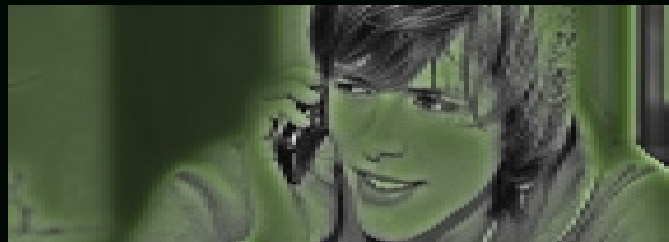


Serving Students the Big Red Way



Seven descriptors of
the current
generation of college
students:
SPECIAL
SHELTERED
CONFIDENT
CONVENTIONAL
TEAM-ORIENTED
ACHIEVING
PRESSURED

Debard, 2004



get to **know** me

A information guidebook about UNL students
for those who serve them



Serving Students the Big Red Way

To: All Faculty and Staff

From: Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, Barbara Couture
Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Juan Franco
Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance, Christine Jackson
Vice Chancellor for Agriculture and Natural Resources, John Owens
Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies, Prem Paul

Creating positive student relationships and enhancing student retention are an integral part of the university's mission and values. We all want students to learn, flourish and graduate. Everyone contributes in many unique ways to the success of our students. This booklet is one more tool for you to help students feel they belong and can succeed at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

In the last few years, many of you have participated in efforts to reach out and retain UNL students. The millennium generation, 1980 to 2000, represent the period from which most of our students are born. They come to college with some unique challenges as well as commonalities with generations past. The information here offers you some insight into the developmental stages of students today, as well as an understanding of some of the unique cultural backgrounds and technical experiences they bring to campus.

Helping students belong and succeed is more than being nice. Whether it is a long term advising association or a quick phone call, effective interaction with students means developing relationships that value problem-solving, trust and cooperation through open communication and feedback. We are all essential to every student's achievement and vitality.

get to KNOW me

The information provided in this booklet is designed to provide a rich picture of the students that we serve at UNL. It is created with the belief that increasing our knowledge about the mindset, motivations, and circumstances of those we educate and serve will ultimately yield better service. The information published here comes from a wide variety of local and national data sources and the writings of credible developmental and generational researchers. A bibliography of these sources appears on page 7.

Thomas Workman, Ph.D., editor & Lead Trainer, Serving Students

GET TO KNOW MY GENERATION

By exploring the factors that shape a generation's peer personality and discerning identifying characteristics of that personality, educators can develop more effective policies and practices.

Coomes & DeBard, 2004

A generation gap?

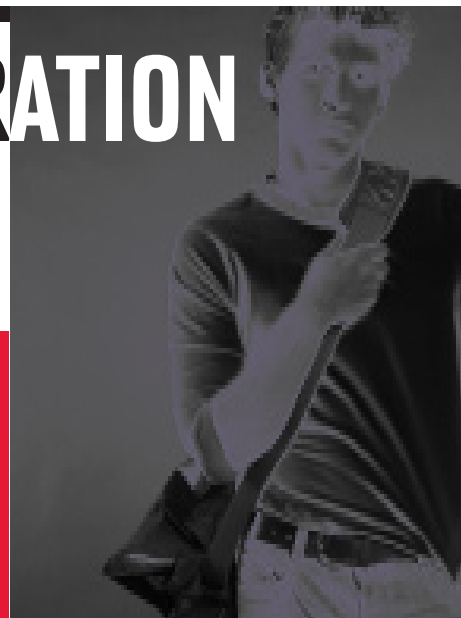
71% of all undergraduate students at UNL were born after 1985.

2% of all undergraduates students at UNL are over 30.

61% of all UNL faculty were born between 1946 and 1965.

3% of all UNL faculty are 30 or younger.

