

**ARE YOU SMARTER  
THAN A 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADER**

The winner of the first  
**ARE YOU SMARTER THAN A 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADER**  
inter-hall competition is  
**JACK MARKELON**  
of Centennial Hall

Other finalists included:

**Sophie Orejola** — Pinney Hall

**Marshall Littlefield** — Litchfield Hall

**Alex Ferraiuolo** — Grasso Hall

Congratulations to everyone who participated in the program!

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# The Handout

NOVEMBER 2021

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### Volume 10, #3

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# 1 | Let's See the First Generation Succeed Here at WCSU!

**Vivian Pereira,**  
Centennial Hall ARM



Being a first-generation student is a huge accomplishment in college. By definition, being a first-generation student means that both your parents did not complete a 4-year college degree. Without all the help that other students have from family who have attended college, first-gen students persevere regardless of the lack of assistance. They walk into college with a goal mentality, causing them to have a higher satisfaction rate when being

compared to their peers. Still, for all of their successes, more than one in three first-gen students leaves college before graduation.

First-gen students withstand many pressures along with the positive impacts they feel. That pressure would cause almost any student to drop out and feel extremely challenged. Some of the psychological challenges include:

- ✓ Guilt and family conflict - student's focus shifts from family obligations and helping out financially at home to being in school full time.
- ✓ Shame – of being the first in their family to choose this route, and often feeling outcast by their peers.
- ✓ Confusion – it is tough with no familial help to know what to expect and what is offered at school. Peers can be helpful, but first-generation students are often afraid or embarrassed to ask.
- ✓ Anxiety – which is caused by many things related to academic achievement, social inclusion, and financial worries, especially paying back loans.

First-gen students also face academic challenges, such as:

- ✓ Being prepared – students may have come from less rigorous schools, or possibly have had lower test scores, leading them to be less confident in their academic success.
- ✓ Difficulties understanding the academic system. Since first-gen students often don't have anyone who's “been there, done that,” they have to look to others to provide that insight.

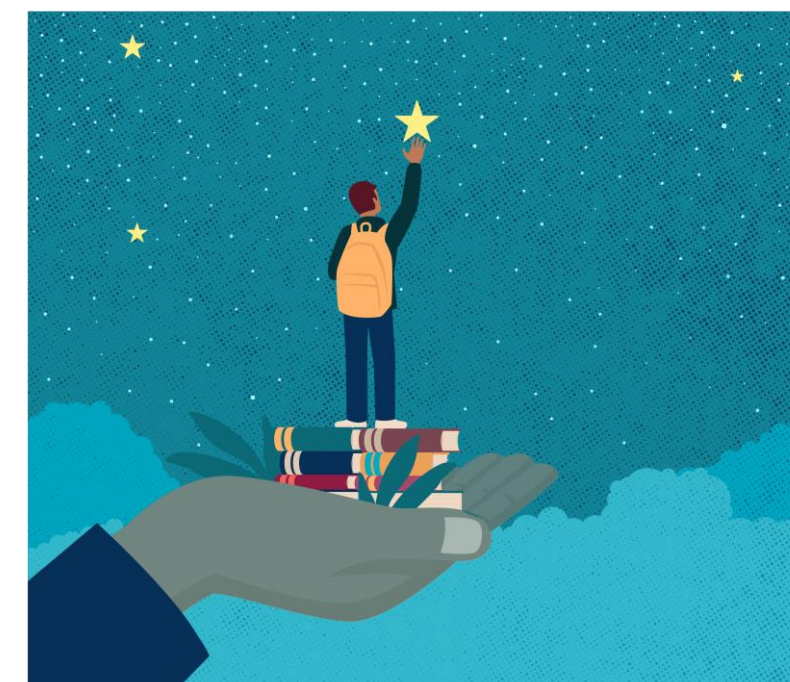
Financial challenges, like:

- ✓ Many first-gen students come from families with lower family income. This means they may need more loans, look for scholarships, and have to work to support themselves in college. Financial burdens like this are why

many of these students leave college early.

Social challenges also are present:

- ✓ Many first-gen students face discrimination, as nearly 1/3 are member of racial or ethnic minority groups. Many face targeting for their minority or lower-income status, causing alienation, isolation, and other things which impact their mental health (which *then* impacts their academic performance).



What are things a first-gen students can do to succeed?

- ❖ Seek support for themselves and their families. WCSU offers guidance through Counseling Services., as well as advisors and other resources. Students can talk about their academics, social

feelings, and economic difficulties. Families can also be helped, with referrals to other specialists outside of WCSU.

- ❖ Have conversations with first-gen students about your experiences. This can help relieve a lot of built-up stress. Students can talk to mentors, faculty, counselors, RAs, ARMs, friends – WCSU is here for you!
- ❖ Make sure to access all the resources you need on campus. From tutoring to PASS, the Career Success Center, or visiting your professors during their office hours, there are people here who want to help. Find them and let them.

