# *Running with Perseverance: The Theological Library's Challenge of Keeping Pace With Changing Students*

*by Nancy K. Falciani-White*

**ABSTRACT:** In the last thirty years, the study habits and learning styles of students have changed, influenced by factors as diverse as how they were parented, pop culture, and the influx of technology into their lives. Students studying theology in seminaries and universities across the United States have likewise changed dramatically. Their ages, ethnicity, gender, technological ability, and goals are all different from those of previous generations, and so are their expectations for their education and their library. This paper will examine the characteristics of those students considered to be part of the "Millennial" generation, examine how these characteristics apply to students of theology, and explore the impact that these characteristics are having, and will continue to have, on theological libraries.

## INTRODUCTION

A significant amount of research has been done in recent years on the characteristics of the current generation of college and graduate school students, known as "Millennials." These students make up the majority of students attending colleges and universities today, either completing their undergraduate degrees or in their first years of graduate school. Much of this research has been carried out on undergraduate students, since Millennials have only recently begun entering graduate schools and seminaries. Additionally, little research has been done that examines the theological education of this population, again largely because of Millennials' having only recently entered seminaries and graduate schools. Because of these issues, the present essay will examine the characteristics of Millennial students broadly[1], and will then move on to examine those characteristics as they apply to graduate students, seminarians, and theological libraries specifically.

## THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

Millennials, also called the "Next Gens," "Generation Y," or the "Net Generation," are those individuals who were born between 1982 and 2002. These students have lived through the first Gulf War, the expansive growth of technologies in the lives of individuals (almost everyone now has a personal computer, internet access, a cell phone, and many have iPods and other "non-essential" technologies), the rise and subsequent failure of many dot-com companies, the September 11 attacks, the war on terrorism, and so on.

Millennial students share experiences, high levels of dependence on technology, and extensive connectedness. These characteristics, combined with a culture that has been accused of encouraging narcissistic indulgence and high levels of parental involvement (known as "helicopter parents"—parents who "hover" over their children and are more involved in their lives than parents of other generations[2]), have created a generation of learners significantly different from the generations that have gone before. Millennials are approaching higher education with more

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[1] For example, although too recent (Oct. 2008) to be incorporated into this essay, Don Tapscott's *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World.* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008) examines this population as they become adults and take their place in the workforce and society at large.

[2] Reynal Junco, Jeanna Mastrodicasa, and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (U.S.), *Connecting to the Net. Generation : What Higher Education Professionals Need to Know about Today's Students* (Washington, DC: NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2007), 94.

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advanced technological skills than any previous generation, and they have higher technological expectations for their colleges and universities, their professors, and their advisors. They likewise expect their learning to take place as it has throughout their education to date—collaboratively, and with some reliance on technology. Many of the things that these students care about and have taught themselves have been learned online, often independent of a traditional teacher figure. Millennials are accustomed to entertainment, to speed, and to having things their own way.

This population has developed a unique series of learning characteristics, ten of which have been identified by Jason Frand in his article "The Information-Age Mindset."[3] Although these characteristics were identified eight years ago, the findings of more recent research (such as that done by Junco and Mastrodicasa) are similar.