UNL Fact Book, 2006



WHO THEY ARE

A new generation has come of age, shaped by an unprecedented revolution in technology and dramatic events both at home and abroad. They are Generation Next, the cohort of young adults who have grown up with personal computers, cell phones and the internet and are now taking their place in a world where the only constant is rapid change. Kohut et. al., 2007

Why the label Generation Me? Since GenMe'ers were born, we've been taught to put ourselves first. Reliable birth control, legalized abortion, and a cultural shift toward parenthood as a choice made us the most wanted generation of children in American history. Television, movies, and school programs have told us we were special from toddlerhood to high school, and we believe it with a self-confidence that approaches boredom: why talk about it? It's just the way things are. This blase attitude is very different from the Boomer focus on introspection and self-absorption: GenMe is not self-absorbed; we're self-important. We take it for granted that we're independent, special individuals, so we really don't need to think about it. Twenge, 2006

In reassuring ways, the generation that came of age in the shadow of Sept. 11 shares the characteristics of other generations of young adults. They are generally happy with their lives and optimistic about their futures. Moreover, Gen Nexters feel that educational and job opportunities are better for them today than for the previous generation. Kohut et. al., 2007

College student culture has long had its own rules that kept professors, classes, and intellectual life at arm's length. The second salient point to remember is that not all college students buy into the dominant paradigm of the day. College culture, like any culture, is neither singular nor monolithic. There are subcultures and alternative cultures that have long existed within American colleges and universities. They still do. Nathan, 2005

WHAT THEY DO IN THEIR FREE TIME

71% of first-year students reported that they spent some time each week participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, social fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intermural sports). UNL NSSE Study, 2004

73% of college undergraduates said that the iPod was the most "in" thing for college students. Drinking beer and Facebook.com tied for second place. Strauss, 2006

89% of UNL students work either part or full time while attending college.

64% of UNL students own their own computer.

96% of UNL students use the internet daily. UNL Omnibus Study, 2005

63% of high school graduates have had some experience with community service, usually as a school requirement.

41.3% of students believe it is essential or very important for them to influence social values through community leadership. Lopez, 2002.

Two out of three (66.3 percent) entering freshmen report they believe it is essential or very important to help others who are in difficulty, the highest this figure has been in the last twenty-five years. Howe & Strauss, 2000

WHAT THEY WANT FROM COLLEGE

High school and college students in national focus groups stated that the primary objective of a college education is to get a diploma in order to get a desired job, or to gain knowledge, skills, and experience that will enhance their potential for professional and personal success. “Participants place only moderate emphasis on becoming a more critical thinker and problem-solver, and learning about people from other cultures and preparing for a life of civic responsibility and leadership are considered low priorities.” Hart & Associates, 2004.

In 2004, a national survey found that more college freshmen said they wanted to be an “actor or entertainer” than wanted to be a veterinarian, a dentist, a member of the clergy, a social worker, an architect or work in the sales department of a business. Music was just as popular as acting, and even more said they wanted to be artists. Almost one out of 20 college students expects to become an actor, artist or musician; more than want to be lawyers, nurses, accountants, business owners, journalists or high school teachers. Twenge, 2006

The majority of (first year student) respondents felt “completely successful” in developing close friendships with other students; less than half felt similarly about understanding professors’ academic expectations and adjusting to the demands of college in general; less than a third were completely successful at utilizing campus services, developing effective study skills, managing their time effectively, or getting to know faculty. UCLA “Your First College Year” Study, 2005

BELIEFS AND LIFESTYLES

Roughly eight-in-ten say they have talked to their parents in the past day. Nearly three-in-four see their parents at least once a week, and half say they see their parents daily. One reason: money. About three-quarters of Gen Nexters say their parents have helped them financially in the past year. Kohut et. al., 2007

Their heroes are close and familiar. When asked to name someone they admire, they are twice as likely as older Americans to name a family member, teacher or mentor. Moreover, roughly twice as many young people say they most admire an entertainer rather than a political leader. Kohut et. al., 2007

About half of Gen Nexters say the growing number of immigrants to the U.S. strengthens the country – more than any generation. And they also lead the way in their support for gay marriage and acceptance of interracial dating. Kohut et. al., 2007

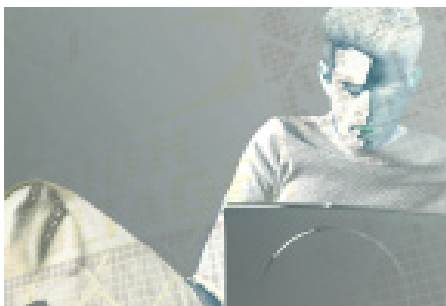
In a 1999 survey of 766 college students with tattoos and body piercings, the most common reason given for their choices was “self-expression.” Eighty-one percent of tattooed college students named self-expression, independence, or uniqueness as a motivation. Sixty-nine percent of students with body piercings named self-expression or “to be different.” as their reasons. Twenge, 2006

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: ONE UNL STUDENT’S STORY

A recent research project asked UNL students to explain what they’d like faculty and staff to know about them. Here’s one response.