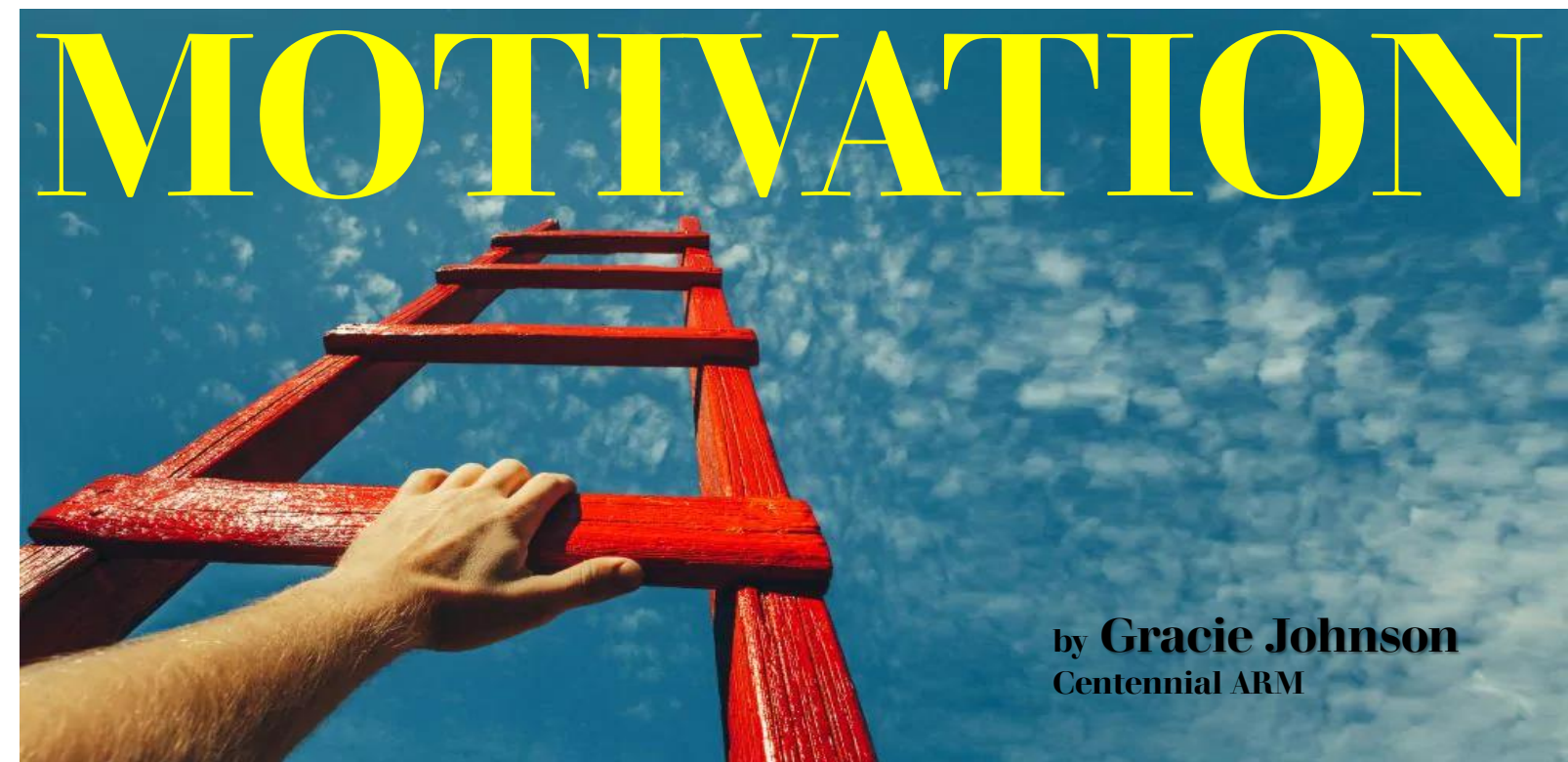
First-gen students – you are not alone here! There are a lot of challenges that have to be conquered to graduate from college. WCSU is here to help you increase your knowledge and broaden your success circle by helping to achieve a profession when you leave here. Each student is a part of our future, and represents our school – we want to see you succeed!

If anyone ever needs help finding a resource, my email is [pereira090@wcsu.edu](mailto:pereira090@wcsu.edu). As a first-generation student, I'd like to say THANK YOU for what WCSU has done for me so far!

Concerned about finals? Take a listen to these two podcasts from Gab & GROW, featuring professors talking about how to prepare for your exams NOW!

