

Finals week pressure takes toll on everyone

Students not only ones under stress

By Amie Haggar
Staff Reporter

Late-night study sessions, caffeine overdoses and no sleep become habit for many UNL students during dead week and finals week.

But the increased workload and stress students face also is encountered by many UNL professors.

"Reality strikes for everyone at the end of the semester," Michael Stricklin, a UNL news-editorial professor, said.

Robert Bergstrom, UNL associate professor of English, said his workload increased significantly during dead week and finals week.

At the beginning of dead week, Bergstrom said 36 students in his literature classes submit 12-page final papers, which he tries to return before the week is over.

In his freshmen composition classes, students polish all of their work from the semester and expect to receive feedback on it, Bergstrom said.

"It's not like a job you can get through quickly, like shoveling or raking leaves," he said. "These papers are people's human products, and they deserve to be treated with respect, dignity and concentration so that every-

one receives the best feedback."

Stricklin said he had 103 students who submitted papers and essay tests during the final weeks of the semester, but he said he prepared himself for the added work.

"I know I have to dedicate time to this; it's not a surprise," he said.

"I think about the expectations and quality standards I have for the students," he said. "I also think about where they are in the course."

Richard Boohar, UNL chief adviser and associate professor of biology, said aside from correcting more papers and tests, he had to deal with a rush of students and staff. Students, who have shown little interest in his class so far, venture into his office with questions about their final grades, he said.

Unlike most professors, Stricklin, who once worked for a newspaper, said the added stress wasn't a problem.

"I've always liked deadlines; I like that kind of stress."

Boohar's feelings about the last two weeks of the semester were just the opposite.

Bergstrom said he had to alter his daily routine during the last weeks of the semester.

"I don't talk to my family as much," he said. "I'm really sort of a workaholic anyway, but I become more of a hermit."

Bergstrom said he reminded himself the additional work would not last forever.

"I look forward to the rewards of hard work by thinking the tension will soon release," he said.

Simple strategies help ease anxiety

By Rebecca Oltmans
Staff Reporter

For the majority of students, studying for finals takes precedence over food, sleep and even showers.

But Sue Bukacek, counseling psychologist at the University Health Center, said when students gave up normal activities and relaxation techniques, it only added to their stress.

Students' stress peaks while studying and during exams. Keeping up with assignments during the semester is the key to avoiding stress during finals week, Bukacek said.

But if students haven't done that, other strategies can be used to reduce stress, she said.

Drinking soda pop and coffee to stay awake is the number one mistake students make, Bukacek said.

"It doesn't keep you awake," Bukacek said, "it just makes you sleep restlessly."

Although caffeine does stimulate the nervous system, it makes people jittery and exaggerates stress, Bukacek said.

Instead of breaking the work load down into small pieces they feasibly can do at one time, Bukacek said, students become overwhelmed by considering all the work at once.

Sometimes reducing stress is as easy as breathing in and out. Cramming creates tension, and students often take short, shallow breaths as they study.

"Take a minute to slow down and take deep, rhythmic breaths," Bukacek said. "That will reduce tension and bring the focus back to taking care of the business in front of you."

Stress during test taking is normal for most students, but for some it escalates to the point of anxiety, said Mike Coplen, graduate assistant at the Academic Success Center.

Students are most stressed at the beginning of the test, he said. The more questions they see that they don't know the answer to, he said, the more stressed out they become.

"That makes things worse, because stress takes up part of the information processing abilities of the brain," Coplen said.

Students should go through the test and answer the questions they know first to make the experience less overwhelming, Coplen said. They also should check answers, especially the first four or five, to catch mistakes caused by stress.

For students with test anxiety, testing rooms themselves can be stressful.

Students can condition themselves against this by studying in an environment similar to the testing room or by studying in the testing room itself, Coplen said. This stress-reducing method helps students focus on the material, not the surroundings.

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