

**Student Stress in a Quarter System-
An Action Research Report**

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SiTNA

In my Action Research endeavor, I wished to answer the following question: Does the pace of a 10-week quarter turn to “burn-out” of the students? How can this be prevented? What situations cause this to happen?

Cal Poly Pomona’s academic calendar is based on a quarter system. Many students have expressed a concern over the accelerated pace and describe the last few weeks of the quarter as “stressful” and feelings of “burn out.” I observed the behaviors, experiences and patterns of four students as they progressed through the spring quarter (March-June), 2011, and they chronicled their journey through the quarter. I documented the frequency of key words used most and commonly among them. In addition I took note of “burn out” symptoms as reported in their journals and through group and individual meetings.

Section 1: Focus and Framing through setting the stage

In an accelerated ten-week quarter system, students of Cal Poly Pomona are tasked with a duty to work at a rapid pace in order to fulfill the requirements of the course. Many students have expressed a concern over the accelerated pace and describe the last few weeks of the quarter as “stressful” and a feelings of “burn-out.” However, in surveys conducted in 2004, students overwhelmingly supported the quarter system, and its pace and rigors over the alternative- the semester system. I observed the behaviors, experiences and patterns of four students as they progress through the Spring Quarter (March-June) to see if their phenomenon is analogous to a problem campus-wide.

Stakeholding Groups

I selected a group of five people. These stakeholders consist of four students and an administrative staff member. Two of the four students are from a past quarter, and the other two

from the current spring quarter. I received positive confirmation from twenty students and as the study proceeded, it was narrowed down to the four students and one administrative member who remained until the end. But as you will see later in the paper, the whole group of subjects voluntarily opted out by week eight.

This group of five was chosen based on their willingness to participate, their perception of the stress factor a quarter system produces, and their involvement with the campus at large. These five people represent a broad demographic of the campus. Two students graduate in June 2011, the other two are transfer students from a semester-based community college, and the administrative staff member is a department coordinator who interacts with students daily and has been employed in this capacity for six years. The department coordinator is in a position of leadership, and it is she who accesses the students' academic data for the release of "holds" (an accounting status when a student must pay a fee or fulfill a registrar requirement). She also schedules student advising with the department chair, and coordinates paperwork for registration. Her primary role is as liaison between the student and the University.

Role, Position, and Agenda

My role as a researcher for this project was to inquire with an opinion-free open mind to uncover the reasons behind student anxiety during a 10-week quarter. I facilitated a dynamic evolving research process that had structure insofar as to coordinate journal entries and student collaborative meetings. I also used my role as professor to informally "poll" my students (not part of the formal research process) on their levels of stress during the quarter. Truthfully, I approached the study with a preconceived anticipation of stress causers such as multiple exams in one week, work pressures, and pace, but I was not presumptuous with the students' acknowledgements of their experiences and let the data unfold as it happened.

As Stringer (2007) noted, “Initial statements should provide the tacit understanding that the researcher is a resource person whose role is to assist stakeholders, rather than to prescribe their actions” (p. 48). My students expressed their anxieties to me, and it was consistent with other quarters as it peaked at the sixth week of instruction. With the use of coding and analyzing journaling, I came to understand a few of the reasons behind the stressors, why they hit during a similar time period and, ways of handling the pressure. By conducting my research at the University, I viewed students’ on-campus activities first hand and inquired about off-campus activities as well.

My positive student rapport, helped keep the study easy going and nonthreatening. The department coordinator and I have a very casual relationship and we have pleasant interactions. I believe this prior positive rapport with both groups helped aid my approachability; fostering candid responses. Because the research revolved around the student, they had little difficulty expressing their feelings. I thought the department coordinator might experience difficulty in divulging her experiences with students and their stressors as it related to the departmental protocols. But indeed she was very forthcoming in her disclosure.

Section 2: Literature Review

The following is representative of the available literature on student stress. There was neither specific nor definitive research conducted on stress in a 10-week quarter system; however, the literature did provide a framework in which I based my theoretical findings later in this paper.

“Concerning the measurement of such experiences, psychologists have defined stress as a stimulus (e.g., Holmes & Rahe, 1967), a response (e.g., Selye, 1976), or a stimulus response interaction (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)” (de Carvalho et al., 2009). Cushman & West

(2006) define stress as “a global term that refers to how stimuli negatively or positively affect an individual.” Weckwerth et al. (2006) noted, “Stress, is often referred to as any emotional experience that is negative, and is accompanied by biochemical, physiological, cognitive, and behavioural changes that predictable by nature, and are directed either toward adapting to the effects of the stressful event or altering the stressful event itself (Taylor, 1999).”

