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Those Crazy Millennials!: Some Thoughts on the Vast Majority of our Students, or, Why Did the Millennial Cross the Road?

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Those Crazy Millennials!: Some Thoughts on the Vast Majority of our Students, or, Why Did the Millennial Cross the Road?

I was driving across back campus a few weeks ago. A young woman entered the crosswalk, so I stopped. She was wearing earphones, crouched over her phone, her thumbs busy texting. She never looked up, never looked left or right, but just kept walking, slowly, through the crosswalk. Those crazy millennials!

I mentioned this incident in my 20th Century American Novels class. My students, all but three of them ourselves millennials, did not react the way I expected, with a knowing laugh, but with this statement, from several of them: “She wanted to get hit!” Astonished, I asked, “What?” “She wanted to get hit,” one student repeated. “If you get hit by a car on campus, the university will pay your tuition for the rest of your time here.” Many students nodded, and several said they had heard the same thing. And, smart though they are, they seemed to believe it.

Those crazy millennials!

Demographically, millennials are those born 1982 and after, into the early 2000s. (They were originally called “Generation Y,” but “millennial” has replaced that term. Good thing—we were about to run out of alphabet!) Our traditional-aged students were born between 1994 and 1998. And we know all about what they are like, right?

They are tuned out and turned inward, obsessed with their phones, addicted to texting, gaming, tattoos, piercings, and Red Bull. They don’t care about politics, they don’t know nothing about history, they have attention spans shorter than Matt Lauer’s hair, they are not as academically oriented as their Generation X predecessors, and they certainly can’t hold a candle to those of us who are called Baby Boomers.

Ah, the good old Baby Boomers! What did the wise older folks say about us?

They’re ungrateful wretches who don’t realize just how good they have it! They’re hedonists who only care about sex, drugs, rock and roll. They need to grow up and face reality. They don’t have the persistence and dedication our generation had. Their music is just screaming! They are naïve optimists who mistakenly think they can change the world. And dadgum it, cut your hair!

[I have now finished channeling Jake Bird, rest my father’s soul.]

A few facts about millennials: the average millennial carries $45,000 in debt. Their unemployment rate is 16.3%. Half of them don’t believe Social Security will exist when it comes time for them to retire. 48% of employed millennials who are college graduates work in jobs that don’t require a college degree. 63% of them know someone who had to move back home because of the economy. 40% of millennials say their stress has increased since last
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year.

But also this: 80% of millennials have donated money, goods, or services. 75% see themselves as authentic and are not willing to compromise their family and personal values. 61% are worried about the state of the world and feel personally responsible to make a difference. They are on track to become the most educated generation in American history.

They make up 36% of the workplace, and by 2025, they will make up 75% of the global workplace. 41% do what their managers tell them to do, which is higher than previous generations. 84% say that helping to make a positive difference in the world is more important than professional recognition. 92% believe that business success should be measured by more than profit. Millennials say they do not deserve special treatment and are equally as committed as non-millennials.

I have been teaching for nearly 40 years, since 1977. I have seen many changes in students and many changes in the world. I have shared my despair with colleagues about declining standards and skills and commitment among students—but I was already doing that 35 years ago. I am nearing the end of my time as a teacher, and despite my occasional pessimism about “these kids today,” I remain at my core just as optimistic about teaching and learning. The kids are all right!

But this idea that they want to get hit by a car—oh my! Those crazy millennials!

A few more websites with good information and comments about millennials:

From NPR, “Amid All the Stereotypes, Some Facts About Millennials” http://tinyurl.com/og3lhva


From The Huffington Post, “Stop Stereotyping Millennials” http://tinyurl.com/hllj7dp

From NPR’s “Here and Now,” “The Average Millennial is Nothing Like the Stereotype” http://tinyurl.com/govf78m

I must admit that on first glance, my millennial students do seem to be tuned out and turned inward. When I walk into class a few minutes early, the majority of them are wearing earphones, staring down at their phones, thumbs flying in that amazing way they have. Only rarely do I walk in to find them engaged in conversation with each other. And as soon as class is over, the earphones get plugged in, and they file out, silent zombies in their own little cocoons.

But once class starts, if I am engaging and if what we are reading is engaging, they get just as engaged as the generations of students that preceded them. They often astonish me with their insights, their passion, their knowledge, their skill.

[Taken from “74 of the Most Interesting Facts About Millennials”-- http://tinyurl.com/knmxys8]
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To offer this programming, the TLC depends on the talent, expertise, and generosity of our faculty and staff. We do not have a big budget to bring in outside speakers and experts. Even so, we are able to offer engaging, timely, and valuable sessions every year on a variety of topics. We thank those who have offered their time and talent in past years.

If you have a request for a session you would like to see, please email me and I will try to arrange it. And if you have a session you would like to present, please email me. We will set something up as soon as we can!

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Thought For the Week

“Consider well the proportion of things. It is better to be a young June-bug than an old bird of paradise.”

--Mark Twain