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The Millennial generation of college students has demographics and attitudes toward diversity issues different from their predecessors; this chapter explores those differences and their implications for student affairs work.

Understanding Diversity in Millennial Students

Ellen M. Broido

College students of the new millennium are different from their predecessors in many ways, among them having distinct demographic characteristics, views of people different from themselves, political and social values, and attitudes about social justice issues. As the Millennial generation brings these differences with them to college, university administrators need to rethink how they attempt to address social justice and diversity issues on campus.

Changing Student Demographics

One highly visible way in which Millennial students differ from earlier students is their racial and ethnic diversity. According to the 2000 U.S. census, 39.1 percent of people under eighteen are people of color (Asian; black; Hispanic, who may be of any race; or Native American), as compared to 28.02 percent of people eighteen and over (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001a, 2002). The growing percentage of young people of color is likely to be reflected in the student population. According to the Educational Testing Service (Carnevale and Fry, 2000), “The increase in African American undergraduates will be relatively modest—from 12.8 percent of students in 1995 to 13.2 percent in 2015. Asians on campus will swell dramatically by 86 percent over the 1995 level, growing from 5.4 percent of college students to 8.4 percent. Hispanic students, too, will register large increases, from 10.6 percent of 1995 undergraduates to 15.4 percent in 2015. . . . Minority enrollment will rise both in absolute numbers of students—up

about 2 million—and in percentage terms, up from 29.4 percent of undergraduate enrollment to 37.2 percent” (p. 9).

Millennial students also are far more likely to be biracial or multiracial than are previous generations. This group made up 3.95 percent of the under-eighteen population in the 2000 U.S. census, while they made up just 0.95 percent of the eighteen-and-over population. Moreover, the fraction of biracial and multiracial children in the population grows in each successively younger age group; this group makes up only 3.15 percent of those fourteen to seventeen years old in 2000 while they were 5.35 percent of those who were less than one year old in 2000. Biracial and multiracial students are most likely to be most visible at institutions that draw their students from urban areas, especially in the southwestern United States, and the East and West Coasts (Rosenblatt, 1999). At these institutions the “check one box” racial categories on university forms make little sense to an increasing fraction of the student body (Renn, 1998). Moreover, informal reports indicate that an increasing number of college students are refusing to identify their race at all.

The rise in the number of people of color does not necessarily translate into increased intergroup contact, particularly between whites and people of color, because neighborhoods and schools tend to be racially segregated. According to research done under the auspices of the Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative and Urban Research (Logan and others, 2001), “children of all groups are being raised in environments where their own groups’ size is inflated, and where they are under-exposed to children of other racial and ethnic backgrounds” (p. 1). However, this reality is shifting, slowly for white children’s contact with children of color, much more rapidly for contact between racial or ethnic minority children. Between 1990 and 2000, there was a greater than 10 percent decrease in the level of segregation between black children and Asian and Hispanic children (Logan and others, 2001). White children in metropolitan areas are living in somewhat more racially mixed neighborhoods than they did a decade ago; however, racial and ethnic minority “children have lower exposure to white children in their neighborhoods now than was true ten years ago” (p. 4).

Simultaneously, after decades of progress toward desegregation of children’s schools, that change generally has halted, and in some places, particularly in metropolitan areas, schools are becoming more segregated than they were a decade ago (Logan, 2002). Currently, “at the national level. . . white, black, and Hispanic elementary children on average all attend schools where their group is a majority” (p. 3). Thus, although campuses generally will become increasingly diverse, interracial contact is likely to be a new experience for many (especially white) college students.

However, this will not be the experience at all campuses. Because of the urbanization of people of color (whites are about twice as likely to live in rural areas as are Asians, blacks, or Hispanics; Battelle, 2000), rural

campuses that draw their students from local regions may remain overwhelmingly white institutions.

