



C A M P U S

Sleep Metrics & Accountability

A Campus Action Toolkit

*Measuring sleep burden, care access,
and progress across U.S. colleges and universities*

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If Campuses do not measure sleep, they cannot improve it.

Many colleges already collect student health data.

Some publish wellness dashboards.

Some discuss sleep during awareness campaigns.

But very few campuses do all three of the following at the same time:

- isolate sleep-specific indicators
- measure access to structured insomnia support
- publish clear targets for improvement

And that's the missing step.

Sleep is often discussed as a student behavior problem. But once campuses begin to measure it clearly, a larger picture appears:

Sleep is also a systems issue.

This toolkit helps campuses move from general awareness to practical accountability.



WHY THIS TOOLKIT EXISTS?

Most campuses already have pieces of the picture.

They may have:

- ACHA-NCHA data
- counseling center utilization data
- waitlist information
- student wellness reports
- housing and basic-needs data

What is often missing is a simple way to connect those pieces into one campus story:

- How many students are struggling with sleep?
- How many are experiencing academic impact?
- How many are receiving structured support?
- Which student groups are carrying more of the burden?
- Is the campus improving over time?

This toolkit was created to help answer those questions in a way that is practical, transparent, and repeatable.

THE SLEEP- SMART CAMPUS FRAMEWORK



Academic
Design



Residential
Design



Dining &
Campus
Services



Economic
Stability



Digital Culture

A Sleep-Smart Campus operates across five design domains:

1. **Academic Design:** How coursework, deadlines, and exams influence sleep patterns.
2. **Residential Design:** How housing environments affect sleep opportunity and quality.
3. **Dining & Campus Services:** How food environments, dining halls, and campus vendors influence sleep behaviors—particularly through the availability and promotion of caffeinated beverages and late-night options.
4. **Economic Stability:** How financial pressures disrupt sleep stability.
5. **Digital Culture:** How constant connectivity prevents nighttime recovery.

Each domain offers opportunities for structural improvements that reduce sleep burden across the student population.

ACADEMIC POLICY & SLEEP

Academic structures significantly influence student sleep patterns. Clustered deadlines and exam schedules often contribute to late-night or overnight study behaviors. *To address this, the following five policy strategies are recommended:*

MORNING EXAMS

1. **Morning Exam Scheduling**

Institutions are encouraged to avoid scheduling exams before 8:30 AM, particularly during high-demand academic periods. Later start times support adequate sleep and improve student alertness and performance.

SYLLABUS TRANSPARE NCY

2. **Syllabus Transparency**

Faculty should communicate major assessments early in the semester. This may include:

- Publishing exam dates in Week 1
- Avoiding unexpected or last-minute deadlines

Early visibility allows students to plan their workload and maintain consistent sleep schedules.

DEADLINE TIMING

3. **Deadline Timing**

Midnight deadlines may unintentionally encourage late-night work. Recommended approach:

- Set assignment deadlines at 5:00 PM or 6:00 PM

Earlier deadlines promote completion during daytime hours and reduce the need for late-night academic work

EXAM SCHEDULI NG LOAD

4. **Exam Scheduling Load (Aspirational Practice)**

Departments may review whether students are scheduled for multiple major exams within short timeframes (e.g., within 24 hours). Where feasible, reducing high-density exam scheduling can help prevent acute sleep disruption during peak academic periods.

ACADEMIC MESSAGING AND CULTURE

5. **Academic Messaging and Culture**

Faculty communication plays a role in shaping student behavior. Instead of normalizing sleep deprivation (e.g., “You may need to stay up all night”), faculty can emphasize planning and sleep protection:

- “Organize your work in advance to allow adequate rest before assessments.”

Consistent messaging can support healthier academic norms over time.

RESIDENCE HALL SLEEP STANDARDS

Residence halls are often the primary sleep environment for students in major universities. Yet many are not designed with sleep in mind.

Key areas for improvement include:



1. Quiet Hour Enforcement

Effective quiet hours should include:

- consistent enforcement
- clear reporting mechanisms
- student-led peer accountability



2. Lighting Design

Bright hallway lights and screens disrupt circadian rhythms.

- Sleep-smart housing can include:
- warmer hallway lighting at night
- motion-activated lighting
- reduced blue-light exposure after midnight



3. Sleep vs Study Zones

Students often study and sleep in the same space.

Residences can create:

- dedicated late-night study lounges
- quiet sleep floors
- designated “recovery spaces” during exam periods



4. Morning Light Exposure & Campus Design

Morning light is a key regulator of circadian rhythm and helps anchor consistent sleep-wake cycles.

