

Classroom Multitasking and Health Risk Behaviors Among University Students

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For many individuals, multitasking means engaging in two or more things at the same time. A more accurate definition of multitasking is the performance of multiple tasks sequentially and in quick succession. Although research indicates that multitasking results in negative consequences, many students appear to simultaneously engage with texting, Facebook, internet searches, e-mailing, instant-messaging, and schoolwork. The purpose of this study was to examine multitasking behaviors in the classroom, and to determine if multitasking was associated with health problems or health behaviors. Nearly 800 university students participated in the survey-based study wherein they were asked to identify the types and frequency of multitasking behaviors in which they engaged. Other survey items addressed health problems, health behaviors, and personality traits. Results of the study indicate that students engage in high levels of multitasking – both in traditional classrooms as well as while engaging in online classes. The most frequent behaviors included Facebook, text messaging, e-mailing, instant messaging, and working on other classes, with more than half of the students reporting that they frequently or very frequently engage in multiple multitasking behaviors. Students reported significantly more frequent ($p < .01$) multitasking while working on online classes than in traditional classrooms. Multitasking was significantly ($p < .01$) related to a number of health risk behaviors, including physical fighting, cigarette smoking, binge drinking, frequency of alcohol consumption as well as with musculoskeletal problems. Although some individuals may consider the ability to multitask desirable, the results of this study indicate that multitasking is associated with multiple risk behaviors. Learner Objectives: Participants will be able to

- Identify common multi-tasking behaviors of university students
- Discuss the general consequences of multitasking
- Describe the relationships between multitasking behavior and health risk behaviors