

TechNews

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McCormick Tribune Campus Center
Room 221
3201 South State Street
Chicago, Illinois 60616

E-mail: editor@technewsiit.com
Website: <http://www.technewsiit.com>

TECHNEWS STAFF

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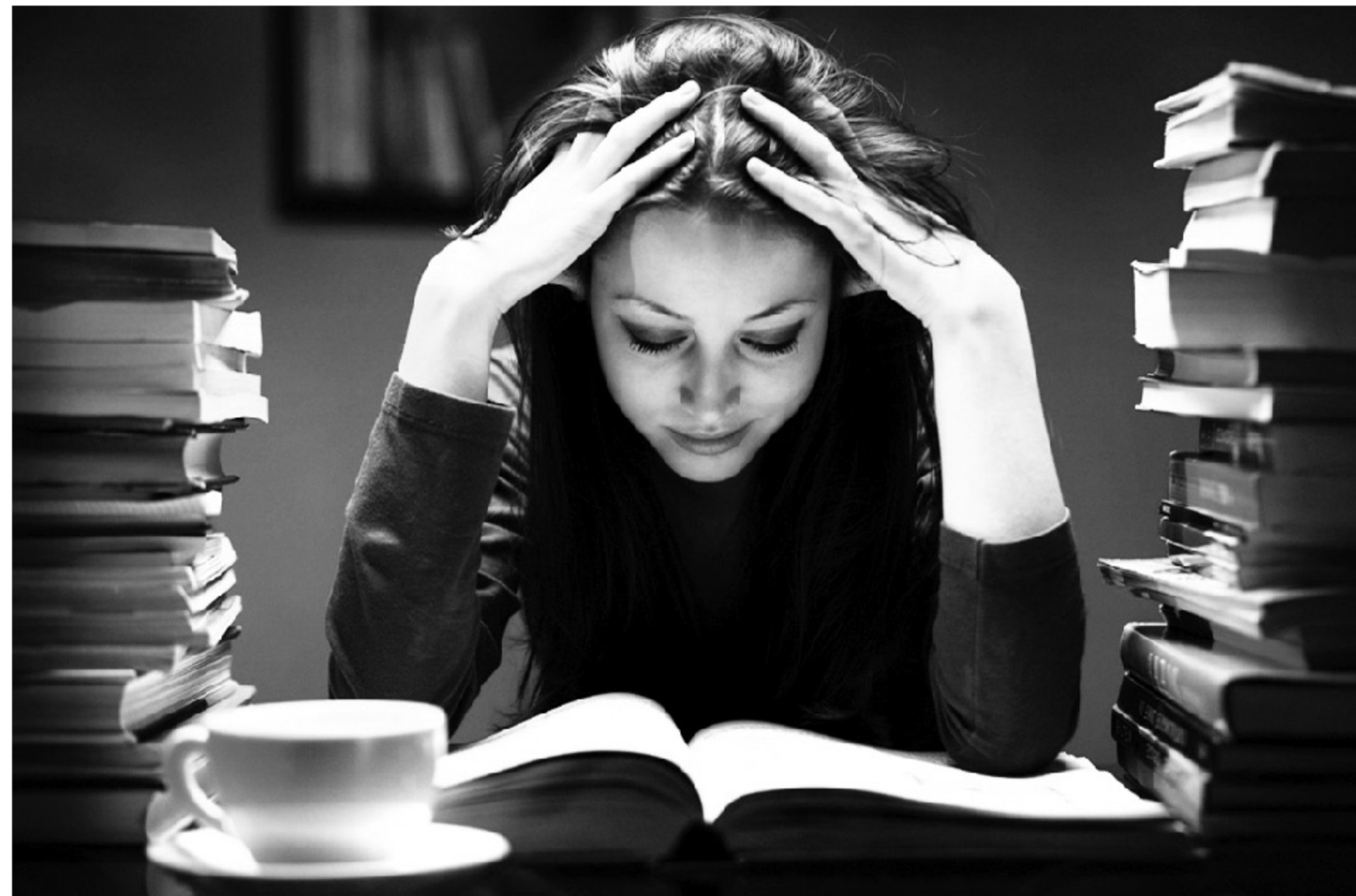
Does using study drugs enhance performance?

