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# STUDENT ENTITLEMENT

## ISSUES AND STRATEGIES FOR CONFRONTING ENTITLEMENT IN THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND

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**Abstract.** While not representative of all students, those who demonstrate a sense of entitlement demand a great deal of instructors' time and energy. Our article places student entitlement in its social context, with specific attention to the prevalence of the consumer mentality, grade inflation, and the self-esteem of the student generation. We then outline several strategies for dealing with entitlement behavior. We suggest that greater clarity in standards and assessment, combined with specific requirements guiding teacher-student interactions and general efforts to resocialize students and faculty, will help to curb these behaviors.

**Keywords:** *classroom incivilities, classroom management, student entitlement*

### **Email from a Student Dropped Due to Lack of Prerequisite:**

Hey [author's first name],

Do you really think its absolutely necessary to require the completion of SOC151 to remain in this class? You're not teaching Finance 400 buddy. You teach Women's Studies. Do you seriously have nothing better to do than personally check the transcripts of everyone registered for your class? I dont [sic] mean to sound venomous,

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but ive [sic] just grown weary of the whole class registration process after 4 years. I need this class to fulfill a 200 level requirement for College of Arts and Science. Thats [sic] it. I finally have a schedule that i [sic] like, and here you go e-mailing me almost a month after i [sic] registered. The whole situation is a legitimate joke. But i guess if requiring the completion of a prereq makes you or the class you teach seem more important, than [sic] go ahead.

Peace and Prosperity,

[Student's name]

### **Email from a Student Who "Deserved" an A:**

After getting my grade for your class a couple of days ago, I keep going over and over what exactly you expected out of

your SOC 152 students. I'm questioning who/what sets the standard for your class...To me, if a student does/hands in all assignments, misses class no more than two times, participates during lecture, takes notes, attentively watches videos, and obviously observes/notes sociology in his/her life, it would make sense for that student to receive a respectable grade—an A. It seems like the work and time that I (and I'm assuming other students) put into this class didn't create the results that I (or you) wanted. Personally, I can't comprehend how my performance in your class equated to an 87 percent.

**B**oth of these emails reflect a sense of entitlement. The first student felt that the prerequisite simply should not apply to him because he was "special" and tired of the registration process. The second student felt that if she simply did the assigned work she should receive an A. We and other instructors increasingly see evidence of this sense of entitlement among our students, a sense that they deserve what they want because they want it, and want it now. Sometimes it comes in the form of an unreasonable request, such as why we did not respond to an email written at 2 a.m. before an 8 a.m. class. Sometimes it comes in the form of rudeness (cf. Boice 1996). In one of our classes recently, a student was leading the discussion on *Newsweek*. After taking more than the usual amount of time and when he seemed to be finished, the instructor thanked him and he responded, "What? Are you cutting me off already?" There was no sense on his part that the instructor might have misunderstood about him being finished or that he had already taken more time than usual. What the student wanted

and expected was intruded upon and he thought only of himself and what he wanted in his reply.

College students today grow up in a dramatically different world than those from as little as a decade ago. Their familiarity with and reliance on new technologies shape the nature of their social relationships, study habits, and norms of interpersonal communication and decorum (Frاند 2000). These technologies empower students but also heighten a sense of immediacy and alter the norms of social interaction. For example, when cell phones were new, the “other” in a social situation (such as a clerk) would often refuse to service someone until he or she finished a call. Now, however, the norms are that the actor can do whatever she or he desires and the other simply must accept it.

In addition, growing levels of affluence among some segments of the population coupled with shifts in labor market institutions create a mix of heightened expectations, increased uncertainty, and new pressures for college students thinking about work and careers. For example, attaining a college education is no longer the guarantee of success that it once was. As a result of these and other factors, a growing number of today’s generation of college students exhibit a new combination of attitudes, outlooks, and orientations to their work and toward others—frequently described as student entitlement—to which many professors are unaccustomed and unprepared to address. Armed with this emerging orientation to academic life, some students appear to have more casual and presumptive outlooks in the classroom and in one-on-one interactions with faculty members. They have inflated expectations about grades and seem more aggressive when negotiating for changes in the grades they receive.

