



a newsletter for parents & families



GEORGIA'S PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

University Housing

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Minimizing Test Anxiety

Reminders for Students and Families About Making the Best of Final Exams

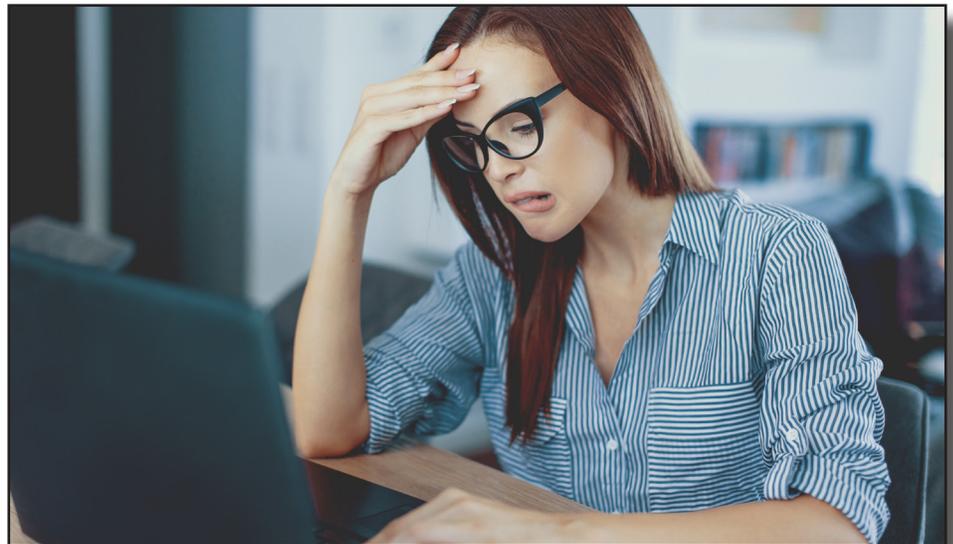
As final exams approach, some students may work themselves into a frenzy – worrying about how they'll do, the impact of the pandemic and wondering if they've worked hard enough this term. A bit of test anxiety may be taking hold. Yet, there are ways your student can prepare before exams to make this finals season less stressful and more successful.

The University of Chicago's Academic Center for Excellence recommends the following strategies before taking an exam. You can share them with your student as finals creep closer...

Put Things in Perspective. Your whole future doesn't depend on this one exam. Take a moment to wrap the exam in an overall context of perspective.

Remind Yourself of Past Successes. You've done well on past exams. And the admissions office admitted you for a reason!

Don't Give a Test the Power to Define You. Your performance is important, yet it doesn't cement your place as the smartest/least smart student in class. Instead, it's about how effectively you studied, your test-taking strategies, what you're learning and more.



Visualize Completing the Test Successfully. Walk yourself through the moment you wake up on exam day to when you finish the test. Aah!

Remind Yourself That a Bit of Anxiety Can be Helpful. A certain level of anxiety about an exam can actually help you perform your best. Try to harness that energy positively.

Give Yourself Practice Exams. This can help you practice your test-taking skills as well as your anxiety control. Timed practice questions can also help if you're afraid you won't finish an exam on time.

Get a Good Night's Sleep. For several days before the exam, be sure to get adequate sleep so your mind will work clearly and your ability to deal with anxiety will improve. Being well-rested helps with concentration and focus.

Reduce Your Caffeine Intake. High anxiety can increase caffeine's impact, so consider reducing your intake on test days to keep the jitters at bay.

Source: Cecilia Downs, University of Chicago's Academic Center for Excellence, as published by Brown University's Counseling and Psychological Services page



Safe Travel by Car

Many of us are traveling by car these days, as other forms of transportation feel iffy amidst the pandemic. For those going through wintry areas, there are some safety precautions. Consider passing these along to students who may be in the driver's seat...

- Winterize the car before heading out (see box)
- Allow extra time to reach your destination when roads are slick and avoid sudden stops and turns
- Keep the gas tank close to full, so that an unanticipated delay or traffic detour will not be problematic
- Wear a seat belt



- Keep windshields and lights clear of accumulated ice and snow
- Remember that bridges and overpasses freeze before road surfaces and take extra caution
- Allow additional stopping distance between cars when driving on wet roads
- Know what to do if skidding on ice or getting stuck in snow (When skidding, counter steer to regain control and then steer the car in the same direction that the rear wheels are sliding. When stuck in snow, remove snow from the area around the tire and spread sand or salt under the wheel instead of spinning.)
- Access information about road conditions through a preloaded app
- Make sure to have an ice scraper and broom for cleaning off the car
- Be aware of alternate routes, in case weather conditions warrant detouring traffic from main roads
- Have extra blankets, warm clothing and other emergency gear should the need arise

And, most important of all, use common sense. There are occasions

Car Checklist for Winter Travel

- Get a tune-up
- Check battery
- Check coolant
- Fix leaks
- Check wipers
- Fill your tank
- Fill washer fluid
- Carry sand bags/cat litter
- Check rear defrost
- Know your car
- Get snow tires
- Carry supplies
- Have a phone
- Clean off your car
- Go slowly

Source: www.cartalk.com

when the best driving decision is *not* to drive, for safety's sake.

