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One Student at a Time: Attracting and Supporting the Millennial Generation at Vincennes University

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti

They are the Millennial Generation: that cohort of young people born between 1980 and 1994 that is unlike any generation that has come before. Never before have universities seen a generation at once so much a part of a larger whole, thanks to technology, yet with a sense of individual uniqueness.

The Millennials believe they are destined for something special, and they are very confident about their futures. They have been sheltered by their families, their communities, and their institutions; the term "helicopter parent" was coined to describe the family members hovering around the Millennials, many with their student's blessing. The Millennials are team-oriented, seeing themselves as part of a whole (be it family or institution) in a way that the individualistic and alienated Generation X probably finds unexpected. Finally, the Millennials respect institutions and rules in a way that may make some Baby Boomers -- remembering a certain concert at Yasgur's farm -- blanch.

It is critical that universities find ways to attract, retain, and support Millennials by reaching them on their own terms. Christian Blome, of the Vincennes (IN) University admissions office, and Kristi Deetz, Vincennes University external relations/communications, recently spoke with *Student Affairs*

Leader about their efforts to attract and support one student at a time.

Recruiting Millennials

"Millennials are so marketing and technology savvy," says Deetz. In fact, some 85 percent of this generation prefers email contact to speaking by phone, and 15 percent of them have even checked their email on a PDA while in the bathroom. With this high level of exposure to the online world and to a culture that seems to market with every breath, "they know if a message seems forced or generic," says Deetz. Blome adds, "You have to be very careful on how you word things." This caution extends to some of the traditional admissions marketing tactics, such as the use of stock photos and carefully posed portrayals of ethnic diversity on campus. Millennials can sniff out the lack of sincerity, and it will drive them away.

This is just the opposite of what Deetz and Blome intend. "Communication is developing a relationship, so that you have more opportunities to show why your institution is a fit for them," Deetz says. But while it is tempting to take admissions marketing completely online, with a blitz of Web sites, emails, blogs, and podcasts, Deetz and Blome have taken a more measured approach that includes the rest of the student body.

Involving current students

"You have to decide if you are going to jump on the technology bandwagon or let marketing drive what technology you use," says Deetz. Vincennes chooses to let their marketing needs drive their choice of technology, and the first step in this is keeping current students involved.

The key, Deetz says, is talking to students and finding out which technologies current students use to form relationships and keep in touch. For example, the popular video clip hosting site YouTube has been embraced by current students, so Vincennes is preparing to use this venue to reach potential students.

The university also encourages current students to keep online journals and help with the contact made to potential students. Blome says this gives the current students "celebrity status," and the potential student who has had some sort of online experience with these current students "already has a relationship formed at Vincennes University."

Another big win for creating connections is instant messaging. "IM has been a huge success for us," says Blome. Deetz further explains that several student support offices participate in offering availability over IM, so that current and prospective students can see at a glance which offices are currently online. If the office does not respond within fifteen

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seconds, the message becomes an email message that can be sent to the office the student is attempting to contact, so students are sure that they have made some sort of connection in obtaining an answer to a question.

Deetz notes that this service is particularly popular with prospective students, who may need to ask a quick question between classes or while filling out an admission or financial-aid application.

Listen to your audience

Millennials flock to online social networking sites like previous generations ran to the telephone or frequented the corner hamburger shop. Therefore, it is important that universities learn to listen to their online students to receive the most accurate feedback about how the university is perceived and what it can do better.

"Monitor the Internet to see what people are saying online," says Blome. Vincennes regularly monitors sites such as www.technorati.com, Facebook, and MySpace, along with a variety of others. Some sites, such as Google, can be set to send updates when a news story or other piece of information is posted about the university. Some give the university a chance to put their own message out and interact with all comers, such as Blome's own Vincennes University Admissions site on Blogger.com. In fact, the pair emphasizes the importance of blogs as a new medium that can push stories out into the public in seconds.

