# *Generation Z Goes to College*

*by Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace*
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Are we ready to welcome the next generation of college students onto our campuses? Ready or not, Generation Z has arrived! Who are these students, and what does this mean for our work? *Generation Z Goes to College* is a great read for all higher education professionals interested in understanding how this generation of college students differs from previous generations. Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace's book provides faculty, student affairs staff, and higher education administrators alike with valuable insight into these students' learning styles and preferences. This information can assist professionals by providing both individual and institutional approaches to creating learning environments that will support the success of these students.

Seemiller and Grace (2016) base their book on the findings from their 2014 study of over one thousand Gen Z students from fifteen institutions. They also cite over three hundred additional sources ranging from market research and social science research to Pugh data and CIRP survey responses. The authors also include an overview of the study's methodological details, data analysis, and limitations; however, the true focus of the book is their translation of the data outlining the implications for curriculum development, pedagogical practice, and co-curricular programming.

The authors begin by providing a helpful review of the previous generations (i.e., Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, also known as "Millennials"), before fully exploring the profile of Generation Z. The review helps to create context in which to understand both the similarities and differences of this next generation of college students.

Students classified as Generation Z were born between 1995 and 2000. According to the authors, not only are Gen Z students driven by different learning preferences and motivating factors, but their learning styles, academic skill sets, social practices, and social concerns are quite different than those of previous generations. The authors dedicate chapters for sharing and highlighting the characteristics of this generation, their beliefs and perspectives, communication preferences, social media usage, relationships, general cares and concerns, engagement and social concerns, and leadership styles and capacities, leaving the

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last two chapters to address how to maximize their learning and effectively work with them.

This book was informative and thought-provoking. As a Generation Xer, a student affairs professional with over twenty years of experience, a current doctoral student in educational leadership, and a mother of a Gen Z teenage son in the midst of the college search, I found that numerous aspects of the Gen Z profile resonated with and had profound impact on each of these identities. The authors not only paint a clear picture of the differences between Millennials and Gen Zers, but they also highlight the importance of the implications of these differences, making it a great choice for higher education administrators and faculty of all disciplines.

For faculty, the authors share their recommendations to support the hard work of designing and teaching courses that can engage, challenge, develop, and support Gen Z students. Faculty will find the chapters on communication platforms and preferences particularly helpful. Despite a lifestyle of constant connectivity, Seemiller and Grace (2016) found that "83 percent of Generation Z students prefer face-to-face communication because it allows them to connect better and read the other person" (p. 61). This could mean that faculty might see a resurgence in office hour usage that has declined with Millennials. In addition, the maximizing learning chapter is a must-read for all faculty. The authors share academic-focused points, such as how "more than 70 percent [of Gen Zers] think it is important to be able to design and build their own course of study or major" (p. 185) and how "they prefer to learn on their own time and in their own way" (p. 185). This supports the assertion of Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla, & Terry (2010) that faculty will "have to abandon their 'same old, same old' mentality and approaches" (p. 8). This book is the perfect choice for a faculty development workshop for both new and seasoned faculty. According to Hainline et al. (2010), "institutions need to provide training in new teaching pedagogies, and faculty should be willing to learn and use these methods" (p. 8). Such a learning opportunity would increase the generalized understanding of Generation Z student learning styles, preferred learning environments, academic motivations, and their approach to vocational discernment.

For administrators, the chapters on cares and concerns and communication platforms and preferences are quite helpful. These students have grown up in the midst of the economic downturn. Although this generation believes "that education is the foundations for individual success and societal prosperity" (p. 98), the "anxiety over being able to afford a college education is forefront on the minds of these students" (p. 98). Moreover, these students worry about post-college employment. They have witnessed parents and other loved ones lose their jobs and, as a result, are well aware that a college degree does not guarantee long-term employment. This awareness has influenced their shift in focus from selecting a major for finding a job to identifying an academic path that supports their vocation—their purpose. Not only will administrators need to continue to keep access and affordability as top priorities when recruiting these students, they will need to design marketing strategies that demonstrate how their institution

will help them discover their purpose and construct a plan to live it out post-graduation. Furthermore, the study revealed, "a quarter of Generation Z students indicate that they do not like e-mail, and almost half indicate that they only somewhat like it" (p. 60). Clearly, this illuminates a need to strategize around how to communicate important information effectively to these students upon enrollment and throughout their educational journeys.

Student affairs practitioners will find useful information in each of the chapters of this book. They will learn the correlation between this generation's views on human rights and social justice and the fact that they are the most socially diverse group in recent history and that they are graduating from high school with more diverse friend groups than previous generations. This could change our notion of how to deliver diversity education on our campuses. Practitioners will see the themes of relationships and mentors woven throughout several chapters, especially as related to students' parents. The relationships between Gen Zers and their parents are different from those of Millennials. They see their parents as "sources of emotional and financial support" (p. 89). According to Seemiller (personal communication, 2017), the parents of Gen Z students are moving beyond being helicopter parents to becoming co-pilots. Gen Z students "take the opinions and perspectives of their family into consideration in their decision making" (p. 89). An awareness of this instinctual habit will help professionals be better prepared for students to turn to their trusted advisors when making important decisions during orientation and throughout their college years. Professionals can also infuse this knowledge into planning and assessment for both student-centered and parent- or family-focused programs. Furthermore, the chapter on leadership styles and capacities can help professionals think more intentionally about our systems and processes as we prepare for the recruitment of this generation of students for various leadership positions and campus employment opportunities.

For all readers, the overview of who these students are, in addition to the chapters on beliefs and perspectives, communication platforms, preferences, cares, and concerns are extremely pertinent and insightful. The authors warn that if higher education wants to stay relevant for this generation of students, faculty members must learn to tweak courses, redesign learning environments, and reevaluate their approaches to measuring and assessing learning; administrators must adapt processes; and student affairs practitioners must reimagine programming and engagement initiatives.

One recommendation for making the book stronger would be to add examples of practical action steps that correlate with each chapter topic. The authors clearly communicate the implications for adjustments and change on the part of higher education faculty, staff, and administrators; however, if they were to offer a few specific action steps for consideration, these would assist audiences, either individually or in work groups, with brainstorming ways that their valuable information can be applied on their campuses. If the authors took this tool one step further and provided practical examples of approaches to creating motivational scaffolding, for instance, audiences could consider those examples during strategic planning, faculty development workshops, and student

engagement planning discussions, while taking into consideration institutional differences.

Understanding generational differences has been just one tool in the toolbox for higher education professionals, whether they are faculty, staff, or administrators. Seemiller and Grace (2016) have packaged the pertinent information regarding the newest generation of students on our college campuses, Generation Z, into a quick, insightful, and entertaining reading experience. I agree with the authors' sentiment that knowing and understanding the mindset and goals of this generation of college students is paramount to our ability to adjust curricular and co-curricular experiences and to support these students throughout their educational journeys. Are we ready to welcome the next generation of college students onto our campuses? Generation Z is here, so "let's make a difference for them" (C. Seemiller, personal communication, 2017)!

### References

Seemiller, C., & Grace, M. (2016). *Generation Z goes to college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hainline, L., Gaines, M., Feather, C. L., Padilla, E., & Terry, E. (2010). Changing students, faculty, and institutions in the twenty-first century. *Peer Review, 12*(3), 7.