

University of Michigan athletes steered to professor

Posted by Jim Carty, John Heuser, Nathan Fenno | The Ann Arbor News March 16, 2008
00:10AM

First in a four-day series

Even as the [University of Michigan men's basketball team](#) played Iowa on a Saturday night in mid-January, most eyes in Crisler Arena seemed focused on Section 46, where new [Michigan football](#) coach Rich Rodriguez sat near quarterback Terrelle Pryor, the No. 1 high school player in America.

No one paid much attention to the grandfatherly figure who sat three rows behind Pryor.

John Hagen was, as he has been for decades, close to some of the most recognized athletes at Michigan. University records obtained by The News show that the veteran psychology professor has taught at least 294 independent studies from the fall of 2004 to the fall of 2007, and 85 percent of those courses, 251, were with athletes.

Michigan officials said Hagen taught additional independent studies in that period, however, they refused to disclose the number of athletes who were part of that group.

During most of that period since 2004, Hagen had a .25 teaching appointment, meaning one quarter of his time was supposed to be spent in the classroom.

Independent studies traditionally are one-on-one courses arranged between a professor and a student to cover subject matter that isn't available as a university course. In some cases, they involve small groups of students.

Since August 2006, university officials have twice examined whether Hagen's courses meet Michigan's academic standards. They call his independent studies an example of a nationally respected researcher working with undergraduates.

"This is the kind of faculty experience we aspire to provide for all of our students," said [Terry](#)

Day 1

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[McDonald](#), dean of the [College of Literature, Science, and the Arts](#).

When The News dug further, however, speaking to athletes and former athletic department employees as part of a seven-month investigation that included interviewing 87 people and reviewing more than 3,500 pages of internal documents, a different picture emerged:

- Michigan athletes described being steered to Hagen's courses by their athletic department academic counselors and, in some cases, earning three or four credits for meeting with Hagen for as little as 15 minutes every two weeks.

- Three former athletic department employees said Hagen's independent study courses are sometimes used by academic support staff to boost the grade point averages of athletes in danger of becoming academically ineligible to compete in sports.

- Athletes have enrolled in independent studies with Hagen several weeks beyond the normal deadline to add classes, which is 21 days after a semester begins. For example, in the winter 2005 semester that began Jan. 5 and ended April 19, two football players enrolled in independent studies with Hagen on March 18.

- The amount of time some athletes said they spent on independent study work fell short of guidelines listed on the psychology department's [Web site](#).

- The News analyzed transcripts from 29 athletes who are either currently enrolled at [Michigan](#), or left the school within the past three years. Twenty one of the athletes took 32 graded courses from Hagen - 25 independent study courses and seven standard classes. They averaged a grade of 3.62 in the professor's courses, compared to an overall grade point average of 2.57 in the athletes' other classes. No athlete received a grade worse than a B-minus from Hagen.

- At least 48 athletes have taken two or more independent study courses with Hagen; nine of those 48 have taken three or more.

- Athletes from every varsity sport except women's [water polo](#) and [cross country](#) - including 22 members of last fall's [football team](#) and eight members of this year's [hockey team](#) - have taken independent studies with Hagen since fall of 2004.

Quarterback [Chad Henne](#), wideout [Mario Manningham](#), hockey player [Chad Kolarik](#) and softball ace [Jennie Ritter](#) are just a few of the Wolverines who have taken independent studies with Hagen, as have [Jake Long](#) and [Shawn Crable](#), two of the captains on last season's football team.

When asked what they learned in Hagen's courses, some athletes described being taught how to take notes, use a day planner, make a calendar and manage their time.

In many cases, athletes said the main content of these courses was study skills and time management, although Hagen called the material "learning styles."

[University of Michigan President Mary Sue Coleman](#) and athletic director Bill Martin refused repeated requests to be interviewed in

Key player

John Hagen

Psychology professor

- **Why he's important:** Taught at least 251 independent study classes to Michigan varsity athletes from fall 2004 to fall 2007, with much of the course content directed at improving students' learning skills.

- **What he's saying:** "I view (learning disabilities) and being a student athlete both as potential risk categories. Students with learning disabilities just have to spend more time at whatever they're doing. Student athletes often have less time to spend than they would like to be able to spend."

