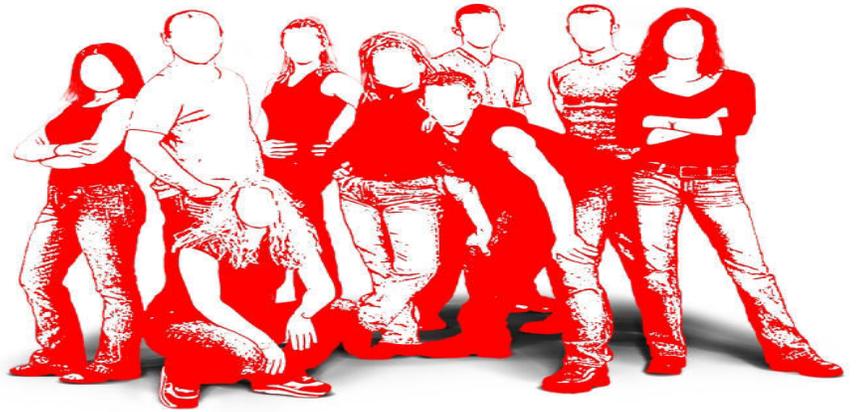
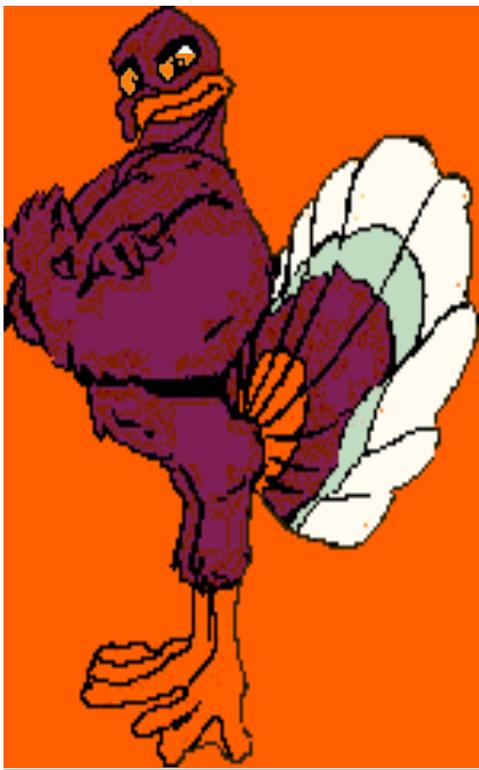


Psych

# ACCESS



*Fall 2011:  
Issue 2*

## Psychology Newsletter

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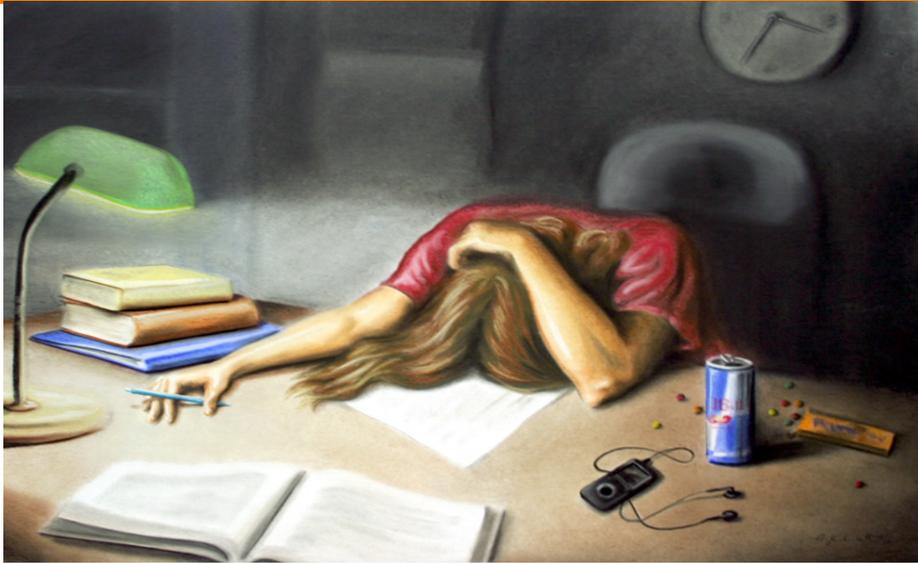


It is almost that time of the year that everyone is looking forward to: the holidays!

