Encouraging Healthy Sleep
Princeton Professor Wellbeing Toolkit
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Introduction:
Sleep is vital for student health and academic performance. Despite evidence linking poor sleep quality to worse academic performance\(^1\) and a multitude of health issues from mental health\(^2\) to cancer\(^3\), sleep deprivation and poor sleep hygiene on campus is a longstanding and widespread problem\(^4\). Most sleep habits are established during the first month of college and can have long-term repercussions for a student’s success in college\(^5\). It is recommended that an adult receives a minimum of 7-9 hours of sleep per night.\(^6\) Additionally, recent research has pointed toward sleep regularity—defined as how often one wakes up at the same time—as a crucial component of overall sleep quality\(^7\).

Quick Facts about Sleep at Princeton\(^8\):
- Students have erratic wake-up times, exacerbated by the weekend
  - 29% of students have a 3+ hour wake-up range on weekdays (ex: one day waking up at 8 a.m. and the next day waking up at 11 a.m.)
  - Double the number of students have a 3+ hour wake-up range when including weekends
- First-Year’s average only 6 hours of sleep per night
- 92% of student claim “sleep is important to [their] health and wellbeing” but only 22% believe “it is possible to get 8 hours of sleep per night at Princeton”
- 57% of students report studying within 30 minutes of bedtime
- 19% of students report their latest school night bedtime as 1 a.m. while 56% of students reported going to bed at 3 a.m. or later and only 8% of students report their latest night as 11 p.m.

Recommendations for professors to encourage a healthier sleep environment:
- **Set 5-9pm (homework, assignments, etc.) deadlines**
  - Students often work on assignments until the last minute; setting midnight, morning or “at the beginning of class” deadlines encourages late nights\(^8\)
- **Model good behavior**: Clearly delineate academic and personal boundaries. For example, inform students that you will not respond or send emails after 8PM and on weekends
- **Be open to extensions** if the alternative is forcing a student to pull an all-nighter
  - It takes about 7 days getting 8 hours of sleep to recover from one all-nighter\(^9\)
- **Encourage students to prioritize their sleep** by 1) waking up at the same time every day, 2) getting at least 7 hours of sleep per night, and 3) avoid caffeine after noon
- **Explore alternative night seminar and lab formats**: Consider ways to reduce the amount of time students spend in the classroom (or in front of the screen) at night. For example, assign a one-hour pre-recorded lecture for students to watch before a night seminar, and then reduce in-class discussions by one-hour to 7:30-9:20 p.m.
- **Move class outside when possible**: Natural light is very important for regulating our circadian rhythm and stimulates the brain.
Bibliography:
8. Marquardt, M. & Pontis, S. Consequences of following the herd: social norms and the role of “busyness” on student sleep habits and sleep regularity at an Ivy League University. (2020).