The literature maintains that stress can lead to burnout which “has been operationalized as a three-dimensional concept: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)” (Cushman & West, 2006). There are other studies indicating burnout as “a psychological syndrome stemming from one's relationship with work, and characterized by three dimensions: overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment, and a sense of ineffectiveness on the job (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Letter, 2001; Schaufeli & Buunk, 2003)” (Pisarik, 2009).

The literature search identified various measurement tools to study stress. Early studies of burnout centered around the human service industries with less focus on the student experience (Edwards et al., 2001; Deckro et al., 2002; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Weckwerth, 2006). Researchers use a self-report questionnaire, the Maslach Burnout Inventory (utilized primarily in the human service area), to measure stress. Adjusting the questions with a focus on college students created a focus on the student experience. This questionnaire is now known as the Maslach Burnout Inventory- Student Survey (MBI-SS) (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Other tests and methods in stress levels are the Life Experiences Scale, the Hassles Scale, the Social Support Survey, the Test of Negative Health Exchange, the Mental Health Index, and the Pennebaker Inventory of Limbic Languidness (Edwards et al., 2001;

Deckro et al., 2002; Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2002; Weckwerth, 2006); although, the MBI is used most often in determining stress levels and causes (Robotham, 2008).

Studies in the past decade depict varying sources of stress for University students which lead to burnout (Cushman & West, 2006; Darling et al., 2007; Law, 2010; Schaufeli, 2002).

Stressors are linked to many sources; a few of which are, emergence from adolescence to adulthood (Broughman et al., 2009), moving away from home (Darling et al., 2007) assignment overload, instructor attitude and behaviors, lack of personal motivation (Cushman & West, 2006), and work related or financial problems (Cushman & West, 2006; Law, 2010).

Darling et al. (2007) said this about adolescent development in adapting when moving away from home in correlation to academic success:

“Developmental tasks of adolescence include individuation, differentiation and independence (Fulmer, 2005). A college student’s struggle for individuation is an indicator of academic success, whereas systems theorists describe the concept of differentiation as an individual striving and working towards achieving a sense of separateness from one’s family of origin while simultaneously maintaining connectedness (Rice, Cole, & Lapsky, 1990).” In addition to individuation, Broughman et al (2009), said this of adolescents and stress, “It has been hypothesized that emerging adulthood, the transition from adolescence into adulthood, increased college students’ vulnerability to stress (Towbes and Cohen 1996).”

Feelings of being overwhelmed due to assignment overload were also listed as possible sources of stress. “Responses indicate that students find their course load excessive and instructors’ expectations unreasonable” (Cushman & West, 2006). In addition, students felt

stress when instructors were flippant, uncaring or indifferent. In more severe cases, a teacher with verbal aggression towards students can also lead to burnout (Cushman & West, 2006).

Law (2010) made an interesting observation when he said:

“This characteristic qualifies job burnout as a potentially useful construct in assessing and researching stress in university students. Yet, compared with the number of studies undertaken in the workforce, the construct has only lightly been addressed in university students. One reason for the lack of research involving university students and job burnout is that university students are in fact preparing for jobs and are not as yet considered employed. However, it is arguable that full-time student status in a business program can be regarded as an occupation by itself due to the rigorous nature of the coursework. This may be compounded for those students who work full- or part-time. Similar to their counterparts in the workforce, business students are continually subject to assignments, deadlines, and potentially long hours. These work stressors have been tied to job burnout (Garrosa, Moreno-Jimenez, Liang, & Gonzalez, 2008; Pines & Maslach, 1978; Sweeney & Summers, 2002); thus, business students may be susceptible to burnout.”

The reason to study stress is most aptly stated by Pitarik (2009)

“An empirical examination of burnout among college students is important for several reasons. First, as alluded to earlier, research results suggest that the general college student population experiences fairly high levels of burnout (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; Meier & Schmeck, 1985). However, more research is needed to examine the prevalence of burnout within this population using the

most current constructs and assessments. Second, academic performance is found to be significantly related to measures of burnout in the college student population (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; McCarthy, Pretty, & Cattano, 1990). Third, burnout has been empirically associated with a myriad of mental health related issues such as depression (Glass & McNight, 1996), and substance abuse (Nowack & Pentkowski, 1994). Lastly, burnout has been associated with factors in the world of work that are analogous to student retention and persistence such as intention to leave employment, and reduced organizational commitment (Lee & Ashforth, 1996).”