<https://soundcloud.com/wcsu-media/gab-grow-preparing-for-finals>

Or  
<https://soundcloud.com/wcsu-media/gab-grow-finals-prep-advice-from-your-professors>



Are you feeling tired and less motivated as the semester goes on? Do you feel that it is harder for you to complete assignments? Your motivation may be fading out as we continue to dive deeper into the semester! Do not worry, as this is a common finding for college students, especially when dealing with tough courses and a long semester without many breaks. Many students also participate in various jobs, sports, and clubs that may interfere with focusing as well. With recovering from midterms, Thanksgiving break coming up, and the semester ending with finals right around the corner, it can be hard to manage a consistent level of motivation with these constant changes. Burnout is not uncommon among college students and can cause a lack of motivation. Some other various causes of dwindling motivation can include procrastination, feeling overwhelmed, or feeling disrupted emotions.

Keep on reading to learn about some tips to stay motivated to finish out the semester strong!

### CHECK IN WITH YOUR REASON WHY

What are your goals and passions? What kind of activities or academic topics excite you? Think about what goals you have set for yourself and keep them in sight. When we lose sight of what we are working towards, it can often leave us questioning why we are putting in such tough work. When it feels like we are working towards nothing, this can make our academics and day to day life become overwhelming and not as exciting. Reminding yourself of the goals you are working towards can help put you back on track.

**Getting ready for your finals? Create your own study guide (1 per course) for your classes using this Study Plan.**



Course: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Test: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

**What will an “A” test look like?**

*Brainstorm your professor’s expectations for this test. What is the format of the test? What clues or information has your professor given in class about what is important to study for this test? What does s/he expect in good answers?*

**In general, what will I need to learn?**

*Come up with a list of 10 – 20 main ideas, key concepts, or topic. These should be general. Many of these ideas or topics may have many subtopics or supporting details. You will get into the details and specifics when you begin to study. Once you have your list, star or highlight the topics that are the most difficult and/or least familiar to you or the material that will take the longest to learn.*

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**How will I study this information in order to learn it fully?**

*Studying different types of information requires you to use a variety of study strategies. Make a list of the study techniques that you will use to learn the material in your list above.*



**TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME:**

When assignments and responsibilities pile up, it can be extremely overwhelming and cause us to shut down. When we are faced with an enormous pile of things to do, it can be hard to know where to start and tasks can seem daunting to us. This can make us feel overwhelmed and can cause procrastination. This lack of motivation can be fixed by doing small bits and pieces at a time. You are not going to get everything done in one day, there is simply not enough time. Instead of trying to get everything done all at once, pick a single place to start. Sometimes picking the easier tasks to do first can help fuel our motivation. Chipping away at small tasks can help remind us that we are capable of being productive and can drive our motivation further! Take it one day, one lecture, one test, or one assignment at a time!



**DON'T FORGET THE PEP TALKS:**



It can place a strain on us when we are hanging on throughout the semester. This can lead to feelings and thoughts such as “I’m not smart enough” or “I can’t do this”. Instead of beating up on yourself, try to switch up your mindset by turning those negative statements into positive statements. This can include something like “I am smart enough and I will pass this test” or “I will be able to push through and make it through this week”. Believe in yourself and your ability to achieve your goals! Be proud of yourself and celebrate your accomplishments, no matter how big or small.

**TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF:**

If you have a lot going on, it is easy to become exhausted, whether it’s physically, emotionally, and/or mentally. It is important to take breaks and not neglect self care! You cannot run on an empty tank. Simply getting enough food, sleep, and exercise are all equally important. The more effort you put into yourself and your mental health, the more effort you will be able to put out into your academics and various life obligations.



# 3 | The Importance of Practicing Gratitude

**Gabriella DeMaro**

Grasso ARM

It's easy to complain about the stress and hardships we face daily. We often forget we have so much to be grateful for, even if it feels like there is nothing. Experiencing gratitude requires us to reflect inwards. This is difficult to do at first but can become a part of a daily routine. It is a selfless act that can be quite contagious. It has numerous health benefits, and can have a positive impact on relationships with others in your life.

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## What is gratitude?