Key players

person or on the phone about Hagen or the athletic department's academic support program. A university spokesman said Coleman was too busy to be interviewed, but eventually offered to answer questions via e-mail. The News declined.

When first interviewed last fall, Hagen initially denied teaching a high percentage of independent study classes to athletes.

But when shown class enrollment lists by The News, he did not dispute their accuracy. Nor did he disagree with the general descriptions of course work, which were provided by athletes.

Hagen disagreed with three former athletic department employees who said his courses are sometimes used to help keep athletes eligible.

"If I thought that, I wouldn't do it," said Hagen, who has taught at Michigan since 1965. "I mean, that's ridiculous. I've worked too hard to get where I am."

Hagen is 'a safety net'

Last June, six weeks before football practice began, [Perry Dorrestein](#), an offensive tackle, was below the 1.8 cumulative grade point average required by the [Big Ten Conference](#) to be eligible to participate in college athletics.

Dorrestein, at the time about to enter his sophomore year, said the football team's academic counselor encouraged him to request an independent study over the summer term with Hagen. By mid-August, Dorrestein had received an A in the four-credit course, raising his grade point average to 1.91, above the 1.8 that permitted him to successfully appeal to be allowed to play football.

Hagen, Dorrestein said, helped him improve his study habits and take better notes, meeting with the football player and other athletes for a half hour once or twice a week during the six-week session. Dorrestein estimates he spent three to four hours per week on material related to the course outside of class.

Michigan has a program intended to help students who need to improve skills such as time management, critical writing, and note taking - the [Comprehensive Studies Program](#). But most CSP courses are worth two credits and are not graded, so they could not have raised Dorrestein's grade point average.

"It was beneficial to learn from it," Dorrestein said of Hagen's independent study class. "It was beneficial for the A."

Eligible to play this fall, Dorrestein moved into a backup role and appeared in four games.

Two former athletic department employees familiar with Michigan's Academic Success Program - the department's tutoring and advising arm - said this is typical of how athletes are sometimes funneled into Hagen's independent study classes by those charged with helping them balance academics and athletics.

The former employees, granted anonymity by The News because they were concerned that Michigan officials might try to damage their

Mary Sue Coleman
President

• **Why she's important:** Leads the university, which has approximately 26,000 undergraduate students on its Ann Arbor campus and a general fund budget of \$1.35 billion for the current fiscal year.

• **What she's saying:** Coleman refused to be interviewed in person or by phone for this story. The News did not accept her offer to respond to questions via e-mail.

Bill Martin

Athletic director

• **Why he's important:** Runs the athletic department, which sponsors 25 varsity sports and has budgeted revenues of \$87.4 million for the current fiscal year.

• **What he's saying:** Martin refused to be interviewed for the story, calling it an "academic" issue.

Key players

professional reputations, said Shari Acho and Sue Shand, co-directors of the Academic Success Program, have relied on Hagen's independent studies for years to keep athletes with low grades eligible, and they told other athletic counselors to do the same.

"He was used as a safety net," a former employee said. "... The Hagen thing wasn't a secret. One of the first options, probably the first option always ... was John Hagen - 'See if we can get John to take another.' "

Steve King, who lettered in football at Michigan from 1993 to 1996, worked in the Academic Success Program from 1998 to 2000. His tenure overlapped with Shand, but not Acho.

As a player, he took an independent study with Hagen, which he described as a loosely structured course in which he picked a topic and wrote a paper.

Later, while working in an academic support role, he saw Hagen's independent study classes used - along with other courses - to keep athletes eligible.

"I would say it does happen," said King, now a certified financial planner in Chicago. "You would hope that advisers are putting kids in classes that are toward their degree, (that) it's not a random class. There were quite a few guys taking independent studies with him."

Hagen said he and the athletic department's academic counselors "try to work as a team on things," and that often involves communicating with Acho and Shand about which athletes should take his courses.

Acho disagreed with Hagen's characterization of their work together and said the Academic Success Program does not steer students to his courses.

"I don't direct anybody to any courses," Acho said. "I think what happens, maybe, with John Hagen's class, a little bit, is a lot of students have really benefited from his class, and they're going to hear (about) it from other students on the team."

An e-mail obtained through a public records request shows Shand, the program's co-director, working with Hagen or his assistants to set up courses for athletes.

"I have two more students to register for Psych. 218.001 for Fall 07," Shand e-mailed on Sept. 7, 2007.

