

Information Technology

<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v53/i18/18b01001.htm>

From the issue dated January 5, 2007

How the New Generation of Well-Wired Multitaskers Is Changing Campus Culture

They're the Net generation — kids with wires running through their veins, kids who grew up on video games and the Web. They're on your campus now, and the contention is that they are different from previous generations of students. Should they be treated differently? Educated differently? Those and other questions were discussed at an interactive session at *The Chronicle's* Technology Forum.

Richard T. Sweeney, university librarian at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (and the father of two Millennials as well as four other children), served as moderator. He drew upon his own research to provide a portrait of the Millennials, then brought in a dozen authentic specimens — local students from Nevada State College and the University of Nevada at Las Vegas — for a live exchange. Picture a fast-talking host on daytime television, minus the teary reunions and Oprah-style giveaways, and you've got the idea.

Mr. Sweeney argues that Millennials, who were born between roughly 1980 and 1994, have grown up with more choices and more selectivity in the products and services they use, which is why they do not have, for example, a generational music. "The key issue is whether or not they grew up with video games, and whether they expect that kind of interactivity," he told the audience. Whether they're using Facebook, MySpace, iPods, instant messaging, or text messaging, Millennials are plugged in.

Some other traits of Millennials: They rarely read newspapers — or, for that matter, books. They are impatient and goal oriented. They hate busywork, learn by doing, and are used to instant feedback. They want it *now*. They think it's cool to be smart. They have friends from different ethnic backgrounds. They want flexibility — in the classroom and in their lives. "To get this generation involved, you have to figure out a way to engage them and make their learning faster at the end of the day," Mr. Sweeney said. "Is it possible to do that? I think the answer is yes, but the jury is out."

The students on the panel, who did not hear Mr. Sweeney's introductory remarks, confirmed many of his findings. Mr. Sweeney opened by asking them a series of questions about their tastes and personal-technology use, such as what music they had last listened to (a variety, from British pop to Ani DiFranco to alternative Christian rock); how many friends they had on their instant-messaging lists (anywhere from a few to 200); and whether they used text messaging and YouTube (many did). He wanted to know when they had last written a real letter, what was the last book they had read, and whether they regularly read the newspaper (no, in most cases). And he wanted to know about their expectations and experiences in the classroom. Following are excerpts from the panel discussion.

Keeping in Touch

Richard T. Sweeney, Moderator: *How many close friends do you have? ... How do you keep in touch?*

John Nicpon: Close friends? Probably less than five. ... Mainly telephone, or e-mail.

Edna Gomez: Good friends, I would consider two. ... How do I communicate with them? MySpace or just a phone call or cellphone. ...

Laura May: I would have to say less than five also. ... I usually contact them by phone or at work or MySpace.

Sarah Mihelic: I have two really close friends. ... I see them every weekend ... and [contact them] through the phone and MySpace.

Deanna Rilling: I probably have about three really close friends right now. I talk to them every day either on the phone or, yes, I use MySpace. ... I think the easiest thing, though, is e-mail or MySpace because it does not matter what time it is.

Ashley Brown: I have three really close friends. ... In person, on the phone, MySpace, it does not really matter.

Mandy Akers: I have two really close friends. ... We either talk or text message.

Jennifer Wolf: I probably have about two or three. We usually phone and text message a lot.

Anthony Filippo: I would say probably about seven, eight close friends, and we contact through phone or in person. I specifically tell them, Do not text message me. I do not go in MySpace that often. ...

The Lost Art of Letter Writing

Moderator: ... *When was the last time you wrote a letter, handwritten?*

John: Probably over a month ago. ... I have a family that does not use electronic communication tools. ...

Sarah: It was probably when I was about eight or nine. It was to my grandparents just to say hi. They live pretty far.

Ashley: About five years ago. And the occasion was I had a friend in Colorado, and I do not actually think I sent out the letter, but I did write it.

Mandy: I do not remember. ...

Jennifer: It was about two weeks ago for a birthday.

Anthony: If you are talking about a long letter, I do not remember. If talking about a card like the ones you give for holidays, then I would say last holiday. ...

Velanie Williams: For me, about three years ago to my friend in Ireland.

Krystal Martinez: Maybe six or seven years ago. My cousin.

Valerie Correa: Last semester, to the head of the Millennium Scholarship office.

The Lost Art of Literature

Moderator: *When was the last time you read a book not for school? For fun, from cover to cover? ...*

Valerie: Last week I read Mitch Albom, *For One More Day*.