The traditional media consult blogs as sources for news, they say. They remind other admissions and marketing profes-

sionals that student writers often use blogs as their way to present their views of campus life, a perspective that students and prospective students may find just as compelling as any printed college guide or national ranking.

Involving the family

Finally, it is important that universities reach out to their students on terms that students understand, and for the Millennial Generation, this means including the entire family. At Vincennes, the parent-services office fielded some 1,800 questions and comments from parents last year, and it is on pace to break that record this year. Millennials are accustomed to involving their families, and Vincennes makes an effort to include them as well.

"We target and try to reach the entire family," says Deetz. Blome adds that Millennials are used to thinking of their mom and dad as friends," so it is important that the university "include the parent in the message." Because of this, admissions events usually plan for three attendees per registered new registered student. At some events, the university even plans play areas for young siblings to be amused while the older sibling registers for classes.

At Vincennes, the university's goal is to treat its Millennials as they want to be treated: as part of a vast, interconnected network that runs from online interactions to involvement of family, but also as a unique person. It is an example of working with a cohort of students, one student at a time.

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti frequently writes for Student Affairs Leader. ●

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at the University of Florida. Both are former vice presidents for student affairs and authors of Critical Issues for Student Affairs: Challenges and Opportunities, Jossey-Bass, 2006, upon which this article was based. ●

On-Campus

Report

C A P S U L E S

Dorm security is a front-page story in many of the college newspapers we receive. The **University of South Carolina's** *Daily Gamecock* (www.dailygamecock.com) reports that a string of burglary and assaults have resulted in tightened security. The director of residence life says that the school is "aggressively expanding" the card access and camera systems that are currently available in some of the dorms. He also noted that students should do their part by keeping their doors locked. At the **University of Alaska Anchorage**, on-campus crime has risen 15 percent since 2005. *The Northern Light* (www.thenorthernlight.org) reports that now resident advisors lock side doors and check the student IDs at the main entrance from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m. The paper noted that this policy became problematic when a moose blocked the main entrance of a building shortly after 5 p.m. one evening. At **Northwestern University**, a series of articles have been run on the school's response to nine dorm intrusions last year. *The Daily Northwestern* (www.dailynorthwestern.com) says that there is "significant resistance" from the students to the administration's plan to place alarms on all but the main doors at university dorms and residential colleges. In a recent meeting, the students asked for more input in future decisions.

Speaking of dorms, the Association of Colleges & University Housing Officers – International gave their Best Design award to Jonathan Levi Architects for its design concepts of the residence hall of the future. The firm's ideas include: stackable rooms, fold-out beds, and a one-piece sink and toilet. These innova-

tive ideas, along with technological advances such as a smart-media wall and glass walls with adjustable transparencies, earned the company the jury's grand prizes at the 21st Century Project Design Showcase. For more information, go to: www.21stcenturyproject.com/press_winner.html

If your idea of having a really bad day includes reading a negative story about your institution on the front page of a Sunday edition of the *New York Times* (circulation: 1.7 million), perhaps you can imagine the pain administrators at **The University of Phoenix** felt on February 11 when they read paragraph two in a story titled "Troubles Grow For a University Built on Profits," which said, "But its reputation is fraying as prominent educators, students and some of its own former administrators say the relentless pressure for higher profits, at a university that gets more federal student financial aid than any other, has eroded academic quality." Go to: www.times.com

According to the *Los Angeles Times* (www.latimes.com), **UCLA** is a top choice for freshmen. The paper states that the university's 50,694 applications for fall entry may be the most in the nation. This number is up 7.1 percent from last year. The story noted that increased interest from blacks and Latinos pleases officials.

A story in *The Boston Globe* (www.boston.com) titled "Plumbing, then political science" caught our attention. It reports that more vocational school-sacrificing Massachusetts are preparing their students for colleges, some as elite as MIT. Nearly half of the state's vocational

students now enroll in a two- or four-year college after graduation, which is more than double the rate in 1990.