Other researchers noted that a severe accumulation of stress leading to burnout (Cushman & West, 2006) could also lead to drug related problems (Pillay & Ngcobo, 2010), as well as physical problems through negative social changes (Edwards et al., 2001). Other causes of stress and burnout are exhaustion, lack of self- efficacy and cynicism (Schaufeli et al., 2002), as well as stressors related to studying and examinations (Robotham 2008).

While there are many sources of stress in college students’ surroundings, the literature points to personal low self-efficacy as the prevailing source (Broughman et al., 2009; de Carvalho et al., (2009); Deckro et al., 2002; Pisarik, 2009; Sizoo, 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Self-efficacy is an intrinsic motivation to achieve, and when challenged or placed in challenging situations, the level of self-efficacy wanes (Chemers et al., 2001; de Carvalho et al., 2009; Deckro et al.; Pisarik, 2009). Highly efficacious students experience greater amounts of stress than other students in similar circumstances (Chemers et al., 2001). Students will also experience stress as their relative “locus of control” (de Carvalho et al., 2009) dictates. Those

with high internal locus of control experienced higher, more severe stress, and related their stressors to behavioral situations (de Carvalho et al., 2009).

Section 2 continued: The Literature Gaps

While the studies are replete with sources of stress, there is missing research specifically geared towards quarter-system University students. The unique nature of quarter systems introduces a variety of additional stressors; none of which is represented. The quarter system has been in place at this institution since 1938. There was discussion of converting to a semester system this January with a prior conversion debate in 2001. The current failure to convert to a semester calendar stemmed from financial shortcomings on behalf of the state and a University-wide vote to maintain the status quo (http://www.csupomona.edu/~calendar_convert/). Student surveys reflected overwhelming support for the quarter system even when there are complaints of the speed-related stressors. This seems a contradiction to relieving stress and a point of further research.

My role as a researcher for this project was to inquire with an opinion-free open mind to uncover the reasons behind student anxiety during a 10-week quarter. I aim to add to the literature with my new time-dimension as it relates to student stress. Some areas for further inquiry may include the question of: If a student is pressed for time in a quarter system, thus creating stress, why, then vote to maintain the status quo?

Section 3: Methodology via context picture

Utilizing the tool on page 53 of the Stringer offered insight and understanding of the dynamics and history of the SiTNA. Because this research focused on inner conflict students have over the workload and its accompanying stresses, the social dynamics lean towards personal coping issues which might affect students at large. There are studies related to student

stress (see Literature Review) none of which focus on the unique quarter system as a factor of stress. Because of this gap, I chose to focus my attention on the 10-week dynamic.

Relationship- the students are “related” in as much as they are all co-eds working towards an undergraduate degree. The department coordinator is related to the students via one-on-one, in-office contact.

History- the quarter system has been in place since 1938. There is a discussion of converting to a semester system at present. The prior conversion debate was in 2001. The failure to convert to a semester calendar stemmed from financial shortcomings on behalf of the state. Student surveys show overwhelming support for the quarter system.

Groups- The primary focus of this research was the 4 students. Demographic specifics were not a factor to this problem. Through this process I anticipated students’ negativity towards some professor’s workload adding to their stress (an assumption). My prediction, therefore, considered a pool of professors as overloaders in the groups. In my findings, you will see this to be a minor factor.

Past Problems- The problems that plague Cal Poly is the location of the University. It is considered a “commuter school.” Most students are employed either full or part time in addition to going to school full time. Student stress reaches beyond the campus as most juggle myriad activities outside of the University. I keenly focused on the problem of balance for the student, as this became a prevailing theme as I coded the data.

Resources- I am unaware of resources, outside of University counseling services, addressing student mid-term stress. However, I discovered an on campus program whose primary focus was addressing student stress via group-counseling sessions. When I contacted the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services to inquire about the program, they

mentioned the program received little interest and was subsequently disbanded. I inquired further into the various other programs and services related to student stress. They indicated that most counseling sessions were conducted one-on-one, and although they would not offer specific case discussion, they affirmed that “there are more students making appointments for counseling during the middle and latter third of the quarter mostly due to stress-related issues.” I tried to inquire further, but they declined to answer any further questions based on the privacy and IRB issues.