But for now finals are here and it is that time of the year that everyone is trying to get everything done before the semester ends. This issue includes several articles that you might find helpful to deal with the stress and survive!

We wish you the best and hope you enjoy your winter break and have great holidays!

Psych Access Authors



## Crunchtime: Academic Stress and Coping

It's that time of year again. Every class seems to have exams scheduled on the same day, you're feeling a bit overwhelmed, and it's a lot easier to think of all the home-cooked meals that go with a nice break rather than making sure your final grades are solid when the smoke clears. Experiencing stress in college is normal, especially with final projects and exams on the horizon. However, not everyone responds to stress the same way, and some approaches have been found to be more advantageous than others. Looking at previous findings of academic stress and the ways students best deal with it may provide some helpful strategies for handling not only the rest of the semester, but going forward with the rest of your college experience.

When you find yourself stressed about an upcoming assignment or maybe a less than stellar grade, there are certainly different approaches you can take in handling that stress. Some individuals find themselves relating the stress to their overall lack of ability, rather than a poor performance or lack of preparation, which can lead to a lowered motivation to keep working at that task or staying focused on building up their remaining grades. Instead, approaching stress as something that can be handled on a situation-

to-situation basis usually motivates individuals to keep pushing themselves to succeed and not judge poor performance as reflection of the self (Hong et al., 1999).

Along the same line, when stressed individuals work to be less self-critical, relate their situation with others (because many of your classmates are also likely stressed), and take the time to think through what is causing that stress, they find themselves persevering a bit better through initial setbacks in the classroom and looking ahead to performing stronger on later assignments (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005). If you can maintain a strong sense of control over your academic future and push yourself to continue preparing well, your chances of success improve greatly (Perry et al., 2005).

Finding ways to keep yourself focused and maintaining a positive outlook in the face of stress is important, but it is not something you have to handle alone. Whether it's getting advice from an advisor or professor, getting hints on exam stress from the Cook Counseling Center (an excellent service, by the way), catching up with family, or relaxing with friends, it's important to be able to reach out to others to either work through stressful assignments or just get a break from that stress (Bailey, Wolfe, & Wolfe, 1994). It is also important to remember that some outlets are healthier than others for alleviating stress.

Catching up for food or sports with friends is usually seen as a better route than going partying just for the sake of forgetting about academic worries (Step toe et al., 1996).

Hopefully, keeping some of these findings in mind will help you work toward coping with end-of-semester stress that's inevitable, but manageable. Best of luck with closing out the semester strongly!

BY JORDAN BOOKER

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## Getting What You Want by Going Soft

subtle actions like touching sandpaper or sitting in a hard chair can have a major influence over important decisions such as which candidate employers are willing to hire, how generous we are, and how much we're willing to pay for big ticket purchases? Josh Ackerman (MIT associate professor of psychology) and his colleagues have recently performed a series of studies that show just that!

Did you know



### The Research Findings

In the first study, participants pretended to be "buyers" and were tasked to negotiate the sales price of a car. The researchers found that there was a significant difference between subjects sitting in hard and soft chairs. Those seated in hard chairs judged their negotiating partner to be less emotional. Moreover, the "buyers" in soft chairs increased their offer by nearly 40% more than those in hard chairs. In short, a hard chair not only changed the buyers' perception of their negotiating partner, it made them more difficult bargainers.

In a second experiment, participants were asked to rate a manager/employee interaction after feeling either a hard piece of wood or a soft blanket. Participants who felt the hard wood rated the employees in the scene as being more rigid than participants who felt the soft blanket

### Real World Applications

You may be asking yourself right now how any of this psycho-mumbo-jumbo research with pretend scenarios impacts your life as an undergraduate student at Virginia Tech. In the real world, the stakes of decisions are often higher and this stress can consequently place more demands on cognitive processes which make us less logical creatures and more susceptible to the influences of feelings, both emotional and tactile. So when you need an extension on that paper deadline or you are looking to secure a position as a research assistant, these issues may become quite important.

So how can you use this information in your negotiations?

- Be aware of environmental influences - If you have a tough request or a big issue coming up at the office, consider where you make your demands.
- Surround yourself with comfort and softness for the best results. Classroom hardwood desks and rigid chairs (which are the tradition) may be the worst possible surroundings for getting what you want and being perceived by others as being open-minded and flexible.
- Realize that what is said and the logical argument is not always of ultimate importance. How you make others feel is nearly important, if not more important, when trying to get what you want.

