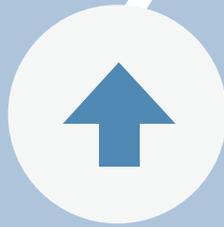


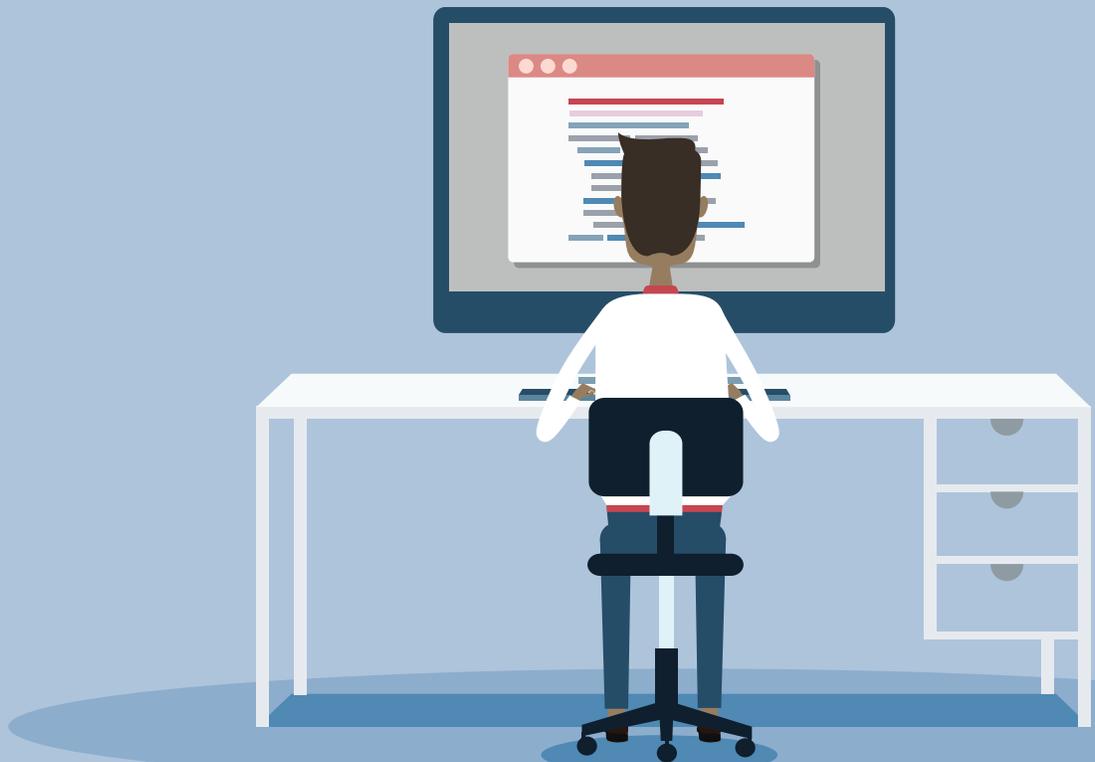
Instant Generation

By Elaina Loveland





Generation Z students have replaced millennials on college campuses. Here's what you need to know about this new generation of students.



Generation Z students (born between 1995–2010) are entrepreneurial, desire practical skills with their education, and are concerned about the cost of college.

“Students are overwhelmed by the cost,” said Corey Seemiller, co-author of *Generation Z Goes to College* with Meghan Grace. “They still see value in a college education, but they are doing a cost-benefit analysis to determine if what they will pay is worth the investment.”

A Northeastern University (MA) study in 2014 reported that two-thirds (67 percent) of Generation Z students indicate their top concern is being able to afford college. The study also reported that learning practical skills in college is important to students: 63 percent believe it’s important for colleges to teach entrepreneurship and 85 percent believe they should learn about financial literacy in college. Forty-two percent of Generation Z students expect to work for themselves at some point in their career, which is nearly quadruple the percentage of Americans who are actually self-employed.

When it comes to education, 72 percent say they want a more customized college experience in which colleges allow students to design their own course of study or major and 79 percent would like to integrate their higher education experience with employer internships. Eighty-one percent believe that college is crucial to starting a career.

