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Student Entitlement: Key Questions and Short Answers

By Maryellen Weimer, PhD
From FacultyFocus.Com

What is student entitlement?

Ask a group of teachers to define student entitlement and their answers will strike similar themes. A definition often used by researchers categorizes student entitlement as a “tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without taking personal responsibility for achieving that success.”

How widespread is it?

Very, if you talk with faculty. They’ve seen it, experienced it, can tell stories about it, and know colleagues who’ve had to deal with it. The research (and there’s not a lot) reports finding less student entitlement than faculty do. In one study, 370 business students had a “low sense” of entitlement on a research-developed instrument (a 2.82 mean on a 7-point scale, Elias, 2017). In another, a 2.63 mean on the slightly disagree side of a 6-point scale represented the views of a 466, cross-disciplinary student cohort (Greenberger, et. al., 2008).

What does it look like?

Despite agreement on the definition, there’s not much consensus on the beliefs and behaviors that illustrate entitlement. Those commonly proposed include the belief that effort should count (“If I’m trying, the professor should consider that”), that grades should be adjusted in favor of the student (“If my grade is close to the cutoff, the professor ought to bump it up”), that are responsible for student learning (“If the prof can’t explain it clearly, I shouldn’t have to learn it”), that professors owe students certain things (“If I need help, the professor should come to me”), that students have the right to behave as they see fit (“The professor shouldn’t care if I come late or leave early”), and that exams and courses better if they’re not terribly taxing (“I like courses where I don’t have work too hard”).

Can a student be entitled without being rude and disruptive?

Yes. Students can have beliefs like those mentioned above and only discuss them with other students or not discuss them at all. Part of what makes entitlement challenging for teachers are those students who do verbally express the attitudes, often aggressively. What the research hasn’t yet sorted out is the percentage of students who

do and don't express these attitudes to their teachers and whether those unexpressed attitudes affect learning outcomes.

Are millennial students more entitled than previous generations?

That's another widely held assumption in the academic community, but support from research is indirect and inconsistent. Research does show an association between narcissism and entitlement but there's disagreement as to whether college students today are more narcissistic than they were previously. There is evidence that millennials do believe more strongly in their capabilities at the same time they report weaker work ethics. And the research is uncovering some interesting blips. The entitlement attitude found in some studies isn't related to one's age or year in school.

Is entitlement something that only happens in the academic environment?

No, it has been studied, written about, and observed in other contexts (like work environments), but some of its features are unique to the academic environment, such as the idea that grades are deserved, not necessarily earned.

What's causing it?

There's a plethora of reasons that have been proposed. Some research has tied entitlement to personality characteristics; other researchers have looked at parenting and parental expectations. A number think it's the result of previous educational experiences and/or grade inflation. Some blame technology that gives students greater access to teachers and the expectation of immediate responses. Fairly regularly, student evaluations are blamed for the anonymous power and control they give students. And finally, there's the rise in consumerism that's now associated with education. Students (and their parents) pay (usually a lot) for college and the sense that those tuition dollars entitle them to certain things, is generally not what teachers think education entitles learners to receive. At this point, it's probably safe to say that entitlement is not being caused by one thing, but by a collection of them, and the causes vary depending on the student.

How should teachers respond?

This is probably the most important question and the one not being addressed in the research or talked about much by teachers. Perhaps that's because the entitlement discussion isn't an easy one to have with students. If students endorse an entitled attitude ("I'm paying for the class and that entitles me to use my phone if I want to"), telling them that's wrong isn't likely to change the attitude. It helps if teachers clarify their expectations with constructive positive language and even more importantly with discussions of the rationales on which those expectations rest. Teacher authority gets most students to follow the rules, but force doesn't generally change attitudes and those are what need to be fixed in this case. This an important and complex issue, difficult to explore deeply in a single post.

