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# A's for Everyone: The Effect of Student Consumerism in the Post-Secondary Classroom

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## A's for Everyone: The Effect of Student Consumerism in the Post-Secondary Classroom

### **Abstract**

With millennial students as the primary population in many higher education institutions today, many instructors experiencing a paradigm shift of behaviors they are observing in their classroom. Many educators are observing today's students failing to take personal responsibility for their educational endeavors and in turn viewing their educational experiences as a services-for-payment relationship rather than an exploration of knowledge. With this shift and the ever present consumerism type behaviors now being observed, the role of instructor has changed and many are seeking tools to effectively manage their students and classroom.

### **Keywords**

Student Consumerism, Classroom Management, Disengaged Students, Teaching Tools

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## **A's for Everyone: The Effect of Student Consumerism in the Post-Secondary Classroom**

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*With millennial students as the primary population in many higher education institutions today, many instructors experiencing a paradigm shift of behaviors they are observing in their classroom. Many educators are observing today's students failing to take personal responsibility for their educational endeavors and in turn viewing their educational experiences as a services-for-payment relationship rather than an exploration of knowledge. With this shift and the ever present consumerism type behaviors now being observed, the role of instructor has changed and many are seeking tools to effectively manage their students and classroom. Keywords: Student Consumerism, Classroom Management, Disengaged Students, Teaching Tools*

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Student Consumerism is a collection of different types of beliefs and behaviors such as the belief that all factors of a student's educational endeavors are negotiable such as grades, timelines, and expectations. Increasingly, students view education as a service for which they have paid and for which in turn they expect a commensurate high grade regardless of their actual learning or effort (Harris, 2007). Lack of personal responsibility is also a major tenet of the Student Consumerism phenomenon. For many, college once represented an entire host of positive educational experiences to which participants may not have previously encountered (such as having the freedom of attending classes of their own choosing). College represented a major paradigm shift from a childlike pedagogical learning style to an adult or andragogical format that acknowledges that learners have a role in contributing to their own educational achievement (Taylor, 2006).

The present college population is from a more socially diverse background than previous populations found on college campuses. Activism may have once been the more noticeable activity on campus in previous generations whereas the more prevalent in today's higher education classroom is Student Consumerism. As educators work to develop their students' skills and understanding of qualitative inquiry and a desire to build their base of knowledge, they are often now faced with apathetic students. There has been an observed shift in the attitudes within the academic classroom, especially among the Millennial students (Ricketts, 2009). Unfortunately this shift tends to learn more towards unrealistic expectations from students and the desire to simply be given the grade they want rather than what they have earned. Most post-secondary educators may have experienced Student Consumerism behaviors in their classrooms at one point or another. It has been determined that the phenomenon is almost exclusively displayed by students from this generation and often correlates to the increase in the Millennial student population in many colleges and universities today.

Traditionally, for post-secondary students, the responsibility of engaging in their learning was placed squarely on the shoulders of the students themselves. The traditional college educational paradigm emphasized greater student responsibility which was an alluring psychological milestone in personal development in that success and failure rested in their hands as they themselves decided where to allocate resources such as where to go to school and what classes to attend (Harris, 2007). Unfortunately for many educators, the wide-eyed optimism that was once prevalent has turned to pessimism and angst. The image

of engaged and respectful students actively participating in their education has been replaced with disrespectful attitudes, inattentiveness in class and student who consistently question their grades to school administration. Gone are the days where students come to class to learn and expect to work for and earn the grades they receive.

The cause of this dissonance is that educators are experiencing a shift in student attitudes regarding educational achievement that is vastly different from the traditional known paradigm. As pointed out by Harris (2007), “the traditional faculty role in guarding academic integrity and quality faces challenge by this wave of consumerism” (p. 192). The unfortunate reaction to the Student Consumerism behaviors from many post-secondary educators is fear and obsequiousness to the requests and demands of the students. Student Consumerism causes instructors to fear the students, fear their administrators, and most unsettling, creates the fear of losing their jobs. Student Consumerism causes meaningful and well intentioned instructors to behave in such a manner that is counter to their instincts and morals. Educators who were once excited about guiding their students through the qualitative inquiry process are now simply looking for ways to appease their students in order to maintain retention and in turn, their job. Educators working with today’s students need a set tools that can help them to manage their classroom and work to bring students back to looking are learning as a journey. The development of tools to help reduce the incidents of Student Consumerism behaviors that may be exhibited in the post-secondary classroom can help faculty better deal with these types of behaviors. Some effective tools for the classroom are:

### **Develop clear and detailed course policies**

Clear and detailed course policies provide a written document of what is expected from all students in your class and can often work as an “insurance policy” when students question a grade on an assignment or why late penalties were imposed on late work.

### **Be clear in your expectations at the beginning of the class**

Spending more time in the beginning, providing detailed instructions to the students not only answers many of the questions but also increases the probability that issues will not arise in the future.

### **Keep students accountable for their actions and education**

Often students will spend more time looking for excuses for not completing work than they would have spent completing the actual assignment. By reiterating your expectation and grading consistently and fairly, students will hopefully gain an understanding of the role in their education and that they are accountable for the work and the subsequent grades earned.

### **Provided detailed feedback and guidance**

Often students (especially Millennial students) struggle with criticism of their work. Be consistent in your grading, providing rubrics and positive feedback along with the constructive criticism on their work can often provide students the motivation and understanding to improve future work.

While tools such as these can help an instructor when dealing with students, what can be done to combat the effect of Student Consumerism in the post secondary classroom? While removing the primary engagers in these behaviors, the Millennial Student, is not

realistic or advisable, it is important for educators to recognize these behaviors and have a set of tools in place to modify and reduce incidents of these behaviors. Comments are welcome. Please take some time to share your experiences with these types of consumerism behaviors in your higher education classroom. What has been your experience with these types of behaviors and what tools have you found to be effective?

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### Author Note

Anthony D. Plunkett has a PhD in Professional Studies in Education, and a MA in Organizational Management. He has several years of experience in higher education focusing on student engagement, student motivation, and development of engagement opportunities for first year and non-traditional students. Correspondence can be made to Anthony D. Plunkett at [mail4plunkett@yahoo.com](mailto:mail4plunkett@yahoo.com).

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