

Dodge Offers Help for Test Anxiety

The average student walks into a test carrying a sharpened #2 pencil and an eraser. But students with test anxiety often carry

more – headaches, nausea, diarrhea or a myriad of physical, emotional, behavioral and cognitive symptoms.

“It is common for college students to be anxious about tests, and a little nervousness can help to motivate us,” said Carla Dodge, access adviser, Access Services for Students with Disabilities. “But when test anxiety gets to the point that it affects the grades of studied and prepared students, it is time for them to seek help.”

So Dodge wrote a brochure, *Managing Test Anxiety*, published in October 2006, with practical tips on how to stem the flow of test trepidation before, during and after the exam.

Before the test, Dodge offers suggestions from making and taking practice tests to avoiding too much caffeine. During the test, the anxious student is coached to organize test-taking time, control fear with positive statements, and breathe deeply and slowly for physical relaxation. After the test, students are advised not to dwell on mistakes and review strategies that worked and didn't work. These are just a few of the gems from the six-page easy-to-read brochure, available in JCCC Counseling Services.

Dodge says test anxiety is part of a generalized performance anxiety – the same feeling one has when performing a solo, stepping up to the batter's box or interviewing for a new job. This anxiety may manifest itself only while taking a test and sometimes only a test in one subject like math.

“We find there are good students who are absolutely familiar with the material but get frustrated because they can't demonstrate that knowledge in an anxiety-producing test situation,” Dodge said. “It is hard to be evaluated by others.”

Anxiety can be compounded – worrying about how anxiety will affect the test performance can be as debilitating as the anxiety itself. Dodge says students need to remember that a test is only a test and perfection is not always realistic.



An access adviser for seven years at JCCC, Dodge was inspired to write the *Managing Test Anxiety* brochure for students who have test anxiety but don't have documented disabilities. Access Services can only provide testing accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

“I had to tell students, ‘I know test anxiety is real and I know it's affecting your grade, but I can't set up testing services for you without disability documentation.’ At least the brochure is something to provide them with encouragement that things can get better,” said Dodge, who has a bachelor's degree in education with an emphasis in special education from the University of Kansas and a master's degree in educational psychology from Wichita State University.

About 300 copies of *Managing Test Anxiety* were published in the fall, and a re-order of 600 copies was made for the spring semester to meet the demand. Students with test anxiety are encouraged to meet with a JCCC counselor.

“Feeling ready to meet the challenge can keep test anxiety at a manageable level,” Dodge said.

Carla Dodge, access adviser, Access Services for Students with Disabilities, is seen here in front of the Testing Center.