

1-2009

Our University – Entitlement

Walter V. Wendler

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, wendler@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/arch_hepc

Recommended Citation

Wendler, Walter V., "Our University – Entitlement" (2009). *Higher Education Policy Commentary*. Paper 43.
http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/arch_hepc/43

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Architecture at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Higher Education Policy Commentary by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

Our University – Entitlement

Entitlement is the state of being owed that which you have not earned. We see workers of all kinds, at every level, from classroom teachers to state and national political leaders who suffer from the notion that they are entitled to a perquisite, to employment, to reward or benefit of some kind, because they have sacrificed or labored diligently. They paid their dues. And this payment of dues entitles to privilege.

Maybe... maybe not.

Elected officials might believe they have served the people well and, through that service, earned the right to something that benefits them personally. Students have paid tuition and believe that payment guarantees a good grade.

Entitlement is to opportunity what arrogance is to talent. In both cases the former dilutes the latter until a society, or a subgroup within it, begins to believe that position ensures reward or desired result.

I don't think so.

There is always a testing of opportunity that will lead to achievement and recognition for the attainment of certain goals. I have seen this 3 times a year every year, for the past 33 years at university commencements. Commencements mark the exercise of opportunity through the attainment of goals. I fear some days that commencement is anticipated as a foregone conclusion: The price has been paid and the gold ring is waiting.

Without the possibility of failure, success is a cheap thing. Entitlement steals opportunity and with it, quality.

I remember a faculty member coming to my office to voice concerns about not receiving a promotion after years of teaching, contributing to the body of knowledge through research and publication, and serving the professional and extended community through service. He was upset about the results of the process. Every committee and individual along the way viewed his work in the same way - not up to the standards of the university.

"I work hard, come to the office, teach my classes and publish papers...I deserve to be promoted," he said. I told him I understood how he felt but "What you deserve is your paycheck every month, which you received without interruption, and your health insurance, and a good office in which to work, and students, and support, all of which you had, but you had to earn tenure from your peers, and tenure was not an entitlement."

Yet.

He was angry with me for my forthrightness. I understand that too.

We see public officials who believe that their entitlement extends to actions and privileges not granted but grabbed. We are entitled to serve and in service earn respect.

How sweet it is.

In any organization nothing undermines success more than the idea that people within the organization are entitled to something, other than the opportunity to succeed or excel. Another position, a promotion, a career guarantee, anything which is given by length of service or some equally insubstantial substitute for results - an entitlement - is a sickness.

The cousin of entitlement, patronage, didn't work in Tammany Hall and shouldn't work here. These cousins place people in positions for which they are unqualified.

At our university, we should see entitlement for what it is, acid to our purpose. We should covet attainment, merit, excellence, and the demonstration of quality in all that is carried out.

Excellence is the elixir for entitlement, nothing else works.