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### Walmart vs. Whole Foods for the College Student

The freedom to choose is like currency to those transitioning into adulthood. The choices made throughout early adulthood are an important investment towards the yet to be made choices of the future. For the first few years of adulthood, during the so-called honeymoon period, we use our freedom to choose much like we use the banking system; we open credit card accounts as if they were free money. But for the college student, as debt starts piling up and the uncertainties of the future begin creeping in, we come to learn that this freedom of choice, like all freedoms, comes at a cost. And since even the most seemingly insignificant choices, like which grocery store to buy groceries at, comes at a cost, it's good to be informed on *what* it's costing us and *where*. In comparing and contrasting sights and sounds, product prices, and conveniences at Walmart and at Whole Foods, it's evident that for the average college student buying groceries at Walmart is the better choice.

Prices at Walmart are much cheaper than at Whole Foods. Walmart prices live up to their slogan to "Save Money. Live Better," without neglecting to keep up with current trends of all-natural and organic everything. Walmart even has its own organic brand products and are proudly displayed with a purple price label. Whole Foods, of course, known as a leading supplier of all things natural and organic, is also known for carrying all things more expensive. Advantages of these higher prices are somewhat limited to having more choices in brands and

flavors claiming to have some kind of health benefit. A 16 ounce bottle of in-store pressed juice labeled as Green Aid is the same price as a 32 ounce bottle of organic juice from Walmart; but it would better aid the college student's greens to buy the juice at Walmart, which is no less "whole" than its counterpart. For those with real health concerns such as allergies and skin sensitivities, Walmart also offers personal care products that are paraben-free, and unscented. Some of these brands are the same ones found at Whole Foods, and at cheaper prices. Walmart offers everything a college student needs to live a healthy lifestyle with healthy spending.

Walmart has everything Whole Foods carries and more. The wide variety of products that Walmart carries allows for a one-stop-buy-all experience that makes it convenient for all different types of people. Most notable of the types of items that Walmart carries and Whole Foods does not include hardware, electronics, entertainment, cookware, and furniture. Many Walmarts also offer car maintenance services, optical services, banking services, and an in-store McDonalds. And because most Walmarts are open 24 hours, it is not only the go-to place for leisurely browsing, but also for emergency runs—real and supposed (including late night cravings). What Whole Foods offers and Walmart does not is a bar, a coffee shop, fresh-baked pizza, a mochi bar, and a self-serve hot and cold food bar that sells by the pound. It is also important to note that while Walmart offers clothes for all genders, ages, and occasions, the clothing section at Whole Foods barely takes up a quarter of an aisle, with mostly all yoga clothes for women and a single type of underwear for men. The lack of product variety is the reason why even Whole Foods regulars can be found at Walmart. All the more, College students will find everything they need at Walmart and save precious time to spend it on what really matters: their grades.

The sights and sounds at Walmart make a more interesting grocery buying experience than at Whole Foods. The people and music at both places are vastly different. Walmart, with its cheaper prices and wider variety of products, attracts a broader range of customers. People of all ages, races, and backgrounds are seen at Walmart. People dressed in their Sunday Best and people in sweats from a night's rest. The rebellious teenager who reeks of marijuana, and the local firefighter that can only fit time for buying groceries at 3 AM. The unapologetically scantily-dressed woman and the head-and-ankle covered Amish women. Whole Foods, on the other hand, has a generally smaller range of customers: wealthy people, and people feigning wealth. Wealth allows people to be more selective about such things as the gluten content in their muffins. It also allows Whole Foods to be more selective about who they hire. When asked about her work title, a worker at Whole Foods mentioned that she had a Master's degree and was applying to Medical school. At Walmart, an employee could not hear me ask any questions because of her hearing impairment, but was happy to communicate using body language. While Whole Foods might play alternative-genre music of artists you've probably never heard of, Walmart plays popular classics such as Justin Bieber's "Baby." Whole Foods' obscure playlist might give it an edge over its competitor, but this rather superficial cool factor is trumped by the more wholesome experience of encountering people from all walks of life that Walmart offers.

The more inclusive, more convenient, and cheaper Walmart is the clear winner when deciding where the average college student should buy their groceries. Through this small choice-investment, the student can save time and money, and also learn to coexist with different peoples. Even the medical school applicant employee at Whole Foods admitted to doing her grocery shopping at Walmart. And as it takes good reason and sense to graduate with a Master's

degree and apply to medical schools, good reason and sense indicate that Walmart is the right choice.