

OT graduate students conduct study on sleep deprivation

Dominican University of California occupational therapy students recently conducted a sleep study of more than 300 students to explore ways to improve sleep patterns among college students. The study, which focused on sleep as an everyday ‘occupation’ of life, measured sleep quality and patterns of sleep in undergraduate students, as well as the relationship between sleep, academic self-efficacy, and student characteristics.

“Sleep as an Occupation in College Students: An Exploratory Study” was conducted by Dominican graduate students Amanda Cervantes, Michelle Del Rosario, Carl Fitzgerald, and Lisa Mrsny as their capstone project. Ruth Ramsey, program director and chair of [Dominican's OT Department](#), was their adviser in the [School of Health and Natural Sciences](#).

Study participants were asked to complete a standardized measure of sleep, the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, and also to answer questions about themselves and their sleep habits. Results showed that 65% of the respondents (all Dominican students) reported poor sleep quality, with the average number of sleep hours reported at slightly more than 6.5 hours per night. The results supported existing national evidence suggesting college students are sleep deprived. Many of the students’ sleep issues can be addressed by an occupational therapist, Ramsey said.

“What the study did show us was that there are a significant number of students on our campus who have challenges getting good enough sleep, and we as occupational therapists know, there are some things we can do about that,” Ramsey said.

“Sleep is often overlooked as an occupation,” Ramsey added. “However, occupational therapists can help to improve the performance of sleep as an occupation. Interventions to improve sleep quality can be made through environmental modifications, education, and promotion of good sleeping habits.”

While research shows many college students have poor sleep quality and quantity, there is little research investigating underlying beliefs and attitudes about sleep. A current follow-up study under the supervision of OT department faculty member Susan Morris, is investigating the impact of college student’s beliefs and attitudes on the quality and quantity of their sleep. Dominican students were recruited for the study; the data, collected through interviews and sleep diaries, will be qualitatively analyzed for recurrent themes in the responses.

“Our ultimate goal is to learn more about what creates sleep problems for our students and to develop interventions to help them improve their sleep habits, which will also help them be successful in other areas of their life,” Ramsey said.

For example, poor sleep among college students is often related to today’s technology, with students using computers and mobile devices right up until they go to bed. Many also fail to turn off devices, which contributes to light pollution in a room. Students also need to realize that ‘catching up over the weekend’ is not a good strategy.

“College students often think that if they stay up late during week, they can make up for lost sleep over the weekend. But they can’t make it up. If you accumulate a sleep ‘debt,’ it is not possible to put the money back in the bank. A good night’s sleep is the foundation of good health and college success.”

Dominican students had an opportunity to learn more about sleep on April 9 when the Arianna Huffington’s “Sleep Revolution College Tour” stopped on campus from 4-6 p.m. in Creekside Room. Huffington, chair, president and editor-in-chief of the Huffington Post Media Group, spoke [in the Institute for Leadership Studies’ Spring Lecture Series](#) in Angelico Concert Hall that night. She hosted the “Sleep Revolution College Tour” at Dominican where students won big prizes at the free sleep fair while recharging and relaxing with healthy snacks, pajamas, meditation tools and mind-blowing sleep gadgets from leading tech entrepreneurs. Prizes awarded at the event included a free roundtrip ticket on JetBlue, a \$250 Marriott hotel gift card, a dorm room makeover for two from Remodo, tote bags filled with special

gifts from Lands' End, Spotify, Victoria's Secret and more, and an autographed copy of Arianna's book *The Sleep Revolution*.

In addition, the first 50 attendees received a free ticket to Huffington's lecture in Angelico Hall.

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