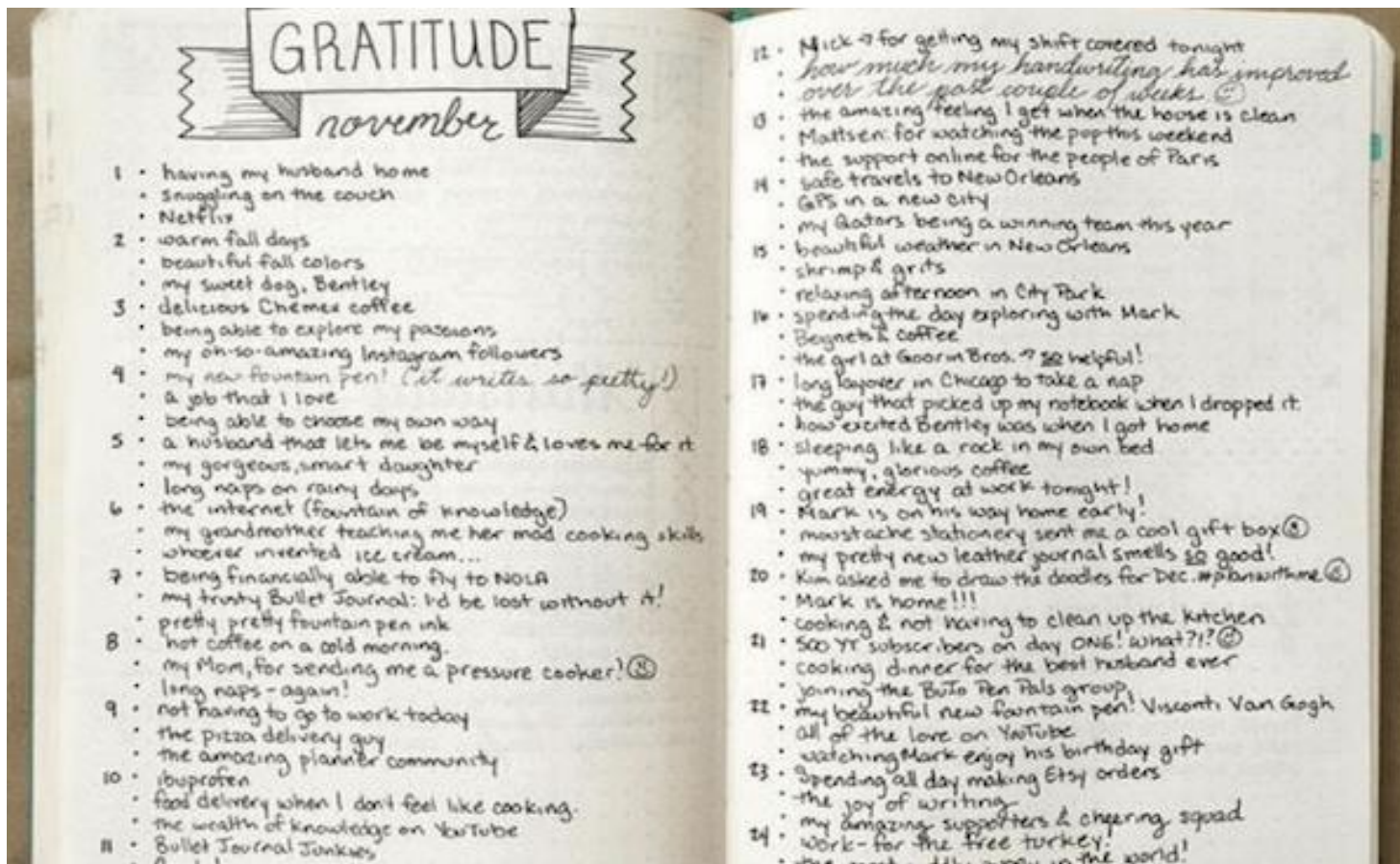
You've probably heard of "giving thanks" around Thanksgiving time. This is a form of gratitude, to say what you're thankful for. Learning to appreciate the good things in your life is a part of the journey, but it is also important to be able to return the kindness we experience. This has begun to be integrated into humanistic therapies for people with depression, anxiety, and other disorders. This is especially helpful for those who feel helpless or pessimistic, as it forces you to find something that is positive about your life.

## Its effect on our brains

In a study conducted on college students who suffered from anxiety and depression it was found that those who kept a gratitude journal were significantly happier than those who only attended therapy. Furthermore, those who practice gratitude give more money to charity and have greater neural sensitivity in the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is associated with learning and decision making.



**Grand Canyon West, Guano Point**  
Hualapai Native American Reservation (Griffin, 2021)



## Ways to practice gratitude

- Keep a gratitude journal.** Every day, write down three things in your life that you're grateful for. It could be small things; like someone stopping by to see you. At the end of the week, reflect on the things you have written down, and set goals for yourself.
- Watch your language.** When bad things happen in your life, don't focus on the negative and talk down on yourself. Remind yourself that obstacles can be overcome, and use positive affirmations.
- Share your gratitude.** Telling others how grateful you are for them can really make someone's day. When a friend or partner does something for you, show your appreciation! If it's too hard for you to do in person, try writing a letter or texting them.
- Acts of kindness.** Do something kind for a person who is struggling. Learn to empathize with others who are having a more difficult time than you are. Gratitude is contagious! If you help someone, they're likely to help someone else in need!