- *Computers do not equal technology.* "Technology" has been described as "anything that wasn't around when you were born." For anyone born after the 1930s, automobiles are not technology. Similarly, Millennials simply cannot conceive of a world that operates without computers.
- *The Internet is better than TV.* The internet has become more engaging for students as it has become more interactive and more social. Social applications such as Facebook, MySpace, Del.icio.us and Twitter have been adopted by Millennials as convenient ways to keep in touch, network, and develop new relationships and friendships, and 62% of Millennial students use instant messaging to chat with their friends.[4]
- *"Reality" is no longer real.* What you see is no longer what you get. Photographs and video can be manipulated to the point where they bear no resemblance to real life, and users can create email addresses under any name. Authentication (logging in to a system with a personal username and password that "proves" a user's identity) is becoming increasingly important for online security and safety.
- *Doing is more important than knowing.* The half-life of information is shortening as prevalent technologies increase the rate at which things change. Being able to accomplish goals and efficiently do what needs to be done is more important than knowing an accumulation of procedures and facts.
- *Learning more closely resembles Nintendo.* In the world of Nintendo (video games), learning how to play the game, progressing through levels, and ultimately winning the game, are accomplished through trial and error, failing, and starting over. Each mistake teaches the user a little more about the system and how the game should be played. This heuristic learning style suggests that students will not read manuals or menus before beginning a project or trying a new program, but rather will jump in and do what they need to do, seeking help only if they cannot figure it out on their own.
- *Multitasking is a way of life.* A survey by Junco and Mastrodicasa found that 91.9% of individuals who use instant messaging (IM) software will do something else on the computer simultaneously, while 75% of IM users will chat with friends while they are doing homework.[5] These individuals are comfortable doing many things at once, though multitasking may be a way of dealing with the overload of information and expectations that many students today face.
- *Typing is preferred to handwriting.* Students prefer typing a note or comment to writing one by hand, due to the features of Word Processing (such as spell check) and the ease with which electronic text can be manipulated.

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[3] Jason L. Frand, "The Information-Age Mindset: Changes in Students and Implications for Higher Education," *EDUCAUSE Review* 35 (2000): 15-24.

[4] Junco, Mastrodicasa and Administrators, 18.

[5] Ibid., 74.

- *Staying connected is essential.* Students expect to be connected all the time, and no longer expect to have to study, do homework, or contact professors within the traditional bounds of time or location. The success of sites like Twitter.com suggests that the more details students have about one another (and their professors!) the happier they are.
- *There is zero tolerance for delays.* Millennial students have been raised to expect instant gratification. ATMs, email, 1-800 numbers, have all trained them that it is reasonable to expect a result or answer immediately.
- *Distinctions between consumer and creator are blurring.* The abilities to cut and paste, hyperlink documents to other sources, and share editing and documentation are causing the lines separating owner, creator, and user to become more and more indistinct.

Abram and Luther add a few more characteristics: Students are *nomadic*, expecting "information and entertainment to be available to them whenever they need it and wherever they are," and *direct,* demanding respect and seeing no reason to beg for good service.[6] In addition, Fidel, et al., found that Millennial high school students make extensive use of graphics and visual clues when they evaluate web pages.[7]

Beyond these characteristics, however, are the social and personality tendencies that these students demonstrate. Junco and Mastrodicasa provide a helpful table that facilitates an understanding of the distinct personality characteristics that collectively impact how Millennials interact with each other and their environment [See Table 1].

## TABLE 1[8]

|  | Silent Generation<br>Born between<br>1925-1942 | Boomers<br>Born between<br>1943-1960 | Generation X<br>Born between<br>1961-1981 | Net Generation<br>Born Between<br>1982-Now |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Peer Personality** | Loyal<br>Collaborative<br>Personal sacrifice<br>Patriotic<br>Conformity<br>Respect for authority<br>Civic Pride | Optimistic<br>Competitive<br>Individualistic<br>Reject authority<br>Return to religious values | Independent<br>Skeptical<br>Latchkey kids<br>Shun traditional values<br>Nihilism | Special<br>Sheltered<br>Confident<br>Conventional<br>Team-oriented<br>Achieving<br>Pressured |
| **Defining Events** | WWI & II<br>Great Depression<br>New Deal | Vietnam War<br>Watergate<br>Women's Rights<br>Reagan recession<br>Civil Rights Movement<br>Television | Challenger accident<br>MTV<br>Computers<br>Video games<br>Persian Gulf War | Columbine shootings<br>September 11 attacks<br>Oklahoma City bombing |
| **Attended College** | 1943-1960 | 1961-1978 | 1979-1999 | 2000-Now |

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6  Stephen Abram and Judy Luther, "Born with the Chip: The Next Generation Will Profoundly Impact Both Library Service and the Culture Within the Profession," *Library Journal* 129 (2004): 34-7.

