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Great VCU Bike Race Book Faculty Reflections

Great VCU Bike Race Book

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Motivation and Performance

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Jeffrey Green's Great Bike Race Page

BEST OF MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE

Twenty students took the class titled "Motivation and Performance." Drawing inspiration from watching and being involved with the "Worlds" bike races, students learned about issues of motivation and sustained performance by applying a variety of ideas and research evidence to their personal lives. Students chose two or three ambitious goals that they could start on during the class and continue to work on in the coming months. These goals included writing a book, designing a video game, producing music, making substantive changes to spending habits, preparing for 10K and half marathon races, achieving new heights of excellence in their classes, and earning a spot at the World Irish Dance Championships!

Students became inspired by reading about various heroes on a blog written by an author of hero-related books. Students also took a character "strengths" test in order to help them evaluate the suitability of their goals and how they might achieve them. For example, was self-control a relative strength or weakness? Students also examined which activities put them in a "flow" state that would indicate some natural ability and interest in certain activities.

The number one focus of the course was to learn about and apply recent scientific breakthroughs regarding **how to maintain and enhance self-control**. Arguably, one of the most important causes of a host of societal ills ranging from unwanted pregnancy to rising obesity rates to mounting credit card debt is a lack of self-control. Students read the fascinating and inspiring book *Willpower* by social psychologist Roy Baumeister with John Tierney. This book catalogues a great deal of fascinating research, mixed with engrossing stories about people like magician and physical extremist David Blaine and African explorer Henry Morton Stanley.

Armed with these insights, students learned how to make appropriate goals, and break them down into manageable components. They discussed how to enlist the support of others (including the benefits and costs of competition), and how to avoid or reduce situations of "ego depletion." Ego depletion is the weakening of the self-control "muscle" that can derail goals, and it occurs simply by exercising self-control. That is, there is one source of self-control, and it follows a "use it and lose it" strategy, much like a muscle gets fatigued by use. The solution is rest, as well as avoiding situations in which ego depletion occurs if possible; students examined ego depletion in their own lives and how to avoid and overcome it. They also learned about the physiological component of ego depletion: ego depletion is associated with lower blood levels of glucose, so one remedy involves restoring those blood levels. Students also

prepared themselves for inevitable setbacks and frustrations—to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Some students joined me on Friday September 23rd—right outside the Psychology Department offices—to watch the Men's Under 23 Road Circuit race!



Students wrote about their specific goals and insights in ten blog posts, one per day throughout the bike races. They boldly discussed their ambitious goals in a public forum, and they commented on each other's ideas and plans. For their culminating project, they created videos or similar outputs (e.g., Prezi presentation) that described their favorite insights learned in the course, and how they applied them to their goals. Almost all students reported already making impressive progress on their goals!

Some particularly inspired student blog posts:

Grayson talks about **ego depletion and how he is learning to overcome it.**

Eva talks about **setbacks to reaching goals and how she can overcome them.**

Jessica talks about **the problem of social loafing when trying to reach group goals.**

Morgan discusses the role of both **competition and cooperation in striving toward important goals.**

Maya talks about **overcoming ego depletion.**

Ian discusses the **role of glucose in recovering from ego depletion.**

Geena discusses **how simply making decisions can wear us out.**

Great examples of final projects (videos and Prezi presentations):

Mason gives us **a tour of a bike race course while discussing what he learned in the class!**

Jessica talks about her **involvement in the races and her progress toward her goals.**

Madison shares her **favorite insights from the class and how she is increasing her self-control.**

Grayson discusses **the importance of choosing the right goals and his progress thus far.**

Mimi talks about **what she learned (such as the best to-do lists) and shows a bit of the bike races.**

Ian mentions **several tips he's learned to exercise sustained effort toward his goals.**