Student Entitlement: Truth, Fiction, or Some of Both

Presented by:
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Maryellen Weimer has edited The Teaching Professor newsletter since 1987 and writes the Teaching Professor blog each week on Faculty Focus. She won Penn State’s Milton S. Eisenhower award for distinguished teaching in 2005. Weimer has consulted with more than 600 colleges and universities on instructional issues and regularly keynotes national meetings and regional conferences. She has published many books, including: Inspired College Teaching: A Career-Long Resource for Professional Growth (Jossey-Bass, 2010), Enhancing Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning: Professional Literature that Makes a Difference (Jossey-Bass, 2006).

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Maryellen Weimer has edited The Teaching Professor newsletter since 1987 and writes the Teaching Professor Blog each week on Faculty Focus. A distinguished scholar and author, her Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice, 2nd Edition (Jossey-Bass, 2013) remains one of the most influential books for educators looking to adopt a learner-centered approach in their classrooms.
Student entitlement

What is it and what does it look like when students have it?

Webster: “belief that one is deserving of or entitled to special privileges.”

Chowning and Campbell: “tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without taking personal responsibility for achieving that success.” (p. 982)


Attitudes and beliefs that illustrate entitlement

- Effort should count.
- Grades are deserved, not just earned.
- Paying tuition means the professor works for students.
- Professors have the responsibility to respond to student needs.
- Paying for an education entitles a student to act as they see fit in a course.
- Individual requests for special accommodations (deadline extensions, make-up exams) should be honored.
- Exams, assignments, indeed courses, should not be terribly taxing.
How widespread is student entitlement?

According to faculty: It’s widespread.
According to the research: Maybe not so widespread.

How widespread is student entitlement?

• 370 business students surveyed; 2.82 mean on the low side of a 7-point scale

• 466 students across disciplines; 2.63 on the slightly disagree side of a 6-point scale

• 266 students in undergraduate marketing courses; 23.2% of cohort were deemed entitled.

Is student entitlement a new phenomena?

Some of the support is indirect.
• Example: There’s an association between narcissism and entitlement but not all the evidence supports that millennial students are more narcissist than other generational cohorts.

Some millennial student characteristics relate to entitlement.
• Example: Millennial students believe they can do anything at the same time they report lower work ethics.

Some evidence raises doubts.
• Example: Some studies found that entitled attitudes were not related to age or year in college.
How is entitlement being measured?

With instruments that reflect what researchers believe is causing entitled attitudes and beliefs.

Sample items:

• “If I’m not happy with my grade…the professor should allow me to do an additional assignment.”
• “Professors who won’t let me take an exam at a different time because of my personal plans…are too strict.”
• “It is unnecessary for me to participate in class when the professor is paid for teaching, not for asking questions.”
• “I should never receive a zero on an assignment that I turn in.”

What’s causing these entitled attitudes?

A wide range of reasons have been proposed:

• Entitled attitudes are a function of various personality characteristics, like narcissism and high self-esteem.
• It’s the result of parenting and the expectations parents have for their children.
• Previous educational experiences have encouraged students to expect more than they deserve. Example: grade inflation
• Technology gives quick and easy access to professors.
• Anonymous evaluations give students power and control over professors.
• Entitlement comes from consumerism and the idea that education is a product.

How should faculty respond?

Work to prevent entitled expectations.
Clarity expectations, at the beginning of the course, in the syllabus and subsequently as needed.
“Grades are not curved. Those close to cutoff points are not bumped up.”
“Exams are taken on the days they are scheduled 99% of the time.”
“Late homework gets feedback, but no credit.”

Consistently adhere to your expectations.
Talk about entitlement
Define it
Provide examples
Ways to change entitled attitudes

Avoid confrontational exchanges. The goal is to do more than say no.

Explain why the attitudes are wrong.

- They hurt the student
- They harm the professor
- They compromise the quality of the degree
- They devalue education
- They have professional consequences

Discuss what paying for a college education does entitle students to receive.

Be realistic about the outcome—one conversation isn’t likely to persuade students. It’s a message they need to hear consistently.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/entitlement101817

Thank you!