

Objective: Students will understand that preparing for and completing a postsecondary education will require delaying gratification in different ways throughout their educational careers and will consider how well they are currently able to defer gratification to achieve their goals. Students encounter and discuss the idea of delayed gratification using Walter Mischel's famous marshmallow experiment.

Resources Needed for this Activity:

- YouTube Video, "Joachim de Posada: Don't Eat the Marshmallow!", 7 minutes 15 seconds.
Available at: <http://youtu.be/M0yhHKWUa0g>

Opening: 5 minutes - The advisor puts the words "delayed gratification" on the board or the screen and asks the group if anyone can define the meaning of that term. One or more students is given an opportunity to share their answers.

The advisor ensures that students understand that delayed gratification is the ability to wait in order to obtain something that one wants. The advisor then explains that the group will be thinking and talking about delayed gratification during the next three advisory sessions.

Activity: 20 minutes - The advisor then shows the students one of the many videos of the "marshmallow experiment" that are available on the Web. The recommended video is a TED talk featuring writer Joachim de Posada. This video provides images of kids participating in the experiment along with an explanation of the experiment, so that students will be able to get all of the information they need from watching the video.

Alternatively, the advisor could show one of the many other videos of kids participating in the experiment that are available on YouTube and elsewhere, though if only video of the students is shown, the advisor will need to provide background information on the experiment. An example of another (funny) video is <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sc4EF3ijVI8> The supplemental information is:

- In the 1960s, Stanford psychologist Walter Mischel conducted an experiment on delaying gratification with young children that has now become very famous.
- During the experiment, 4 year-olds were brought into a room and the adult experimenter placed a single marshmallow in front of the child. The experimenter then said he or she had to leave the room and told the child that if she could wait until the experimenter returned, the child would be given two marshmallows. The child was also told that if he or she wanted to eat the marshmallow that was fine and the child should ring a bell on the table.
- In some cases, the kids immediately ate the marshmallow whole, or in tiny bites.
- Other kids sang songs and looked away.
- When the researchers followed up with participants many years later, the kids who didn't eat the marshmallow had better self-regulatory skills and did better in school.

- For example, the children who were able to wait for 15 minutes to eat the marshmallow had SAT scores that were, on average, 210 points higher than those who had rung the bell after 30 seconds.

After the students watch the video, the advisor should ask students to turn and talk with a partner about the following questions which should be placed on the board or on a screen:

1. Why do you think students who did not eat the marshmallow were more successful in school and other areas many years later?
2. Imagine yourself at age 4. Do you think you would have eaten the marshmallow? Why or why not?
3. If a person eats the marshmallow right away at age 4, do you think that he or she can learn to defer gratification later in life? In other words, are some people just born able to defer gratification while others usually can't?
4. The advisor asks the students to think of something that they like doing that would be very difficult to give up. The advisor then asks several students to share their answers. The advisor should ensure that a diverse array of activities are identified through the student responses, including things like eating certain foods, texting, watching programs on TV or the web, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

The advisor then asks the students to think about how long they could give up the activity they just mentioned. The advisor should again allow students to share their answers.

The advisor explains that the group is going to brainstorm some strategies for increasing your ability to delay gratification because learning to do so is an important aspect of preparing for and completing college.

The advisor tells the students that the psychologist Walter Mischel, who originally conducted the marshmallow experiment, later developed ways to increase the ability of young kids like those he included in his marshmallow experiment to delay gratification. His later studies showed, for example, that self-control skills can be taught to young children. For example, if the kids were taught to pretend that the marshmallow is a cloud, or to pretend that the candy is only a picture surrounded by an imaginary frame, the kids who couldn't wait 60 seconds were now able to wait 15 minutes.

The advisor then asks the students to turn to a partner and share the activity they would have trouble giving up and brainstorm things that they can do to increase their ability to give up that activity for a period. Students should be urged to think creatively about ways to control their impulses in order to achieve their goals.

After students have had time to develop their strategies for delaying gratification in their pairs, the advisor should invite the pairs to share their strategies with the full group. In taking responses from the full group, the advisor should seek to highlight not only distracting techniques such as the ones Mischel and his colleagues developed for the marshmallow test (i.e. imagining the marshmallow as a picture) but also activities that focus the person on a longer-term goal, such as writing that goal on a Post-it note and putting it in a prominent place.

Closure: 2 minutes - The advisor ends the session by telling students that in the next advisory session they will apply what they have learned about delaying gratification to the task of preparing for postsecondary success.