Krystal: I do not remember.

Velanie: It was about a month ago. It was *Cell* by Stephen King.

Anthony: Over the summer. I am almost done with *Atlas Shrugged*.

Mandy: Over the summer. I do not remember the title. ...

Ashley: Last semester I read *The Analysis of Mind* by Bertrand Russell.

Deanna: I have not read for pleasure since the semester started, but over the summer the last book I read was *House of Leaves*. ...

Sarah: I finished this book last night. It was Dean Koontz's *Hideaway*.

Laura: It was probably a month ago.

Edna: It has been so long. It is like a year ago. *When Angels Fall*.

John: This summer. I read the *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho.

Do You YouTube?

Moderator: *How many of you currently use Del.icio.us? Anybody? Flickr, YouTube? OK, YouTube. So how are you using YouTube?*

Valerie: TV shows.

Krystal: I watch cartoons.

Velanie: I watch cartoons, as well.

Anthony: A few times I use YouTube for humorous content.

Ashley: Comedians.

Deanna: I posted bootleg footage that I took at a concert that I was not supposed to take there.

Moderator: *How many of you have posted to YouTube? What did you post?*

Sarah: Just funny stuff like my friends and I singing along or like dancing in the mirror. Just random stuff that I can send it on MySpace, and they just have a laugh.

Students' Views on Distance Education

Moderator: *I'm going to ask you some questions related to higher education and your learning stuff. Has anybody here ever taken a distance-education course?*

Deanna: Currently I'm in an online class. It is language and the literary experience. ... I hate it. I do not like online classes, but it is only offered online. I would rather be in the classroom. I learn better that way. ...

Valerie: Right now I'm taking social psychology. I had to retake it because I did not get a great grade the first time.

Moderator: *All right, and how did it compare to the face to face? How did you like or dislike the distance-education course compared to face to face?*

Valerie: I do like it better because people say things in the online class that they would not normally say face to face. Yes, I think it is just more convenient instead of having to go to class every day ... like, they give you a week to do an exam as opposed to one day, or one hour. ...

Moderator: *Do you use a thing like Blackboard or WebCT?*

Valerie: It is Web-cam based.

Moderator: *Do you like that kind of software?*

Valerie: I like WebCT better.

Moderator: *So how many of you have taken e-learning, WebCT, or WebBoard or any of those kinds of things? OK, almost everybody. Do you like it?*

Deanna: We are actually required at Nevada State to log on. Most of the classes have an online portion, and we send a lot of our assignments via e-mail. I think everybody pretty much — yes, we do not bring in papers anymore.

Moderator: *OK, no papers. We are all submitting everything electronically. You get graded electronically?*

All: Yes.

Classroom Highlights

Moderator: *I would like you to be very specific and tell us about one instance, one class that was your best experience in college to date.*

Krystal: Mine was my first semester, and I took psychology with this professor. ... She was an excellent teacher, and I learned a lot, and she made it fun. ... She did in-class activities, or she would play something for us or do experiments on us to teach us. ... She had one of her students come in and yell at her to get a reaction from us. ...

Ashley: I'm actually taking a class right now — social psychology and research methods. I like it because of the professor because research methods have a tendency to be very boring. ...

Moderator: *Can you hold that one second? How many of you think that your average lecture is exciting? Show of hands. Now how many of you think your average lecture is boring? [Most students raise their hands on "boring."]*

Ashley: The research methods, again, does have a tendency to be boring, but he breaks up the monotony in his lectures; he puts little clips from YouTube. ... And they were just comical; they were just funny, and he incorporated the comedy into the lecture itself, and it just made it interesting, and I want to go to class. ...

Anthony: My math professor ... is amazing. For math class, she is the one that made me become a math minor. I took calc, going into it scared, and came out of it with great grades. She is very organized, very thorough, and she demonstrates that she cares for the students and she is willing to help the students and go at their pace. ...

Sarah: I'm taking communications right now. ... And I really like this class because it is hybrid, which

means it is half online and half in person. ... And we go once a week, and all the tests are online. ... We do not have to sit there for an hour and a half, and he has all the PowerPoints online, so he does the lectures in class, and the Power Points are online so just in case you want to go back. ...

Hybrid Courses

Moderator: *How many of you have taken a hybrid course? What did you like or not like with the hybrid experience?*

Anthony: Well, it is not that it was horrible, but I am one of those people that definitely prefer in-person classes. I find out when you take online classes there is a delay between question and answer. ...

