

# Student Observations

by Kenneth A. Kuhn  
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The following are a number of observations in no particular order about students and life in general that I have noted over the years. Sadly, there are a lot of negative comments. However, there are a number of positive observations that should be encouraged to displace the negatives. In spite of the negatives, my intent is to be inspirational. My hope is that the reader will identify with the positive comments and feel good about having taken the right course in life and will be inspired to continue to grow. I also hope that those who recognize that they are described by some of the negative comments will be inspired to improve. The key to improvement is to recognize one's imperfections. There are many stories of people who began on the wrong course but ended up on the right course by making the effort to change.

The quality of good students has not deteriorated over the years as one might be led to think from various stories in the press concerning various educational averages. I have said before that the quality of good students of today is as good as that of good students at any time in the past. The problem is that there are fewer of them. Also, the lack of quality in the not so good students does seem worse so the overall average is definitely down. It is wrong to use averages to hide what is really happening. The focus should be on the good students who are earning a good education and indicate that the educational institutions are doing their job. It is wrong to blame the institutions for being the victims of government money used to enable non-students to fill the class rooms thus lowering various averaging metrics.

The good students are going to be the leaders of tomorrow. The non-students are going to be society's problems of tomorrow. Under the moronic socialist government in the United States both have equal stature. Someday that will change when socialism finally implodes. Afterwards it will be very good to be of the producing class.

Students will spend more time trying to find a technicality to obtain a point or so on a test than in studying the related material.

Homework problems are provided that relate to the material. Students in my class have the luxury of not having to hand in much if any homework. This translates into students ignoring the homework until possibly the night prior to a test.

Students are too obsessed with trying to obtain (rather than earn) a high grade for the class and in school in general. Schools are very lax in handing out passing grades or even high grades. This is well known throughout industry and only modest weight is given to GPA on a resume or job application unless it is very clear that the applicant really did earn the value and is capable of adding value to the company.

It is a major mistake to try to apply blind procedure to my tests. An engineer is supposed to be able to think. If you can not think then perhaps you need some mindless job such as

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dish washer. I rig the tests such that blind procedure will either not work at all or produce the wrong answer. It is important to know the material from a variety of angles – that is what you will see on the tests.

The tests are open-book/notes because I do not believe in memorization. I do believe in thinking and that is what you must do to score high on the tests. I also believe in preparation – i.e. recognize the general problem and know how to quickly find and apply the related material in your notes for the solution. Interestingly, students who follow this tend to score very high on the tests.

Students skip class at an alarming rate. In the old days skipping a class was considered academic suicide. I attribute the high degree of skipping to the over use of financial aid to students and the lax standards for continuing aid. It is very unusual for someone who is actually paying for school to skip school. The best students are often paying a significant part of their education and are thus inspired to do their best work. They may be working either part or full-time jobs. Students (if that is what they are called) who are on full-time aid programs funded by either family, government, or other tend to become over involved in the social scene and can not find the time to study if they even cared to study. Financial aid is not necessarily bad. In the old days a student of limited financial means could earn the privilege of aid by dedication to studies. Those people today (a.k.a. the evil rich) are paying the bill for the aid that is often given out loosely.

You often hear stories about people who are very successful today tell of the financial struggle they went through to earn a college education. You never hear a successful person tell how easy they had it in school with government aid – I do not think such people exist.

There is a strong correlation between the grade a student earns in the class and the effort (attending class, doing homework, doing rather than copying a lab, etc.) put forth. With rare exception the lower grades are earned by students who skipped the preceding.

Grades are what they are. I do not give grades – I am not allowed to. I only report the grades as earned by the student. No amount of pleading can change a grade. It would have been much easier to have studied the material and earned a higher grade.

Students have too many distractions. School is about learning, not being involved with entertainment. Entertainment is for the ignorant who have no other purpose in life.

Students give up too easily on challenging problems. You learn and grow by overcoming challenges. View challenges as opportunities.

Life is about results rather than excuses. *Almost* counts for nothing. Who was that almost famous surgeon whose patient almost lived? Who was that almost famous lawyer who almost won the big case? Who was that almost famous parachutist whose parachute almost opened. Who was that almost famous person who almost won the \$300,000,000

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lottery? All failures have excuses. No successful person needs one. In all my years of teaching I have never had an 'A' student with an excuse.

Some students have low ethics and use or copy other's work. There is a similar problem in industry.

It is a good thing for students to study together – I highly encourage that. It is all right to hand in original work based on something you learned from some group study. It is an entirely different matter when there are various deals to use each other's work or copy work from a previous year. Computers have made this type of cheating very easy. I am very disappointed when I am grading a lab and the student turned in a copy of a previous year's lab without so much as noting that I had made changes in this year's lab.

Some student's work is often sloppy and hard to follow. It is a torture to look at and grade. Your advancement in a real job depends on your ability to communicate effectively both oral and written. Once you make a bad impression on the job that will stay with you.

Students should practice doing excellent work. That is what will get them ahead when they are employed.

The days of obtaining a piece of paper that essentially states, "This diploma heaby states that Sam Arnt Student is got a education" that enables Sam to obtain an easy nothing job with the government or quasi government such as a utility are coming to an end. This particular observation seems to apply less to engineering students than some other fields as such people tend to seek the easiest possible way – engineering is definitely not that – but it does happen. If Sam can not actually do something then Sam is going to be working some minimum wage job regardless of what degrees he may have (*he is got* may be more accurate). Private industry is well aware that a lot of diplomas are being handed out. They take great care in the hiring process to avoid these "graduates". GPA means nothing if it is not real.

Keep in mind that your instructor did not receive any aid in going to school. College was paid for by roughly fifty percent working and fifty percent from parents. Your instructor lived in what today is commonly referred to as abject poverty. But that sacrifice and investment was for a limited time in order not to accrue college debt. The popular saying, "*Much is expected from those who are given much*" is often erroneously and demeaningly applied to those who have worked hard to earn what they have. In truth it applies to those who receive the gift of opportunity. They are expected to fulfill this gift so that they can pass the gift on. The gift is not meant to be consumed. It is meant to be used to the fullest. Unfortunately, these gifts have become expected rather than earned. There is a name for this phenomena, **Entitlement Syndrome**. The net effect of this is to increase the cost of education for those paying their own way. Squandering the opportunity for an education is extreme moral corruption for which there is no excuse. There are many other people in the world that could have received the gift instead and would have worked hard to fulfill it. They are waiting while someone else is squandering. That is

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wrong. Unfortunately, the socialist “solution” of our corrupt and incompetent government is to make the problem worse by increasing funding to those least deserving while increasing costs to those who work hard. Education would be of much higher quality and lower cost if government was not involved. But few see this for they are blinded by the siren call of the socialist money spigot.

School is supposed to be a challenge both financially and mentally. Employers would much rather hire someone who struggled and succeeded rather than someone who practically had success handed to them.

One thing that has baffled me over the years is that some students are very good at studying and mastering material so that they score very high on the tests but actually have little if any concept of the material. That is scary for potentially these people obtain good jobs for which they actually are not qualified for in spite of a high GPA. They slip through the system.

more comments to come ...