

THE UNDERGRADUATE

Sleeping Smarter

by ARIANNE R. COHEN '03

EARLY FRESHMAN YEAR, in order to experience *all* that college had to offer, I decided to cut sleep out of my life entire-

ly. Having over-committed myself to an array of activities so wide that multiple meetings overlapped each evening, I faced the daily interference of my academic life with my social and extracurricular lives—I was running short on time. Meanwhile, sleep was taking up a third of my life. So why not scrap it?

To my 18-year-old mind, this solution made sense. It also made sense to one of my four roommates. We were the Sleepless Duo of Wigglesworth G-32.

Every night, our evening would begin with the cue of our “healthy” roommate—we’ll call her Healthy Hilary—

going to sleep. She was the one who always went to bed around 9 p.m. and seemed to enjoy both eating well and natural, spontaneous exercise. I heckled her constantly for these tastes.

While she slumbered deeply, our other two roommates would come in and out, some nights sleeping, some nights not, always stopping to chat with the Duo. As for us, we would spend the early evening either away at meetings or procrastinating with phone calls, AOL Instant Messenger,

NBC “Must-See TV,” and popcorn. Around 11:30 p.m. or so, the studying would begin, quickly turning into late-night bonding

all-nighter. (As a result of this nutritional regimen, I proceeded to go above and beyond the proverbial “freshman 15” to gain the “freshman 20.”)

We also made sure to spend a hefty chunk of our time dozing off and complaining, so confused that we regularly forgot the paragraph we’d just written.

(This description might imply that I was actually friends with my Duo partner. I’m not sure that “friend” would be quite the word to describe the situation, as my sleepless roommate—let’s call her Susie Sleepless—was a fanatically conservative Christian Asian pre-med from Alaska, and I was a typical liberal-minded jock from New York. Though she was nice, we had not a single common interest or activity, and I had the bad

habit of offending her regularly with the freethinking sentences that mercilessly popped out of my mouth. But relationships—along with everything else—tend to blur in the late hours of sleeplessness, so we were friends.)

After a full night of procrastination and studying, I would collapse into bed around 4 or 5 a.m., only to drag myself *back* out of bed at 6:45 a.m. to make my 7 a.m. monitoring shift at Malkin Athletic Center, where I would fall asleep every few



over problem sets and papers begging not to be written, not to mention Conan O’Brien and that really awful talk show that comes on afterward.

When our stomachs surprised us by growling eight hours after dinner, we made late-night scavenging expeditions to Store 24, where I would spend unnecessary money on two-liter bottles of Diet Coke and those suspiciously fat-free Wow! potato chips, counting on this quality nutrition to pull me through my

minutes while sitting straight up on a metal stool for two hours, before heading off to class. Accordingly, I considered myself one of Harvard's hardest working, most self-sacrificing students.

This pattern continued through first semester, until my mother told me that I looked "like death" during a vacation, at which point I upped my sleep to around five or six hours a night. (I continued to sleep 18 hours a day over vacations, spurring my mother to accuse Harvard of making her daughter "boring.") I was permanently exhausted, frequently returning to my room to take naps in the tiny gaps of time between classes and commitments, but so was the rest of the student body. This was normal.

Meanwhile, Susie Sleepless often never made it to bed, continuing to study with her friends through dawn. Her eyes were always partially puffed shut, and midway through first semester, Susie's Chinese teacher made her an appointment to see the dean because she kept falling asleep in class. Though the other roommates and I thought this was hilarious, we did express concern about Susie to our proctor multiple times. Susie, however, didn't seem to find her lifestyle problematic or (gasp) self-defeating, and her lack of sleep became another point of bonding for our room—particularly Susie's habit of blurrily emerging midday from her room to say, "Oh no! I just slept through ____!" She was just another overworked Harvard student.

THE COLLEGE has apparently taken notice of its sleepless students. Dean Harry R. Lewis headlined the spring/summer 2001 *Parents Newsletter* with an article entitled "Nocturnal Harvard," outlining the sleep schedule of the average Harvard student, as well as the University's struggle to respond. His summary: "Many students ought to be doing fewer things better, and sleeping more." A similar letter encouraging healthy sleep patterns was sent to this year's incoming freshmen. Meanwhile, professors continue to be surprised by how many lights are still on in the Yard in the wee hours of the morning and are regularly quoted in the *Crimson* on the number of students dozing during lectures, not to mention their distress at being considered brutal for scheduling pre-11 A.M.

classes. In fact, professor of Latin Kathleen Coleman wrote a *Crimson* op-ed last year begging students to sleep.

Though dozing through *early* classes is nothing new for undergraduates, the vast shift to *later* dozing in the past decade can be partially attributed to the Internet, which sucks hours away from student life. The school has responded to the new always-connected student lifestyle with all-night library hours during reading and exam periods, as well as a "fly-by" lunch service that allows late-sleeping students to take classes through lunchtime and still enjoy a quick meal.

