

## Chapter 8: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROJECT

### *Who takes it?*

Volunteers from a random sample of undergraduates complete the Student Interview Project. The University Assessment Committee selects one or more class levels (e.g., first year students, seniors) from which the sample is drawn.

### *When is it administered?*

The Interview Project is administered during the first half of the spring semester, annually.

### *How long does it take for the student to complete the interview?*

The interview plus accompanying questionnaires require about 30 minutes.

### *What office administers it?*

The Interview Project is administered by the University Assessment Committee and the Chair of the Student Interview Project, plus additional volunteers, including students, faculty, and University administrators. Interviews are conducted by a faculty member or administrator plus a student co-interviewer.

### *Who originates the questions?*

The University Assessment Committee and the Chair of the Student Interview Project write and assemble the project materials.

### *When are results typically available?*

Results are usually available at the end of the summer following data collection.

### *What type of information is sought?*

The University Assessment Committee selects questions based on current curricular or cocurricular topics of interest to the University. In 2011, interviewees discussed the academic stress they experience as students at Truman State University.

### *From whom are the results available?*

Results of the Interview Project are available from the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs Office and the Chair of the Interview Project.

### *To whom are the results typically available?*

Results are available to the Assessment Committee and the University community through University-wide conferences and this Almanac.

### *Are the results available by division or department?*

Results are not broken down by division or department.

### *Are the results comparable to data of other universities?*

The results are not directly comparable with other institutions.

## **Background and Rationale**

The annual Student Interview Project addresses issues relevant to Truman State University students' experiences. Past years' interview topics have included costs and benefits of students' leadership and service learning participation (Vittengl, Wessel, & Wooldridge, 2006), faculty and staff influences on students' engagement in college life (Vittengl, Bozeman, & Schmidt, 2008) and students' quality of life (Vittengl, Bozeman, & Constance, 2009; McDuff, Beuke, & Leshner, 2010).

The 2011 and 2012 interviews focused on student academic stress, in response to the 2009 and 2010 Quality of Life studies, which found that mood and emotions ranked lowest among nine quality of life domains, that mood and emotions had a strong negative correlation with overall student well-being, and that the majority of interviewees with poor mood and emotions attributed it to a stressful, demanding academic workload. In fact, about one-fifth of the entire combined sample of students participating in the 2009 and 2010 interviews (not just students with poor mood and emotions) said directly that prospective students should be told about the stressful academic life at Truman State University, and nearly one-third of all interviewees phrased similar ideas more positively by commenting that prospective students should be told about the strong academic quality and high expectations of the University. Further, almost one-fourth of students who experienced health as a low point in quality of life saw their health concerns as the result of academic stress.

On the other hand, interviewees in both 2009 and 2010 with good mood and emotions frequently attributed their high quality of life to strong interpersonal relationships. Students with a positive social life often attributed their success to involvement in campus organizations and associated friendships, and students whose quality of life was positive in regard to academic achievement

identified rewarding interactions with faculty/staff as the second most common cause (after personal challenges and accomplishments). One interpretation of this pattern of results is that positive social relationships, including relationships with faculty, may facilitate well-being (or at least buffer stress) in a rigorous academic environment. Further, students who identified academics as a high point in their quality of life often mentioned having some choice and control in the academic realm. Almost a third of students in 2010 for whom academic work was a high point made positive comments about the quality and variety of available courses from which they could choose. On the other hand, half of the interviewees for whom academics were a low point in 2010 mentioned lack of support from faculty and staff (difficulty getting overrides, problems with advisors and the registration office, or a lack of research opportunities) reflecting a perception of limited choice or control.

Student stress levels are not uniquely high at Truman. Recent studies have shown that stress is increasing on college campuses across the country (Freshman Study 2010; ACHA 2010; MCHBS 2010). The Higher Education Research Institute's 2010 Freshman Study, which includes responses from 200,000 first-time, first-year, full-time students at 4-year schools, found the lowest self-reported emotional health in 25 years. On the American College Health Association's 2010 national research survey, 51.4% of students reported more than average stress in the last 12 months, and 25.4% of students reported that stress impacts their academic performance. On the 2010 Missouri College Health and Behavior Survey (MCHBS), 82.4% of students indicated feeling stressed during the past two weeks, with 28.4% saying they felt extremely stressed. And 39% of MCHBS respondents reported that stress has substantially impacted or interfered with their academic lives. Truman students reported similarly high or higher levels of stress on each of these instruments.

High levels of stress, if not dealt with effectively, are known to contribute to a variety of negative outcomes. In a university setting, these can include poor academic performance, health and well-being, and retention (Kohn and Frazer, 1986; Campbell and Svenson, 1992; Abougerie, 1994; Misra, McKean, West, and Russo, 2000; Struthers, Perry and Menec, 2000; Zajacova, Lynch and Espenshade, 2005). Given the potential for serious problems related to student stress, and existing indicators of high stress levels among Truman students, the 2011-2012

Student Interview Project was designed to: (1) measure the extent of self-reported general and academic stress at Truman, (2) identify the domains of academic life that students experience as most and least stressful, and (3) find out how students explain the levels of stress they experience across different academic domains. . The 2012 Interview Project replicated the 2011 Project with a new sample in order to increase confidence in the results.

Participants were asked to complete a survey instrument that included measures of: (1) perceived general stress levels, and (2) perceived academic stress. In the interviews, individual students were asked to talk about the two highest and the two lowest sources of academic stress they identified on the survey, and to explain why each category is or is not a major source of stress for them. They were also asked for suggestions for reducing academic stress, and for helping students cope with stress. The following are the 15 categories or domains of academic stressors included in the survey instrument (as identified by Truman students in a series of focus groups in fall semester 2010):

- multiple back-to-back assignments and tests in different classes
- amount of work required in classes
- keeping a high enough GPA
- group projects
- studying for tests
- getting into required/desired classes
- co-curricular or extra-curricular involvement
- balancing work and classes
- effectiveness of teaching
- participating in class discussions
- consistency of BA/BS and curricular requirements across majors
- faculty communication about expectations and due dates of assignments
- academic advising
- getting timely feedback on homework and tests
- faculty availability

In keeping with findings from the 2009 and 2010 interview projects at Truman, several studies have found that positive associations between students and faculty can serve as a stress buffer for students. Pascarella (1980) found significant positive associations between extent and quality of student-faculty informal contact outside of the classroom and students' educational aspirations, their academic achievement, intellectual and personal development, and their institutional persistence. Wilson et al. (1975) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1976) found that frequency of informal non-class contacts for advising, career counseling, and intellectual discussion are significantly and positively associated with student satisfaction with academic and nonacademic college experiences. In addition, studies have found that students who build social support networks over time with both faculty and peers have greater resources for managing stress and the anxiety of demanding school work (Allen and Hiebert, 1991; Rawson, Bloomer and Kendall, 1994). Further, Clifton, Perry, Stubbs, and Roberts (2004) find that students who have more interaction with professors develop a stronger sense of academic control and better coping strategies, which in turn contributes to academic achievement.

Another finding of the 2009 and 2010 quality of life interviews which is supported by studies of academic stress is that student stress can be reduced through effective time management and/or student perceptions that they have control of their academic time schedules and performance levels (Brown, 1991; Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, and Phillips, 1990; Peacock and Wong, 1990). Nonis, Hudson, Logan and Ford (1998) found that students who perceive high levels of control over their time experience lower levels of stress, and higher levels of academic performance, problem-solving ability, and health, relative to students who perceive low levels of academic control, regardless of actual time management behaviors. Thus, it is not time management per se but the perception that a student has control over time and task management that has the most significant impact on stress and stress-related outcomes (Nonis et al., 1998). Zajacova, Lynch, and Epenshade (2005) conclude that academic self-efficacy and academic control serve to moderate the effect of stressors on perceived stress for college students, and increase academic success and persistence. Similarly, Macan et al. (1990) find that students who feel that they are in control of their academic work are more confident about their academic performance and experience lower levels of stress.

Given the evidence of a connection between faculty relationships and academic control (Clifton et. al, 2004), and support for a significant impact of both factors on student academic stress and academic achievement (Zajacova et al., 2005; Nonis et al., 1998; Pascarella, 1980), it was expected that faculty-student relationships and academic control would be positively correlated for students at Truman, and that each would have a significant association with student stress and its outcomes. Measures of academic control and quality of student-faculty relationships were therefore included along with the two stress measures in the questionnaire in hopes of gathering information that could inform university efforts to reduce and/or help students manage their academic stress at Truman.

## **Methodology**

### ***Focus Groups***

In the fall 2010 semester, 8 focus groups met and discussed major sources of academic stress at Truman. In order to encourage open sharing on a potentially sensitive topic, groups were led by trained student moderators, along with a student assistant who took notes and recorded the session. Each focus group session lasted approximately one hour, and a full transcript of each discussion was later entered into a database by student workers. There were five or six participants in most sessions, with one group of ten participants. Discussions in the focus groups centered around responses to the question, “What are some of the main areas in which you experience stress in your classes and in regard to your schoolwork?” The main themes that emerged from the sessions in response to the central question were identified and used to create an academic stress scale for use in the Student Interview Project. Student participants in the focus groups were recruited from a random sample of 200 Truman students, with the exception of one focus group which was made up entirely of African-American students, in order to be sure to include diverse perspectives on sources of academic stress at Truman.

### ***Student Interviews***

#### ***Participants***

Participants in 2012 (N = 115) were undergraduates at Truman State University. Most participants (70%) were women and 30% were men; 2% were African American or black; 9.5% Asian American, Asian, or Pacific Islanders; 86% Caucasian or white non-Hispanic; and 2.5%

Hispanic or Latino/a. Participants were of traditional college age (mean = 20.0 years, range 18-23); 32.2% described themselves as first-year students, 26.1% sophomores, 16.5% juniors, and 23.5% seniors. These percentages are comparable to the 2011 sample and the overall demographics of the student body, suggesting that both samples are reasonably representative of students at Truman.

Both years, participants were recruited from a university-wide random sample of 450 undergraduates with introductory letters from the University President's Office and email contacts by student Interview Project team members. Thus, the sample consists of a 25% response rate. Students were assured that their participation was voluntary and that their names would not be reported with their interview or questionnaire data.

### *Procedure*

Each participant attended one assessment session, and completed a short battery of questionnaires (about 10 minutes). Immediately after each participant completed the stress questionnaire, interview project staff reviewed it to select the two lowest and two highest sources of academic stress to discuss during the interview (see Appendices A-C). High stress in regard to an item was defined as a rating of 4 to 7 on a 7-point scale, and low stress was defined as a rating of 1 to 3. In the case of ties (e.g. three or more 7s), a random number table was used to select items for discussion. Instructions used for both the academic stress questionnaire and the interview mentioned that "the potential academic stressors on the questionnaire are ones that were identified in student-led focus group discussions of academic stress at Truman in the fall of 2010." This information was included in order to inform participants that the potential stressors being discussed represent areas of academic life that many students experience as stressful. Participants then completed an interview (roughly 10-20 minutes) conducted jointly by a volunteer faculty or staff member (N = 42) paired with a volunteer student co-interviewer (N = 39).

### *Measures*

*General Stress.* The Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein, 1983) was used to measure general stress, which is the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as

stressful. The Perceived Stress Scale is a 10-item, widely used and validated inventory (Cohen et al., 1983) which asks participants to rate items on a 5-point scale of agreement from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A total score is derived by summing the item ratings. Alpha internal consistency reliability for the well-being scale was acceptable (.83) in the current sample.

*Academic Stress.* Participants rated their level of academic stress in relation to each of 15 domains of academic stressors identified by approximately 50 Truman students participating in focus groups in fall 2010 (see Appendix A). Participants rated domains on a 7-point scale from not stressful (1) to highly stressful (7). Item ratings on the academic stress screening questionnaire were summed to provide a total measure of academic stress, and also served as the basis for selecting interview questions (see Appendix A). Alpha internal consistency reliability for the academic stress scale was .83 for the student sample.

