September 2022 Newsletter

Korbitz Financial Planning Newsletter

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An
AICPA Personal Financial Planning Section
member benefit

To my clients and friends:

Vanguard recently implemented an increase in their account fees. IF you have Vanguard accounts, and IF your total household assets at Vanguard are less than $1 million, you probably got an email from Vanguard about this. If you got an email telling you that if you do not "transition" to the brokerage account platform you will be charged $20 per FUND per YEAR, then you should transition your Vanguard mutual fund accounts to brokerage. If, on the other hand, this is news to you, and you did NOT get an email like I described, then you can let this go to another day.

This newsletter has two articles related to investing, including an explanation of TIPS bonds, and two related to college funding. I hope you find them to be interesting and useful.

Since yesterday was the "autumnal equinox" I will wish you all a happy fall season!

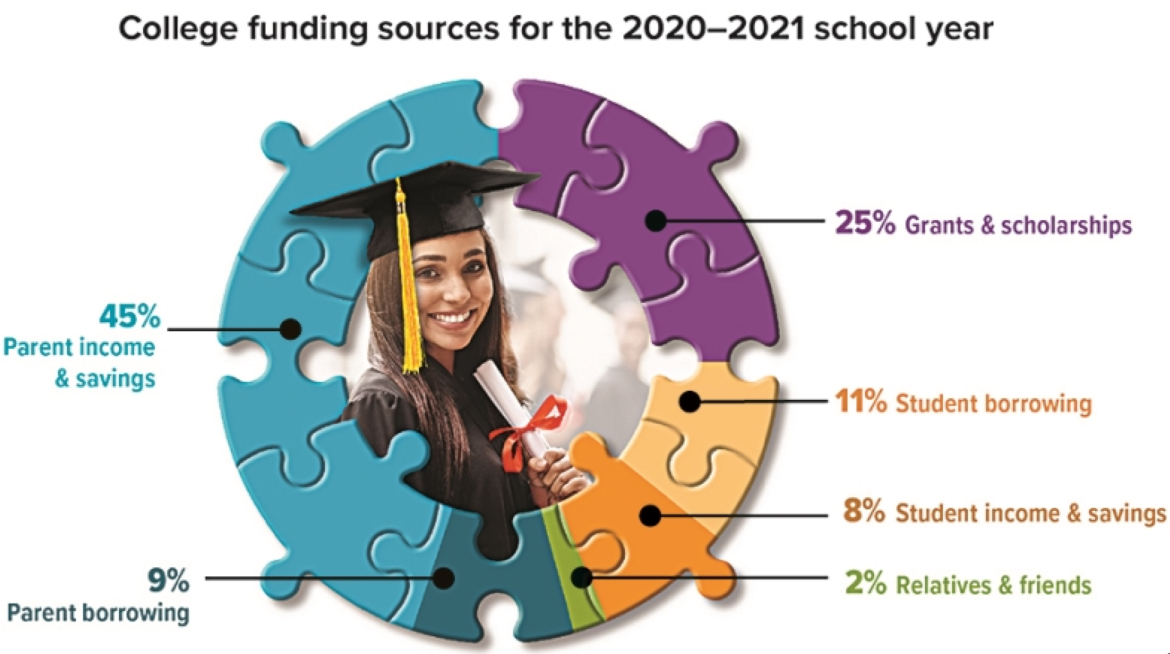
Please let me know if you have any questions.

Eric

Paying for College: Pieces of the Funding Puzzle

The typical family uses a combination of income, savings, borrowing, and grants/scholarships to pay for college. Not surprisingly, the largest source of funding — 45% — comes from parents in the form of current income and savings.

Starting a college fund as early as possible and aggressively looking for grant aid at college time can help families reduce the amount they may need to borrow, giving students greater flexibility when making decisions. Colleges are usually the best source of grant aid. A net price calculator (available on every college website) can help students estimate how much grant aid they might receive at specific colleges.



Source: *How America Pays for College,* 2021, Sallie Mae

Retirement Savings in a Volatile Market

If you worry about your retirement investments during market downturns, you're not alone. Unfortunately, emotions are often the enemy of sound investing. Here are some points to help you stay clear-headed during periods of market volatility.

Markets Rebound

Historically, even the worst bear market has bounced back and eventually gone on to reach new highs. In fact, since 1970, bear markets have lasted an average of 14 months.

A Chance to Buy Low

If you're investing a set amount of money on a regular basis, such as in a retirement plan account, you're buying fewer shares when prices are high and more shares when prices are low — one of the basic tenets of investing wisely.

Systematic investing involves making continuous investments on a regular basis, regardless of fluctuating share prices. Although this strategy does not ensure a profit or prevent a loss, you must be financially able to continue making purchases through extended periods of high and low price levels.

Retiree Strategies

The risk of experiencing poor investment returns just before or in the early years of retirement is a significant factor that can affect a nest egg's long-term sustainability. Fortunately, some strategies can help mitigate this risk.

For example, consider a tiered investment strategy, in which you divide your portfolio into tiers representing your short-, medium-, and long-term needs for income and growth.