Source: www.accuweather.com

Seasonal Student Issues

Here are a few things students may be experiencing this month...

- Panic, fear and cramming as finals and paper deadlines approach
- High temper as stress mounts
- The realization that some friends may not be returning next year
- Increased pressure to participate in sexual activity because an extended separation is approaching
- Financial strain due to holiday gifts and travel costs
- Religious conflicts, as they get ready to return home after a term of gaining new perspectives
- Excitement/anxiety about returning home





Depression and College Students

Mental illnesses – including depression – are medical conditions that can dramatically impact a person’s thoughts, feelings, judgment and ability to function. And, although these conditions impact people of all ages, they often first appear between the ages of 18 and 24, according to The Jed Foundation.

Depression involves the body, mind and thoughts, impacting one’s ability to sleep, study, work, eat and enjoy life. It is more than feeling “down in the dumps” or “blue” for a few days. It’s feeling down, low and hopeless for weeks at a time, often with the inability to pull oneself together.

Chances are that students may experience or see someone in the throes of depression during their time in college. Consider talking with them about the signs and symptoms of depression – and what to do if they come into contact with someone who is struggling or are struggling themselves.

Depression

Signs and symptoms include...

- Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness and pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Decreased energy, fatigue and being “slowed down”
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering and making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain

Help is Available

There are plenty of caring, trained professionals on campus available to help students contend with depression and other mental health problems. These conditions *are* treatable through therapy, medication and medical attention.

So, encourage students to reach out if they or their friends are struggling. Help is available through the counseling center, faculty and staff members. *No one* has to go through this alone.

- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- Restlessness and irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain

women experience serious postpartum depression after giving birth.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This is the onset of depression during the winter months, when there is less natural sunlight. It generally lifts during spring and summer.

Bipolar Disorder. This is also called manic-depressive illness and is less prevalent than major depression or persistent depressive disorder. It involves cycling mood changes from severe highs (mania) to extreme lows (depression). These mood switches are typically gradual but can occur in a rapid manner. Mania may include...

- Abnormal or excessive elation
- Unusual irritability
- Decreased need for sleep
- Grandiose notions
- Increased talking
- Racing thoughts
- Increased sexual desire
- Markedly increased energy
- Poor judgment
- Inappropriate social behavior

Left untreated, mania may worsen to a psychotic state.

Other Depressive Disorders

Beyond major depression, there are other forms of depression, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. They include...

Persistent Depressive Disorder. This is a long-term depressed mood that lasts at least two years. Someone diagnosed with persistent depressive disorder may have episodes of major depression along with periods of less severe symptoms.

Psychotic Depression. This occurs when a person has severe depression plus some form of psychosis, such as having disturbing false beliefs or a break with reality (delusions) or hearing or seeing upsetting things that others cannot hear or see (hallucinations).

Postpartum Depression. This is more serious than the “baby blues” that many women experience after giving birth, when hormonal and physical changes and the responsibility of caring for a newborn can be overwhelming. An estimated 10 to 15 percent of

Sources: National Institute of Mental Health, www.nimh.nih.gov; The Jed Foundation, www.jedfoundation.org



Understanding and Using Instagram

You've likely heard about Instagram, a photo- and video-sharing program that is widely popular with current students. It also has group chat features and a livestreaming option. Here are some tips to better understand Instagram and how to use it effectively...

Instagram Live

Instagram Live allows a user to livestream. Viewers can ask questions through the messaging feature. To go live, swipe left from anywhere on the feed and touch "live" on the bottom of the screen. Instagram "Stories" appear at the top of users' feeds and disappear after 24 hours unless they're archived.

Instagram Stories

1. To create a story, swipe left from anywhere in the feed or click on "My Story" at the top of your feed.
2. If you want to post photo(s) or video(s) that is on your camera roll, click on the photo in the bottom left-hand corner. Once you've chosen an image (to post

more than one, tap "select multiple" in the top right corner), the menu at the top will allow you to save it to your gallery, add filters and effects, insert swipe up links, add stickers, write on the screen (with options for pen, arrow, marker, spray paint or pencil) and insert text. Hit "Send To" when your image is ready to go.

3. You can take a new photo or video by hitting the circle button at the bottom center of the screen (filters can be accessed by swiping right on the circles near the photo button).
4. You can post a message with text by clicking on "Aa." The bar on the left allows you to adjust the size of the text, while font options are just above the keypad. The buttons at the top allow you to adjust alignment, color and whether or not you want the



text box to be transparent. The buttons at the top allow you to adjust background color, to save the screen, to insert a "swipe up" link that will allow users to go to a website, insert stickers, write on the screen or insert more text boxes. When you're finished, hit "send to" and that will allow you to send your story to particular users or a friend list.

Source: *How to Program Virtually*, 2020, PaperClip Communications, www.paper-clip.com

Keeping Up the Pace

From now through the end of the term, students need to keep their stamina up so they can finish strong academically. Here are some simple ways they can do just that...

- Eat healthy meals
- Make sleep a priority
- Study some every day, rather than cramming
- Get fresh air
- Say "no" to something if they're overwhelmed
- Spend positive time with friends
- Seek help if they're struggling

Making academics a priority means making *yourself* a priority. You can help your student realize this so the remainder of the term is a healthy one.