References

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Incorporating Principles in Cognitive Psychology to Improve Student Learning

By Christopher Grabau, PhD
From FacultyFocus.Com

At the 2017 STEM FIT Symposium at Washington University in St. Louis, Mark McDaniel, PhD, Professor, Psychological & Brain Sciences, co-director of CIRCLE, and co-author of *Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (2014), presented a plenary address on how research in cognitive psychology can support effective teaching practices and improve learning. Supported by laboratory and field experiments, many of the techniques McDaniel presented from the book can be applied to most academic subjects in order to promote student learning. Henry L. Roediger, McDaniel's co-author, previously grouped many of these same techniques into three general principles to enhance educational practice (Roediger & Pyc, 2012). Each principle offers an opportunity to consider how to incorporate research-supported practices for sustained learning. Brief summaries of the three general principles are listed below. I have also included a few examples found within the literature of how you may incorporate these principles into your teaching:

1. Distribution: How information is distributed can determine the level of sustained learning. Two effective strategies to distribute information: repetition and interleaved practice, offer ways to improve memory and retention. Repeating and revisiting key concepts and topics throughout the duration of a course can aid in long term memory and recall. Furthermore, mixing (or interleaving) new information with previously covered material can support more durable learning and benefit retention of information.

Consider reviewing topics covered in previous lectures at the beginning and ending of each class or including information from previous sections in homework assignments. Mix questions and topics throughout the course instead of teaching in a blocked or linear fashion. Mix problem sets instead of grouping into clusters in order to provide between-concept comparisons, improve proficiency, and promote retention for sustained learning. (Rohrer, Dedrick & Stershic, 2015; Sana, Kim, & Yan, 2017)

2. Retrieval practice: Creating sustained and effortful learning practices can help support retention of information. Instead of using repetition as a way to remember information, develop a sustained process of instruction where information recall is spaced over a longer period of time.

Offer low-stakes quizzes throughout the semester to help students reconstruct learning of course information. Also, encourage students to self-test by creating flash cards. Help students learn how to self-quiz using flash cards. Have students frequently shuffle cards they answered correctly into the deck until all questions are mastered. (Roediger & Pyc, 2012)

3. Explanatory questioning: Providing spaces where students can question course information can be a powerful opportunity for sustained learning. Two techniques to provide explanatory questioning are elaborative interrogation and self-explanation. Elaborative interrogation opportunities allow students to explore why certain information is true. When asking “why” questions, students are forced to incorporate existing information into their understanding of new concepts and topics. Elaborative interrogation also prompts students to think of similarities and differences between related topics. Similarly, self-exploration offers students a space to integrate new information with existing prior knowledge. Broadly speaking, self-exploration invokes metacognitive questioning in order to help students make personal connections to learning. (Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathan & Willingham, 2013)

Incorporate active learning exercises like the “one-minute paper exercise” at the end of class. Ask students to write about why the topic may be relevant to their learning. Also, when introducing new material, ask students to self-explain, “What parts are new to me? What does the statement mean? Is there anything I still don’t understand?”

Consider incorporating each of these three principles into your teaching. What techniques will you use to effectively distribute information? How will you help students practice learning and re-learning course material? What teaching strategies will you use to help students retain course information? How will you make these techniques visible in your course design?

References

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- This article originally appeared in *The Notebook*, the blog for the Reinert Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning at Saint Louis University. Reprinted with permission.

Announcements

2018 Annual Meeting: Can Higher Education Recapture the Elusive American Dream?

January 24, 2018 to January 27, 2018

Grand Hyatt Washington

1000 H Street, NW

Washington, DC 20001

Pre-Meeting Symposium

Wednesday, January 24

The Power of Civic Engagement—Across Campus, Within Communities, Beyond Borders

9th Annual Forum on Digital Learning and ePortfolios

Saturday, January 27, 2018

For more information visit www.aacu.org

Collaboration, Growth, and Innovation (CGI) Grant Program

The 2018 New American Colleges & Universities Collaboration, Growth, and Innovation (CGI) Grant Program

–Call for Submissions–

2018 Application Deadline: December 1, 2017

Anticipated Notification Deadline: February 1, 2018

For more information and to download application materials visit

www.newamericancolleges.org

**Applications materials may be emailed to Michelle Apuzzio, Assistant Director,
NAC&U: apuzzio@newamericancolleges.org**

The application must include:

- A letter of support from the applicant's dean or vice president for academic affairs
- A letter of commitment from collaborators