7  Raya Fidel, et al., "A Visit to the Information Mall: Web Searching Behavior of High School Students," *Journal of the American Society of Information Science* 50, no. 1 (January 1999): 24–37.

8  Junco, Mastrodicasa and Administrators*,* 4.

This table also provides a snapshot of earlier generations. There are some notable similarities between the "Silent Generation," born 1925-1942, and Millennials, for example their team-oriented, collaborative natures and their more traditional, conventional values. These characteristics are in stark contrast to Baby Boomer and Generation X individuals who value individualism, independence, competition, and a move away from traditionalism.

In addition to these similarities among personalities and experiences, another factor that defines Millennials is that more and more of them are attending college as nontraditional students. A nontraditional student is defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as a student who meets one or more of the following criteria:

- Delays enrollment (does not enter post-secondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school)
- Attends part time for at least part of the academic year
- Works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled
- Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining financial aid
- Has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others)
- Is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents)
- Does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school)[9]

The *Condition of Education 2002* report found that in the 1999-2000 academic year, only 27 percent of undergraduate students were considered traditional, while a substantial 73 percent of undergraduates met at least one of the criteria above. Based on the number of the above characteristics that could be applied to them, students are considered Minimally (1 characteristic), Moderately (2-3 characteristics), or Highly (4+ characteristics) nontraditional. In 1999-2000, 17 percent were considered minimally nontraditional, 28 percent were considered moderately nontraditional, and another 28 percent were considered highly nontraditional. Many of these criteria, such as working full time or being a single parent, suggest that for students categorized as nontraditional, education is likely not the primary demand on their attention, time, and resources. Unfortunately, the only nontraditional student characteristic that is measured annually is student age: according to the 2007 *Digest of Education Statistics,* nontraditional students are those who are 25 years of age or older. These statistics show that the percentage of students aged 25-34 years of age who are enrolled in school has been increasing steadily, in 2006 accounting for 18.9% of the population.[10] Although it is difficult to predict with certainty, based on the existing data a continued increase in the number of nontraditional students seems likely.

Both the NCES data and the Peer Personality characteristics proposed by Junco and Mastrodicasa support Frand's suggestion that Millennial students have little patience for delays, consider multi-tasking to be a way of life, and believe that successfully completing a task or reaching a goal is more important than knowing a collection of facts. Students today are under a great deal of pressure, both from themselves and from their Generation X/Baby Boomer parents. There is pressure for them to succeed, and pressure to change the world, or at the very least have a positive impact on the world.

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[9]  National Center for Education Statistics and Barbara Kridl, *The Condition of Education 2002* (Lanham, Md; Washington, D.C: Bernan; U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Education Statistics, 2002), 26.

[10] Sally Dillow, Charlene Hoffman, and Thomas D Snyder, 2008. *Digest of Education Statistics 2007*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, Table 7.

These students are different from earlier generations in how they communicate, how they process information, how they spend their time, how they value their time, and how much they want to accomplish with their lives. Many, if not all of these characteristics can be attributed to the role that various technologies have had in their lives, but regardless of what caused the shifts, there can be little doubt that these differences must impact the way that Millennials learn. Confronted with such distinct learning characteristics, it becomes obvious that instruction methods and other services tailored to previous generations will likely not meet the needs of Millennials.

## MILLENNIALS AND LIBRARY USE

How have these developments in students' learning and social behaviors affected libraries? In 2005, OCLC conducted a survey that examined college students' perceptions of libraries and information resources. Six countries participated in the survey, and the 396 students surveyed comprised both undergraduate and graduate students. This report serves as confirmation of the above student characteristics, finding that similar characteristics revealed themselves in current students' use of libraries: "[t]hree major trends were identified…[s]elf-service, satisfaction, and seamlessness."[11] Students like to do things for themselves (Nintendo-style learning), they want what they want when (and where) they want it (nomadic), and they want it quickly and easily, with relatively little inconvenience (zero tolerance for delays). The inconvenience factor is a significant one: the tools that students use fit their lives and their expectations, and resources that do not fit simply will not be used. OCLC found that 94 percent of college students consider search engines (e.g. Google, Ask.com) to be a good or perfect fit for their lifestyle, while only 63 percent consider online or physical libraries to be a good or perfect fit [See Table 2].