Ethics

The intent of the research was to determine reasons for stress without placing students and the department coordinator in uncomfortable positions. The students were very open with their interview answers and their candid journal entries. Stringer (2003) states, “Because of the participatory nature of action research, ethical considerations work in a special way. The same provisions for duty of care apply, and all stakeholders have the same rights to safety and informed consent that apply in other forms of research” (p. 55). The transparency of this research required debriefing through every step; which they appreciated as it made them part of the process. The PAR nature of the research design allowed me to journey with them on their path, yet focused on their experience of stressors as they occurred. It was not my agenda, I merely focused the research aspect.

I referred to Glesne’s (2011) summary in her book, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*, for a proper informed consent outline. She suggests a research summary used for Institutional Review Boards to best notify and educate all participants in the following areas: the study background, the use of results, how the participants were chosen, a promise of anonymity, a disclosure of benefits and risks, the length of the research, and data collection methods. I

prepared a statement via email about the nature of my Action Research and its inevitable evolving process for all my stakeholders. I sent this information along with my request for participation in the initial email request and made certain I upheld all the parameters of the study (Appendix).

Rigor

When conducting dynamic research such as this, Stringer (2007) advises ensuring “the outcomes of the research are *trustworthy*” (p. 57). He suggests this can be established via four study elements: *Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability*.

To cultivate *Credibility*, there must be synergy amongst the following activities: Persistent observation, Triangulation, Member checking, Participant debriefing, Diverse case analysis, and Referential adequacy. Because of the condensed nature of this study, not all areas of *Credibility* were feasible, but I did consider all axioms while conducting the study.

I engaged with the students face-to-face 2 times during the 10-week quarter, I emailed them once per week, and visited their journal blogs two-three times per week. I attempted weekly phone calls, but the students felt the other modes of communication worked better, so I deferred to their preference. This involvement allowed me to *persistently* observe the students’ behavior and performance. I connected with the department coordinator every other week to assess her findings as well. I wanted to have weekly conversations, but she indicated her tight schedule would only allow for every other week debriefs via email. Unfortunately, by the end of week eight, my 4 student subjects stopped their journal entries to focus on their school studies and projects. The last group meeting on May 12 was our final discussion about the project. One student apologized for having to “bail” on the research; I understood and felt I had enough data for the paper.

In an effort to include other sources of information, I reached out to the counseling services Cal Poly offers for students, and as mentioned above was given limited access to specific student inquiries or use of the facility because of privacy issues. I pursued triangulation using student, department coordinator and student services data to enhance the research and meet the goal of Rigor via Credibility in Action Research.

Member Checking and Participant Debriefing, also recommended by Stringer, aided in providing research members information on the ongoing data collection with an opportunity to share their feelings and emotions aside from the research information. Because the subjects of the research were the heart of the project, I aimed for complete participant perspective inclusion (Diverse case analysis), without overt academic or institutional influence.

I kept in mind the concept of Referential adequacy when I interpreted their data. Having the journal documentation via an online blog site made it easier to code the journal entries in the true form in which it was delivered. I ensured that perspectives in this paper are that of the stakeholders and their reflective their input put in terms easily understood by them.

My findings and subsequent recommendations make portions of this research *Transferable* to the student body of the University. My data sources were reliable in that their perception was their experience; however, based on the tenets of Stringer's data *Dependability* and *Confirmability*, I propose this study to be one mostly for the student body of Cal Poly Pomona. I made efforts to provide thoroughness in data collection processes and that I checked for impartiality, traceable links, meticulous field notes, and all-around data storing sensitivity. Perhaps those efforts can aid in the potential Transferability of my findings.

Section 4: Outcomes and Findings

After eight weeks of discussion with my research subjects, I found their interest in the study waned toward the end of the quarter. Their projects and exams took precedence over this research. But I felt I gathered enough good data to offer valid results. Perhaps if I had more time to dive deeper into this study, I might have additional data in different areas. Albeit simplistic, I found it helpful to divide the data into three recurring themes. I segmented the outcomes and findings into the following areas: a. Coded words and repetitive stressor themes, b. Opinions on the quarter system and how it relates to stress, and c. Student remarks on relieving stress.

a. Coded words and repetitive stressor themes

Using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet program, I listed each participant's name and noted key words. I documented commonly used and in-common words and phrases; counted the number of times they used them in their journal, in our group meetings and in one-on-one conversations and coded them below. The themes of *workload* and *time crunch* were prevalent across participants and the complaining seemed to increase as the quarter progressed. Also the similarities among the journal entries became more noticeable. Even though each student expressed their opinions, it was a unique phenomenon to detect the similarities in their common experiences. . In Figure A below, I noted the common words in use.

