

Study Drugs: Are they all you think they are?

With finals around the corner students often look for competitive advantages in the classroom. Prescription drugs, dubbed “**academic steroids**,” such as *Adderall*, *Ritalin*, *Concerta*, and *Dexedrine* are used by college students to enhance their academic performance. These drugs are powerful stimulants used to improve focus for people with diagnosed ADD or ADHD, and should be used only as prescribed with ongoing medical supervision. When used by students who don’t have a legitimate medical need for these medications, they give an unfair advantage comparable to the advantage some athletes seek by using anabolic steroids to enhance their performance. This is widely regarded as a form of academic cheating.

Physical Effects

- Addiction, both physical and psychological.
- When crushed and snorted they give a rush similar to cocaine.
- Medical risks include increased risk of seizures, stroke, and heart arrhythmia that can lead to sudden death.
- Causes rapid heartbeat, increased blood pressure, and an increased sense of anxiety.
- Insomnia
- Non-prescribed users often crash into exhaustion as the drug wears off.
- Using these drugs without medical supervision can lead to psychotic symptoms including paranoia and hallucinations. There have been several Washington and Lee students who developed paranoid psychosis from using illicit stimulant medications such as Adderall or Ritalin.

Data

- White males in fraternities have emerged as frontrunners in stimulant use.
- 16% of W&L students used “study drugs” in the past year (CORE survey, 2007); which means 84% of W&L students do not rely on these drugs to make it through the year including during the exam crunch period.
- It is estimated that between 3-30% of college students use “study drugs.”

Legal Issues

- These are Schedule II controlled substances regulated by the Drug Enforcement Administration.
- The minimum federal sentence for first-time possession is five years.

It is against federal law to use these medications without an authorized prescription from a physician. Students who share or sell their prescription drugs are abusing a medical privilege, breaking the law, and face severe penalties if caught.

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