The short-term tier(s) could contain the amount you need for about two to five years, invested in assets designed to preserve value. The medium-term tier(s) could hold investments that strive to provide income for perhaps three to 10 years, balanced with some growth potential. The longer-term tier(s) could hold higher-risk, higher-growth potential assets that you wouldn't need for at least 10 years. Generally, this tier is intended to feed the shorter-term tiers and fuel the strategy over the course of your retirement.

Another possible strategy is using a portion of your retirement savings to purchase an immediate annuity, which offers a predictable retirement income stream you could pair with Social Security and any other steady income sources to cover your fixed expenses.

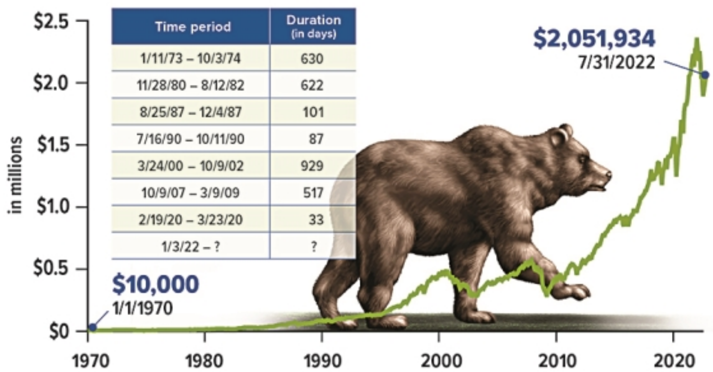
An immediate annuity is an insurance-based contract in which you pay the issuer a single lump sum in exchange for the issuer's guarantee of regular income payments for a fixed period or the rest of your life. With some exceptions, you typically receive fixed payments with little or no variation in the amount or timing. When purchasing an immediate annuity, you relinquish control over the amount you invest.

A Financial Professional Can Help

If volatile markets prompt you to question your retirement investing strategy, your financial professional can be an objective third party to help ease your worries and evaluate possible portfolio shifts.

Bear Markets Eventually End

A bear market is generally defined as a loss of at least 20% from a recent high. From 1970 to 2021, there were seven bear markets, the longest lasting less than three years. A new bear market began in January 2022. Despite these down periods, a hypothetical $10,000 investment in the S&P 500 in 1970 would have grown to more than $2 million by 2022.



Source: S&P Dow Jones Indices and Refinitiv, 2022, for the period 1/1/1970 to 7/31/2022. The S&P 500 is an unmanaged index that is considered to be representative of the U.S. stock market. The performance of an unmanaged index is not indicative of any specific investment. Individuals cannot invest directly in an index. Past performance is not a guarantee of future results. Actual results will vary.

All investments are subject to market fluctuation, risk, and loss of principal. Shares, when sold, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Investments seeking to achieve higher returns also involve a higher degree of risk. There is no assurance that working with a financial professional will improve investment results.

Generally, annuity contracts have fees and expenses, limitations, exclusions, holding periods, termination provisions, and terms for keeping the annuity in force. Most annuities have surrender charges that are assessed if the contract owner surrenders the annuity. Withdrawals of annuity earnings are taxed as ordinary income. Withdrawals prior to age 59½ may be subject to a 10% penalty. Any annuity guarantees are contingent on the financial strength and claimspaying ability of the issuing insurance company.

Inflation Protection for Investment Dollars

For the 12-month period ending in May 2022, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) — the most widely used measure of inflation — increased 8.6%, the fastest pace in 40 years.[1] The rate may trend downward as the Federal Reserve raises interest rates and supply-chain issues improve. But inflation is likely to be relatively high for some time.

High inflation not only hits consumers in the pocketbook for current spending, it also has a negative impact on the future purchasing power of fixed-income investments. For example, a hypothetical investment earning 5% annually would have a *real return* of –2.5% during a period of 7.5% annual inflation. This rate of return might be further reduced by taxes.

One way to help hedge your bond portfolio against inflation is by investing in Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities (TIPS).

How TIPS Fight Inflation

The principal value of TIPS is automatically adjusted twice a year to match any increases or decreases in the Consumer Price Index. If the CPI-U moves up or down, the Treasury recalculates your principal to reflect the change. A fixed rate of interest is paid twice a year based on the current principal, so the amount of interest may also fluctuate. Thus, you are trading the certainty of knowing exactly how much interest you'll receive for the assurance that your investment will maintain its purchasing power over time.

Like all Treasury securities, TIPS are guaranteed by the federal government as to the timely payment of principal and interest. If you hold TIPS to maturity, you will receive the greater of the inflation-adjusted principal or the amount of your original investment.

