

Dealing With Entitled Students

Picture the following: You have just received an e-mail from a graduate student asking that you, her faculty, send her a PDF of a required class reading as she does not know how to navigate the university's online library system. What about the situation when a student challenges faculty regarding the pedagogical approach being used in a class? How do you respond? What are you thinking? Informal interactions with faculty who encounter such situations frequently share that these encounters are both trying and emotionally draining. They may even feel blindsided by these interactions.

For many of us, these examples reflect what seems to be an increasingly common student behavior: academic entitlement. Academic entitlement (AE) is “the tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without taking personal responsibility for achieving that success” (Chowning & Campbell, 2009, p. 982). Cain, Romanelli, and Smith (2012) highlighted five key points:

First, knowledge is a right and students should receive it with minimal exertion and discomfort. Second, instructors will provide all necessary information and guidance necessary to be successful in the course. Third, the instructor is responsible for student success (or failure) in the classroom. Fourth, all students should receive equal recognition regardless of individual effort put forth. Fifth, aggressive confrontations with instructors or school administrators are acceptable if student expectations are not met. (p. 1)

Although all are troublesome, the last key point is the most troublesome, as faculty typically do not expect stu-

dents to confront them in an aggressive manner.

How common is it? While we may think the prevalence of AE is increasing, Lemke, Marx, and Dundes (2017) reported a decrease in academic entitlement between 2009 and 2017 (41% versus 27%). However, although more men scored high on AE in 2009 (50%) in comparison with women (34%), this difference was not present in 2017. Luckett, Trocchia, Noel, and Marlin (2017), in a sample of 293 university business students, found a little more than 76% of their sample scored low on their measure of AE. Only 17% of their sample scored high on AE. However, these were the students who believed effort not results should be rewarded, access to the Internet for nonclass-related interests should be unquestioned, and unbridled access to instructors was their right. Thus, although not overwhelmingly present in the student population, faculty experience their impact more because academically entitled students often demand more faculty time than do students who do not feel so entitled.

To what is AE attributed? Although no one factor is a major contributor, several factors have been implicated in its development. One suggestion is the shift in how higher education is perceived. No longer is higher education seen as a place in which “transformative intellectual experiences” occur (Lippmann, Bulanda, & Wagenaar, 2009, p. 198). Rather, higher education is considered a means to an end—the end being a better job or increased income. To some degree, higher education bears some of the responsibility for this perception, as competition for

students has driven how higher education institutions are marketed. Cost of higher education has also contributed to students, who may perceive themselves as customers and college as merely an economic transaction, wanting a significant return on their investment. Attending college is now considered a right, given employment requirements.

Grade inflation may also influence how students approach course and college expectations. Grade inflation may foster “inflated expectations among students about the quality of their work and about the amount of work expected of students” (Lippmann et al., 2009, p. 199).

Finally, not to be ignored are generational issues. Faculty typically represent the Baby Boomer generation, whereas students with whom they interact represent younger generations who have been raised in an environment that focused on fostering self-esteem and rewarding effort and participation. Thus, these students may never have encountered a situation in which their work was not considered outstanding. When such instances occur in the classroom, behaviors reflective of AE may surface.

What are the consequences? There is literature to support that students with higher levels of AE have a greater tendency to exhibit uncivil classroom behaviors (Chowning & Campbell, 2009), may be less compliant in addressing academic or institutional requirements, and may engage in academic dishonesty (Jiang, Tripp, & Hong, 2016). There is beginning evidence that these AE behaviors transfer to the workplace (Peirone & Maticka-Tyndale, 2017). These characteristics, as well as uncivil student be-

haviors, may lead to faculty stress and burnout (Jiang et al., 2016).

What can we do? Emphasis should be on addressing behaviors exhibited by students who are academically entitled, rather than trying to address AE directly, given that AE is a stable trait not amenable to modification (Chowning & Campbell, 2009). There are strategies that faculty and institutions can employ to address AE:

- Make expectations explicit in course syllabi and in assignments, and not deviate from them (Lewis, Williams, Sohn, & Loy, 2017).