The bottom-line is social influence is all about making others like you and want to do more for you. Making people feel comfortable- by giving them a nice, soft place to sit or smiling and genuinely caring about them- is a priority when you are trying to negotiate and work with others.

BY SARAH ALLGOOD

## Procrastination: “I’ll do it later...”

Procrastination can be defined as the deferment of tasks to a later time. As college students you all experience procrastination. Early research indicated that 80-90% of college students engage in procrastination (Ellis and Knaus, 1977). The effects of procrastination are often most noticeable when it interferes with your work quality, delays completion of projects, requires you to ask for extensions on assignments, and ultimately leads you to fail assignments because you never turned them in. However, there are also subtle forms of procrastination that lead you to always wait until the last minute to complete assignments and finish projects. Fortunately,

procrastination is a behavior and can be changed. There are subtle forms of procrastination that will be discussed and strategies will be provided to help increase productivity and avoid some of the abovementioned pitfalls.

Joseph Ferrari, Ph.D & Timothy Pychyl, Ph.D are two professors of psychology who have both done significant research on procrastination. They provided *Psychology Today* with some information about procrastinating. They suggested that procrastination might represent a problem with self-regulation (2003). It may not be a problem with time-management or planning but rather difficulties with getting started on projects and completing tasks. Procrastination behaviors can be linked to early experiences during childhood- for those individuals who had overly controlling parents who structured everything and did not allow for the child to develop appropriate self-regulation skills, procrastination could be a due to a lack of ability to regulate ones own emotions or it could actually be a form of rebellion.

Procrastinators actively look for distractions, such as checking e-mails, or using the phone as a way to regulate emotions, such as a fear of failure or frustration with difficult tasks. It is important to explore the core of your procrastination behaviors and ensure that there is no deeper thought process that is influencing your behaviors. Although some people will say that they work best under pressure or at the last minute, this is likely not the case for majority of people. Procrastination can weaken your immune system, keep you awake at night, and can be harmful for relationships. As noted by Steel (2007), procrastination can become dangerous.

Consider the following criteria to determine whether you have a serious problem with procrastination and make of note of the ones that may be at the root of your problem:

- You overestimate time left to complete tasks

- You underestimate the amount of time it will take you to complete the task (poor planning)
- You believe that you have to be in the right “mood” to complete tasks; otherwise it is a suboptimal time to complete the task
- You overestimate how motivated you will feel the next day, week, or month or whenever you are putting things off until
- You fear rejection or disapproval and fear the outcome
- You have a low estimation of your ability and lack confidence
- Inadequate motivation. The outcome is not truly important to you so you’re not motivated to start the task.
- Fulfilling your beliefs. You believe you are a procrastinator, so you live up to your expectations of yourself.



1. Estimate the amount of time you believe it will take you to complete a tasks and then multiply by 100%:
  - a. Always try to give yourself enough time so that any unanticipated difficulties can be addressed and still leave you with enough time to review the final product.

Below are some suggested strategies to help deal with procrastination:

2. Make a list of everything you have to do
  - a. Work from a prioritized daily to-do list, which helps with organization
3. Write a statement of intention
  - a. Make sure the things you are pursuing are part of the overall goal
4. Set realistic goals
5. Break it down into specific tasks
  - a. Identify small steps to make the project more manageable
6. Make your task meaningful
  - a. Pick a topic that interests you or try to incorporate something that will keep you engaged
7. Promise yourself a reward
  - a. When you complete a portion of the task, reward yourself and make sure you plan a large reward for when you complete the task/assignment
8. Eliminate tasks that you don't intend on completing
  - a. Only put items on your list that you must complete- too much on your to-do list becomes overwhelming

In order to overcome procrastination, you have to make a commitment to work on it and be mindful of your behaviors in these situations. It is important to realize that when you constantly fail to follow through with your responsibilities and commitments you may have, the results may be damaging. The effects of procrastination can include depression, guilt, low self-worth, social disapproval, poor grades in class, and unemployment.

