

## **University Faculty Perspective on Student Entitlement**

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### Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Grades and letters of recommendation are accepted as the core of college student evaluations (Rosovsky & Hartley, 2002). However in recent years, faculty are experiencing increased behaviors of academic entitlement (AE) that impact grades. The 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 distressed if a grade less than an A is the expected outcome. Students' sense of entitlement is reinforced by professors providing high marks for minimal to average effort by the student. Inflated grading reinforces the view that favorable academic outcomes are given rather than earned (Twenge & Campbell 2009). Benton (2006) felt that the culture of self-indulgence is due in part to the consumer mentality of students and the failure of professors to maintain expectations. This demand creates tension for faculty who know that student evaluations influence promotion, so accommodations are made for customer satisfaction (Benton, 2006).

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). Twenge (2014) calls this narcissistic entitlement where feeling good about yourself is more important than good performance.

### Methods

The population of study was a stratified random sample of university faculty at the University of Arkansas. Participants (544 tenured, 294 tenure-track, and 560 non-tenure) were stratified, based on the number of faculty representing each college or school and rank, resulting in a selected sample size of 500. Sample size was calculated by total population ( $N = 1,398$ ) with a confidence interval of 95% with an acceptable margin of error equaling 5% resulting in a sample size needed of 302 participants. Researchers chose to increase the participant list based on the use of an electronic instrumentation system (Qualtrics). University IRB approval was gained (#16-02-540) and the University of Arkansas Office of Institutional Research stratified and provided the needed electronic list. The instrument was a modified version of a reliable and valid entitlement instrument (Greenberger et al., 2008) where slightly modified phrasing was used for adaptation in this study. Questions about personal and academic entitlement ( $N = 22$ ) were used. Responses were indicated on a Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Demographic data were correspondingly gathered through the instrument.

### Results

Crosstabs were used to analyze participant responses. When gender was utilized to categorize responses, no significant differences were found, except when viewing responses to the statement *If students have completed most of the reading for my class, they deserve a B in the course*. Males ( $n = 81$ ) more strongly disagreed than females ( $n = 68$ ) with this statement and the overall mean was 1.89 ( $SD = .85$ ) with a mode of 2. When asked about their position to the

statement *I tend to provide students with higher grades than they have earned because I worry about my annual performance evaluation being influenced by student evaluations*, faculty at the assistant professor level responded in agreement as opposed to other faculty ranks. Instructors, Associate Professors, and Professors most often disagreed with this statement. When asked their position on the statement *I feel poorly when I don't respond the same day to an e-mail a student sent*, Instructors ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) and Professors ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ .) most often agreed whereas Assistant ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) and Associate Professors ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ .) were divided between agree and disagree.

### **Conclusions**

Entitlement is a topic of much discussion in today's educational settings. The differences between age groups (student and faculty) towards their values and beliefs should be investigated to determine best practices in educational settings. It is apparent through analysis of the participants (overall) that gender does not play a role towards entitlement views of faculty at any level (i.e. instructor to professor). It was interesting to note that males tended to disagree more than females toward student grades based on information intake required of a course. We must understand that each participant might view the requirement differently based on their course needs but overall faculty did indicate that just by accomplishing an assignment does not indicate their deserving of an acceptable grade (B).

Additionally, when analyzing participants (based on rank), assistant professors were concerned about student evaluation and therefore grade inflation was viewed as an acceptable alternative. It is easy to determine that this rank of faculty more easily viewed this as acceptable because of their tenuous stance in the academic profession. Furthermore, it was noted that Professors most often agreed to "feeling poorly" when not responding quickly to student emails. It is assumed that instructors who are strongly tied to students through extensive teaching loads would agree to this statement but the emergence as professors who also felt this was intriguing.

### **Implications/Recommendations**

The immediate question based on the findings of this study is how to alleviate the idea to non-tenured faculty that grade inflation based on perceived student perceptions is not optimal for student learning or a founded view of attainment of course goals based on actual performance. How should the academic field gather perceptions about teaching yet reduce the mitigating factor of how student evaluations will be shown? Do we adopt the secondary school practice of having outside evaluators assess faculty teaching performance?

Further study of this topic is imperative. It should be realized that the largest segment (nationwide) is part-time faculty members (AAUP, 2017). A further investigation into their perceptions should be undertaken. We recommend that this research continue to explore public (land and non-land grant) and private university systems. Understanding the views of academic professionals will shed light on the diversity of student and faculty views of entitlement and education and may allow a more holistic view on student and faculty responsibilities of learning.

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