

# Study shows direct link between health-related behaviors and grades

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Lack of sleep, excessive television/computer screen time, stress, gambling, alcohol and tobacco use and other health-related issues are taking a toll on college students' academic performance, according to a study released by the University of Minnesota Boynton Health Service.

"Our study shows that there is a direct link between college students' health and their academic achievement. This is the first time that anything like this has been published where Grade Point Average is linked to all these behaviors," said Dr. Ed Ehlinger, the director and chief health officer of the University of Minnesota Boynton Health Service.

Today's report, "Health and Academic Performance: Minnesota Undergraduate Students," is part of one of the most comprehensive studies of college students' health in the nation. About 24,000 students from 14 Minnesota colleges and universities were randomly selected to participate in this study and 9,931 completed the 2007 College Student Health Survey Report. The results only include undergraduate students from two-year and four-year institutions. All five University of Minnesota campuses were included in the survey.

In the results, 69.9 percent of college students reported they were stressed and 32.9 percent of those students said that stress was hurting their academic performance. In fact, the mean GPA for students saying stress impacted their academics was 3.12, compared with the 3.23 mean GPA for students who didn't believe it was affecting their academics.

"While this may seem like a small difference in GPA, when you are looking at over 9,000 students the impact of this difference is huge," Ehlinger said.

Twenty percent of students reported that sleep difficulties impacted their academics. In fact, those students who reported getting fewer nights of adequate sleep had a mean GPA of 3.08 compared with a 3.27 mean GPA for those who do not report sleep deficiencies.

"The more days students get adequate sleep -- the better GPAs they attain," Ehlinger said. "There is a direct link between the two."

When it comes to excessive television and computer use (not including academic use), 30.4 percent of students surveyed reported excessive screen time. Thirteen percent of those with the issue reported that it impacted their studies; these students had a lower mean GPA of 3.04 compared with a mean GPA of 3.27 for those who said the problem did not impact them.

"Turning off the computer or TV and going to sleep is one of the best things our students can do to improve their grades," Ehlinger said.

Students who reported that they had smoked during the past 30 days had a 3.12 mean GPA compared with a 3.28 mean GPA for students who reported not smoking. The study revealed surprising information for students who even smoke infrequently.

"Even students who smoked once or twice in a month had lower GPAs than those who didn't smoke," Ehlinger said. "Using tobacco to calm down or 'to be social' is lowering students' grades."

Ehlinger hopes that this study's results will spur college students to change behavior and for colleges to pay more attention to the health of

their students.

"We hope this information helps students make wise decisions," Ehlinger said. "If you're investing a lot of time and money in your education, do you really want to waste your investment on behaviors that interfere with your academic success?"

The report also includes information on mental health, health insurance, physical activity levels, financial issues, drug use, injury, sexual assault and alcohol use.

Members of the public, along with students and health officials, should pay attention to the results of this report, because the health of college students is important to society, Ehlinger said.

"College students are so important for our economic development -- the development of our society," Ehlinger said. "One way to protect that investment in our future is to help them stay healthy."

To view a video about the study, see [http://www1.umn.edu/urelate/newsservice/Multimedia\\_Videos/boynton\\_08.htm](http://www1.umn.edu/urelate/newsservice/Multimedia_Videos/boynton_08.htm)

Source: University of Minnesota

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