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ARTICLE

Redesigning Traditional Programs to Meet the Needs of Generation Y

David B. Johnson and Michael T. Miller

The 14th American generation is defined as those born after 1981, numbering between 31 and 55 million people who are now arriving on college campuses. These students bring to campus distinctive characteristics, attitudes, and expectations for the collegiate experience. College and university orientation program administrators have an opportunity to adapt to this generation by examining their characteristics. The current discussion provides an outline of how orientation programs meet changing student needs. Specifically, they need to convey institutional concern for new students, demonstrated through creative, unique programming that expresses a caring attitude toward students.

Orientation and transitional programs traditionally have been designed to help students adjust and adapt to their new collegiate surroundings and master skills necessary to succeed in their academic careers. Transitional programs serve a variety of functions beyond these goals, including building bridges for success among international students (Borland, 1999), conveying institutional expectations to new students (Mullendore, 1992), and creating a sense of community among students new to the college environment (Twale, 1989). A central element in each of these goals is that they recognize the unique needs and differences among students. Efforts with multi-ethnic students such as those by Nadler and Miller (1999) are important first steps in applying strategies to meet the different needs of various student subgroups.

As college enrollments are predicted to increase throughout the current decade (Scully, 1999), real changes can be expected in the new generation of college students. Understanding and adapting to these changes will help those working with transitional programs to better prepare for meeting the dynamic challenges of the future. Although individual institutions have predicted what might be expected from this generation of traditional-aged college students, especially in terms of enrollment projections, little has been done to identify the future culture of the new generation from a national perspective. While much has been written about current college students, often known as Generation X, little effort has been made to look at their successors, known as Generation Y.

A critical analysis of current literature provides an initial foundation for understanding the next generation of college students. Through an examination of some key elements of the literature, important bearings on orientation and transitional programs and courses, including both the content and the methods of instruction, can be

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found.

As with any demographic profile, care must be taken not to over-generalize and to always place the individual at the forefront. Drawing from demographic data, much can be inferred about new students' sense of community and commitment to sharing their lives as members of extended families. There is also a need to look at who these students are, what they expect and feel, and how transitional programs can, in a meaningful fashion, respond to their unique and unusual view on college life.

Generation Y: New Students on Old Campuses

Howe and Strauss (1997) refer to Generation X as the 13th American generation, broadly defined as those born between 1961 and 1981 and who are currently 19 to 39 years of age. This group has been identified as culturally "alienated", "cynical", and "skeptical." They have been acknowledged as the first generation of "latch-key" children (Murray, 1997). Murray also has noted that this generation expects more personal attention and individualized solutions, often because they are not receiving this attention at home. While Generation X has been growing up, the American divorce rate has tripled, resulting in increased time in front of the television, less time spent between children and parents, and a diminished sense of community as children have difficulty relating to the larger sense of family (Murray, 1997). Howe and Strauss and Murray also have described the generation as largely non-career directed. Generation X students typically have arrived on campuses without a strong sense of what to expect from the collegiate experience or what society expects from them. This lack of expectation has been at least partially a factor in the success of such programs as service learning, where students are brought in connection with their surrounding communities and learn about societal expectations. Many orientation and transitional programs have responded to Generation X by focusing on building a sense of community or "esprit de corps" (Twale).

In contrast, Generation Y students, also termed the "Echo Boom" and the "Millennials," are identified as culturally social, success oriented, and career directed. This generation is described as very social and involved in a number of group-learning activities (Cuneo & Krol, 1998; Rosenthal, 1998; Murray, 1997). They may be involved in many activities from a very early age, such as athletics, fine arts, and other enrichment programs. Often, members of Generation Y have been reared for success by parents who take their children to after-school activities and stay to watch the child participate. Even latchkey children are being subsumed by planned activities.

Omelia (1998) identifies one of the most effective forms of learning for this generation as peer education. Students learn from each other as they work in groups together, formally and informally. For Generation Y, working in teams seems to be more natural and effective than working independently (Wellner, 1999). Generation Y students like to work in teams as equals rather than working independently or as group leaders (Wellner).

Generation Y students are more tolerant of process than the Generation X students, but they are acutely results driven (Murray, 1999). This generation has come of age in a

time of economic growth, fueled largely by the technology industry (Wellner, 1999). They are technologically advanced and literate, having grown up with the Internet (Stanley, 1995). As a result, these students expect technology to be available to make life easier, to gain more information, and to provide entertainment (Murray). In 1998, 75%-90% of teenagers have computers at home, and of those teenagers, 50% of them have access to the Internet (Omelia).

This electronic generation is searching for facts to confirm the direction they are seeking. Many of the members of this generation enter secondary schools and colleges knowing what careers they seek. They largely are looking for assistance to confirm their interests and to find the best path to their goals. Generation Y is career focused and in search of long-term employment (Murray, 1999).

Generation Y students may be more spiritual than many previous generations; they look for moral leaders, actions, and deeds (McLaughlin, 1999). It is also noted by McLaughlin (1999) that Generation Y students are reading more now and at least 13 million students surf the Internet.

The Generation Y population totals over 55 million young people today, and is increasing at twice the rate of the overall US population (Cuneo & Krol, 1998). They have influenced household spending in the amount of almost \$250 billion (Rosenthal, 1998). They spend an average of \$84 per week in discretionary money, and largely seek out conservative and preppie styles (McLaughlin, 1999).

Discussion

Generation Y is seeking more direction in terms of careers than their predecessors, and recruitment and orientation efforts in higher education cannot assume that traditional presentations and programming will continue to work. Murray (1997) noted that this generation expects career information and courses that will enable them to get the jobs they want. This does not mean that they will be better or harder working students, but that they generally have a stronger value for formal education in comparison to their predecessors (Murray). Colleges and universities, then, need to explore how they can instill a desire for learning and study in addition to career preparation. Peer groups should be considered in learning and teaching models as these students work well in groups.

