Faculty offer advice to relieve some of the infamous finals week-related stress

Students fill the tables in Edith Garland Dupré Library as they study for final exams and finish the last assignments of this semester.

Shane Manthei
shanemanthei@gmail.com

From students camping out between Edith Garland Dupré Library to cups of ramen noodles strewn about obliterated dorm rooms, finals either incite or worsen students' stress.

Professor Whitney Storey, a teacher of introduction (both major and non-major), adjustment and developmental psychology, said stress can be divided into two categories: biological and emotional. A stressed out student's sympathetic nervous system will trigger a "fight or flight" instinct among other physiological symptoms including panic, headaches and fatigue. Emotional responses include anger, distress or anxiety.

"There are a lot of different theories," said Storey, "and one of them is that physiological reactions lead to interpretations."

In one analogy given, Storey said observing sweating before a date allows one to conclude they are nervous, even if it is a natural stress response.

Professor Mary Stegall, an educational and general honors psychology instructor, stated stress was a natural response to demands.

"A moderate amount of stress during finals is normal," Stegall said, "we just don't want the distress."

Stegall provided the Yerkes-Dodson Curve, which relates performance to the amount of stress people are under. The curve dictates that stress drives people to perform and complete tasks; however, too much stress incites burnout.

Ny Pham, a junior in computer science, said she hadn't started studying yet.

"Most classes have tests the week before," Pham said. "I don't know why, but they think it's manageable."

Where stress may drive some students to the nearest notebook, computer or tablet, Pham said stress inhibits her ability to complete tasks.

"Stress makes me do whatever's not studying," she said. "I'll have to clear my whole apartment before not studying."

Another student, Alyssa John, a junior business management major, said she had not begun preparing yet, citing her two jobs to be where she spent her spring break. John said stress was the main enabler of anxiety.

"During finals week, I panic over trying to figure out how I will study everything, which eventually leads to a panic attack," she said.

Stegall said the phenomenon may be attributed to the two-word combination that is synonymous with the semester's denouement.

"It's something about the words 'final' and 'exam' that has everyone on edge," Stegall said.

Asked about remedies to stress, Stegall stressed time management as well as sleep, study breaks, healthy eating and physical activity. Storey agreed.

"I preach in my 209 all the way to my upper classes to get sleep," she said. "Pacing an all-nighter is not going to be helpful, because you won't get REM sleep."

Storey said rapid eye movement helps retain memories. As people sleep, the time spent in REM increases, which is why eight hours of sleep is the optimum amount for stress.

"It's not a magic bullet, but you'll be better off," Storey said.

Time management is how both John and Pham said they get through their studying.

"Time management is always my go-to, though," she said. "I'll set up different subjects for a set period of time and study them for an hour."

Pham said sleep paired with coffee ameliorates their stress levels.

Stegall cited the change in class times during finals to hinder management of free time. Stegall added that sticking to a general routine but adding small breaks in between allows students time to adjust.

"Often, schedules get thrown out the window because students aren't following their routine anymore," Stegall said.

Stegall said instructors and professors experience stress during the crunch to tell students their results. Faculty members have 48 hours after final exams to turn grades in, and Stegall said she has to hold students accountable for their answers while also understanding they are going through a stressful period.

"When I grade papers, I often find time to relax by playing solitaire or reading the paper," Stegall said.

Storey claimed similar, stating she wants to see all her students succeed. Storey said oftentimes, students don't pay attention to their grades until the end of the semester, and she is limited in what she can do.

"I'm also in graduate school," Storey said, "so I try to walk in the students' shoes when it comes to stress."

Storey also added that students shouldn't hesitate from seeking help during stressful periods.

"Stress is the perfect thing to go to counseling for," she said.

Chronic headaches, stomach issues, mood swings, and sleep issues are problems to look out for. The Sandier Wellness Center in O.K. Allen Hall offers free counseling to students. Stegall urged students to feel free to experiment with different counselors if they do not connect with one.

STRESS continued from page 2

continued on page 16