

Senioritis: The Science behind the Slump

It can be tough for students to stay motivated throughout the school year and put forth their best work for the duration of two semesters. As the weather changes and that “new year smell” wears off, the reality that hard work is ahead sets in. Once the thought of summer vacation begins to reappear into the heads of struggling students, they are given hope that there is a light at the end of the tunnel that is school work.

Sometimes, this does not, however, motivate them to complete their work to the best of their ability.

Especially for seniors.

Each year, as members of the Senior class who are preparing to graduate inch closer and closer to that magical date, the time begins to pass slower and slower. Work begins to pile up, and there seems to be no motivation to do it. Could this just be sheer laziness, or could it be something deeper, perhaps a mental state known as Senioritis?

The word itself sounds like a sickening condition that may inflict seniors with pain and hopelessness. It is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “an ebbing of motivation and effort by school seniors as evidenced by tardiness, absences, and lower grades.”¹

The main basis of Senioritis is that a student who is soon to graduate does not perform to the standards that they previously did, by failing to come to class, not turning in assignments, or not completing them to the best of their ability. Their motivation to finish out the school year has disappeared, and been replaced by looming anxiety and stress for the future. Perhaps it is the

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/senioritis>

anxiety that comes with finishing college, the stress of starting a new job or getting married, or the sheer uncertainty of turning the page in life.

Whatever the case, senioritis is alive and well, and affects much more in a person's life than they may think.

Dr. Elizabeth Sites, who could be found sipping tea in her economy-sized cubicle in the Liberty Psychology Department, looked to stress as a main cause for senioritis.

"There's good stress and bad stress involved with it," she said. "Emotionally, they've had so much stress they, almost shut down from the stress. It's not that they go through more stress, it's almost like they shut off."

Sites, who holds a Ph.D. from LU in Professional Counseling, and has been instructing classes like "Behavioral Management" since 2002, connected the science behind stress to the major changes that come with finishing college.

"With stress comes fight or flight, the adrenaline kicking in and you either run away from the whole thing or you want to fight about it. It wouldn't surprise me is the additional stress of "I'm graduating, this is my last chance, I have to get a job, I have to go to graduate school" (had something to do with it)."

From a mental standpoint, Sites said that the major transition from college to beyond was also a major contributor.

"Even though they're (seniors) saying they're shutting down, there's a lot of stress, more on them than there would be if they were just coming back to school next year."

For soon-to-be-graduating senior Janna Holcombe, this is all too true, as the future inches closer, and new beginnings loom at the end of her collegiate career.

“I would say I feel more stressed. I think that all of the transitions at one time, knowing that it’s such a big change that’s coming, does affect the way that I’m working because I’m much more nervous. I’m pre-occupied with the emotions that go into transitioning.”

Holcombe was quick to admit that she had caught senioritis, recognizing the signs of her condition.

“I think I have it for sure because I don’t want to do any of my homework, and I’m not typically a procrastinator, but I’ve been procrastinating on every single one of my assignments.

Personally, I’ve never felt like this before.”

With her future set out before her, Holcombe explained that she lacks any motivation to compete her work.

“I pushed through (before). I was much more motivated to get done because I knew I still had time here,” she said. “Now, I’ve already accepted a job, and it just feels like it doesn’t matter what my grade looks like.”

Senior Taylor McCallman echoed Holcombe’s words, and also admitted to being a victim of senioritis.

“Most certainly, I definitely think I have it (Senioritis),” McCallman said. “[because] I’m pretty much moved on with life. I’m engaged, I know what I’m doing after this, I’m accepted into law school, so all of the stuff that I’m doing right now seems really irrelevant and time consuming.

It's an everyday struggle to want to come in and do work that I just don't care about anymore, because my future's already set in stone"

McCallman also confirmed Site's theory that stress was the main factor behind the condition.

"(my) Stress level is at an all-time high," He said. "It has nothing to do with school, it's just (the) future. It's a lot at one time, so it's definitely something that' if you don't manage it at one time, it can really stress you out."

As stress seems to be the main factor behind senioritis, many students use different outlets to avoid giving attention to their final assignments, instead choosing to relax or "check out", in light of the road ahead.

"I've been watching a lot more Netflix because I have more work to do, Holcombe admitted. "I think the deeper root of the senioritis is the fact that I'm going through so many transitions, so I know that has affected my behavior in that I'm a bit more anxious and a little bit more nervous about things."

Strategic Communications Professor Dr. David Allison suggested that the sheer thought of life after college drives students to turn in early from school work.

"Senioritis for some students is evidence by a total separation of life and academics," Allison Said. "Some seniors are very driven and want to achieve in their classrooms, and some are so focused on being out of college that they live as though they're already out, and their grades show it."

Allison, who has taught seniors throughout much of his 39 year tenure at Liberty, combined seniors' exit from college and experience in time management when it comes to work to explain the rationale behind the lack of production.

"They're better at postponing and better at making excuses," He said. "I think they're better at rationalizing."

Allison also listed four major factors that he felt were key contributors to Senioritis, which included the weather, romance, job searching, and what he called "non-classroom activities."

"I think for students who have senioritis, [I think] they've already checked out and they just want to get through it," He said. "So they'll do whatever is necessary to get through, but they're not going to worry about it."

Ultimately, senioritis can be caused by stress, anxiety, or just the act of looking ahead to the future. According to Sites, it is something that is quite common for students preparing to graduate.

"I think it's a real state," She said. "It's almost a developmental issue. If you come to college and you complete it, you're going to go through these developmental stages of college."

So for those nearing the end of their collegiate careers in the coming weeks, beware of the urge to avoid completing assignments and neglecting other responsibilities as part of the grip that is senioritis. Not everyone will be affected by it according to Site, but the transition from college to the outside world can be one that can have a metamorphic effect on a graduate.

"Part of it is your personality," Site said. "Nobody stays a college student forever."