Millennial Behaviors & Demographics

By Richard Sweeney
University Librarian, New Jersey Institute of Technology
University Heights, Newark, NJ 07102-1982
973-596-3208
sweeney@njit.edu
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They are a huge generation of impatient, experiential learners, digital natives, multitaskers, and gamers who love the flat, networked world and expect nomadic connectivity, 24x7. More importantly they are demanding consumers who expect more selectivity, personalization and customization in their products and services. They are the Millennials (a.k.a. NextGen, GenY, C Generation, M Generation, and Echo Boomers), the generation born 1979 though 1994. The exact years of birth of Millennials differ slightly depending upon the demographers and some use 1982 as the start of this generation.

There are a number of researchers who have focused upon the common Millennial (a.k.a. NextGen, GenY, Echo Boomers, C Generation) behaviors and characteristics that distinguish them in degree or kind from previous generations *at the same age*. This author has conducted more than 35 Millennial college student focus groups in front of live audiences in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. These focus groups have confirmed most of the research about Millennial behaviors by other groups and individuals such as EDUCAUSE, the Pew Foundation, OCLC, etc. See the attached bibliography. This author has observed in his focus groups that the lower the age of the adult Millennial, the more likely that he or she will exhibit these behaviors. Focus groups can be used to test formal research studies and to learn other useful knowledge about specific behaviors although they are not statistically valid.

Generational research is a matter of degree. Clearly, not everyone in a generational cohort behaves the same. All the prevailing Millennial behaviors from one college or university will not necessarily be identical to those at another. Yet, my work has definitely shown that most Millennial behaviors at one college will be the same behaviors at the others.
Millennials are "natives" of this new, digital, consumer driven, flat, networked, instant satisfaction world. While some in the older generations may adapt quickly, they will always be immigrants and will never be as competent, resourceful or "natural" as the Millennial "natives" born into this new culture.

Demographics

Millennials are a very large generation, the second largest in US history, only smaller than the baby boomers (born 1946 -1964). More than half of the Millennials are already voting age adults. Many Millennials are already in graduate schools or into careers. We can assume that the vast majority of Millennials, who are now at least 23 years old (i.e. those born1979 through 1983 in 2006) and who will go to college, have already graduated. The remaining Millennials, born 1984 through 1994, who will go to college, are either already in college or will be entering by 2012.

While Millennials will be attending colleges and universities at least through 2017 (b. 1994), those from the single largest birth year in 1990 will typically enter college about 2008 and will likely graduate from 2011 to 2013. The class entering college in 2009 and thereafter will get smaller for many years. This population decline is expected to begin impacting colleges and universities only four or five years from now. *The college and university competition to recruit Millennial students after 2008 will be fierce as the supply of high school students drops.* We can then expect an even greater graduate student and continuing professional education competition for Millennials. The very large Millennial immigrant population and local birth rates will vary the impact times on a specific college or university, particularly those which draw from a specific community, state or region. This coming precipitous decline in the pool of prospective undergraduate students is likely to increase the differentiation of college and university services marketed to Millennials. In short, in the near future more competitive environment, the most successful colleges and universities will enter market niches specifically designed to attract and engage Millennial students.

Millennial Behaviors

There are a number of Millennial behaviors that are different in statistically significant ways and will impact all of society. The key behaviors and preferences are those which are different in kind or degree from previous generations **at the same age** and which are likely to become part of their **lifelong culture**. While there are a number of researchers who have studied the common behaviors and characteristics that distinguish Millennials in degree or kind from previous generations *at the same age*, the focus here is upon those which most impact their learning, education, communications and consumer behaviors.

More Choices; More Selectivity: Millennials expect a much greater array of product and service selectivity. They have grown up with a huge array of choices and they believe that such abundance is their birthright. This is a sea change in consumer behavior. Millennials also feel less need to conform in their consumer choices to everyone else in their generation or to other generations. They desire ultimate consumer control: what they want, how and when they want it. For example, this author typically asks in Millennial focus groups, "What was the last piece of music and genre that you listened to that you chose?" Millennials will choose any or all types of music. No one type of music prevails for the majority. Millennials do not have a generational music. Jazz, country, or classical are as likely as rock or hip hop. This certainly was not true with the previous generations. Another example: I often ask the Millennials, "What is your favorite type of jeans. They are more likely to answer cost, comfort or the cut of the jean than the brand. When they do mention a brand, rarely does more than one person mention the same brand. Impact on academe: Millennials expect significantly increased learning options and far more educational services from their colleges and universities.