**NOV. 15 - DEC. 7**

## ASK A LIBRARIAN!

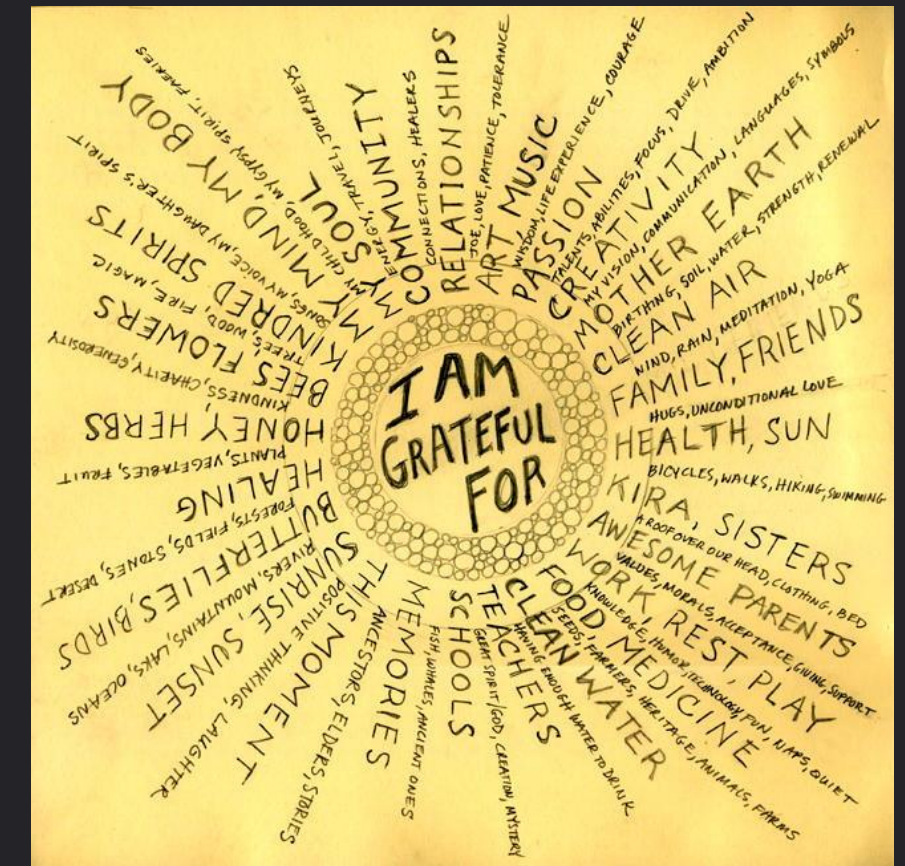
Get help preparing for finals and get rewarded!  
2 ways to participate:

**In-Person:**  
Visit the Haas or Young Library reference desk, chat with the librarian on duty, get a goodie bag, and get entered to win 1 of 9 \$5 Einstein Bagel gift cards!

**Online**  
Use our online chat to ask a question and be entered to win 1 of 9 \$5 Einstein Bagel gift cards!

## Benefits of Gratitude

As stated before, gratitude has been shown to increase our happiness. It has also been shown to reduce our stress levels. A study done with heart failure patients showed they got better sleep, had better moods, and lessened their symptoms of heart failure in less than 8 weeks of journaling. Practicing this can also improve your relationships with your peers. When they see you appreciating them, they're more likely to appreciate you.





At the root of any conversation is the expression of emotions. One of the largest keys to balancing the duality of mental health and academic performance is allowing [your]self to express and process the thoughts and feelings [you] have.



## 4 Seasonal Affective Depression: What It Is and How to Balance

by **Elizabeth Hinds**  
Litchfield & Newbury ARM

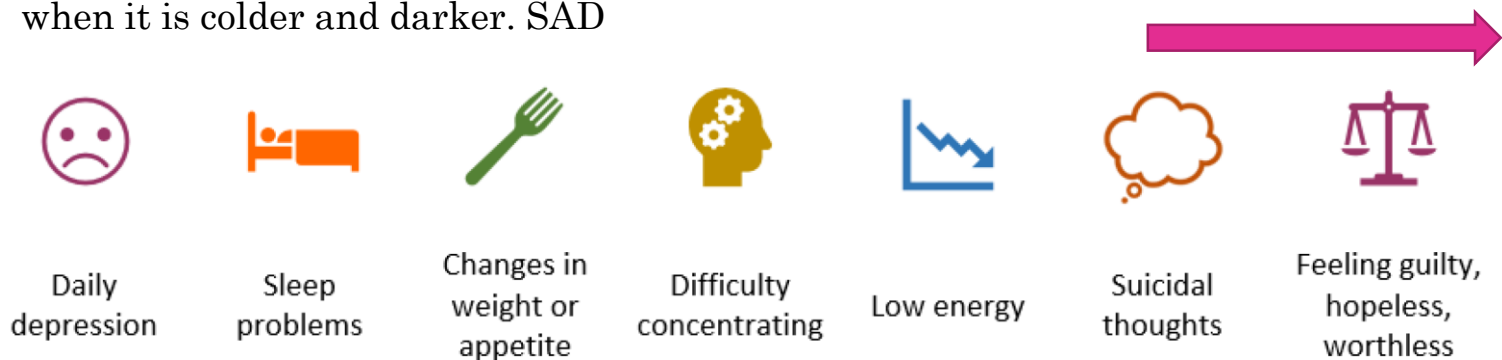
With the November 7<sup>th</sup> Daylight Savings change, many are enjoying an “extra hour” of sleep. Others, however, are facing the daunting reality of a sun that sets by five o’clock. As the daily duration of sunlight decreases, sometimes so does mood. Seasonal Affective Depression [Disorder], or SAD, can play a significant role in not only daily activities, but also in academic performance. It is essential to know that this doesn’t mean there’s anything “wrong” with it. Rather, there are so many ways to support oneself through it!