Hagen's reply was partially redacted by the university, but read in part, "I don't have e-mails for them so have not sent them the appl. forms yet. They can complete them in class. JOHN"

School officials said Psychology 218 is a "learning styles" course that evolved from Hagen's Psychology 200 independent study course. At one point last fall, 16 of the 25 students who signed up for Psychology 218 were athletes.

Asked why Shand would be setting up courses with Hagen for athletes, Acho shrugged.

Shari Acho

Co-director of the athletic department's Academic Support Program.

• **Why she's important:** Hagen and athletes said she helped place them in independent study classes taught by the professor.

• **What she's saying:** "I don't direct anybody to any classes. The only involvement I have in course scheduling is if there's time management issues."

Sue Shand

Co-director of the Academic Success Program.

• **Why she's important:** Hagen and athletes said she helped place them in independent study classes taught by the professor.

• **What she's saying:** Repeated requests by The News to speak with Shand were denied.

Read the reports

"You know, I can't explain it, because I haven't seen the e-mails," she said. "I will not do it. It's standard practice for me. I will not e-mail professors for any of those things."

Michigan would not release eight other e-mails between Hagen and/or Shand and Acho, writing that disclosure of the e-mails would prevent the university from complying with the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#), which protects students' privacy.

Hagen said that in some cases, after consulting with Shand or Acho, he approved independent studies several weeks into the term for athletes who wanted to drop another course because they found it too demanding or because it didn't fit with their athletic travel schedule.

The professor viewed his flexibility as a better option than allowing students to struggle in other classes.

"I think the worst thing to do is set them up for failure," Hagen said.

In one instance, Hagen set up independent study courses for two Michigan football players with just more than a month remaining in a semester. [Rueben Riley](#) and [Gabe Watson](#) dropped other classes and enrolled in an independent study course with Hagen on March 18, 2005.

The 15-week winter semester began Jan. 5 and ended April 19, and students had 21 days after the start of the semester to add classes without special permission from a professor.

Two other Michigan professors described adding a mid-March independent study as extremely rare.

Riley said he didn't recall why he dropped a class, but said Acho or Steve Connelly - the football team's academic counselors - told him to seek an independent study class with Hagen.

Riley said the players met with Hagen twice a week for the rest of the semester and remembered writing a 15-page paper on parental involvement in youth sports.

"You can come up with your own (assignment), that was kind of Hagen's style," Riley said. "Because we had missed so much of the early part of it, we had those two meetings a week. We weren't slacking."

Slots in Hagen's independent study courses were so highly coveted within the athletic department, according to one former employee, that counselors competed for them and Acho and Shand were considered "gatekeepers," determining who got in.

"There was a certain amount of gatekeeping with football and basketball because their whole team would be on there if you let them," the former employee said.

After working with multiple athletes enrolled in Hagen's independent study classes, the former employee said the required course work did not justify awarding three and four credits per class.

"If I have (an athlete) on my roster, and I know I have to help her with Intro to Psych, and I have to help her with speech, and I have to help her with something else, and I don't have to help her with an independent study, then I know she's not doing any work for that independent study," the former

- [Report by the College of LSA on Investigation of Allegations Against Professor John Hagen \(December 12, 2007; revised January 21, 2008\)](#)

- [Report by the Psychology Department Executive Committee on its Investigation of Potential Academic Misconduct Involving Professor John Hagen](#)

employee said. "Because she truly only does what I'm there to make her do."

Athletes enjoy time with Hagen

When asked about Hagen, most Michigan athletes interviewed by The News expressed affection for the professor.

"He's definitely laid back," said Kolarik, the second-leading scorer on this season's top-ranked [Michigan hockey team](#). "He's not one to yell at you if you don't bring your assignment in, and he'll give you the benefit of the doubt most of the time."

"He really likes the athletes."

Kolarik has taken Psychology 200, 327, 421, all independent studies, and 401, a standard course, with Hagen, earning three B-pluses and an A. Kolarik estimated he spent an hour a week doing work for Hagen's independent study classes, well below the suggested guidelines published by the psychology department.

Going into the fall semester, the junior carried a 2.3 grade point average outside of Hagen's courses.