One reason the Millennial generation has a racial and ethnic profile different from that of earlier generations is the rising number of immigrants to the United States. According to Howe and Strauss (2000), 20 percent of this generation have at least one parent who is an immigrant. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001b), half of those living in the United States who are foreign-born are from Latin America, and a quarter are from Asia. This immigrant population is highly concentrated in urban areas and along the East and West Coasts of the United States (as well as a few very large mid-western cities).

Not surprisingly, given the increasing number of children who are immigrants or children of immigrants, the Millennial generation reflects a different level of English language proficiency than do recent generations (a century ago, immigrants made up a slightly larger fraction of the U.S. population than they do currently, although immigration rates were appreciably lower in the intervening years; Camerota, 2002). The total number of children and young adult students who speak languages other than English at home has roughly doubled since 1979. According to Livingston and Wirt (2003), in 1999 17 percent of five-to-twenty-four-year-olds spoke a language other than English at home. Although speaking a language other than English at home is by no means a guarantee that a person does not speak English well, 6 percent of the participants in Livingston and Wirt's study were identified as able to speak English less than very well.

Race, ethnicity, immigration status, and English language skills are not the only ways in which the Millennial generation differs from earlier ones. The distribution of wealth has become more polarized in the United States over the last fifteen years, according to Pear (2002), who drew upon 2002 census data. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2003) reiterated this point, writing that "after-tax income was more heavily concentrated at the top of the income scale than at any other time in the 1979–2000 period" (p. 1).

This shift in income is relevant for understanding Millennial college students because access to college is restricted for students from less wealthy families. According to Burd (2001), "the gap in the college-going rates between students from low-income families and those from high-income families is nearly as wide as it was three decades ago" (p. A26). A 2001 report of the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, a group that advises Congress on student financial aid policy, stated that "low-income students, who are at least minimally qualified or better, attend four-year institutions at half the rate of their comparably qualified high-income peers" (p. v). This problem has been exacerbated by shifts in private and state-based financial aid awards from need to merit and from grants to loans, and the decreasing purchasing power of Pell Grants.

Additional demographic shifts will be evident in the Millennial generation. People can become aware of their sexual orientation at any point in

their lives, but data indicate that an increasing number of students are coming out as lesbian, gay, and bisexual, even as early as elementary school (Cahill, Ellen, and Tobias, 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2001). Because of the stigma of homosexuality, and because people's understanding of their sexual orientation can shift over their lives, estimates of the number of lesbian, bisexual, and gay students are quite tentative. However, "most researchers believe that between 5 and 6 percent of youth fit into one of these [lesbian, gay, or bisexual] categories" (Human Rights Watch, 2001, sect. III, p. 1).

The Millennial generation also includes a greater number of transgender students, or at least more students willing to claim this identity. According to Beemyn (2003), "There is no accurate measure of the number of transgender college students. . . . Direct observation and anecdotal evidence suggest that youth who do not fit stereotypical notions of 'female' and 'male' are becoming much more visible on North American campuses and a growing number of students are identifying as gender variant or, as many describe themselves, 'gender queer'" (p. 34).

Little is known about transgender college students, but their needs are gaining greater attention, as more campuses add gender identity and gender expression to their statements of nondiscrimination and still others debate this shift (Transgender Law and Policy Institute, 2003).

Another change evident in this generation is the family structures in which they have been raised. More than any earlier generation, these students come from single-parent families, blended and stepfamilies, and families with same-sex parents. According to Mason and Moulden (1996), "one-fourth of all children born in the U.S. in the early 1980s will live with a step parent before they reach adulthood" (p. 11), and at any given point roughly 25 percent were living with only one parent. Although firm data on the number of children raised by same-sex parents are hard to obtain, several sources indicate that those numbers are significant (between one million and fourteen million, depending on the source consulted) and growing (Cahill, Ellen, and Tobias, 2003). Regardless of the specific numbers, colleges and universities need to reconsider assumptions they make about the family structures of their students, which has implications for financial aid policies, forms, and communication with parents.

