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How to Cope During Finals Week

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How to Cope During Finals Week

December 3, 2010

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – While children across America are “nestled all snug in their beds” having hung their stockings “by the chimney with care,” Illinois Wesleyan students are more likely to be found snuggling next to their fifth cup of coffee as they frantically memorize those last few equations and read the novels that seemed to have slipped away earlier in the semester in preparation for finals.



While some students rely on tradition and superstition to survive finals week, such as Jaclynn Sullivan, a psychology major, who eats an entire Papa John's pizza before taking her first test or Sarah Carlson, a nursing major, who has used the same pencil on every final since her freshman year on campus, others look for techniques that are a little more conventional. Bob Rogers, mental health counselor at Counseling and Consultation Services, offers tips to help students achieve their final goals.

• Avoid stressful people

Some people feel more relaxed when they can get others around them to feel stressed or worry with them. Avoid these folks during exam week because they will raise your anxiety and you will become less productive in your study habits. You may even find yourself taking care of them.

• Do Not Procrastinate

Procrastination leads to nothing good. It also increases anxiety and makes you feel overwhelmed. Most people procrastinate because it is a way to avoid anxiety. Anxiety and procrastination go hand in hand. Logically we know that it is not a good idea to cram a whole semester's worth of information into one night of caffeine induced studying. The way to overcome this is to plan ahead. Attack your hardest exam and seek resources to help you if necessary. Set a schedule and stick to this schedule. Practice the 3 P's of time management - Prioritize (your hardest exam/or what is most important), Plan (set up a schedule to study) and Protect (stick to this schedule and do not allow distractions).

• Eat Healthy and Exercise

Practicing good self-care during stressful times is of utmost importance. Skip foods that will make you crash like high carbs, greasy foods and foods that contain caffeine or high sugar. Alcohol is definitely a no no. If you are studying for long periods of time, eat healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables or nuts. This will help maintain your blood sugar level. Also exercise can help reduce stress and recharge your batteries. Even exercising for short periods can be beneficial in helping to manage the stress one feels during finals. Students often say "I don't have time to exercise". I explain that by allowing good self-care they will be more productive in their study habits, concentration skills and information retention and recall.

• Get Good Sleep

Pulling all nighters is never a good idea. Even if you have had success doing this in the past this can be a false illusion that future all nighters will lead to success. When one is tired it is very difficult to concentrate and leads to difficulty in recalling information previously learned. We know that there are only 24 hours a day and many students try to extend their days by reducing the amount of time they sleep, reducing exercise or skipping meals. All of these are bad ideas and counterproductive to good self-care which we know is so important to academic success. Good time management will help reduce the risk of skipping things that are so important

to overall good self-care. The amount of time one needs to sleep fluctuates, but most students need 6 - 8 hours of sleep to function at their best.

- **Force Yourself to Take Breaks and Just Say "No"**

A good rule to follow is allow yourself to take a short 10 - 15 minute break for every 1 - 1 1/2 hours of studying. This will get you refreshed and keep you focused, which will make studying more productive and help you maximize your time. When we do things that make us anxious and that we don't like (like studying intensely) many temptations pop into our minds. Have the ability to resist these temptations at the moment and use these as rewards for completed study session. Just like when we were kids - no dessert until you eat your vegetables. No hanging out with friends, watching TV or getting on Facebook until the studying is done.

- **Keep Everything in Perspective**

Stressing out can drive you and your friends crazy. You will become the person everyone is avoiding. It also will not help academic performance. Make sure your self-talk and cognitive thoughts are positive and are not predicting failure and disaster such as - I am going to fail this exam and my future plans will be ruined. Negative thoughts generally lead to anxiety and depression which affects academic performance. If you need to talk to someone or access resources that can help you, *The Counseling Center has licensed professionals that can help you* prepare for finals, and study effectively.

Go to www.iwu.edu/ccs/ to find out more about The IWU Counseling Center and to access some good resources on line. Also the Academic Skills Series is another great resource - www.iwu.edu/advising/success/.

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