By Udayan Debasis Das
STAFF WRITER

On NPR last week, I came across the issue of the use of study drugs. Wesleyan University has taken an important step this semester by deeming the use of pharmaceutical study aids, such as Ritalin and Adderall, without a prescription as a violation of their honor code. The use of these drugs is considered to potentially enhance performance on tests, etc. and thus their (illegal) use constitutes a form of cheating.

On the surface, this decision and the firm stance being adopted by Wesleyan seems to be the right one. No student should have an unfair advantage when it comes to academic performance. (Note that Wesleyan is not the only university with such a policy. Others also forbid the use of such drugs, but Wesleyan is rarer for the fact that they are calling this an ethical violation.)

Certainly, an unfair advantage is exactly what it says it is: unfair. And cheating, in any form, must not be tolerated. But as the NPR show noted, there are bigger questions underlying this issue, such as the rhetoric that is surrounding this discussion: competition, performance enhancement, etc. The NPR show noted that this is dangerously close to sport rhetoric, and that the whole notion of education as competition is the one that must be under scrutiny, rather than the use of illicit drugs. I tend to agree with that position. The question needs



to be: it is acknowledged that cheating is unfair, but why are so many students resorting to it (in whatever form)? Somehow, the emphasis in education has shifted to performance, rather than the exploration and accumulation of knowledge, and dare I add, wisdom. (In fact, we are seeing a crisis brewing across high school systems, where test scores are being used to gauge performance, and this is leading to some serious implications for teachers.)

Why is the question of fairness not arising in the minds of those who are resorting to these methods? The notion of a code of ethics is fine,

but why is that notion not being embraced by students? To ask a related question, or perhaps state the question another way: why is it that serious deterrents are the only things that are seen as guarantees against cheating, why is it that in that opening class we are given the slide about academic honesty without a discussion of what that honesty actually means, and why it is important?

I don't know the answers to these questions. I have some thoughts, but would like to give the IIT student body a chance to respond before I expand on them.

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Charlie Sheen and the State of the Union: Part II

By Udayan Debasis Das
STAFF WRITER

Two weeks ago, I wrote Part I of this article. My thesis being that if Charlie Sheen is undergoing a meltdown, it is not cool to be using that as a spectacle for entertainment. But a criticism of the news media must go far beyond that. For, given how heavily Charlie Sheen-oriented the coverage was back then, one could be forgiven for thinking that there weren't important issues that needed airtime; in other words, that Sheen was ruling the airwaves because there wasn't much happening.

But that, of course, is the farthest thing from the truth. By all accounts, we are having one of the most tumultuous years, so far. What is transpiring in the Middle East, for example, deserves constant and close scrutiny on the

part of every news organization. Even forgetting international matters for a moment, you will find that there is enough going on in the nation to fill up any number of news hours. Consider, for example, the Wisconsin teacher protests. It has not been surprising to me, how little some people have been aware of the goings-on up in our neighboring state. In short, there are people who have perhaps not even understood the situation because of a lack of information.

It has been the nature of current news programming (for example, a somewhat more neutral news provider CNN) to have any number of experts comment on current issues. Long before the reporting has even concluded, you suddenly have pundits of opposing viewpoints about to comment on the issue at hand. This is all well and good, except that these "pundits" are not here for a discussion or an

argument – which by definition imply some sort of movement towards some understanding – but to state their opinion (or rather their side's opinion) and move on. You can have them speak for a minute or for an hour; they will keep on the same line of attack. Under these circumstances, a viewer can take a side with one opinion or the other (depending often on political allegiance) but cannot form a fresh opinion of his/her own.

These are dangerous times, not only because of the partisan nature of individual news organizations, but because of the mind-numbing nature of commentary that seeks to be impartial by enabling two people who do not (cannot) see eye-to-eye to blabber on and on.

There is a lot going on in the US and around the world: good luck understanding all that if you rely only on TV news, particularly when the day's favorite YouTube picks come on.