“GENERATION ON A TIGHTROPE”: LESSONS LEARNED APPLIED TO TEACHING AND INSTRUCTION

Donna J. LaVoie, Ph.D.
Associate Dean, Arts & Sciences
Today’s college student

- Millennial: Born 1982 -2002 (or thereabouts)
- roughly 30% of the American population
- children of Baby Boomers or early wave members of Generation X
- Participated in “play groups”
- The most protected generation in terms of government regulations on consumer safety
- used to being consulted in decision-making by their parents
- strong bonds between these students and their parents
- Expected to excel by their parents
- Highly scheduled and sheltered in childhood

Today’s college student

- They represent the first generation of students to be born in a global, digital, information economy.
- More comfortable with racial, ethnic, and gender differences
- Pragmatic, career oriented, and determined to do well
- Global talkers, green thinkers, and local actors
- Engaged in service and wanting to do good
- Optimistic about their personal futures
- Issue oriented rather than ideological
- Demanding of change
Today’s college student

- Weak in face-to-face social skills
- Immature, needy, timid, protected, and tethered to their parents
- Self-absorbed, polite, rule observers
- Hard hit by the recession
- Hard working, but confuse the quantity of work they do with the quality of the product
- Consumer oriented and entitled
- Pessimistic about the future of the country
- Disenfranchised with politics and the nation’s social institutions
- Lacking in decorum related to technology and understanding of academic rules and values
Today’s college student

“This should not be taken as a slap or dismissal of current undergraduates, harking back to the old saw about students being so much better in my day. They were not. This generation of college students is no better and no worse than other generations but, like every generation before, they are different and will live in a world demanding a different set of skills and knowledge to thrive.

As a result, this generation requires a different brand of education that will enable them to attain their personal dreams and to serve the society they must lead. The education we offered to previous generations, whether successful or not, will not work for these students.”
Challenges

- Oriented towards collaborative learning (social contact)
- Prefer structured activities that encourage creativity, not memorization
- Want to learn information that is relevant to life
- Heavy users of technology

...in their own words

Ideal learning environments

- Research-based methods:
  - Millennials prefer a variety of active learning methods.

- Relevance:
  - Millennials have grown up being able to Google anything they want to know, therefore they do not typically value information for information’s sake.

- Rationale:
  - Unlike Boomers who were raised in a more authoritarian manner in which they more readily accept the chain of command, Millennials were raised in a non-authoritarian manner and are more likely to comply with course policies when teachers provide them with a rationale for specific policies and assignments.

Source: Price (2011)
Effective Teaching

- Shift focus from information delivery to active learning techniques
- Think about *learning effectiveness*

*Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in class listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.*

Active Learning

"Active learning" means students engage with the material, participate in the class, and collaborate with each other.

Student-centered approach; responsibility for learning placed on student
Active Learning Strategies

This is a spectrum of some active learning activities arranged by complexity and classroom time commitment.

Prepared by Chris O'Neal and Tershia Pinder-Grover, Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan
Example: Reflection

- Take a moment to reflect on your experience with PowerPoint—Think of one positive and one negative example
Example: Think-Pair-Share

- Think about what you know about active learning strategies…
  - Turn to a partner and share with each other what you know.
  - Share your findings with the larger group
Example: Game

- After teaching basic principles, have students apply them in a fun, game-like setting
Perception begins with feature extraction (a bottom-up process)

- A preliminary “guess” is made about what the object is, but processing continues so that only those features in need of further analysis are extracted
  - Top-down processing guides this process, so that we can create meaning from elementary features
    - But, this also reflects our expectation of what something should be
Summary

- Shifting the focus from what *you* do, to what *students* do, engages students in and outside of the classroom.
  - *I hear and I forget*
  - *I see and I remember*
  - *I do and I understand*

- Creates engaged learners and dynamic thinkers.