Changes in Students' Attitudes Toward Diversity and Social Justice Issues

Millennial students will bring with them not only a different demographic profile from earlier generations but also different views about diversity and social justice issues. Most indicators point toward Millennials having more open attitudes toward issues of diversity and social justice, although there are a number of trends challenging that perspective.

Race and Racism. The Millennial generation has grown up with more mixed messages about race and race relations than perhaps any previous generation. This generation experienced the uprising in South Central Los Angeles in April 1992 following the beating of Rodney King. They witnessed the trial of O. J. Simpson, and how it was perceived by various racial and ethnic groups. Throughout their entire lives, affirmative action has been debated in the media and in the courts. They grew up aware of intense public and governmental attention to illegal immigration, which invariably was cast in racialized terms. As Hu-DeHart (1997) states,

In short time, illegal aliens ceased to be merely those who enter the country without proper documents. They are the dark-skinned Arab/Muslim religious fundamentalist and terrorist who blows up the World Trade Center in New York City; the black Caribbean sociopath who shoots innocent passengers on the Long Island commuter train; the pregnant Mexican welfare cheat who crosses the border to San Diego to have babies who then become U.S. citizens and in turn enable the mother to claim welfare benefits; the unassimilable Southeast Asian war refugees too eager to take any job at any wage, thus depressing the wage scale and stealing the livelihood of bonafide, longtime Americans [p. 19].

However, this generation, more than any previous, grew up aware of interracial couples, people of color in high-profile governmental positions, and a growing middle class of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Overt expressions of racism are increasingly rare on college campuses (Levine and Cureton, 1998), although they certainly still occur.

Indicators of how the Millennial students will view issues of racial and ethnic diversity give a number of messages. Several points, however, are clear. First, though dialogue about race in the United States has historically been primarily a discussion about black and white people, the Millennial generation has a much more expansive understanding of race, one that better reflects the demographics of people of color in the United States. This generation no longer sees race as a black-white issue. It is commonly understood to include Latino and Asian people, and people of all nationalities (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

Less clear is whether the Millennial generation actually has had greater interracial contact than have their predecessors. CIRP data from 2001 indicate that incoming students reported the highest level of cross-race socialization since that question was first asked in 1992 (Sax and others, 2001). However, as discussed earlier, this seems unlikely, given the increasing racial segregation in schools and neighborhoods. This can be explained if demographics are not presumed to be the only reason for contact; perhaps this generation of children is more likely to interact across racial boundaries even if there are fewer other-race children with whom to interact.

Given that conflict around diversity issues is often cited as one of the dominant causes of tension between college students (Levine and Cureton, 1998), these tensions may increase. Additionally, fewer incoming college students see racism as a major problem in America than in the last three years (Sax and others, 2001).

Nevertheless, an increasing number of students are citing more positive attitudes toward race-related issues and support for affirmative action is climbing, although views vary tremendously by race. CIRP data (Sax and others, 2001) indicate that support for the elimination of affirmative action is now at its lowest level (49.0 percent) in the six years the question has been asked. Additionally, also according to 2001 CIRP data, there has been a small rise in interest in working for racial understanding (at 31.5 percent, up from a low of 30.0 percent in 1999, but still far below the high of 46.4 percent in 1992).

Gender and Sexism. Another area in which Millennial students have different experiences and expectations is that of gender and sexism. This generation holds attitudes about appropriate roles for women that are much more egalitarian than in earlier generations. This is a generation that has seen a rise in women as leaders in peer culture, government (Hillary Clinton, Madeline Albright, and Condoleezza Rice), business, and many other areas. Not surprisingly, “three times more girls than boys now say their top career choice is medicine or law” (Howe and Strauss, 2000, p. 224). As these women enter the university, however, they are likely to notice that women are less evident in the leadership of college campuses; this diversity is not yet reflected in tenure-track faculty and the senior administration of universities (Wenniger and Conroy, 2001).