It is very hard sometimes to let teachers know who I am. I do not want special treatment or them to think I am using it as an excuse, but I do feel I am different than most teachers feel the traditional student is to them. I work 30+ hours a week and the work day starts at 2:50 in the am and then I am in classes all day most days. I am a full time student at UNL taking 18 hours and at SCC taking 9 hours there this semester. Last semester I took 16 hours at UNL and 13.5 at SCC. I also go to school all year round. If I miss an assignment it is probably because I simply had too much to do or forgot among the other things on my list. I am not yawning in class because it is boring or I was at party late last night, it is because I normally get 4 hours of sleep a night. If you feel like I do not participate enough, it might be because my brain is exhausted. I am 24 and married. I have been married for three years. My parents died in a car accident two years ago and I am raising my two younger brothers as well. I need to work to have extra money but I need to go to school in order to have a better job and I need to get school done faster because I would like to have a stable schedule (9-5) to spend time with my family. I feel like I don’t have much of a choice sometimes. So when I am not in class it might be because I am taking somebody

to a doctor or dentist appointment or I am supporting my brothers in an after school activity. I feel like college is something I have to do to build the type of future I want. I know every student has their own situation, but I want teachers to understand that I am not that stereotypical student. Every assignment teachers assign for outside the classroom needs to be meaningful and not just busywork because that is time away from my family and activities, sleep, and other school work. I do not mind working hard and I enjoy lots of assignments because I normally do not have the mental alertness to comprehend material the first time and the assignments help with that. I also feel that teachers can be extremely busy as well and students do not know what it is like for them, which is why I think it would be a good idea to not only help teachers know students but do this same thing so students can better understand teachers.



GET TO KNOW MY DEVELOPMENT

The Seven Vectors of College Student Development was created by scholars Chickering & Reisser (1993). Although these vectors may mature in sequence, most students are grappling with all of these vectors at different rates and at different times throughout their college years.

AREA OF GROWTH

INTERSECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Developing Competence: Intellectual, physical/manual, and interpersonal competence are all sought and developed during college years. Competence gives students a sense of confidence that they can “cope with what comes and achieve goals successfully. Obviously, students will be at different levels of their competence in each area—for example, those with intellectual competence may lack interpersonal competence.

What may seem like a lack of willingness to accomplish a task or poor manners may actually be a demonstration of a student’s lack of competence in these areas. Be patient. Know that you may be playing a critical role in skill-building, even though the interaction or assignment is unsatisfying now. The better question: What competencies exist that I can build from that help promote growth?

Managing Emotions: During college, students are developing the ability to recognize, accept, appropriately express, and control their emotions. Early stages of development can be seen when young adults are unable to distinguish or articulate their feelings, or seem to express emotion inappropriately.

What some assume to be “GenMe rudeness” may just be an undeveloped sense of emotional awareness or control, particularly in periods of extreme stress. Given that this generation is under more pressure than those of the past, you may see more indications of undeveloped emotional maturity as the cause for conflict.

Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence: Both emotional and instrumental independence is developed as students learn self-reliance, self-direction, and autonomy. However, maturity in this area occurs when young adults discover interdependence—a sense of interconnectedness with others.

It shouldn’t be surprising that students aren’t coming to us for help or advice—they are trying to build autonomy skills. We must be careful not to confuse GenMe’s self-importance with this essential developmental stage. Best bet: help a student see their role as part of a whole system.

Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships: Young adults learn in this vector that experiences with relationships contribute significantly to the development of a sense of self. Tasks include intercultural and interpersonal tolerance, and building the capacity for healthy and lasting interpersonal relationships.

Like it or not, we’re in the relationship business, and much of our challenge in creating and maintaining positive relationships with students may be their lack of development in this area. Role model these skills often. You’re providing key training for this set of skills every time you interact.

Establishing Identity: Gaining comfort with physical appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, a sense of cultural and social heritage, and comfort with one’s roles and lifestyle all make up the development of a secure sense of self for young adults. This development usually occurs through feedback from significant others, self-acceptance, self-esteem, and personal stability/integration.

