CFFiM Senior-Level Case Competition Solution

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I. Overview & Assumptions

I'm Vivian, a Grade 11 student from Toronto preparing for my first year of independent living. For this case, I assume I will be studying at the Ivey School of Business at Western University in London, Ontario. My plan reflects what I would realistically do as a low-income student living with one roommate on Western's campus.

This financial plan outlines how I will manage $12,000 (CAD) in savings for the 2026 academic year while covering essential expenses, hidden start-up costs, and realistic living needs in London. My approach uses rental, utility, and cost-of-living averages across Southern Ontario to meet first-year needs, avoid debt, and build foundations for long-term financial independence.

Note: Any supporting information is included in supplementary documentation for conciseness; still within word limit. For convenience, the footer redirects immediately to the respective heading!

II. Initial Savings Allocation ($12,000)

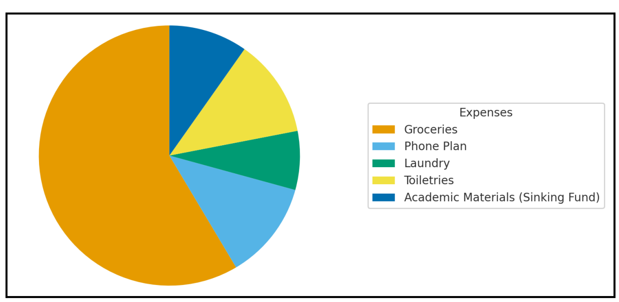
I follow a simple 50/30/20 split to stabilize my first months and cover realistic start-up needs.

Use of Funds	Allocation	Notes
Essential Needs (50%)	$6,000.00	First month's rent, groceries/utilities starter fund, renter's insurance, toiletries, furniture, inflation buffer
Flexibility (30%)	$3,600.00	Cash-flow cushion, unexpected costs, clothing, small academic costs
Savings (20%)	$2,400.00	$1,500 emergency fund in HISA, $900 initial TFSA/GIC savings

For essentials, I stay cost-efficient by including thrifted items in my expenses for a cost-per-use approach, minimizing long-term depreciation.

III. Budget Breakdown

Living in a Western residence with a compulsory meal plan means I do not pay separate rent, utilities, or WiFi; these are covered through OSAP eligibility and scholarships. My monthly budget therefore focuses on personal, variable, and savings categories, with shared or minimized costs where possible (V).



Essential Monthly Costs

Expenses	Estimated Monthly Cost
Groceries	$120.00
Phone Plan	$25.00
Laundry	$15.00
Toiletries	$25.00
Academic Materials (Sinking Fund)	$20.00
Total/Month	**$205.00**

The first-year tuition payment ($8,077 CAD) is covered by my parents and scholarships.

Variable Monthly Costs

Expenses	Monthly Cost	Details
Transporation	$30.00	LTC bus pass is included in Western tuition
Wellness	$35.00	Includes 2-3 volleyball drop-in sessions, other outings
Subscriptions	$15.00	Netflix, The Economist (family plans)
Clothes (Sinking Fund)	$20.50	Seasonal needs
Personal Spending	$150.00	Supplies, entertainment, miscellaneous purchases
Total/Month	**$250.50**	

Savings & Investing

Category	Amount	Details
TFSA Investments	$30.00	Index ETF contributions
HISA Savings	$35.00	Short-term emergency savings
Total/Month	**$65.00**	

Summarized First-Year Budget Totals

Monthly	**$520.50**

Yearly	**$6,246.00**

IV. Income Plan

I earn most of my monthly income from a part-time job, supplemented by graphic design commissions and the federal GST/HST credit (which I factor in to boost my emergency fund).

Income Source	Net Income	Details
Part-Time Job	$650.00	$16/hour × 12 hrs/week; biweekly pay; deductions for CPP, EI
Graphic Design Commissions	$40.00	Short-term emergency savings
GST/HST Credit (averaged monthly)	$43.25	Federal low-income tax credit.
Total Monthly Income	**$733.25**	

Attached is a [Cash Flow Calendar].

V. Debt Minimization & Risk Mitigation

Below is my strategy to minimize debt.

Strategy	Rationale	Amount Saved
Split Subscriptions	Sharing Netflix/Economist	$20.00/month
Reuse/Hand-Me-Downs	Western students often sell older editions; used books cost a fraction of new ones	$80–120 per course
Meal Prepping	A personal hobby; reduces takeout spending and prevents impulse food purchases	$60–100/month
Student Discounts	Using Western student rates for events, software, and transit	10–50% off
Emergency Fund	$1,500 in HISA covers unexpected expenses	Avoids interest charges

Below is my strategy to proactively approach managing and mitigating financial risks.

Strategy	Rationale	Amount Saved
Scenario Planning	If income drops: cut discretionary spending + rely temporarily on emergency funds	$20.00/month
Personal Behaviour	Western students often sell older editions; used	$80–120 per course

Controls	books cost a fraction of new ones	
Budget Tracking	A personal hobby; prevents impulse purchases	$60–100/month

VI. Emergency & Savings Plan

I have outlined below four strategies to realistically prepare for the future.

1. **TFSA Contributions:** I contribute an initial $900 into a TFSA and continue adding $30 monthly per my income. This grows tax-free.
2. **High-Interest Savings Account :** My $1,500 emergency fund remains in a HISA. I add $35 per month, plus quarterly GST/HST credits to strengthen my contingency.
3. **FHSA for Future Housing:** Once my income increases, I will contribute ~$50 monthly to an FHSA to support homeownership with tax deductions and tax-free withdrawals.
4. **Sinking Funds:** For predictable expenses like electronics, travel, clothing, and academic fees, I contribute $20–40 per month to individual sinking funds (mentioned in previous figures). This prevents seasonal costs from turning into debt.

VII. Long-Term Planning

To map out my own journey to financial and personal independence, I formulate my long-term planning through the C.F.F.I.M framework, detailed:

C	**Career/Income Growth:** I plan to steadily increase my income through internships and leadership opportunities. I will gradually expand my savings and investment contributions.
F	**Financial Habits:** I plan to steadily increase my income through upper-year internships, part-time roles aligned with my field, and student leadership opportunities. As my earning power rises, I will gradually expand my savings and investment contributions.
F	**Future Housing Preparation:** I will build the financial foundation needed for independent renting and eventual homeownership. This includes contributing to my FHSA, maintaining a credit score above 700, and applying for the Ontario Trillium Benefit to offset rent and electricity costs as a low-income student.
I	**Independence Milestones:** I plan to steadily increase my income through upper-year internships, part-time roles aligned with my field, and student leadership opportunities. If needed, I may open a student line of credit later on, but only after establishing strong credit habits, since student LOCs offer lower interest rates (Prime + 1%).
M	**Moderate Wealth Building:** I will continue steady wealth growth through TFSA contributions, maintaining my emergency fund, and investing in low-risk GICs once my savings stabilize. My goal is to graduate university with minimal debt.