How Do We Measure Academic Entitlement? (and should we?)

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Academic entitlement is defined as ‘students who believe they deserve positive academic outcomes independent of performance’ (Sessoms, Finney and Kopp 2016). Aspects of the Academic Entitlement Questionnaire (AEQ, Kopp and Finney 2013) was adapted and included in the larger SEaSIPS project questionnaire and administered to 325 students in October 2019.

Background and Methods:

Student Engagement and Success in Physical Sciences (SEaSIPS)

This project is designed to evaluate and compare aspects relating to student engagement, motivation, retention and achievement. A questionnaire was developed from existing instruments, using a mixture of 5 or 7 point Likert scales and a semantic differential instrument. No free text responses were included. Items were adapted by reforming the UK Higher Education context to ensure terminology recognisable to the students was used (tuition = tuition fees; tests = exams; professor = lecturer). A favourable ethical opinion was obtained.

Key aspects:
- reasons for studying subject and for selecting Keele University
- experiences of outreach and recruitment
- self reported grades and attendance (2nd and 3rd year only)
- attitude towards subject of study (semantic differential instrument)
- academic, academic enjoyment, maths self-concept inventory
- study skills and learning including academic entitlement

This was distributed to Chemistry (n = 109), Forensic Science (n = 198), Physics/Astrophysics (n = 18) students across 1st, 2nd and 3rd year in October 2019 as part of a pilot study. The questionnaire was administered online where feasible, and by hard copy where not.

The data is currently being analysed and the questionnaire will be refined for September 2020. The intention is to follow the 19/20 and 20/21 cohorts through their studies.

If you would be willing to give the revised questionnaire to your students in 20/21, please get in touch!

Analysis of the academic entitlement aspects have been carried out using the approach demonstrated by Mistry and Gorman (2020).

Independent samples T-tests were carried out to test for differences between year groups before analysing the combined data. There was a significant difference in the scores for If a lecturer does not cover material in class, I should not be expected to learn it 1st year (M=4.600, SD=1.760) and 2nd year (M=3.854, SD=1.696) conditions; t(94)=2.087, p = 0.04

Reliability Analysis: Cronbach’s α

- All α = 0.645, 1st year α = 0.615, 2nd year α = 0.675

Pearson correlation coefficients:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All years</th>
<th>1st year</th>
<th>Second year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submit coursework - pay tuition r(96) = .38, p&lt;.001</td>
<td>Cover material - pay tuition r(96) = .37, p&lt;.001</td>
<td>Submit coursework - miss exams r(41) = .47, p=.002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cover material - pay tuition r(96) = .37, p&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td>Miss exams - pay tuition r(40) = .44, p = .005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miss exams - pay tuition r(95) = .32, p = .002</td>
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Discussion: The introduction of tuition fees is anecdotally held responsible for the increasing perceptions amongst staff that students exhibit more behaviours that might be categorised as academic entitlement. This sentiment is fed by the approach of the press to the marketization of higher education.

Initial analysis of the combined 1st and 2nd year data shows that there are correlations between the tuition fee item and items related to re-submitting coursework to improve marks, additional opportunities to take exams, and coverage of content by lecturers. Exploratory factor analysis shows those four items clustering.

The only significant difference between 1st and 2nd year students was coverage of content by lecturers (distribution shown below) and relates to the proportion of students selecting the disagree option between years.

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