We don't read many articles about students who are critical of new integrated technology used in classrooms, so a piece in the *The Dakota Student* (www.thedakotastudent.com) on the **University of North Dakota's** controversial "clickers" interested us. The clickers allow instructors to integrate questions into their presentations and gather real-time responses from students. The small remote-like devices have several buttons on them which typically correspond to multiple choice questions imbedded into a PowerPoint presentation. The big issue, according to the student newspaper, is that instructors are utilizing different models of clickers, which forces many students to have to purchase multiple clickers. ●

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approach often distract colleges from addressing issues of content and teaching. *Thus colleges need a stronger focus on solving the difficult pedagogic aspects of online education programs.*

For more information on the book, please visit <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu>. To order, call the Hopkins Fulfillment Service at 1-800-537-5487 or visit http://www.press.jhu.edu/books/title_pages/9201.html (Mention or enter the code NAF to receive a 20% discount) ●

DSU Updates Its Freshmen Success Seminar

Catherine Stover

In 1994, Dakota State University (DSU) launched its Freshmen Success Seminar. Its purpose was to provide an extended orientation to help students adjust to college life and to life at DSU in particular. The curriculum included information about campus resources, study skills, academic planning, and time management. By all accounts, it was a good program: students, facilitators, and the advisory committee all felt that it helped freshmen make a successful transition to DSU.

In 2004, DSU began a campus-wide strategic initiative to support student success. The school received a five-year Title III Grant, joined the Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), and developed several new retention strategies. These three initiatives shared a set of seven projects, one of which was to update the freshmen success seminar.

And so, the question became, "How can this program further enhance student success and retention?"

"The Title III Grant provided an opportunity for faculty to redesign our first-year experience course to incorporate new ideas and best practices. The redesigned course promotes early and frequent contact between the students and their academic advisor," observed Carrie Ahern, Title III Activity Director.

The faculty review of the program resulted in changes in content, delivery, and scheduling -- all of which were implemented in the fall of 2006.

Changes included:

1. More prominence in students' schedules: The course has been named GS 100: University Experience. It is graded (satisfactory or unsatisfactory), and appears on students' transcripts.
2. Standardized curriculum: The new course's curriculum was expanded to include eight sessions and is now

loaded on a course Web site for faculty to access. There is a new online evaluation tool which aligns with the course's goals.

3. Alignment of advisors: Rather than being randomly assigned to faculty members, students are now matched with faculty advisors from their majors.

According to Meghan Peterson, DSU Retention Specialist, the results of these changes include:

- Improved attendance. Success or failure is determined by attendance. Ninety-five percent of the students who registered for GS100 in the fall of 2006 received the grade of "S" for the class.
- Better advising. Advisors now spend more time with advisees and are able to develop a stronger relationship early in the student's academic career. This has resulted in positive comments from both students and faculty. Faculty, many of whom were reluctant to serve as facilitators, now readily volunteer.
- Easier student tracking and attendance monitoring. Dividing students into appropriate sections during the registration process has made the situation much less confusing for both faculty and students alike.
- Fewer burdens placed on faculty. The use of a unified curriculum, an outline of class activities, and other materials on the Web site makes teaching easier for faculty, all of whom volunteer their time to facilitate sections.

According to Ahern, the majority of the students who completed the survey evaluating the new University Experience course agreed that the course provided an opportunity to make connections with DSU faculty and other students. "We are excited about the effect this will have on our students' engagement with the University."