## TABLE 2[12]
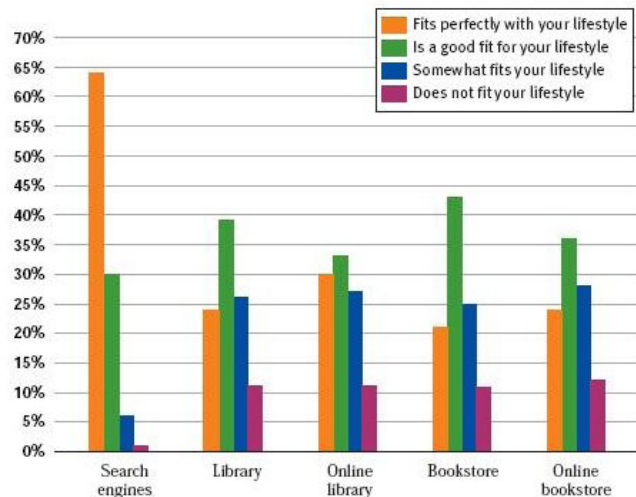


Source: *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, OCLC, 2005, question 1345.

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[11] OCLC. *College Students' Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Online Computer Library Center, 2006)*,* vii.

[12] OCLC*,* 3-20.

What makes "lifestyle fit" so important? The most significant reason is the increase in the number of nontraditional students entering higher education. As time becomes more valuable due to a part- or full-time job, children, or other stressors, the importance of convenience increases. If students can access sufficient information without having to leave their places of residence and without needing to call the library, it is logical that they would do so. In addition to being a good lifestyle fit, OCLC found that 89 percent of students begin their search for information with a search engine such as Google.[13]

Students in this category simply do not have very much time to devote to the accumulation of research materials or an analysis of the research process. They sincerely feel that they do not have the time to travel to a physical location to pick up a book or photocopy a journal article, and that they do not have the time to learn how to use research databases or the online library catalog.

A few factors contribute to this ease-of-use mentality. First is the comfort level that students have with Google. They use it to get driving directions, to find out what movies are playing, and to research job prospects. Having had success in finding general information via Google, it is only logical that the next time they have an information need that is more academic, they will return to this familiar interface. Many students are not as successful at locating information using the research databases to which libraries subscribe. This does not mean that these students are poor researchers or poor students – this phenomenon is simply human nature, and is well-known among librarians, psychologists, educators and others as the "Principle of Least Effort." Interestingly, however, this dependence on the internet and Millennials' high comfort level with technology can foster a false sense of ability. In reality, most students routinely overestimate their skills at finding and evaluating online information.[14]

Research has become messier. Access to information used to be significantly more limited, in that someone interested in performing research had to travel to where the sources were located. There was an expectation that research involved sustained attention and effort, not just in constructing an argument and writing a paper, but also in accumulating resources. The internet and web search engines have accustomed students to finding information quickly, and they now have the assumption that research (the process of meeting an information need) should be easy, just like getting driving directions. In addition, the advent of the internet and hypertext has combined to make the search process, never a precise or particularly linear procedure, even more meandering and interactive than it was before.[15]

This means that students are confronted by a tremendous amount of information in which they can easily become lost, as they link from a website to an article to another website to a blog. Unless they are taught how to evaluate the materials they find, they are no better off than they would be just searching Google. To a student who has had no formal evaluative training, there is no obvious distinction between a JSTOR article that they found through Google Scholar and a general website, and many would consider a popular blog to be a credible source of information.

Although the OCLC report referred to earlier shows that students rely heavily on search engines for their information needs, the report also indicates that many students have a positive opinion of libraries and librarians, and use both when the opportunity presents itself. The report shows that 85 percent of college students rate their perceptions

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[13] OCLC, 1-7.

