

TOP SECRETS OF ONE TOP STUY STUDENT by Dawn Helene

Stefanie Weisman is the student that most of us wish our kids could be. Valedictorian of the Class of 1999 here at Stuyvesant, valedictorian at Columbia University four years later, summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, with degrees in history, art history, and computer science. This is a woman who, if she has something to say about study skills, should command our full attention. And she did so, as the guest speaker at the September PA meeting.

Among the surprises of the evening was Ms. Weisman's admission that it was poor listening comprehension skills that drove her to develop the good study techniques she used in her rise to the top of every class she ever took. In answer to the inevitable and unending question of "How did you do it?" she published a book entitled *The Secrets of Top Students: Tips, Tools, and Techniques for Acing High School and College*. In it she spells out the most effective strategies she herself employed as a student. And, while she may not break new ground with her advice, the mileage she got out of it definitely makes it worthy of another look. Here are some of Ms. Weisman's top recommendations for our young scholars:

TAKE GOOD NOTES

No, take excellent notes. Be the person everybody asks when they need to borrow notes after an absence. The majority of test questions come directly from lectures, so thorough, detailed, comprehensive notes actually save time when preparing for tests, and ensure you have what your teacher considers to be the most essential information right in front of you. Furthermore, Ms. Weisman said, review your notes within twenty-four hours of taking them for maximum retention.



photo: Jessica Chung

SPACE IT OUT

Cramming, pulling all-nighters, downing another Red Bull, none of these popular practices works as well as studying a body of material a little at a time, consistently and, ideally, daily. This habit builds mastery of the material over time, and doesn't require dedicating a huge chunk of time to any one subject on any given evening.

STUDY ACTIVELY

Ask yourself questions, explain a concept to someone else, test yourself, do practice problems, take practice tests. Simply reading the textbook over and over again will not make a material difference in your understanding of the subject matter.

USE YOUR TIME

Especially when taking a test, make every minute count. Double-check your work. Use each minute you're given. There's no advantage in leaving a test early.

In the end, Ms. Weisman said, the ideas and information you're learning are more important than numbers on a transcript. And, as many of us can attest from watching our own careers unfold, hard work and determination are often more important than intelligence. In some ways, her best advice is the oldest and simplest of all. Take pride in your work. If that's the way you approach things, the rest of it will follow on its own. ♦

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