Some view these traits as reflecting the defining characteristics of the “me” generation (Twenge 2006), nurtured in elementary and secondary schools highly tolerant of problematic behaviors and overly concerned with propping up students’ self-esteem (Carroll 2003). Others see these characterizations as stereotypes and claims about the prevalence of these selfish behaviors as a myth that distorts public and academic perceptions of individuals moving through a new phase

of life (Arnett 2007). Regardless of the prevalence of these behaviors, it is likely that all instructors will have to deal with students who exhibit at least one of them at some point in their career. Although we recognize that entitled students may comprise a small percentage of students (in our experience, less than 10 percent), we are also aware of the fact that they require a far greater proportion of our time and energy. This paper contributes to the large literature on classroom incivility, classroom conflict, and difficult student behavior<sup>1</sup> by examining student entitlement, an aspect of these issues that has not been addressed, neither conceptually nor empirically, to this point. In contrast to the episodic and situation-based nature of most classroom incivilities, we conceptualize student entitlement as reflecting a more deep-seated shift in students’ normative expectations and the institutional structures surrounding higher education in the U.S. We review some cultural, social, and social-psychological explanations for student feelings of entitlement and offer some practical strategies for dealing with the resulting behaviors.

### **Why do Some Students Have a Sense of Entitlement?**

We observe student entitlement to be a self-centered disposition characterized by a general disregard for traditional faculty relationship boundaries and authority. Further, the behaviors and attitudes which stem from this disposition often reflect a sense of being owed an assessment of performance inconsistent with students’ actual effort or work. Whether the issue of student entitlement is growing overall or is only getting stronger in a limited proportion of students, the behavioral manifestations of entitlement often create unpleasant and sometimes very difficult experiences for instructors. These dispositions likely emerge from a complicated mix of social and cultural changes in higher education, among adolescents themselves and in society in general. We outline several of these factors below and then propose strategies to help curb faculty frustrations related to student entitlement.

#### *Cultural Norms and Student Expectations*

Normative orientations toward higher education. Ideally, students would enter

college eager for transformative intellectual experiences and engross themselves in their studies to that end. However, students’ attitudes about education and collegiate experiences differ to varying degrees from this ideal (Borden and Evenbeck 2007). Instead of giving themselves over to their academic work and intellectual pursuits, students appear increasingly likely to view their college educations as they would any other economic exchange. That is, education is increasingly viewed as a “ticket” to a better job or more income than as a means for greater self awareness and recognition of one’s place in society.

This “consumer mentality” shapes students’ views about the classroom experience, course and curriculum content, and most important for our purposes, grades. Critics have identified several complementary sources of this mentality, and the structure of colleges and universities tends to reinforce it. Long before entering college, students grow up in a media-saturated world in which seemingly everything has become commodified. In an increasingly rationalized, homogenized, and disenchanted world, some critics argue that consumption has become the source of meaning for individuals—especially youth—in society, and the means through which they create an identity and self-image (e.g. Ritzer 2005). Mark Edmunson argues that, as a result of growing up in such an environment, “students . . . bring a consumer *weltanschauung* to school, where it exerts a powerful, and largely unacknowledged, influence” (1997, 40). Moreover, it is reinforced by “university culture . . . [which] is ever more devoted to consumption and entertainment, to the using and using up of goods and images” (Edmunson 1997, 40).

Edmunson (1997) attributes much of this shift in orientation to the changing environment in which colleges and universities operate. In an increasingly competitive market place, where state and federal funding is spiraling downwards, universities must cater to students to boost enrollment numbers. To do so, developments in university programming and infrastructure cater increasingly to the wishes and interests of students, including better and more interesting food choices, 24-hour fitness centers, expansive new

residence halls with no shared bathrooms, on-campus writing and learning centers, and student unions that resemble resorts and shopping malls. As students are increasingly marketed to as “consumers” of an “experience” (Edmunson 1997; Sosteric, Gismondi, and Ratkovic 1998), they may be internalizing that orientation and taking those role-behaviors into the classroom and in one-on-one interactions with faculty members. As a result, some students may see themselves as customers, their instructors as service providers, and good grades as something they deserve as a matter of course and as part of the exchange, not something to be earned through diligent and insightful work subjected to careful faculty review (Twenge 2006).

