

College students sleep longer but drink more and get lower grades when classes start later

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Although a class schedule with later start times allows colleges students to get more sleep, it also gives them more time to stay out drinking at night. As a result, their grades are more likely to suffer, suggests a research abstract that will be presented Tuesday, June 14, in Minneapolis, Minn., at SLEEP 2011, the 25th Anniversary Meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies LLC (APSS).

Results show that later class start times were associated with a delayed sleep schedule, which led to poorer sleep, more [daytime sleepiness](#), and a lower grade-point average. Students with later class start times also consumed more alcohol and reported more [binge drinking](#). Students who were "night owls" with a natural preference to stay up later were more likely than "morning types" to have a delayed sleep schedule and to consume more alcohol.

"Later class start times predicted more drinking, more [sleep time](#) and modestly lower grades, overall," said co-lead author Pamela Thacher, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Psychology at St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y. "Later class start times seemed to change the choices students make: They sleep longer, and they drink more."

Thacher speculated that drinking more alcohol, which is known to disrupt sleep, may reduce the benefits of getting more sleep.

"The effects of later class start times might include more sleep," she

said. "But this might be offset by lower quality sleep, which in turn might affect their ability to engage, intellectually, with their coursework."

Thacher, co-author Serge Onyper, PhD, and their research team studied 253 college students. Participants completed [cognitive tasks](#) and a one-week retrospective sleep diary, as well as questionnaires about sleep, class schedules, [substance use](#) and mood. All data were collected on a weekday one month before the end of the semester. GPA was recorded from university records and self-reports.

Results also show that [students](#) were attempting to catch up on sleep on the weekends with later rise times and longer sleep durations. Average total sleep time for weekdays and weekends was 8.0 hours.

The authors noted that the results are much different from previous studies of school start times in middle and high school. Those studies show numerous benefits of later school start times, which tend to decrease truancy, improve mood and indirectly promote learning.

In a study published in 2008 in Behavioral Sleep Medicine, Thacher found that 60 percent of student participants at a liberal-arts college reported engaging in a single night of total [sleep](#) deprivation once or more since starting college. Statistical analyses found that pulling an "all-nighter" was associated with lower grades.

Provided by American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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