Millennial students have decreasing expectations that women’s place is restricted to the home, with only 21.5 percent of students agreeing that “the activities of women are best restricted to home and family” (Sax and others, 2001, p. 32). At the same time, though, this generation has experienced a much greater level of gender-based segregation in activities, interests, and publications than the one preceding it; men, in particular, are predicted to have trouble redefining their masculinity in socially productive ways (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

Sexual Orientation and Heterosexism. The Millennial generation has grown up knowing of “out” television and movie stars, politicians, musicians, and possibly peers. They have heard discussions about lesbian, bisexual, and gay people and issues as part of public discourse for their entire lives. Domestic partner benefits, gay marriage, and discussion of gay and lesbian people serving in the military are not new or shocking for many students of the Millennial generation, whether or not they support such policies. Not surprisingly, this generation reflects an increasing level of support for the rights of lesbian and gay people (Sax and others, 2001). This may be a consequence of the increasing number of junior and high school students who are out; the strongest predictor of positive attitudes toward lesbian and

gay people is knowingly having had contact with them (Herek, 1997). The Millennial generation shows increasing support for lesbian and gay marriage (57.0 percent of 2001 freshmen believe “same-sex couples should have right to legal marital status,” up almost 10 percent from when the question was first asked, in 1997) and decreasing support for criminalization of homosexual relationships, now at a record low level since the question was first asked, in 1976 (Sax and others, 2001).

Reports of harassment and violence at the junior and senior high school levels indicate that these remain exceedingly hostile environments for most lesbian, bisexual, and gay students (Human Rights Watch, 2001), but there also is increasing support for these students and their straight allies. The number of gay-straight alliances in U.S. high schools exceed nine hundred in 2003, spread across forty-six states (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2003). Students involved in these organizations are likely to bring their growing comfort with lesbian, bisexual, and gay students with them to college.

Political Attitudes. Political views and attitudes about diversity and social justice issues have long been linked, although the relationship has never been exact. Following the Civil War, work to advance social justice issues was more closely linked to liberal political parties than to conservative ones. To some small extent, however, this distinction may be less true of the Millennial generation.

What is clear is that there is an increasing polarization in the political identification of this generation. According to CIRP data, in the entering class of 2001 “those labeling their views as politically ‘liberal’ or ‘far left’ [were] at a two decade high” (Sax and others, 2001, p. 2). More students are defining themselves as liberals, but more also are defining themselves as conservatives. In both 2001 and 2002, the percentage of students identifying as conservative rose (Rooney, 2003). According to Colapinto (2003), “The College Republican National Committee, a group that mobilizes students to campaign, has tripled its membership since 1999 to an all-time high of 1,148 chapters” (p. 32). This is challenged somewhat by the findings of the Schneiders/Della Volpe/Schulman group, done in conjunction with Harvard University’s Institute of Politics (2003), which asked instead about political party affiliation. They found that although the percentage of students identifying as Democrats has been stable since 2001 (at 29 percent of students in 2001, 2002, and 2003, down from 34 percent in 2000), the fraction of students identifying as Republicans has dropped in the same time frame (from 28 percent in 2000 to 26 percent in both 2002 and 2003). In that same period, however, the percentage of students identifying as independents has grown from 33 percent in 2000 to 41 percent in 2003.

College students’ liberalism is evident in a variety of measures, including support for legalization of marijuana along with decreasing support for employer drug-testing of employees or job applicants and for the death penalty. These findings are further supported by the research of the

Schneiders/Della Volpe/Schulman group (2003), which found that regardless of party identification more surveyed college students identified themselves as liberals or moderates (37 percent and 34 percent, respectively) on social issues (including education, health care, and affirmative action) than on general issues (36 percent and 29 percent) or economic issues (25 percent and 42 percent). Nevertheless, according to Colapinto (2003) CIRP data also reflect a conservative shift on a number of other, traditionally liberal issues. Support for the legalization of abortion is down from 66 percent in 1989 to 54 percent in 2002, support for wealthy people paying a larger share of taxes has dropped from 66 percent in 1995 to 50 percent in 2002, and support for gun control laws is at the lowest level ever recorded.

