexpected expenses is because if you're a human, you will have to go to the doctor or the dentist at some point. Absolutely. If you have transportation, if you have a car, you're going to have to get some repairs done. What were some of the other ones? Oh yeah, vacations. So hopefully some of you will be taking some vacations when they're available. It's going to happen. So what we say is that they're not unexpected. Let me rephrase that. The only thing that's unexpected about these expenses is that it's the timing. But you need to be aware that they're coming. They are absolutely coming. So that's why we want you to have savings allocated to specific things like vacations or emergencies. But here are my unexpected expenses for that year, last year. And my niece, she got she got married in Florida. So flights were very expensive because it was right after COVID. And cost me $2,000 for a weekend in Florida. Holiday and birthday gifts. Some of you like to give very expensive gifts, especially if you have children. Luckily, my children are grown. So every time I ask them, what do you want for Christmas or what do you want for your birthday, I don't need anything. I'm OK. So I've been making stuff for them. So like I told you, I'm a musician. So I write them poems, songs I make for them. And they love that very much. And it's very inexpensive that way. Car expenses. I told you the tires cost me about $1,000. And then there were chipmunks that got into my electrical system. So that was another $300 there. So easily. I think it was more than that. I don't own a home anymore, thank God, because there's always repairs for a home. I mentioned dental work. That's actually on the low end. I found more receipts after I made this. Same thing with eye care. Clothing and footwear. You may go through things a lot sooner than you think. Somebody mentioned pet vet bills. Yes, absolutely. So those cost me 4,510 divided by 12. So then I'm going to move that to here the totals for the monthly expected expenses, the yearly expected anticipated expenses divided by 12. The so-called unexpected expenses divided by 12. And then our total expected and unexpected by my total expected, unexpected monthly expenses were 2,964.16. Can anybody tell me why it's in the red? Why is it in the red? What does that mean.

AUDIENCE: It's an outflow.

JORGE CUEVAS: I'm sorry. I didn't hear you.

AUDIENCE: I said it is an outflow of funds.

JORGE CUEVAS: It's outflow, which means that I didn't make enough in my previous job to cover the expenses. So here are your options. When you're not making enough money to cover your expenses, you have three options. Either make more money. So you may have to get a different job or get a part time job or on top of what you're doing. If you don't have a job and you just go to school, you may have to get a part time job. Some people get multiple jobs. Spend less. That's why it's so critical to have an actual budget that you can look at and you can decide, are these my values? Is this where I really want my money to go? Is this how I really want to spend my money? And then the other option is being creative around your debt. And that has many facets to it. And we can certainly talk just about that for the whole hour. But we'll give you some ideas of how not to waste your money on high interest rates, loans, or credit cards and so forth. So luckily for me, like I said, I do other things during the summer. So I take that money and I spread it throughout my year. But I have to be very careful and diligent about knowing that whatever money comes in during the summer, I can't just spend that. That money is going to be spread throughout the year. So that is my multiple jobs that I do, and luckily I enjoy it. Ever since I got this job, I am luckily not as tight with the money, but I still have to obviously be careful with how I spend. And this is just a way of addressing the three options that you have. So let's talk about allocating money towards your savings goals or specific emergencies. Brendan, you are the master of the multiple subaccounts. I would love to hear from you about your accounts.

BRENDAN WILBUR: Awesome. One of the biggest financial tools I received when taking a class that we teach in Alternatives called money wise was this idea of saving for unexpected expenses and just expecting them to happen. So I started by doing the envelope method. You might have heard of this. I got it from my grandma. I wrote down envelopes of all of my expected expenses. Car repair, dentist, medical, vacations, gifts, home repairs. And then each time I was paid, I put a little bit of money in each of those envelopes. I'd always been told to save money, but saving without purpose meant as I saved money, I also spent money as I saw things that came along. As I had a affinity for shoes, as I would save money and I saw a pair of shoes I really wanted, I would be like, I can afford those shoes. I have money in my savings account, because my savings account didn't have a purpose. So with my envelope method, I started to add a purpose to my savings. After doing the envelope method for a short period of time, I realized I didn't like it. I had IOUs in one envelope to another. And I realized that these were two emotions for me, and I put it in the chat a few minutes ago. One is happy, vacations and gifts, and the other is sad dentist, medical, car repairs, et cetera. So every time I'm paid, I put a little bit of money into my happy account and a little bit of money into my sad account. This means I have less money to spend today, but it also means I'll start to build some savings for those other purposes. Now, at Alternatives, you can have as many savings accounts as you want. I at one time had 14 subsavings accounts. And you can call them whatever you want. Our tellers and staff can see what they're called, so I don't encourage you to call them like I did the first time. I had creative names for them that were inappropriate because I like to think I'm funny. I changed it to happy and sad because that was the emotions that that money encapsulated for me. I'm happy to spend money on vacations and gifts. I never feel as good when I'm spending the money on my car, my pets, my teeth, my body, any of those other things. So automated, paying myself first, putting the money aside with purpose. It starts to build a reserve. I'll tell you, the first time I tried this, I had a car repair come up about three months after I started. My car repair was $1,000. My sad account had 500 in it. I didn't have the full $1,000, but had 500, which means I was halfway to my goal. Now I only had to be creative with coming up with 500 more dollars, not in a whole $1,000 to work with. And over the years, I've been able bit of reserve in the happy and the sad. So I have more room to work with. And the key for me on this one is when Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Solstice comes, I look at my happy account and it tells me what I'm able to do. If I have $200 in my happy account, that's what I use to start my gift buying budget with. I don't use my imagination or my emotions for buying gifts, because they don't know what's possible for me. They put me in debt and put me in a harder situation. So these savings accounts with purpose lined up with my values actually give me the framework and structure I need to be able to live within my means. I don't always have what I need, but I always have a start getting me closer to meeting those goals as they come up.

