"I Don’t Want to Seem Like a Burden to Them": Exploring the Emotions Behind Students Asking for Extensions and Excused Absences

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Introduction

As school begins and workloads increase, deadlines become harder to manage, assignments begin to blur and due dates are missed. This leads to needing an extension, but asking for one can cause different emotions for a college student. This study looks to research the emotions felt when students ask for an extension. In the research, it is evident that the emotions that come with giving an excuse is nervousness and anxiety, disappointment, and stress.

Literature Review

Students feel different emotions when asking a professor for an extension or excused absence. Caron (1992) found that students strongly experienced both fear and desperation before asking for an excuse. Caron also stated that students felt shame and guilt as well. Ferrari (1998) found that long-term procrastinators would feel regret after giving phony excuses to professors. Myers and Claus (2012) adds stress, anxiety, and worry to the list of emotions by collecting data from student surveys about what motivated them to communicate with professors about schoolwork. Some more emotions have also been explored in different ways. O’Sullivan (2015) found that students would attend class in order to avoid needing to meet with a professor. Resulting in the students sharing that they would feel less confident if they missed class and had to meet with a professor to discuss the absence. William and Frymier (2007) also found that Goal oriented students, or students that went to school for the benefits after completion would feel threatened by needing to approach a professor or an extension. All of the reviewed studies used quantitative surveys to assess students’ emotional responses. This project expands upon this existing research about the emotions that students feel when asking for an extension or excused absences through analysis of qualitative interviews.

Research Question

What emotions do students feel before and after asking for an extension or excused absence?

Methods

This project is part of a larger interview interview study in which interviewees described what it was like to ask for extensions and excused absences. We asked them a variety of open-ended questions about a time a student made this request, how they decided to make the request, and a time they wanted to request but did not. Interview lasted from 10 to 30 minutes. The full project contained 69 interviews and took place in the Fall of 2020 in two sociology research methods courses. This data for this study focused on 20 transcripts interviews. Interviewees had to meet the following criteria:

- Over 18 years of age
- Currently enrolled in a university or college

Data was analyzed using grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). Themes were identified and initial coding focused on 3 issues: nervous and anxiety, disappointment, and stress. Memos were used to reflect on and refine coding categories.

Analysis

Nervousness and Anxiety

The first pattern was that students experienced emotions of anxiousness and nervousness when deciding to approach and ask for an extension or excused absence from a professor. For example, in one interview, Lili discusses her emotions when she brings up how she felt about asking for an extension. “Okay, so it was very nerve wracking. I tend to like overthink stuff a lot. And so I will like, spend like, maybe 20 minutes to an hour just trying to type an email…”. In this example, Lili describes her nervousness from just sending an email to her professor in an attempt to ask for an excuse. Just like in Lili’s interview, nervousness and anxiousness were felt by the students in the other interviews.

Disappointment

The second pattern was that students were feeling different emotions such as disappointment for not asking for an extension or excused absence or exaggerating an excuse. In one interview, Alli shares about her emotions for not asking for an extension. Alli states, “Disappointing. Just that’s points I could have had but I didn’t take advantage of it”. In this example, Alli’s feelings matched other students interviewed where they all felt disappointment for failing to get their work done or missing out on points they could get.

Stress

The final pattern was that students expressed feeling the emotion of stress both before and after asking professors for an extension or excused absence. When asked what emotions she felt after asking, Violet answered, “Stressful is what it felt like”. When asked what emotions she felt before asking, Anne shared “And I probably could have asked for extensions. I just was really stressed out…”. Feeling stressed was a common answer that many of the students shared during the interviews. It was also not restricted to any certain part of asking for an excuse. Where students mentioned they were stressed in both asking for an excuse and after asking for an excuse.

Conclusion

It is important to study the emotions that student feel during the process of asking for an extension or excused absence. By trying to study these emotions, professors can gain a better idea about their students and shape coursework more to help students succeed better.

References

Available upon request

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