



# "But I Worked so Hard" : Perceptions of Effort and Reward in the Academic Environment

Beth Ryszewski, Washburn University

Faculty Advisor: Joanne D. Altman



## ROLE OF EFFORT AND REWARD FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL TO SECONDARY SCHOOL


•There is a huge disparity between instructor and student perceptions regarding the role of effort and performance in college

- Instructors place a much greater weight on performance versus effort, in comparison to students
- Instructors feel that to earn an A, students should put forth much more time (in hours studied) per week than students
- Instructors think that students' total weekly amount of time spent on school work is higher than student perceptions

(Zinn, 2008 ; Adams, 2005)

•The role and emphasis of effort and performance changes as students progress through their academic careers

### •Elementary School

- The relationship between the role of effort and ability is related to age (Benbow et al., 2008)
- In elementary school, children are reinforced for their effort because they are learning skills.
- Grading systems are primitive: 

### •Middle School

- Teachers reward students for mastering skills and overall improvement (Kelly, 2008)

- Grading system also reflects this change in emphasis to product: **A, B, C, D, F**

### •High School

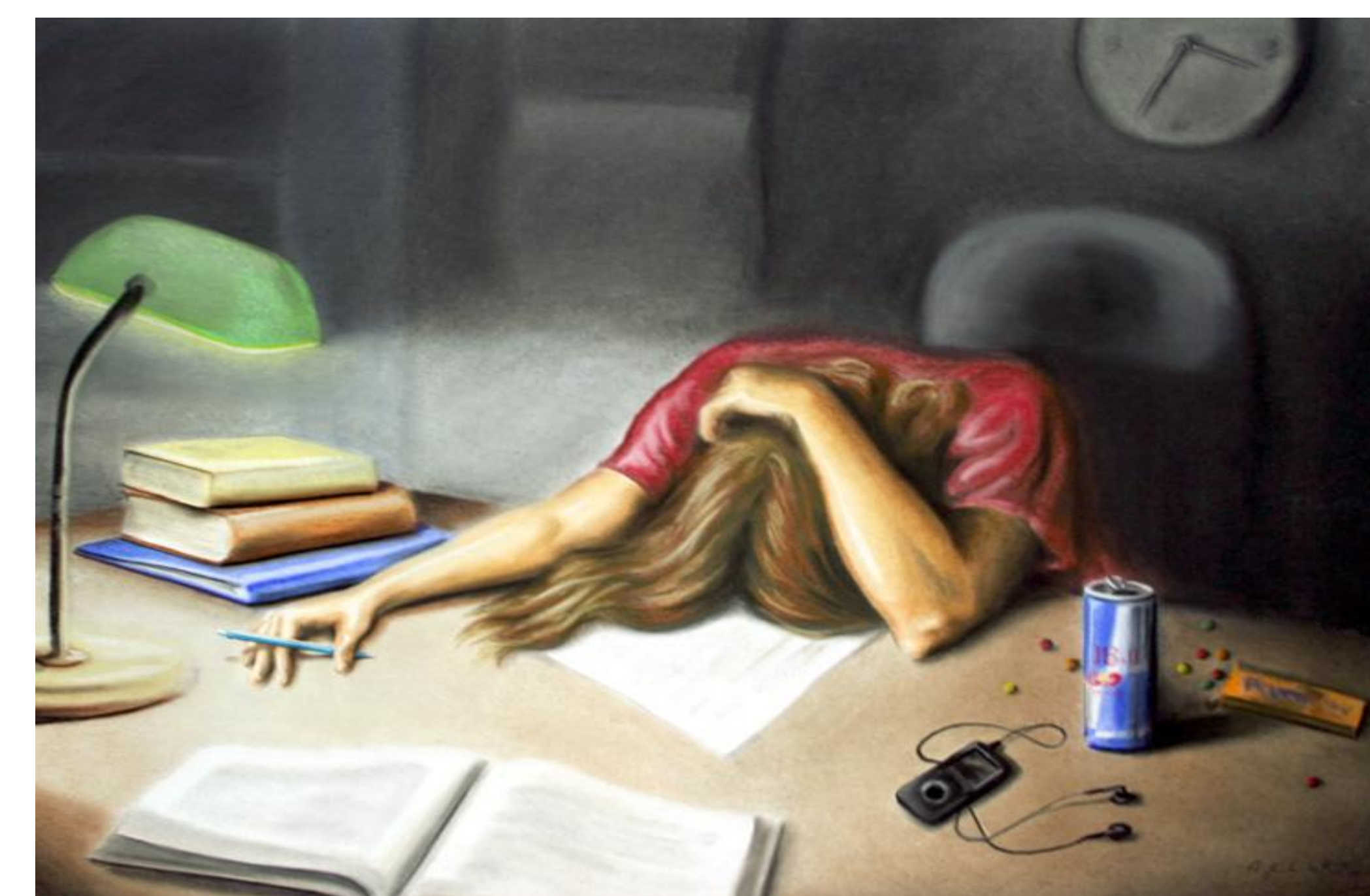
- If this progression were to continue, you would expect to see that by high school the emphasis would now be on product– but this DOES NOT HAPPEN!
- Students begin to disengage, and this only escalates from Freshman to Senior year.
- Teachers inflate grades→ a student does 'B;' work but is rewarded the 'A'

