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DAVID RIDLEY

BITING DOWN EASES THE PAIN With finals on the horizon, you might want to rethink putting off hitting the books.

Cramming ineffective—study

JEFF LABINE
Excalibur (York University)

TORONTO (CUP)—A study at York University suggests that cramming right before an exam may not the best way to learn and retain information.

The study, titled *Spacing Effects in Learning: A Temporal Ridgeline of Optimal Retention*, was concluded by psychology professor Nicholas Cepeda in October 2007.

The study surveyed 1350 students, and showed that material needs to be relearned at least one month after initial learning in order to retain it for one year.

Cepeda used online, flashcard-style testing at varying times to reveal that information is retained on a sliding scale.

"What we have conducted shows that using flashcards while studying can greatly increase how much you remember compared to just reading the textbook. Write the question on one side of the card, and the answer on the back. Quiz yourself using the question, then wait a few seconds, and then look at the answer," Cepeda explained.

"Cramming for exams hurts short-term retention of facts a month after learning. Students remember about 10 per cent additional facts by not cramming. Cramming is even more detrimental to long-term retention a year after learning. By spacing study episodes across a month-long period, students remember twice as many facts as when they cram, a 100-per cent improvement in retention after a year."

> **"Cramming for exams hurts short-term retention of facts a month after learning."**
>
> **DR NICHOLAS CEPEDA**
> YORK UNIVERSITY

While many students agree with Cepeda's study, they recognize that cramming is often necessary.

"If your schedule is very tight, then you don't have much time. You have no choice," said Levi Stutzman, a first-year psychology student at York.

"When you cram, you pretty much are putting as much information as you can, and when you study longer you have time to digest."

Cepeda said that his studying time was usually under control.

"I can quite confidently tell you that I have never pulled an all-nighter getting ready for a test. Personally, I find sleep is more important than spending half-asleep time studying," Cepeda said.

He does understand, however, that some students need to cram before an exam.

"It's natural for everybody," Cepeda said. "Cramming is more like absorbing information instead of learning it."

Despite the study results, some people argued that they work better under tight deadlines.

"Some people work better under pressure. You can produce good or bad quality of work," Shutzman said.

Capeda suggested that spreading out study time would improve retention.

"If you have three hours devoted to studying for an exam, spend an hour a day, over three days, instead of spending three hours in a single day."

He also recommended that students alternate their study times across different types of material.

"Spending an hour on history, and then an hour on math will be more effective than spending two hours solid on history and then two solid hours on math."

But some students feel it's not necessarily important to remember everything after an exam has passed.

"I work really well under pressure," said Janilee James-Coutou, a first-year Science major. "When I know I have to get this done, it motivates me. You cram to pass an exam, not to get intellectually rich."

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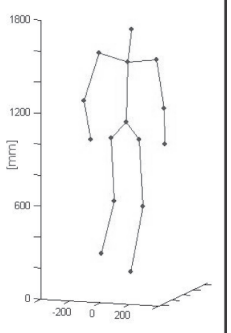

When: 3pm, Fri, Nov 23, 2007

Where: Rm BSM145
(BioSci Bldg, below the foyer)

See: www.psych.ualberta.ca/~psychoqu/ for more info.

NEWS MINIONS ASSEMBLE!

This Friday, 23 November at 3pm in 3-04 SUB will be the last official news meeting of the semester! Holiday cheer will prevail as we swap the traditional news list for an elevator ride up to RATT.

If you've written news this semester come out and enjoy a drink on us!

GATEWAY NEWS
Going out with a bang since 1910

Ottawa students learn to investigate crimes in new hands-on house

AARON MATTHEWS
The *Charlatan* (Carleton University)

OTTAWA (CUP)—Forensic science students at the University of Ontario's Institute of Technology (UOIT) can now study in a specially designed crime-scene house, the first of its kind in Ontario.

UOIT unveiled the training tool for third-year forensic science students on 17 October.

According to Melissa Levy, a communications officer at UOIT, the school leased an abandoned ranger's cabin only a few hundred metres from campus to stage crimes in.

Aspiring crime scene investigators then seek out clues relating to their classes without being involved in actual crimes.

William Smith, Dean of the Faculty of Science at UOIT, said he was inspired after he saw a similar crime-scene house at a university in the UK.

According to Kimberley Nugent, senior lab instructor, the program's main benefit is the unique experience of using a house to learn about crime scene investigation.

Evidence is strategically planted to simulate the scene of any number of crimes selected by instructors, she said.

Matt Wilson, a third-year student enrolled in the course, said the crime scene house "puts a real-life perspective on these things."

The course starts with a hit and run, followed by a gun-related incident, and peaks with a homicide scenario.

The homicide involves the most thorough study and is a culmination and summary of all the techniques learned in the course, Wilson said, adding that students need to be able to make connections between all the evidence and the rest of the case information.

The forensic science program also takes advantage of modern technology. Students are provided with laptops and tablet PCs to collect information from evidence and transmit it to other students wirelessly, Nugent explained.

Their tools closely mirror those used by professional investigators, including crime scene and forensic photography kits used to document and collect data.

An example of one of the tools students use in their investigations is the polylight, which allows the user to spot liquids and miniscule fibers that would normally be invisible to the naked eye.

In cases involving bodies, a forensic dummy with evidence planted on it is placed in specific locations in the house.

Despite all the demands placed on them, Wilson said feedback from fellow students has been positive, and they come to class excited.

"Every week, we learn something new," he said, adding that another benefit of the course is that it's not overly specialized.

"It's a combination of science and law."