- Provide clear rubrics by which assignments are graded. While conveying that review of grades is welcome, consider making negotiating for grades open to potential negative consequences (potential to raise or lower a grade).

- Help students understand class expectations by providing examples of outstanding work. Reorient and resocialize students so they understand normative expectations; reinforce behaviors such as respectful interactions, responsible class preparation, and class attendance (Lippmann et al., 2009).

- Administer an AE assessment on the first day of class to gain an idea of its prevalence in your class. There are several instruments from which to choose. Doing so may enhance the use of preventive strategies by faculty.

Institutions also have a role to play in diffusing the negative behaviors associated with AE. Rigorous freshmen seminars, discussions of expectations during student orientations to campus and to the major, and ensuring faculty are well prepared to teach courses may affect the presence of AE in classes.

That said, it is important for faculty to appreciate student expectations as well. Students want “an environment that fosters student professional growth and development” (Karpen, 2014, p. 1). They want “courses that adhere to a high standard of disciplinary excellence and encourage original thinking” (Lewis et al., 2017). Students expect faculty to be well prepared for classes, be available to assist with their learning by providing appropriate learning tools while not tutoring them, convey enthusiasm for their subject, and manage the classroom to foster learning.

A consistent theme in the literature is that when faculty are clear and consistent about expectations related to student behavior, student performance, guidelines for and grading of assignments, and type and quality of feedback provided, students are more responsive and may exhibit less AE. Given these expectations, it is incumbent on institutions of higher learning to employ careful assignment of teaching responsibilities, along with intentional mentoring of faculty.

The presence of AE calls for being proactive in helping faculty use documented strategies to enhance student learning and to address AE. Are academic leaders and schools of nursing doing this? The consequence of not being proactive may be considerable faculty burnout, contributing to an already serious faculty shortage. We cannot delay!

References

Cain, J., Romanelli, F., & Smith, K.M. (2012). Academic entitlement in pharmacy education. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 76(10), Article 189.

Chowning, K., & Campbell, N.J. (2009). Development and validation of a measure of academic entitlement: Individual differences in students' externalized responsibility and entitled expectations. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 101, 982-997. doi:10.1037/a0016351

Jiang, L., Tripp, T.M., & Hong, P.H. (2017). College instruction is not so stress free after all: A qualitative and quantitative study of academic entitlement, uncivil behaviors, and instructor strain and burnout. *Stress and Health*, 33, 578-589. doi:10.1002/smi.2742

Karpen, S. (2014). Letters. Academic entitlement: A student's perspective. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 78(2), Article 44.

Lemke, D., Marx, J., & Dundes, L. (2017). Challenging notions of academic entitlement and its rise among liberal arts college students. *Behavioral Sciences*, 7, 81. doi:10-3390/bs7040081

Lewis, C.S., Williams, B.D., Sohn, M.K., & Loy, T.C. (2017). The myth of entitlement: Students' perceptions of the relationship between grading and learning at an elite university. *The Qualitative Report*, 22, 2997-3010

Lippmann, S., Bulanda, R.E., & Wagenaar, T.C. (2009). Student entitlement. Issues and strategies for confronting entitlement in the classroom and beyond. *College Teaching*, 57, 197-204.

Luckett, M., Trocchia, P.J., Noel, N.M., & Marlin, D. (2017). A typology of students based on academic entitlement. *Journal of Education for Business*, 92, 96-102. doi:10.1080/08832323.2017.1281215

Peirone, A., & Maticka-Tyndale, E. (2017). “I bought my degree, now I want a job!” Is academic entitlement related to prospective workplace entitlement? *Innovative Higher Education*, 42, 3-18. doi:10.1007/s10755-016-9365-8

Karen H. Morin, PhD, RN, ANEF, FAAN
Professor Emerita

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

The author has disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.
doi:10.3928/01484834-20180522-01