[14] Kate Manuel, "Teaching Information Literacy to Generation Y," in *Information Literacy Programs: Successes and Challenges,* ed. Patricia Durisin (New York: Haworth Information Press. 2002),198.

[15] Sonia Bodi, "How Do We Bridge the Gap Between What We Teach and What They Do? Some Thoughts on the Place of Questions in the Process of Research," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 28 (2002): 109-114.

of a physical library as "very favorable," while 66 percent say they have a "somewhat favorable" perception of online libraries.[16] In addition, 46 percent of college students have sought help when using the library's electronic resources, and of this 46 percent, 76 percent say that a live, in-person librarian is their first choice for help in the library, compared to 18 percent who prefer a computer in the library, 3 percent who prefer to look to the library's collection for help, 1 percent who ask another person in the library, and just 2 percent who use online librarian question services.[17] The implications of these numbers for libraries will be discussed in more detail later, but a cursory comparison of this data with the characteristics mentioned earlier in this paper suggests an interesting trend. It seems that while students are adept at online communication, they are not averse to interpersonal (face-to-face) interactions. The percentage of students who have asked for assistance with a library's electronic resources suggests that Millennial students are not as resistant to asking for help as the independent, individualistic, anti-authority Baby Boomer and Generation X students traditionally were. This knowledge, supported by information suggesting the prevalence of "helicopter parents" in the lives of these students and their team-oriented, social tendencies, suggests that perhaps students are more interested in interpersonal interactions than the many hours they spend online would suggest—especially those interactions involving an authority figure, which a librarian would be in the library context.

In addition to seeking help, significant numbers of students are taking advantage of the library's online resources as well. Of students surveyed by OCLC, 56 percent were found to use the library website on at least a monthly basis, while 47 percent use the online library catalog and 42 percent use online databases within that same timeframe.[18] Millennial students use the library to find information, at least some of the time, but they are encountering a barrier in that the library (either physical or online) simply is not fitting their lifestyle. They either do not know how to use the resources and do not ask for help, or they rely on their familiarity with search engines. But this is not an anti-library attitude *per se*, a fact that will be discussed in more detail later.

## STUDENTS OF THEOLOGY

An examination of current trends in the enrollment characteristics of students of theology shows that Millennial students are entering seminaries in ever-increasing numbers. Thirty or fifty years ago, the average seminarian was a white male coming directly from an undergraduate degree program.[19] The demographics of the theology student population have since undergone a shift that has seen an increase in the age, ethnic diversity, and percentage of women in seminaries around the country. The average age of seminary students has crept up steadily, peaking at slightly over thirty-six, and is now decreasing slowly due to active recruitment of younger students by theological schools over the last decade [See Table 3].
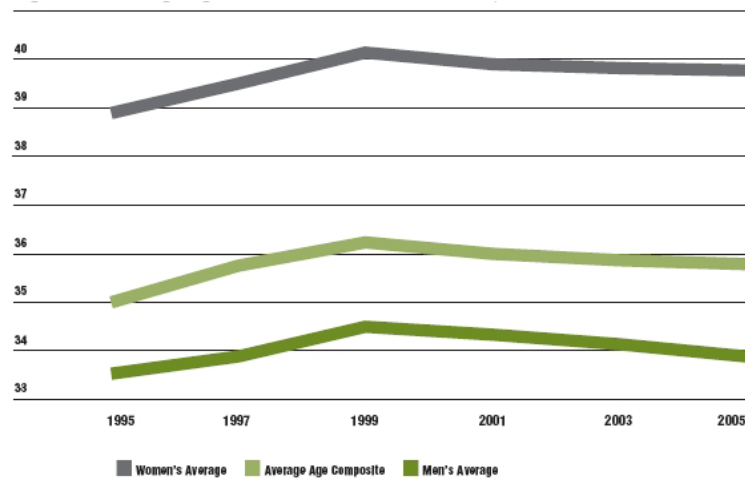
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[16] OCLC, 1-10.

[17] OCLC, 2-6, 2-7.