FIGURE A

Word(s)	Documented Word(s), frequency and where they were expressed											
	Participant 1			Participant 2			Participant 3			Participant 4		
	# times journal	# times group mtg	# times face/face	# times journal	# times group mtg	# times face/face	# times journal	# times group mtg	# times face/face	# times journal	# times group mtg	# times face/face
overload	3	0	0	4	5	2	0	6	3	5	2	3
workload	6	5	3	7	2	2	5	3	4	5	3	1
so fast	2	6	2	2	7	1	3	2	2	6	1	1
all due at once	5	3	1	5	2	1	6	3	3	4	2	2
too much work	2	5	2	3	3	0	5	6	2	3	3	2
professors make things due at same time	3	2	1	4	3	2	7	3	4	2	3	2
can't finish on time	0	0	0	5	2	1	2	1	1	1	3	0
procrastinate	7	6	2	5	4	2	5	5	2	4	2	1
work and school	6	2	3	2	0	0	3	1	1	3	1	1
stressed out	6	6	5	6	5	1	7	6	4	5	2	3
motivated	2	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	1	2	1	2
can't wait for the end of the quarter	2	1	1	3	1	1	4	3	1	2	2	1

What I found most interesting is the students became more open about their feelings about the amount of work to be done towards the end of the quarter. They expressed their true stressors more candidly the more we connected throughout the quarter. The story unfolded in a manner I predicted. The students were highly motivated at the start of the quarter and then experienced workload stress in correlation with the quarter-system speed. I queried the administrative assistant about her opinions of the students during the sixth week of instruction. She told me students who were about to register for the next quarter's classes were showing signs of anxiousness. She mentioned that academic holds (temporary suspensions to student accounts for various academic or financial reasons) were the main cause of stress at this time of year. She also mentioned the students complaining about the lack of coordination between professors and their project due dates.

In conversation, the students shared similar feelings of frustration, fatigue and burn out. One student said this in a group meeting, "I'm sick and tired of all these professors making

everything due at the end of the quarter and on the same day. Why can't all the professors get together and coordinate their stuff so we don't all have to suffer?" (Student participant 3, personal communication, April 14, 2011). Another student said, "And these stupid holds for a late library book is making me lose my priority registration" (Student participant 1, personal communication, April 14, 2011). I had to chuckle about these complaints as it would seem an impossible task on behalf of professors to coordinate with each student to devise syllabi conducive to the students' due date desires. Then the late library book conversation had me wanting to shake my finger at the student for not returning the book on time. Although I felt this way, I did not *express* this opinion to my research subjects.

I did, however, interject with a question, "Would you prefer to turn in projects another time during the quarter, and if so when? What amount of time would you need to complete them?" I really just wanted their opinion on timing to see if there were stressors that could be quelled. Interestingly, they said they wanted the projects due at the end of the quarter because there would not be enough time to complete the task. This made me pause to look at the coded words again. They did not state with resounding consensus a fear of not completing their work. So perhaps the time crunch was a motivator? This now took me to a whole new line of questioning.

b. Opinions on the quarter system and how it relates to stress

Recently, the University polled the student body about their desire to maintain the current quarter system or replace it with a semester system. The students overwhelmingly supported maintaining the quarter system (http://www.csupomona.edu/~calendar_convert/), which afforded an opportunity to explore the student participants' perspectives.

During a group meeting on April 14, I asked them their opinion on the University's decision to maintain the quarter system. All were happy about the decision, which begged the question, "Is stress really related to the speed of the academic calendar, or is it just the amount of work alone?" Their responses were candid and to the point. I am paraphrasing the points in aggregate when I say they all like the speed, but feel that *complaining about* the pace is therapeutic. They went on to say the quarter system has its upsides: it limits the possibility for procrastination, and it allows the student the ability to tolerate the class work and professor for a short time with the knowledge of a new quarter quickly approaching.

They emphatically agreed that the quarter system, with all its rapidness, makes for a more positive University experience because the length in which they have to *tolerate* stress is lessened than if it were a semester system. I asked them what they had to tolerate and they responded with: professors, administration, and schoolwork.

Villanova (1984) stated in a paper presented to the Southeastern Psychological Association that 1/7 of student stress is related to the context of a University student's college experience. Issues such as dealings with administration, parking and relationships with professors seem to factor heavily in student stress.