(Smith et al., 2009)

**This 'break' in the progression indicates that there is a developmental breakdown somewhere between middle School and High School.**

## THE DISPARITY BETWEEN STUDENT & TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

	Students	Instructors
<b>Effort</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Performance</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>83%</b>



## THE DISPARITY BETWEEN STUDENT & TEACHER PERCEPTIONS & HOMEWORK

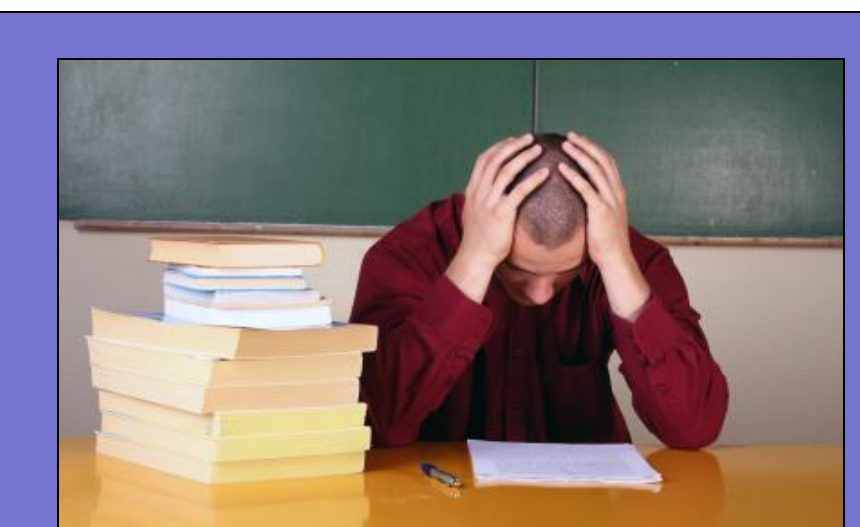
	Study Hrs/week per class	Total weekly class work
<b>Students</b>	<b>6hrs</b>	<b>14hrs</b>
<b>Instructors</b>	<b>9hrs</b>	<b>20hrs</b>

## WHAT CAUSES THIS DISCONNECT?

One explanation is that it is the characteristics of the Millennial Generation

- Narcissistic
- Egotistical (self-liking)
- lower self reliance ( lower internal locus of control)
- Increased importance of leisure time
- Greater expectations of work/life balance
- And expect greater salaries

(Twenge & Campbell, 2008, 2009)



## EXAMPLES OF THESE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

### •Expectations of minimal effort

- Just showing up for class may be seen as putting forth lots of effort.

### •Academic Entitlement

- Campbell et al. (2009) defined academic entitlement as: the tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without taking personal responsibility for achieving that success

- Commonly seen where students feel that

- "I paid for this course, I bought the grade"
- "I got As in high school, I should get them now!"

### •Expectations of success

- Students over-rate their anticipated course success
- In Introductory psychology classes, 95.5% expected a grade of B or better
- Especially true with individuals who have lower cumulative GPAs

- these individuals differ in their learning skills
- how much effort they feel they need to exude to achieve a grade
- And nearly 30 – 40% FAIL!!!

(Bigatti et al., 2006)

Because of this disconnect, the subsequent transition into college is devastating for many

## WILL THE VIEW THAT EFFORT IS WHAT IS REWARDED (ATTITUDE IN COLLEGE) CARRY-OVER INTO THE BUSINESS WORLD?

•There is some evidence that it may:

- We are changing the business world to accommodate the Millennials
- Study by Twenge & Campbell (2009) found that this generation has:
  - A high need for praise
  - Difficulty accepting criticism
  - High expectations
  - And commonly partake in 'job hopping'
- \*Suggested that managers should expect to see more employees with these characteristics, and should implement plans to accommodate these individuals.
- Also seen in study of nurse retention where:
  - Nurses who felt high levels of effort / reward imbalance felt high levels of job strain and stress (Lavori-Tremblay et al., 2008)
  - Suggested to managers that they should understand this trend, & implement programs to alleviate these tensions

## RESEARCH CURRENTLY UNDERWAY AT WASHBURN UNIVERSITY

•We are looking to see if this attitude does indeed transfer from college into the business world

•Participants for our study were:

- Students, faculty and staff, and businessmen and women

•Participants completed one of two surveys, either academically or professionally oriented.

•Example from Professionally oriented survey:

•"A student takes a course and performs unsatisfactory, failing to meet the minimum course requirements. At the same time, he or she puts a great deal of effort into the course. What grade would you recommend the student receive, and how much relative weight (%) should the faculty give performance and effort?"

•Results pending

## SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

•In the long run, who should adjust? Should it be the millennials or earlier generations?

- Most likely outcome is that we will have to reach a compromise. As the literature has shown, if we fail to do this, only more frustration and disappointment may be expected for both instructors and students.