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The Presumption of Payment

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The Presumption of Payment

Abstract

At Gettysburg College, students invest a considerable amount of money to make their experiences rewarding for future aspirations. Enrollment at this school, like others, I am sure, seems to breed a special type of student: the students who view themselves as paying and therefore deserving consumers. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, college, college funding, cost of education, student loans

Disciplines

Economics | Education | Inequality and Stratification | Sociology

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

THE PRESUMPTION OF PAYMENT

February 13, 2014

At Gettysburg College, students invest a considerable amount of money to make their experiences rewarding for future aspirations. Enrollment at this school, like others, I am sure, seems to breed a special type of student: the students who view themselves as paying and therefore deserving consumers.



These students might sit through a lecture from a doctoral professor until they decide that their time is more important and better spent elsewhere— they leave. Or they might come to class only when it's convenient for them, but still choose to sleep for the next fifty minutes rather than feign respect. Or maybe they'll complain about walking to class in the snow, claiming that they deserve the day off and forgetting about the early-rising facilities employees who work tirelessly to clear our paths.

We sometimes feel as though these and other privileges are actually unalienable rights. Maybe these attitudes are embedded in the type of student that Gettysburg attracts. Perhaps the price or reputation of the school or an individual's inflated perception of self-importance is what perpetuates the meritocracy at Gettysburg. Over and over again, I've seen students demonstrate their feelings of deserving what they get here. They paid for their meal plan, so they can steal some extra food from Servo. They paid for their dorm room, so they can trash it. They paid for exactly 50 minutes of class on Monday morning, so they aren't going to stay for 51. I cannot say with a clear conscience that I'm guiltless because I find myself doing this, too. It's hard to resist, for example, looking at my phone and shooting off a few texts during class. After all, I paid to be there. I can do whatever I want – right?

The pervasiveness of this attitude among many on campus boils down to a common denominator of feeling entitled. We pay to be here, so we do what we want. Paying over \$50,000 dollars a year, however, does not elevate any individual over any other nor does it warrant a free pass, disrespect or an attitude of superiority. Our time as students is valuable, yes, and we do pay to be here. But, what does it say about us when we expect or deserve a Gettysburg College education? Have we earned it?

Some would say, yes. *My parents worked hard. My grandfather came from nothing.* All true, yet, the story is incomplete. The ironic truth is that the myths perpetuating a sense of entitlement work as blinders. A family's

wealth doesn't earn a student the right to pick and choose his way through college. After all, status and income owe much to historical racial preference embedded in our education system, housing policies and employment policies.

To assume we are entitled to treat my professors with disrespect because my family pays tuition or because our hard work has earned us a place at Gettysburg College only sustains the fallacy of meritocracy. Instead of assuming our access to a great education is a right, we need to acknowledge it for what it is – the culmination of hard work *and* privilege.

Ownership and recognition of this are the first steps. Sitting through class at 8 in the morning is not something that sounds altogether appealing to me, and I wouldn't quite venture to use the word "enjoyable" to describe sitting through a 50 minute lecture that feels at least twice as long. But, the inconveniences we face certainly should not make us reflect and say: "I'm too good for this." Disrespecting a professor because his lecture is dull and feeling entitled to the things that we students believe we are owed is unacceptable – it ignores the context within which we even earned the opportunity to attend this institution in the first place.

Yes, we pay to be here. Yet, looking at ourselves as consumers who are owed a product is debilitating for us as individuals and the college environment as a whole. It makes our perspective limited and one-dimensional; our ability to develop authentic working relationships or a reality shared with others becomes incapacitated. When we spend most of our lives assuming our teachers and schools need to ensure our satisfaction, the world of work will be a major shock. We are not entitled consumers of a Gettysburg College education – we are learners, and we are privileged.

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2014/02/13/the-presumption-of-payment/>