

**Student and Faculty Perceptions of Academic Entitlement:  
A Look at One Southern Land-Grant University**

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### **Introduction**

Faculty are increasingly asked to accommodate student needs and preferences related to the growing occurrence of academic entitlement behaviors of college age students (Baer & Cheryomukhin, 2011). These behaviors may include students lobbying for higher grades, expectations of special accommodations, asking for concessions that relate to their needs, requesting class notes, or asking for grades they have not earned. Many students become very distressed if a grade less than an A is the expected outcome. Multiple phenomena are believed to contribute to these behaviors such as narcissism (Twenge, 2006), self-esteem (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008), and psychological entitlement (Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, & Bushman, 2004). Faculty contribute to this expectation by easy grading, avoiding too much out of class work or less rigorous requirements, often because tenure and promotion decisions are tied to student evaluations (Tabachnick, Keith-Spiegel, & Pope, 1991). Faculty modify their behavior so that students will like them. Grade inflation also contributes to student entitlement by creating the expectation of a high grade with little effort (Kun & Hu, 1999).

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Academic entitlement is “the tendency to possess an expectation of academic success without taking personal responsibility for achieving that success” (Chowning & Campbell, 2009, p. 982). Greenberger et al. (2008) defined academic entitlement as the “expectation of high rewards for modest effort, expectations of special consideration and accommodation by teachers when it comes to grades, and impatience and anger when their expectations and perceived needs are not met” (p. 1194). Self-entitlement is conceptualized as a construct of maladaptive and socially problematic traits or dispositions such as narcissism, an inflated sense of self-importance to the exclusion of others (Twenge, 2006), self-esteem, or generalized personality entitlement (Baer & Cheryomukhin, 2011) defined as “a pervasive sense that one deserves more and is entitled to more than others” (Campbell et al., 2004, p. 31).

### **Methodology**

This study examined the entitlement expectations of agricultural students and faculty at the University of Arkansas ( $N = 338$ ). Approval from the Institutional Review Board was obtained. All participation was voluntary. Data were collected in regularly scheduled face-to-face class sessions with the students, and faculty completing the Academic Entitlement (AE) questionnaire and the personality entitlement instrument (PE) on their own time (Greenberger et al., 2008). Examples of items represented on the AE are: “If I have attended most classes for the course, I deserve at least a grade of B,” and “Professors have no right to be annoyed with me if I tend to come late to class or tend to leave early.” Faculty instruments had slightly modified phrasing compared to student assessments. Responses were indicated on a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Demographic information was gathered.

## Findings

The majority of student respondents were 19 to 24 years (77.8%), followed by 18 years or less (16.7%). The remaining students were over 25 years of age (5.6%). The majority of students were females (59.5%) and classification was nearly equally dispersed between freshmen through seniors. There were 20.6% freshman, 27.8% sophomores, 25.4% juniors and 25.80 seniors based on identified classifications. Twenty four percent of the students' assessed were Honors students and 64.7% were on academic scholarship. The majority of students had one or two siblings (66.7%), followed by three to five siblings (25.0%), no siblings (5.2%), and over five siblings (3.2%). The highest frequency of student respondents were the youngest in their family (39%), followed by oldest (32.7%), and then middle (33.5%). Of the faculty assessed, 66.7% were female. The largest percentage of faculty were associate or full professors (33.3% each), 22.2% were instructors, 11.1% were assistant professors. All faculty (100%) had appointments in the Dale Bumpers College of Agriculture, Food and Life Sciences and most had 10 years or more in teaching experience (88.8%). The largest percentage of faculty assessed were 31-40 years or 41-50 years (33.3% each).

Using a previously validated 6-point scale to assess academic entitlement (AE), participant responses on average tended toward "slightly disagree" for students ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) and faculty ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ). Of the 15 items, agriculture students disagreed with six of the statements and strongly disagreed with the statement, "A professor should be willing to meet with me at a time that works best for me, even if inconvenient for the professor" ( $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ). Among the most highly endorsed items by students was "if I have explained to my professor that I'm trying hard, I think he/she should give me some considerations with respect to my course grade" ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). However, for faculty the highest item was "I treat students poorly when I cancel an appointment on the same day as we were supposed to meet" ( $M = 4.67$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ). Three other items related to lending class notes, responding to an email on the same day, and responding to phone messages appeared to be of more concern for faculty than students. Of the personal entitlement items, the statement "I do not necessarily deserve special treatment" received a mean score of 4.19 ( $SD = 1.48$ ) and "I honestly feel I'm just more deserving" received the lowest disagreement rating ( $M = 1.81$ ,  $SD = .95$ ).

## Conclusions, Implications/Recommendations

The findings are limited to the population of agricultural students and faculty in this study. These findings suggest that agricultural students have a different perception of academic entitlement than students from previous studies (Baer & Cheryomukhin, 2011, Greenberger et al., 2008).

On a practical note, increasing feedback on assignments and course grades may help overcome the perceived threat with students. Recommendations include integrating AE instruction and objectives into the entering student orientation course to assist students with more realistic expectations. This study needs to be expanded to assess more students at this land-grant institution. A study of students in other colleges on campus is needed to determine if this is a phenomena specific to agriculture students. Additionally, a study should focus on comparing self-esteem and academic entitlement to determine if students with higher self-esteem have higher perceptions of entitlement.

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