The rise of this consumer mentality may be partially explained by another significant development in higher education—its rapidly and continuously increasing cost. According to a 2006 report released by the College Board (College Board 2006), the inflation-adjusted price of college tuition has more than doubled since the mid-1970s. In constant (2006) dollars, the average tuition price at four-year private institutions in 1976–77 was less than \$10,000, and by 2006–07 it had increased to \$22,218. At four-year public institutions, tuition in that same time period has risen from just over \$2,000 to over \$5,800 in constant (2006) dollars. Financial aid increases have not matched tuition increases. For example, colleges expect to reduce the number and size of Perkins loans—the cheapest education loan—by 10 percent to 50 percent (Clark 2008a). Cost issues are complicated by increased admission competitiveness and reduced parental financial resources. The number of high school seniors rose to its highest in 2008 at the same time that many state schools have moved from open admissions to selective admissions (Clark 2008b). Lower home equity, fewer lenders making student loans, the subprime credit squeeze, and recession worries complicate affordability. Given these dramatic price increases and the efforts students and parents put into affording them, it is not difficult to imagine that both parties expect a substantial return on what is an increasingly significant investment.

Finally, the normative climate for attending college has changed. College is seen as nearly mandatory by most adolescents. The percentage of high school completers enrolled in college the following October rose from 58 percent in 1985 to 69 percent in 2005 and continues to rise (US Department of Education 2006). Attending college is increasingly seen by students as a “right” because it is increasingly required for employment and because more of students’ friends are attending college.

**Grade inflation.** Grade inflation is another ongoing development in higher education that may structure students’ outlooks and expectations. Several highly publicized examples are often used as evidence for the gradual devaluation of grades, the slow upward creeping of GPAs, and the increasing frequency and ease with which

that the average SAT score declined by 5 percent, indicating that the overall increase in grades is not an accurate reflection of superior student performance.

Grade inflation has important implications for student entitlement, primarily by fostering inflated expectations among students about the quality of their work and about the amount of work expected of students. Landrum (1999, 126) reports that “students performing average work, who acknowledge themselves that their work is average, expect a grade of B or A more than 70 percent of the time, even though they realize that the grade for average work is C.” When such expectations are rampant, faculty efforts to curb inflation and evaluate students according to more rigorous criteria are likely to experience unhappy students. As the proportion of students with such expectations rises within a classroom, there is greater

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## GRADE INFLATION HAS IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT ENTITLEMENT, PRIMARILY BY FOSTERING INFLATED EXPECTATIONS AMONG STUDENTS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THEIR WORK AND ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF WORK EXPECTED OF STUDENTS.

As are given out in college courses. Johnson (2003) discusses cases at some of the most prestigious universities in the country in which grade inflation appears to have become a problem. At Duke University, for example, he notes that by the late 1990s, over 45 percent of all grades given to undergraduates were A’s of one form or another (including “plusses” and “minuses”). Grade inflation at Princeton got so bad that the faculty voted in 2004 to restrict the total number of A’s awarded to 35 percent (Aronauer 2005). These incidents appear to be indicative of a more general trend in grade inflation throughout higher education. Rosovsky and Hartley (2002) reviewed several empirical studies of grade inflation at the national level and concluded that grades were inflated substantially between the 1960s and the 1990s. Over that same period, they report

pressure on faculty to alter the traditional normative structure in the classroom to adhere more to students’ views. Indeed, students have devised many strategies and behaviors to pursue their vision of academic success, including, but not limited to, contesting grades and grading decisions (Pope 2001, 152–53). Hence, a refusal to grade leniently may often result in student-instructor confrontations and conflict given the difficulty in interacting positively with students who are unhappy with their grades (Johnson 2003).

**Generational effects.** Many argue that there has been a significant generational shift beginning with those born in the late 1970s (Pope 2001; Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Twenge 2006). The exact timing of such shifts is debated and they have been given a variety of labels, such as

Generation Y, the Millennials, and Generation Me. There is widespread agreement that those entering college after the turn of the century are culturally distinct from the generations preceding them. Jean Twenge (2006) has written extensively about this generation and argues that members of this new generation have grown up in a culture obsessed with self-esteem, and have been told constantly by their parents, teachers, and the media that they are “special” and can achieve anything that they desire. As a result, average rates of self-esteem are significantly higher among members of “generation me” than among those in previous generations (Twenge and Campbell 2001).