### What is SAD?

Seasonal Affective Depression (or Disorder), commonly referred to as SAD, is the increase in lower mood based on seasonal changes or characteristics. This can include depression, anxiety, or general heightened emotions. Most individuals who experience SAD experience it during the winter months, when it is colder and darker. SAD

translates into appetite changes, reduced interest in hobbies, and significant disinterest in academics. Sleep becomes irregular, with variations of not sleeping at all to sleeping in excess. Some individuals experience both ends of the sleep irregularity spectrum. While these signs of SAD are slightly alarming, there are hundreds of thousands of cases of SAD, both reported and estimated, each year. Its prevalence is immense, and there is nothing wrong with experiencing it.

When it comes to academic impact from SAD, there is much to be said. Most commonly, students minimize in-class participation, and the quality of their work decreases. As time goes on, students become less likely to submit work or attend class. The interest dwindles, which can feed other aspects of life impacted by depression. In contrast, though it is less common, some students instead immerse themselves in their studies.





The hyper-fixation may be viewed as a positive, but if carried too far, can be indicative of trying to avoid additional problem areas. While SAD is highly common, and the signs of it slightly alarming, not all individuals affected experience major depressive states that last for long periods of time.

### How do I Balance it All?

The first and most important step to balancing mental health and academics though SAD is knowing that any emotions are valid. These experiences, as confusing as they may be, are real and completely acceptable. Once that recognition sets in, the technicalities of balancing can take place. Because students are people first, “self care” can be very beneficial to easing a lowered mood. This doesn’t have to look like the face masks and journaling that are commonly associated with the term. This can look like taking a long shower, listening to favorite songs, exercising, or wearing a favorite outfit. Small tasks like these can boost one’s mood more

than most would think. However, it is important to repeat these tasks. Self care is a routine, a habit. Continuing such care over an extended period of time is what will lead to the best management of SAD. Sometimes, though, self care isn’t quite enough to manage the emotions that can run rampant through a person. An additional option to this is communication with others. This can mean confiding in a friend, family member, or campus resource. As the stigma surrounding counseling lessens, it is becoming an even more beneficial avenue. At the root of any conversation is the expression of emotions. One of the largest keys to balancing the duality of mental health and academic performance is allowing oneself to express and process the thoughts and feelings they have. If personal self care is not enough, bringing another person or people into the circle may be more productive.



Check out this video about SAD treatment options.



“ Self care is a routine, a habit. Continuing such care over an extended period of time is what will lead to the best management of SAD. ”

Putting academics into this dynamic can be tricky. Much like communicating can help with the mental health aspect, communicating with professors regarding the necessary timing logistics may be of benefit. While nothing is guaranteed, being proactive and trying to plan for what efforts may need to be made will likely stand out. Professors do acknowledge that students are complete people, much like they are. Aside from this, students can consider spacing out study time and personal time, scheduling exactly when specific assignments will be completed, and maybe a small self reward after accomplishing it all.

Of course, there are a plethora of resources available on campus. While so

many are ready and willing to help, there is much to be said about the capabilities that each person has within themselves. Balancing the intricacies of mental health and academic progress is no small feat, but with effort and support, it can most definitely be done.

### Helpful Resources:

- Math Clinic: <https://www.wcsu.edu/math/math-clinic/>
- Tutoring Resource Center: <https://wcsu.edu/trc>
- Counseling Services: <https://www.wcsu.edu/counseling/>
- Your ARM(s)!



# 5 Ways to Give Back During the Holidays

by **Finan Deakin**  
Pinney ARM

As Thanksgiving and Christmas approach, it is important to give back in order to help those in need and those less fortunate during these times. I have put together a list of ways we can all give back to help make someone's holiday season a little better!

## Donate Your Clothes

Donating your clothes can help those who are not able to afford new clothes during the winter season. Not only can it provide those in need with warm and comfy clothes for the upcoming cold season, they could be used as presents. Many kids are not as fortunate to be provided with new clothes. By donating your clothes during the holidays, children can be surprised with them on Christmas day. Next time you are cleaning your room, go through your clothes and think about donating stuff you no longer wear.



## Volunteer

During the holidays, the need for volunteers increases. By setting aside time out of your week to help volunteer you could make a big impact. For example, volunteering at a local food bank could help provide families with food to enjoy and celebrate the holidays. By volunteering at a homeless shelter, you might be able to provide help and support to those in need of a place to stay. There are so many places that need help during this time of the year. Spread the holiday joy and volunteer!

