

# The Tar Heel

## College stress: Surviving campus ups and downs

By CATHY COWAN

Stress is one of the more unpleasant aspects of everyday life. In college, however, academic, time and personal pressures and turn small problems into big ones, and big problems into almost unbearable burdens. Yet as frightening as they may seem to be at the time, such problems are much more reparable given a little time and effort than they seem to be. The trick lies in reducing (though not doing away with) stress.

The simple truth is that college is a high pressure environment. You are not putting pressure on yourself. If you are in college, you will experience some, maybe more than your fair share, of stress.

If you are undergoing such college stress, remember that almost nothing which happens in college will be permanently damaging. Bad grades, a breakup with a boy or girlfriend, or even flunking out are not final judgements on your destiny as a human being. This does not mean that you should dismiss a truly important problem; but those relating directly to being in school are probably much more curable than you might think.

Everyone undergoes the same fears, anxieties, and worries during college. College is a time of growth and change — possibly the most change you will undergo in four years — which is mental, physical, and emotional in nature. If you are feeling a little disconcerted, it's no wonder. Hang on, and you'll get through. Even if it doesn't seem that you'll be

okay, there are plenty of options.

College is a new and unfamiliar environment. Especially at a school like Carolina, many very different people with as many different backgrounds are thrown together for the first time. People from urban New York share dorm rooms with people from Arkansas. Porsche owners are the fraternity brothers of those whose parents can barely afford to pay their tuition. Homosexuals attend the same classes as heterosexuals. Don't get overwhelmed, but go at whatever speed you need to to adjust to it. If you do feel lost, realize that these feelings will fade away as you begin to adjust.

There are several specific things you can do to reduce academic and personal pressures. Reducing your academic load will ease some of the pressure. Good time management means that you will be able to do more, more effectively. Taking a semester off after a difficult year can reduce stress.

Regular exercise is not only good for your body, but for your mind as well. Its positive effects include making you more calm, comfortable, healthier, and more alert. Good nutrition is essential to physical and mental well being. Meditation is a way of clearing and relaxing the mind that doesn't have to cost a lot or be associated with any particular religious group.

If however at any time during your college years, you find that you are not doing well either academically, emotionally, or both, ask yourself the

following questions:

1. Do I want to be here, at this college?
2. Do I want to be in college at all?
3. Should I take fewer classes next term?
4. Should I take easier classes next term?
5. Why did I take the classes I've taken?
6. How do I feel much of the time? Bored? Angry? Homesick? Anxious? Lonely? Panicky? Frustrated? Unwanted? Lost? Out of place? Stupid? Overburdened? Inept? Frightened? Uncertain? Confused? Why?
7. What can I do to make myself feel better, or at least different? What, if anything, is keeping me from doing this? How can I enable myself to do it?
8. Should I change my major or career plan? Is my current major or career plan uninteresting, or too difficult, or otherwise unappealing or unreasonable?
9. What concrete things can I do to improve my situation?
10. Why am I here at college? Why am I at this college in particular?
11. Would I be happier, or would things be easier, or would I do better at a different school?
12. What, if anything, would I rather be doing than being in school here? How can I arrange to do it?

Remember that no matter what, you cannot do better than your best. This is hard for those who are used to being at the top of their classes,

and hard if it means that you will have to drop a class or obligation. But trying to do more would only be counterproductive.

Don't take mistakes as failures. You may grow from one stage to another in life, but you will never stop making mistakes. Take what you can from them to learn and grow.

Try to avoid burnout by taking precautions in advance to make sure it does not occur. Burnout is the state in which you cannot make yourself go on even if you want to. The best way to avoid it is to commit yourself to a reasonable amount of work from the very beginning. If you feel it coming on, stop and take a break. You can probably recover quickly and return to the race rejuvenated.

Solve problems before they become big. For example, if you are having trouble in a class, see the instructor soon. If you have had no idea what is going on in class for two weeks, it will be hard for you to catch up, even with his or her help.

Finally, both Student Health Service and the Student Development and Counseling Center have

trained counselors and psychologists on their staffs. Feel free to use these services. All counseling is absolutely confidential — no one is told and nothing goes on your academic record. Using these services does not mean that you are "cracking up," but rather that you are legitimately seeking any help you need in sorting through college pressures and stress. Many of the students who seek counseling are among the best.

Above all, however, relax and enjoy yourself at Carolina. Here you will be presented with opportunities and experiences which you will not find anywhere else. You will make many new friends, change and grow in ways you never foresaw, and emerge with some of the best four years of your life behind you. Knowing the potential pitfalls and the options for dealing with them before you begin can only put you ahead in the game.

Catherine Cowan, a senior from Fayetteville, Arkansas, is Managing Editor of The Tar Heel.

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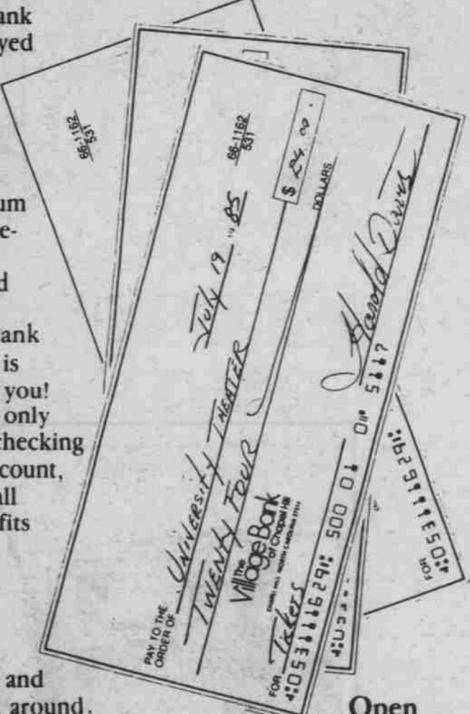
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