

π PAIDEIA

TEACHING & LEARNING AT MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PURDY CRAWFORD TEACHING CENTRE

“MILLENNIAL” STUDENTS

Look around your classroom or lab and at the students who populate it. They have grown up with e-mail, internet, computers and 24-hour news channels. Facts are just a click away and “research” is synonymous with “Google search” for some of them. They may take their class notes on laptops—at least that’s what you believe they are doing, but they could be downloading music. And they always seem to have some electronic device attached or inserted—indeed, they have been dubbed “the net generation” or the “new learners.”

Several writers such as Howe and Strauss (2003) and Twenge (2006) have coined the term “Millennials” to describe these students, and the literature abounds with descriptions, checklists, and characteristics of this group (see the list below). But, going beyond the cliché and the canned generalizations, what does the rather awkward tag “Millennial” mean in a teaching and learning context?

This issue of PAIDEIA presents some material related to Millennial students and explores its pedagogical implications. You’ll also find some tips on using PowerPoint, some guidelines for teaching portfolios, and information about the new-faculty Mentorship programme.



Characteristics of Millennial Students Howe & Strauss (2003)

1. Conventional
2. Confident
3. Special
4. Sheltered
5. Pressured
6. Achieving
7. Team Oriented

Who Are The Millennials?

According to a definition by Lyons et al. (2003), the majority of Mount Allison's students are "traditional"; in other words, *for the most part* they tend to live on or near campus, work mostly at on-campus jobs, are unmarried, have no children, and range in age from 18-22. That final characteristic also puts our student population firmly into the Millennial category.

In *Millennials Go To College* (2003), Neil Howe and William Strauss describe the dominant characteristics of this group, born between 1982 and 2001. The authors say that many Millennial students are from small families. From elementary school on, they have encountered support, encouragement and a focus on building their self-esteem; therefore, they expect the same support and attention from their university professors.

Jean Twenge, author of *Generation Me* (2006) goes further. She suggests that since today's students have been told by a succession of teachers, coaches and mentors that "they can do anything," they have an aversion to criticism or correction; failure is viewed as "deferred success," so a disappointing grade must be the professor's fault (65). Perhaps for the same reason—fear of failure—Millennial students tend to be reluctant to take risks.

While many would agree that current students are confident, others would have difficulty accepting Twenge's further characterization of Millennials as "narcissistic". They would argue instead that, realizing that a university education is essential if they are to acquire good jobs, these students are under considerable stress to achieve good grades.

A final key characteristic of Millennial students (which also seems to contradict

Twenge's narcissism charge) is their consciousness of values and the importance of teamwork. According to Howe and Strauss, this generation of students tends to prefer group or collaborative activities, and they are especially interested in service learning and co-curricular opportunities.

Twenge speculates that, because they have grown up in a world where facts are just a click away, Millennial students find it difficult to accept that professors actually know more than they do (29). In other words, factual knowledge itself is no longer power, and the professor no longer the centre of authority. Indeed, with group projects and peer review growing in prevalence, the Millennials' classroom is becoming much more learner-centred.

Millennial Students and Grades

When coupled the students' sense of entitlement and focus on high grades, this easy access to factual knowledge contributes to a troubling possibility, however: grade inflation.

Writing in *Change* (February, 2008), William Abbott contends that as a result of "uneven, unfair assessment of accomplishments" undergraduate GPAs in the United States have increased over the past three decades without corresponding increase in performance. He argues that giving high marks to low-performing students means that all graduates from the university face "skepticism" when they apply for jobs or graduate school. Abbott also notes that he has witnessed similar inflation in letters of recommendation.

What causes the grade inflation which Abbott finds so lamentable? In the superbly titled article *Are We a Gift Shop?* (*Journal of Nursing Education* 38 (9)),

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Shoemaker & DeVos suggest some possible causes:

Some speculate that grade inflation . . . is an outcome of student demands for high grades combined with faculty willingness to capitulate to them. Others believe the problem is related to lack of faculty knowledge about evaluation methods, or the quest for positive student evaluations in support of promotion, tenure, and merit decisions.

For more on this “willingness to capitulate” and its possible causes, see the provocative excerpt from Thomas Benton.