Many teachers have moved away from correcting student mistakes and providing students with challenging intellectual assignments for fear of damaging their self-esteem (Twenge 2006, 53–60). This trend, linked with grade inflation, helps raise and maintain the self-esteem of students. In turn, students often use grades to evaluate themselves. Furthermore, grade inflation for the purpose of maintaining student self-esteem has resulted in students internalizing the expectations that attendance and effort (or the appearance of effort) are sufficient to earn high grades (Landrum 1999), as reflected in one of the opening emails in this paper. Taken together, the result is a generation of students who feel increasingly entitled to more positive evaluations in the classroom. It is this sense of entitlement that often manifests itself in confrontations and conflicts with students who do not earn the grades they expect.

In subsequent empirical work, Twenge and colleagues (Twenge et al. 2008) found that today’s college students have significantly higher levels of narcissism than those of the late 1970s (by a factor of .3). Individuals exhibiting narcissism, which Twenge et al. (2007, 2) define as “a positive and inflated view of the self, especially in agentic traits [such as] power, importance” and intelligence are more likely to “respond to failure feedback with anger and aggression” (Twenge and Campbell 2003, 263). As levels of narcissism have grown, students who receive grades lower than they expected or than they felt entitled to appear more willing to actively dispute those grades and the

legitimacy of professors’ evaluations. Furthermore, these discrepancies in faculty and student grade expectations may lead to student attrition, loss of rapport in the classroom, and/or lowered teaching evaluations (Miley and Gonsalves 2004).

Narcissism and an inflated self-esteem have also colored how students view the professor’s role. As in the examples noted at the beginning of this article, students now see professors less as intellectual leaders who are to be respected and more as simply gatekeepers (even impediments) on the students’ path to educational completion and the desired better job. Hence, they are more likely to attend class late and leave early, call professors by their first names, skip class, entertain themselves by texting and using laptops, and fail to respond to the intellectual climate proffered by their professors. The intellectual climate in the classroom often suffers. The result has been more cynicism and less job satisfaction among professors (Hagedorn 2000).

### **Strategies for Dealing with Entitled Students**

Students who exhibit an unrealistic sense of entitlement often demand a significant amount of instructors’ time and energy. The powerful social and cultural changes that underlie the emergence of entitlement make it difficult for individual faculty members to respond effectively. Therefore, in this section we offer several strategies that may be helpful in dealing with entitled students or, more usefully, curbing the behaviors associated with entitlement before they occur. These strategies emerge from our collective experience, from our review of social forces above, from empirical research conducted in related disciplines, and from discussions with colleagues. To our knowledge, however, they have not been empirically linked directly to reduced entitlement. Also, even if a particular strategy ameliorates one cause of entitlement, other causes still remain. A review of potential strategies is an important precursor to empirical research, particularly given the limited literature on entitlement. To be sure, the literature on classroom improprieties is relevant (e.g. Braxton and Bayer 2004), and entitlement may be a force in

classroom incivilities (Boice 1996). We hope our suggestions stimulate professors to think of others and to empirically test their efficacy.

### *Make Expectations Explicit on Syllabi and Assignments*

Many of the problems that lead to students’ feelings of entitlement to negotiate for better grades may stem from their perceptions about course and disciplinary content. In the humanities and social sciences students may feel that course and disciplinary content—and the grades that evaluate their mastery of it—are more subjective than in their natural science courses. This perception might be fostered by assignments popular in introductory classes, in which students are encouraged to “tell their own stories” or engage in speculative writing (Riedmann 1991; Singh and Unnithan 1989). While we agree wholeheartedly that these exercises can foster the sociological imagination and have other positive pedagogical outcomes, we are concerned that their improper implementation may support the views that social science knowledge depends in large part upon individuals’ points of view and that all such points of view are equally intellectually valid. Students may feel that in such an environment, all work, if completed on time and with a minimal level of technical and mechanical competency, should be worthy of a high grade.