Millennials may be the leading consumer edge and the natives of "The Long Tail" phenomena.[1] Chris Anderson in his book, The Long Tail, says," The Long Tail is nothing more than infinite choice… Abundant, cheap distribution means the audience tends to distribute as widely as the choice. " The idea is that more efficient, and economical distribution systems (e.g. via the internet) are making a much wider array of products and services more available and cost effective. Because Millennials grew up with a much wider array of services and products they expect them in every service, including their college or university. The converse is, of course,

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[1] **The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More (Hardcover)**
by Chris Anderson New York : Hyperion, ©2006.

also true: Millennials are most unhappy with limited choices (e.g. when there is only one professor teaching a particular required course).

Experiential and Exploratory Learners: Millennials strongly prefer learning by doing. They almost never read the directions; love to learn by doing, by interacting. Multiplayer gaming, computer simulations, and social networks are some of their favorite environments and provide little penalty for trial and error learning. By and large, in my focus groups, Millennials have said that they find their average lectures boring. With such experiential learning, the Millennial gets lots of interactivity and feedback about what works and what does not. Example: there are virtual chemistry experiments and exercises on the web offered by Davidson University. Another example: freshmen Millennials at NJIT often will find a more engaging biomedical engineering class that has only 15 minutes of lecture followed by 75 minutes of building a machine that can suture fingers (actually hot dogs). Impact on academe: Millennials are more engaged through active learning, effective experiential processes such as games, case studies, hands-on experiences, and simulations that can speed their learning and hold their interest.

Flexibility / Convenience: Millennials prefer to keep their time and commitments flexible longer in order to take advantage of better options; they also expect other people and institutions to give them more flexibility. They want to "time and place shift" their services, to have them where and when they are ready. They want more granularity in the services so they can be interrupted and finish when they are ready without any loss or productivity. Example: they will often delay to the last possible moment their important choices such as jobs and college selection so as to not foreclose a better option later. Example: In some colleges and universities, I have discovered, on-campus Millennial students are often opting to take "distance education" courses, even when they prefer a face to face course. This is because they can attend such courses in their own time and preferred location. They opt for the convenience and flexibility. Impact on academe: colleges and universities have to find alternatives to the lock step credit hour and semester systems, to courses essentially taught by a single professor, and to other flexibility and convenience areas that might involve systemic change.

Personalization and Customization: Once Millennials do make their choices in products and services, they expect them to have as much personalization and customization features as possible to meet their changing needs, interests and tastes. Example: they will change their cell phone caller rings so they can tell who is calling them by the type of ring. Another example, a student, particularly one that might have a reading comprehension problem may find it easier to learn by listening to the 'textbook' than reading it. Impact on academe: colleges and universities must provide personalized systems that both constantly monitor and coach students-intervening as needed. Such personalized monitoring should be continuous, not just a few times a semester. The current process of assessment and feedback is cumbersome and slow and loses many students.

Impatience: Millennials, by their own admission, have no tolerance for delays. They expect their services instantly when they are ready. They require almost constant feedback to know how they are progressing. Their worst nightmare is when they are delayed, required to wait in line, or have to deal with some other unproductive process. Their desire for speed and efficiency can not be over estimated. The need for speedy satisfaction, or as some believe instant gratification, permeates virtually all of their service expectations. Example, a student who does not get an immediate response from a faculty member by email will write several emails within a short time, each more insistent. Impact on academe: college and universities are beginning to use automated systems that give almost immediate answers based upon

previous questions asked in addition to answers from expert faculty. Instant messaging rather than email will be used more often for such quick assistance.

Practical, Results Oriented: Millennials are interested in processes and services that work and speed their interactions. They prefer merit systems to others (e.g. seniority). Millennials are furious when they feel they are wasting their time; they want to learn what they have to learn quickly and move on. Millennials have no tolerance for services that do not continuously and reliably work. Example, if a student believes that a particular teacher is ineffective, he or she will do whatever it takes to find another teacher, even taking a distance education class. Impact on academe: colleges and universities will have to solve real Millennial problems with their teaching and delivery systems and not let them fester. In this more competitive environment, students will go elsewhere if they do not get the desired result.

