

Students in Crisis Topic: **Generation Gap**

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Introduction: The *traditional* undergraduate and graduate student of today was born between the Regan administration and the George H.W. Bush presidency. Alternately called the Internet Generation, Echo Boomers, the Boomlet, Nexters, Generation Y, the Nintendo Generation, and the Digital Generation or the Millennials, the people born between (some say as early as 1977) 1980 and 2000 have no memory of a time before microwavable popcorn and Lean Cuisine. Personally, this became a painful reality to me while teaching a mass communication class and attempting to convey the societal importance of Norman Lear to students who never have seen “All in the Family,” “The Jeffersons,” “Sanford and Son,” “Good Times,” or “Maude.” Then, searching for another example of the power of television, I dredged up the space shuttle Challenger explosion. Still, I drew a room full of blank stares.

This handout seeks to provide information that will help faculty better understand the Millennial Generation and thus engage them more fully in the classroom.

Facts: Claire Raines, an author and expert on multigenerational workplaces, made these observations about what has shaped Millennials:

- **Focused on children and family** – *The early 90s saw the spotlight swinging back (toward children and family). Las Vegas and Club Med went family. Parents and grandparents took the kids along on trips across the country and to destinations all over the globe. Eating out—once an adult thing—became a family matter.*
- **Scheduled, structured lives** – *The Millennials were the busiest generation of children we’ve ever seen in the U.S, growing up facing time pressures traditionally reserved for adults. Parents and teachers micromanaged their schedules, planning things out for them, leaving very little unstructured free time.*
- **Multiculturalism** – *Kids grew up in the 90s and 00s with more daily interaction with other ethnicities and cultures than ever before. The most recent data from UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute shows that interracial interaction among college freshmen has reached a record high.*

- **Terrorism** – *During their most formative years, Millennials witnessed the bombing and devastation of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City. They watched in horror as two Columbine High School students killed and wounded their classmates, and as school shootings became a three-year trend. And their catalyzing generational event—the one that binds them as a generation, the catastrophic moment they all witnessed during their first, most formative years—is, of course, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.*
- **Heroism** – *Emerging out of those acts of violence, Millennials watched the re-emergence of the American hero. Policemen, firemen, firefighters, and mayors were pictured on the front page of the newspaper, featured on TV specials, and portrayed in art and memorabilia.*
- **Patriotism** – *During the post-Vietnam and Watergate era, patriotism was at an all-time low. Displaying the American flag, always and forever the right thing to do for members of the WWII Generation, had become less and less common—particularly among disillusioned Boomers and skeptical Xers. September 11 changed all that.*
- **Parent advocacy.** *The Millennials grew up, by and large, with active, involved parents (sometimes called helicopters) who often interceded on their behalf. Millennials actually like their parents. In the Generation 2001 survey, conducted by Lou Harris on behalf of Northwest Mutual Life Insurance, Mom and Dad were most often named when young people were asked whom they admired.*
- **Globalism** -- *With penpals in Singapore and Senegal, Millennials grew up seeing things as global, connected, and open for business 24/7.*
- **Be smart. You are special** – *They’ve been catered to since they were tiny. Think Nickelodeon, Baby Gap, and Sports Illustrated for Kids.*
- **Leave no one behind** – *They were taught to be inclusive and tolerant of other races, religions, and sexual orientations.*
- **Connect 24/7**– *They learned to be interdependent—on family, friends, and teachers. More Millennials say they can live without the television than the computer. Many prefer chatting on line to talking on the phone.*
- **Achieve now!** – *Some parents hired private agents to line up the right college; others got started choosing the right pre-school while the child was still in the womb.*
- **Serve your community.** *Fifty percent of high school students reported volunteering in their communities, many of their high schools requiring community service hours for graduation. On one Roper Survey, when Millennials were asked for the major cause of problems in the U.S., they answered “selfishness.”*

Millennial Characteristics

Here are the main components of their work ethic (which may impact their school work), according to Raines:

- **Confidence** – *Raised by parents believing in the importance of self-esteem, they characteristically consider themselves ready to overcome challenges and*

leap tall buildings. Managers who believe in “paying your dues” and coworkers who don’t think opinions are worth listening to unless they come from someone with a prerequisite number of years on the resume find this can-do attitude unsettling.

- **Hopefulness** *They’re described as optimistic yet practical. They believe in the future and their role in it. They’ve read about businesses with basketball courts, stockrooms stocked with beer for employers, and companies that pay your way through school. They expect a workplace that is challenging, collaborative, creative, fun, and financially rewarding.*
- **Goal- and achievement-orientation** – *Just a day after she won a totally unexpected Olympic gold medal, skater Sara Hughes was talking about her next goal—scoring a perfect 1600 on her SATs. Many Millennials arrive at their first day of work with personal goals on paper. This may apply equally to school.*
- **Civic-mindedness** – *They were taught to think in terms of the greater good. They have a high rate of volunteerism. They expect companies to contribute to their communities—and to operate in ways that create a sustainable environment. Qualitative research at the University of Connecticut produced similar findings with regard to students’ expectation that the university should be “green” and isn’t green enough.*
- **Inclusiveness.** *Millennials are used to being organized in teams—and to making certain no one is left behind. They expect to earn a living in a workplace that is fair to all, where diversity is the norm—and they’ll use their collective power if they feel someone is treated unfairly.*

COMPARING BACK-TO-BACK GENERATIONS

From The Learning Café and American Demographics enterprising museum 2003

	Generation X’s	Millennials	
	Mentoring Do’s	Mentoring Do’s	
	Casual, friendly work environment	Structured, supportive work environment	
	Born 1965-1976	Born 1977-1998	
	51 million	(some argue 1980 - 2000)	
	Involvement	Personalized work	
	Flexibility and freedom	75 million	
	Accept diversity	Interactive relationship	
	A place to learn	Be prepared for demands,	
	Pragmatic/practical	high	
Web Sites:	Self-reliant/individualistic	Optimistic/realistic	
	Reject rules	High	
	Killer life	expectations	
	Mistrust institutions	inventive/individualistic	Read more of
	PC	Rewrite the rules	
	Use technology	Killer lifestyle	
	Multitask	Irrelevance of institutions	
	Latch-key kids	Internet	
	Friend-not family	Assume technology	
		Multitask fast	
		Nurtured	
		Friends = family	

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Claire Raines’ thoughts and advice on the Millennial Generation.

<http://www.abanet.org/lpm/lpt/articles/mgt08044.html>

Site of the American Bar Association. Read more of Diane Thielfoldt and Devon Scheef’s thoughts and advice on the Millennial Generation. This duo co-founded The Learning Café.

<http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2008/02/is-religion-los.html>

Blog site at *USA Today* where Stephen Prothero, chair of Boston University's Department of Religion and the author of *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know — And Doesn't*, shares what Millennials think about religion.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/11/08/60minutes/main3475200.shtml>

Visit this site at CBS News to see Morley Safer’s *60 Minutes* report on the Millennials.

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