This issue is part of a larger theoretical debate surrounding the post-modern condition in the humanities, social sciences, and social life that is beyond the modest scope of this paper. However, empirical research has shown that greater clarity in expectations provided in syllabi and other course material reduces ambiguity in students’ minds and, consequently, the perceived room for negotiation such coursework allows (Parkes et al. 2003). Given these findings, some practical pedagogical strategies may help to disarm students who view the world and their coursework in this way. Making expectations and grading criteria explicit may help to address this issue for several reasons. Rubrics break assignments down into their component parts and provide grades or evaluations of each. Walvoord and Anderson (1998, 3, 16, 65) note that

explicit goals and objectives and the rubrics to assess them contribute substantially to course and program assessment as well as student learning. Using a rubric may help to assuage student concerns in several ways. First, rubrics provide detailed expectations for the content and structure of assignments and give students direction as they complete their tasks (Brookhart 2004). Clarifying expectations and directions may eliminate much of the surprise associated with sweeping summative grades, as students are more likely to understand the criteria upon which they will be evaluated. Second, rubrics help to focus student-instructor discussions about grades and can help instructors to explain their decisions to students in a focused manner. Instead of asking for more points in a general manner, students must now target specific aspects of their performance and instructors can limit the discussion to those aspects. Similarly, students often feel entitled to attend class late or submit work late without penalty because their reasons are exceptions. We have found that placing explicit deadline expectations on syllabi and then adhering to them helps address this problem.

#### *Give Students Something to Lose by Negotiating*

Students may feel that they have nothing to lose by asking for a grade change or a reevaluation of their work except for a simple answer of “no” from their professor. We suspect that not only is this typically the case, but that in many cases, those students who do argue for more points or higher grades actually succeed. These outcomes may be more pronounced with graduate teaching assistants or new faculty members (Cordell et al. 2004, 79–5). To combat this attitude, we suggest making explicit, either on the syllabus or in class as assignments are being handed back, that requests for grade reviews are welcome but can result in either the adding or subtracting of points, or the raising or lowering of grades. We explicate the assumption of instructor oversight underlying students’ requests for a reevaluation. If this assumption is true, students must be willing to accept a reevaluation that could add to or detract from their grade, and thus accept greater risk in negotiation. In other contexts, research has shown that in situ-

ations involving substantial risk, parties in certain structural positions, including weak or subordinate ones, are less likely to negotiate aggressively (Bottom 1998). We make it clear that as teachers who are capable of introducing error into their original grading assessments, this error may be more positive or negative the second time. For this reason, we invite students to raise their concerns with us. However, empirical evidence suggests that giving students something to lose could give students pause in contemplating a relatively blind request for a grade increase.

#### *Post Anonymous Examples of “Excellent” Work*

Some students may be genuinely surprised by the grade they receive and may feel that their work was of higher quality than it is in reality. A simple discussion with these students about their weak areas is generally sufficient for explaining the mechanics of grading and justifying their grade to them. However, many of these discussions may be avoided if students can see other examples of excellent work with which to compare their own. This gives students a reference point for understanding the shortcomings of their work, and allows them to see how other students are interpreting and executing assignments. In addition, posting examples of excellent work can provide instructors with tangible points of comparison in discussions with students who want explanations for the grade they have received. All exemplary work should be completely anonymous, and we find that this is facilitated by bringing in examples from previous semesters or other sections of the same course. In any event, student permission must be obtained and names and other defining characteristics must be removed. Although posting excellent examples can result in students attempting to copy the format of the successful paper without sufficiently developing their own frameworks, posting them after the assignments have been graded and handed back will largely eliminate this problem.

#### *Have Students Prepare and Present Their Case in Writing, in Advance*

Much of the discomfort associated with interactions between instructors and entitled students may arise out of

being caught off guard and the utter lack of preparation instructors might have in dealing competently with complaints or requests for grade changes. For this reason, we suggest requiring that all requests for grade changes be submitted in writing in advance of any one-on-one meetings to discuss grades. This approach can be helpful in several ways. First, it helps eliminate or lessen the emotional reactions that often arise in students immediately after receiving a poor grade. A large body of psychological research has demonstrated that, through a variety of mechanisms, intense emotional responses dissipate over time (Tice and Ciarocco 1998). Time allows individuals to think about a situation more holistically, which often leads to a consideration of a wider variety of factors that led to the event, and reorientation of the individual to it (Levine 1996).

Delaying any discussions gives students time to consider their work carefully and the validity of the grade they have received. Second, reading a written explanation gives instructors sufficient time to consider the student’s argument and to craft an appropriate response. When students approach an instructor immediately after class or arrive during office hours without warning, instructors are often caught off guard and the situation can quickly become awkward, uncomfortable, and/or rushed in search of a hasty resolution. Such situations are likely to result in acceding to meeting students’ requests for grade changes. However, a more reasonable approach is to prevent such situations from happening in the first place. Last, placing the responsibility for explaining and arguing a case for a grade change on students means that those students without a reasonable case are less likely to pursue negotiation.

