

**Give Me My A... And That Beer!: Examining the Relationship Between
Academic Entitlement, Major, and Alcohol Use**

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Samantha A. Carson
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Abstract

Academic entitlement (AE) is a relatively new area of research. AE is defined as expecting higher grades for minimum effort and exhibiting demanding behaviors towards teachers, such as expecting to receive a good grade in a class just for showing up (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen & Faruggia, 2008). Alcohol is also a reoccurring problem on college campuses, and is associated with many other negative behaviors and consequences (Wesley, 2002). It has been found that students who drink more are less likely to schedule Friday classes (Paschall, Kypri, & Salt). It has also been found that the later a student schedules their first Friday class, the more they are apt to drink on Thursday night (Wood, Shere, & Rutledge, 2007). If students are likely to change their schedule to accommodate their drinking, it is also likely that their choice of major influences their drinking behavior. Since AE is tied directly to a student's classwork, it also stands to reason that different majors would have differing levels of AE. Will a student with higher levels of AE be more likely to drink more because they feel they don't need to spend time on course work to achieve good grades or that showing up to class hung over is acceptable? Are the academic majors that tend towards having heavier drinkers also the same majors that have more academically entitled students? Examining these questions will better help us understand the relationship between academic entitlement and other factors common to college students. The data will be collected from students at a mid-sized Midwestern university via an online survey. The survey is currently in progress. Implications will be discussed.


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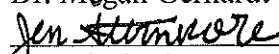
Approved by:



_____, Advisor
Dr. Rose Marie Ward



_____, Reader
Dr. Megan Gerhardt



_____, Reader
Jen Stirnkorb

Accepted by:



_____, Director,
University Honors Program

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Preface

The phenomenon of academic entitlement has always fascinated me. I attended a high school where over 1/3 of my graduating class had a GPA of 4.0 or greater, something that is neither unheard of nor even rare now. Getting Bs was unheard of for a large majority of us – it was actually difficult to not get top grades for simply showing up in class and turning in homework. It was with this mentality – one where we simply expected As for minimum effort because we were “smart kids” – that many of us left for college. There has been much anecdotal evidence of my generation’s shows of narcissistic behavior and entitlement, but very little research done on these individuals’ entitlement in the classroom. It is a relatively new phenomenon, but gives rise to problems that are obvious to teachers, students, and the general public.

I was fascinated and shocked by the behaviors I saw my fellow classmates exhibiting: expecting professors to email them back at 2 am, complaining about not getting an A when they’d gone to all the classes, and going to office hours to argue about grades with professors. When I joined Dr. Ward’s research lab, I learned that in the literature these behaviors were collectively called “Academic Entitlement” – and I wanted to learn more about it. A surprisingly scarce amount of research had been done on the subject, and I wanted to know more about the factors that influence levels of academic entitlement. It was with this in mind that I set about designing the research project that evolved into this thesis, with the hope of contributing to the growing body of knowledge about academic entitlement.

1. Introduction

Instead of being the exception, students exhibiting entitled and demanding behavior in a classroom setting have become commonplace. This phenomenon, called Academic Entitlement, is defined by entitled behavior such as expecting high grades for showing up to class and putting in minimum effort and displaying demanding behaviors towards teachers (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen & Faruggia, 2008).

Academic entitlement might not be distributed evenly across majors. Classes in the humanities and social sciences where assignments are often based on opinion and grading is more subjective could create a greater sense of entitlement among students. Entitled students fail to see that not all opinions are academically equal or viable, and therefore they believe that as long as they attend class and turn in assignments on time, they deserve a good grade (Lippmann, Bulanda, & Wagenaar, 2012). However, in subjects like the hard sciences where there are clear right and wrong answers, students might have clearer expectations, and less room to argue that they should have a higher grade. It is entirely possible that students in certain majors, particularly ones that require students to take mostly subjective or opinion-based courses have higher levels of academic entitlement. Knowing which majors have a tendency to create academically entitled students can help schools pinpoint which classes are creating problem students. It also can help instructors identify which classes need to be restructured to lessen the environment in which entitlement can thrive. By looking at academic entitlement across majors, this study seeks to find if there is a significant difference in the levels of entitlement between majors.

