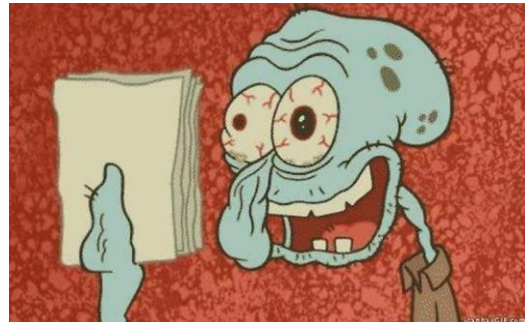


It's a Hard Candy College Christmas by Abby Lyons

December is here! 'Tis the season of finals, projects, and espresso shots from your favorite coffee shop. College students across the country are now being deprived of sleep and spending every free moment in study sessions.

Finals week can leave a student feeling dazed and confused with a touch of PTSD. No joke! I still wake up from nightmares about being late for a final and it takes me a second to remember that I have been out of college for 6 years now.



BUT once the finals are done and a much deserved nap takes place, excitement fills the air once more because Christmas is only a couple weeks away. But then...you reach deep into your wallet...and remember that you're still a broke college student who must live on a tight budget. It's hard to find a great gift for your loved ones when this is your living allowance:



Don't feel pressured! People understand your position. However, if you did want to get your friends and family a little something, I have some great gift ideas that are affordable and personable.

Bake them something! Make a nice platter of Christmas cookies or go to a dollar store and put together a bag of candies. Who doesn't love getting sweets?! It's always nice to receive a gift that took time and effort to create. You will probably get brownie points for knowing someone's favorite food or candy!

Gift cards! Free food is the best kind of food. Get someone a gift card to one of their favorite fast food restaurants. It doesn't have to be much.

Frame a picture! Capturing moments in an image is one of my personal favorite gifts to give and receive. Print out a photo or send them to apps like Free Prints. You can buy a cheap frame in a dollar store. This is a cute and homey gift idea that will make them feel important and loved.

Framed Scrabble tiles! This is a simple and very personal gift. If you have an old Scrabble board game you can make a sweet message or personalize it with a name! (I am probably going to try this out for myself this year!)



Movie night survival kit! Pick out a cheap movie at FYE or one that is on sale in another store, buy a bag of popcorn and/or candy, and wrap them together. This is a nice, personal way of giving a gift to someone that you can share a movie night with.

Mini makeup kit! Create a little bundle of cosmetics in a mason jar or goody bag. You can add nail polish, nail file, eyeliner, face masks, mascara, or anything else. This is a great way to give beauty products for cheap and make a nice little go-kit of necessities in the process. This could make a great personal spa day!

Cocoa on the go! If you're feeling a bit creative you can put hot chocolate mix and marshmallows in a mason jar or a coffee mug. You can throw a candy can in there for a bit of holiday cheer! It's simple, easy, and cheap. I know that it doesn't get any better for me on a snow day when I can sip on some hot chocolate.

Mason jar kits! Go to a dollar store and get a small mason jar and grab some cheap candy to put in it. You can decorate the jar to make it Christmas special.

Jewelry! I'm not talking about sterling silver. You can pick up anything for super cheap anywhere, like dollar stores or Walmart. Get creative and pick your own symbolic jewelry that could hint to a funny memory or a sentimental moment.

Fuzzy socks! Who doesn't love some fuzzy socks?! If you say no, you know you're just lying to yourself.

T-shirt! Everyone loves getting a shirt that has a design of their favorite band, team, brand, quote, etc. You can find graphic shirts for cheap in stores (especially Old Navy). Find sales and you could walk out with five or more shirts for under \$20.

Outdoor winter set! It's super cold this winter so you could get someone some fuzzy ear muffs, gloves, scarves, or a winter hat. You can buy sets of these things to mix and match different colors and styles. Places like 5 Below sells good quality items for \$5 or less.

Scent arrangement! Buy someone some arrangement of their favorite scents with candles, air fresheners, hand soap, perfume, and lip balm. Make a creative little bundle of goodies that will freshen and brighten their day.

Bundle it! If you have a large group of people to buy for, you can always do joint gifts. You can buy something that everyone can use, like board games or blankets. You can also have multiple people buy one big gift. Collaborate and then divide up the cost.

Now that you have gotten your gifts you will need to wrap them! Follow this link to find some creative and cheap ways to wrap your gifts:

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/wrapping-paper-alternatives_n_5983298

Although gift giving is nice and fun, it's not the most important thing to remember this season. Spending time with your friends and family is worth more than any gift. Take the time you are given during the holidays to surround yourself with people who matter to you most and appreciate their presence by showing kindness and compassion. Gifts are not everything- you and your loved ones are! Take this time to rest up and get ready for your spring semester.