Dining Services has also answered its always-awake-and-hungry student body with nightly Brain Breaks, a wonderful (and well-timed, because Store 24 has closed) snack served at 9 five nights a week in Annenberg Hall and the Houses. Though Brain Break has done a lot to reduce midnight snack treks off-campus by offering students much-needed healthy food, the fact remains that Harvard students are probably among the most sleep-deprived people in the world. Undergraduates spend the vast majority of their waking hours in a fog so thick they don't know they're in it, holding onto their coffees and Cokes with a death grip, falling asleep all over the campus, making avoidable errors, breaking appointments, and becoming unnecessarily distressed, all because they're not sleeping enough.

Mood and motivation, both of which are pivotal in the stressful environment induced by the Yard, are the first to be affected by lack of sleep; not to mention intellectual accuracy (a desirable attribute at one of the world's premier universities), which plummets without adequate rest; and general energy, a much-needed source of strength to get students through 16-hour days of classes, meetings, practices, and homework.

The funny thing is, Harvard students themselves have no idea how tired they are. They honestly think that one eight-hour night or a quick hour-long nap should wake them back up again, erasing all sleep debt. Weekends provide little refuge after five days of burning the midnight oil, as many students enjoy a social life that involves staying up even later than normal, as well as some alcohol.

(Compounding the problem, the effects of alcohol are significantly increased by sleep debt.) Students have a good time hanging out on the weekends, then stay up all night on Sunday to catch up for Monday classes, waking up bright and early in a true state of delirium. The sleepless cycle continues.

MY WHOLE LIFE CHANGED one day in the used-books section of Harvard Book Store. I'm a longtime impulse book buyer. I like to purchase overly thick books on interesting topics that I think I should read. Instead, I have piles of never-opened books on my bookshelf with titles like *The History of God* and *Women Who Kill*.

On this particular day, I picked up a book entitled *The Promise of Sleep*, by William Dement, the resident sleep guru at Stanford University. It was 450 pages long, a likely prospect to end up in a permanent bookshelf pile, right above *Dengue and Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever*.

To avoid this sad event, I made myself put the book back and went to Widener. Of course, of the 13 million books in the Harvard College Library system, *that* book was not there. So I went back and bought it.

And I read it. Twice.

I was enthralled. Dement's book actually explained the science of sleep to me, a far cry from the University Health Services placards on the dining-hall tables that tell me to get eight hours of sleep and "avoid caffeine after 11 A.M." (Yeah, right.)

One would think that with sleep supposedly occupying a third of our time, the topic would be taught somewhere in school, or at least written about frequently. But no. I consider myself a well-read, educated person, and never before had I heard that eight hours of nightly sleep is the number-one lifestyle habit correlated with longevity. (If the UHS placard had said that, I would at least have taken notice.) Never before had anyone explained to me that each waking hour accrues one half-hour of sleep debt, and that unless that debt is slept off each night, it will continue to grow until the body collapses and forces itself to sleep. Sleep debt works in opposition to daily clock-dependent alerting cycles—which pump vari-

ous hormones into the bloodstream—most notably awakening signals in the morning and early evening. This changes how tired one feels at various points of the day, and explains why after two adjacent all-nighters freshman year, I still felt wide awake at 9:30 A.M., a feat I'd previously attributed to “magic.”

Never had anyone mentioned that based on these two systems, we each have our own points of peak alertness, during which it's best to do most accuracy-dependent work. (I discovered that I tend to do all paper-writing during my two daily slumps in alertness.) I had honestly believed that I was more tired on Saturdays because I'd slept “too much” (which isn't really possible), and that adults are just supposed to be tired during the day—not true—because staring at a computer screen is somehow a tiring activity.

Amusingly, early sleep researchers at Stanford used undergraduates as test subjects in research experiments for years, unaware that the data generated might not necessarily represent that of the general population due to severe sleep deprivation. One luxury mattress company was extremely upset to find that Stanford Sleep Clinic test subjects slept just as well on cold concrete floors as they did on the company's state-of-the-art mattresses—which would not have happened had non-sleep-deprived subjects been used. Tired undergraduates were able to fall asleep on concrete in minutes.

During my two weeks of reading this book—full of studies showing that undergraduates are unable to gauge how tired they are and are incompetent at predicting when they might doze off—I slept off years of sleep debt. Suddenly, boring lectures weren't boring anymore. I didn't nod off during dull reading assignments. My studies—even the Core course I'd long written off as “pointless”—became interesting. And I began to get my work done in half the time, without daily hours of staring off into space.