Catherine Stover is the editor of *Student Affairs Leader*. ●

Advice for Those Considering Launching a Freshmen Success Seminar

Meghan Peterson and Deana Hueners

1. Pairing advisors with advisees is an excellent idea. Students and facilitators both seem to enjoy and benefit from this exchange.
2. Developing a standard curriculum that is easily accessible to facilitators helps maintain the uniformity material covered and decreases the amount of planning required of faculty.
3. It is important to make the content of the curriculum relevant to incoming freshmen. We collected a lot of data when deciding what to include in our new course.
4. If possible, we recommend that the seminar be offered for credit and that faculty be provided incentives for volunteering their time. We haven't been able to take these steps yet, but the research we've done supports both of those steps.
5. It is also important to keep section sizes small to provide students the opportunity to help build relationships with advisors and fellow students.
6. Two resources that we found particularly helpful are: the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience: <http://www.sc.edu/fye/index.html> and the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA): <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Clearinghouse/AdvisingIssues/index.htm>

Meghan Peterson is DSU's Retention Specialist, and Deana Hueners is the Faculty Advising Specialist ●

Twelve Recommendations for Community Colleges

Defending the Community College Equity Agenda, edited by Dr. Thomas Bailey and Dr. Vanessa Smith Morest, published by Johns Hopkins University Press, is the newest resource to come from Columbia University's Community College Research Center.

Why does the community college agenda need to be defended? About 80 percent of students entering community colleges say their goal is to earn a bachelor's degree or higher, but only 18 percent actually do so within eight years.

These recommendations were taken from this book.--CS

1. A focus on student achievement as well as enrollment and access

Community colleges can be proud of their role in providing access to college for a wide variety of students. But many of those students make little progress in college. *Management, professional development, human resource policy, and program planning and coordination should all be explicitly designed to promote student progress.*

2. Beyond enrollment-based funding and accountability

In most states, college revenues are based on enrollments. As we ask colleges to shift their focus from enrollments to student success, *states must develop funding, accountability, and regulation systems that encourage colleges to work hard to ensure that each student achieves his or her goal.*

3. Closing racial and income gaps in college achievement

Although community colleges provide access to college for African American, Hispanic, and low income community college students, their outcomes remain below those for white and higher income students. *While colleges must improve outcomes for all students, they must focus particularly on closing racial, ethnic, and income gaps.*

4. Systemic reform

In seeking to improve student outcomes, rather than primarily pursuing discrete, small-scale programs that are often based on outside funding and targeted at a limited number of students, *colleges must think of reform in terms of broad institutional policy that creates fundamental change in the way a college operates.*

5. Informed decision-making through data analysis

Colleges must improve their use of data—both quantitative and qualitative—to promote student success. Colleges must design better data systems to track student progress so they can understand how students move through college (both within and outside state borders) and better recognize common barriers to student achievement.

6. Incentives in the accountability movement

In shifting attention from college enrollments to actual student outcomes, *performance accountability systems introduced by states and accreditors should avoid creating unintended incentives for colleges to enroll more easy-to-educate students.*

7. Strategies in developmental education

The weakness of the academic skills of their entering students is the most difficult and important problem facing many community colleges. Colleges use a bewildering variety of developmental education strategies to address this issue, yet have little idea about which approach is most effective. *Colleges must focus financial and human resources on developmental education, but in doing so must do a better job of measuring the strengths and weaknesses of these programs.*

8. Direct counseling and advising

Counseling and other student services are fundamental to the community college equity agenda. *As is the case with*

developmental education, colleges must improve their knowledge about the use and effectiveness of these services. Our study suggests that a variety of services are needed, but that face-to-face counseling should be prioritized over excessive written information.

9. Lessons from for-profit colleges in the design of student services

Successful for-profit colleges in general use a much more highly structured approach to student services than community colleges. While the much broader mission of community colleges makes this approach much more difficult, nevertheless, *community colleges should work toward providing a more structured and coordinated approach that is still consistent with their comprehensive and diverse roles.*

10. The expanding role of dual enrollment

Once limited to high-achieving students, dual enrollment is increasingly seen as a model for helping a wider variety of high school students prepare for college. There appears to be great potential in this strategy, nevertheless, *dual enrollment needs to be designed so that it does not exacerbate inequality in educational opportunities, and colleges need to do a much better job of measuring the effects of the model.*

11. Credentials for the workplace

Although community colleges play a central role in workforce development, the training they offer is sometimes short term and episodic. *Community colleges need to listen to both employers and students and offer comprehensive programs that provide credentials of value in the job market.*

12. Teaching and learning through online education

Most colleges have incorporated online education into their curriculum; nevertheless, the technical aspects of this

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CRITICAL ISSUES

Where Should Student Affairs Be Placed Within an Institution's Organizational Structure?

