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Maas Pushes for Later Start Time at Schools

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Dawn Lim

Prof. James Maas Ph.D. '66, psychology, has attempted to wake his students up to the dangers of sleep deprivation for 44 years in his course Psychology 101: Introduction to Psychology. Now Maas is taking his sleep campaign to schools around the country and enabling high school students to have more snooze time.

In the past two years, Maas has spoken as a sleep specialist at over 100 venues, many of which include Fortune 500 companies.

With the recent emergence of research on adolescent sleep, Maas has extended his campaign to high schools. According to Maas, teenagers face significant challenges in maintaining healthy sleep routines.

A Harvard University study revealed that the teenage brain is biologically set to fall asleep at 3 a.m. and wake up after 11 a.m. This later sleep cycle is caused by growth hormones produced at puberty, which delay the production of melatonin, a hormone essential for regulating and aiding sleep.

"Because academic clocks are in conflict with teenagers' body clocks, teenagers are one of the most sleep-deprived in the country," said Maas, who coined the phrase "power nap" over 35 years ago and penned the bestselling self-help guide, *Power Sleep*.

"Sleep affects everything from your mood to the likelihood of heart attacks, obesity and cancer. In the past ten years, I've used my training as a public speaker to go out and spread the gospel," he added.

Maas has spoken at three different schools this year, and has four speaking appointments at schools lined up this spring semester.

Deerfield Academy, a preparatory boarding school in Massachusetts, jumped on the bandwagon last year. After Maas spoke at Deerfield Academy in Sept. 2007, the school administration began to consider implementing changes in its school schedule.

Although some have called Maas the "sleep evangelist," Deerfield Academy's Head of School Margarita Curtis clarified in an e-mail that "he did not preach; he just presented the facts."

Some at Deerfield Academy proposed pushing back the start times of lessons and making lights-out earlier. Implementing change seemed an upward struggle at first. 90 percent of the feedback that the school's academic Dean Peter Warsaw received was critical of changing the school schedule. Faculty members were resistant to the idea that "if we started the day later, sacrifices would have to be made, and time in the classroom had to be cut back," he recalled. "A lot of [administrators and faculty] were wondering, 'are we being too reckless?'"

In Oct. 2007, the school voted to decide if the semester-long pilot test should be given the green light. The referendum provided a vote of confidence: 61 to 27 voted in favor of the pilot plan.

The school's 7:55 a.m. start time was moved to 8:30 a.m. Study hours and lights out were moved 30 minutes earlier. To accommodate the later start times, 50-minute classes were reduced to 45 minutes, and faculty lost 25 minutes of classroom time on three days of the week.

For a boarding school that clings tightly to its traditions, dress code, and sit-down meals, "we were closer to

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being mavericks,” laughed Warsaw.

Nathalie Weiss '12 is a recent graduate from Deerfield Academy who went through the pilot test and helped Maas to collate survey responses for the pilot test. Weiss said that although some students were upset that study hours and lights out were moved forward, giving them less time to socialize, “once everyone adjusted to the new schedule, we felt so much more relaxed.”

Deerfield Academy noted an increase in hot breakfasts served, a drastic reduction of unexcused absences, a record increase in grades and a 20-percent reduction in visits to the health center — even though neighboring schools reported a higher number of flu cases than normal.

Warsaw noted that despite the loss of classroom time, teachers were delighted that students were more attentive and engaged.

“Teachers of first-period classes reported that vibrant discussions now began at the opening bell instead of half-way through the class,” Warsaw stated in an information sheet.

When the pilot test was over, Deerfield Academy decided to maintain the new school schedule and later start times.

Closer to home, Maas also spoke at Ithaca High School five years ago about sleep. Two years later, the Ithaca City School District made start and end times later for its schools.

Superintendent Judith Pastel stressed that this move was not influenced by Maas' sleep research.

“For many people, sleep research is controversial. Some support it and others don't,” she said.

Start times of the Ithaca schools were moved back because of transportation problems in which buses were not arriving on time, and students were arriving at school late. However, Pastel noted that Maas' talk might have made this transition easier.

“For those who agreed with research on adolescent sleep, these families were more accepting of the change,” Pastel said.

Prof. Bruce Lewenstein, communication and science and technology studies, said Maas' work illustrates how “science research does not take place in isolation in an ivory tower.”

Lewenstein said that a range of factors influences scientific inquiry, including political processes that affect research funding.

“Ideas don't just live in academia. Professors are actively engaged in the real world, and the real world is actively involved in us,” Lewenstein said.

Rebecca Robbins '09, the head teaching assistant of Psychology 101 last year, has presented with Maas on numerous speaking assignments about sleep. A co-author of Maas' upcoming self-help sleep guide, she is a firm advocate of what she terms, “sleep hygiene.”

“So much of our culture and lifestyle runs counter to promoting good sleep,” Robbins said. “People compare how little they sleep to feel macho. We have slogans like, ‘the city never sleeps.’”

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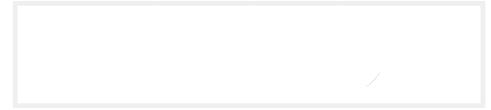
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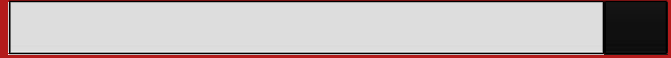
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Weather for Ithaca

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Partly Cloudy	Partly Cloudy	Chance of Rain	Chance of Rain	Fog
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