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Procrastination and the College Student: An Analysis on Contributing Factors and
Academic Consequences
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Introduction

Procrastination and the college student seem to go hand in hand. At the beginning of a new semester, nearly every student makes the goal of finishing work on time, doing his or her best, and making good grades. In reality, most students put off the work until the last minute. Despite this ever-popular trend of putting off work, most students regret procrastinating.

The question is, why do students procrastinate? Do they not believe in themselves? Is the work too hard? Do students not have enough time? Do teachers put too much pressure on them? The reality is that many students have jobs that take up a large amount of time. Also, as students get closer to graduation, their classes become more difficult, which results in more work. Some students will take on the work and complete it in a timely manner. For other students, this amount of work results in stress and eventual procrastination. Our research is going to figure out why students procrastinate and the associated consequences.

A Review of the Literature

The literature we have reviewed is from other researchers who found information on procrastination and the college student. These sources shed light on common problems and solutions others have found. We will be able to compare them to our own findings and see if our participants relate to them.

An article written by the American Psychological Association reveals, "...students worry about performing inadequately or fear their success may raise others' expectations of them" (Novotney, 2010). In our survey, we asked our participants if they found that they procrastinated due to fear of success. Some

students feel that they are never good enough and do not want to complete their work. When this happens, students will get low grades and that will discourage them further.

In a research study done at Ohio State University, it was found that “high procrastinators suffer more stress than do other students” (Grabmeier, 2002). College students are known for being stressed. What we are trying to find is if they are they stressed because their courses are difficult or are they stressed because they are waiting to do their work until the last minute?

Some students feel that the work they are doing is just busy work and will not help them succeed in life. When students feel that way, they may procrastinate more. If those students challenge themselves or set goals to finish the work, they are more likely to finish it. The Journal of Education and Psychology has more to say on the topic: “Self-induced challenge appears to be especially effective when a task is viewed as boring or irrelevant to their personal goals because it enables them to reframe a task so that its completion is relevant to them for personal reasons, even though the task had no perceived intrinsic merit” (Sansone, C., & Harackiewicz, J. M., 1996). Some students need to feel that the work is going to benefit them immediately.

Method

The research we conducted uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. We sent out an electronic survey asking multiple questions including grade level, lifestyle choices, and other questions involving how they complete their homework and what causes them to procrastinate. We used the data to see if there is any kind

of correlations between certain types of lifestyles and procrastination. Our questions were a mix of free response and scaled answers. The scale ranged from strongly agrees to strongly disagree. At the end of the survey, participants offered up suggestions for what method(s) would help them procrastinate less.

Our sample included a total of 42 random students at Southern Adventist University. The students volunteered to take the survey by following a link posted on social media leading to the survey. The survey was not limited to grade level. Instead, the only qualification was that the participant was a currently enrolled student at Southern Adventist University.

Results

The results listed below are from the electronic survey. The full charts can be seen in the appendix. The full list of questions can be found in Appendix C.

Table 1 shows the two types of procrastinators: passive and active.

Table 1. Types of procrastinators.

Passive (paralyzed by their indecision to act and fail to complete tasks on time	31.25%
Active (prefer to work under pressure, make deliberate decisions to procrastinate)	68.75%

Most of our students are not scared of their work. A large percentage decided that they choose to procrastinate and enjoy working under pressure. After looking at table 1 and 2, we can see that they go hand in hand. Our participants choose to procrastinate because they get distracted and choose to do other things.

Table 2. Why do you procrastinate? (Appendix A)

Getting distracted	87.50%
Not wanting to do something	75%
Lack of motivation	75%
Not knowing what needs to be done	50%
Wanting to do another task instead	50%

After analyzing the results, we found that students procrastinate the most because they get distracted. The next two reasons tie with a 75% score. Those reasons are “not wanting to do something” and “lack of motivation.” Tied for third place with 50% is “not knowing what needs to be done” and “wanting to do another task instead”. These students are basically saying that their homework does not interest or motivate them. Half of the students get overwhelmed and do not even know what they need to do.

In our scaled survey located in appendix B, 25% of people said they get distracted easily. Another large group, 37% of people, “strongly agree” that they work better under pressure. About 19% of people say that they procrastinate when they feel they are not good at something. To me, this says that even though something is difficult, students would rather be pressured and procrastinate than ask for help.

When asked what would help them procrastinate less, we got various replies. There was the humorous “graduating” to the serious “creating a schedule and sticking to it. Most of the responders needed self-motivation, determination, and exciting teachers. The responders’ conclusions stated that their teachers did not

seem excited about the material they were teaching. This is clear to the students who become unmotivated to do the work. Students are looking for purpose, excitement, and motivation in their classes.

Conclusion

It seems inevitable that all students will procrastinate at one time or another. Students work, have a social life, and attend many classes. What seems to be the biggest issue is that students are not motivated by the work that they are assigned. Any person who is not a student can relate to that. If a task does not specifically relate at the moment, people are less likely to complete it.

To avoid procrastination, students need to increase their determination to see the bigger picture. They need to see that they will graduate someday and all of these small tasks will be worth it. Despite the fact that college professors assign large amounts of work, it is ultimately up to the student how the work is completed. It is up to them whether or not they will be an active procrastinator or just get the work done.

This survey certainly was not perfect. It was limited to the people that we know personally. It would be quite interesting to see this study broadened to the entire university to see how they procrastinate as a whole. It would be interesting to see how these questions would be answered in a broader setting.