Arthur Sandeen and Margaret Barr

Where should student affairs be placed within the organizational structure of an institution of higher education? Should the senior student affairs officer report to the president or to the provost? These questions have consumed time and energy of professionals and professional associations for decades.

As competition for resources becomes more intense, as expectations from students for service increases, as greater public scrutiny is given to what students are actually learning, and as technology continues to change the way education is delivered, where the student affairs organization fits within the institution is emerging as a critical issue for our profession. If we do not confront this challenge with vigor and forthrightness, it could be resolved by people outside the student affairs profession.

In our opinion, there are four important initiatives that student affairs leaders should embrace:

1. We should focus on gaining access to institutional resources. Our position on the campus organizational chart is far less important in obtaining resources than is our ability to articulate the needs of our division in a clear and persuasive manner. We should “follow the money” on our campuses and demonstrate by our actions what the real benefits of our programs and policies are to our institutions and our students.

Through our positive contributions, knowledge, and insight, we should make ourselves indispensable participants in the institutional decision-making process. Reporting directly to the president does not ensure that this will happen; we must earn our place at the decision-making table, regardless of the formal organizational arrangements at our institutions. This means we must be very well

informed and able to make data-based contributions to the budgetary and decision-making process.

2. We must be strongly committed to student learning as the primary focus for our work. It's our responsibility to initiate and build collaborative programs with the provost, academic deans, department chairs, and faculty. Student affairs leaders do not have to report to the president for this to happen; it is a matter of leadership, and if we do not take the initiative, it is unlikely that others on campus will do so.

3. We should understand that our role is to persuade, to advocate, and to produce successful results for our students and for our institutions. We rarely achieve anything significant in isolation. If we think that a lofty title or position on the organizational chart will persuade others to support our programs, we're fooling ourselves. Leadership demands taking chances with ideas, programs, and policies. To be effective, we have to know how to present, defend and implement our ideas.

4. We should educate ourselves about the most important issues at our institutions. We should be able to make important contributions to the academic, research, and development programs at our institutions. Our competence, knowledge, courage and personal integrity will earn our role at the decision-making table.

Do these recommendations sound extraordinary? When Harvard College president Charles Eliot split the existing position of dean into academic dean and student affairs dean in 1890, the profession of student affairs began to emerge. The appointment of LeBaron Russell Briggs to this new position was not greeted with much enthusiasm by the faculty,

and Briggs was a one-man “organization” with no job description and vague “marching orders” about what he was to do. That he succeeded in becoming one of the most influential, beloved, and legendary deans in the profession's history is both an indication of his genius and a lesson for current practitioners. Briggs earned the confidence and support of others at Harvard because of his competence, his energy, and his ability to produce positive results.

Let's move forward 75 years to the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War period. At many colleges and universities, student affairs leaders proved themselves to be effective in resolving conflicts, dealing with racial disputes, and keeping the peace. This ability on the part of outstanding deans to handle very difficult problems arguably did more to elevate and advance student affairs than anything else in the history of the profession. As a result, many became a part of the management team of their institutions.

More recently, in 2000, a study of highly successful senior student affairs officers found that no particular administrative arrangement was related to success, but that all of these officers had strong leadership skills, were persistent, and had developed positive relationships with constituent groups and colleagues (Sandeen, *Making a Difference: Profiles of Successful Student Affairs Leaders*).

The important message for us is this: don't wait for your institution to hand you the ideal venue for supporting student success. Instead, take a leadership role in creating an organizational structure that will maximize your potential to be a contributing partner in the educational programs of your institution.

Where you report is much less important than what you do.

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