JORGE CUEVAS: Thank you, Brendan. And also you brought something up very important is that my father didn't believe in banks. He literally had envelopes. And I think of all the money that he could have earned through interest if he invested or even if he has a minimal interest savings account. So make sure that you're earning some interest by putting your money into a credit union, preferably, of course. But yeah, get rid of those envelopes if you're still using the envelope method. So here is a topic that drives me crazy. So use your credit cards. Don't let them use you. And I will state it every time that credit cards are a wonderful, free tool to use. When is it free? Think about it. When is it absolutely free and advantageous to you? Because it's building credit. It's building your credit score if you pay on time. So anybody jumping on the chat and mention that? When is your credit card absolutely free to use? Anybody have a response?

BRENDAN WILBUR: Some are starting to come in. When you pay in full monthly.

JORGE CUEVAS: Yes, absolutely. BRENDAN WILBUR: There's no annual fees on the card. And also there's those rare, not so rare, but those instances where you can have a 0% APR for a period of time.

JORGE CUEVAS: Excellent. Thank you so much. So, yes. When I first got a credit card, I thought that I had to carry a balance in order to build my credit. That is not true. As long as you're using the card, at least every now and then, and paying it off on time, even if it's not fully, you will develop positive credit and a better increase your credit score. But the best practice is to pretend that whatever money you're going to be spending, if at all possible, is something that you actually have to be able to pay at the end of the month. Use your credit card. Don't let them use you. Credit cards are predatory lenders. Credit card companies. They don't check to see whether you are able to pay them. They don't check to see if-- they're going to give you a limit and you can lie to them and tell them that, yeah, you make exorbitant amounts of money, and they don't double check that. So you can get yourself into some serious trouble, serious debt. And so anyway, yes.

BRENDAN WILBUR: We're not encouraging you to lie, but it's called a stated income application with credit cards. And that just means they don't ask for pay stubs. They don't ask for tax returns. They just ask you to write down what your gross income is. And I'm here to tell you that most Americans don't know what their gross income is. They don't know what that means. And when people don't know how to answer a question, they're going to answer it incorrectly. And credit card companies are predatory by nature, every single one of them. It's stated income application. Doesn't matter if it's a bank, credit union, anyone. They're doing it in a way where they're trying to give you access to funds that you may or may not be able to afford to borrow. My first credit card I got after my divorce, they offered me a $20,000 limit. I said, I don't need $20,000 in a credit card available to me. That sounds like it could put me into a really bad spot. So I called him and asked him to lower it and put it to something that was more reasonable for me. You don't have to go with what they give you. I got mine lowered to 10 because that was more comfortable for me. It felt better with my values and seemed like something that I was more comfortable moving forward with.

JORGE CUEVAS: And then the other thing to look at is that the average American was $7,000 in credit card debt in 2023. And I have to let you all know that we try to help people who are in serious financial debt, specifically with credit cards. And last week, there was a couple that felt that they lost their jobs and many other things happened. And they were over $100,000 in credit card debt. That could easily happen. And that's not typical. That's the extreme far end. But I don't want to be $7,000 in debt, in credit card debt. So what we suggest is that you pay it in full every month. And also, if at all possible, avoid paying the monthly minimum. And here's an example of if you spend $1,000 in your credit card for that month, and even if you don't charge anything else, it's going to take you three and a half years to pay it off if you only pay the minimum of the $35. They want you to pay the minimum. That's how they make their money. They call me a deadbeat because they can't get any money out of me. But look over here to the is that if you were to pay double the amount of the minimum payment, that will still help you. Because we understand sometimes you need to use a credit card to help you get past a certain bump in the road, a certain situation. And at that point, if you just double the amount, you're going to lower the amount of time. It's only going to take you a year and a half. And then it's going to be closer to $200 that you've spent as opposed to $500. So that's what we say. Pay it in full if possible. Don't pay the minimum. Pay at least a little bit more, if at all possible. And that's how it's going to help you as far as not-- that's how you're going to save money by not spending. Look at the interest rate. It was 23.99 APR. So the interest rate could be anywhere from up to 36% from what I understand. And I think New York State has a cap and I believe it's 36%. And the other thing, another way that you can also save money is by, hey, you just moved into town. You want to get that TV. You want to get that couch, that furniture, so forth. And look, you can buy that, you can buy this $250 TV for $1,000. How can you resist? Because you're only going to be paying $13 a week over 78. I mean, yeah, over 78 weeks. So look at the astronomical interest rate. So avoid these places, because you're just going to be wasting your money. So we're getting close to that time, and we want to tell you about some of the products that we have. And remember, at the end of the slides, which we'll be sharing, we also have other very great resources. Brendan, do you mind going over some of our products? I can use a little break.