*Academic Control.* Perceived academic control was measured with eight items from a widely used questionnaire assessing the extent to which students believe they can influence their desired level of academic achievement, and monitor and adjust their goal-striving efforts (Perry, Hladkyj, Pekrun, and Pelletier, 1998). Participants rated items on a 5-point scale of agreement from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A total measure of academic control was derived from summing the item ratings, and the alpha internal consistency reliability for the sample was .78.

*Quality of Student-Faculty Relationships.* Quality of student-faculty relationships was measured with two items: “I am comfortable talking with one or more of my professors at Truman about questions or concerns I have regarding class assignments, and/or expectations in a particular course,” and “I am comfortable talking with one or more of my professors at Truman about questions or concerns I have regarding requirements and other issues related to work in my major.” Students rated each item on a 5-point scale of agreement from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Overall quality of relationships with faculty was measured for each student by summing responses to the two items.

### *Interview*

The semi-structured interview contained five questions about sources of students' academic stress (see Appendix C). Interviewers were instructed to ask the questions as written and to avoid follow-up questions and prompts unless an interviewee clearly misunderstood a question.

Co-interviewers recorded responses independently, focusing on key words and phrases. At the conclusion of the interview, the co-interviewers compared their notes and made corrections to a designated master copy, as needed. The master copies were transcribed verbatim into a computer spreadsheet for coding.

Project co-coordinators coded dichotomous (present=1, absent=0) response categories (see Appendix D for categories and sample responses). Separate sets of 3-10 response categories were developed and utilized for each of the fifteen academic stress domains as high points and as low points (30 sets covering interview questions 1-4), as well as for participants' summary comments (1 set for question 5). Eight sets of categories in both 2011 and 2012 had insufficient data to be included in the analysis. For the 15 sets of categories (8 in 2011) applicable to < 19 participants (e.g. 17 interviewees discussed amount of work required in classes as a relatively high source of academic stress), both co-coordinators coded all participants' responses. For the 7 sets of categories applicable to > 20 participants (e.g. 52 interviewees discussed keeping a high enough GPA for scholarships or graduate school as a relatively high source of academic stress), co-coordinators 20% of participants' responses independently to check the reliability of the coding system, and the rest were team-coded. Coders' agreement was high (94%), and their inter-rater reliability was adequate in a random effects multilevel model (intraclass correlation = .79). Coders discussed and resolved disagreements before further analysis.

## **Results**

### *Levels of General Stress and Academic Stress reported on Questionnaires*

Participants' average general stress level in the sample was 25.8 (SD=5.4) out of a possible total score of 50, which is lower than in 2011 (M=31.9, SD=3.1) but substantially higher than the norm groups from the general population as reported by Cohen et al. (1983); no comparison data is available for college student samples, but 18-29 year olds in Cohen et al.'s (1983) sample had

an average general stress level of 17.8 (M=17.8, SD=6.2).

Perceived academic stress levels varied across the 15 domains, from 88% of participants reporting high stress related to multiple back-to-back assignments and tests in different classes, to only 11% reporting high stress related to faculty availability (mean stress levels in each domain are reported in Table 1). All domains except for group projects, participating in class discussions, academic advising, and faculty availability were significantly correlated with perceived general stress levels. Multiple back-to-back assignments and tests, amount of work required in classes and studying for tests each had a strong and statistically significant relationship with general stress; keeping a high enough GPA for scholarships and graduate school, and consistency of BA/BS, curricular requirements across majors co-curricular or extra-curricular involvement, balancing work and classes, effectiveness of teaching, getting timely feedback on homework and tests, and communication by faculty about expectations and due dates of assignments each had a moderately strong relationship with general stress. These results suggest variations in the importance of domains for overall student stress.

**TABLE 1: RATINGS OF ACADEMIC STRESS CATEGORIES AND CORRELATIONS WITH OVERALL STRESS (N=114 in 2011; N=115 in 2012)**

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Perceived as High Stress category	Perceived as Low Stress category	Correlation with overall stress
<b>Multiple back-to-back assignments and tests in different classes</b>					
<b>2012</b>	5.32	1.55	88%	12%	.313**
<b>2011</b>	5.50	1.36	91.2%	8.8%	.451**
<b>Keeping a high enough GPA for scholarships and grad school</b>					
<b>2012</b>	4.81	1.78	79%	21%	.244**

<b>2011</b>	4.45	2.04	68.4%	31.6%	.228*
<b>Amount of work required in classes</b>					
<b>2012</b>	4.32	1.33	73%	27%	.246**
<b>2011</b>	4.51	1.50	73.7%	26.3%	.443**
<b>Studying for Tests</b>					
<b>2012</b>	4.10	1.55	68%	32%	.382**
<b>2011</b>	4.32	1.55	60.5%	39.5%	.433**
<b>Getting into Required/Desired Classes</b>					
<b>2012</b>	4.05	1.74	59 %	41%	.115
<b>2011</b>	4.10	2.03	58.8%	41.2%	.289**
<b>Group Projects</b>					
<b>2012</b>	3.79	1.70	56%	44%	.148
<b>2011</b>	4.04	1.61	64%	36%	.172
<b>Co-curricular or extra-curricular involvement</b>					
<b>2012</b>	3.09	1.63	41%	59%	.225*
<b>2011</b>	3.17	1.80	41.2%	58.8%	.269**
<b>Balancing work and classes</b>					
<b>2012</b>	2.63	2.28	39%	61 %	.216*
<b>2011</b>	2.61	2.32	39.5%	60.5%	.253**
<b>Effectiveness of teaching</b>					
<b>2012</b>	2.87	1.56	33%	67%	.227*
<b>2011</b>	2.85	1.58	31.6%	68.4%	.289**
<b>Getting timely feedback on homework and tests</b>					
<b>2012</b>	2.79	1.51	28%	72%	.217*
<b>2011</b>	2.49	1.42	21.9%	78.1%	.244**
<b>Consistency of BA/BS and curricular requirements across majors</b>					
<b>2012</b>	2.42	1.69	25%	75%	.297**

<b>2011</b>	2.35	1.79	28.1%	71.9%	.194*
<b>Communication by faculty about expectations and due dates of assignments</b>					
<b>2012</b>	2.64	1.31	25%	75%	.224*
<b>2011</b>	2.70	1.39	25.4%	74.6%	.298**
<b>Participating in class discussions</b>					
<b>2012</b>	2.38	1.39	22%	78%	.144
<b>2011</b>	2.61	1.57	28.1%	71.9%	.135
<b>Academic Advising</b>					
<b>2012</b>	2.36	1.49	18%	82%	.125
<b>2011</b>	2.40	1.46	23.7%	76.3%	.225*
<b>Faculty Availability</b>					
<b>2012</b>	1.83	1.15	11%	89%	.178
<b>2011</b>	2.08	1.32	14.9%	85.1%	.238*

\* $p < .05$ , 2-tailed; \*\* $p < .01$ , 2-tailed

*Interviewees' Explanations for High and Low Levels of Academic Stress in each domain*

In the interviews, students identified factors that made a particular domain a major source of stress for them (meaning it was rated as highly stressful, very stressful, stressful, or moderately stressful), or factors that helped to limit or buffer stress in relation to that domain (meaning it was rated as mildly stressful, slightly stressful, or not stressful). Response categories (for factors which were frequently mentioned by students) are listed in the following tables, and examples of specific interview responses fitting each category appear in Appendix D.

*Multiple back-to-back assignments and tests in different classes.* In both years, students who identified multiple back-to-back assignments and tests in different classes as a high source of academic stress tended to emphasize problems with (1) the timing of tests and assignments, and faculty communication, coordination, and flexibility, and (2) students' ability to prioritize and time management skills. Only one student discussed this domain as a low source of stress in the interviews.

**Table 2: Explanations for MULTIPLE BACK-TO-BACK ASSIGNMENTS AND TESTS IN DIFFERENT CLASSES as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=55)</b>	<b>2011 (N=56)</b>
Personal time management issues	40%	41.1%
Multiple assignments at the same time	38%	41.1%
Multiple tests at the same time	31%	33.3%
Hard to prioritize	26%	12.5%
Professors could be more flexible	24%	19.6%
Need better communication of requirements and due dates	22%	17.9%
Need better inter-departmental and intra-departmental communication	18%	23.2%
Major/graduation requirements make it difficult to avoid taking multiple difficult classes	-	14.3%
Extracurricular commitments	7%	10.7%
<b>Low Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=1)</b>	<b>2011 (N=0)</b>
Insufficient data		

*Keeping a high enough GPA for scholarships and grad school.* The majority of students who discussed keeping a high GPA as a high source of stress commented on the high GPA requirement at Truman for keeping student scholarships. Other important factors that students mentioned were grad school admission requirements and scholarships, challenging class requirements that make it hard to make good grades, grade pressure from parents, the need for more faculty/advisor communication and support, and the high academic expectations Truman students have for themselves to work hard and make good grades. Unlike in 2011, only two students discussed keeping a high GPA as a low source of stress. This change, along with the

increased percentage of students in 2012 who consider keeping their GPA high to be stressful (Table 1), suggests an increase in grade-related stress from 2011 to 2012.

**Table 3: Explanations for KEEPING A HIGH ENOUGH GPA FOR SCHOLARSHIPS OR GRADUATE SCHOOL as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes (N=38)</b>	<b>2012 (N=52)</b>	<b>2011 (N=38)</b>
Truman scholarships/need a lower GPA requirement	71%	68.5%
Grad school admission and scholarships	44%	39.5%
Feel a need to work harder/time management	33%	15.8%
Challenging class requirements	25%	28.9%
Other sources of grade pressure	15%	7.9%
Need more faculty/advisor communication	14%	13.2%
Important for post-undergraduate success	12%	28.9%
Internal pressures to make good grades	12%	23.7%
Difficult transition from high school	-	13.2%
<b>Low Stress Codes (N=8)</b>	<b>2012 (N=2)</b>	<b>2011 (N=8)</b>
Not hard to get good grades	-	37.5%
Work very hard	-	37.5%
Started off well as a freshman	-	37.5%
Confident/laid back attitude toward grades	-	25%
Focus on learning, not grades	-	25%
No grad school plans	-	25%

*Amount of work required in classes.* Students who find the amount of work required in classes at Truman to be a relatively high source of stress commented primarily on the challenges of finding time for the amount of work required in multiple classes, the difficulty of tests, feeling overwhelmed with the amount of reading, the number of assignments that feel like busy work, and the need for clearer faculty expectations. A substantial number of students also mentioned that students need to learn better time management skills, and acknowledged that extracurricular activities can interfere with the time required for class work. Only two students discussed this domain as a low source of stress in an interview, providing insufficient data for analysis.

**Table 4: Explanations for AMOUNT OF WORK REQUIRED IN CLASSES as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=17)</b>	<b>2011 (N=24)</b>
Hard to balance work in multiple classes	47%	45.8%
Students need better time management	29%	37.5%
Difficult tests and papers	18%	37.5%
Too many assignments	18%	33.3%
Too much reading	18%	29.2%
Need clearer expectations	18%	25%
Requirements are stressful (labs, LSPs, etc.)	-	25%
Extracurriculars interfere with classes	18%	12.5%
<b>Low Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=2)</b>	<b>2011 (N=1)</b>
Insufficient data		

*Studying for tests.* Whereas in 2011, students mentioned the transition from high school as a factor contributing to the stress associated with GPA, in 2012 students mentioned learning to study for college tests as a stressor. In both years, a significant number of participants for whom studying for tests was identified as a high source of academic stress believe that the stress comes

from not having study guides that can organize and direct their test preparation. Almost a fourth of students find studying for tests to be stressful because tests count for such a high percentage of course grades, and because they demand memorization of facts and figures. Only one of the participants discussed studying for tests as a low source of academic stress in the interviews.

