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Giants vs. Eagles

Dorm decor among hidden costs of college

by [Ana M. Alaya](#)/The Star-Ledger

Thursday August 28, 2008, 4:43 PM

It took a few hours and more than a few dollars for Christy Amato and Sarah Thompson to outfit their 12-by-12-foot dorm room in the freshman hall at The College of New Jersey in Ewing.

They moved in a rug and a lamp, a refrigerator and microwave, a printer and laptops, a DVD player and a flat-screen television. They added laundry baskets, drying racks, alarm clocks and surge protectors. They added a pair of hot pink trash cans to match the pink-and-lavendar color scheme of their room.

Photos by [Tony Kurdzuk](#)/The Star-Ledger

College of New Jersey freshman Christy Amato of Marlton, 2nd from left, and Sarah Thompson of Holland, PA, right begin to organize their dorm room after moving into Wolfe Hall. Helping them are Christy's mom Jean, left, Sarah's brother Patrick, 12, and mom Peggy. The two students coordinated the colors of the new bedding beforehand in pink, purple and green, not realizing their room would come with a yellow closet and front door.

"There seems to be no limit as to what you can buy for the dorm," said Sarah's father, Gerry Thornton, of Holland, Pa., who helped the girls move in earlier this week. There seems to be no limit to what you can spend, either. He figures he dropped about \$4,000.

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College of New Jersey freshman Joe Rosenberg of Wilmington, DE plugs his laptop computer into his printer in a dorm room in Wolfe Hall.

As millions of students move into their campus digs for the start of the fall semester, parents like Gerry Thornton are learning that college expenses don't end with tuition, fees, room, board and books. Outfitting a dorm room in the style of the day costs real money. It's one of the hidden costs of college.

"A kid used to go to college with a bag of laundry and a hot plate," said Amato's father, Tom, of Marlton.

Those days are gone. Today's college students need more, lots more.

Diane Junger and her family helped her son Shane move into his Felician College dormitory in Rutherford this week.

Among the items they toted into the room: A 32-inch LCD television, refrigerator, Xbox 360, rice cooker, coffee maker and laptop. All of the items were new.



College of New Jersey freshman Tanya Kulkarni and her dad Mahesh of Randolph carry a portable refrigerator through the hall to Tanya's new dorm room in Wolfe Hall as they move her in.

"I've been shopping for a year so I didn't have to do it all at once," said Diane Junger as her son unpacked his electric shaver, 23-oz bottles of Frank's Red Hot sauce, instant mac-and-cheese and DVDs of the 'Bourne Identity' and 'Harold and Kumar go to White Castle.'

"The room is pretty good size," Shane Junger said, "though there could be a little more storage space."

Retailers start marketing dorm supplies in early summer, often creating entire lines of furniture and goods for the college student. Target's website

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has a section called "Economics 101: Deck out your Dorm for Less" and prominently advertises products aimed at the college crowd. PBTeen, a brand of Pottery Barn, also offers special products for college students, like the Supercool Fridge that comes in pink and chocolate brown. For students worried about losing their sheets in the laundry, they can pay \$6.50 to get their linens monogrammed.

Sarah Plamondon of PBTeen said the company tends to recommend products with multiple uses, such as lap desks that can be used on a bed and that store notebooks and hook up to an MP3 player.

"We know teens are tech savvy, and that they're looking for items that can be used with the technology they own," Plamondon said.

One of this year's hottest dorm items is "Glue Dot," that allow students to stick posters and pictures without damaging walls, said Jeff Gawronski, director of product development of www.dormbuys.com.

Gawronski's company does regular surveys of college student dorm habits. He said students tend to spend about \$600 to \$700 on stuff to outfit their dorms, not including electronics like computers and televisions.

"It can add up," Gawronski said. "Bedding alone can get you to \$200 and then you have your decor, laundry and bath. A lot of students say they didn't realize they needed so many things until they get there."

The "cleanliness aspect" also worries students, Gawronski said. "We do quite a bit of sales with allergy and bedbug covers."

One of the must-have dorm room accessories this year seems to be the Mini-Mantle, a small shelf that clamps onto a bed and is used to hold cell phones, papers or other small items. Tiffany Acevedo of East Windsor bought one for her dorm room at TCNJ.

"It's really useful," said Acevedo, who also brought a photo of herself and her brother to display on her desk. Her mother was equally concerned with the room decor, as well as foodstuffs, toiletries and "all the little things" like Pepto-Bismol.

"You have to be concerned about the college food you know," Miny Acevedo said.

Upstairs, 17-year-old Marc Castellazzo of Freehold was unpacking his Guitar-Hero guitar, laptop, iPod, television, Xbox, and 24-pack of Ramen noodles.

"The life of the college student is not deprived," said Castellazzo's mother, Joanne.

Back in room 109, Thornton and Amato were settling into their new digs. Christy Amato's pink and lavender sheets and pillow cases were crisply tucked, all the newness juxtaposed with the ragged-looking stuffed animal propped on a pillow, completing her home away from home.

"That's Eeyore," Christy Amato said. "I got him in Disney World."

Her mom's eyes were getting misty.

Did anyone bring tissues?

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