The National College Health Assessment was administered in the 2009 spring semester to a random sample of undergraduate students at Villanova. In one of the questions, students were given a list of behaviors and conditions and were asked to indicate if they experienced each and whether and how that experience affected their academic performance. The figure to the right lists the issues that had a disruptive effect on the academic performance for more than 5% of the students. The dark blue bar shows the percent whose experience adversely affected their academic performance. The adverse consequences included the following: they received a lower grade on an exam or important project; they received a lower grade in the course; they received an incomplete or dropped the course; or there was a significant disruption in thesis, dissertation, research or practicum work. The light blue bar shows the percent of students who experienced the issue but their academics had not been affected.

- Stress was, by far, the most prevalent issue. A total of 70% of the undergraduates experienced stress. For one-fourth of all respondents, stress adversely affected academic performance.
- Often related to stress, anxiety and sleep difficulties were disruptive for 14% of the students, while 8% said depression had adverse effects on academics.
- Colds/flu/sore throat took its toll on academics for 17%.
- Activities such as extracurricular (14%), Internet use/computer games (10%), and work (9%) were disruptive of academic performance.
- Concern for family/friends, relationships, and roommates were other types of issues that were impediments to academic performance.
- While a high percentage of students used alcohol, only 7% reported alcohol use having a negative effect on academic performance.
- Between 2001 and 2008 (Outside the Classroom, Inc., 2009), Villanova first year students consistently indicated that the #1 reason that they would choose not to use, or would responsibly use, alcohol would be to stay on top of their academics, even more than the worry of getting in trouble with the University. Students want to make healthy choices, and faculty, staff, and administration can empower them to be part of a healthy Villanova community.

"Health creates capacity...students whose health is flourishing have greater ability and readiness to learn and engage fully in all meaningful educational experiences inside and outside the classroom" (Silverman et al., 2008, p. 7). Faculty are particularly well positioned to influence their students’ academic AND social environments to one that is promoting an optimal community for learning and health. The connections between academic success, student health, and faculty involvement are becoming more clearly articulated in the growing body of literature on college student health.

- Porter & Pryor (2007) demonstrate that involvement with faculty can often serve as a protective factor for students with regard to GPA, degree attainment, and academic honors. Conversely, as alcohol consumption increases, level of faculty interaction decreases.
- George et al. (2008) in a study of academic success, found that among the greatest predictors of GPA were time management skills, time spent studying, less time spent in passive leisure, and a healthy diet.
- Wyatt & DeJong (2009) clearly delineate the significant positive relationship between student report of negative consequences of alcohol use and their academic performance, as measured through missing a class, getting behind in schoolwork, and performing poorly on an assignment.
One-Minute Strategies:

• Monitor language. What you say and what you don’t say can speak volumes to students (e.g., “It’s Thursday and I know most of you are already thinking about your party plans for the weekend, so I know you’re not ready for this pop quiz.”).

• Use your syllabus to make statements about student health. Consider including a brief statement about making healthy choices, managing time and stress, and/or the impact of quality sleep on academic success. Be conscious of your schedule of important course dates that might reinforce unhealthy habits.

• Ask about things like sleep, stress and time management, and over-scheduling in advising sessions, and make appropriate referrals.

• Don’t cancel that class – invite a Health Promotion staff member, Counseling Center staff member, or the POWER peer educators to address a particular hot health topic in your absence.

Short-Term Commitment Strategies:

• Incorporate interactive journaling, a guided writing process that encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how it applies to their lifestyle choices.

• Invite a Health Promotion or Counseling Center staff member to a faculty or advisor meeting.

• Make a common lecture more practical for students by applying concepts, theories and processes to “real world” student experiences (e.g., effects of alcohol on respiration in a biology course).

Long-Term Commitment Strategies:

• Contribute to the data pool by encouraging your students to explore student health issues and effectively measure student attitudes, perceptions and behaviors, complete a problem analysis or needs assessment.

• Invite a Health Promotion staff member to serve as a second reader in a capstone project.

• Integrate course projects that challenge students to evaluate and work on their own health.

• Serve as an advisor for a student serving as a Health Promotion intern.

• Provide opportunities for students to work on applied problems by 1) observing a phenomenon, 2) studying it under controlled conditions, and 3) applying what was learned back in the “real world” with Health Promotion.

• Introduce projects that examine the feasibility of employing various strategies to reduce a risky behavior or increase a health-promoting behavior.

Resources:

www.villanova.edu/healthpromotion (Office of Health Promotion)
www.villanova.edu/counselingcenter/ (University Counseling Center)
www.neiu.edu/~cinfusi/ (Network for the Dissemination of Curriculum Infusion)
www.learningreconsidered.org/ (Learning Reconsidered)
www.longwood.edu/assets/health/leadership_for_a_healthy_campus.pdf (Leadership for a Healthy Campus)
www.alcohol.vt.edu/Faculty/index.htm (Virginia Tech’s model faculty Web site)

Bibliography:


