

“It’s all about ME”: Narcissism and entitlement among college students

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Scenarios: Can You Relate?

- A student skips class and then sends an e-mail message asking for copies of the lecture notes.
- Another student does not like the final grade and writes a contemptuous message to you, the professor.
- Seven students decide to walk out on a lecture after 15 minutes and when they were told they violated class policy, they explain that they are paying for the class and have a right to come and go as they please.
- During lecture, students are surfing the net, spending time on e-bay, myspace/facebook, and/or e-mail, and when they perform poorly in class they don't understand why because they say "I come to class everyday!"
- When asked why he was late for class, a student explains that the reason for his tardiness was due to the fact that he was recovering from drinking too much at a wild weekend frat party, and then asks if he can get a copy of the lecture notes from the missed class.
- How about the question "did I miss anything important in class?"



Reason #1: Media and Culture

- According to an article in the Wall Street Journal, part of the blame belongs to children's television icon Mr. Rogers.
 - the idea that being special comes from working hard and having high expectations for yourself was never brought out.
 - "You're special." On the Yahoo Answers Web site, a discussion thread about Mr. Rogers begins with this posting: "Mr. Rogers spent years telling little creeps that he liked them just the way they were. He should have been telling them there was a lot of room for improvement. ... Nice as he was, and as good as his intentions may have been, he did a disservice."
- Changing role of the parent/authority on television
 - Gone from "Father Knows Best" to "That's so Raven."
 - Shows like "The Real Housewives of Orange County," "The Hills," "The OC," "The Gilmore Girls," and "Desperate Housewives" are filled with characters who seem to expect a disproportionate amount of respect, from their teens.
- Today's culture:
 - Want what we want and we want it now.
 - No delays/No aggravation.
 - No hassle, pain-free, our way, right away.
 - Highly technical
 - Expect efficiency and convenience.



Reason #2: Parenting

- Narcissism and entitlement among college students have increased steadily since 1979, according to a study to be published this year in the Journal of Personality.
- Cultural effects
 - Asian-born versus American students
- Parents need to teach kids that “ You have to work and compete. If you want to be special, you'll have to prove it.”
 - Often we hear: "They're just children."
 - When kids are rude, self-absorbed or disrespectful, some parents allow or endure it by saying, "Well, they're just children."
 - NOT appropriate as an excuse or as justification for unacceptable behavior,
- "Call me Cyndi." Is it appropriate to place kids on the same level as adults, with all of us calling each other by our first names?
 - Students try to call me by my first name and it bothers me. Why?
 - familiarity like this shows a loving closeness between professor and student.
 - When students call an adult Mr. or Ms., and refer to professors by the appropriate title, it helps them recognize that status is earned by age and experience. It's also a reminder to respect your elders.



The Influence of E-mail

- At colleges and universities nationwide, e-mail has made professors much more approachable
- Some professors seem to think that e-mail makes students view us being “available around the clock.”
- Many e-mail messages are often too informal or incredibly disrespectful
 - E.g. A student writes “I wrote you over a few hours ago and have not received a response from you. Will you please respond?”



E-mail Effects

- **The Good**

- E-mail provides invaluable and instant feedback.
 - A question about a lecture or discussion "is for me an indication of a blind spot"
- Makes it easier to ask questions and helps them to learn.

- **The Bad**

- Can make students feel that they can “vote” on our teaching style
 - (e.g. “I think you're covering the material too fast, or I don't think we're using the reading as much as we could in class, or I think it would be helpful if you would summarize what we've covered at the end of class in case we missed anything.)



The Ugly

- That professors can drop everything at the drop of a hat.
- Students have no fear of giving offense, imposing on the professor's time or even of asking a question that may reflect badly on their own judgment.
- For junior faculty members, the barrage of e-mail has brought new tension into their work lives, some say, as they struggle with how to respond.
 - Their response to e-mail may affect student evaluations of their accessibility which may ultimately affect tenure ability.





Tips

- **Create Rules and Policies for E-mail Use**
 - Inform your students about:
 - Your response rate (e.g. I tell student to allow 48 – 72 hours)
 - E-mails and types of messages that will warrant a response from you
 - Etiquette (e.g., please and thank you)
- **Remind them that there is another human being on the receiving end of the e-mail.**
 - Whenever I receive a disrespectful e-mail, I have the student come in and read it to me to my face.
 - Teaches the lesson that it is easier to vent and send “hate-filled” e-mails than it is to take the more mature route.

Consumer Mentality

- The “consumer mentality” of students results in their expectation to do less work because they are paying more for it.
- They use the cost of tuition as a justification for why they believe professors should and are obligated to lower teaching standards.
 - we do our students no favors by letting them leave with so little knowledge and so much attitude.
- Students, even if they are paying tuition, are not "customers" and I make this statement in my syllabus.
- Survival of untenured faculty members depends on processing large numbers of students without getting students “mad at them” or “angry.”





Syllabus

- **Tell them that “Students are not customers. Teachers are not employees.”**
 - Students and teachers have obligations to each other.
- **Your expectations**
 - Students will treat everyone in the class, including the professor, with the respect due to all human beings.
- **Students will attend every class, give your full attention to the material, and conduct yourself in an appropriate manner.**
- **Students will agree to do the work outlined in the syllabus on time.**
- **Acknowledge that your perception of YOUR effort, by itself, is not enough to justify a distinguished grade.**
- **Students will not plagiarize or otherwise steal the work of others.**
- **Students will accept the consequences -- good and bad -- of their actions.**

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Here is what students can expect from me:

- I will treat you with the respect due to all human beings.
- I will attempt to get to know you and your name and treat you as an individual but YOU must meet me halfway (e.g. realize that I teach large lectures of over 180 students. You have to work with me on this goal).
- I will not discriminate against you on the basis of your identity or your well-informed viewpoints.
- I will manage the class in a professional manner. That may include educating you in appropriate behavior.
- I will prepare carefully for every class.
- I will begin and end class on time.
- I will teach only in areas of my professional expertise. If I do not know something, I will say so.
- I will continue to conduct scholarly research and publication with the aim of making myself a more informed teacher.
- I will pursue the maximum punishment for plagiarism, cheating, and other violations of academic integrity.
- I will keep careful records of your performance, and progress.
- I will investigate every excuse for nonattendance of classes and no completion of assignments.
- I will make myself available to you for advising.
- I will maintain confidentiality concerning your performance.
- I will provide you with professional support and write recommendations for you if appropriate.
- I will confiscate laptops and cell phones if used in class, during lectures.
- I will be honest with you.
- Your grade will reflect the quality of your work and nothing else.
- I am interested in your feedback about the class, but I am more interested in what you learned than how you feel.

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Keep in mind that...

- The popularity of programs like American Idol in the college-student demographic shows how hungry they are for honest criticism.
 - On some level, they want the hard truth instead of the "everybody is a winner" nonsense.
(e.g. Popularity of judge Simon Cowell versus Paula Abdul)
- They will rise to high expectations if teachers are firm and resist sending mixed messages.
- And we teachers should want, most of all, to be respected rather than liked, even if that means having to grow some backbone and take some risks.
 - Tenure does help, I admit.
 - But stick to your principles and you will be rewarded. As my advisor told me, "start out mean. You can always get nicer!"

