

Student Life Research Newsletter

TECHNOLOGY & THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

BY SANDRA MARQUEZ HALL, PH.D.

Are Colleges Catering to Customers or Teaching Students? The average college student today born between 1980 and 1994 (often referred to as Millennials) appear to be smart, but impatient. Some colleges believe treating Millennials like market-driven customers is the wave of the future. Partly on-demand and partly entertainment, technologically savvy schools want higher education to “up” their approach on campus with instant messaging, web-surfing, and class availability presented like an iTunes play list. Add in courseware, search engines, library databases that are animated, image-based and interactive; it appears that many techno driven schools seem to be caving into the newest, latest, and fastest gadgetry.

Over Exposure: Core questions on how much students learn from using techno tools are usually secondary to innovation. What about the students who complain about the distraction caused by laptop users emailing and surfing the web during class? Coolness and majority rules seem to subdue most non-participants, even in the classroom.

Teaching: Is Faster Better? Some Millennials maintain that the pressure to succeed drives their peers to want to skim topics to retrieve only the most significant information. Savvy instructors have found using the latest technology can be effective in keeping students interested by using various innovative approaches in class settings such as: Podcasting which uses a microphone and an Internet connection to create course audio files that others can download automatically into their iPods or digital-audio players. Listeners can download one file at a time or subscribe to a series of recordings through their

computers. Also known as coursecasting, the process can help students that prefer to review information later or hear it multiple times. A similar product, known as BoilerCast Web sites, host downloadable MP3 files that allow students to download lectures for up to 50 courses.

What's Missing? Technology does provide more options for learning material in different ways. Having choices and customizing are two things that Millennials find appealing along with portability, preferring the use of video, audio

and interactive media. Many people (parents and educators) believe that expanding student interest in technology dehumanizes personal contact, often with adults that want to communicate something important. In spite of what the media conveys about the use of advanced techno tools in colleges, the current literature is inconclusive on whether a school’s status as “technologically savvy” makes a difference in student success. Most college students are seeking basic technological support from their academic experience.

Measuring Up: So how does Texas Tech measure up as compared to other public universities technologically? The Assessment & Student Life Research Office reviewed selected findings from nationally benchmarked College Student Survey (CSS) administered to seniors in 2003, 2004 & 2005. The questionnaire covered a variety of areas on student attitudes and satisfaction with several items related to technology. Based on comparisons to other participating colleges and universities, Texas Tech students indicated slightly higher levels of activity in course-related assignments received and delivered online, and had comparable levels of activity for Internet use for assignments. Texas Tech students appear to be more satisfied with Internet availability and computer facilities on campus than peers at other schools. Although cutting edge gadgetry gets the headlines, Texas Tech students are comparatively happy using basic technology for course work.

College Student Survey (CSS) Results		
(n=# of participants for year of study)		
Year	Texas Tech	All Participating Universities
Turned in course assignments electronically		
2005	93.7% n=567	91.5% n=32,287
2004	90.0% n=442	88.5% n=35,503
2003	87.9% n=165	86.3% n=34,078
Received course assignments through Internet		
2005	92.6%	92.8%
2004	93.5%	89.3%
2003	89.7%	87.4%
Used the Internet for research or homework		
2005	84.1%	84.4%
2004	84.1%	82.9%
Students indicating they were “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their current college		
Availability of Internet access		
2005	85.9%	80.4%
2004	88.5%	81.5%
2003	87.8%	80.9%
Computer facilities		
2005	82.1%	73.8%
2004	88.5%	81.5%
2003	87.8%	80.9%

BOOK REVIEW

PROFESSIONAL GETS SCHOOLED IN STUDENT LIFE

by Sandra Marquez Hall, Ph.D.

MY FRESHMAN YEAR: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student.

Rebekah Nathan

168 pages. Cornell University (2005), \$24.00

Student Affairs professionals, college administrators and university professors stand to learn a great deal about contemporary college students from the exposé of an insider's experience on the first college year. Established anthropologist and professor Rebekah Nathan (a pseudonym) invested sabbatical leave and her own funds into a freshman college year at "AnyU" by living in a residence hall and attending classes as a full-time student. Even with a wealth of ethnographic field experience and years of teaching experience under her belt, it was more difficult than she anticipated. Direct and indirect observations, conversations, group participation, focus groups, interviews, and unintentional eaves dropping provide rich insight into Nathan's college freshman and residential life experience.

In spite of AnyU's best intention for creating community among students, very little is shared as a "group" by the freshman cohort. Juggling personal schedules, prior relationships and the sheer volume of options available to students on campus discourages a universal freshmen class experience. Time management, ethical questions, and unconscious norms prevailed as key issues during Nathan's academic year of study. Forget

about students embracing deep intellectual conversations, philosophical discussions, or exploring diverse cultures; academics played a secondary role to college students' other priorities.

Maintaining social norms and work schedules trumped classes as students sought to fit in any course to make a schedule work or get an easy "A." Dorm room decor celebrated the current life cycle of students' with memorabilia that honored "youth, fun, and connectedness." Residential rooms were also crammed with every imaginable audio or electronic device and appliance, sabotaging many of AnyU's efforts for residence life activities. World-views varied widely, and diverse students (international and students of color) experienced only surface relationships with the mainstream groups who were highly selective even among their campus peers.

To her credit, author Rebekah Nathan wins over the students in her dorm and classes with grit and social sensitivity. She achieves acceptance without causing too many challenges to her research objectives and ultimately finds support within the unlikely peer group. This insightful book raises more questions than it can answer. The author recognizes the social and economic challenges that have led to change in contemporary college life over the past 20 years. The book is highly recommended as reading for professionals in post-secondary education who are interested in understanding some of the social underpinnings that affect student success in college.



"In spite of AnyU's best intention for creating community among students, very little is shared as a "group" by the freshman cohort."

~ Dr. Marquez Hall

Assessment & Student Life Research

125 Doak Hall, Box 41141

Lubbock, TX 79409-1141

www.aslr.dsa.ttu.edu

References

- Carlson, S. (2005, October 7). The Net Generation in the Classroom. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, pp. A34-A37.
- Howe, N. & Strauss, W. (2000). *Millennials rising: The next great generation*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Read, B. (2005, October 28). Lectures on the go. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, pp. A39-A42.
- Taylor, M. (2004). Unique traits of generation next require a new approach from you. *Student Affairs Today*, April 11. Retrieved May 8, 2006, from <http://www.taylorprograms.org>



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Division of Student Affairs