What seems to be occurring is a new definition of liberal and conservative, or at least a distinction between social and economic liberalism and social and economic conservatism. Definitions of what it means to be politically conservative seem to be shifting, particularly around attitudes related to social justice issues; conservative political beliefs no longer can be considered a proxy for racial intolerance. Colapinto (2003) documents leaders of a campus conservative group supporting same-sex unions and saying “People expect us to be like Pat Buchanan, like, ‘We’re diluting our great Western culture by letting immigrants in.’ I don’t think any of us buy that” (p. 35). He noted: “Like the rest of their generation, they’ve been trained, from preschool onward, in the tenets of cooperation, politeness and racial and gender sensitivity. As much as they would hate to admit it—as hard as they try to fight it—these quintessential values have suffused their consciousness and tempered their messages. . . . [The leader of the campus Republican group] has no desire to be mistaken for a bigot” (p. 58).

Social Justice Behaviors. The Millennial generation is likely to engage in behaviors that relate to social justice issues (including voting, community service, protest and demonstrations, and discussion of social and political issues) differently from their predecessors. We can expect them to have a greater focus on social change efforts from within the system, given their tendency to be group-oriented and accepting of authority (Howe and Strauss, 2000). However, this generation seems to be engaging in more visible protest and organizing than recent generations; “participation in organized demonstrations during the past year reached an all-time high 47.5 percent in 2001, compared to 45.4 percent last year and a low of 14.8 percent when this question was first asked in 1966” (Sax and others, 2001, p. 4).

Even though in recent years college students have not been a major force in elections, there is evidence that this is shifting. According to a report by the Schneiders/Della Volpe/Schulman group, 59 percent of college students interviewed stated that they would definitely be voting in the 2004 presidential election, and another 27 percent indicated they probably would vote. Not surprisingly, there has been an increase in entering college students’ discussion of politics and belief in maintaining awareness of political affairs (Sax and others, 2001).

This generation has participated in community service and service learning activities at levels unseen in the past; “[the] 2001 [CIRP] survey also marks a record high level of volunteerism, with 82.6 percent of incoming freshmen reporting frequent or occasional volunteer work” (Sax and others, 2001, p. 4). However, recent studies (Jones and Hill, 2003; Marks and Jones, forthcoming) raise the question of whether students will continue their engagement, having absorbed the values that leaders of this movement hope, or whether they will turn away from that which previously has been required of them. The findings of these studies do indicate that those required in high school to serve indeed are less likely to continue their engagement in college than those whose service was voluntary. It is important to remember, also, that not all service activities are closely related to social justice work, although many are.

Implications for Student Affairs Practice

The Millennial generation will ask of and need different things from student affairs practitioners than have previous generations. They will have different demographics, attitudes about diversity issues, and personality characteristics. What follows are some ideas for how we might best prepare for and react to those differences to ensure that all students are welcomed and supported on our campus and that all students learn to work effectively with people unlike themselves.

- *Embrace the reality that our campuses will be different as our students change.* Find ways to incorporate all students, in all aspects of their identities, into the rituals, ceremonies, and cultural aspects of the campus environment. Do not limit their involvement to mere presence; be sure that these aspects of the campus actually incorporate students’ cultures, and expect the campus to change along with its students.