When our students graduate, their degree and the grades of which it is comprised become “currency” which they use to bid for jobs or graduate places. They are bidding against graduates with currency earned at other institutions. Grades which exaggerate students’ performance devalue their currency.

Given this monetary metaphor, we should defer to *The Economist* for its perceptive summation of the problem. The March 2002 issue contained an unattributed column about grade inflation (72), written in response to a study that found that half of the grades given at Harvard have recently been A or A minus.

The article pointed out that the term “grade inflation” is wrong—since we are not creating new grades above an A+; rather, what we are seeing is **grade compression**, with more and more As given out. *The Economist* argues that such compression is worse than inflation because it distorts the value and sends misleading information—or no information at all. When all the students get A all the time, the grades will tell us nothing. Grades will be reduced to “an absurdity.”

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A TOUGH-LOVE MANIFESTO FOR PROFESSORS

Thomas H. Benton

My argument is that a student culture of self-indulgence is enabled by the failure of professors to maintain expectations in the classroom. At many institutions, courses have been gutted to the point that students receive high grades for minimal effort, and the lowest grade many professors can risk assigning is a "B+." Even that will produce imperious complaints from students who think they are destined for greatness: "I worked really hard. Your class is not fair. Raise my grade or I'm taking it to the provost. Just wait till you get your evaluation!"

The consumer mentality of students results in their desiring less rigorous instruction because they are paying more for it. They use the cost of tuition -- which I acknowledge, is far too high -- as a justification for lowering standards. So they will pay again later when they discover that their degrees are a form of inflated currency and that employers will not treat them like little geniuses but expect them to actually work without complaining. Even if one accepts the instrumentalist view of education, we do our students no favors by letting them leave with so little knowledge and so much attitude.

Students, even if they are paying tuition, are not "customers" because, at most institutions, their tuition covers only a fraction of the total cost of their education, which is paid for by the state, donors, and accumulated institutional capital. The professors are also making a major contribution by working for far less than comparably educated professionals.

From *The Chronicle of Higher Education*
<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2006/06/2006060901c/careers.html>
Friday, June 9, 2006

Millennials and Teaching Evaluations

The so-called sense of entitlement that underpins students' quest for higher grades also influences their demands for teaching evaluations.

Bruce MacFarlane, author of *Teaching With Integrity: The Ethics of Higher Education* (2004), suggests that students have an increasing tendency to think of themselves as "consumers of educational services," especially in circumstances where scarce students have been as much wooed as recruited.

MacFarlane points out that though most academics are reluctant to use terms like *customer* and *client*—"a fast food approach to education which transforms the professor into a service worker"—those teaching in professional or vocational fields are less uncomfortable. For this group, clients and customers "comprise students, professional organizations and society at large." (9)

The consumerist mindset reduces education to a commodity which tuition fees buy, and professors supply. A heavy reliance on teaching evaluations may perpetuate this student-as-customer view, and we must be careful lest the evaluation becomes merely a customer-satisfaction survey.

Students are not always best placed to evaluate things for which they have no expert knowledge, says MacFarlane. Nor can they immediately judge the quality of their educational experience—sometimes it takes years after graduation to make such a judgment. (86).

We must be careful lest teaching evaluations become no more than customer-satisfaction surveys.

Where Are the Males?

When you look around your classroom, as I invited you to do earlier, you may notice that the majority of the students in it are women—where are the males? That's the question Ken Coates and Clive Keen (2007) are asking.

They point out that in 1960 only 4 percent of Canadian young people attended university; today it is closer to 40 percent. Yet for the past two decades, the number of males entering university has dropped steadily; furthermore, male dropout rates are higher than women's, so more women actually complete their degrees.

In 1969, only 36 percent of undergraduates were women; in 1981, the percentage was 47 percent; today 58 percent are female. (In 2007/8, Mount Allison's female enrollment was slightly higher, at 59 percent.)

In other words, in 1969 men represented 64 percent of university enrollments; today they represent only 42 percent—a substantial drop.

Keen and Coates emphasize, of course, that they are not complaining about the success of women at university; however, they are concerned about why young men seem to be lagging further and further behind:

This is not a suggestion that we do things to make women lose ground but rather that we recognize and admit that there is a problem and think deeply about it.

