

IPCN

Indiana Pathways to College Network

Pathnotes, Vol. 25, No. 1

Purpose-guided Learning: Improving Graduation Rates and Student Satisfaction

Jerry Pattengale
Indiana Wesleyan University

“Purpose-guided education” provides a research-based perspective on students from the Millennial Generation.

Examples of Millennial-focused approaches to higher education include: taking a “big-picture” approach (beginning with a snapshot or overview of an issue, then backing into the details), using culturally relevant pictures and film-clips to supplement lessons, and ensuring that students understand how issues and lessons relate to and are relevant to them.

Understanding that “Millennials” are “digital natives” using and adapting to technology with relative ease, compared to professors belonging to earlier generations who are, at best, “digital immigrants” should guide the way institutions think about presenting information and reaching out to students.

Millennial students are characterized as:

1. **Special**
2. **Sheltered**
3. **Confident**
4. **Team-oriented**
5. **Achieving**
6. **Pressured**
7. **Conventional**

Implications of these characteristics for college admissions, campus life, and the classroom are central to the purpose-guided learning curriculum.

Implications of a cultural belief that Millennials are “**special**” include gearing recruitment and admissions toward parents, as well as to their children, providing apartment-style clustered housing where students can live without roommates, designing parent-transition events and initiatives to keep parents connected, and providing students with frequent positive-reinforcement, including quizzes, feedback, small projects, and core skill mastery.

Implications for a generation of “**sheltered**” students include emphasizing campus security and safety records, no-nonsense enforcement policies, access to health services with frequent checkups, and increased scrutiny of what goes on in the classroom, especially in light of increased parental monitoring of professor-student relationships and students’ grades.

Implications for colleges teaching and serving a “**confident**” generation, described as upbeat and positive, include the importance of emphasizing dream-actualization over problem management, providing ceremonies and rituals to celebrate collective confidence and identity, and the need for professors to work harder to draw out creative intellectual risk-taking from a generation whose collective confidence translates into a hesitancy to take risks and a decreased desire to “win” or stand-out among their peers.

Implications for serving a “**team-oriented**” population include the development of group enrollment strategies to capitalize on the strong value Millennials place on relationships, rather than on “going it alone,” focusing social activism on income and class, rather than on race and gender, emphasis on group work and community service, and teaching through a combination of teamwork and technology.

Implications for serving a high “**achieving**” student population include increasing retention by focusing on students with a good academic fit, rather than on upper-echelon students with a high probability of transfer or those who view your institution as a “safety-school,” providing a wide variety of extra-curricular offerings and equipping campuses with the latest technology, and using technology effectively in the classroom to support every subject.

Implications for serving “**pressured**” students include the need to provide recruitment materials that convey how a particular college fits into the students’ life plan and provides a place of refuge, offering creative opportunities for physical exercise and relaxation, and conveying clear rules about what constitutes cheating and plagiarism, to help students accustomed to teamwork and collaboration take tests and complete assignments independently.

Implications for “**conventional**” students center on the importance of garnering respect for the institution by holding students to high expectations and assuring that professors also meet high standards of conduct and competency,