“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.”
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.
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!”