**Table 5: Explanations for STUDYING FOR TESTS as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress.**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=18)</b>	<b>2011 (N=11)</b>
Challenging transition from high school to college tests/study habits	78%	-
Need study guides	39%	54.5%
Time consuming/multiple tests same time	22%	27.3%
Tests worth a lot	22%	27.3%
Emphasis on memorizing	22%	27.3%
Grade pressure	17%	-
Too much material	11%	27.3%
Hard to balance with other work	-	18.2%
Need reviews	-	18.2%
<b>Low Stress Codes (N=0)</b>	<b>2012 (N=1)</b>	<b>2011 (N=0)</b>
Insufficient data		

*Getting into required/desired classes.* High numbers of students find it very stressful to get into desired or required classes. In both years, many students expressed concern about inadequate information about the registration process, or pointed to problems with overrides or technical difficulties with computer registration. Changes in registration times in 2012 eliminated the problem with 5 pm registration. In 2012, only one student discussed getting into classes as a low

source of stress (compared to 9 students in 2011), but since there was little change in the overall percent of students finding this to be a low source of stress, the reduction in number of students discussing this topic is likely due to random selection of other categories for the interviews.

**Table 6: Explanations for GETTING INTO REQUIRED/DESIRED CLASSES as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=18)</b>	<b>2011 (N=25)</b>
Getting into desired classes	72%	28%
Getting into required classes	56%	40%
Need information about the process	44%	36%
Lacks credits to register early	28%	24%
Technical difficulties with registration	17%	32%
Problems with overrides	17%	20%
Do not like 5 pm registration	-	12%
<b>Low Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=1)</b>	<b>2011 (N=9)</b>
Can get overrides	-	33.3%
Helpful advisor	-	22.2%
Personal flexibility about classes	-	22.2%
Helpful major	-	22.2%
Experienced with the process	-	11.1%
General classes are easily available	-	11.1%

*Group Projects.* Fewer students discussed group projects as a high stress area in 2012 than in 2011, and they identified fewer factors contributing to stress in this area. A majority of

participants who find group projects to be highly stressful attribute their stress to an inability to trust group members to make equal contributions to the project. Other problem areas include difficulty coordinating schedules, conflicts among students due to different working styles, and different grade expectations, making it problematic to share a grade. While only two students discussed group projects as a low source on stress in 2011, four students did so in 2012. They indicated that shared work is beneficial for learning or study, and commented that other students are generally reliable or willing to be flexible with scheduling.

**Table 7: Explanations for GROUP PROJECTS as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=16)</b>	<b>2011 (N=20)</b>
Want to pick groups, not be assigned	-	55%
Unequal input from group members	63%	50%
Difficult to coordinate schedules	38%	35%
Do not like sharing a grade	31%	45%
Better to work with people you know	-	35%
Students have working style differences	31%	25%
Contact/communication problems	-	20%
Would prefer an individual work option	-	15%
<b>Low Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=4)</b>	<b>2011 (N=2)</b>
Sharing work benefits learning	75%	-
Other students are reliable	50%	-
Group projects work well in major classes	50%	-
Most students have flexible schedules	25%	-

Enjoy getting to know people	25%	
------------------------------	-----	--

*Co-curricular or extra-curricular involvement.* In 2011 and 2012, both the group of students who experience co-curricular/extra-curricular involvement as a relatively high source of stress, and those who experience such involvement as a relatively low source of stress, tend to be active in clubs, sports, and other organizations, but they experience that involvement differently. Those who find their involvement to be stressful talked about feeling overwhelmed by high expectations for time commitment and engagement; this was especially the case for activities perceived as necessary for grad school or careers. Several students also acknowledged problems with personal time management. On the other hand, students who experience little stress related to co-curricular or extra-curricular involvements either mention not being involved in very many activities, or perceiving those activities as stress-reducers rather than stress-creators.

**Table 8: Explanations for CO-CURRICULAR OR EXTRA-CURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress.**

<b>High Stress Codes (N=12)</b>	<b>2012 (N=7)</b>	<b>2011 (N=12)</b>
Conflict with academics	-	50%
Time commitment: clubs and organizations	86%	41.7%
Hard to balance activities	43%	33.3%
Time commitment: sports	-	25%
Teacher/coach lack of cooperation	-	16.7%
Personal time management issue	43%	16.7%
Involved in important activities with real responsibilities	29%	-
Activities required for graduate school	14%	8.3%

Other	29%	25%
<b>Low Stress Codes (N=10)</b>	<b>2012 (N=12)</b>	<b>2011 (N=10)</b>
Not involved in too many activities	58%	40%
Good stress outlet	42%	40%
Personal benefits of involvement	50%	40%
Activities are fun	50%	30%
Activities aren't too demanding	17%	30%
Offer a good break from academics	-	30%
Good for resume	8%	30%

*Balancing work and classes.* Students in both years who discussed having a difficult time balancing work and classes mentioned financial needs that make it extremely difficult to avoid the stress of competing time demands; apparently jobs that pay reasonably well are not very student-friendly when it comes to managing work/school conflicts, so students would like to find more scholarship opportunities or flexible jobs through Truman. The students who do not find their work to be problematic generally talked about having found a job that IS student-friendly, having good time-management skills, or not needing to work.

**Table 9: Explanations for BALANCING WORK AND CLASSES as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress.**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=5)</b>	<b>2011 (N=8)</b>
Work conflicts with academics	100%	100%
Need the money	40%	62.5%
Need more scholarships/jobs through school	40%	50%
Time management issues	40%	-

<b>Low Stress Codes (N=7)</b>	<b>2012 (N=4)</b>	<b>2011 (N=7)</b>
Job is easy	25%	42.9%
Can do homework at work	25%	28.6%
Good time management	75%	28.6%
Do not have a job	25%	28.6%

*Effectiveness of teaching.* Whereas none of the interviews focused on effectiveness of classroom teaching as a high source of stress in 2011, a few students discussed this as a problem area in 2012, and there was a small increase on the questionnaire in the overall percentage of students who consider this to be a source of stress (See Table 1). A majority either mentioned poor class organization, a lack of good in-class learning activities, or a boring teaching style. Students who talked about effectiveness of classroom teaching as a low source of stress (in both years) frequently mentioned knowledgeable professors who communicate clearly and effectively with students. They also mentioned effective lectures, having good class notes, and professors who are student-focused. In addition, many suggested that effective teaching and learning is the responsibility of BOTH faculty and students.

**Table 10: Explanations for EFFECTIVENESS OF CLASSROOM TEACHING as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=5)</b>	<b>2011 (N=0)</b>
Poor class organization – more learning should take place in-class	40%	Insufficient data
Teachers need to vary teaching and assessment styles.	40%	-
Teachers should help organize study groups	20%	
Language barrier limits effectiveness	20%	

<b>Low Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=22)</b>	<b>2011 (N=20)</b>
Good professors – clear/knowledgeable teachers	64%	45%
Student responsibility to learn	50%	35%
Like or can adapt to teaching styles of most profs	-	25%
Profs are approachable	-	20%
No problems with profs	-	20%
Have good class notes	14%	15%
Provide study guides	-	15%
Professors are student-focused	14%	-

*Getting timely feedback on homework and tests.* A few students in 2012 commented on slow feedback as a high source of stress, with delays reducing the value and relevance of feedback. There was also an increase on the questionnaire from 2011 to 2012 in the percentage of students who indicated that getting feedback was a high source of stress. Students who discussed feedback as a low source of stress indicated that they are satisfied with the timeliness and quality of feedback they receive from professors, or commented on reasons why they do not feel a need for formal feedback. Some also mentioned their ability to be patient, even if feedback is slow, since they are aware of the demanding workload of faculty.

**Table 11: Explanations for GETTING TIMELY FEEDBACK ON HOMEWORK AND TESTS as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=4)</b>	<b>2011 (N=2)</b>
Need more TAs or study groups	50%	-
Slow turnaround/loss of relevance of feedback	50%	-

Do not know grades	25%	-
<b>Low Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=12)</b>	<b>2011 (N=26)</b>
Generally get timely feedback from profs	58%	65.4%
Not concerned about feedback/can be patient	42%	34.6%
Student already knows how he/she did (good communication with professor)	33%	26.9%
Student can take initiative to get feedback	17%	19.2%
Feedback received is good/helpful	-	15.4%
Student understands professional workload	-	15.4%
Student works hard regardless	-	11.5%

*Consistency of BA/BS and curricular requirements across majors.* Most of the students who consider consistency of BA/BS and curricular requirements across majors to be problematic emphasized lack of clarity in regard to curricular requirements, or suggested that some LSP requirements are unnecessary and irrelevant. Those who did not consider this domain to be problematic commented that curricular requirements are clear, straightforward, and reasonable (in their major), and that they have good advisors who have helped them develop a reasonable 4-year plan.

**Table 12: Explanations for CONSISTENCY OF BA/BS AND CURRICULAR REQUIREMENTS ACROSS MAJORS as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=4)</b>	<b>2011 (N=8)</b>
Need more clarity of communication/requirements	75%	62.5%
Too many curricular requirements	50%	25%

Some LSP courses are irrelevant	25%	50%
LSP courses can be too difficult	-	25%
Want to graduate in 4 years	-	12.5%
Other	-	12.5%
<b>Low Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=18)</b>	<b>2011 (N=20)</b>
Requirements are clear/straightforward	33%	35%
Good advisors	33%	25%
Major is reasonable	33%	20%
Have a 4-year plan	28%	10%
Students know what is expected	11%	25%
Other	33%	30%

*Communication by faculty about expectations and due dates of assignments.* Only two student discussed communication by faculty as a high source of stress. In both years, students who did not indicate having problems related to faculty communication commented that they receive regular and consistent communication from their professors, either in class, on the syllabus, or electronically (e.g. Blackboard), and that most professors are approachable and available for asking questions.

**Table 13: Explanations for COMMUNICATION BY FACULTY ABOUT EXPECTATIONS AND DATES OF ASSIGNMENTS as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=2)</b>	<b>2011 (N=1)</b>
Insufficient data		
<b>Low Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=20)</b>	<b>2011 (N=21)</b>

Approachable/available	50%	28.6%
Clarity of syllabus and due dates	45%	-
Consistent communication	25%	57.1%
Continual communication/reminders/updates	-	42.9%
Use of blackboard	15%	38.1%
Opportunity to ask questions	15%	-
Other	-	19%

*Participating in class discussions.* In 2011 most of the students who talked about participating in class discussions as a high source of stress mentioned that they are shy and uncomfortable with speaking in public, especially in front of people they know. In 2012, too few students discussed participating in class discussions as a high source of stress to provide sufficient data for analysis, and in both years a fairly low percentage of students identified this as a high stress area (see Table 1). Students who talked about experiencing little stress when participating in class discussions perceive themselves as confident and well-prepared, and feel that most faculty are supportive and helpful in encouraging student contributions.

**Table 14: Explanations for PARTICIPATING IN CLASS DISCUSSIONS as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress.**

High Stress Codes (N=7)	2012 (N=2)	2011 (N=7)
Shy	-	71.4%
Necessary in smaller classes	-	42.9%
Need more practice	-	28.6%
Would prefer that less be required	-	28.6%
Can't speak/communicate thoughts well	-	14.3%
Need more professor prompting	-	14.3%

More difficult when know other students	-	14.3%
<b>Low Stress Codes (N=27)</b>	<b>2012 (N=38)</b>	<b>2011 (N=27)</b>
Confident/extraverted	53%	59.3%
Encouraging professors	34%	25.9%
Less stress in small classes	26%	22.2%
Enjoyable/open class environment	21%	18.5%
Well-prepared	18%	18.5%
Responsibility of students/discussion facilitates learning	18%	11.1%
Experienced	16%	22.2%

*Academic Advising.* In 2012, a few students discussed academic advising as a high stress domain, emphasizing lack of direction in advising and lack of knowledge of major requirements, especially for general college advisors. However, the overall number of students who indicated on the questionnaire that advising is a high source of stress was lower in 2012 than 2011. In both years, students who considered academic advising to be a low source of stress commented on the friendliness, knowledge, accessibility, and helpfulness of most academic advisors. Other students said that they get most of their advice from other teachers or students, rather than from an academic advisor.