BRENDAN WILBUR: Yeah. And there was a great question in the chat about are credit cards necessary? And I just want to touch on that. Because credit cards are a tool. I've told this story hundreds of times in my adventures here at Alternatives. And when I was in my 20s, even before that, I was 18, showed up on college campus. And who was there? Discover, Citibank, Chase. They were all there on my college campus. And they're like, hey, Brendan, do you want Twizzlers? And I was like, I like Twizzlers. They're like, hey, fill out this credit card application and you can have some Twizzlers. I was like, I don't have a job. I'm a college student. I just want the Twizzlers. So I filled out the application, stated I had no income. They gave me a credit card anyway. That credit card I likened to a chain saw. It was a dangerous tool that I had no business operating. I didn't have chaps, I didn't have a direction manual. All I had was access to money that I had not earned to spend on crap that I did not need. As a college student, I did not need to have it. I got out of college with a lot of credit card debt. By the time I addressed all of it and became a more seasoned financial adult, credit cards became more like a hammer to me. I understood how they worked. I understood how I could use them to get rewards, whether it was airline miles, cash back, or points. I could use them to better my financial situation through my credit score and getting rewards from the company itself. But it took me some time to get to that point. If credit cards are not a tool for you, you certainly don't need to have a credit card to build a credit score. At Alternatives and many other financial institutions, we do something called a score builder loan, which is a loan where we lend you money, $500, but we don't actually give it to you. We put it in a savings account in your name. You make monthly payments to pay the money back. And at the end of the loan, you have saved $500. This is a way to simulate a savings. It shows up on your credit report as a loan. So it builds you credit. And at no point are you at any risk of going into debt. If you're six months into the program and you decide you can't continue, you simply call us, say, I'd like to close it out. We close out your savings account, pay off the remaining balance of the loan, and give you the money that you have paid into the loan back. Simple way to build a credit score. Effective. Doesn't cost you money. And you end the account with savings, 500,000, whatever the dollar amount that you choose to work towards. So coming back to the credit cards. You don't have to have it. But if it's a tool that you think you can manage, something you could pay off in full each month, you can certainly use the credit card to better your financial situation by taking advantage of airline miles, cash back, whatever it is that you might be able to get from them. But also know they're making money every time you use the card. Even if you're not paying interest, they're still making money every time you use the card, those transactional fees. Another way that you could look at saving money is something called Lucky Savers. And this is a credit union product. It's not an Alternatives product, per se. Many credit unions throughout New York State are offering this. It's a lottery based savings account. So if you are someone who wants to save and you want to save with a little bit of excitement, I will tell you, we don't have a tremendous amount of members that are using this. And the way it works is you open a Lucky Savers account. You save $25. Every $25 you save enters you for a chance to win money. We give away money each month to people who are saving their own money through a credit union drawing. And then there's also a state drawing. The prizes range from $25 a month up to $5,000 for a quarterly prize. And each month we're giving away five $25 prizes, two $50 prizes, and $100 prize. That's money people are getting for saving their own money. What we're trying to do is get people off of the lottery because the lottery is a way of stripping wealth from generally lower and moderate income people. They want to have a hope and dream of getting out of debt, getting out of financial struggles, and the lottery seems like a way to do it. With Lucky Savers, you're saving your own money and you're building yourself up with some financial reserves. The money that you save does go into what's called a club account. So it earns an interest rate. It is locked in there for a year term. So it's a way to save with purpose. If you have a goal of, hey, I would like to go to the World Cup next year and you want to start saving for it, Lucky Savers could be a great envelope savings account to start saving towards a particular goal like a vacation, an event, or as my grandma used to do, she would have a Christmas club account. She would open one up every November and start saving for the following year. It would mature in that October, November time period, and she would have money for the Christmas gifts that she liked to buy her grandkids.