Streamlined processes and procedures in areas such as admissions, orientation, and registration will be even more in demand by this "To Go" generation. Staff, for example, will need to sharpen their overall view of the institution, as one-stop-shopping and efficiency in delivering programs and services become catchwords for campuses. On large campuses, cross training of staff may be necessary in the efficient delivery of programs and services.

Along with streamlined services, the availability of technology will be expected by Generation Y. To these students, being a number in a computer system may not be a bad thing, as long as they are treated well and are served quickly and efficiently. This generation is accustomed to accessing information through codes and numbers. These students and their parents expect quickly delivered services as they arrive on campus.

The use of electronic kiosks and "On-Line Registration" will be commonly expected by this generation.

Orientation program coordinators also may want to begin a critical conversation about how their activities can be interpreted or experienced through the lens of Generation Y. Although it is a daunting task to redesign transitional programs, there are at least several key questions that must be asked in designing orientation programs for the new century:

Planning

How do the transition or orientation programs develop a connection between individualizing mass-service programs and technology savvy? Who (not currently involved in the planning process) can help define the impact of transition and orientation program experiences? What partnerships can be forged that will assist in working with students of Generation Y?

Budgeting

How are long-term investments being made that will carry importance throughout students' careers? What are the budget implications of a more technologically sophisticated transitional program? What are the impacts of budgetary front-end loading?

Personnel

Who are the creative, caring individuals who can facilitate growth among teams of students? What are the differences in skills for orientation team leaders today and in the future? Are there different types of team-training that team leaders can experience to be better team-focused trainers? How can these technologically savvy students of Generation Y be engaged in the academic process? Should peer group collaboration be used as a learning and teaching tool?

Intention and Purpose

What is the tangible, measurable purpose of an orientation or transitional program? Can these programs deliver something identifiable for which they can be held accountable? Will program evaluation need to be changed in the future to address the institutional student culture? There are many dimensions to transition and orientation programs, ranging from traditional interpretations of getting students registered for classes to building community on campus for new students. A recent round table discussion at the Association for the Study of Higher Education meeting in Texas classified orientation programs into pre-enrollment and pre-registration (Miller, Nadler, & Dyer, 1999). Other classifications and functions of transition and orientation programs include assisting students in understanding the purpose and mission of an

institution, determining personal reasons in attending an institution, developing positive relationships between students and faculty and staff, and orienting students to their new surroundings and environment, including safety issues (CAS, 1988). Nadler, Miller, and Casebere (1998) found that these programs have support from senior level student affairs administrators, and students who voluntarily participate in them tend to be those with a collegiate- or professional-oriented view of the college experience.

Regardless of the classification and functions of transition and orientation programs, the standards set forth by the Council for Advancement of Standards (CAS) are one of the few efforts aimed at developing cross-institutional expectations about the function of orientation programs. It is important that those who work in higher education, specifically those designing orientation programs, realize that the CAS standards can assist in planning, developing, evaluating and assessing programs and services for new students.

There continues a need for a critical constructive discussion about how to construct orientation environments that meet student needs. Students will continue to change, grow, and be interpreted differently, and Generation Y is a stellar example of how student generations can differ from their predecessors. Colleges and universities need to address concerns about generational shifts, but orientation programs specifically need to convey institutional concern for new students, demonstrated through creative, unique programming that expresses a caring attitude toward students. Ultimately, as programs are rethought to meet the needs of Generation Y, they should be redesigned with these students in mind – students who are peer group focused, career interested, and technology savvy. Do we know who these students are, what they expect, and what their needs are? Do we know how to interact with them, and what guidance they require from us? Are our orientation programs addressing these questions? These are the questions orientation directors should be asking themselves and their campuses as they redesign programs for Generation Y.

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ARTICLE

First Generation College Students: A Courageous Group in Transition

Emily M. Lehning

First-generation college students have distinctive needs for support. Institutions of higher learning can provide the proper support for students through needed services and interventions. This article will review the unique demographics and needs of first-generation college students. A model for practice is described and recommendations will be offered to encourage the persistence of first-generation students and the role of student service functions toward meeting that goal.

First-generation college students are an often-overlooked, but increasing, population of students with unique needs for support in the pursuit of higher education. While it is difficult to define a "typical" first-generation student, we can define challenges encountered by students who are the first in their immediate families to matriculate into the higher education system. As students encounter challenges, institutions of higher learning can intervene to provide the needed services and support for students. Koehler and Burke (1996) offer an intriguing description of the effect of these challenges on students and the potential impact of institutional intervention by using the analogy of "transforming the treadmill into a staircase." The services and support provided by institutions can essentially elevate students by encouraging persistence in degree attainment which will improve their social, economic, and occupational standings. The elevation can be likened to moving from a treadmill that remains relatively constant to a staircase that provides for upward mobility.

Demographics of First Generation Students

The United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (1998) reported that during the 1989-90 school year first-generation students made up 43 percent of post-secondary students. First-generation students are more likely than non-first-generation students to be Hispanic rather than white, non-Hispanic; female rather than male; from families that have incomes in the lowest quartile; older (thirty years or older); and married. They are also more likely to have dependents, receive financial assistance, work full-time (thirty-five hours or more per week), and enroll in public two-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). When deciding between institutions, these students are more likely to consider factors such as the availability of financial assistance, the opportunity to complete course work in a short amount of time, the ability to live at home while attending college, and the availability

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