So although there are questions of rapid pace and the ability to keep up, my focus group was not as concerned with the speed. In fact they found it to be more positive than negative. This is not assuming all students regard the quarter system with as much favor, but this group likes the quarter system.

c. Student remarks on relieving stress

There are many references to stress relief in the student journals. I requested a list of the top 10 stress relievers. Most were very similar and note a breakdown of top eight stress relievers

in Figure B below. Most methods appeared to be innocuous ways to control or relieve stress; however, the number two stress reliever, drinking, was disturbing. I wanted to remain as neutral as possible during this study, but I found it impossible to avoid giving advice for the safety of the students. I felt it my obligation to offer alternative stress-relieving methods as well as an admonition to consider designated drivers if they indeed wish to let off steam this way.

FIGURE B

- Top 8 Student Stress Relievers
- 1 Gym/Exercise
 - 2 Drinking
 - 3 Sleeping
 - 4 Eating junk food
 - 5 Hanging out with friends
 - 6 Computer games
 - 7 Television
 - 8 Family gatherings

Section 5: Suggested Action

In my capacity it would be impossible to change the ten-week quarter system, and as the student body voted, not desired. The focus for action to help the students should be directed in two areas: 1) Recognizing stress and 2) Stress relievers. Student groups on campus have opportunities throughout the quarter to meet with guest speakers. The Student Senate at Cal Poly encourages groups to reach out to community member and on campus experts in a variety of subject matters.

Typically, I speak to different campus groups about business communication and networking once or twice during the school year. The opportunities to speak about stress should be suggested to the Student Senate as a possible topic. I propose that counseling services on campus send a representative to one of the larger groups on campus (the aggregate of Fraternities

and Sororities are the largest at 29 chapters) to speak about signs, causes, sources and remedies of stress.

Their resources and licensed expertise could prove to be a valuable; at least they have an arena in which to discuss (which was particularly evident when my group met). Also, the counseling center could revive the now defunct group gatherings in this larger assembly format. The Greek council could advertise their guest speaking events to students outside their fraternity or sorority; encouraging additional student involvement. The counseling center could also provide tips for surviving stress healthfully. The number two stress relieving methods was drinking. Alcohol and partying can be a way of escaping the stress woes; however, the consequences outweigh the benefits for any long-term stress relief.

Several departments on campus could contribute to a forum providing helpful stress relief tips to students. I recommend the Physical Education and Nutrition Sciences department work side-by-side in providing seminars to students about how exercise and eating right benefit student health and the impact it has on stress. Outside community members and alumni could come to speak about other methods of stress relief such as meditation, journaling, counseling, and time management tools. With a diverse pool of resources and experts, this constructive educational endeavor could be very helpful in addressing student stress.

Conclusion

Although this research was brief, I did gain insight into my student subjects' source of stress. The literature focuses primarily on college student's coping mechanisms and causes of stress and the similarities were many. Research from the literature states student stress stems from course workload, outside interpersonal influences, jobs, and administrative hurdles. My research subjects also experienced these stressors in addition to the quarter system.

Curiously, the students in my research group found the quarter system to be a bonus in helping them manage time and avoid procrastination. So perhaps a further study is in order to examine the effects of deadlines and time demands on college students and stress. Could it be helpful or could it worsen the effects? Because my study was limited to only 4 students, it was difficult to generalize the findings and opinions of the quarter system speed as a factor in causing stress. However, I did find that my subjects were more apt to vent their frustrations in a constructive forum and ultimately felt better having unloaded a bit. For this, I believe this study could be helpful for the entire student body. Group dynamics as a way of relieving stress in a quarter-system might in fact be a viable second study.

One student told me she had an increased desire to be more “Zen” having participated in this research study for the past eight weeks. Although, she opted out in week eight, she continues to journal and finds it a satisfying way to relieve some.

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Appendix

Email Excerpt for Participation

Dear Student A,

I am conducting a small research study on the nature of student stress in the quarter system at Cal Poly.

If you would consider being a part of the study, your requirements would consist of:

1. Journaling your levels of stress (daily or at least 3 times a week)
 - Why you are experiencing stress
 - What in your life is causing stress
 - When did the stress begin
 - How you feel during times of stress
 - What do you do to alleviate stress
 - How does the quarter system play a role in your stress level
 - And any other thoughts
2. 3-4 face to face meetings throughout the quarter

You don't have to follow the exact guideline above, but the more candid you are, the better sense I have of your stress levels and causes. Also, please know that all your responses are completely safe with me. I will not share this information with anyone. And only the results in aggregate will be part of my research paper.

Thank you,
Mrs. Laura Pohopien