Kolarik, current [men's track](#) athlete [Roger Billhardt](#), and [women's basketball](#) player [Ta'Shia Walker](#) told The News that they met with Hagen for 15 to 25 minutes each week during independent studies with the professor.

In [Alan Branch's](#) independent study with Hagen, the professor taught the former Michigan football player and current [Arizona Cardinals](#) defensive tackle how to use a day planner, Branch said.

Asked if Hagen's classes were easy, Long broke into a smile, paused, and then laughed.

"If you do your work and you meet with him and don't give him any problems, he's going to give you a good grade," the All-American left tackle said.

Crable, a senior linebacker last fall, wrote two papers for his Psychology 200 class - "six to eight pages, nothing serious" - adding that the writing process was greatly helped by Hagen.

"He reads it as you're going, and it's nice," the linebacker said. "He's really helping you and giving you the game plan to pass his class, because as you're doing the paper, he's proofreading and doing all kinds of things, telling you - you need to look into this, and be more interested in that topic, stuff like that."

Crable added that Hagen is not "really a guy who is work-oriented, he's not just bringing you in to write papers and all that stuff."

Hockey player [Danny Fardig](#), who took his third independent study course with Hagen last semester, said his courses with the professor primarily have been conducted via e-mail.

[Greg Mathews](#), a sophomore wide receiver, said he met Hagen "a couple of times" while taking an

Key player

Phil Hanlon

Associate provost.

• **Why he's important:** Along with Bill Martin, Hanlon helps oversee the Academic Success Program.

• **What he's saying:** "It certainly is in the interest of all the academic deans and the provost to make sure that all students are able to have high-quality academic experiences. I think it's a shared responsibility. I don't think there is any one individual or office that is supposed to look at this."

independent study class with the professor.

"He seems like a big sports fan," Mathews added.

Mathews said he was taught by Hagen's assistant, Steve Pacynski, when he took Psychology 200 in fall 2006. Pacynski received his undergraduate degree from Michigan in 2006 and is employed by the psychology department as an "instructional aide."

"Me and (teammate) Brandon Minor, we had class together, so we met once a week with Steve," Mathews said. "He just gave us a packet to do. The packet would be along the lines of learning to study, focusing on studying and preparing for tests, things of that nature."

"It wasn't anything too terribly challenging. At the end, we had to make a calendar about the remainder of the semester. It was about a month-long calendar. It was one of the easier classes. It was a class I'd recommend for any freshman student."

It was also a class that Mathews had no idea existed before Acho enrolled him in it.

"She just put me in the class and told me it would help me out a lot," Mathews said.

Staffers raise concerns

The large number of athletes in Hagen's courses and the role academic counselors played in placing them there caused some members of the academic support staff to raise concerns in a 2002 meeting about how the [NCAA](#) might view the courses, a former employee said.

Acho, Shand and assistant athletic director [Warde Manuel](#), who then oversaw the Academic Success Program, were among those present, according to one of the former employees, and Manuel was animated in defending the courses. Manuel earned a master's degree in social work at Michigan, working in part with Hagen, who described him as "my graduate student" in an e-mail to The News.

Manuel, now athletic director at the [University at Buffalo in New York](#), said he does not recall the meeting.

"I don't remember specific conversations about people saying John Hagen is doing too much," Manuel said. "And I'm not saying we didn't have those conversations while I was there, I just don't remember it rising to the level of this huge concern about how much he was doing, and what we were doing with him."

Manuel believes Hagen's work benefits students who need help note taking, reading and other college skills.

"As much as the numbers look daunting, I think John has worked with the kids that other people wouldn't work with, to get them better," Manuel said. "Not get them grades - I want to make that clear; to make them better as students, to be able to succeed at the university."

When asked why other professors wouldn't work with the athletes Hagen would, Manuel said there was little interest among other professors at Michigan in helping students with basic skills.

Mel Sanders, director of academic services for athletics at [Colorado State](#), worked as a counselor in the

Academic Success Program from 2001 to 2004 and remembered independent studies, and the number Hagen taught, as issues the staff discussed in relation to an upcoming [NCAA](#) recertification process.

Dean looks at Hagen's work

In July 2006, a [New York Times investigation](#) detailed how Auburn professor Thomas Petee taught dozens of directed readings - a form of independent study - to Auburn football players.

