

# Local co-eds earn sweet rewards as Sugar Babies

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Brooke has big dreams for her future.

A 23-year-old senior at the University of Pittsburgh, “Brooke” has a biology major that will serve her well when she follows through on her plan to attend medical school next year, where she is considering studying internal medicine or cardiology.

She has a thing for older guys.

And she has two Sugar Daddies to help make her dreams come true.

Brooke is one of 166 Pitt students who have signed up to be Sugar Babies through Seeking Arrangement, an online arrangement service boasting 3.6 million members, including 2.6 million Sugar Babies, across 139 countries.

Seeking Arrangement’s premise is both controversial and popular. The service, founded in 2006, encourages wealthy men to connect with young women, many of whom are college students, and then generously pay the women for companionship, a financial incentive for college students looking to avoid student debt. Some critics of the program compare it to prostitution, claiming it encourages young women to devalue themselves just to earn some money.

But such criticism hasn’t stopped Seeking Arrangement from finding willing Sugar Babies at local colleges.

Waynesburg University in Greene County has six women registered, California University of Pennsylvania has 13 and West Virginia University in Morgantown has 77 women who



## Sugar Babies

image courtesy of [seekingarrangement.com](http://seekingarrangement.com)

are part of seekingarrangement.com. According to the website's registered university email addresses, Penn State University has 422 Sugar Babies, but the site does not break down from which of the university's many campuses the women come.

Registered email addresses show an additional 23 from Carnegie Mellon University, 16 from Washington and Jefferson College and seven from Duquesne University.

The numbers may be growing, but Seeking Arrangement can be an awkward, concerning proposition for participating Sugar Babies. Brooke doesn't know any other Sugar Babies at Pitt and has been comfortable telling only a few close friends – and not her parents – that she has relationships for money. She always tells one of those close friends where she's going when she goes on dates as a safety precaution. Discussing the financial aspect of relationships with her Sugar Daddies also gets awkward for her sometimes.

Still, she says that the stigma, resulting in her wish to remain anonymous for this story, is worth managing.

“Even the application process for med school is really expensive,” said Brooke, who still holds down a part-time job on Pitt's campus. “Sugar Daddies like it when their Sugar Babies are working toward something and aren't just frivolous and not wanting to do anything for themselves.”

Brooke has two main Sugar Daddies – an engineer and a doctor, both in their 40s. The doctor has been paying her \$300 per visit since September. The engineer has paid her a comparable but fluctuating rate per visit for the past two years. The doctor cooks her dinner and prefers a low-key relationship, while the engineer frequently takes her out for drinks. She grabs coffee and watches movies with both of them.

“Do I have relationships with Sugar Daddies in the bedroom? Sure,” Brooke said. “But I don't go jumping in the bedroom with them from the beginning. It progresses just like any relationship.”

### **The price of 'sugar'**

“They're looking for someone smart, young, beautiful,” said Christina, a 2013 graduate of the University of Delaware and Sugar Baby for the past two years who also asked to remain anonymous because of the stigma associated with sugar relationships. “They all want to have sex with you.”

According to Seeking Arrangement spokesperson Brook Urick, the Sugar Daddies, who

pay \$60 monthly for messaging privileges, also want to connect with women they consider out of their league and aren't set on a monogamous, long-term relationship. Urick says the average Seeking Arrangement relationship lasts six months.

Still, Christina says she hasn't had sex with any of her Sugar Daddies yet, however much they might welcome it.

"I thought it'd be a cool opportunity to make money, meet new people," Christina said. "And possibly fall in love, that'd be nice, too. I knew of the negative connotations, but I wanted to try it and judge it for myself."

She posted several photos to her Seeking Arrangement profile along with a description indicating she was interested in professional networking, good friendships and not sex for money. Still, a small minority of the 10 to 20 messages she received per day from interested Sugar Daddies were explicit solicitations for sex. Like Brooke, Christina always lets a friend know where she's going when she goes on dates.

"Don't consider it a dating site," online dating expert Julie Spira said of SeekingArrangement.com. "It's an arrangement with benefits. You don't need to fall in love. In fact, they probably don't want you to."

Christina, who also works as a research technician for a pharmaceutical company, is currently in a Seeking Arrangement relationship with a 35-year-old man who she calls her "Spartan doctor" because of his good looks. He took her to a strip club on their second date, cooks for her and takes her to Indian and Greek restaurants.

"The stigma's understandable but I say don't knock it till you try it," Christina said. "People who haven't used it shouldn't judge it."

Local police aren't judging it. Although critics have likened it to prostitution, Trooper Stefani Lucas of the Uniontown state police station says those types of dating websites aren't under any law enforcement scrutiny.

Many local college students aren't judging it either.

"People on campus jokingly mention it because students are hard-up for money," said Taylor Brown, editor-in-chief of the Cal Times, Cal U's student newspaper. "People say, 'Okay, I'll end up having to do this because I have to pay off X, Y or Z.'"

The average yearly tuition for Pennsylvania residents attending Cal U, Carnegie Mellon, Duquesne, Penn State, Pitt, W&J, Waynesburg and WVU is \$24,989, which does not

include room and board and other fees.

Brown is currently a senior at Cal U, but when she was a freshman, she worked at a Connellsville restaurant with a student who was a sugar baby with a similar sugar relationship service.

“The daddy would bring her a bag, a purse,” Brown said. “Sometimes they’d play cards, watch a movie. She said his wife had passed away and he just wanted someone to spend time with and listen to him.”

“It’s interesting because if you look at a traditional site and somebody’s dating profile, the most common phrases in people’s descriptions are ‘attractive’ and ‘looking for a great guy who’s financially secure,’” Spira said.

“The difference is they’re also looking for a lifetime partner.”

The success of social media-oriented services like Tinder, a matchmaking mobile app that was initially designed to allow users to connect with other nearby users for casual sex, speaks to the willingness of young people to embrace more unconventional dating and arrangement services. Brown estimates that 75 percent of all Cal U students have Tinder.

“When you’re using a website, it’s mutual and one depends on the other. It’s a new type of relationship that is just starting to take hold in our culture,” Brown said.

“Whether we realize it or not, these types of relationships have been around for a really long time. Now that the technology is there to accommodate it, it’s inevitable.”

That doesn’t mean some other local college students find it worthwhile.

“It’s more worth it if you actually go out,” Cal U senior Cara Scagline said.

“It’s more worth their while to go out and find a job and pay loans rather than be dependent on one person. If that person dies, then you no longer have that service.”

### **Relationship rearrangement**

For now, Christina is satisfied with the Seeking Arrangement side of her life. She says her “Spartan doctor” beau is “way too into himself” and wants to have sex with her, but she enjoys his company and assistance paying her bills.

As Brooke navigates medical school applications, she is coming to terms with the fact that she may be separated from her current Sugar Daddies, especially the engineer.

“I texted him saying, ‘You’ll have to come visit me,’” Brooke said.

Spira and Brown agree that Seeking Arrangement’s reinforcement of traditional, stereotypical gender roles (the male provides for the female, the female provides beauty and compassion for the male), and reliance on 21st-century technology make it retro and modern at the same time.

For some people, it can cross too many lines. But for Brooke at least, it has paid off in more ways than one.

“It’s been a good experience in my life,” Brooke said. “No regrets.”