Not only do students feel entitled to receive certain grades, they also feel entitled to their choices about alcohol. Students feel entitled to heavy drinking because they feel it is their role as a college student and that it is a rite of passage. The more strongly college students hold these beliefs, the more likely they are to also drink (Crawford & Novak, 2006). Alcohol abuse is a very serious problem on college campuses. In 2005, 67.9% of college students said they had drunk in the last month, and 40% admitted to binge drinking. Alcohol consumption, and in particular binge drinking, where 4 or more drinks for women or 5 or more drinks for men are consumed in a row, is on the rise. Negative consequences of drinking include injury, drunk driving, arrest, increased risk for sexual assault, and lower GPAs ("Wasting the best", 2007). One typically thinks of students drinking heavily, for the most part, on weekends. However, there has been the troubling pattern of students scheduling none or later classes on Fridays, leading to an increase in Thursday drinking. Students who had higher levels of alcohol use and increased amounts of heavy drinking were less likely to sign up for Friday classes. These students also reported Thursday as being their biggest drinking occasion at a significantly higher rate than those who had Friday classes (Paschall, Kypri, and Saltz, 2006). In addition, the later in the day a student schedules their class on Friday, the more likely they are to drink on Thursday nights (Wood, Shere, & Rutledge, 2007). If drinking and a student's schedule share this relationship, it is also likely that the types of classes a student enrolls in will have a relationship with alcohol consumption.

As students feel entitled to drink in an irresponsible manner, it seems as though they schedule their classes around their drinking behavior in order to better accommodate

the behavior that they believe is expected from them. If students are more entitled in the classroom, it is likely they are entitled in other environments. However, it is also possible that students in different majors experience different levels of academic entitlement – do those students who are less entitled in the classroom also drinking less outside of it? This study seeks to examine the relationship between alcohol consumption, academic entitlement, and academic major in order to better understand how levels of AE vary among majors, and if these differences lead to different levels of alcohol consumption.

2. Methods

2.1. participants

The sample included 254 students from a mid-sized, Midwestern, 4-year public university. Approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A majority of those sampled were female (69.7%, $n = 177$). The mean age was 20.36 ($SD=3.31$). Most were not married (97.6%) and heterosexual (92.5%). The average GPA was 3.27 ($SD = .44$). The majority of students identified as white or Caucasian (90.2%). The majority of our sample reported having consumed an alcoholic drink before (90.2 %). 33.3% of students did not have Friday classes, while only 8.8% had 8 AM classes on Fridays. Our sample was fairly evenly spread across year in school: 21.7% freshmen ($n = 55$), 26.0% sophomore ($n = 66$), 23.3% junior ($n = 59$), 25.2% senior ($n = 64$) and 2% 5th year senior ($n = 5$). The number of participants in each major is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. number of individuals in each major

Major	Business	Education	Engineering	Fine Arts	Health & Sports Studies	Humanities	Natural Science	Social Science	Undeclared
n	46	14	6	2	107	12	16	37	6

2.2. procedure

Approval was obtained by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the primary author. Participants for this cross-sectional study were recruited via a snowball method. We collected data using an online survey which was hosted by Prezza Checkbox. The information collected was housed behind the university firewall. The email sent out was written by Dr. Rose Marie Ward (faculty advisor) briefly describing the survey along with a link included for them to complete the survey. They were also informed that they could enter their email address at the end of the survey in order to be entered into a drawing for one of four \$50 gift cards. The choice to take the survey was completely up to the individual. The link to the survey led students directly to the consent page, where we obtained consent from each student before continuing with the survey. If they chose to participate, they were reminded that they could skip any question they felt uncomfortable answering. A debriefing form was allotted to each individual at the end of the survey to give more information about the study. The debriefing included contact information for both the faculty advisor, Dr. Rose Marie Ward, as well as for counseling services.

2.3. measures

2.3.1 academic entitlement

The academic entitlement scale (Greenberger, Lessard, Chen, & Farruggia, 2008) has 15 items. For each statement, the participants responded on a scale from 1 (“strongly

disagree”) to 6 (“strongly agree”). Statements such as “A professor should let me arrange to turn in an assignment late if the due date interferes with my vacation plans” were shown to the participant. The participant’s endorsement of the items is indicative of their overall level of AE.

2.3.2 academic major

We asked students to provide their academic major. The majors were grouped into major categories: business, education, engineering, fine arts, health & sports studies/family studies & social work, humanities, natural science, social science, and undeclared. If students listed more than one major, we only used the first major they provided for analysis.

2.3.3 alcohol consumption

In order to measure participants’ alcohol consumption, we asked them to provide how many days they have at least one drink containing alcohol, how many drinks they have on a typical day when they are drinking, and the highest number of drinks they had consumed on one occasion in the last 30 days.

3. Results

Because there were only 2 participants who reported being fine arts majors, we did not include them in our analysis. Our results showed that there was a significant relationship between academic major and drinking behavior. ANOVA tests revealed a significant relationship between academic major and the number of days you drink in a typical week ($p < .001$). Humanities majors reported the highest number of average days they had at least one drink containing alcohol (2.58). There was also a significant relationship between major and the number of drinks consumed on a typical day when drinking ($p = .002$). Business majors reported the highest average number of drinks consumed on a typical drinking day (6.04). The highest number of drinks consumed on one occasion in the last 30 days also had a significant relationship with major ($p < .001$). Table 2 contains the mean responses of each major to the measures asked.