**Table 15: Explanations for ACADEMIC ADVISING as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=4)</b>	<b>2011 (N=1)</b>
Lack of direction for planning	75%	-
Insufficient information about the major	50%	-
Would prefer an advisor in the major	50%	-

Lack of communication by advisor/too busy		
<b>Low Stress Codes (N=34)</b>	<b>2012 (N=33)</b>	<b>2011 (N=34)</b>
Friendly/approachable	36%	44.1%
Generally helpful	36%	23.5%
Available/accessible	33%	35.3%
Do not need an advisor	33%	14.7%
Get advice from other teachers or students	27%	20.6%
Able to receive nonacademic advice	-	17.6%
Knowledgeable/good resource	24%	38.2%
Clear communication	12%	11.8%

*Faculty Availability.* Only one interviewee discussed faculty availability as a high source of stress in 2012, providing insufficient data for analysis. Most interviewees who consider faculty availability to be a low source of stress commented on quick email responses, supportive and friendly faculty who are accommodating to students' needs, a general willingness of faculty to meet during office hours, and faculty flexibility in making appointments.

**Table 16: Explanations for FACULTY AVAILABILITY DURING OFFICE HOURS AND BY EMAIL as a relatively HIGH or LOW source of academic stress**

<b>High Stress Codes</b>	<b>2012 (N=1)</b>	<b>2011 (N=0)</b>
Insufficient data		
<b>Low Stress Codes (N=43)</b>	<b>2012 (N=49)</b>	<b>2011 (N=43)</b>
Quick email responses	47%	53.5%
Supportive and friendly faculty	41%	-
Generally willing to help/meet	39%	41.9%

Clear about office hours	27%	11.6%
Flexible in making appointments/accommodating to student needs	22%	34.9%
Dependable professors	18%	-
No need to meet with professors	12%	11.6%

*Correlations between perceived academic control, faculty-student relationships, and student stress levels*

A sense of confidence, self-efficacy, and control over academic outcomes, as well as generally positive interactions with faculty both inside and outside of the classroom are themes that appear frequently in student explanations for low stress levels across the various domains, as well as in previous research. At the same time, students experiencing high levels of stress across domains often mention lack of ability to manage academic demands due to perceptions of excessive amount of work and unreasonably high grade expectations. It is therefore not surprising that the summary measures of academic control and quality of relationships with faculty are positively correlated with each other, and that both are significantly negatively correlated with academic stress. In other words, students with a high sense of academic control also tend to have positive relationships with their professors and feel comfortable talking to them and asking for help or advice, and in turn experience lower levels of academic stress.

**Table 17. Correlations between perceived academic control, faculty relationships, and student stress (N=115 in 2012; N=114 in 2011).**

			<b>Overall Stress</b>	<b>Academic Stress</b>	<b>Academic Control</b>	<b>Faculty Relationships</b>
<b>Overall Stress</b>	<b>Pearson correlation (Significance: 2-tailed)</b>	<b>2012</b>	1	.371** (.000)	-.216* (.020)	-.210* (.024)
		<b>2011</b>		.539** (.000)	-.222* (.018)	-.136 (.149)

<b>Academic Stress</b>	<b>Pearson correlation (Significance: 2-tailed)</b>	<b>2012</b>	.371** (.000)	1	-.269** (.004)	-.014 (.886)
		<b>2011</b>	.539** (.000)		-.291** (.002)	-.214* (.022)
<b>Academic Control</b>	<b>Pearson correlation (Significance: 2-tailed)</b>	<b>2012</b>	-.216* (.020)	-.269** (.004)	1	.161 (.087)
		<b>2011</b>	-.222* (.018)	-.291** (.002)		.344** (.000)
<b>Faculty Relationships</b>	<b>Pearson correlation (Significance: 2-tailed)</b>	<b>2012</b>	-.210* (.024)	-.014 (.886)	.161 (.087)	1
		<b>2011</b>	-.136 (.149)	-.214* (.022)	.344** (.000)	

### *Summary Comments and Suggestions for Dealing with Academic Stress at Truman*

When asked for their suggestions for “reducing levels of academic stress at Truman without compromising the quality of a Truman education,” and ways to help students cope with stress more effectively, the most frequent response (28%) was that it is largely the responsibility of students to take advantage of existing resources for help and support – to improve their time management and organizational skills, and to have a good attitude about their academic work. A fourth of participants also suggested that professors should be more open and available to talk with students, clearly communicate their expectations, cooperate with other faculty in regard to test scheduling, offer a more reasonable set of assignments, and provide students with more study resources. Almost a fourth (21%) of participants encouraged students who feel stressed and overwhelmed to exercise or get involved in social activities or clubs that offer opportunities to relax and reduce their stress levels. This does not mean getting over-extended, but getting involved in activities while maintaining a positive balance between the academic and non-academic parts of college life. Interviewees even mentioned the need for students to get enough sleep! Almost 20% encouraged Truman faculty and administrators to offer more mentoring, grad school help, transparent and reasonable policies related to the LSP and academic

scheduling, and an improved registration process and scholarship system. Some students also mentioned a need for better parking, longer recreation center and library hours, better housing, less crowded dining halls, better advising, and more effective mechanisms for orienting freshman to the Truman community.

**Table 18. STUDENT SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING LEVELS OF ACADEMIC STRESS AND/OR HELPING STUDENTS COPE WITH STRESS MORE EFFECTIVELY (N=114)**

	<b>2012 (N=114)</b>	<b>2011 (N=115)</b>
<b>Students have ability/responsibility to limit their own stress by having good time management, organization, and a good attitude; students also need to take the initiative in and out of class, using resources and being prepared</b>	28%	50.9%
<b>Professors should be open and available to talk with students, have and communicate clear expectations and requirements, and cooperate with other faculty regarding test scheduling and flexibility.</b>	24%	33.3%
<b>Students should find a stress outlet through exercise, social activities, campus activities, etc. Get involved in extracurriculars but make sure you have a good balance (between school, social, organizations, and work), and get enough sleep.</b>	21%	36%
<b>Truman as an institution could do more to improve its relationship with students through transparency, accommodation, mentoring, grad school help, and two-way communication.</b>	18%	22.8%
<b>Re-evaluation of administrative policy in regard to LSP, academic year, scheduling, alcohol policy, etc. Also improve registration process and scholarship system.</b>	15%	19.3%
<b>Students need to balance work and life, and not try to do more than they can handle, especially in regard to credit hours,</b>	15%	-

<b>overscheduling, and academic expectations.</b>		
<b>Need to create more support for freshman, in regard to finding appropriate activities, making social connections, and facilitating faculty interaction, but in a low-stress environment. Freshman should be discouraged from biting off more than they can chew.</b>	12%	7%
<b>Professors need to be organized and effective in providing students with materials and study resources, while holding students accountable. There should be less busy work and more productive smaller assignments/quizzes, with big assignments spaced out.</b>	11%	23.7%
<b>Advisors need to be more effective in helping students plan out their years at Truman, make informed decisions, and be aware of all of the their academic options and opportunities.</b>	11%	7.9%
<b>More/better facilities/services including parking, library hours and resources, more rec center hours and classes, better housing facilities, and less crowded dining halls.</b>	6%	11.5%

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Clearly students experience high levels of stress at Truman, as is the case at campuses across the country. While many students express concern about the levels of stress they are dealing with, most students recognize that hard work and some degree of stress are part and parcel of academic life. Areas of academic life that are most often identified as creating high levels of stress for students are multiple back-to-back assignments, the amount of work required in classes, grade concerns, studying for tests, and getting into classes. The explanations students offer for why these areas are highly stressful generally fall into two groups – those that emphasize faculty responsibility (open communication, clarity of expectations, and flexibility), and those that emphasize student responsibility. For the most part, Truman students are willing to take responsibility for engaging in stress management by making good use of their time, being well organized and having a good attitude, and by finding outlets for their stress through exercise,

social activities, etc. However, participant comments suggest that students who are making their best effort to manage their academic stress can only balance the multiple demands they face if their professors are willing to work with them by communicating clear expectations and requirements, being open and available to answer questions, being flexible in response to overlapping test schedules and due dates, and providing adequate materials and study resources.

Areas frequently associated with low stress levels include effectiveness of teaching, participating in class discussions, curricular requirements, faculty communication, advising, feedback, and faculty availability. Student attributions for low levels of stress in these domains, as well as explanations for why keeping a high GPA and studying for tests create little stress for some participants, also tend to cluster in two groups: those that emphasize individual self-confidence and a sense of academic control (or perceived ability to achieve positive outcomes with hard work), and those that emphasize positive interactions with faculty. In other words, self-confidence and academic control and good relationships with supportive and engaged faculty seem to play particularly important roles in reducing student stress. This is supported by the significant negative correlations found between academic control, positive faculty-student relationships, and academic stress (see Table 16). Reducing academic stress may therefore call for finding ways of increasing students' perception of choice and control over their academic lives and building confidence in their ability to work hard and succeed, as well as fostering mentoring and advising relationships between faculty and students both inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, faculty may need to take a closer look at class organization and assignments like group projects and re-think how to accomplish desired goals without creating so much stress for students. Beyond the contributions of faculty and students, staff and administration may need to consider student concerns about registration, scholarship renewal requirements, scholarship jobs, recreation center and library hours, and academic advising, especially for freshmen (see Table 18), if the goal is to reduce student stress levels and improve academic performance and retention.

## References

- “2010 Missouri College Health and Behavior Survey.” Partners in Prevention. Available at <http://pip.missouri.edu>.
- “2010 National Research Survey.” American College Health Association. Available at [www.acha-ncha.org/pubs\\_rpts.html](http://www.acha-ncha.org/pubs_rpts.html).
- Abouserie, Reda. 1994. “Sources and Levels of Stress in Relation to Locus of Control and Self-Esteem in University Students.” *Educational Psychology* 14:323-331.
- Allen, S. and B. Hiebert. 1991. “Stress and Coping in Adolescents.” *Canadian Journal of Counseling* 25: 19-32.
- “The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2010.” From the Cooperative Institutional Research Program at UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute. Available at [www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/pubs/briefs/HERI\\_ResearchBrief\\_Norms2010.pdf](http://www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/pubs/briefs/HERI_ResearchBrief_Norms2010.pdf).
- Brown, R.T. 1991. “Helping Students Confront and Deal with Stress and Procrastination.” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 6: 87-102.
- Campbell, R.L. and L.W. Svenson. 1992. “Perceived Stress Among University Undergraduate Students in Edmonton, Canada.” *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 75: 552-554.
- Clifton, R.A., R.P. Perry, C.A. Stubbs, and L.W. Roberts. 2004. “Faculty Environments, Psychosocial Dispositions, and the Academic Achievement of College Students.” *Research in Higher Education* 45: 801-827.
- Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., and Mermelstein, R. 1983. “A global measure of perceived stress.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 24: 386-396.
- Feldt, Ronald C. 2008. “Development of a Brief Measure of College Stress: The College Student Stress Scale.” *Psychological Reports* 102:855-860.
- Kohn, J.P. and G.H. Frazer. 1986. “An Academic Stress Scale: Identification and Related Importance of Academic Stressors.” *Psychological Reports* 59: 415-426.
- Macan, Therese, Comila Shahani, Robert Dipboye, and Amanda Phillips. 1990. “College Students’ Time Management: Correlations with Academic Performance and Stress.” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 82: 760-768.
- McDuff, Elaine, Molly Beuke, and Susie Leshner. 2010. “Student Interview Project: Quality of Life.” In *Assessment Almanac* (Chapter IX). Kirksville, MO: Truman State University. Available at <http://assessment.truman.edu/almanac/2010/CH09.pdf>.

Misra, Ranjita, Michelle McKean, Sarah West, and Tony Russo. 2000. "Academic Stress of College Students: Comparison of Student and Faculty Perceptions." *College Student Journal* 34:236-247.

Nonis, Sarath A., Gail Hudson, Laddie Logan, and Charles Ford. 1998. "Influence of Perceived Control over Time on College Students' Stress and Stress-Related Outcomes." *Research in Higher Education* 39:587-604.

Pascarella, Ernest T. 1980. "Student-Faculty Informal Contact and College Outcomes." *Review of Educational Research* 50:545-595.

Pascarella, Ernest T. and Patrick Terenzi. 1976. "Informal Interaction with Faculty and Freshman Ratings of the Academic and Non-Academic Experience of College." *Journal of Educational Research* 70:35-41.