Although this generation may be more susceptible to media influence on their identity, never forget that you have a role to play here as well. Providing clear, supportive feedback for a student is critical so that they can see how their behavior “looks” to another person. Blaming, shaming, or condemning simply creates walls, especially when a young adult is trying to gain a sense of self.

Developing Purpose: Discovering vocational goals and meaningful commitments to specific personal interests occurs at this vector. A sign of maturity is maintaining commitment, even in the face of opposition.

Missed deadlines, lack of direction or motivation, and a general sense of confusion over matters we’ve already determined to be important are all signs of this stage of development, regardless of the generation. Work through missed deadlines and commitments carefully—you can make a difference here.

Developing Integrity: Here, young adults develop the ability to humanize values, personalize values, and develop congruence and authenticity.

The most difficult phase of human development needs lots of role modeling from us. We must walk our own talk and show tolerance for others.



Implications for UNL Faculty & Staff

I wish that more teachers could see students and student culture from “the other side.” Teachers would come to know that when a student openly snoozes in class, or invents a story about why the paper hasn’t been written on time, or wants an override into a course because of its time slot, this is the small stuff, the workings of a culture. As hard as it may be to realize sometimes, it’s really not personal. Nathan, 2005

Serving Students the Big Red Way Help students feel they BELONG at UNL Help students SUCCEED at UNL

What can knowing the students we teach and serve—both generationally and developmentally—do for us as faculty and staff members at UNL? Though this booklet provides only a limited snapshot, the voices and facts suggest several important approaches to helping our students belong and succeed at UNL. The key, of course, is to build service relationships with students that are based on trust, mutual respect, and problem-solving. Here are a few suggestions:

Students DO want to be known, BUT...

Many students, according to the experts, believe they must “manage” faculty and staff by telling them what they want to hear rather than what we really need to know. Communicating from a position of authority or communicating formally may be a barrier to honest, open responses. Casual and sincere communication may yield better dialogue and more information. Remember that most young adults are trying to gain independence; show them that interdependence doesn’t undermine that autonomy.

Know your own generational “hot buttons.”

It’s easy to react or to make assumptions about student attitudes, styles, or behavior based on our own generational lens. We must recognize our own generational values, beliefs, and attitudes, and acknowledge that our thinking may simply be different than the student in front of us. More importantly, we must remember that we are (hopefully!) at a later stage of development than the young adult in front of us.

The stress is real.

The stress and pressure students face is very real, and students are quick to accuse faculty and staff of adding to their stress level, especially if we demand activities that require additional time constraints or financial resources. A student may not be procrastinating a task, but may be involved in juggling multiple commitments. Ask about other schedule demands, and listen to the reasons why a student is unable to follow deadlines or due dates. Equipped with more information, you may help a student manage their time more effectively or make decisions that may yield better outcomes.

Traditional motivators may not work, and could actually cause more harm than good.

Attempts to motivate a student out of their respect for authority, their social position in the academy, or their age may not only fail but could backfire into a negative relationship that keeps you from serving the student well. Though challenging, communicate with students from a place of sincere respect for their ideas, interests, and positions. You’ll find plenty of self-motivation from this high-achieving group, if they believe that their efforts will yield positive results.

Yes, it IS all about them. How can you use this knowledge to help them belong and succeed?

Perhaps the most difficult characteristic of the Millennial generation is their tendency toward self-absorption: It seems as if it is all about them. It is! Knowing that this is a generational characteristic will help you avoid reaction and judgement when a student seems oblivious to anyone else’s needs but their own. Here’s where negotiation is critical. Communicate your own needs, and explain why a deadline, rule, or procedure exists. Most students will reject a process if they feel it exists just for the convenience of the institution, so explain the reasoning or simply express your own need. Then help a student find solutions so that they can benefit from the system itself. Also remember that this is developmental. Keep exposing students to other real needs around them, and help them find ways to meet their needs without hurting the needs or rights of others.

Remember that NOT all students are the same.

The danger in providing generational tendencies, as we’ve warned earlier, is to over-generalize all students into a set of characteristics that may not hold true for many subpopulations. Your best bet is to ask—and ask often—about an individual student’s likes and dislikes, beliefs, attitudes, and interests. Check in with the individual student about your assumptions. Be careful about making broad general statements about students—they rarely yield a positive reaction.

