Are Students ENTITLED to High Grades

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Abstract

The engineering student today is different from the students in past generations. They have rapid access to information and their ability to assimilate information from multiple sources could be characterized as strengths when used appropriately. However, many of the students have changed in other ways. The current students are members of the Y Generation, a group which expects to get ahead in this world as fast as possible. Some of these students have never heard the word NO in their lives and have received extremely high grades in high school without doing much work. Their parents act more like friends of their children and less like parents. How does an engineering professor interact with these students in an engineering classroom setting?

Observations from the Classroom

Burns, in his book, *Success in College*, presents a table with the differences between high school and college. (1)

High School	College
Parents structure your life	You structure your life
Attendance is mandatory	Attendance is voluntary
Intelligence leads to good grades and respect	Intelligence is a given
Subjects covered in a month	Subjects covered in a week or two

The good students can make this transition from high school to college as they enter college. It takes some students a year or two to make this transition. These students have a low grade point average during their first year or two, but come on strong at the end.

Goal setting is very important for students. "Most experts agree …that there are mastery goals and performance goals.' (2)

> "Students who are **mastery oriented** try to do things well because they want to do their best. They are not driven by external factors like grades or praise, but instead they seek to learn things because they want to really understand them and not just get the correct answer.
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> Students who are **performance oriented** seek to earn good grades to reflect how hard they've work. They study because they know it will get them something- a

> scholarship, an above-average grade, or praise from their parents. Since grades are tied to their sense of achievement, students who are performance oriented tend to feel discouraged and anxious when they earn low grades. They tend to want to memorize and pattern-match to solve problems, rather than learn the underlying concepts and methods." (2)

"Most students have been performance oriented throughout high school. In college, you will be more successful if you start thinking in terms of mastery" (2)

One of the authors has been teaching freshmen for over 25 years. At the end of the fall 2009 semester, one of his students came up to him and stated that he, a freshmen in engineering, was ENTITLED to high grades. The professor was astounded and he rebutted that this was definitely not the case. Where did the student develop such an attitude? Maybe this attitude grew from the feeling that since the student, or the student's parents are paying for the student's education, that high grades are deserved. Or maybe it is because parents have control of our high schools and high grades are given to quiet any rebellion from parents. After all, it is necessary to have high grades in order to receive scholarships. This statement was told to one of the authors when he was making a presentation to parents in western Kansas.

The high grading in high schools is not fair to the true "A" students. They get "As" and the not-so-good students also receive "As". There does not seem to be much distinction between the "A" and "B" students since they all receive "As". Several years ago there were two students from a Kansas City area high school applying to the KU School of Engineering. Their high school graded on the percentage basis. One had a 98.6% g.p.a. and was 82 out of 226 in her class. The other student had an 86% g.p.a. and was 223 out of 226 in the class. It seems like the goal in high school is to make everyone feel good about themselves.

It seems to the authors that students expect to receive an "A" in all their college courses. That is the grade of entitlement. If they make serious errors, they are dropped down to a "B". And they would have to die and start to smell to get a "C" in a course. Grade inflation is now part of our culture. Some younger faculty members do not want to give low grades because it might affect their course evaluations at the end of the semester.

What really is upsetting is the student with high ACT scores who does not succeed in college. For example, take a student with the following ACT scores, ENGL-35; MATH-24; SOC-31; NS-26; and a COMP score of 29. This student was not in the School of Engineering; she was a pre-med major. Her first semester she earned a C, three Fs, an I and a B+ in a jazz course. In her second semester she earned all Fs. What was this student thinking? People who know her said she was totally addicted to social communication. She was always on her Blackberry. This young lady never had to study in high school and yet she was an "A" student.

One semester a student came in and stated that she was going to drop a course because she was doing AWFUL. When she was told she has a solid "B" in the course, she said

she knew that and wanted to dropped the course because of her bad performance. She was told to get out of the high school mentality and realize that a "B" is a very acceptable grade.

Still another student wanted to drop a course and transfer out of engineering because she was receiving a "B". She was told she was doing very well in the course and to hang in there. She graduated in engineering and is now running a consulting office in Colorado .

The entitlement feeling in students has other ramifications. Students are so intent in receiving high grades at all costs that it is now common for students to buy solution manuals for their engineering courses and copy the homework problem straight out of the manual. After all, the important outcome is to hand in a completed homework assignment, not to learn the material. There is even something called CRAMSTER available to students. For a small semester or yearly fee, a student can receive worked out problems for most of the math, physics and engineering text books. These students are completing the homework assignments with the minimum effort. If they would use CRAMSTER to check their homework, then CRAMSTER would have a positive impact.

There are two statements a student should never say to a professor: 1) my homework grades are great, I just cannot take tests, or 2) your tests are too long. The messages sent to the professor are 1) I copied my homework and received high homework grades, but I really do not understand the material, and 2) I copied the homework or I did not do any homework and I need more time to think through these problems because this is the first time I have seem problems like these. Some engineering departments have established a policy that if the homework average is so many points higher than the test average, the homework grades do not count in the determination of the final course grade. (EECS Department – KU)

Burns stresses that it is important to "attend all classes". (1) However, There seems to be a feeling among students that attending class is optional. At the end of an Introduction to Architectural Engineering class last semester, a student emailed the professor and asked why he had received an "F" in the course. The student was sure he had earned a "C". This student did not turn in four assignments, received a grade of fifty on two other assignments, and a grade of eighty-seven on one assignment. He attended fifteen of the 45 class periods. How did he expect to receive a passing grade?

Many students, who do not do well in engineering classes, need to have a job or want to have a job. Students can either take a full load of courses and work a few hours or work 20 to 40 hours and take a lighter load of courses. Landis in his book, *Studying Engineering: A Road Map to a Rewarding Career* states, (3) "If you must work while going to school, how can you achieve a reasonable balance between the two? A way to manage your study and work loads is to follow the '60 Hour Rule' developed by Dr. Mulinazzi". (3) Many of our engineering students have worked in high school and received high grades and they assume they can do the same in engineering school. The 60 Hour Rule assumes a person can be productive for 60 hours a week for the length of a

semester. Take 60, subtract the hours working at a job and then divided the remainder by 3. The result is the number of credit hours a engineering student should take in a semester. A large percentage of the student dismissed from the school of engineering violated the 60 Hour Rule.

The authors have attended a seminar on the various generations. Professor Mulinazzi is a part of the senior generation, a generation who grew up with the attitude, "I live so I can work". The current college age students are part of the Y generation, a generation raised with the attitude that a person "Works so that they can live". There is nothing wrong with either of these attitudes. However, Generation Y also has the attitude that they want to be now where their parents are as fast as possible and by any means. Therefore, cheating is prevalent in high schools and in our classrooms because that is the easiest way to get a good grade. If the students gets caught doing something unethical, they know their parents will support them in every situation. To many parents today, their children can do no wrong. They can be called "helicopter" parents because they continuously hover over their children. It seems to be our fault that their child did not succeed in college.

Conclusion

In conclusion, do not be surprised if your students complain about their grades, try to talk you into giving them a higher grade or have their parents call you and demand a higher grade. After all, today's students are ENTITLED to high grades; just ask them.

Bibliography

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