

# Procrastination is...

By JEREMY NELSON  
CUP Prairies Bureau Chief

There's no such thing as a deadline."

More than a statement, this phrase embodies the philosophy of University of Winnipeg student Mike Kolbus. While most other students put off writing an assignment from time to time, Kolbus makes it his sworn duty to hand in the majority of his assignments late. You might go so far as to say he is a professional procrastinator. In fact, since beginning his B.A. in 1995, the 21-year-old History student has managed to hit deadlines only four times.

"I'll always be a procrastinator," says Kolbus in a relaxed tone that mirrors his attitude. "I was born late and I'll die late -- that's just the way it is."

As to why he refuses to see deadlines as anything more than a suggestion, Kolbus simply laughs and replies: "because I can."

"In high school the extensions had to be fought for really hard -- they were really rigid and stupid there," he says. "I think one of the most valuable things I've learned in university is how to negotiate stuff like how to hand in a paper a week late without being penalized."

Although few students are at ease with their procrastination as is Kolbus, he is far from unique in the fact that he has a hard time managing his time. Depending on how you define procrastination and which university you survey, studies have shown that 40-80 per cent of student procrastinate regularly.

"It's certainly the most common problem among university students," says Lilly Walker, Chief Psychologist at the University of Manitoba Counselling service. "For some people procrastination is a lifestyle and it just causes them a bit of stress. But for some

individuals it destroys their academic performance and with it, their career possibilities."

Just as seriously, Walker adds, procrastination can leave deep emotional scars as students gradually lose faith in their abilities because of low grades and missed opportunities.

"The guilt is so self-destructive that it can have really serious side effects if it isn't dealt with," she says. "Lack of self-esteem and faith in oneself are the psychological consequences of long-term procrastination."

## Getting your priorities straight

Simply defined, procrastination is letting low priority tasks get in the way of high-priority obligations. For some this means watching T.V. instead of cleaning the house or going to the bar instead of studying for a mid-term. For Kolbus, procrastination means any number of things.

"I'll do just about anything when I'm procrastinat-

ing," he says with a laugh. "When I've got a lot of essays due, my room is probably the cleanest it will ever be. My friends find I'm the most willing to go out and drop everything around exam time. Basically, I'll do anything rather than do an unpleasant thing like write an essay."

While the definition of procrastination may be simple, the root of the problem is often complex, ranging from improper time management skills to low self-esteem. Walker says that most procrastinators have any number of reasons for putting off necessary but unpleasant obligations but generally most procrastinators fall into a combination of one of four categories -- the Perfectionist, the Postponer, the Politician and the Punisher.

"The first step to dealing with procrastination is always finding out what kind of procrastinator you are," she said.

Perfectionists set such high goals for themselves that they often put off projects until they are in the perfect frame

of mind and even then their intense fear of failure often holds them back. Creative and astute, perfectionists often slip into fantasies as a way of putting off unpleasant or unexpected situations or problems. Postponers, on the other hand, tend to live for the moment because they find routines and structure confining and monotonous. These procrastinators thrive on the difficult and surprising situations caused by deadlines and use procrastination as a way to not feel responsible for their own destiny.

People who base their perception of themselves on what others think of them are fall into the Politician category. These procrastinators worry so much about disappointing others that they take on more work than they can handle and then often put that work off for fear of not meeting the expectations of others. Finally, Punishers are overly-self critical people who are prone to jump to extreme conclusions about themselves and their situations. They overestimate others'

abilities and underestimate their own thus producing feelings of worthlessness and cynicism about their ability to manage their own life.

## Pressure Junkies

One thing most procrastinators have in common is that they thrive on the pressure that comes with putting off everything to the last possible moment.

Kolbus, for example, says that when an essay is due in a month he can sit in front of a computer for hours and only manage to write a single page, but if the essay was due two days ago he can write the entire thing in just a few hours.

"I have no idea why that is but it seems to work," he says. "Pressure is what I need."

Walker believes that the reason most procrastinators require pressure is because they are essentially addicted to the feeling of conquering over seemingly impossible odds.

"The pressure charges them up, gives them an adrenaline rush and lets them stay up all night to get their essay or project done," she says. "The rush, coupled with the sense of victory are both very powerful motivators for the practice procrastinator."

The best way to counter this habit-forming system according to Walker is for the procrastinator to find other ways to get his or her rush.

"Until those pressures come, they can't get their motivation up," she explains. "So what we tell them to do is to chop their deadlines into chunks. Rather than having a paper with a big deadline, make mini-deadlines with the parts - have a deadline for when your research has to be done, when your draft has to be writ-

*Photo to be inserted here*

Regrettably, the photographer didn't get around to taking a poignant photograph.

Continued on page 10