#### *Resocialize Students and Faculty*

Individual instructors can modify the social context and the social contract that exists in the classroom. Titus (2008) found empirical evidence for a shift in the institutional logic of higher education in his study of student evaluations of teaching, whereby students now conceive of education much as they would any other consumer transaction. In such an environment, “student expectations are based on

a conception of teaching and learning qualitatively distinct from the pedagogical view of faculty” (399). To combat this orientation and the behaviors it fosters, it is important to make normative expectations clear. Explain your philosophy of teaching and learning and your focus on student responsibility. Focus on the joint venture of learning so that students see it less as you demanding things and students complying, often with minimal effort. Socialize students into assuming responsibility for their own efforts and their own learning so that they are less likely to blame you for any shortcomings (Walvoord and Anderson 1998, 43). Finally, socialize students into a set of behavioral norms you value, such as respecting others’ views, taking turns in discussion, attending class, and avoiding disruptive behaviors. Call out students privately to let them know they have violated those norms. We have found that students themselves suggest appropriate behavioral norms when asked to develop them the first day of class. These efforts will likely encourage students to assume greater responsibility for their learning and in-class behaviors. In fact, Hirschi and Braxton (2004) found that “insolent inattention”—maximizing what the student wants and minimizing what the instructor wants—is negatively linked with academic performance. Student socialization confronts students with your expectations, your goals, and how classroom activities relate to your goals. Student understanding of such connections and rationales may help them structure their assignments such that their performance is more clear to themselves as well as their instructors, thereby potentially reducing grade challenges.

Faculty members also need resocializing into the world of today’s students to better understand their expectations and orientations surrounding learning and education. Frand (2000) documents how the changing “information age mindset” of students substantially challenges the old information age mindset of faculty members. He describes ten attributes which reflect the values and behaviors of this new mindset, such as doing rather than knowing and zero tolerance for delays, that taken together, appear to underlie broader changes in students’ notion of temporality. Considering the implications

of suggestions such as his may help create new intellectual challenges for entitled students. For example, Arhin and Johnson-Mallard (2003) document student preference for visual and engaged learning over that which is passive.

Although we are reluctant to cater to every whim and want of our students, we believe that a firmer understanding of this cultural and normative change will allow us to more effectively meet students where they are, not where we as instructors wish them to be.

### *Institutional Responses*

Thus far, we have conceptualized student entitlement as largely a faculty issue and our suggested strategies also center on what faculty members can do. But we believe that the institutional climate can significantly influence student behavior, and that changing this climate can help reduce entitlement behaviors (see Tagg 2003). For example, many institutions have found that offering rigorous first-year seminars that inculcate the institution’s focus on solid intellectual engagement helps set the stage for student expectations in their future classes (Hyers and Joslin 1998; Schnell and Doetkott 2003). Other schools have found that the use of the “inverted” classroom, where students are engaged in the business of the disciplines, heightens student engagement and reduces situations of entitlement (Lege, Platt, and Treglia 2000). Still others have found that bridging the gap, technologically and otherwise, between boomer faculty members and today’s students has helped by enabling faculty members to better understand the life circumstances of students (Frand 2000). Our point is that any attempts to root out entitlement behaviors will likely fail without some attention to institutional goals, norms, and climate.

We also believe that the institutional climate can significantly affect faculty behavior. The rise in student entitlement corresponds to the rise in the proportion of part-time faculty members. About half of all faculty members are now part-time, twice as many as 30 years ago (American Association of University Professors 2006). The unstable and unpredictable nature of many of these jobs may force term and adjunct faculty to make difficult

choices between demanding high quality work from students and appeasing them to keep them happy and to keep the instructors’ jobs. Similar pressures exist for probationary and other untenured faculty. These pressures are exacerbated by a heightened emphasis on student evaluations (Cave et al. 1997; Haskell 1997; Titus 2008). Benton (2006) argues that these developments have fueled the student-as-customer mantra, which in turn accentuates the faculty role as employee rather than professional. Faced with the increasing emphasis on student evaluations for promotion, tenure, and retention, non-tenured faculty may themselves feel as though they must keep the customers happy, and they often do so by giving high grades to students—customers—who expect them. Such behaviors are far more likely to be found in schools governed by the business model than in schools governed by the intellectual challenge model. Tenured colleagues and academic leaders need to reinforce such an intellectual climate, provide support services for faculty in providing appropriately challenging pedagogical experiences, and lead by example by rewarding those teachers who challenge rather than cede.