**BY KRYSTAL LEWIS**

Recommended resources:

**Websites:**

[www.smartrecovery.libsyn.org](http://www.smartrecovery.libsyn.org)  
<http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201109/procrastination-oops-where-did-the-day-go>  
[http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view\\_doc.php?type=doc&id=9770&cn=353](http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=9770&cn=353)

**Book:**

Beat Procrastination Now (free ebook by Dr. Bill Knaus)  
 End Procrastination Now (Dr. Bill Knaus)

**References:**

Ellis, A., & Knaus, W. J. (1977). *Overcoming procrastination*. New York: Signet Books.  
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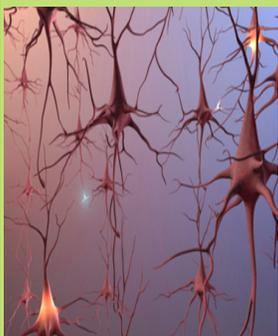
## Dr. David Harrison

**How did you get interested in psychology?** I have had a passion for learning about the brain for as long as I can remember. Interestingly, the place to learn about the brain and neuroscience has always been within our Psychology Departments and much was being discovered in the biological bases of behavior during my early years. My first experiment as an undergraduate in the Psychology Department at the University of New Mexico manipulated the pars compacta in the substantia nigra, which is the primary site for dopamine and research on hyperkinesia. Interestingly, this neurotransmitter is found more within the left hemisphere and has been integral to research on positive reward mechanisms



and energetic and happy affect. Neuroscience is clearly the most exciting area of academic study and scientific inquiry for me. But, it becomes more relevant in my work with individuals suffering from a brain disorder. Each patient that I serve continues to teach me about life and it is a great pleasure to work with these folks and their families.

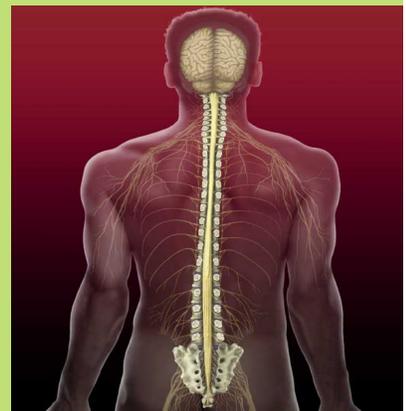
**What is your research interest?** One of the fundamental relationships discovered early on in Psychology was the relationship between emotion and health and this helped to forge the area of Health Psychology. This was initially investigated within the realm of cardiovascular disease but has expanded to encompass the metabolic syndromes and diabetes, for example. The message here is that the brain systems which process an emotional valence must also be responsible for the concurrent regulation over the heart, glucose levels, cholesterol mobilization, oxygen



saturation and other systems. Thus, an emotional disorder may be a cardiovascular disorder with the unifying anatomy being within the brain rather than specifically restricted to a peripheral site or organ. I am interested in the specific stressors which impact these specific brain systems as to modify one may be to modify the other.

**How do you think psychology apply to our daily life?** Each of us may find a passion and we should invest in it to the fullest extent. I think many folks are unhappy at their job, whereas to be paid for working on your passion must be one of the best things in life. If you can find something that you love to do and you learn to do it well, happiness may find you a willing partner.

**For students who are interested in getting involved in research, what is your advice to them?** There is nothing more exciting than discovery and scientific inquiry. Actively seeking out research opportunities with vigor and passion is important. We have many incredible opportunities here in our department. Seek them out.



**DR. HOFFMAN: Faculty Advisor to Psych ACCESS.** Dr. Hoffman is a Developmental and Biological Psychology faculty and the Director of Undergraduate Studies at Virginia Tech.

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**JARED MCGINLEY** is a third year graduate student in biological psychology at Virginia Tech. His research focuses on central mechanisms in regulating autonomic activity as well as on profiling the biological signatures of anxiety disorders.

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**JORDAN BOOKER** is a third year doctoral student in Developmental and Biological Psychology at Virginia Tech. His research interest is parental emotion socialization, children's development of socio-emotional skills, and peer relations, from a strengths-based perspective.

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**SCOTT MOSHIER** is a third year graduated student in the Industrial/ Organizational Psychology program. His primary research interests include leadership, teams, and team processes.

**JIWON CHOI, Editor,** is a senior at Virginia Tech majoring in Psychology. After graduation, she is interested in pursuing a graduate degree in Clinical Psychology and working with children. \*All pictures included in this newsletter were obtained from Google Images.