[18] OCLC, 2-5.

[19] Barbara G. Wheeler, "Is there a Problem? Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future," *Auburn Studies* 8 (July 2001): 1-28.

TABLE 3[20]



**Average Age of M.Div. Students by Gender, 1995-2005**

Younger students have an advantage over their older peers in that they are more likely to have taken undergraduate classes or programs that prepare them for graduate work in theology.[21] This is significant because these students may have greater familiarity with many of the research techniques, databases, and technologies that they will need for their graduate work, as well as basic writing skills that will be needed. In addition, many of these students will be approaching their graduate education with a foundational knowledge of Biblical Greek and Hebrew, which may make them less dependent on outside resources. Younger students (those under 30) have also been found to bring more academic strengths to their graduate work than do their older counterparts. They have better performance records, both academically and non-academically, have higher grade point averages, and have received more academic and non-academic honors.[22]

Older students, by contrast, often have more life experience, are more settled, and are often more disciplined. These students have been out of college for an average of ten years, are not as familiar with the ways in which research has changed in the last decade, consider computers to be technology that must be adopted, learned, or *dealt* with (rather than seeing them as ubiquitous, as most Millennials do), are less adept at using computers and other technologies, and have often forgotten many of the research and writing skills that they learned as undergraduate students. In general, the older students entering theological studies are not prepared for the fact that higher education and libraries today bear little or no resemblance to the higher education and libraries that they used during their undergraduate education.

The sharp contrast between older and younger theology students will likely balance out as more and more Millennials enter graduate school, because the increased number of nontraditional undergraduate students as defined by the NCES will result in graduate students who, though younger, will have already had to juggle the responsibilities of jobs and dependents in addition to their academic pursuits. This means that students' expectations that their education will "fit into" their lifestyle will likely carry through to graduate school.

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[20] Barbara G. Wheeler, Sharon L. Miller, and Daniel O. Aleshire, "How Are We Doing?: The Effectiveness of Theological Schools As Measured By The Vocations and Views of Graduates," *Auburn Studies* 13 (2007): 14.

[21] Chris Meinzer and Nancy Merrill, eds., *Fact Book on Theological Education, 2002-2003* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2003): 17.

[22] Wheeler, 16.

The amalgamation of age and experience that occurs in theological schools makes interactions with these students challenging, because as a population their needs can vary widely. A 2005 study of the information-seeking behaviors of graduate students in the humanities found that although many of their research behaviors are similar to those of faculty and undergraduates, they exhibit some characteristics that are unique to the graduate school environment.

Graduate students' research behaviors are similar to those of faculty in that they:

- Rely on subject experts and colleagues for feedback and suggestions;
- Are predominantly interested in primary sources and will travel to obtain them;
- Are comfortable with a "detective"-like approach to information seeking; and
- Often initiate research in haphazard, serendipitous ways.

They are similar to undergraduates because they:

- Regularly use electronic information technology and often utilize generic Internet search engines to find general information on a topic;
- Rely heavily on the advice and guidance of instructors and on course materials; and
- Lack personal collections and substantial subject experience.

Graduate students are distinctive in their research habits in that they:

- Rely heavily on research supervisors; and
- Deal with time pressures related to the progress of their program of study.[23]

These behaviors correspond to those exhibited by Millennials: these graduate students are working collaboratively to give and receive feedback and ideas and they depend on technology in the form of search engines and other tools to find information on their topics. These habits, combined with their expectations that their education must fit their lifestyle, suggests some clear steps that can be taken to ensure that their needs will be met.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL LIBRARIES

The Millennial generation will have an impact on theological libraries, as it will likely have an impact on any environment with which it interacts. One of the easiest trends to analyze is simply the raw numbers: the Millennial generation is the largest generation in United States history. If the average age of theology students continues to decrease, theological schools and their libraries will be facing a large population of Millennial students in the next several years.

