

CRAM IT!

Last-minute studying keeps students up all night

A sophomore at Iowa State U. stayed up all night studying — only to fall asleep during the exam.

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PHOTOS BY JOHN COX, EASTERN ILLINOIS U.

PICTURE IT: THE NIGHT BEFORE finals. The clock flashes 3:42 a.m. Three chapters left to read before your 9 a.m. test. Placing your trust in Coke and highlighters, you turn the page. Surely you can grasp in one night the concepts that eluded you all semester. After all, it's only... 3:45 a.m.

For Iowa State U. junior David Humphrey, a similar scenario became his own personal hell last semester. Humphrey dozed off at about 4 a.m. while watching the end of a Harrison Ford movie for a 7:30 a.m. English final.

Had a friend not come to wake him at 9 a.m., he would have missed the entire test. "I had roughly 30 minutes to finish a two-hour exam," he says. His professor gave him an extra half hour to write his essay, but Humphrey says he still felt rushed.

You'll pay the next day

All-nighters are often necessary during finals week. Although it's certainly not the preferred method of exam preparation, it happens. By that point, you've made your bed, but you won't be able to sleep in it with all that cramming left to do. If you do go this route, getting through the next day is vital.

Jolita Anderson, a sophomore at Iowa State U., stayed up all night studying once — only to fall asleep during the exam. She remembers getting to No. 5, and then everything went dark.

"When I woke up, the time was almost up, and I had to fill in everything," she says. Needless to say, she didn't do well on the test. But an unsympathetic professor did generously offer to wake her up if she ever fell asleep again.

Budget your time

Advance preparation is the most recommended method of avoiding all-nighters. Nonetheless, experts say students hit the same pitfall every semester — believing they will feel good enough to perform well on the exam after studying all night.

"You expect the work to pile up during finals week, but if you use your time wisely, it won't be as bad," says Peggy Gates-Wieneke, fitness coordinator for a U. of Illinois fitness center.

However, if late-night cram sessions are unavoidable, there are ways to stay alert.

Oberlin College, Ohio, junior Andrea Hargrave discovered midnight aerobics classes during finals week last year. "I saw people running around the block between 1 and 5 a.m.," she says. Guess it's never too early to get the old blood pumping during finals week.

Gates-Wieneke says exercising is an excellent stimulant. "You can feel more energized after exercising than after drinking a cup of coffee," she says.

Did somebody say "coffee?"

"Caffeine is an early-morning and late-night must for students during finals week," says Garen Smith, owner of Bagelman's, a bagel and gourmet coffee shop just a yawn away from the U. of Illinois

campus. "The coffee, espresso, Pepsi and Mountain Dew disappear."

In addition, Smith says, students' days seem to start earlier and end later during finals week. "They crave caffeine to keep them going."

Gates-Wieneke doesn't fully endorse the caffeine rush. She says a habitual coffee drinker may need two to three cups for that late-night jolt.

"There are no real problems with short-term use," she says. "But if you continue to use caffeine as a stimulant, your body will adapt to that level, and you will need more and more to achieve the same effect."

Although coffee can keep you more alert, Gates-Wieneke says, you probably won't do your best on tests.

Other artificial stimulants, like Vivarin and No-Doze, often need to be counteracted with sleeping pills, she says. "It's not good for the body to be artificially pumped up." Common effects of such use include nausea, irregular heartbeat and short-term memory loss. Yeah, like that's exactly what you need at test time.

There must be an easier way. For starters, those of the studious persuasion have found that test performance increases dramatically after basic test preparation.

Just don't cram

"Don't force things into your head," says Franklin Benjamin, a sophomore at Polytechnic U. in New York.

Even self-professed crammer Mary Modley, a Lamar U., Texas, junior, is hesitant to extol the virtues of cramming. "When you cram, you pile everything you have learned for a significant amount of time into your little old brain, which can only process so much of it," Modley says. "Learning takes time. You should allow your brain a substantial amount of time to process what it takes in."

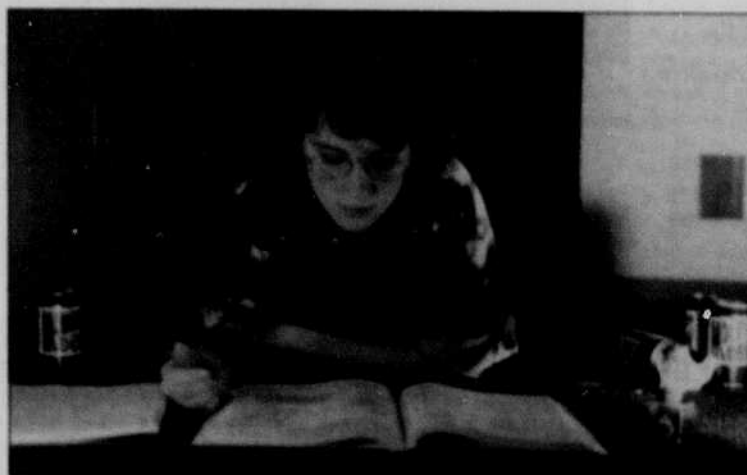
She recommends Alert for those times when fake energy seems absolutely necessary. Coke and will power are two of her other favorite aids.

Time is the key to success for Erik Brooks, a Marquette U. junior.

"I usually start studying a week before," Brooks says. "That way I can catch up on any missed readings and go through my class notes. I couldn't stay up all night. I'd probably die."

Modley says pulling all-nighters is not particularly effective or healthy. "Read on a regular basis," she says. "When the real deal comes, it won't stress you out, and you'll never have to use the word 'cram' again."

Oh, is that all there is to it? And we thought salt-water gargling was the trick.



Late-night cramming...



...can leave you dead tired.

Raven Hill, a sophomore at the U. of Illinois, says she's too tired to have a hobby. But she does like to shop.