### **Discussion**

We have identified what we observe to be several underlying issues in student entitlement. Dissecting these issues has led us to several strategies for curbing unwanted student entitlement behaviors. We hope that these strategies may ultimately help reduce teacher-student conflict, maintain positive rapport in the classroom, and protect the time of instructors. Perhaps more important, we believe that combating student entitlement with these proposed strategies will help refocus faculty and student energies on other substantive pursuits.

First, we believe it necessary to make clear, through both instruction and example, the standards of excellence versus mediocrity for students. In doing so, teachers are better able to combat one root of student entitlement—lack of clarity. Reducing potential ambiguity in our standards of success and/or the process of evaluating student work serves the purpose of reducing the number of student debates regarding our grading decisions,

as well as minimizing the time necessary for us to review these decisions. Providing examples of excellent work and identifying specific grading rubrics each serve to minimize potential gray areas in our assessments.

However, because student entitlement reflects a deeply rooted and internalized set of attitudes and orientations, it is not sufficient to only become clearer in the classroom. Some entitled students will continue to debate grading assessments regardless of the transparency we hope to infuse in our standards and grading procedures. For this reason, we also feel it is necessary to reestablish (or make clearer) the parameters in which you will engage your students, particularly with regard to issues about grades. Specifically, we suggest giving students something to lose and providing written arguments requesting grade changes. We believe the dissolution of the social structure guiding teacher-student interactions is symptomatic of student entitlement, and that these strategies help to introduce barriers to superfluous requests regarding grade changes. At minimum, these procedural requirements provide teachers with the opportunity to provide more deliberate and accurate revisions to their original grading assessments. Finally, the institutional climate matters.

Student entitlement is often reflected in students' priority of grades over learning, and the appearance of achievement over achievement itself (Pollio and Beck 2000). The implementation of our proposed strategies has the potential to refocus both faculty and student energies on the appropriate standards of academic excellence and success. We hope that the net effect of using the proposed techniques is to reduce the incidence of student debates and increase the efficiency and effectiveness with which we may respond. Furthermore, they allow for more time to be dedicated to substantive student concerns and for more productive allocation of faculty time to improving classroom instruction and to other professional obligations.

It is our hope that further discussions will yield additional strategies for dealing with entitlement and may interest researchers in testing our proposed causal links empirically. Similar techniques to combat other forms of difficult

student behavior have been found to be effective in reducing them (Boice 1996; Kuhelschmidt and Layne 1999; Meyers 2003). Although student entitlement represents a unique and emergent form of student behavior, instructors' responses and future empirical research on the effectiveness of those responses should be informed by this literature. Future research might also profitably address something we do not address in this paper: a possible rise in entitlement behavior among faculty members as younger entitled students become faculty members.

There are downsides to what we propose. Syllabi may become too long and too legalistic and may lead students to think of the syllabus as an employee manual or student code of conduct that tells them what their consumer rights are when taking our classes. Professors employing our strategies may create course experiences quite different from what students experience in their other classes, potentially leading to further conflict about unreasonable expectations. However, we believe that with practice and development, our strategies can better equip instructors to confront undesirable behaviors associated with a sense of entitlement.

In conclusion, we wish to make clear our awareness that many students do not favor aggressive strategies to pursue extra points or higher grades (Pope 2001, 4). We also wish to be clear that individually and collectively we support a democratic approach in our own teaching and classrooms. Indeed, students' voices should be heard and they should be granted a sense of agency in their educational pursuits. However, we also feel an emerging culture of student entitlement has made it common for students to expropriate a disproportionate amount of faculty time and to deflect attention from intellectual accomplishment to grades. Ultimately, notes Benton, "a student culture of self-indulgence is enabled by the failure of professors to maintain expectations in the classroom" (2006, 1). It is in this regard that we propose the aforementioned strategies to help curb issues related to student entitlement.

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#### NOTES

1. Influential work on these topics by Boice (1996) and Kuhelschmidt and Layne (1999) has been followed up by useful papers by Meyers (2003), Meyers, Bender, Hill, and Thomas (2006) Caboni, Hirschy, and Best (2004), and Bray and Del Favero (2004).

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