Peacock, Edward J. and Paul Wong. 1990. "The Stress Appraisal Measure: A Multidimensional Approach to Cognitive Appraisal." *Stress Medicine* 6: 227-236.

Rawson, H.E., K. Bloomer, and A. Kendall. 1994. "Stress, Anxiety, Depression, and Physical Illness in College Students." *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 155: 321-330.

Struthers, Ward C., Raymond Perry, and Verena Menec. 2000. "An Examination of the Relationship Among Academic Stress, Coping, Motivation, and Performance in College." *Research in Higher Education* 41:581-592.

Vittengl, J., A. Wessel, and C. Wooldridge. 2006. "Student Interview Project." In *Assessment Almanac* (Chapter XIV). Kirksville, MO: Truman State University. Available at <http://assessment.truman.edu/almanac/2006/CH14.pdf>.

Vittengl, J., S.M. Bozeman, and J.D. Schmidt. 2008. "Student Interview Project." In *Assessment Almanac* (Chapter XIII). Kirksville, MO: Truman State University. Available at <http://assessment.truman.edu/almanac/2008/CH13.pdf>.

Vittengl, J., S.M. Bozeman, and Constance. 2009. "Student Interview Project: Quality of Life." In *Assessment Almanac* (Chapter X). Kirksville, MO: Truman State University. Available at <http://assessment.truman.edu/almanac/2009/CH10.pdf>.

Wilson, Robert, Jerry Gaff, Evelyn Dienst, Lynn Wood, and James Barry. 1975. *College Professors and Their Impact on Students*. NY: Wiley.

Zajacova, Anna, Scott Lynch, and Thomas Espenshade. 2005. "Self-Efficacy, Stress, and Academic Success in College." *Research in Higher Education* 46: 677-705.

## Appendix A

### Academic Stress Screening Questionnaire

**Instructions:** Indicate the degree of stress you typically experience in regard to each of the following potential stressors by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. The items included are ones that were frequently mentioned by Truman students who participated in focus group discussions on academic stress in Fall 2010. Please be open and honest in your responses.

*0=not applicable, 1=not stressful, 2=slightly stressful, 3=mildly stressful, 4=moderately stressful, 5=stressful, 6=very stressful, 7=highly stressful*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Academic advising
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Communication by faculty about expectations and due dates of assignments
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Faculty availability during office hours and by email
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Amount of work required in classes
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Effectiveness of classroom teaching
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Getting timely feedback on homework and tests
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Keeping a high enough GPA for scholarships or graduate school
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Getting into required/desired classes
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Group projects
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Multiple back-to-back assignments and tests in different classes
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Consistency of BA/BS and curricular requirements across majors
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Co-curricular or extra-curricular involvement (sports, clubs and organizations, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Balancing work and classes
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Participating in class discussions
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Studying for tests
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Process for Identifying High Stress and Low Stress categories from the Questionnaire for the Interview

1. A member of the Interview Project team collects the questionnaire from the student and identifies the high and low stress areas for use in the interview.
2. Items with ratings of 4, 5, 6 or 7 qualify as high stress areas. The two items with the highest ratings serve as high stress categories. If fewer than two items have ratings of 5, 6, or 7, then the interview will include one or no high stress areas. In the event of a tie among high stress items, items are chosen randomly to break the tie (see step 4 below).
3. Items with ratings of 1, 2, or 3 qualify as low stress areas. The two items with the lowest satisfaction ratings serve as low points. If fewer than two items have ratings of *very dissatisfied*, *dissatisfied*, *neutral/unsure*, then the interview will include one or no low points. In the event of a tie among items as low points, items are chosen randomly to break the tie (see step 4 below).
4. Resolving ties: Read the digits from left to right in the random number table below. (Cross out digits as you read them so that they are not used more than once.) Select the item or items whose numbers first match the random digits.

#### Random Digits

2039 2993 4362 6363 2914 4955 6364 5237 6456 5561  
0176 2425 2968 3834 6077 4302 3499 9938 7231 2136  
2161 1365 2764 7836 1584 2421 4247 2930 0783 9989  
0407 1760 7048 1929 9034 0242 0753 4851 9465 0791  
0055 7981 7760 2215 3323 4727 8884 8066 7965 3939  
0726 2104 9164 6275 5464 4073 1715 3215 7883 8087  
2475 9583 8713 1445 2702 4952 4307 5796 2913 0589  
0686 1266 4341 9760 9608 5773 7394 9333 4752 8395  
4223 4033 3734 8221 2055 5131 0065 1626 7742 5806  
9596 5241 3230 3269 4836 9776 2894 5740 1557 2515  
1581 5007 6906 8933 9981 3175 4979 4525 5334 6038  
6558 6350 1273 6164 7125 1481 3084 1517 4748 0956  
1974 7635 1129 0593 7963 3817 0148 1377 5165 6568  
8671 4147 7231 3509 9032 4233 9087 3328 9044 3152  
0979 6984 8428 7697 8859 5363 2984 2649 9244 7035  
0635 0334 7219 7422 9571 1053 5954 4040 5777 2440

## Appendix C

### *Interview Instructions and Questions*

#### **Instructions Read by Interviewers to Interviewees**

*[Co-interviewers alternate reading the paragraphs below.]*

We would like to learn about students' experiences at Truman State University. In particular, we would like to better understand what contributes to academic stress for students at Truman State. You just completed a questionnaire about academic stress. The potential academic stressors included on the questionnaire were identified in student-led focus group discussions of academic stress at Truman in the Fall of 2010. Based on your responses, we will ask you about areas of high and low academic stress for you at Truman. Specific answers will help us identify areas that are frequently problematic for students and need to be addressed, as well as helpful strategies for managing potential stressors.

The Interview Project team will combine many students' answers in reports to the University administration, faculty, and staff. Interview reports will not include your name, so you may speak freely. You are not required to share information that you prefer to keep private or feel uncomfortable discussing.

What questions do you have before we begin?

*[Clarify and reassure, as needed.]*

#### **2012 Student Interview Project Questions**

##### **Academic Stress: High Stress Area A**

Questionnaire Item Number \_\_\_\_ Stress Category \_\_\_\_\_

1. On the questionnaire, [category] was an area you identified as a relatively **high** source of academic stress. Why is [category] a major source of stress for you? What would make it less stressful? Please give specific examples.

**Academic Stress: High Stress Area B**

Questionnaire Item Number \_\_\_\_ Stress Category \_\_\_\_\_

2. *On the questionnaire, [category] was an area you identified as a relatively **high** source of academic stress. Why is [category] a major source of stress for you? What would make it less stressful? Please give specific examples.*

**Academic Stress: Low Stress Area A**

Questionnaire Item Number \_\_\_\_ Stress Category \_\_\_\_\_

3. *On the questionnaire, [category] was an area you identified as a relatively **low** source of academic stress. What helps to limit or buffer the potential for stress related to [category] for you? Please give specific examples.*

**Academic Stress: Low Stress Area B**

Questionnaire Item Number \_\_\_\_ Stress Category \_\_\_\_\_

4. *On the questionnaire, [category] was an area you identified as a relatively **low** source of academic stress. What helps to limit or buffer the potential for stress related to [category] for you? Please give specific examples.*

**Final Question**

5. *What overall suggestions do you have for reducing levels of academic stress at Truman without compromising the quality of a Truman education, and what would help you cope with your current stress more effectively?*

## Appendix D

### *Interview Question Coding Categories and Examples*

#### **Contributors to High Points in Academic Stress (Questions 1 and 2)**

- I. Multiple back-to-back assignments and tests in different class
  - A. Multiple assignments at the same time
    1. "Multiple back to back assignments are something you have to deal with"
    2. "When many different classes have things due on one day it causes stress"
    3. "English class has 4 papers due and tests on same day"
    4. "Multiple assignments on one day doesn't allow me to dedicate time to assignments"
    5. "History classes have big papers for each class and usually due at the same time"
  - B. Personal time management issues
    1. "Time management is an issue -- personal time management and studying earlier would help lower stress"
    2. "It's difficult to study weeks ahead of time, cramming for a test 4-5 days before"
    3. "Need to schedule gaps between classes and keep up with work so no cramming the night before"
  - C. Multiple tests at the same time
    1. "One test per day is hard enough- more than one doesn't allow enough time to review notes"
    2. "Snow days made for more exams and assignments in fewer days (4 exams in 5 days instead 2 each week)"
    3. "Test in every class this week"
    4. "Each week this semester I had 3 tests in 2 days"
  - D. Need better inter-departmental and intra-departmental communication
    1. "Pre-MAE for special education doesn't communicate well with major"
    2. "Smaller departments could coordinate tests"
    3. "Poor communication between professors in science department"
    4. "Need better communication between chemistry and math departments"
  - E. Professors could be more flexible
    1. "Professors need to be clear about when things are due and be flexible"
    2. "When you talk to professors, they should be understanding"
  - F. Need better communication of requirements and due dates
    1. "Knowing details ahead of time would make things less stressful"
    2. "There were misunderstandings that couldn't be clarified right after lecture"
    3. "Knowing when assignments are due well in advance would help"
  - G. Major/graduation requirements make it difficult to avoid taking multiple difficult classes
    1. "Taking fewer science classes- makes it less stressful but not realistic to graduate in time"
    2. "Department scheduling - hard to take required courses"

#### H. Hard to prioritize

1. "Have trouble planning ahead sometimes"
2. "Sometimes you have to choose where you concentrate"
3. "Hard to make time for everything- like to keep a good balance"

#### E. Extracurricular commitments

1. "Lots of time in organizations outside of school"
2. "17 hours a week for Ultimate Frisbee team"
3. "Hard to balance school and extracurriculars (cross country and track)"

### II. Keeping a high enough GPA for scholarships and grad school

#### A. Truman scholarships need a lower GPA requirement

1. "Keeping scholarships will always be stressful"
2. "If GPA requirements were lower, it would help – have to keep scholarship to pay for School"
3. "Wish a 3.25 GPA didn't matter so much"
4. "Make full scholarship renewal a 3.0 instead of a 3.25; science courses can tank your GPA"
5. "Scholarship jobs add to pressure"
6. "Frustrating to focus more on GPA than learning"

#### B. Grad school admission

1. "The big issue is graduate school: getting a high enough GPA"
2. "Grad school is expected for my major (health and ex science) so the pressure is up"
3. "Can't do much with my major unless I go to grad school"
4. "Depend on good GPA to get into grad program at Truman"
5. "Difficult required psych class could lower GPA for grad school"

#### C. Important for post-undergraduate success

1. "Your GPA decides your future – internships and job applications ask for GPA"
2. "Students feel that other schools and grad schools won't recognize the difficulty of Truman's workload and how it affects GPA"

#### D. Challenging class requirements

1. "Chemistry and Math supports for Biology are difficult"
2. "Classes out of major (e.g. for BS) as biggest problem"
3. "Stressful classes are ones in which profs do not teach well but expect students to learn at high level"

#### E. Internal pressures to make good grades

1. "Aspire for a 4.0 because I know I'm capable"
2. "Truman students have pretty high expectations for themselves"
3. "Want to graduate Magna Cum Laude"
4. "Need a 4.0 for a top grad school"

#### F. Feel a need to work harder/time management

1. "Competition – feel I'm falling behind"
2. "Motivated to do well because there are not a lot of scholarships out there"

3. "Need to stay on top of homework"
4. "Need to study more in advance to do well on tests"

G. Difficult transition from high school

1. "Keeping good grades in high school was easy, but it was hard to transition from high school to college because I have to work a lot harder to keep my GPA up here"
2. "HS was easy, didn't even have finals! Then Lindenwood, then transitioned poorly"
3. "First semester was hard - homesick. Adjusting to college life is hard"
4. "One bad semester can bring down GPA"

H. Need more faculty/advisor communication

1. "Miscommunication about requirements from advisor caused me to fall behind a year"
2. "Feel guilty talking to professors about all this - it's not their job!"
3. "Would be helpful after freshman year to continue with non-academic advisor"
4. "Wish someone would sit down and talk to me about grad school!"
5. "Need help planning course schedule to balance difficult classes"