Generation Z students appreciate practical-real life experience. “They want more hands-on application of in internships during the course of college,” said Seemiller. “Many of them would be interested in a first-year internship or an entrepreneurship class as a general education option.”

Generation Z students also highly value input from their peers more than parents or other role models compared with previous generations. In fact, Generation Z relies on the opinions of their peers more than admission or school counselors when it comes to selecting a college.

Social issues are also important to Generation Z.

Seemiller said that these students feel strongly about racial equality, for example, and want to create an “equitable environment for everyone.”

“Generation Z feels passionate about making their world a better place,” said Dayna Bradstreet, assistant director of admission at Simmons College in Boston. “I am constantly impressed by the changes applicants have brought about in their high school communities.”

RISING COLLEGE COSTS MAKE GENERATION Z MORE PRUDENT

“I routinely get detailed questions that I never heard five years ago,” said Bradstreet. “(Students) want to know facts like a school’s average starting salary, average indebtedness at graduation, and student loan default rates.”

College graduates of the class of 2015 had the largest student loan debt in history. These borrowers owed an average of \$30,100, up four percent from the 2014 average of \$28,950. Average debt at graduation ranged from \$3,000 to \$53,000.

Bob Bardwell, a school counselor in Monson, Massachusetts, and NACAC board director, said parents are being more “cautious” when it comes to considering the costs of college. “More students, at least in my area, are going to community colleges because there is a conscious decision to look at costs as a factor,” he said.

COMMUNICATING WITH PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

Technology has undoubtedly changed with the way students communicate in recent decades, but Generation Z is the most tech-savvy of all to date.

MEET GENERATION Z

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Generation Z Goes to College features findings from an in-depth study of 1,200 Generation Z college students from vastly different higher education institutions across the United States. Authors Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace found that Generation Z students:

- Describe themselves as being influential, thoughtful, loyal, compassionate, open-minded, and responsible.
- Have repeatedly received the message that they must be entrepreneurial, and comfortably adopt that mentality.
- Name education, employment, and racial equality as their greatest concerns, more so than immigration, climate change, and the legalization of marijuana—issues they believe are receiving the nationwide attention they deserve.
- Are often disengaged from political participation and take little interest in running for public office, preferring not to participate in what they view as a dysfunctional political system.
- Are very career-minded, having seen adults around them lose their jobs—in the midst of high unemployment rates—and experience home foreclosures.
- Are intimately aware not only of troubles and traumas happening in the lives of family members and friends, but of communities around the world.
- Have a “thoughtful worldview” and want to engage in service that has a tangible and lasting impact on systematic and structural problems.
- Are “we-centric” and are generally motivated by a desire to help and please others. They want to advocate and work on behalf of something they believe in.
- Are willing to take personal risks if they believe they have more to gain.

Peter Kraft, CEO and co-founder of Evolution Labs said that “millennials may have been digitally native, but Gen Z is mobile and app-native” and that Generation Z’s “lens to the world is a small screen with multiple apps running simultaneously.”

“In a world where they can instantly stream their favorite TV shows on Netflix and their favorite music on Spotify, Generation Z expects instant answers to their every question,” said Bradstreet.

Different expectations of communication via technology changes the way colleges communicate with students.

“Email is one of their least preferred communications in admission,” said Grace. “They prefer texting.”

Texting as a preferred method to receive information is gaining broader appeal in the college admission process. In October 2016, The Common Application announced a partnership with the Better Make Room national texting and social media campaign to provide high school students with personalized guidance and encouragement on how to apply and pay for college.

Social media practices are also different among Generation Z than the last college cohort—the millennials.

“Whereas Facebook was the go-to social media platform for millennials, Generation Z is all over Instagram,” said Bradstreet.

One-on-one communication, while traditional, is desirable among Generation Z students as well.

“Students want face-to-face interaction,” said Grace. “Admission officers need to take the time to build a face-to-face relationship with prospective students.”

