The week before the semester starts, I get a lot of emails from students who do not know me, but who apparently really really really want to enroll in one of my classes.

This is not because of any amazingness on my part. This is because here at Oversized State University, we have what we call a "disproportionate teacher-student ratio."

(See what I did there? That's what we in Rhetoric call "polite spin.")

In other words, we have way too many students, and way too few teachers. Which means during registration time, classes fill up quickly and a lot of students who need required classes don’t get into them. As a result, students often have to resort to crashing classes: attending on the first day, standing in the back, and looking at the instructor at the front of the room with puppy dog eyes, desperate to receive an Add Code that will allow them to snag a spot.
The process sucks, but it's pretty straightforward. If I have an open seat in a section, I give it to the crashing student who has the most units. The rest of the puppies, sadly, must leave the room and push their puppy noses against the window in another class.

But before the first day: the emails. Oh, the emails. They all have the same request, but they typically use one of three approaches. Here are three I received recently (names changed). Consider this a lesson in rhetorical strategy. Each student clearly thought their approach was the best way to get what they wanted.

**Approach #1: The Flatterer**

Dear Professor T,

My name is John Green and I will be crashing your 9:30 class this week. I am greatly excited by your course and am VERY interested in adding it to my schedule, if at all possible! I feel your course could benefit me not only as a student at this school, but as a citizen in our society. In fact, even if I did not need your class to graduate, I would be interested in taking it anyway!! Friends of mine told me you're an awesome teacher with great style!!! Please let me know if you have any open seats, so I can benefit from your fine teaching skills.

Wow. Thank you for your praise, John. Each of your heartfelt exclamation points humbles me. If I could just point out, though: you don't know me, so you really don't know whether or not I have fine teaching skills or not. I hate to say it, but it's extremely unlikely that your friends told you I'm awesome. If you go to ratemyprofessor.com, you'll find that a much greater number of students think I'm strict, grumpy, with the curmudgeonly nature of a man twice my age. Plus I have a strict No Cell Phone policy that students hate. Trust me, you don't want any part of this.

You say you feel my class will benefit you as both a student, and as a citizen. This is Basic Composition. Sure, I feel you'll become a better person if you take my class, but somehow, I doubt that you feel that way. I'm sorry, good sir. I have no add code for you.

**Approach #2: The Victim**

Dear Instructor,

Do you have any open seats in your 9:30 class? I need an English class this semester, and your class is the only one that I can take based on my very busy schedule. This will be my third time taking this class, but the reason I failed it the previous two times is because of too many social commitments, and then a difficult personal situation due to a break up with my boyfriend who cheated on me and ended up giving me mono. If you don't let me into your class, I will lose my financial aid and I won't be able to graduate this Spring, which will keep me from pursuing my dream career and life's goals.

Heather Johnson

It sounds like you have a lot going on, Heather. Life has clearly dealt you a rough hand, what with those numerous social commitments and all. And I'm sorry to hear about that cheating, germmy boyfriend. Guys, pffft. Am I right? If I knew you personally, I'd take you out for some fro-yo and we could spend several hours talking about it.

I admire your honesty and willingness to share your struggle in the interest of getting a seat in my class. Regrettably, the class is already full. I understand that by not giving you an Add Code, I am singlehandedly destroying your future. Let's agree that it's definitely my fault that you will never achieve your dream, but will instead be resigned to a sadder fate, possibly life on the pole. I will just have to try and make my peace with that.

**Approach #3: The Bad Ass**

Professor T:

I want to add your 9:30 class, even though the schedule says it is full. I know students sometimes drop early, and that you'll probably have seats at some point. You might have already given add codes out to students but I know you have to fill up your class because that's the rule. I know teachers sometimes say their class is full when it isn't. If those students do not add the class soon, I need to be in it. The last time a teacher told me his class was full, I went and talked to his supervisor. I expect a reply to this email.

Sincerely,

Mark Smith
Well played, Mr. Smith! You clearly see behind my professional facade, and have uncovered my secret agenda to sabotage your education — all before even having met me! You certainly are the sharp-witted Holmes to my diabolical Moriarty! Consider me foiled, Sir!

I don’t get paid enough to throw down with you, so instead I’ll just say: good luck not getting fired from every future job you ever have due to that toxic attitude. Later, Crusader.

*

I applaud them all for employing these tactics. Sure, the tactics are BAD. But at least they're thinking rhetorically when they contact me. I teach Rhetoric, so of course I'm going to respect the attempt (All expect that last one, maybe.) And if I were them, I'd likely try something similar to get into a class I needed. Oversized classes and underfunded departments create tough situations for students. It’s not their fault.

But it’s clear I should probably avoid my Inbox until after the Add/Drop deadline has passed.

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**84** Recommend this on Google

Labels: Crashing Classes, Puppies, Student Emails, teaching

Posted by Didactic Pirate at 7:34 AM

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11 comments:

* SherilinR  January 16, 2013 at 8:00 AM
  that third guy was funny, trying to bully you into adding him by insinuating that teachers are liars and jerks.
  
  Reply

* Vinny C  January 16, 2013 at 9:55 AM
  The Flatterer's, “…could benefit me not only as a student at this school, but as a citizen in our society...” made me laugh out loud.
  
  As a student in a school that similarly-um-disproportionately ratioed, I just make sure I sign up on the first day registration opens. Saves me a lot of hassle... Unless said school screws up & the courses I'm assigned aren't offered that semester. It has happened a few times.
  
  Reply

  Replies

* Didactic Pirate  January 16, 2013 at 10:17 AM
  Yea... I've learned over the years that 75% of crashing students are crashing classes because they missed their online registration window. Possibly due to hangover issues.
  
  Reply

* Leigh Anne  January 16, 2013 at 9:58 AM

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It's a shame you don't have room for them, since all three appear to be in desperate need of Basic Composition skills! (And the bad ass sounds like he has serious stalker potential).

Anonymous  January 16, 2013 at 10:57 AM
How about a blog entry about the girls you invariably 'send to the pole?'
-Ben from Redlands (you know who)

Homemaker Man  January 17, 2013 at 11:44 AM
" . . . Nature of a man twice my age." They think you're 150?

btw, can I add your class. I really respect old people.

Sorry, been a long day here. Your responses to student emails truly one of my favorite semi-regular blog features anywhere

Anonymous  January 17, 2013 at 3:19 PM
That pole dancing comment made me laugh out loud (I refuse to use LOL). Too bad I'm attending a funeral.

Happy New Year Prof T!

Cheers,
Crashing Bull (I know you know who)

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Muskrat  January 21, 2013 at 7:41 PM
I wish I could've learned English from you.

Reply

Margie  February 15, 2013 at 8:08 PM
Life on the pole...that is the best ever! For a grumpy old man, you're awfully clever.

Reply

jual busana muslim murah 2013  March 6, 2013 at 1:58 AM
This comment has been removed by a blog administrator.

Reply