There are several possible reasons. Perhaps the work of scholars such as Blythe Clinchy and Mary Belenky has reaped dividends and attention to women's learning styles has paid off. Teaching methods such as collaborative learning and discussion are increasing at university, but Keen and Coates wonder if these pedagogies disadvantage males.

The authors also point out that female students more readily use academic support services that bolster their study skills, time management, and

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writing. They also point to increasing numbers of female role models in academy.

What can be done to increase the number of male Millennials without compromising the gains made in women's education over the last 40 years? Keen and Coates recommend strategic enrollment practices and "careful cultivation" of male applicants:

The widespread disengagement of young men is a loss of human capital and a loss of students for universities.

Making Pedagogical Decisions

Although our students are comfortable with technology, perhaps even more than their professors are, we must be careful to balance students' exposure to and expectations of technology with judicious pedagogical decisions that help them to engage in deep, rather than surface learning.

For example, when so many sources are so easily accessed, students may believe that all the information they have found is of equal authenticity and value. This means that the professor has to spend time discussing not only plagiarism, but also methods of appraising and thinking critically about sources.

Dziuban, Moskal, and Hartman (2005) caution that while Millennial students "get their information from blogs or wikis" and "can complete a task, listen to music, and talk on their cell phone simultaneously," employers see gaps in their critical thinking and willingness to take intellectual risks. Millennials tend to view problem solving as "a series of choices on a monitor."

The authors go on to suggest that Blended Learning is a pedagogical approach that really addresses Millennial students' preferences. The balanced integration of

technology with face-to-face learning, Blended Learning engages students by allowing them to use technology in ways that enhance the teamwork and collaborative approaches they prefer.

Raines (2002) posits several things that Millennials want from their teachers, including flexible learning environments that reflect creative teaching and delivery methods that allow for interaction and community-related learning.

It becomes the professor's goal, then, to harness Millennial students' natural enthusiasm for technology—especially messaging and social networking—and teamwork and apply it to learning activities that have an experiential or service component and with clear social value and community focus. A tall order!

Yet, Millennial characteristics aside, we must remember Bruce MacFarlane's caution that in teaching, assessing and managing their classes, professors "can no longer treat students as a malleable homogenous group with identical backgrounds" (11).

References and Resources

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Current technology fuels the increase in Millennials' narcissism. By its very name, MySpace encourages attention-seeking, as does YouTube.

Jean Twenge

Resist The Temptation To Use PowerPoint Too Often . . . (Some Tips for Your Tech-Savvy Students)

PowerPoint is best used to convey a simple informative message to a large group of people.

Because you can create slides quickly, you make far more than are appropriate.

You can use up precious time "tweaking" a presentation.

It lends itself to unnecessary competition. Presenters-particularly students-become distracted with "dueling PowerPoint."

*With PowerPoint, many of the elements that establish **ethos**, personal appeal, are blunted or negated. Speakers don't look at the audience and the audience doesn't look at the speaker. Subtle nonverbal cues are lost, such as eye contact, posture, etc. Presentations tend to be read off the slide or handouts, thereby flattening delivery.*

It does not lend itself to spontaneous discussions; it is heavily scripted and is not a tool for discovery.

It does not handle text well. The general rule for PowerPoint text is no more than three lines of text on a slide and no more than 6 words per line.

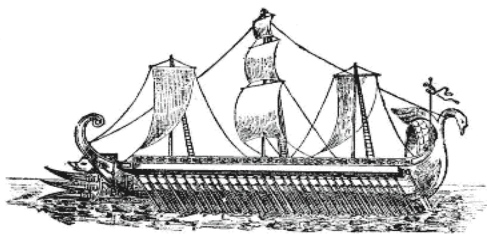
Presenters rely too much on the slides for structure. The aids should *reinforce* the structure, not replace it.

Presenters often rely too much on the visual slide to make the connection and neglect repetition, examples, metaphors and other devices that make a message memorable

Adapted from Kaminski, S. H. (2003) *PowerPoint Presentations: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

Retrieved from Tomorrow's Professor
<https://mailman.stanford.edu/mailman/listinfo/tomorrows-professor>

New Faculty Mentorship



The Purdy Crawford Teaching Centre's Mentorship programme will build on our successful Peer Consultation programme. Simply put, new professors are matched with tenured faculty (mentors) who guide and support them through a variety of means: regular meetings, discussion and feedback.