Jose Bowen, president of Goucher College in Baltimore, agreed. “Having a conversation is the best way to communicate with Generation Z,” he said. “We don’t want to talk at them. We want to have a conversation. Face-to-face interaction, while old school, has a lot of authenticity and influence. While this generation still opens emails, they often associate emails with something their parents do at work.”

When it comes to school counselors communicating with students about college admission, Bardwell said it’s important to understand what this generation of students wants in terms of communication to best serve them. “Understand what motivates them to give them the support they need,” he said.

Bardwell uses email and text messages to communicate with students. Paper handouts are a thing of the past.

Bardwell also thinks it’s important to understand what parents want as well and has done a needs assessment at his school to try to better serve parents and students. “If you haven’t done a needs assessment in a few years

it is probably a good idea to do one to make sure you are communicating with families to ensure they will read about what they need to know in the college admission process. You might be delivering good information—but it’s not as relevant if your delivery methods don’t fit the preferences of your audience.”

AVOIDING PITFALLS WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH GENERATION Z

Long gone are the days of mailing prospective students college information—email replaced it. But email marketing campaigns to prospective students could use improvement.

“My students are telling me that they are getting multiple emails a day—if they get too many emails from one institution, they get turned off,” said Bardwell. “Be selective of what you send and *when* you send it.”

“Students are sick and tired of being blasted with automated messages,” said Kraft. “Even when they are slightly personalized (“insert first name”), students can see right through it. Most prospective students want to shadow or follow current students at the school—they want to hear from real students not the canned pitches from the school. Virtual following is also a new trend.”

The best way to engage prospective students is to provide customized information. “This all comes from their expectations founded in their experiences with other tools/websites that let them customize their

INSIGHTS ON GENERATION Z

Tom Richmond is the executive director of enrollment marketing at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. He is a frequent speaker at state and national conferences on communicating with millennials and Generation Z and the use of social media and digital marketing.

What are some unique characteristics of Generation Z? How do they compare with millennials?

Richmond: Whereas millennials carried a planner, looked up numbers in a phone book, and ordered a high school yearbook, Generation Z is more likely to say, “There’s an app for that.” *How Teens Do Research in the Digital World* researchers note that more than half of teenagers consider social media and YouTube to be good sources for doing research. If you are a millennial, you might or might not agree. If you are a member of Generation Z, you probably already tweeted that.

What are some common attitudes about education and their expectations of higher education that Generation Z students have compared with past generations of students?

Richmond: Generation Z has grown up with a fast-forward button and a like button. They use their multiple-screen view of the world to get peer reviewed (most social media likes) content and they won’t pay attention to anything that isn’t as good as something they can find online. I know of several Bradley University students who have said, “If my professor isn’t that interesting, I can probably find the same information on YouTube done by someone who is more interesting, and it might have animated graphics.

Millennials were the first tech-savvy generation. But, they immigrated to new media. Generation Z was born with new media. This year’s college freshman was about seven years old when they learned to pinch and zoom a smart screen. That’s about how long this type of communication, and learning style has been around. For Generation Z, that’s a lifetime.

How can colleges best communicate with Generation Z? How powerful is social media? What social media platforms do they use the most and/or trust the most?

Richmond: Knowing that this generation streams TV and music, shares their lives in social media, and stays connected via smart phones, colleges can get their attention by becoming familiar with digital and social media marketing. It isn’t a coincidence that students who click on Bradley’s website usually see advertising about the university in their internet browsing, Facebook feed, and between images on Instagram. This is where they spend their time. We follow them there. It is much more effective to communicate with people who have clicked on your website than to communicate with people who haven’t shown a previous affinity.

I hear people ask if Facebook is an effective place to communicate with Generation Z. The answer is yes and no. Yes, they still use it. We track the number of clicks generated by Facebook interactions and the answer is that the majority of our applicants use it. And, the answer is “no.” Facebook is only one channel. To reach the most, we have to communicate through multiple social media channels. We repurpose images, stories, and video across several media including Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram. If something comes out of nowhere like Snapchat did in 2014, we’ll probably send our messages there also.

experience to their preferences,” said Kraft. “Most communication from schools is “one-way”—it simply prompts a student to take action (inquire, visit, apply, deposit, etc...). But Gen Z expects their experience to evolve based on their engagement.”

