

Study break

Exams | *Rachael Duane*

School-sponsored stress relievers include puppies, coffee and free food



In this May 2, 2012 photo, law students Josh Richey, 22, right, and Lindsay Stewart, 26, play with Hooch, a 19-month-old golden retriever, right, and Stanley, a 4-month-old golden retriever, in between final exams at Emory University in Atlanta. (AP Photo/David Goldman)

Caroline Perkins saw the cluster of puppies on the quad and couldn't resist. She paused from her busy schedule and studies to spend some time with the fuzzy, tail-wagging pack. Walking into a dorm just isn't the same as being greeted at home by her three, loving dogs. But Perkins, a freshman at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C., found that just twenty minutes of cuddling with one of Forsyth Humane Society's puppies provided the perfect exam-week stress-reliever.

For students in the midst of a week defined by the impending doom of final exams, every study break counts. Grabbing some coffee, watching that latest episode of their favorite television show, or taking a walk around campus may be adequate diversions from studying, but students and administrators are seeking to provide new ways to maximize students' peace of mind.

Wake Forest is just one of several schools that regularly invite local animal shelters to bring dogs to campus to give students a welcome study break. The ability to lighten burdens is simply the nature of man's best friend, said junior Leann Westin, who volunteers regularly at the Humane Society. As pack animals, dogs naturally empathize, she said.

"It's just a comforting thing, getting to relate with someone like you would with a friend," she said. "And sometimes it's easier because you don't have to use words."

Junior Kristie Chan said the event was just the distraction from "normal" that she needed.

"It was a great environment-especially in the middle of exam week," she said. "It's good to give people something to look forward to."

Meanwhile, students at College of Charleston also will enjoy some puppy play time-in addition to free coffee and cupcakes, massages, and pancakes with the president throughout exam week.

Senior Ingrid Gambee said she finds some of the events more worthwhile than others. While the puppies are cute and fun, they couldn't play with every student on a campus of 10,000 people. But for students so busy with studying that planned meals tend to fall on the back-burner, free food and coffee are ideal.

"It's nice knowing that there's always a little break to look forward to," Gambee said. "I think they help make exam week more bearable, so I definitely think it's worth it for the school to provide them."

But some students find themselves wondering why efforts to encourage them in their studies are limited to the final week of the semester. At Wake Forest, administrators have taken the initiative to change that pattern.

This month, as students walk by the quad, they pass a carnival stand of board games, dozens of folding chairs and tables, and an array of sports equipment. The recreational resources are the first phase of a project designed to give students more flexible places to sit and enjoy campus outdoors.

"The whole idea of the project is to give students options for ways to take a break during the day and enjoy the campus when they have a few minutes to spare," said Kim Struglinski, a Wake Forest fellow who is working closely with consulting firm Biederman Redevelopment Ventures on the effort.

"We know that life at a prestigious university like Wake Forest can be stressful," said Dan Biederman, head of BRV. "By providing amenities that make the public spaces on campus more comfortable and more fun, we hope to help relieve some of that pressure."

Students are starting to pick up on the idea, stopping between classes for a quick game of Connect Four or Guess Who?

"It gives us some play opportunities on campus," said senior Katie Kron. "We often forget how important play is."