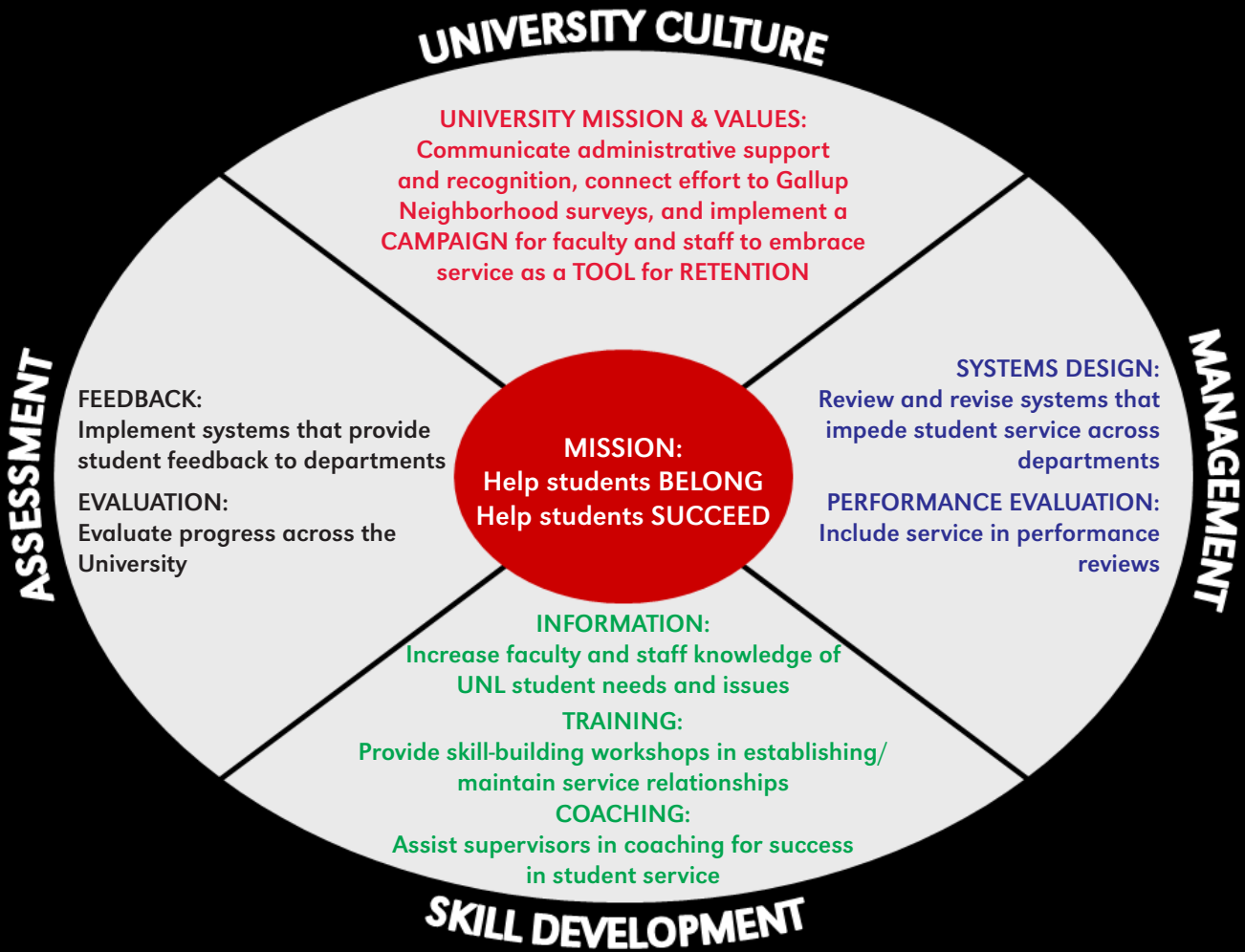
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For additional information on training sessions, workshops, and other resources associated with the “Serving Students The Big Red Way” Initiative, please visit our web site at www.unl.edu/retain



Serving Students at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Conceptual Model of Campus-wide Program



get to **know** me



Created by Student Involvement Information Strategies
Research/Writing: Tom Workman, Ph.D.

visit the accompanying web site:
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