

THE MILLENNIALS ARE IN COLLEGE – TEACHING STRATEGIES TO REACH THE MILLENNIALS

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ABSTRACT

“Students today are different, really different!” Such observations can be heard across campuses and college classrooms. This statement reflects a reality that college students today are in fact different from students of years past. Demographers continue to present information confirming that the Millennial Generation, the generation of people born after 1982, is indeed a distinct generation and significantly different from the previous ones, including Generation Xers.

Size estimates of this group range from about the same or larger than the Boomer Generation. Millennials (Gen Y, Echo Boomers, Next Gen, etc.) are a force worthy of study. Indeed, a myriad of studies and articles have outlined the characteristics, attitudes, aspirations and fears of this generation. As Millennials enter the workforce, many more articles are being written about managing these new employees. Effective managers have found that new skills and expectations are necessary to manage and mentor these Millennials. Just as managers have realized that new skills and expectations are required in the workplace, effective college educators have determined that new techniques and realizations are necessary, both in and out of the classroom, for this new generation of students.

As the first wave of the Millennials enrolled in colleges, it was apparent that indeed these students were in fact different from the preceding classes of students. These young people, who were praised for participation, regardless of individual achievement, are in classrooms today. The members of the Millennial generation arrived on campus upbeat, close to their parents and optimistic about the future. “Unlike Boomers, they do not want to ‘teach the

world to sing.’ Unlike Gen-Xers, they do not ‘just do it,’ – they plan ahead” (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

The Millennials with all of their unique traits and characteristics are now ready to make their contribution to and their mark on classrooms and colleges. As every generation before them, the Millennials have been shaped by their environment. This is a generation that has been surrounded by digital media, terrorism and globalization, as well as many other important factors. Millennials share seven core traits – special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured and achieving. These traits will be examined to determine effective strategies for enhancing the contributions Millennials can make to the classroom. Carol Phillips, president of Brand Amplitude and a marketing instructor at the University of Notre Dame, recently wrote an article, “Get the Best Out of Millennials by Tweaking Habits” (Phillips, 2008), outlining six lessons to enhance the learning by college sophomores. The six lessons are: eliminate ambiguity, think of time as a 24/7 resource, combine work with play, make it worthwhile, handle with care and play to their strengths. Understanding these lessons are critical to effectively engaging and teaching this generation.

The attitudes and behaviors of this group suggest that educators recognize and adapt to the Millennials, or risk missing an opportunity to engage with this group of talented individuals. Adaptation need not be an all-or-nothing proposition. Rather, successful college educators that do adapt to Millennial students will be rewarded with engaged, enthusiastic students ready to contribute to their course work, campuses and communities.

References Available on Request