I. Other sources of grade pressure

1. "Grades suffer from work and school"
2. "Parents give me stress about my grades"
3. "Hard to take so many classes to graduate"
4. "Raised to do my best, so a mindset to do my best"
5. "As an international student, high parental/cultural expectations – and need a higher GPA for graduate school"

III. Amount of work required in classes

A. Hard to balance work in multiple classes

1. "Hard to balance with other work, like adding the pre-MAE (which adds more studio classes - up to 60 hrs a week)"
2. "Every professor seems to think their class is the only one"
3. "Teachers assign stuff without consideration of how much work you have in other classes"
4. "In business classes there are two group project meetings, 2-3 times a week, 2-3 hours For each class"
5. "I can't handle 3+ hours of work a day for each of 5 classes"

B. Students need better time management

1. "Trying to do more than reasonable- pre-med"
2. "Sometimes it's hard to find enough time to excel in all – need time management"
3. "Need time management skills – trying to divide time by the hour"
4. "Taking 17 hours, hard to balance; classes equally hard and equally important"
5. "Quick pace in classes – can pile up if you fall behind"

C. Difficult tests and papers

1. "Upper level math- a lot of homework, difficult, tests are stressful"
2. "Have a HUGE research project due worth a lot of points and that is causing stress"
3. "Daily write-ups are stressful"
4. "More stressful when you're trying to make As"

D. Too many assignments

1. "A large course load for the viscom major, including class work and projects that can be up to 30 hrs a week"
2. "Have already done 30 projects in one class with little prep time – should reduce number of practice projects"
3. "Feels overloaded in upper level math - too many assignments at once"

E. Too much reading

1. "English classes require more reading than possible"
2. "Professors should have fewer books for a class to accurately understand the material"
3. "Two to three readings by next class - impossible to read"
4. "Most classes have excessive requirements (3 chapters for one class, 3 for another)"

F. Need clearer expectations

1. "Expectations are often not clearly given by professors ahead of time; disorganization is common"
2. "Often cover too many topics that are not understood easily"
3. "Language barrier - sometimes teachers talk too fast"

G. Requirements are stressful (labs, LSPs, etc.)

1. "The department could decrease some unnecessary required classes"
2. "Taking high class volume- 17 hours (science), 3 labs- which do not match credit hours"
3. "Tutoring for language- one extra hour is stressful"
4. "Take 16 credit hours- needed to graduate in 4.5 years with a double major"
5. "LSPs may not be inherently difficult, but adding on work makes it harder"

H. Extracurriculars interfere with classes

1. "Participating in several extracurricular activities- also, want to take care of myself."
2. "Involved with 5 organizations – hard to balance"
3. "Sports team schedule exacerbates problems"

#### IV. Studying for Tests

A. Need study guides

1. "[Some] professors provide incorrect/incomplete topics for what's on the test"
2. "To decrease stress professors could produce better study guides"
3. "Better idea of what to expect on tests would help – sample questions"

B. Time consuming

1. "Studying is very time consuming"
2. "When trying to master lots of areas of content, not just memorize, it takes more time"

C. Tests worth a lot

1. "Tests are worth majority of grade – need to give more tests to provide opportunity to improve"
2. "Would prefer smaller tests/quizzes"
3. "Helps when profs drop lowest score"

D. Too much material

1. "Only 3 tests per course- a lot of material on each one"
2. "Tests cover too much material"
3. "Stress makes it hard to retain material"
4. "Problem when information added at the last minute"

E. Emphasis on memorizing

1. "Theorems and proofs- lots of memorization"
2. "Hard to memorize material and study for tests"
3. "Doesn't have a good memory"

F. Hard to balance tests with other work

1. "Cut the class workloads around test times"
2. "Can get extensions on other assignments- would help if more flexibility on due dates"
3. "Multiple tests at the same time (3 in a week, 2 back to back), not possible to study adequately for both, causes poor performance"

G. Need reviews

1. "Feel as if some questions come out of nowhere"
2. "Prefer study sessions organized by teachers"
3. "Would be helpful if professors said 'you should know 'x' of chapter 'x' by date/day'"
4. "Not sure what to study"
5. "Hard to talk to professors and TAs are too busy"

V. Getting into Required/Desired Classes

A. Getting into required classes

1. "Getting into LSP classes is difficult because they fill up fast (especially the good sections, with the best professors)"
2. "Trying to follow 4 year plan- not enough open spots"
3. "Was unable to enroll in major required courses"
4. "There could be more sections of required courses that have large numbers interested in taking them"
5. "Profs should try to find spots for majors, not just seniors"
6. "Need larger or more online classes"

B. Need information about the process

1. "Classes with codes – students do not always understand the process"
2. "We should go in and have advisor help us register; need new advising system"
3. "It was my first year and I wasn't familiar with the process- afraid I wouldn't get what I needed"
4. "Should have students who've been here longer help freshmen and sophomores register"
5. "Need more guidance from advisor"
6. "Registration more stressful than finals"

C. Technical difficulties with registration

1. "System shut down in middle of registration"

2. "Was studying abroad in England and then I wasn't approved for registering because my hours were all off, which took a long time to fix"
3. "It would help if they gave more notice to the student if something was wrong"
4. "Need more technical efficiency to prepare for influx of students – faster server"
5. "My computer froze this semester when I attempted to register for calculus"
6. "Registration in the computer lab is like a horse race"

D. Getting into desired classes

1. "Time restraints due to sports"
2. "Couldn't get into two classes because professor said he would email me and didn't"
3. "As a freshman, I register last, so less likely to get desired classes"
4. "A lot of people want the same classes"
5. "Had 3 classes scheduled at same time – major, minor, honors – had to drop honors"

E. Lacks credits to register early

1. "Classes full before you can register; no open spots"
2. "Because of low credits coming in as freshman had to register the very last day"
3. "Hard to get any classes as a freshman"

F. Problems with overrides

1. "Not good communication by professors about overrides"
2. "When classes are full, overrides are a hassle"
3. "Last year there was one section of 25 of one required course and the professor didn't give an override (I was number 6 on the list); it got me off track"

G. Do not like 5pm registration

1. "Have to get on at 5pm exactly, but sports practices end after that"
2. "Very much dislikes the registration process"
3. "I want to get good professors, good courses; 7am is a good change to registration"
4. "Hard to be online at 5pm"
5. "Big problem doing registration at 5pm on a certain day"

## VI. Group Projects

A. Want to pick groups, not be assigned

1. "Assigned partners are stressful"
2. "In my major, would prefer to choose partners"
3. "Should let students choose who you work with in groups so I can choose someone I am comfortable with, who is intelligent and hardworking"
4. "Choosing your own groups would make it less stressful"

B. Unequal input from group members

1. "A lot of the time I get partnered with someone who doesn't care as much"
2. "Do not like to depend on others who have questionable effort"
3. "You can't control other individuals work output"
4. "Major/non-major differences in interest level"
5. "Always partnered with people who can't/won't do anything"
6. "Different levels of competence"

C. Do not like sharing a grade

1. "Do not like not being able to control contributions of others and having it affect grade"
2. "Grade/group - so if someone slacks off, others take the lower grade"
3. "Stress and anxiety from my grade being dependent on work of others"
4. "Need an individual grade"
5. "Goals and priorities of students differ"

D. Difficult to coordinate schedules

1. "Organizing meeting times is difficult"
2. "Need more group meetings (but there is no time)"
3. "Hard to coordinate 5-6 people multiple times per week – need fewer people in group and more time"

E. Better to work with people you know

1. "Self-chosen group; better if choose people with good work ethic"
2. "You do not know if partners are reliable or will do their part"

F. Students have working style differences

1. "Cultural differences cause problems"
2. "Study differently than others – do not like matching other students' pace"
3. "Doesn't like taking breaks like other students- get it all done at once"
4. "Particular about how I want things done - working in groups doesn't allow me to utilize my own work ethic"
5. "I have Aspergers – not good at working with other people"

G. Contact/communication problems

1. "Partner's sleeping habits are different which makes him hard to contact"
2. "Meeting coordination difficult at times"
3. "Communication is most stressful"

H. Would prefer an individual work option

1. "Not being in a group would make it less stressful"
2. "Solution: do not do group projects"
3. "Like my own ideas, do not like to compromise ideas"
4. "I am an independent worker"
5. "Sometimes allowing individual options would be helpful"

VII. Co-curricular or extra-curricular involvement

A. Conflict with academics

1. "Lots of extra time - taking away from homework and classwork"
2. "Hard to do homework on buses, take tests before and after games"
3. "Hard to practice until 6 pm and then go to the library"

B. Time commitment: clubs and organizations

1. "Very time consuming – especially when have a leadership role"
2. "University Swingers, time consuming"
3. "ROTC environment - big course load with leadership is like a full-time job"

C. Hard to balance activities

1. "Could always do less stuff - be more flexible with time"
2. "Over-involved"
3. "Individual spreads self too thin; common experience of TSU student"
4. "Hard to balance - choose one or the other"
5. "Military science demands a lot of time and energy"

D. Time commitment: sports

1. "A lot of time required for athletics – sports practices conflict with study time"
2. "Takes away energy from studying"
3. "Stressful since I'm in softball, and practice 6 times a week for 3 to 4 hours"
4. "Varsity soccer - major commitment (15 hours a week minimum, 30 hours a week while in season.)"

E. Teacher/coach lack of cooperation

1. "Have heard of others [teachers] who haven't been cooperative about sports"

F. Personal time management issues

1. "Unnecessary activities for sorority; not a lot getting done - not enough time"
2. "Not enough hours in the day"
3. "Fall asleep doing homework, couldn't finish class load"
4. "Easy to get over-involved"

G. Activities required for graduate school

1. "Psychology/pre-MAE. A lot of outside experience expected"
2. "[Outside experience] not counted in curriculum"
3. "Expected to have internship/research (psych) but difficult with class schedule"
4. "Difficult to be active in outside groups and still maintain GPA and participate in the field experiences grad schools and employers would like to see"

H. Involved in important activities with real responsibilities

1. "Extracurricular activities like SAB involve people depending on you"
2. "Can't just ignore responsibilities – making important contributions"

I. Other

1. "Residence-life involves more responsibilities and less compensation than other schools would give for the same job"
2. "Involvement is good, but not too much"

VIII. Balancing work and classes

A. Work conflicts with academics

1. "Work on weekends - not enough time to do school work"
2. "Overwhelming schedule affects homework and academic studies"
3. "Working a lot cuts study time"
4. "Can't finish assignments if have to go to work"
5. "Job at Hy-Vee is stressful – hard to do homework when work at night"

B. Need the money

1. "Need money to stay in school, so have to work, but the school work is what's important"
2. "Had to work to earn more money for study abroad"
3. "Will need to continue to work to live next year"
4. "Work 55 hours a week to pay for college - it's a rough balance, overwhelming"

C. Need more scholarships/jobs through school

1. "Would be less stressful with more scholarships; wouldn't need to work as much"
2. "Helps to have more scholarships or a closer job"

IX. Effectiveness of teaching

A. Poor class organization – more learning should take place in class

1. "Often have to try to teach myself out of the book – need more in-class problems and discussions"
2. "When lectures aren't well organize, class notes are a jumbled mess"
3. "Need more opportunities to talk and ask questions in class"

B. Teachers need to vary teaching and assessment styles

1. "Spanish classes use one structured style of teaching all semester"

C. Teachers should help organize study groups

1. "Would help with understanding if could coordinate with other students"
2. "Teachers should promote study groups to get more students involved"

D. Language barriers limit teaching effectiveness

1. "Stressful if the only teacher for a required class is hard to understand"

X. Getting timely feedback on homework and tests

A. Need more TAs or study groups

1. "Need more graders in large classes to get grading done more quickly"

B. Slow turnaround/loss of relevance of feedback

1. "Stressful when essays and tests take weeks to be returned"
2. "By the time I get assignments back, comments aren't relevant any more"

C. Do not know my grades

1. "Had no idea of class grade going into final – prof never posted grades"

XI. Consistency of BA/BS and curricular requirements across majors

A. Need more clarity of communication/ requirements

1. "My academic advisor was not very helpful"
2. "Requirements for majors aren't very straight forward"