References

- Grabmeier, Jeff. 2002. *Procrastinators get poorer grades in college class, study finds*. Retrieved from <http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/procrast.htm>.
- Novoteny, Amy. 2010. *Procrastination or "intentional delay"?*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2010/01/procrastination.aspx>.
- Sansone, C., & Harackiewicz, J. M. (1996). "I don't feel like it": The function of interest in self-regulation. In L. L. Martin & A. Tesser (Eds.), *striving and feeling: interactions among goals, affect and self-regulation* (pp. 203–228).

Appendix

Appendix A

Not wanting to do something	75%
Not knowing what needs to be done	50.00%
-Getting distracted	87.50%
-Forgetting	43.75%
-Not caring if it gets done or not	18.75%
-Lack of motivation	75.00%
-Believing it'll get done when under pressure	43.75%
-Waiting for the perfect moment	37.50%
-Wanting to do another task instead	50.00%
-Feeling rebellious	6.25%
-Fear of failure	12.50%
-Fear of success	0.00%

-Appendix B	Strongly Disagree –	Neither Disagree Nor Agree –	Strongly Agree –	Average Rating –
– I procrastinate when I can't see what the point of the task is.	0.00%	31.25%	18.75%	3.75
– I put off doing things I'm not interested in.	0.00%	0.00%	43.75%	4.31
– I work better under pressure.	6.25%	25.00%	37.50%	3.94
– I like to do exciting and/or risky activities.	6.25%	37.50%	18.75%	3.25
– I have a hard time starting because I don't know where to start.	6.25%	18.75%	18.75%	3.56
– I often try several things at once and don't complete many.	12.50%	0.00%	12.50%	2.75
– I settle for mediocre results when I know I can do better.	12.50%	18.75%	6.25%	2.88
– I often put off things I'm not good at.	12.50%	18.75%	18.75%	3.50
– I give up when a task gets too difficult.	12.50%	6.25%	12.50%	2.69
– I often lose motivation in the middle of a task.	12.50%	12.50%	12.50%	3.00
– I wait until the last minute to do things.	12.50%	6.25%	37.50%	3.56
– I wait until a crisis arises or the semester	31.25%	31.25%	0.00%	2.38

is ending before taking action.				
– I avoid setting personal deadlines.	18.75%	18.75%	0.00%	2.13
– I often do things quickly but incorrectly and have to redo them.	25.00%	12.50%	6.25%	2.44
– I spend a lot of time on routine and trivial things.	0.00%	20.00%	6.67%	3.33
– I avoid setting a daily schedule for how I want to use my time.	6.25%	43.75%	6.25%	2.81
– I am bad at prioritizing.	12.50%	18.75%	12.50%	2.69
– I have a hard time saying no to requests or invitations.	12.50%	6.25%	12.50%	2.81
– I often spend time socializing instead of doing work.	12.50%	12.50%	18.75%	3.06
– I get distracted easily.	0.00%	18.75%	25.00%	3.81
– I spend my time wisely.	6.25%	43.75%	6.25%	3.06
– Fear of failure stops me from doing work.	18.75%	6.25%	0.00%	2.13
– I get a feeling of anxiety when I know I'm procrastinating.	0.00%	25.00%	6.25%	3.56
– I procrastinate most in classes within my major	6.25%	25.00%	0.00%	2.69
–				

Appendix C

Major: _____

Circle One

Year(s) in College (If it is your first year select 1)

1 2 3 4+

GPA (Approximate):

<2.0 2.0-2.5 3.0-3.5 3.5-4

Credits this semester:

<12 12 13-15 16 17+

Why do you procrastinate? Check all that apply.

- Not knowing what needs to be done
- Not wanting to do something
- Getting distracted
- Forgetting
- Not caring if It gets done or not
- Lack of motivation
- Believing it'll get done when under pressure
- Waiting for the perfect moment
- Wanting to do another task instead
- Feeling rebellious
- Fear of failure
- Fear of success

Other:

What type of procrastinator are you? Circle one:

Passive (paralyzed by their indecision to act and fail to complete tasks on time)

Active (Prefer to work under pressure, make deliberate decisions to procrastinate)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I procrastinate when I can't see what the point of the task is					
I put off doing things I'm not interested in					
I work best under pressure					
I like to do exciting and/or risky activities					
I have a hard time starting because I don't know where to start					
I often try several things at once and don't complete many					
I settle for mediocre results when I know I can do better					
I often put off things I'm not good at					
I give up when a task gets too difficult					
I often lose motivation in the middle of a task					
I wait until the last minute to do things					
I wait until a crisis arises or the semester is ending before taking action					
I avoid setting personal deadlines					
I often do things quickly but incorrectly and have to redo them					
I spend a lot of time on routine and trivial things					
I avoid setting a daily schedule for how I want to use my time					
I am bad at prioritizing					
I have a hard time saying no to requests or invitations					

I often spend time socializing instead of doing work
I get distracted easily

I spend my time wisely

Fear of failure stops me from doing work

Just before working, I waste time

I get a feeling of anxiety when I know I'm procrastinating

I procrastinate most in classes in my major

I procrastinate much less when working on group assignments

I procrastinate most in classes outside my major

What class do you notice yourself procrastinating in the most? Why? Be specific.

What kinds of professors do you find yourself procrastinating the most with? (Strict, lenient, enthusiastic, dull, etc.)

How would you describe your social life?

What do you think would help you to procrastinate less?
