

Sleep or Standards?

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As we have all heard professionals claim, a growing teenager needs about 8.5 hours of sleep per night in order to function properly. However, it is extremely unlikely that any high schooler, whether attending a private school or not, will ever get over seven hours of sleep on a weekday due to the heavy workload—standardized tests, community service, co-curriculars, and even research and part-time jobs for some, all on top of school work. As a result, our bodies suffer, and illnesses, both physical and mental, begin to appear. At this point, you have two incredibly unappealing choices:

1. Go to the Health Center or the nurse and take the day (or a few days if the nurse won't let you leave) to recover
2. Ignore the problem until it goes away.

Now, I am not your mother. I am not here to tell you what to do. But speaking from personal experiences as well as learning from observations, ignoring a problem will not make it go away. But, another personal experience and observation: ignoring this particular problem seems to be the most popular choice, not just amongst those attending schools participating in *The Tavern*, but amongst students all around the world. Even though we know we are fatigued from the lack of sleep, we just keep on staying up until past midnight, trying to finish our work while our eyelids become heavier. Why do we do it?

As a collection of the world's most elite teenage minds, it's easy to think that we are above most issues that plague us and our peers. Sleep? Who needs it! Dinner? Could be a good time to do work, might as well skip it. It's not just the problem of sleep, but the whole issue of physical and mental health. Our existence is fueled by the attempts we make to become the human embodiments of perfection, especially when we're surrounded by intelligent peers and teachers. Bold claims, I know.

Let me clarify: I am not saying that you think you transcend this world because you would rather get an A on your paper than get nine hours of sleep. If you need to sleep late to finish your term paper or study for the tests that all of your teachers decided to give you on Friday, then go ahead. I understand. I, too, have made that choice. But here's the thing: we choose to ignore the yawns, the migraines, the occasional bouts of depression, and all these different indicators of unhealthiness because we believe that the sacrifices we make as high school students will elevate us one step closer to this golden standard we've created for ourselves. And this golden standard isn't just to impress our teachers and college admissions officers, but also to satisfy our parents, peers, and most importantly, ourselves. It's so easy to believe that the hours we stay awake,

staring blankly at our computer screens, show the amount of dedication we have to doing our very best. But is it our best? Will our teachers, college admissions officers, parents, and friends compliment us for staying up late to finish our work? Can anyone honestly say that they have done their best work after not having slept for two straight days? If you can, please send me an email with your address, and I will send you a bouquet of flowers and some Melatonin. You are incredible, but you need to go to bed.

Perfection is not real. None of us will ever be perfect. And as bright, young people, we know this. We are aware of how elusive this ideal life can be. And yet, we consciously make the choice to strive for it. We, as students, choose to ignore important aspects of our well-being because we think that somehow, someday, our extreme sleep deprivation and crippling anxiety will be the battle scars we admire once we reach the top.