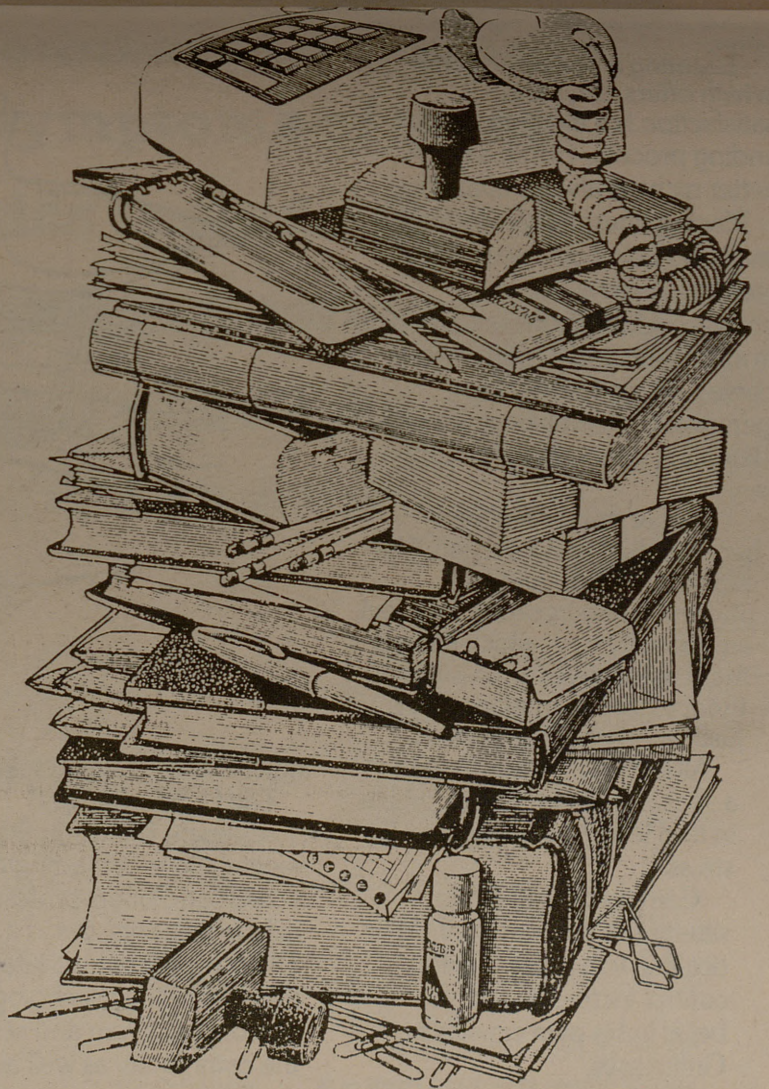


Stress

the pressures college life

by Lydia Berzsenyi



out more about themselves, they begin to feel the stress," Mann says. "Once they get used to the change at hand, the stress gets better."

Yet, stress never goes away. Even after mastering the changes encountered during the freshman year, students meet face-to-face with stress every day of their college careers.

The sophomore year is the peak time for feeling stress about future plans, according to Andrew Griffin, who teaches an Educational Psychology course called Career Development.

"At this time, it finally hits students that they have something at stake," he says.

Many students are forced to make a decision about their futures during the course of their sophomore year. Put to the test of college level courses, students' life ambitions may waver, and they may have to redefine their career prospects, Griffin says.

Juniors and seniors feel still a different stress which comes from the knowledge that the sheltered lives they've led in college will soon end and they

will eventually have to face the real world.

Besides physical and environmental sources, student stress also comes from inside the person: from his thoughts, his perceptions, his desire to succeed, and his sense of self-control.

"It's a matter of expectations versus capacity," Griffin says. "Students have to distinguish between what they want and what they can expect. It is by the results of these definitions that they establish their criteria for stress."

Capability, expectations and an emphasis on success introduce a concept which is constantly intertwined with stress: pressure.

"Pressure is not so much a tangible thing as the label we put on it," Mann says.

"Pressure, like stress, varies from person to person."

Pressure is a cause of stress, just as it is a result of stress. Pressure impresses on one the need to succeed, and the need to succeed causes one to feel stress. Stress, on the other hand, increases the need to

succeed, and in turn puts on more pressure.

Confused? Don't worry, you're probably just feeling stressed out.

Pressure-oriented situations can be dealt with by simply putting the situations into a realistic perspective.

Rationalizing pressure first requires identification of its source. Pressure can be applied either by oneself or by the surrounding community: parents, teachers, friends, work and social life.

However, Griffin says the surrounding community actually only proposes a situation. Pressure arises when a person makes a decision in response to the situation. By making a decision to respond, one puts pressure on oneself.

"You always have a choice," Griffin says. "There is a difference in their (the community) believing and you choosing to believe."

The quest for perfection is the biggest source of student pressure. Based on a system of unattainable goals and unreasonable demands,

perfection is sought after by overly-ambitious students who harbor distorted views of reality.

By telling oneself that certain grades should be made and certain goals should be reached, pressure is generated. It is these "shoulds" that cause stress, Mann says. If these "shoulds" are eliminated, one can become less perfection-conscious and can strive for more reasonable, though more average, goals.

"There's a lot of power in being average," Mann says. "If you can reconcile yourself to being average, you can free yourself from a lot of pressure. Then you wind up being above-average."

Debbie Rabinowitz, a counselor with A&M's Student Counseling Service, says that by striving for goals a little beyond what we are capable of we can raise our level of excellence a little at a time, but first we must have a realistic assessment of where we are.

Discovering where one stands requires placing oneself in relation to others.

"Finding that niche in society