The story caught the attention of [Michigan's Office of the Provost](#), which sent a letter on Aug. 7, 2006, instructing seven university deans to look for similar situations.

McDonald, the LS&A dean, said Hagen was the only one of more than 1,000 faculty members in that college who attracted further attention after an initial check.

[Bob Megginson](#), an associate dean in LS&A, was told by McDonald to examine Hagen's independent studies due to the large number of athletes enrolled. Megginson discussed the independent studies with Hagen and [Terri Lee](#), then the chair of undergraduate education in the psychology department.

Megginson also reviewed a list of students taking independent studies with Hagen - he estimates there were 64 students, 41 of whom were athletes - on the list, looked at posters that had been produced by students in Hagen's courses and talked to one student.

Megginson reported back, verbally telling McDonald that there was "nothing there," because the professor is an expert on teaching about learning styles and studying athletes is part of his research. Megginson also said he judged the course work to be legitimate.

Neither Megginson nor Lee spoke with athletic department officials about the situation, nor did they remember talking specifically to any athletes. Megginson said he viewed speaking to more than one student as unnecessary.

"Because it was just so incredibly obvious at the point and time - look, you just talked to the guy, is there any doubt in your mind about the validity of what he's doing?" the associate dean said. "The man is an eminent, eminent social scientist. He's won the (Neubacher Award) ... which is given to somebody who deeply cares about the issues that surround students who aren't able to perform at the same levels as others. OK?

"What he's doing is exactly (what) we hope faculty will do."

Megginson attributed the high percentage of athletes in Hagen's classes to several factors: they valued the flexibility offered because of busy schedules, they benefited from the content and were directed to Hagen because student athletes were one of the professor's research areas.

Hagen, however, later told The News in an e-mail that student-athletes were not a major research area for him.

Key players

Terry McDonald

LS&A dean.

• **Why he's important:** Directed Megginson to examine Hagen's pattern of independent studies after Provost Teresa Sullivan asked seven Michigan deans to evaluate independent study practices in an August 2006 memo.

• **What he's saying:** "This is the kind of faculty-student experience we aspire to provide for all of our students. If I could do this for 16,000 students, I would do it."

Teresa Sullivan

Provost.

• **Why she's important:** Serves as the university's chief academic officer.

• **What she's saying:** "We have the No. 1 psychology department in the country. Every psychology faculty member in the country would love to be here. They have very high standards, because they won't maintain that ranking if they don't keep those high standards. And so I trust them to police themselves."

"There's a certain collection of students who may appear to you to be out of proportion to what happens in other disciplines," Megginson said. "But the questions I'm interested in is, is what he's doing academically sound? It is, and that was my report to the dean."

'This is not Auburn'

According to guidelines published on the psychology department's [Web site](#), independent study is intended to give students the opportunity to earn academic credit when they are working in a research lab, conducting their own research, performing an in-depth study on a psychological topic or participating in an internship or volunteer opportunity.

Research could entail something as simple as students researching the most current thinking on a psychological topic and citing those studies in writing a paper.

The guidelines note students are responsible for finding their own faculty sponsors and that for each credit hour, students are expected to devote at least three hours per week in the fall and winter terms and six hours per week in the spring and summer terms.

To earn four credits, students would - in theory - be working 12 hours a week on their topic in the fall and winter semesters, 24 hours a week in the summer and spring.

"For all of those 300- and 400-level, they're required to turn in a substantial paper - 15 to 20 pages every semester," Lee said. "There are hour requirements. ... We have a very clear set of standards."

And while some athletes did say they wrote 15- to 20-page papers, most told The News their independent study involved little to no research, and that they devoted a few hours a week - if that - to their three- and four-credit independent study courses.

"My experience is that students, when they're doing independent studies that they like, really underestimate what they're doing," Lee said.

McDonald said Megginson did not have to speak to students in the class, because students had not complained about the content.

When it was pointed out that students also had not complained in the [Auburn](#) case that sparked the investigation, McDonald nodded.

"Right, but this is not Auburn," the LS&A dean said. "This is the No. 1 psychology department in the country telling us that they have vetted this and that they are in conformance with procedures that we were asking about."

A professor's complaint

When Hagen was promoted to director of student services in the psychology department last summer, fellow professor [Scott Paris](#) was disappointed he hadn't been selected himself. Paris' position as the graduate chairman had been eliminated in a departmental reorganization and he'd hoped to land the student services job.