If seminary libraries want to remain relevant to Millennial students, while continuing to meet the needs of their older populations, it becomes necessary for them to realize the demands that are being placed on these students, and to begin to pay attention to things like off-campus access to research databases and online journals, point-of-need instructions and help features, and efficient assistance from librarians and other library staff. This is not to suggest that physical libraries will cease to exist because all the services and resources that they provide have gone online, but that the challenge is one of maintaining relevance in a fast-paced, interactive, and dynamic world. Students' demographics are changing, and every year the ranks will swell with more and more Millennials whose

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[23] Andy Barrett, "The Information-Seeking Habits of Graduate Student Researchers in the Humanities," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 31, no. 4 (2005): 329-330.
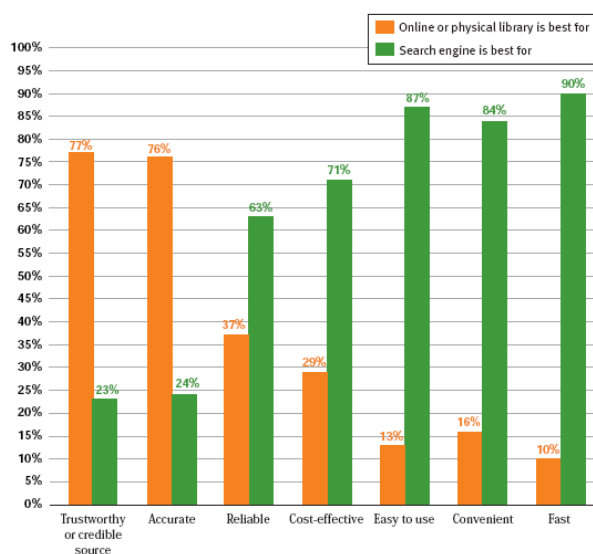
learning styles and educational expectations will place demands on libraries and institutions. To delay action in the hope that by the time Millennial students reach graduate school they will develop different learning styles is not a hopeful strategy.

The OCLC report on college students' library use compared students' perceptions of online and/or physical libraries to their perceptions of search engines, finding that while the library's resources are considered more accurate and trustworthy than search engines, they fall far short of students' expectations of speed, convenience, ease of use, cost-effectiveness, and reliability [See Table 4].

TABLE 4[24]

**Attributes of the Library and Search Engine—**
*by College Students*

Comparing an online or physical library to a search engine, please indicate which source is best described by the following:

Legend:
- Online or physical library is best for
- Search engine is best for

| Attribute | Online or physical library is best for | Search engine is best for |
|---|---|---|
| Trustworthy or credible source | 77% | 23% |
| Accurate | 76% | 24% |
| Reliable | 37% | 63% |
| Cost-effective | 29% | 71% |
| Easy to use | 13% | 87% |
| Convenient | 16% | 84% |
| Fast | 10% | 90% |

Source: *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, OCLC, 2005, question 1355.

In the midst of unpredictable economic times, both the size of libraries' budgets and staff face constant challenges. Nevertheless it is possible to adopt technologies, tools, and habits that will maximize the experiences that Millennial students have in their libraries, without alienating or ignoring the needs of the older members of the student population.

Some small changes that can have a tremendous impact on Millennial student-librarian interactions are:

- *Communicating with students via email, promptly, whenever the opportunity or need arises.* Remember that Millennial students want feedback. All the time. Be available to answer questions when they have questions, not just during office hours or during your reference desk shift. This does not necessarily mean catering to students' late-night routines, or moving to 24/7 library hours or chat

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[24] OCLC, 2-10.

services, but instead means setting realistic expectations: "Emails received between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. will be answered the same day. Emails received after 5 p.m. will be answered the following day." They need to know that you will take their research paper or thesis due date as seriously as they do.

- *Encouraging students to learn through exploration and discovery.* Where possible, permit hands-on, exploratory, trial-and-error learning. Obviously, some situations lend themselves to this option more easily than do others, but any attempts to facilitate this approach can greatly contribute to Millennial students' learning. At the reference desk, allow students to handle the keyboard and mouse while you talk them through the process of finding subject headings or locating the appropriate databases. In information literacy classes, give students the chance to actively work with the databases or the catalog, exploring different combinations of terms in different databases. Keep the focus on their learning, rather than on simply covering a set amount of material.

