

Night People Operating in a Morning Oriented World: Recommendations for Accommodating Students' Natural Tendencies in Academic Settings

Ashlyne I. O'Neil, Joan C. Craig & Kathryn D. Lafreniere
Psychology Department, University of Windsor

Background

It is often difficult for evening-type undergraduate students, who are still establishing work routines and habits, to actually work when they are most cognitively proficient (in the evening), because they are surrounded by an environment that reinforces getting up early, having 8:30am classes, and being in bed before midnight. However, this is less than ideal for those who would more naturally wake up around 10 or 11am, but not go to sleep until 3am. These students are often forced into circumstances in which they are not fully functioning (e.g., 8:30am classes), and by the time they would normally be at their "cognitive peak" they are too tired and have to retreat to bed earlier than they would if they were able to follow their own chronotype. It is important for students to know, that even though they are evening people living in a morning-oriented world, they can learn how to operate efficiently and effectively by embracing and accommodating their own tendencies.

Past research on chronotype has focused on demographics, cognitive performance, work schedules, and personality characteristics (Cavallera & Giudici, 2008).

In the current study, 242 undergraduate students completed the **LOGO II Scale**, **Effortful Control subscale of the Adult Temperament Questionnaire**, **BFI-10**, **Procrastination Assessment Scale for Students**, **Cognitive Appraisal of Risky events**, and the **Composite Morningness Scale**.

Acknowledgements

This project was funded by the *Centred on Learning Innovation Fund* through the University of Windsor's Centre for Teaching and Learning.

Findings



Morningness was related to:

Conscientiousness ($r = .23, p < .01$)
Learning Behaviour ($r = .22, p < .01$)
Learning Orientation ($r = .13, p = .05$)
Activation Control ($r = .29, p < .01$)
Attentional Control ($r = .25, p < .01$)
Effortful Control ($r = .26, p < .01$)



Eveningness was related to:

Neuroticism ($r = .15, p = .02$)
Grade-oriented attitudes ($r = .20, p < .01$)
Grade Orientation ($r = .19, p < .01$)
Academic Risk Taking ($r = .19, p < .01$)
Procrastination ($r = .24, p < .01$)



Interpretation

Students who identify more as "night-owls" are more likely to procrastinate, engage in academically risky behaviour, have neurotic tendencies, and have higher grade orientation (the desire to get good grades, regardless of comprehension).

It may be that the lower ability to effectively and efficiently control attention, displayed by these students, contributes to the inability to function properly during the day when there are more distractions.

Academic risk taking, such as procrastination and not studying enough, may be symptoms of eveningness and should be addressed to maximize student potential.

Because these students often try to force themselves into being morning people (since that is the way most of the world works), they often end up being awake too early to properly function, and by the time they might be at their cognitive peak, they are too tired. Therefore they miss out on the best hours for productivity, and it would really be best to accommodate their own chronotypes instead.

Recommendations

Students...

Students who identify as night-people and find it difficult to function according to our morning-oriented world, should consider the following:

Identify prime cognitive functioning hours...

When do you naturally wake?
When do you naturally fall asleep?
What time of day do you feel most alert and cognitively functional?

Identify fellow classmates who also function later in the day or evening, and set up study or work-groups that accommodate your natural tendencies.

If it is necessary to work during non-optimal functioning times, consider taking measures to maximize productivity. For example, since night-owl students tend to have lower attentional control, it may be necessary to be in more quiet/secluded environments with fewer distractions.

Respond to emails, social media, etc., immediately after waking. This will save your "prime time" later in the day to work on academic papers, studying, etc.

Faculty...

Faculty can play a key role in accommodating students' natural chronotypes by considering the following:



What do you think?

Add your own strategies or thoughts below

Acknowledge that procrastination, and working close to deadlines may be a compensatory strategy for night people who may require the stress of impending deadlines to focus their attention. Consider creating late-night deadlines to accommodate students who might be up later working.

When assigning group-tasks, allow students to identify others who would work best together, according to chronotype. There are always students in both sub-groups and meetings will be more easily scheduled this way.

Try to hold office hours at different times of the day, but also consider your own chronotype, since you will be most useful to students during your own "prime hours".

When advising, acknowledge that academic risk taking may be a 'symptom' of chronotype, and provide the student with appropriate suggestions such as those listed to the left.