

Blog – November 2021

Mid-term motivations



I have recently invested in a smart watch that tracks my steps, stress levels, sleep patterns and sports activities. It nags me to stand up and stretch during my desk-bound days, it gives me a virtual pat on the back for going past my step count goal and it rings with a fanfare for climbing those stairs (as though I have climbed Everest itself). This time of year, I feel we naturally want to start preparing for winter hibernation. Unfortunately (or fortunately) for us, we are not bears or chipmunks. For us humans, autumn and winter months are business as usual, albeit requiring more effort. Many of us mature students have mid-terms and assignments as well as all juggling our other everyday demands. So, combine the urge to stay indoors and the cascade of deadlines and the result is, you are likely to be stuck in a perpetual cycle of study demotivation. And here's why.

According to Dr Liz Stewart from Deakin University¹, getting that study motivation back can be tricky. Understanding the science behind it however, can help you reignite that spark. Dr Stewart explains that our motivation is boosted by immediate gratification. Upon getting that gratification, a hormone called dopamine is released and it makes us feel good. This, however, is tricky when you're writing an essay or revising for that exam because you will only get that dopamine effect once you get your grade and even further down the line, when you receive your degree! In the meantime, you might check how many "likes" you got from the latest Instagram post or the latest drop on Netflix to get that sense of fulfilment. Before you know it, you have barely touched your essay and are probably feeling a twinge of panic and a sense of regret because you haven't achieved what you set out to.

To counter this, Dr Stewart explains that we can easily teach our brains to use and maintain consistent levels of dopamine from our surroundings to keep our motivation levels up. Counter-intuitively, when we get busy with work and study, we tend to avoid activities that would normally give us prolonged natural boost because we feel that we do not have time for them. Here are some tips she suggests that you can schedule in and action to boost your motivation through dopamine production:

- Meaningful face-to-face time with family or friends
- Regular exercise or hobbies that you enjoy (outdoors is great to get that oxygen circulating)
- Eating healthy food
- Connect with your fellow students – whether it be online through forum discussions, during tutorials or outside of the classroom
- Speak with your professor about possible research topics that you find interesting
- Regularly remind yourself (or even write it down in front of you), why you have decided to study as a mature student!

You have probably heard some of the tips before, but I feel it is important to remind ourselves that this is an issue that affects us all. The picture at the top of this blog is from a forest walk I went on a few weeks ago. After all, being outdoors and getting exercise is a great combination. Yes, it was kind of cold, but I had some layers on, good waterproof boots and my trusty (and nagging) fitness watch which told me that I managed to beat my daily goal of 10,000 steps **cue dopamine boost**. The picture will hopefully inspire you to go out to a green space near you, enjoy the beautiful fall or winter colours whilst refuelling your body with fresh air and energy.

If you do need that extra nudge and guidance, don't forget the vast array of support and resources available. Firstly, you can book an appointment with one of our [ACMAPS mature student peer mentors](#) who can help you navigate your academic journey and find the tools you need. The next mentor [drop-in sessions](#) will be on the 22nd November. [Learning Skills Services](#) have updated their November calendar and it includes workshops such as Time Management, Critical Thinking and Exam Preparation. Their Fall special event is [YU Got This! Academic Tips & Tools for End of Term](#) which will be held on 23rd November, 11 am -12 pm. And lastly, our academic and wellness events for mature students are available to view in our [November calendar](#).

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ⁱ "Going back to Uni? How to boost your study motivation". Dr Liz Stewart
Lecturer, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University <https://this.deakin.edu.au/study/think-youre-too-busy-to-study-advice-from-a-single-parent-of-five>