- *Be prepared for more sub rosa, less visible conflict around diversity issues.* Conflict is unlikely to manifest in the form of students challenging one another’s views, or those of faculty or administrators (Levine and Cureton, 1998). This lack of visible challenge results because this generation is less likely to challenge authority (Howe and Strauss, 2000) and because they have grown up understanding the impact of language, or at least having absorbed the rules about what kinds of issues can and cannot be discussed in formal settings. However, those are exactly the discussions and topics that most need to be explored. Faculty and student affairs staff need to develop settings in which students feel they have license to voice unpopular opinions, be supportively challenged, and articulate the rationale for their positions. Use of technology can facilitate this in some instances, using electronic discussion forums and e-mail lists, although students must assume responsibility for their ideas (that is, posts should not be anonymous). Separate forums can be developed where questions can be

asked anonymously and other students can respond, knowingly participating in settings where they might be offended.

- *Move beyond the “food, festivals, fashion, and fun” approach to diversity.* This generation has grown up with multicultural festivals, international dinners, and “celebrate diversity” messages. We need to help them learn to deal more substantively with issues of power, privilege, and oppression, in both curricular and cocurricular areas. This can be done through formal programming, but also by asking students (and ourselves) questions: “How does your being white affect your work as an RA?” “Do the demographics of your student group represent the campus as a whole? If not, why not? What can you do about it?” “Whom do we picture as our ‘normal’ student? How do our institutional practices have an impact on students who don’t fit that image?”

- *Advocate for curricular diversity requirements that go beyond just learning about international cultures.* Diversity requirements need to deal substantively with how issues of power, privilege, and oppression manifest within the contemporary United States. On many campuses, diversity requirements can be satisfied by courses on non-Western cultures, or on aspects of U.S. history far removed from the present day. These requirements are very important, and students should learn about these cultures and histories. However, it is equally important that they gain a better understanding of how issues of social justice play out in their own country, in the present day.

- *Help students learn to act as allies.* They have learned that difference is good, they know that they should not discriminate, and many are feeling guilty about their privileged social status (Levine and Cureton, 1998). Many students need and want to learn how to work for justice. Develop programming that teaches students to organize groups, to lobby administrators and legislators, and to work with media. Actively recruit students into efforts to create change on issues they care about, be that to participate in rallies, send letters to editors, or question your own administration. Teach them to appropriately challenge their peers’ ideas. Role model ally behavior.

- *Identify and address the challenges that students of color face on your campus; assess their needs, challenges, and strengths.* Build on their experience with one another; they will have had far more contact with other students of color than with white students. Be prepared to deal with those who see these efforts as heightening segregation; be able to justify the utility of these programs within the framework of your institution’s priorities and mission.

- *Be sure that campus policies and procedures recognize and accommodate the increasing heterogeneity of students.* For example, screen and amend all forms used on campus to be sure they allow all students to accurately reflect their identities, including aspects such as multiple racial identity; nontraditional gender identity; one, two, three, or four parents; parents who

are same gender; and so on. Do not presume that all materials sent to parents should be in English. Provide gender-neutral bathrooms and locker room facilities for transgender students. Include gender identity and gender expression in campus nondiscrimination clauses (and sexual orientation, if it does not exist).

- *Be prepared for shifting enrollment patterns in low-income students.* Changes in the need for and availability of financial aid are likely to influence who goes to college; they will shape how and where those students attend. Unless financial aid policies change, or we see a shift in how income is distributed, expect even greater disparity in the enrollment patterns of lower-income students, among whom students of color, immigrants, and first-generation citizens are found in greater numbers. These students will more often attend community colleges, where tuition and fees are lower than at four-year colleges; they will work more hours (up to and beyond forty hours a week) while attending full-time; and fewer students will attend full-time.

The Millennial generation will bring many challenges to student affairs practitioners and faculty, particularly in the area of diversity issues. However, they also are poised to be the generation most able to transform how they, and the larger world, think about and act on these issues. As long as we engage in dialogue with this increasingly diverse generation and make genuine efforts to meet their needs, it should be a productive interaction.

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ELLEN M. BROIDO is assistant professor of higher education and student affairs at Bowling Green State University in Ohio.