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Tips for Avoiding Senioritis

The symptoms show up every year. High school seniors try to balance extracurricular activities, a social life, college admission, and perhaps a part-time job. Somewhere along the way, home work begins to seem less important. Then they get accepted to college, and after that, high school seems even less important. School work begins to slide—and so do their grades. The diagnosis? Senioritis.

Senioritis is easy to catch and hard to get rid of. It can also be dangerous to your plans for the future. Every year, colleges rescind their offers of admission, put students on academic probation, or change financial aid packages because of it.

For example, Wilkes University (PA) gives merit-based financial aid based in part on class rank. "Four [students] this year were awarded one merit level based on their class rank at the point of application, but [their] final transcripts showed that their class rank had fallen to such a level that they no longer qualified for the original merit level," says Mike Frantz, dean of enrollment services at Wilkes. "The damage ranged from \$1,000 per year to over \$3,000 per year in merit aid."

A less obvious consequence of slacking off senior year is being less prepared for the challenges of college. Freshman year can be tough, even for students who kept up with their course work throughout high school. Imagine entering college with rusty study skills.

"The habits one forms early in life are often carried over into later stages of life, be it college or the professional world," says Franz. "Motivation and hard work will always win out over basic intelligence."

Regardless of the consequences, it is still tempting to let school work slide. After all, seniors are busy people. To help you fight that temptation, read on for some ways to avoid senioritis.

Plan ahead. You probably already know what activities you'll stay involved in this year. And you know that college applications are coming up fast. Plus you want to make the most of your time with friends and family. Fitting all of it in without pulling your hair out (or pulling your grades down) is the goal. The best tool is a calendar or day planner. Write down all of your deadlines—for applications, papers, tests, and so on. Then note your other activities—your sports schedule, drama or band rehearsals, SAT or ACT day, college visits.

Then look at what you have. To complete that English paper, when do you have to start working on it? If the big game is the night before the due date, plan to finish the paper a few days ahead of time. You won't have time to get it done the night before because you'll be leading the team to victory!

Don't obsess. It's easy to get caught up in the college admission process and forget about the here and now.

"Don't spend the whole senior year obsessing about college admission," says Paul Marthers, director of admission at Oberlin College. "Going about the business of being a good student and good citizen, making choices for the betterment of your brain, body, and spirit, often offers more benefit for college admission than some plan crafted to impress college admission officers."

So don't get involved in some activity just to impress colleges. You don't have time for that. Instead, do the things you love—and drop activities that you're just not that committed to. (That doesn't include academics, though!)

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Talk about it. Senior year can be sad and exhilarating at the same time. You and your friends catalog all the "lasts"—the last first day of school, the last football game, the last prom. But you're also looking forward to graduating and starting college.

"Remember in The Wizard of Oz when Scarecrow said 'part of me is over there and part of me is over here'?" says Joyce Luy, director of admission at Westmont College (CA). "That's how seniors feel."

She advises seniors to talk about their feelings—which can range from fear of leaving high school to stress about college admission to anticipation of the new experiences college will bring. Good people to talk to are your friends (who are going through the same things you are), your parents, your guidance counselor, and other adults whom you respect.

Have fun. "I always encourage seniors to celebrate their senior year," says Luy. "They have worked a long time to get to this point and should do all they can to enjoy it."

Written by Jennifer Gross.

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