Jennifer: My teacher was just not organized. She would say she was going to post assignments for us to do ... and the assignments were never there. So we got to class the next day. She's like, "Oh, I forgot."

Moderator: *Any other experience, any other comments on that, positive or otherwise? Some of you had positive experiences with it.*

John: I think the online classes and the hybrid is a good thing if they are organized and the teacher takes the time or the instructor takes the time to set up the course and facilitate the course. It can be a disaster, and I think we all have some bad experiences where the instructor was not familiar with the technology and that caused all sorts of delays, problems, anxiety.

Moderator: *If you have an option, would you like to have multimedia in the class?*

Sarah: In my core humanities class we watched a Charlie Chaplin short, and we read a bunch of essays about the differences between how women evolved from the 1920s to the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. And we had to take the relationships we saw on the Chaplin short and relate them to the essays that we read. I think it helped me a lot because it was fun and I learned a lot.

Laura: I actually like biology labs just because I'm a nursing major. We do dissecting and that is interesting to me.

Anthony: All the classes at NSC are smart classrooms, so we do have a lot of technology that is incorporated into the classrooms every day.

Ashley: I had a class that was all computers. ... And it was a statistics class, and she also used the overhead projector to project what she was displaying on her computer. ... I preferred it because I was able to go online and see where she was at, what she was doing. I'm more of a hands-on learner. ...

What Do Millennials Really Care About?

Question from the audience: *I'm curious to know, when you read or hear news, what gets your attention? Tell me what you are interested in.*

Edna: I'm a big football fan. So I would have to say sports.

Laura: I would probably have to say people my own age, what they are doing out there. ...

Deanna: I usually pretty much just read everything about the political climate right now and everything that is going on there.

Ashley: I do not usually read the newspaper. I used to go onto AOLToday. And I read usually

whatever they have on the fronts, whatever could indirectly or directly affect me, what is going on overseas, I guess, and anything going on along political aspects.

Anthony: I was going to say I go online. Every day I'm on the news Web sites. I'm looking at technology. ... I also look at stuff that's going to affect my health, and politics.

What Role for Libraries?

Question: *I wanted to know: How often do you go to a library, and what do you do there?*

Laura: I do not go to the library that much, but that is because I work at the front desk at Nevada State College. I get to do my homework over there at the computers. But if I want quiet time to do my homework, I do go to library. ...

Sarah: My dad is still into the whole book thing. He has not realized that the Internet kind of took the place of that. So we go to the library almost every Sunday. I actually have a library card, but I have not rented a book for a long time, but I go to our school's library a lot because they have most of the course books. ...

Deanna: As far as using library for research, I do most of my research online with online libraries, but last time I went to the library it was probably three months ago. And I usually only go there to get books for pleasure, not for school.

Ashley: I actually have several late fees on my library card right now. It is kind of deterring me away from the library. ...

Mandy: I work in the library at my school, so I'm there almost every day for like hours at a time, but I also do check out books from there and do research there.

Jazzing Up Lectures

Question: *Are you comfortable with a lecture style that is just a guy speaking to you, or do you think that colleges should add more flair or more pizzazz to lectures through video and PowerPoint, electronic stuff, and so on?*

Laura: Well, with the professor just lecturing to you it can get boring, so I think they need to. If they do not already have flair, they need to just add a little more instead of just lecturing notes.

Deanna: I agree with her 100 percent. When there is a teacher lecturing to you in the front of the room, it is really boring. You do not get involved, and you tend to kind of zone out the whole time. I need more bells and whistles to keep my attention.

Anthony: I think what they really should look at is how businesses are doing business because the student could say they want to learn a certain way, but if business is not working like that, they might not be prepared to actually go into the work force. So I think you definitely need to look at what the corporate world is doing and try to match with them in some ways.

Going Out Into the Real World

Question: *How many of you think that when you get out into the work world and you are reaching your sort of earning potential, how many of you think you are going to make more money than your parents did? And do you think you will work as hard as they do?*

John: I definitely think we are going to be working more than our parents simply because of the integration of technology and the tools that we are required to learn and use in everyday business. ...

Technology being there is going to force us to be more productive, so in an eight-hour day we are expected to do four, five, six times as much.

Question: *But the tool that was supposed to get rid of work makes work.*

John: Of course. That's the catch.

<http://chronicle.com>

Section: Information Technology

Volume 53, Issue 18, Page B10

[Copyright](#) © 2006 by [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)

[Subscribe](#) | [About The Chronicle](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Terms of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Help](#)