Throughout the college admission process, students change their minds about what they want in a college or what academic majors interest them. For example, just because a student said they were interested in majoring in chemistry six months ago doesn't mean that is still their interest today. “Prospective students expect schools to know what their interests are today—not six months ago,” said Kraft.

Keeping prospective students engaged with an institution means that colleges “need to periodically reassess interests, or even better, adapt their communication based on what the prospective student appears to be interested in,” according to Kraft. “It's the Netflix Generation; Netflix serves up movies based on a user's current interests, not stuff they were interested in six months or a year ago.”

THE COLLEGE PITCH—HIGHLIGHTING A CAMPUS'S UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES TO PROSPECTS

Seemiller would like to see more admission officers highlight specific opportunities on a campus when communicating with prospective students. She said that as more students become geographically bound due to the cost of college, admission officers should “figure out unique opportunities that a campus has and find creative opportunities that would be attractive to prospective students on that campus.”

For example, at Wright State University (OH) where Seemiller works as an assistant professor of leadership studies, holds a program called Wright Venture in which students compete on teams to create business proposals, “I think Generation Z students would be incredibly interested in knowing about this kind of program [before they attend college]. Are admission officers talking about those unique opportunities to prospective students?” she noted. “They should be.”

Seemiller believes the idea of college fit may need to be adjusted. “The notion of a ‘college fit’ assumes that students have a choice and maybe we need to reconsider what ‘fit’ looks like,” she said. “It may be more about helping students fit into the institution where they need to go.”

REINVENTING THE CAMPUS VISIT

The current campus visit is dated for the new generation of students, according to Jeff Kallay, principal of Render Experiences, a consulting firm specializes in campus visits.

“The current campus was created for the last cohort of millennials who had Baby Boomer parents,” said Kallay. “Families are bored and constantly on their devices.”

Kallay recognizes that is not just the students that have changed in recent years—it's also the parents. Just a few years ago, parents were Baby Boomers coming in with millennial students to campus visits. Now it is Generation X parents coming in with Generation Z students.

“The wants and needs of parents are shifting,” he said. “The idealistic Boomer parents trusted the institutions to take care of their kids. Gen X parents are more distrustful of the institutions.”

Eighty-one percent of Generation Z students believe college is crucial to starting a career.



Both students and parents nowadays seem more practical. “There used to be questions about parking and what to do on the weekends, but now there are more questions about safety and about student loan debt and graduation rates,” said Kallay. “They are thinking about making money in relation to college earlier than in the past.”

Kallay advises colleges to revamp their campus visit experiences and said that starting off a campus information session talking about the attributes of the college “turns families off.”

“Deconstruct the information session and long tour and see how can you break it up,” he suggested. “Reverse engineer how you are telling the message... such as addressing safety, meal plans, and transportation first, and *then* talk about what makes the college distinctive.”

INNOVATION IN COLLEGE ADMISSION TO BETTER SERVE GENERATION Z

Some higher education institutions are finding unique ways to position themselves as an innovator addressing the changing realities of the impact of technology with today's students when it comes to their college admission process. Goucher College, in Baltimore, became the first college to use video applications instead of the traditional written college admission essay.

“Goucher is the first to offer an option that will use a student's self-produced video as the crux of the admission decision,” said José Bowen, the college's president. “The Goucher Video Application (GVA) represents an innovative step to demystify and de-stress the admission process and create a more transparent application for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds.”

“What we have found is that Generation Z wants authenticity,” said Bowen. “The GVA allows prospective students to showcase that through a two-minute video rather than a piece of paper. Like a job interview, a resume can tell you one thing on paper—but meeting someone face-to-face may give you a different impression. The GVA allows this generation to show their individuality and that they are more than an ACT/SAT scores and more than a major.”

Elaina Loveland is a freelance writer and the author of *Creative Colleges: Finding the Best Programs for Aspiring Actors, Artists, Designers, Dancers, Musicians, Writers, and More.*