Multitaskers: Millennials excel at juggling several tasks at once since this an efficient, practical use of their time and, as already noted, they are very impatient. Multitasking can enable them to accelerate their learning by permitting them to accomplish more than one task at the same time. They do want to use their time most efficiently and multitasking offers them more options.   For example, a student may download and listen to a lecture while doing his/her laundry or exercising.   Another example: the research shows that Millennials will almost never instant message someone without doing some other task(s) simultaneously.   Impact on academe: colleges and universities will have to enable and encourage widespread recording and downloading from the web (or iTunes U) of lectures and learning modules.

Digital Natives: Millennials clearly adapt faster to computer and internet services because they have always had them.   While they still clearly want and expect expert teachers in a face-to-face environment, they expect the speed, convenience, flexibility and power provided by digitally provided services and resources.   Provide every service digitally, they tell us, and let us decide how much we will use the face to face versus the online.   I have heard about students at one university who must take all of their math classes and exams online from a math lab complain that they also need more face-to-face time. They also complain that the graduate student "math coaches" in the lab are not responsive and that the computers often are broken or unavailable. Millennials are practical, if they are offered a service, they expect it to work. Millennials expect all their academic services to be integrated digitally online so that they can pick and choose how they want to learn and when they want to learn.   Impact on academe: every aspect of colleges and universities must be seamlessly woven with digital service options.

Gamers: Millennials have spent thousands of hours playing electronic, computer and video games. They love the constant interactivity, full motion multimedia, colorful graphics, the ability to learn and progress to higher levels, and the ability to collaborate with friends in their learning and competitions. Gaming is already beginning to have a very significant impact upon their expectations for learning and, in some cases, beginning to find its way into higher education. Gaming offers thrills, competition, engagement and a rich array of emotional stimuli that also enhance learning. There is, after all, strong evidence that the evolution of the emotions in humans occurred as an improved memory device. Thus intense fear or sadness causes us to remember certain events or situations longer. There are a number of educational games listed on Marc Prensky's web site (http://www.marcprensky.com/) and on (http://www.twitchspeed.com/site/cases.html).   Impact on academe: colleges and universities have to find more ways to create and or use academic games in student learning environments but should not expect individual faculty to create these given the current reward structures.

Nomadic Communication Style: Millennials have more friends and communicate with them more frequently using IM (instant messaging), text messaging, cell phones as well as more traditional communication channels. They are prolific communicators.   They love and expect communication mobility; to remain in constant touch wherever and whenever, un-tethered. This is their firm desire to do whatever they need to do, obtain any services independent of their geography or distance. This is particularly important since they typically don't have "offices " at their college or university.   Millennials are much more likely to instant or text message more frequently than they email. They are also much less likely to send a U.S. mail letter than the older generations. It's interesting to note that even their communications are speeded by using shorthand, coded, or abbreviated text.   Millennials typically have many more buddies on their IM lists than the older generations, although their faculty are typically not included. Example, some university admissions and library reference librarians (e.g. http://www.qandanj.org) are providing instant messaging so that they can quickly answer students on their preferred communication channel. Impact on academe: it is clear that colleges and universities must get students quick feedback, anytime, anywhere, on their desired communication channels (IM, text messaging, cell phones, email, etc.). Millennials expect that they should be able "pull" their grades, course schedules and other information automatically (e.g. RSS feeds to their cell phone text messages) as well as obtain human assistance whenever and wherever needed.

Media/ Format Agnostic: Millennials most enjoy interactive full motion multimedia, color images, and audio although they can use any media, even text.   Current examples include Vodcasting and iPodcasting.   Impact on academe: colleges and universities have to provide appropriate learning multimedia learning both in the classrooms as well as outside of the classrooms if they are to compete for this generation. Relying on senior tenured faculty to develop such multimedia learning options will result in losing students to competitors. Such multimedia is key to engaging Millennials. Impact on academe: colleges and universities must institutionally develop such multimedia, perhaps using open source material but certainly sharing development costs.