Key player

Terri Lee

Psychology department chairwoman.

- **Why she's important:** Helped examine Hagen's independent studies in August 2006, when she was the undergraduate education chairwoman in the department.
- **What she's saying:** "John (Hagen) doesn't go out and ask athletes to come join his class. They come to him. And they're appropriate students for this course."

And when faculty members told Paris they were surprised Hagen was promoted after being investigated for his work with athletes, the professor became curious.

He looked into Hagen's courses and was stunned by the number of independent studies the professor was teaching and the percentage of athletes in them.

Key player

Scott Paris

Psychology professor

• **Why he's important:** Raised concerns to Michigan administrators about Hagen's independent studies in August 2007.

• **What he's saying:** "I don't think it's fair to the student athletes to give them cheap academic credit or experiences that are only superficial. ... In the long run, it doesn't do them a service."

Paris - who competed in [gymnastics](#) for Michigan in the 1960s and later served on the Board in Control, a faculty oversight body for athletics that was eventually disbanded - talked to students about what they did in the courses. "The students I talked to said he (Hagen) simply talks about athletics and the university and his projects," Paris said. "They're not academic discussions."

A second psychology professor, Chris Peterson, had confidence in Hagen's integrity, but expressed surprise when shown data on Hagen's of independent studies and the number of athletes in them.

"This is not good," Peterson said in October. "That's very weird. I mean ... there's nothing to say. Of course, it's anomalous. It can't happen by chance ... unless 85 percent of psych students are varsity athletes. I don't know what you want to do with all of this. There may be a completely plausible thing. He may have a soft spot. I've got a soft spot in my heart for international students."

One of Hagen's colleagues, psychology professor Norbert Schwarz, said he doesn't usually take more than three independent study students per semester because of the effort it takes to plan and supervise their work. Another psychology professor, Stephanie Rowley, said she accepts one to three independent study students per year. Her involvement "really can be intense, particularly if they're spending time in an independent research project."

Documents obtained by The News show Hagen has taught as many as 45 independent studies in a single semester.

Paris complained to the provost's office in August, then had a 45-minute meeting with Megginson, who told him the issue already had been examined.

"It became clear to me that he hadn't really talked to students, he hadn't done the research, he hadn't looked back into the record of enrollments," Paris said. "He was quite uninformed of the history and magnitude of the arrangement. He basically saw no problem because he didn't look for it."

Unhappy with Megginson's response, Paris lodged a complaint with the psychology department's executive committee in November.

Key player

Bob Megginson

Associate Dean of LS&A

• **Why he's important:** Took part in two investigations into Hagen's independent studies in consecutive years and concluded there was no problem.

• **What he's saying:** "If we have a course in which a student learns how to study, that's a good thing. It doesn't mean there isn't any academic content."

The six-member committee met with Hagen and Paris, reviewed samples of work from 53 students in Hagen's classes from the fall term, examined grades of athletes and nonathletes in Hagen's classes from 2004 to 2007 and compared those grades to the students' grade point averages and the grades of students

in independent studies taught by the rest of the psychology department.

On Jan. 21, the committee issued a report stating Hagen did not favor athletes, that the content of the independent studies was appropriate for academic credit and that students did their own work.

Members declined to be interviewed about the report. Paris notes that Hagen taught 87 students in fall 2007, according to data supplied by Megginson, and 53 work samples were examined. He questions whether Hagen was allowed to select those samples, wonders why no students or athletes were interviewed and believes his department is more interested in explaining away a potentially embarrassing situation than exploring what work is really done and why there are so many athletes taking independent study with Hagen.

"There are so many holes in the reports that it is laughable ..." Paris said. "(But) the general strategy of reporting some data from some students to show that things are OK is probably good enough for the public."

Lee and Hagen both described Paris as disgruntled over not being named to the position to which Hagen was promoted.

Paris doesn't entirely disagree.

"If she says I'm disgruntled, that may be fair," Paris said. "But I don't think I'm a personally unhappy individual. I'm a faculty member who is concerned about the quality of leadership and the decision-making and the ethics in the department. I don't think it's fair to the student-athletes to give them cheap academic credit or experiences that are only superficial, just because they're really busy and sometimes look for shortcuts."

Seth Gordon contributed to this story.

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