- *Facilitating group work that supports and encourages Millennial students' social tendencies.* Millennials are used to working collaboratively, a process that can help them construct knowledge and also allow them to practice negotiation skills that they will need in the workplace. The OCLC report shows that students ask a librarian in-person more frequently than they use an online chat service. This does not necessarily mean that chat reference services should be discontinued, but rather suggests that reference desks should not be abandoned just yet. These students appreciate connections with others, and want to build relationships. Give them the opportunities to do so.

- *Making assignments and suggestions relevant.* To an even greater extent than their predecessors, these students understand the pressures of having many responsibilities. An irrelevant assignment will be given less attention and less care, and a careless or a time-consuming, impractical suggestion will negatively impact their willingness to approach the reference desk for future assignments. If possible, take the time to explain to students why one particular tool is more likely to help them than another. Remember, these students are constantly connected and constantly communicating, and they expect their professors and their librarians to communicate as well.

- *Moving toward point-of-need instruction.* Instead of having racks upon racks of guides to EBSCO*host* or OCLC databases, put links to online help next to the link for the database itself. Remember, these students do not read manuals, and are likely to spend hours trying to figure things out for themselves before they will even think of asking for help. Do not just scan your guides into PDF format and post them online, however. Instead, adapt your content to the online environment so that it is to the point and effective for students.

- *Including graphics, images, or visual representations wherever possible*. Students are drawn to visual information. They respond to it and remember it, and utilizing this fact can impact promotion for library events and any web design or instruction that is done.

- *Respecting students' time, their responsibilities, and their passions.* Often these students simply do not have the time to sit at the reference desk and have the librarian show them all the various structures a subject heading can take, or explain advanced search strategies that are beyond the scope of a student's current project. Respect their needs and know that efficient help is more likely to bring a student back to the reference desk than will a recitation of the many broader and narrower terms of a Library of Congress subject heading.

- *Improving, where possible, the interlibrary loan services provided by your library.* A library that can get almost everything does not need to own almost everything. Where possible (and affordable) take advantage of state consortia or lending agreements among theological schools.

Librarians will do well to keep in mind the culture and environment in which these students live, and to ensure that reference and instruction services provided are appropriate to this culture and environment. Bodi suggests that "librarians tend to teach a step-by-step, linear search strategy, but research, especially in an electronic environment, is interactive and circular."[25] Learn this, use this, and teach this, because this is how a growing number of our users live and what they experience. Frand noted that *doing is more important than knowing*. In the time that it takes for students to complete their education, especially as nontraditional students balancing a plethora of other responsibilities, the specific databases, websites, or URLs will likely have changed. Technology changes too quickly for educators to be concerned with students' ability to identify specific sites or databases. Rather the focus needs to be on their ability to find information via whatever tools are available (many of which probably have not even been conceptualized yet), and evaluate that information to determine its usefulness. It is not the goal of a theological librarian to prepare students to be students for the rest of their lives. Most students do not care about subject headings – they just need to find articles and books on their topic. The goal instead is to prepare them to be ministers, professors, missionaries, professionals, or whatever they are called to be. These students will need to find information for the rest of their lives, within these various capacities, and it is the job of the librarians to adapt to Millennials' changing needs and assist them.

## CONCLUSION

Theological libraries are facing an influx of Millennial students whose learning styles, behaviors, and expectations will challenge librarians' and faculty members' habits of instruction and presentation of information. There is no quick and easy way to optimize learning for these students, but realizing that interactions with them can be challenging and different reminds those who are charged with teaching them to think creatively and broadly about how the process should be approached. Changes must be made to improve outreach and service to these students, but these changes do not necessarily have to be large either in budget, staff time, or institutional investment. Instead, small changes in service, attitude, and outreach can go a long way toward maintaining the relevance of the library and improving learning for Millennial students.

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[25] Bodi, 113.