Campuses can support this by:

- encouraging morning outdoor activity (e.g., short walks between classes)
- creating safe, accessible walking paths around residence areas
- adding signage that highlights walking times to nearby campus locations
- integrating light-exposure messaging into student wellness campaigns



FOOD INSECURITY & SLEEP STABILITY

Sleep health is closely tied to economic stability.

Students experiencing food insecurity or financial stress may face:

- irregular meal schedules
- late-night work shifts
- unstable housing situations

These conditions can severely disrupt sleep. ACHA survey data show that a significant proportion of students report some level of food insecurity, highlighting the economic context of student health. Improving sleep therefore requires addressing basic needs.

Recommended Campus Strategies:

- Extend dining hall hours during exams
- Expand meal voucher programs
- Provide emergency financial grants

FACULTY MICRO-COMMITMENTS FOR SLEEP HEALTH

Small changes by faculty can have a large cumulative impact.

Suggested Sleep-Supportive Teaching Practices

- Avoid glorifying sleep deprivation
- Encourage students to plan ahead for sleep before exams
- Schedule major deadlines at reasonable evening hours (e.g., 5:00–6:00 PM) rather than after midnight
- Be flexible when documented sleep problems affect academic functioning

These small commitments help shift campus culture from:
“Sleep is optional” to “Sleep supports learning.”

SLEEP-SMART CAMPUS SCORECARD

Campuses can evaluate their sleep environment using a simple scorecard. Example indicators:



ACADEMIC

- % of courses with midnight deadlines
- number of exams clustered within 24 hours

HOUSING

- noise complaints after midnight
- availability of quiet floors

STUDENT LIFE

- dining hours during exams
- late-night study space availability

DIGITAL CULTURE

- faculty email timing
- LMS notification expectations

SLEEP BURDEN INDEX

Sleep problems on campus are often discussed in many different ways: not enough sleep, feeling tired during the day, or difficulty falling asleep.

To help campuses understand the overall picture, Health Culture developed a simple metric called the Sleep Burden Index (SBI).

The Sleep Burden Index combines several sleep indicators from the ACHA National College Health Assessment (NCHA) or from your campus' sleep survey into one number that reflects the overall level of sleep strain among students.

SLEEP BURDEN INDEX

Instead of looking at many separate statistics, the SBI gives campuses one clear snapshot of student sleep health.

Sleep Burden Index (SBI) is the average of:

- % of students sleeping less than 7 hours on weeknights
- % of students with long sleep onset latency (>30 minutes)
- % of students reporting frequent daytime tiredness

The result produces a score from 0 to 100.

Higher scores mean greater sleep strain across the student population.

The index combines three common sleep indicators measured in ACHA surveys or your campus' sleep questionnaire.

1. SHORT SLEEP

The percentage of students who report getting less than 7 hours of sleep on weeknights.

National ACHA data show that more than 4 in 10 students do not reach this recommended amount of sleep.

2. SLEEP DIFFICULTY

The percentage of students who report taking a long time to fall asleep, such as more than 30 minutes after going to bed.

Difficulty falling asleep is a common sign of sleep disruption and stress.

3. DAYTIME SLEEPINESS

The percentage of students who report feeling tired or sleepy during the day on multiple days of the week.

This reflects the real-life impact of poor sleep on daily functioning.

SLEEP BURDEN INDEX

Campuses can interpret the Sleep Burden Index using simple ranges:

- 0–24 → Lower sleep burden
- 25–49 → Moderate sleep burden
- 50–74 → High sleep burden
- 75–100 → Severe sleep burden

Most campuses will fall somewhere in the moderate to high range, reflecting the widespread nature of student sleep disruption.

Why the Sleep Burden Index Matters

Sleep problems often appear as isolated issues:

- fatigue
- insomnia
- difficulty concentrating

But when these indicators are combined, they reveal a broader pattern. It helps campuses see that sleep problems are not just individual struggles; they are population-level signals that the campus environment may be placing pressure on student sleep.

Tracking the SBI over time allows universities to evaluate whether policies, housing environments, and academic practices are improving or worsening student sleep health.

Student sleep problems are often treated as individual responsibility, but the environment plays a powerful role. When universities redesign academic policies, housing environments, and campus culture, sleep becomes possible again. Improving sleep at the systems level supports learning, mental health, and long-term well-being.



Better Mental Health



Improved Learning



Stronger Student Well Being

RESOURCES & FINAL MESSAGE

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We'd love to hear from you—fill out this form:

<https://forms.gle/S9hpaUU9ugNWsKyj6>