## Bake Your Neighbor a Snack

Something as simple as dropping off a quick snack at your neighbors could improve someone's holiday. Maybe your neighbor has been going through something, is alone for the holiday, or just needs some holiday spirit. This

simple and quick gesture can put a smile on someone's face. Next time you are in the kitchen preparing for your holiday, make an extra dessert to take next door!

## Donate Toys

Growing up, we remember the excitement we had leading up to the holidays, wondering what presents were going to be left under the tree. By donating toys, you can help provide happiness to kids whose parents might not be able to afford much. The toys do not have to be new or big but donating a little something can change Christmas for a lucky child. This act of kindness allows less fortunate children to feel the excitement and joy of Christmas.





### Collect Food

Similar to volunteering, try and collect canned goods – for example, cranberry sauce, pumpkin mix, soup, or corn. All these foods can be saved and given to your local food bank, where they can then be given to those in need. This act of giving back can help put a meal on someone’s table during the holidays. Next time you go to the grocery store, grab an extra canned good to donate. Even if you can only bring one can, it helps!

If we all do something to give back, we can make a huge impact this holiday season. Whether the gesture is big or small, anything helps. Let’s come together and spread the holiday joy!

# 6 Eating Healthy on a Budget

by **Lindsay Larisa**  
Pinney ARM

Eating healthy can be challenging and intimidating, especially when money is an issue. As we know, money in college can be tight and isn’t always an available resource. Eating healthy is something that will benefit not only your overall health but other dimensions for optimal wellness. Eating healthy can reduce the risk of cancer, put you in an overall better mood, and even improve memory. Eating healthy can increase cognitive function and health, benefiting you now as a college student, but also preventing the risk of cognitive decline later in life. Here are a few ways that we can change our diet and increase our healthy food intake.

choices. For example, the west side café offers a chicken patty, and rather than having the fried patty, swap it out for a grilled chicken sandwich. Another option within the dining hall that is offered is a cauliflower crust rather than the typical pizza crust offered.

### Plan ahead

Planning your meals for the week can be extremely helpful. Make a list prior to going to the grocery store with everything that you’ll need. Before you go, look over your list and make sure to scan all the current ingredients and food you already have on hand. (You may find food you already have and be able to plan your meals from this!) And by doing all of this, it will allow for you to only purchase what is on the list and what is absolutely needed.

### Small changes at the dining hall

Eating at the dining hall can be tricky. There are always going to be unhealthy options available. But within the unhealthy choices there are healthy

## Top Five Study Tips

### Review books

- Definitions, examples, practice questions



### Study group

- Helps others and yourself study/prepare, more fun, feels less like work



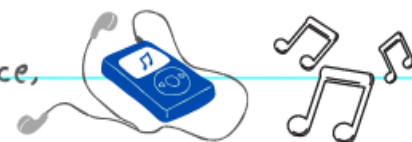
### Study at increments

- Space out studying, do one thing at a time, dont cram, dont procrastinate



### MUSIC

- More enjoyable, not complete silence, dance breaks



### Study setting

- Study outside, fresh air, go to coffee shop, get out of house, limits distractions





Good luck on your finals, and have a restful, relaxing break!