3. "Stressful not knowing if you have all you need"
4. "General advisor isn't as helpful as a major advisor would have been (hasn't been assigned one)"
5. "Came into Truman unaware of liberal arts requirements"
6. "Hard to get consistent information from different sources"

B. Some LSP courses are irrelevant

1. "I do not like wasting time with classes that do not have to do with my major"
2. "I do not have an interest, so it's hard to be motivated in them"
3. "Feel there are unnecessary curricular requirements"
4. "Unnecessary to take health, especially as a senior"

C. LSP courses can be too difficult

1. "100-level courses were hard (most of them for modes); BIO 107 was brutal"
2. "LSP requirements are stressful"

D. Too many/confusing curricular requirements

1. "Most of classes where I've studied hard are LSP courses"
2. "Making sure you get all requirements is stressful"
3. "Would like requirements changed- fewer of them"
4. "Requirements changed twice in pre-physical therapy program"
5. "Problems with Degree Works"

E. Want to graduate in 4 years

1. "Having 2 majors and trying to get done in 4 years is difficult personally and financially"
2. "Stressful to get an email that you haven't completed classes for graduation"
3. "Never heard back about intent to graduate; had to contact registrar"

F. Other

1. "When I came, my father wanted me to have a major that leads to have a steady job."
2. "Want to be able to focus on science but have to spend a lot of time on English"
3. "Language is as important as math, but doesn't count for as much"

## XII. Participating in class discussions

A. Shy

1. "In bigger classes, feel uncomfortable to ask questions or volunteer answers"
2. "I'm shy, I do not like talking in front of people"
3. "Do not like to talk, nervous in front of other students or people"
4. "Dislikes having everyone's attention at once"
5. "Personality issue – not comfortable talking"

B. Necessary to participate in smaller classes

1. "When class numbers are low, under pressure to talk"
2. "Have to talk in WACT class- smaller, sit in circles"
3. "Would prefer small groups in class"

C. Need more practice

1. "It takes me longer to think about things, I do not want to say something just to say something; that's not useful"
2. "It's a personal thing. Public speaking doesn't come easily. The more you do it the easier it gets"

D. Would prefer that less would be required

1. "In upper level classes, it's not needed because there are enough people who will participate anyway, without it being graded"
2. "Make it less a part of grade"

E. Can't speak/communicate thoughts well

1. "I do not speak well in public"
2. "Feel that it is hard to communicate my thoughts"
3. "Hard for other students to understand my accident"

F. Need more professor prompting

1. "If professors do not specifically ask for questions, it's harder to ask"
2. "When I do ask questions, it is after a professor asks for questions- otherwise hard to know when to speak up"
3. "Would help if the professor called on me"

**Contributors to Low Points in Academic Stress (Questions 3 and 4)**

I. Keeping a high enough GPA for scholarships and grad school

A. Not hard to get good grades

1. "Hasn't had to try very hard in the English department"
2. "It's been easy to get desired grades"
3. "Only non-A's have been math classes (math minor); I could have put in more effort"
4. "I have never been in danger of losing my scholarships"
5. "Academics at Truman isn't that difficult or stressful – important to pick good profs"

B. Work very hard

1. "I have a 4.0, and as long as work ethic is maintained, I'm not worried about it changing"
2. "If I tried hard and got a C, I wouldn't be upset"
3. "I set high standards for myself"

C. Started off well as a freshman

1. "Started off strong"
2. "I have always gotten good grades"
3. "Due to a good start I have a 3.9- so lots of wiggle room for keeping 100% of the money"
4. "Brought in a lot of 4.0 credits"

D. Confident/laid back attitude toward grades

1. "Getting good grades is "normal"; no problems with scholarships"

2. "I know it is stressful for those on the edge, but this isn't a concern for me"
3. "Very comfortable with my GPA, confident in my ability"

E. Focus on learning/not on grades

1. "If GPA did drop, I wouldn't be stressed"
2. "Effort level is more important"
3. "Focus on assignments instead of GPA helps"

F. No grad school plans

1. "No plans for graduate school"
2. "Not interested in grad school; not necessary for journalism"

II. Getting into Required/Desired Classes

A. Can get overrides

1. "Faculty are usually open to overrides if you need into a class"
2. "Got an override easily when asked for"
3. "Easy to get overrides into desired classes"

B. Helpful advisor

1. "Speaking to advisor in advance helped, especially walking through how registration works."
2. "Does help to have information about faculty ahead of time, especially for first year student"

C. Personal flexibility about classes

1. "If a class is required, know I will eventually take it"
2. "Had alternative classes picked out"

D. Helpful major

1. "Not too many people have a physics major so it's easy"
2. "Not stressful because sequence not as important for my major"

E. Experienced with the process

1. "Now has experience with process"
2. "Not stressful as an upperclassman (registration by credit hour)"
3. "Came into Truman with a lot of credits so it wasn't stressful"
4. "As a fifth year, I have no problem getting into desired classes"

F. General classes are easily available

1. "Not an upperclassman yet, so more general classes are easier to get into (set aside for freshmen and sophomores)"

III. Group Projects

A. Sharing work benefits learning

1. "Useful to learn to make compromises"
2. "Helps to have others to work with to accomplish tasks"

- B. Other students are reliable
  - 1. “Most Truman students aren’t slackers – willing to share the work”
- C. Group projects work well in major classes
  - 1. “Pre-MAE classes teach you how to work in groups effectively”
  - 2. “Group projects are an efficient way of doing work in major classes”
- D. Most students have flexible schedules
  - 1. “Students can usually find time to meet”
- E. Enjoy getting to know people
  - 1. “Group projects give you a chance to meet students in the major”

#### IV. Co-curricular or extra-curricular involvement

- A. Not involved in too many activities
  - 1. “Cut down how many involvements from past semesters, now only in two or three”
  - 2. “Involved in 2 activities - AMSA and Presomed”
- B. Good stress outlet
  - 1. “Extra-curriculars are more of an outlet for stress”
  - 2. “Helps with grad school stress”
  - 3. “Able to meet good people and de-stress”
- C. Personal benefits of involvement
  - 1. “You can meet new friends and vent, increasing networking”
  - 2. “With CCF can find a person to can express feelings with”
  - 3. “Same interests and can ask questions”
- D. Activities are fun
  - 1. “Actually fun- so is a de-stressor”
  - 2. “Playing sports helps me relieve stress. I go into a different world when I’m playing sports - stress free”
  - 3. “Go to the rec for fun, feel good and can go on my own time”
- E. Activities aren’t too demanding
  - 1. “When I do not have time I just do not do them”
  - 2. “And all the involvements are pre-MAE (pre-professional) which do not have very much of a time commitment”
  - 3. “Two groups- Rotary and Habitat for Humanity which do not take too much time. Meetings are spaced out, easy to attend”
- F. Offer a good break from academics
  - 1. “Studying is not emotionally healthy; clubs, sports, etc., help you grow emotionally and relieve stress”
  - 2. “There is a sense of pride in helping people: it's fun to do and it de-stresses after studying”

3. "Studying alone is only intellectual; one needs emotional growth too"
4. "Taking a break from all of academic stressors"
5. "When I'm studying and doing math- when I get frustrated- I take a break and go to the gym- and when I come back I'm not frustrated."

G. Good for resume

1. "Concerns about putting things on a resume"

V. Balancing work and classes

A. Job is easy

1. "Have scholarship job and a regular job- but I chose to do it so it makes that job more fun and less stressful"
2. "Easy job"
3. "Do not work outside of scholarship job, work as DJ which is fun (for scholarship)"
4. "Only job I have is a scholarship job- only 4 hours"

B. Can do homework at work

1. "Can do homework during work"
2. "Works in library, night shifts, get a lot of hw done then"

C. Good time management

1. "Structured hours"
2. "Having a lot going on in my life, helps me prioritize and stay focused"

D. Do not have a job

1. "No job besides scholarships"
2. "No job on campus and work only when I go home for holidays"

VI. Effectiveness of classroom teaching

A. Good professors-clear-knowledgeable teachers

1. "Hearing things explained in class helps me to understand"
2. "Has had 10 instructors and no problems with them"
3. "Had some profs several times in major- know I can go in to talk to them"
4. "Prof do not try to talk above you, they make it understandable"
5. "Professors know the material"
6. "Profs are willing to listen to feedback and make improvements"

B. Student responsibility to learn

1. "If I have a poor teacher, teach myself material- not stressful"
3. "Students' responsibility to learn"
4. "Being prepared allows the lectures to be easy to follow"

C. Like or can adapt to teaching styles of most profs

1. "Do not see teacher as preventing success"
2. "Visual learner so examples are crucial to learning"

3. "Always try to take certain profs- like the way they lecture"
4. "I've had many of the teachers in the major already, so I know their teaching style"
5. "Profs are flexible with due dates of assignments"

D. Profs are approachable

1. "Friendliness of faculty"
2. "Very approachable"
3. "Profs do not mind answering questions in class"
4. "Even in big classes, profs try to connect with students"

E. No problems with profs

1. "Quality classroom teaching. EX: provide lots of examples, real-life scenarios (tie between what's going in the course and also what's going on in the world)"
2. "I've had excellent teachers"
3. "Individual feels professors are generally good and keep students up to date"

F. Have good class notes

1. "Professors get their points across; outlines help for note taking"
2. "Comm classes- notes on powerpoints online so it is always there if you need more help"
3. "Does well in lecture classes- can sit and take notes well"
4. "Studying for tests from lectures and notes is easy for me- I excel in a lecture format"

G. Provide study guides

1. "Not as stressed if visual information is provided and do not have to go search for information not gotten within classroom during lectures"
2. "Teachers have study guides and identify areas to cover"

VII. Getting timely feedback on homework and tests

A. Generally get timely feedback from profs

1. "Professors seem to be prompt, getting things back in a timely fashion"
2. "Teachers good about getting homework and labs back in a reasonable amount of time"
3. "Helpful getting them back on time to study for tests and find out what was wrong"
4. "Get homework back next class period"

B. Not concerned about feedback/can be patient

1. "I personally do not get bothered with worrying over waiting"
2. "Not very concerned with getting things back on time"
3. "It's not the end of the world when things are not given back ASAP"

C. Student already knows how he/she did

1. "It's easy to know how well you did on an exam after completing it, even without getting it back"
2. "If professor tells the grade, within context of class, generally grades were better than I was expecting"
3. "I know how I performed"

4. "After a test, have gut feeling of results"
5. "Normally I know how well I've done"

D. Students can take initiative to get feedback

1. "For feedback, I go to office hours"
2. "I have to take the initiative to get the feedback I want"
3. "If I have a question, I'll ask, not wait for feedback"

E. Feedback received is good/helpful

1. "Can judge where you are in the class - can judge how things went after test or paper is finished"
2. "Professors email promptly/ helpfully"

F. Students understand professional workload

1. "Sometimes takes a while, but professor will explain why"
2. "Acknowledges that faculty are busy, wishes they would take their time instead of rushing"
3. "Worrying isn't going to get them graded quickly- teachers who take time to grade give better quality feedback"

G. Students work hard regardless

1. "I usually just try my hardest regardless of what I'm getting; try not to pay attention to grade"
2. "Do not expect professor to grade it in less time than I had to do it"
3. "Give it my best, no matter what. Is annoying when do not get assignments back, but still do your best"

VIII. Consistency of BA/BS and curricular requirements across majors

A. Requirements are clear

1. "Catalog spells it out fairly well, info is readily available"
2. "Seem consistent with each other (BS/BA)"
3. "Everything is clear cut"

B. Good advisors

1. "Academic advisors helpful to relieve stress regarding this topic"
2. "Advisors pointing in the right direction help reduce stress"
3. "Good communication on faculty's part"

C. Students know what to expect

1. "Finds degree works helpful"
2. "Already knew requirements before Truman. No surprises, knew what she needed to do, and what to expect"
5. "I knew what I wanted to do when I came here"

D. Major is reasonable

1. "Less structured majors easier to finish on time"

2. "Not really an issue - major is more demanding than some others but that's ok"
3. "Have experienced few changes in major requirements"