WHEN I SAY, “*I am a new wu-mun*,” in the thickest Southern accent I can muster as I try to get my friends to read the book, I'm only half joking. I feel like a new person.

Last semester, I shopped a morning

Drying Out “The Game”

Reacting swiftly to the alcohol-related problems at last November's edition of The Game (see “Unsavoury Record,” January-February, page 83), College administrators put new policies in place for future contests at Harvard Stadium. In December, dean of the College Harry R. Lewis let it be known that henceforth, kegs would be prohibited in the Soldiers Field area and the parking lots. That ban applies to everyone: alumni, stu-

dents, and visitors from Yale. The policy, incorrectly headlined in the *Crimson* as “Alcohol to Be Off-Limits at Future Harvard-Yale Game Tailgate Parties,” does not govern bottles and cans, nor is it a prohibition of alcoholic beverages.

As a related measure, any pregame parties planned by undergraduates will be relocated to Soldiers Field from the Business School parking lot. That move, Lewis explained, will bring students closer to other Game events; eliminate the risk of students crossing North Harvard Street traffic to get to the Stadium; and make it easier for the Harvard University Police Department (HUPD) to control behavior.

House Masters and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Committee on Athletics endorsed the new policy. It was promulgated, Lewis said, because “there were several serious medical emergencies related to alcohol....HUPD was very concerned about the

level of drinking; not only were there a couple of incidents in which students could easily have died, but police were so tied up handling alcohol issues that their capacity to deal with other safety issues was impaired.”

He noted that the policy changes were not directed “specifically or exclusively at students,” although students were clearly among those “who had serious medical emergencies on account of alcohol at this event.” University Health Services reported a spike in alcohol-related student cases during the weekend.

Although Bradford R. Sohn '02—a self-identified minor and therefore ineligible to drink—assailed the policy in a letter to the *Crimson* as “tyrannical” (“revoking from students and alum[s] their liberty to consume beer from kegs at a festive occasion”), it appears to be a benign tyranny to which most subjects assent.

This year's Game is in New Haven, so Yale policies will rule. But come 2002, the revelries outside the Stadium will be more constrained and more carefully patrolled, presumably leaving fans of all ages better able to follow the football being waged on the turf inside.



Some of the detritus left behind after the partying and widespread drinking at The Game last year.

JON CHASE/HARVARD NEWS OFFICE

course in Sanders Theatre with Healthy Hilary. Hilary and I were not the best of friends freshman year, mainly because she slept, so we didn't see very much of each other (and when we did, I was borderline comatose). We actually get along quite well now, and she's the only freshman-year roommate I still hang out with, which is easy because we have similar schedules. She finds it hilarious that I suddenly learned how to sleep—

and talk about it like it's a great epiphany.

Around 10 minutes into class, we spotted Susie Sleepless and three of her friends, all out cold in the balcony. Hilary and I had to crack up. As they dozed in and out of the rest of class, it became clear to me that most undergraduates never make the Great Sleep Epiphany. Good sleeping habits aren't one of those college realizations, like effective laundry sched-

ules, that naturally come with age. Susie and her friends, along with the thousands of students who practice my former habits, are destined to spend their limited time at Harvard walking around in a vague stupor, regularly exclaiming, "Oh no! I just slept through___!"

Arianne R. Cohen is one of this magazine's 2001-2002 Berta Greenwald Leducky Undergraduate Fellows.

SPORTS

The Take-on Artist

Soccer star Joey Yenne eats up defenders, one at a time.

WHETHER OR NOT HER KICK in the womb was especially strong, forward Joey Yenne '03 of the women's soccer team showed competitive fire very early in life. "Joey was a very bright and aggressive child, an independent young thing," recalls her mother, Susan Yenne. In kindergarten, Joey's teacher suggested that the wee girl needed a team sport to channel her intense energies in a social direction.

The team sport that Yenne took up was soccer, and the channeling of energy has worked out fine. Last year, as a mere sophomore, Yenne (YEN-ee) led the Ivy League in goals scored with 11, and

Yenne, the Ivies' top scorer, shows where she likes to put the ball: in the net.

added four assists. Naturally, she made the all-Ivy first team. And after three games this fall, she had amassed 51 ca-

reer points—already eighth on Harvard's all-time list.

Though she has thrived in the team



context, Yenne has also kept her soloist's flair alive. "I'm a take-on artist—I love to take on a defender, one-on-one," she says. "It's great to beat a player and then slot the ball in the corner of the net. I have a drive for goals—when I get the ball, I'm looking to score." Yenne has several talents: she's quick, has an exceptional ability to hold and control the ball with her feet, and can rip hard, accurate shots with either leg.

Her coach, Tim Wheaton, says, "Joey is probably the most competitive athlete I've ever coached—every day, every practice, every drill. She just hates to lose.