JORGE CUEVAS: So we also have a wonderful mortgage products. We don't want to go into a lot of detail because most of you are not going to really be staying and buying. That's what I used to say. But the funny thing that I just heard is that most people from Ithaca are not from Ithaca because they love it and they stay. So we have great mortgage products that you may want to consider. Running low on time, so I'm going to keep moving on. So we have free checking. No minimum balance. We have a Kasasa checking and savers with a higher interest. And we have financial counseling and education. Right now you're receiving some of the financial literacy and education. We could also help you take a look at your credit report for free. And like I mentioned before, we have Balance. And you see the link right here. They are our financial counseling partnership that we have with them. So it's only me as the financial counselor at the moment. Sometimes Brendan is available, but it's myself. And then you can actually make appointments over the phone and they can help you. This is for members and non-members. And they also have some debt management programs, great workshops and webinars, online tools, just like I mentioned with Banzai. And here's their link right there. And the only difference is that Banzai does not offer any living person doing financial counseling. They have a lot of AI gamified courses, but also a lot of great tools. And just about any topic that you can think of, they can actually give you some good perspective and education about it. And then some of you asked about taxes. So I got my taxes done from Cornell free tax prep program at the local library. It cost me-- what was it, for free? It was free. Oh my God. I was spending close to $400 every year going to H&R Block. And it was a wonderful program. And it was students who helped me out. It was a great program. So here are some links that you can find as well. And then some other helpful links. Of course, you can contact us right here. But there are two here that Brendan would like to talk about.

BRENDAN WILBUR: I mentioned clark.com in the chat earlier. It's Clark Howard. They are a financial resource. There's so many great tools on there. One of the biggest things, I did financial counseling at Alternatives for 17 plus years. One of the biggest things I see that people are overspending on are their cell phones and their car insurance. They get attached to a cell phone company. They don't think much of it. They stay with it for years. Same with car insurance. It's just a bill that's paid on a regular basis. I'll tell you, one of my tools I do with counseling is I ask you how much you spend on your cell phone. I'll give you an example. I met with someone the other day, $150 a month on a cell phone plan. I said, that's $1,800 a year. It takes you three weeks in the year to earn that. It's close to the whole month of January just to pay for having a cell phone service throughout the year. Is that something you feel comfortable with? And I like to annualize my expenses like that to see how much time do I have to work in order to earn that. So I turned them on to Clark Howard, where they went on and they were able to cut their cell phone bill from 150 down to around $50 a month by choosing a service that worked for them. I went even cheaper. I went on there and I found one that was $20 a month that works really well for me. In life, I'm on Wi-Fi most of the time. I don't need to have robust cell coverage. I'm really listening to music, texting with friends, and making phone calls. So find what works for you and make sure you're not overpaying for your services. Clark.com a great resource for that. Now, PowerPay is my single favorite financial website. This is one that was developed by Utah State Cooperative Extension. Much like Cornell Cooperative Extension, Utah State Cooperative Extension is the land grant college for Utah. And they developed this financial tool and resource. PowerPay primarily refers to how do I address debt that I have. And there's a gentleman named Dave Ramsey who does financial education. I'm not a big fan of him. He has some good information, but he also has some miscued views, in my opinion. PowerPay takes some of his same ideas, debt snowball, but it puts it into a free, easy to access resource. So when I'm looking at debt and how to get out of debt, I use the PowerPay website. I put in my debts, my monthly minimum payments, my APR, how much I'm going to pay each month, I have the ability to pay, and it tells me who I should pay, how much I should pay, and when I'll get out of debt and how I can save the most money around my debt. They also have tons of calculators. And I noticed as we were looking through the questions, there was lots of questions about what percentage of my income should go towards food, what percentage should go towards my housing. PowerPay has all those kind of calculators in there. I will tell you, be wary of looking at percentages and what should go towards your stuff, because it doesn't account for your values or where you live. And if you live in Tompkins County, it might be difficult to find housing which is 30% of your gross income. You might be forced to spend closer to 40% or 50% of your income on housing in Tompkins County. That means the money has to come from somewhere else. That means you have less money for entertainment, for food, for transportation, for vacations, for others. But for those of you who are looking for those percentages, you want some guidance, PowerPay website is completely free. You can create an account for using all of their resources. I have never gotten spam or any information from them. You can use fake information. It's been a tremendous resource for me. I think I've probably helped 100 people over the years sign up using my own email address. So it's not even important the email address or username. It's really just getting you access to those resources.

JORGE CUEVAS: And that is our presentation. I hope you learned a lot. And remember, you don't have to remember everything that we gave you. You're going to get the slides with all these resource links. So actually, there's one last thing for the presentation evaluation link. I think you have that in the chat as well. Well, thank you so much. We really appreciate your time, and hopefully you learned some valuable information to use. We'll see you in Ithaca.

JANNA LAMEY: Thank you, Jorge. Thank you, Brendan, so much. Appreciate it.