Table 2. Mean responses of each major to alcohol and academic entitlement measures

Major	In a typical week, on how many days do you have at least one drink containing alcohol?	How many drinks do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?	During the last 30 days, what is the highest number of drinks that you drank on any one occasion?	Academic Entitlement
Business	2.4783	6.0435	9.9348	2.86
Education	2.2857	4.5714	8.1429	2.71
Engineering	2.2000	5.4000	10.0000	3.02
Health & Sports Studies	1.4272	3.6961	5.1029	2.93
Humanities	2.5833	4.4167	8.3333	2.90
Natural Science	1.6667	3.8000	5.8571	2.50
Social Science	2.1029	4.1176	6.8824	2.52
Undeclared	2.1667	5.1667	6.5000	3.32
Total Sample	1.8915	4.3889	6.8519	2.83

We found no significant relationship between academic entitlement and academic major (). However, when we controlled for GPA, there was a significant relationship between academic entitlement and major. We also found that GPA is negatively

correlated to academic entitlement ($-.168, p < .05$). Males reported an average AE score of 3.07 while women reported an average AE score of 2.75. Pearson correlations revealed that academic entitlement was not correlated to any of the drinking measures used in the study. However, all of the drinking measures were correlated to each other.

4. Discussion

Our findings concurred with previous literature that indicates that there is a relationship between drinking and academic major. Business majors being amongst the heaviest drinkers also agreed with the previous literature (Wechsler et al, 1994). However, the finding that despite their relatively low frequency of drinking, engineering drink quite heavily when they do drink was surprising. It is possible that due to the heavy course load expected of engineers in order to graduate in 4 years at the university where the survey was conducted does not allow much free time for engineers to drink. However, when they do get to drink, they go “all out” as they are aware they will not be able to drink again for a long period of time. However, we also found that there was no relationship between Academic Entitlement and drinking or Academic Entitlement and major. The lack of statistical difference between major and entitlement contradicts Lippmann et al.’s theory that students in more subjective classes and majors would exhibit more AE due to a lack of clearly defined goals (2009). The lack of difference is surprising; if this study was repeated on a sample that was more evenly distributed across majors the findings might reveal a more significant difference. However, controlling for GPA in later analysis revealed that there is a relationship between major and academic entitlement. Students with lower GPAs tend to be more academically entitled. It is likely that students who have high grades recognize the effort required of them to get the grades they want, whereas students who expect to do the minimum amount of work and get good grades are unlikely to receive desirable grades in that class. However, it has been found in some

samples that GPA and AE are not significantly correlated, and so (Greenberger et al., 2008).

Further research in this area should try to utilize more diverse populations of majors through random sampling. The snowballing method used in this study led to a far greater number of health and sports studies and psychology (social science) majors than is representative of the university due to the composition of the research group doing the recruiting. Another aspect to consider is the relationship between gender and AE. We found that males had higher levels of AE than women, which agreed with previous literature (Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2009). The levels of AE in majors which lean towards one gender could be heavily affected by the effect of gender on AE. Further studies should seek to control for gender when looking at possible relationships between major or type of class and AE.

Looking at the monetary aspects of how students pay for school may also be useful in determining factors that play into academic entitlement. For instance, students who are paying for their own schooling may feel like they are “purchasing” a service, and feel they are owed good grades for the money they are paying the school. Similarly, a student’s socioeconomic background and the family environment they were raised in (including their parents’ education level) may play a role in fostering levels of academic entitlement.

Controlling for year in school may also prove helpful in teasing apart any relationship between major and AE, as well as observing if levels of AE change from year to year in certain majors. Previous studies have found mixed results as to the

significance of the relationship between AE and year in school, so looking into this relationship could provide insight into how AE changes over the college experience for different majors. Ciani, Summers, & Easter found that seniors had significantly higher levels of AE than freshman (2008). We found, however, that there was not a significant difference in academic entitlement scores by year in school in our sample. However, it is possible that the changes in AE over the college career could differ by major. For instance, do students in the humanities become more academically entitled after several semesters of courses where their papers are seemingly graded based on the whims of their professors or do freshman come in expecting that their papers will get the same high grades they received in high school?

By further examining the relationships between academic entitlement and other factors, we can begin to better understand this relatively new area of research. This will be important in decreasing the impact of academically entitled behavior in the future. Without some sort of preventative action, the troubling trend of rude student behavior is likely to continue and escalate, leading to continued grade inflation and possibly the social acceptance of disrespectful behavior towards teachers. Understanding the factors that influence academic entitlement will help identify students most at risk for academically entitled behaviors, as well as potentially help equip educators to better handle this trend in inappropriate student behavior.

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