E. Have a 4-year plan

1. "Spent time constructing a 4 year plan and looking on open course list"
2. "Advisor made the 4 year plan"
3. "Degree works helps a lot"

F. Other

1. "Personal responsibility (being proactive)"
2. "Major requirements prepare for career"
3. "Electives seem to be easy for me - it won't affect career as much as major classes; elective classes- break from science and more fun"

IX. Communication by faculty about explanations and due dates of assignments

A. Consistent communication

1. "Good communication about assignments and due dates in syllabi by physics professors; clear and consistent"
2. "Know when things are due on day 1"

B. Continual communication/reminders/updates

1. "Usually multiple sources for deadlines"
2. "Attend class regularly- receive reminders"
3. "You can always see due dates, either online, or on the syllabus and if they change you're often notified of those changes"

C. Use of blackboard

1. "If syllabus doesn't provide answer, can usually call, email, or check blackboard"
2. "Blackboard is an excellent resource"

D. Approachable/available

1. "Faculty are helpful and flexible if needed"
2. "All of the teachers are so approachable and available"
3. "Getting appointments and talking has eliminated stress"

E. Other

1. "Have gotten extensions if needed"
2. "Helps to talk with other students- remind each other"

X. Participating in class discussions

A. Confident

1. "It's pretty easy, when I am confident enough to speak out in class"
2. "Personally comfortable speaking in a group"
3. "Not worried about looking stupid"
4. "Never felt intimidated by class discussion; not called out during class"

5. "I like to hear myself talk – want to be a teacher"

B. Encouraging professors

1. "Teachers help a lot with participation- encourage all to participate"
2. "Most profs are reasonable"
3. "Finds profs encouraging and supportive"
4. "Professors tend to think well of me"
5. "Helps when profs create an open atmosphere"

C. Experienced

1. "Predisposed to being comfortable"
2. "Lots of experience, not new to class discussions"
3. "Has experience in group discussions in the military – not a big deal"

D. Less stress in small classes

1. "Small number of students in classes helps"
2. "It's less stressful with a smaller class size, fewer people in classroom"
3. "Small class size, creates chance of interacting"

E. Well-prepared

1. "It's pretty easy when you are prepared for class"
2. "Good at reading and analyzing material"
3. "Stressful if not prepared, but usually I'm ready"

F. Enjoyable

1. "Enjoy class discussion"
2. "Quite comfortable talking in front of others- helps pass the time"
3. "I enjoy taking in class, so it comes naturally to me"

G. Responsibility of students

1. "Important to contribute - need to be involved in class community"
2. "It's there for my benefit, so I might as well put my ideas out there and see what others think"

XI. Academic Advising

A. Friendly/approachable

1. "Advisors are approachable and easy to talk to"
2. "Advisors are open, friendly and helpful"
3. "Major advisor - easy to approach and willing to do what needs to be done"
4. "Professors are approachable here (compared to other schools)"
5. "Really cares about me and wants me to do well – knows me personally"
6. "Can email or walk in any time"

B. Knowledgeable/good resource

1. "Advisors give good foundation for what to do"
2. "Comfortable with advisor in major and had advisor as professor"
3. "My advisor is a fantastic educator"
4. "Rarely a question she can't answer"

C. Available/accessible

1. "No problems contacting advisors"
2. "Very accessible, he's in his office when he says he'll be"
3. "Keeps updated with email"
4. "Always there when I need him"

D. Generally helpful

1. "I can talk to him regarding career choices, etc."
2. "Advisors have all been helpful with school/athletics/etc."
3. "Great advisors, cool, helpful, always available"

E. Get advice from other teachers or students

1. "Got to know Education Department professors well early and I go to them"
2. "Many teachers have advised her"
3. "Asking other students is helpful, upperclassmen helpful in answering questions as well"
4. "Can network through organizations"
5. "Other profs are willing to help"

F. Able to receive nonacademic advice

1. "Will talk about all problems"
2. "Goes to advisor to talk about sources of stress, so that de-stresses her"
3. "My advisor is great- like my best friend - young, outgoing, Truman grad."

G. Do not need an advisor

1. "Helps to have access to change major or minor on internet. Likes DegreeWorks"
2. "More independent, okay to figure out things on own"
3. "Didn't need advising"
4. "DegreeWorks and Truview allow monitoring and control that I like"

H. Clear communication

1. "Clear on requirements from the beginning"
2. "Will find out answers to questions if it is difficult"
3. "There is clear communication"

XII. Faculty Availability

A. Quick email response

1. "Professors are very responsive and get back to you fast"
2. "Professors tend to be good about responding to emails"
3. "Quick to respond to students' email"
4. "Physics faculty always available"
5. "Have doors open and respond to emails quickly (when I do not want to walk in the cold)"

B. Generally willing to help/meet

1. "The nursing professors have particularly good availability"

2. "They want to make it manageable for students"
3. "Very open, encourage us to visit for any reason (help w/ recommendation letters or just to talk)"

C. Flexible in making appointments

1. "Willing to make time for you, even outside of office hours"
2. "Have office hours on syllabus, but say they can make availability outside too if a person has conflicts"
3. "When teachers stay after class, that helps a lot"
4. "Truman faculty usually have a lot of time open to meet and talk with you and are fairly flexible"
5. "In exercise science, can schedule meeting outside of office hours"

D. Clear about office hours

1. "They have a good amount of office hours and you can make an appointment"
2. "Always there during office hours, which were clear in the syllabus"
3. "Helps when there are multiple days available- set hours"
4. "Office hours listed on syllabus"

E. No need to meet with professors

1. "Can get advice from peers"
2. "Doesn't really take advantage of faculty hours"
3. "Doesn't generally need to meet with professors, has usually had a good relationship with professors"

**Responses to Question 5**

**A. Students have the ability/responsibility to limit their own stress by having good time management, organization, and a good attitude. Also taking initiative in class and out of class, using resources and being prepared.**

1. "Time management would help with [my] current stress"
2. "Find ways to combat procrastination"
3. "Getting enough sleep (8 hours/night)"
4. "Coping: not procrastinating, having anything other than school to worry about to take stress away"
5. "More tutoring to help with academic situation"
6. "Try to work ahead"
7. "Personal planner helps. Not procrastinating (can be hard)"
8. "Thinking about the payoff makes it easy to cope. The future reward is so high"

**B. Professors should be open and available to talk with students, have and communicate expectations and requirements and cooperate with other faculty regarding test scheduling and flexibility.**

1. "Professors could give out more structured syllabi"

2. "Reminders of upcoming deadlines, etc."
3. "Emphasize deadlines"
4. "Would be helpful if teachers would coordinate test schedules"
5. "Professors being more open - easier access, help with scheduling issues - would help"
6. "Give students a set schedule, expectations at the beginning"
7. "We want to see that Truman cares about us as more than the academic side- ex: professors verbalizing that"
8. "Better/more office hours so profs more available"
9. "Communication: answer emails, openness of professors, professors interested in your future, openness of office hours"
10. "If profs are more open or just say they are, open to some flexibility, so it doesn't feel like teacher is 'against' students"
11. "Would be helpful if more professors used blackboard, grading portion specifically; having syllabi and assignments on it helpful for managing workload"
12. "Teachers need to consider the students' workload (3 tests in one day - 1 teacher should move test)"

**C. Students should find a stress outlet, through exercising, social activities, campus activities, etc. Get involved extracurricularly, but make sure you have a good balance (between school, social, organization and work) and get enough sleep.**

1. "Truman offers activities outside academics- good to de-stress"
2. "Clubs help people meet and you can find a place for yourself"
3. "I run to reduce stress"
4. "Exercise when things are getting really stressful. Meditation"
5. "Truman has lots of activities that reduce stress. Fireside Friday. Exercise helps. Checking out for a while- watching TV, etc."
6. "Personally having some free time each day TV or hanging out with people - self-organized"
7. "Get to sleep early (sleep more)"
8. "Important that students also maintain some type of social life"
9. "Let students know they do not have to spend Saturday afternoons in library or belong to so many organizations"
10. "Truman has endless opportunities-joined club, church, job- this semester"
11. "Get exercise. Make time for 'me'"

**D. Truman as an institution could do more to improve its relationship with students through transparency, accommodation, mentoring and good two-way communication with students and grad school help. Although the high level of education at Truman is academically challenging, the competitive environment requires more stress support to safeguard the mental health of its overachieving students.**

1. "Dealing with financial aid department is very stressful"
2. "Registration holds can be stressful. Feels that registration is too automated"
3. "People that work in the financial aid office are rude and inefficient"

4. "LSPs are stressful"
5. "No suggestion- just a problem. Truman environment develops Type A-ness"
6. "Need more transparency about financial situation at Truman"
7. "Need information about portfolio, intent to graduate for transfer students"
8. "Have a course about grad school and provide more guidance on how to methods of applying"

**E. Re-evaluation of administration policy in regards to LSPs, academic year scheduling, alcohol policy and others. Also, improving the registration process and making a better scholarship system.**

1. "Re-assess required courses for some majors, as well as essential skills and LSPs (it doesn't make a lot of sense to require trigonometry for a viscom major, for example)"
2. "Require fewer classes and a three semester system instead of two semesters. LSPs are stressful"
3. "Having to take Chemistry- probably will never use it, worked harder on it than major classes"
4. "More out of state scholarships for lowered out of state tuition"
5. "Would like more choices in majors; mine requires science classes beyond my interest"
6. "Suggestion: four day week"
7. "Count more courses from transfer schools"

**F. Students need to balance work and life, and not try to do more than they can handle, especially in regard to credit hours, overscheduling, and academic expectations.**

1. "Do not take 18 credits while also being involved with other activities"
2. "Do not take all tough courses in one semester"
3. "Know what you can handle and put your education first"
4. "Set aside enough time for assignments"
5. "Offer a freshman course on balancing your workload"
6. "It's important to know your priorities before going to college"
7. "Start with fewer credits and gradually increase"

**G. Need to create more support for freshmen in regards to creating activities, facilitating faculty interactions, helping make social connections, but in a low-stress environment. Also, freshmen should be encouraged to not bite off more than they can chew.**

1. "More service options for freshmen such as community projects"
2. "Find more ways for freshmen to interact with faculty"
3. "Truman week was stressful"
4. "Freshmen should take a lighter course load"
5. "Should be a cap on how many things to do (socially) freshman year (or better advice!)"
6. "Do not have first year students live in West campus suites"
7. "People shouldn't be able to rush a social sorority/frat their first year"
8. "Telling freshman to talk to their professors and have a dialogue helps clear up discrepancies and issues"

**H. Professors need to be organized and effective in providing students with materials and study resources while holding students accountable. There should be less busy work and more productive smaller assignments/quizzes with a focus on learning material, with big assignments spaced out.**

1. "The amount of work required for classes should be reduced in order to spend more time on topics."
2. "Busy work is too time consuming- it adds to stress; could teach these things more directly."
3. "Require study groups, or at least make available"
4. "Should have small assignments throughout the week instead of one large assignment"
5. "Professors should give students more notes"

**I. Advisors need to be more effective in helping students plan out their years at Truman, make informed decisions, and be aware of all their academic options and opportunities.**

1. "Advisor should suggest plans for major: 4-year plan/outline"
2. "Academic advising- pushed him to a 5 year plan, which was bad advice"
3. "Try to schedule classes in a non-stressful way- spread modes out over 4 years, work with advisor"
4. "Need someone who actually is an advisor, not just in the major"
5. "Student feedback on advising should be taken into account"
6. "Need more academic advising and more control"
7. "Help students make sound academic decisions"

**J. More/better facilities/services which include parking, library hours and resources, more rec hours and classes, better housing facilities and less crowded dining halls.**

1. "Housing not conducive to studying; heat doesn't work"
2. "Needs comfortable space- doesn't like silence in library"
3. "SUB- can be too loud"
4. "Would like to use REC center at hours now closed"
5. "More computers in library"
6. "When dining halls are crowded and it's hard to find a seat, that's an unnecessary stress"
7. "Library hours- if could be open later that would help"
8. "Need better swimming hours at Pershing"