Mentorship addresses not just career development, but also a sense of belonging to the culture, tradition and values of the institution. It helps with the retention of faculty, and it can result in increased teaching and research quality and enhanced job satisfaction.

In September, there will be a meeting of interested new faculty[§] and mentors; its most important purpose is to describe the Mentorship programme to everyone and begin a discussion about teaching at Mount Allison.

For more information about Mentorship, contact the Purdy Crawford Teaching Centre at 364-2652 (pctc@mta.ca).

[§] Our definition of "new" is broad! If you feel "new"—for example, have been appointed to Mount Allison in the last 1-3 years—you are **most** welcome to be part of this programme!

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New and Junior Faculty: Stress and Success

Life for all academics is demanding; however, for new and untenured faculty especially, job stress levels can be high. Research by Boice (1991), Gmelch (1987), and Sorcinelli (1992) points to five aspects of academic life that elicit stress.

- 1. Insufficient Time** "Not enough time to do my work" ranks as the number one stressor for most new and junior faculty.
- 2. Inadequate Feedback & Recognition** Several studies have found that faculty experience tension about unclear criteria for evaluating teaching, research, and service; inadequate institutional recognition for their contributions; and insufficient reward for their achievements.
- 3. Unrealistic Expectations** New faculty feel a great deal of self-imposed pressure to perform well and succeed. They are also concerned about colleagues' evaluations of their work and about fulfilling the standards set both inside and outside their institution.
- 4. Lack of Collegiality** Studies by Melendez & de Guzman (1983) and Seldin (1987) indicate that new teachers are often disappointed in their colleagues, citing a lack of respect and rapport, which may result from politics or rivalry within the department.
- 5. Balancing Work & Life** For many, the stresses of establishing their reputation through teaching, writing, research, securing grants, advising students, and serving on committees coincide with stressors in their private lives: a new marriage or relationship, children, moving to a new city (or country).

Source: Sorcinelli, M (1992). New & Junior Faculty Stress: Research and Responses in Sorcinelli M & Austin A (Eds.) *Developing New & Junior Faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Compiling Your Teaching
Portfolio?
Eileen's Top Five Tips

For more information, contact
Eileen at 2652 (pctc@mta.ca)

Plan Carefully

Be clear about:

1. Why you are creating the portfolio (job search, promotion, tenure?)
2. What you want the readers to know about you and your teaching
3. The best evidence you can provide
4. The most effective sequencing

Align and Link

Make sure the three main parts of the portfolio complement one another:

1. Summary of Teaching Responsibilities
2. Teaching Philosophy
3. Evidence of Achievement

Reviewers and selection committees look for alignment throughout the portfolio. No claim should be unsubstantiated; no piece of evidence should be "orphaned."

Be Selective

Choose evidence that is:

1. Representative of your work
2. Taken from a variety of sources
3. Chosen to fit your purpose

Help your Reader

1. Organize logically—e.g., chronologically, thematically, by category
2. Create a Table of Contents
3. Write a brief preamble to each individual piece or section of evidence to help demonstrate how it fits into your portfolio.

Update Your Portfolio Regularly

If you are planning no major moves, a quick annual tuning is all that's needed.

Coming PCTC Events

Two special events on
Wednesday August 27th!!

PCTC Teaching Day

8:30 am -3:30 pm

Wu Centre, Dunn Building

This year's theme is Academic Renewal

Visit www.mta.ca/pctc/index.html

The Annual Tucker Presentation . . .

The Show Must Go On: Scenes from a Teaching and Learning Life

Dr. Elizabeth Wells

Brunton Auditorium, 3:30 pm

Dr. Elizabeth Wells is the

2008 recipient of the Herbert and Leota
Tucker Teaching Award and the Association
of Atlantic Universities Distinguished
teaching Award.

Visit <http://www.mta.ca/pctc/index.html>

Look out for the following coming in
Fall & Winter:

♠ Te[a]chnology

A series on Teaching Well With Technology

♠ Teaching Portfolio Series

♠ Mentorship (see page 7)

♠ How Am I Teaching?

A series on assessing and enhancing teaching

♠ Lining Up

A series about aligning instruction and
assessment for learning outcomes that
transcend content knowledge