### Stick to your Grocery list

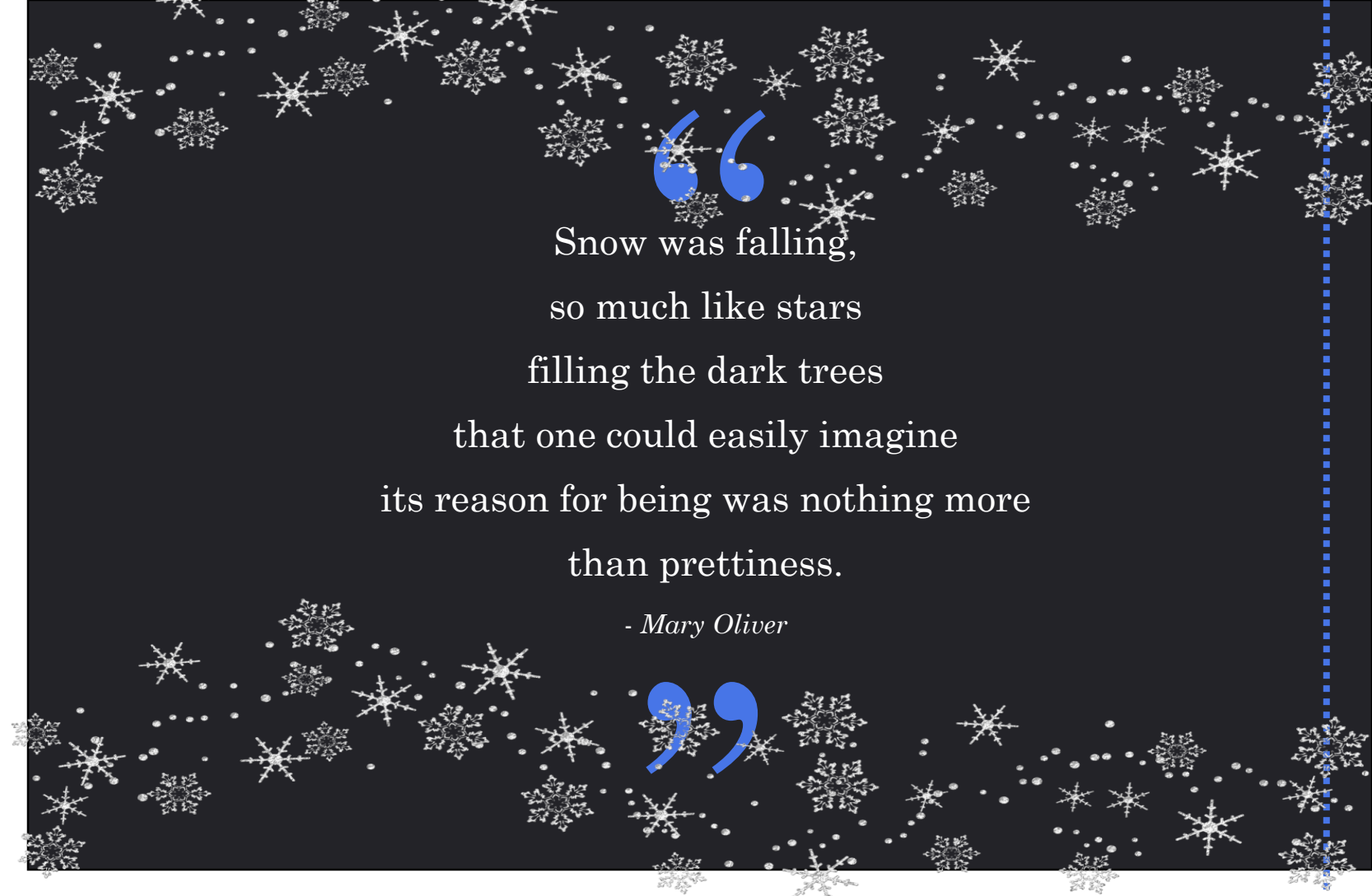
A grocery store can be an intimidating place, and it's extremely easy to get sidetracked by all the big ads and unhealthy food. When in a grocery store it's a general good idea to shop on the outer area of the store because this is generally where the healthier fresh food is located. The middle aisles typically contain the unwanted, processed food. Another tip is the most expensive items are placed at eye level. Looking to the top and bottom rows will provide more items that are economically smarter.

### Meal Prep

Meal prep is the idea of preparing food for the week and ahead of schedule. It saves time, which as we know as a college student can be very helpful.

Meal prepping also helps pick healthier choices. Because you are planning ahead of schedule, it will allow you to really pick what you will eat for the week ahead. We all know after a busy day, the last thing anyone wants to do is cook a meal! Having meals already prepped and ready to go will allow you to pick the healthier premade food, rather than eating out just because of convenience.

Eating healthy is a difficult task in college and using just a few of these suggestions could potentially benefit you now and later on in life.



Snow was falling,  
so much like stars  
filling the dark trees  
that one could easily imagine  
its reason for being was nothing more  
than prettiness.

- Mary Oliver





### Thanksgiving Break:

Remember – you can stay on campus for the Thanksgiving holidays, but you must register before the break in order to have clearance to stay. Please use the QR code to the right to complete your form. These are due by noon on Monday, Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup>.

### Winter Break:

- Students are required to leave within 24 hours of their last final exam, or by 6:-00 pm on Tuesday, December 14<sup>th</sup>.
- During finals, **quiet hours** are in effect **24-hours a day**. If you violate quiet hours or other university or residence hall policies, you will be removed from the residence halls, with a judicial meeting to follow over the break. Please be respectful of your fellow residents as they try to do well on their exams.
- **Housing is available (at an additional charge)** for students **over winter break** in Pinney and Grasso Halls. If you do not currently live in one of those buildings, you must contact someone who does and receive written permission from every member of their apartment to stay in their room for the break. There may be space available if you are not able to secure your own space, but there is no guarantee that there will be space. Please speak to your RD if you have questions or problems. There is no meal plan in effect for break housing. Applications are available using the QR code to the right and are due with payment by December 6<sup>th</sup>.
- If you are **returning to the same room** for the spring, **you may leave** any belongings in your room that you'd like (please take anything of value home with you!)
- If you are **changing rooms** – within your building, to another building, or if you are leaving housing altogether, you **must take ALL of your belongings home** when you leave at the end of the semester. If you have questions, please see your RD immediately.



**WESTERN  
CONNECTICUT**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

**HOUSING AND  
RESIDENCE LIFE**

## About *The Handout*

*The Handout* is a product of the Department of Housing & Residence Life at Western Connecticut State University. There are 6 editions each year – 3 in the fall semester and 3 in the spring semester.

The ideas for and execution of the articles are the work of the Academic Resource Mentors, or ARMs, who provide academic coaching and resource referral to all members of the WCSU residence community.