Collaboration & Intelligence: After many years of collaborating at schools, day care, soccer teams, orchestras, peer-to peer networks, games, and other programmed activities, Millennials know how and when to work with other people more effectively.   Even those who do not prefer collaboration typically do so, if they think it gives them a practical advantage. They respect intelligence and education; "it is cool to be smart". They are electing to go onto college and graduate work in far greater numbers than previous generations and this is an opportunity to hire smart students to help create games and multimedia learning options as well as solve serious problems with student learning. Example: peer to peer just-in-time collaborative learning is happening more often than ever before as a way for students to learn from each other. Impact upon academe: colleges and universities, not just individual faculty, have to do far more in creating collaborative technology so that two or more students can work together faster, more effectively and more comfortably.

Balanced Lives: They don't want to work 80 hours a week and sacrifice their health and their leisure time, even for considerably higher salaries. Yet they expect to earn incomes exceeding their parents. Example, Millennials are more likely to be involved in some extra curricula activities, work or personal commitments and this affects their learning performance. Impact on academe: give them more flexibility; fewer fixed deadlines. For example, a three credit course might be broken down into six half credit mini-courses offered in a week rather then over a fifteen week semester.   Impact on academe: colleges and universities must offer a wider range or learning alternatives as well as a wider range of extracurricular opportunities.

Less Reading: Millennials, disturbingly, are not reading literature or newspapers as much as previous generations of the same age.   In fact, reading is down for most age groups but the decline has been greatest among the youngest adult population. Certainly this is caused in part by the increase in the competition from entertainment and educational options. A Millennial will be playing a game more often than reading a book.   This is most disturbing because reading is a very efficient means of communicating knowledge. Furthermore less reading is likely to cause a decline in student writing skills. Impact on academe: colleges and universities will have to integrate "reading and writing opportunities" to a greater extent across the curriculum. E-portfolios can be one effective way to increase both reading and writing skills by better engaging Millennials.

Other Characteristics: There are many other behaviors that characterize Millennials, but they have far less impact upon academe. For instance, they are direct, often to the point of appearing rude. They believe that they are all "above average"; to be average is really to be mediocre. They are very confident, perhaps because their Boomer parents constantly told them that they would succeed at whatever they did.   They typically led more structured lives, imbued with Boomer parents values who expected them all to excel and go to the very best schools. There is evidence that Millennial values are more aligned with their parents than those of previous generations, although most Boomers and Gen Xers do not believe this is so. Millennials also are more likely to have a close friend of a different ethnicity than themselves and therefore have more tolerance for cultural differences. They are certainly more traveled.

Different Personalities: Not only do typical Millennial behaviors differ in some significant ways from Generation X and Baby Boomers, but some evidence indicates that their personalities may be different in some significantly measurable ways. Millennial students from one medical school, the Northeastern Ohio College of Medicine showed significant differences when compared with Generation X students on 10 of 16 personality factors on a standard personality test (16PF). Millennials were found to be more *warm and outgoing,*(Warmth) more *abstract than concrete (Reasoning),* more *adaptive and mature* (Emotional Stability), more *dutiful* (Rule Consciousness), more *socially bold and adventuresome* (Social Boldness), more *sensitive and sentimental* (Sensitivity), more *self-doubting and worried* (Apprehension), more *open to change and experimenting* (Openness to Change),and more *organized and self disciplined* (Perfectionism). But they were also found to be less *solitary and individualistic* (Self Reliance)[2] While this study was limited to only one medical school and only considered medical students, the results seem to support and extend the focus group work of this author and other published research about Millennials.

Conclusion: The published research about Millennial behaviors (see the attached bibliography) and this author's focus group research have demonstrated that Millennials are very different from previous generations *at the same age* and that many, of these behaviors are likely to remain part of their lifelong culture since they seem to be embedded in their personalities. Typical Millennial preferred behaviors must be a major factor in the strategic planning and design of services of colleges, universities, libraries and other institutions and organizations. As this generation gets older, there are more opportunities to conduct additional focus groups and studies to learn more about Millennial behaviors and preferences. There are a wide array of new learning opportunities that can be employed to better engage Millennial students, if colleges and universities are willing to take some risks and innovate.

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[2] Nichole J Borges et al. "Comparing Millennial and Generation X Medical Students at One Medical School. Academic Medicine; 81.6 (2006): 571-576

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