**Some “Food For Thought” on Millenial Learners**

This is a chapter from Matt Bors’ book “Life Begins At Incorporation”

http://www.mattbors.com/



Maligned as a bunch of shiftless, tech-addled children raised to think they’d all get trophies, Millennials are trying to build careers out of the ruins of a job market. Amid a group that’s supposed to be a bunch of entitled kids, all I see around me are young people juggling multiple jobs and unpaid internships while trying to blot their (trigger warning!) student debt from their minds.

**Why Don't My Students Think I'm Groovy?: The New "R"s for Engaging Millennial Learners**

**Christy Price, Dalton State College**

**The Millennials' Ideal Professor**

Most astonishing of all the findings of my study on Millennial learners were their perceptions regarding the ideal professor. The Top Five List below summarizes respondents' views. Millennials feel that the ideal professor should be:

1. "Energetic," "enthusiastic," and "upbeat" with a "positive attitude." I know upon reading the student quotes above, some of you may suddenly feel nauseous. Or perhaps, like me, the very thought of students desiring me to be "upbeat" drains my energy. The audacity of it all!!!

2. "Open-minded" and "flexible." Unfortunately, students are not using the term "flexible" in the physical "Pilates" sense, as they desire flexibility in assignments, course policy, and our interactions with them.

3. Alert as to whether students understand.

4. "Nice," "friendly," "caring," and "helpful."

If all this is not disturbing enough, the number one characteristic of the Millennials' ideal professor is:

5. "Approachable" and "easy to talk to."

It is hard to believe that what these students basically want is for us to be decent individuals who are responsive to them! As the sarcasm begins to drip from the page, it is important to note that I did ask for Millennials'views of the ideal professor. We should at least give them credit for not expecting us all to have chili peppers at ratemyprofessor.com. Upon further analysis of their responses, what is most intriguing is not what is on their list, but perhaps what is missing. In other words, they seem to care more about who we are and how we interact with them, than they care about what we know. What is painfully obvious is Millennial learners' responses suggest they highly value positive interactions with their professors.

**The Millennials' Ideal Learning Environment**

The next Top Five List below summarizes Millennials' perceptions regarding their ideal learning environment. Millennials felt the ideal learning environment was one in which:

1. "Students know one another" and "work together in groups." This is consistent with Millennials' team orientation, interdependence, and desire for connection.

2. Learning is "relaxed," "enjoyable," and that awful "F" word we dread hearing... "fun" 5 Millennial Traits and Teaching

3. A multimedia format is utilized, including podcasts, on-line activities, video, PowerPoint, etc.

4. "Real examples" that are "relevant" to their culture are used.

The number one characteristic Millennial respondents desired in an ideal learning environment was that it be:

5. "Interactive" and "participatory."

Interestingly, the most consistent theme present in the analysis of the Millennial responses was they preferred a variety of teaching methods as opposed to a "lecture only" format. It is important to note that these Millennial students did not attack the lecture method altogether, but they had strongly negative perceptions of learning environments in which lecture was the only method used. According to one Millennial respondent, "If you lecture all throughout the time then we get bored. If you are constantly changing from lecture, to discussion, to group work, that helps a lot. It helps keep us awake and we learn more. Stuff gets into our head better."

**Excerpts from: "Teaching, Learning and Millennial Students" (2004) by Maureen E. Wilson:**

1. Student-Faculty Contact: Millennials who have had sheltered lives and have involved parents need to learn how to take responsibility for their own learning, how to relate to authority figures and how to advocate for themselves. Quality student-faculty contact can enhance students' motivation and enthusiasm for their own educational experience.
2. Reciprocity and Cooperation: Millennial students have grown up working in groups and playing on teams. Since working with others can strengthen the learning environment for all students, Millennials are more likely to collaboratively work with their peers to enhance their own learning.
3. Active Learning: Active and engaged learning is another aspect of optimal student learning. Using active learning strategies such as discussions, reflection activities, group projects and cooperative problem-solving can deepen students' understanding of course material and ability to apply new ideas. Since Millennials have a team-orientation, they ought to greatly benefit from active learning opportunities.
4. Feedback: Most research on improving student learning emphasizes the need for prompt, frequent and constructive feedback from faculty to students. This type of feedback can help Millennial students to more effectively understand their strengths and weaknesses and lessen the pressure to achieve.
5. Time on Task: Students must devote adequate time and effort to their academic endeavors in order to enhance the quality of their learning. Although Millennial students are confident and achieving, they may underestimate the time that is necessary for academic success. Faculty can help their Millennial students to learn how to better manage their time and efforts in order for them to achieve their academic goals.
6. High Expectations: When faculty set high expectations for their students' learning, students will strive to meet these expectations that lead to enhanced learning. Faculty can help Millennial students by teaching them to think more critically and with more complexity, instead of just "teaching for the test."
7. Diverse Talents and Ways of Knowing: Students' learning styles differ, which requires effective faculty to use a variety of teaching strategies. Millennials' achievement orientation will be challenged by any type of failure. By helping Millennial students to use different types of learning strategies in different situations, faculty are helping these students to be critical thinkers and adaptive learners.

It is critical to note that general group characteristics of Millennial students cannot accurately describe individual students. It is the broad understanding of the issues faced by Millennial students that can help faculty to create active, effective and engaging learning environments for his/her students.