Pricing-In Protection

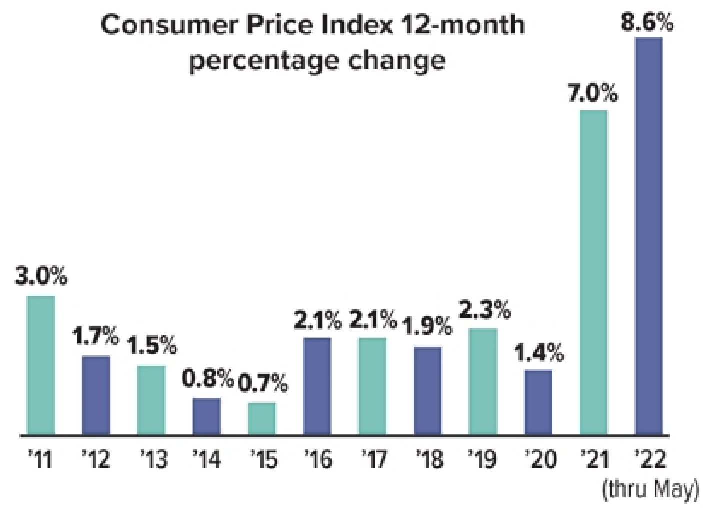
TIPS pay lower interest rates than equivalent Treasury securities that don't adjust for inflation. The *breakeven inflation rate* is the difference between the yield of TIPS and nominal (non-inflation-protected) Treasury securities with similar maturities. It is the premium the investor pays for inflation protection, as well as a market-based measure of expected inflation.

If inflation runs higher than expected, TIPS will earn a better return than nominal Treasury securities. If inflation runs below the breakeven rate, then TIPS have no clear advantage. However, the increased principal due to any level of inflation can still add to the value of your portfolio.

In some situations, TIPS can have negative interest rates that might produce a positive return after the principal is increased for inflation. For example, if a five-year TIPS offers a return of –0.5% while a five-year Treasury note offers a return of 2.5%, the 3% difference between these rates is the breakeven inflation rate. If inflation were to run at 4% over the five-year period, the TIPS would return 3.5% (4% – 0.5%) after adjustments for inflation, 1% higher than the return on the Treasury note.[2]

Eroding Purchasing Power

After an extended period of low inflation, consumer prices spiked in 2021 and 2022 due to supply and demand imbalances as the U.S. economy reopened.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022

TIPS are sold in $100 increments and are available in maturities of 5, 10, and 30 years. As with all bonds, the return and principal value of TIPS on the secondary market will vary with market conditions, are sensitive to movements in interest rates, and may be worth more or less than their original cost. When interest rates rise, the value of existing TIPS will typically fall on the secondary market. Changing rates and secondary-market values should not affect the principal of TIPS held to maturity.

You must pay federal income tax each year on the interest income from TIPS plus any increase in principal, even though you won't receive the principal and interest until the bonds mature. For this reason, investors might consider holding TIPS in a tax-deferred account such as an IRA.

1) U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022

2) This hypothetical example of mathematical principles is used for illustrative purposes only. Rates of return will vary over time, particularly for long-term investments. Actual results will vary.

FAFSA Opens on October 1

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the 2023-2024 school year opens on October 1, 2022. Here are some things you should know.

Why file it? The FAFSA is a prerequisite for federal student loans, grants, and work-study. In addition, colleges typically require the FAFSA before distributing their own need-based aid and, in some cases, merit-based aid. The few hours it might take to complete the form may be time well spent in order for students to be eligible for these aid opportunities.

How do I file it? The best way to submit the FAFSA is online at studentaid.gov. If you haven't filed the FAFSA before, both you and your child need to create an FSA ID (you can use the same FSA ID for all years of college). Students must file the FAFSA each year, though returning college students can file a renewal FAFSA, which should take less time.

How does the FAFSA calculate financial need? Financial need is determined by looking at a family's income, assets, and household information. In general, here's how the calculation works: (1) parent income is counted up to 47% (income equals adjusted gross income plus untaxed income/benefits minus certain deductions); (2) student income is counted at 50% over a certain amount; (3) parent assets are counted at 5.6% (home equity, retirement assets, cash value life insurance, and annuities are excluded); and (4) student assets are counted at 20%.[1]

In this calculation, a family's income is the most important factor. But the FAFSA doesn't consider your *current* income. Instead, it considers your income from two years prior, which it gets from your tax return. For example, the FAFSA for the 2023-2024 year will rely on income information from your 2021 tax return. For your assets, the FAFSA wants the current value of your assets as of the day you fill out the form.

What happens after I submit the FAFSA? The FAFSA calculates your expected family contribution, or EFC. The cost of a particular college minus your EFC equals your child's demonstrated financial need. Colleges will use your EFC to craft an aid package that attempts to meet your child's financial need (they are not obligated to meet all of it).

Changes are coming. More changes are coming to the 2024-2025 FAFSA, a year later than originally planned. Key modifications include (1) a change in terminology from "expected family contribution" or EFC to "student aid index" or SAI; (2) parents with multiple children in college at the same time will no longer receive a discount in the form of a reduced EFC; (3) income protection allowances for both parents and students will be increased; and (4) cash support to students and other types of income will no longer have to be reported on the FAFSA, including funds from a grandparent-owned 529 plan.

1) U.S. Department of Education, 2022