

# The New Generation of Students

How colleges can recruit, teach, and serve Gen Z





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### About the Author



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**A** NEW GENERATION of students has arrived on college campuses. Known as Gen Z, this cohort marks a break from even the recent past in terms of diversity, attitudes about money, and use of technology. Now, institutions that have spent the last several years catering to millennials must pivot to appeal to the traditional-age students poised to enter higher education over the next decade and a half.

Gen Z is the most diverse generation in modern American history, and its members are attentive to inclusion across race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The Great Recession and its aftermath focused Gen Zers on the value and relevance of a degree. The purpose of college for them is to help launch a career, and they will look primarily for academic and co-curricular programs to develop their skills and prospects.

Growing up entirely in the era of the smartphone and social media mean that Gen Zers see technology as an extension of themselves with respect to how they communicate, manage friendships, consume information, and learn. They expect a high-tech educational and campus experience but don't want to live entirely in the virtual world. And they may need more support in the way of personal development than their predecessors did.

No generation is a monolith, and research on Gen Z is just emerging. But campus leaders must pay attention, as this new generation coincides with a shrinking pool of high-school graduates and increased expectations for student success. This report offers insights into the mind-sets and motivations of Gen Zers and describes how colleges can best serve them.



### Section 1 The Recruitment Funnel

In the college search, Gen Zers are more pragmatic than millennials were, and more focused on relevant academic programs and support services than on bells and whistles. They indicate interest on their own terms, say by liking a photo on Instagram. They shop for a good value, appreciate price transparency, and want to estimate their return on investment as specifically as possible. Today's students also seek convenient resources for tutoring, career development, and mental health, with on-demand virtual services available on mobile devices.



## Section 2 Teaching Gen Z

This is a generation accustomed to learning by toggling between the real and virtual worlds. Today's students reflexively turn to YouTube for information, yet don't believe technology has unlimited potential in the academic setting. Above all, they want an education they can apply. They favor a mix of learning environments and activities led by a professor but with options to create their own blend of independent and group work and experiential opportunities. They prize project-based learning and undergraduate research that will hone crucial, marketable skills for life after college.



## Section 3 Shifts in Campus Life

During the height of millennial enrollment, many institutions went on a building, hiring, and programming spree. But Gen Zers tend to want fewer comforts and more supports; they may be fine with simpler housing while benefiting from more flexible spaces that promote interaction with classmates and professors. Today's students come to campus less seasoned than previous generations, which raises the stakes for personal development as part of the college experience — more guidance on issues like study habits, wellness, and campus speech.



**C**OLLEGES have long been on the frontier of generational change. Before workplaces and the rest of society encounter the shifting attitudes of new cohorts, this evolution unfolds on campuses, where large segments of the population make the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Almost since the dawn of higher education in the United States, academic leaders have attempted to interpret the mind-sets and motivations of incoming students, often by comparing them with their predecessors in unfavorable terms. A few years before the Civil War, a professor at Davidson College described students as “indulged, petted, and uncontrolled at home ... with an undisciplined mind, and an uncultivated heart.” In 1871, faculty members at Harvard University debated whether to introduce unannounced examinations to motivate students “who could afford to waste their own time and their fathers’ money.” After World War II, when veterans flocked to campuses nationwide on the GI Bill, the president of the University of Minnesota complained that this next generation was too focused “on finding a job rather than a life of the mind.”

For traditional institutions where 18- to 24-year-old students learn and live, the characteristics of each cohort shape expectations and offerings. By the 1960s, counterculture baby boomers had sparked widespread campus protests for civil rights and women’s rights and against the Vietnam War. The era of *in loco parentis* — when institutions stood “in the place of a parent” — ended as courts recast students as adults. “Going off to college” became a decisive break from parental supervision for boomers and then for Generation X, which came of age on campuses in the 1980s and early ’90s. The high cost and burden of calling or traveling home made it difficult for students of those generations to rely on their parents for guidance and support.

At the turn of the 21st century, colleges welcomed the children of baby boomers, who rivaled them in size and influence: millennials. They came with a new attitude — as customers of higher education entitled to a vast array of services and amenities — and a habit of texting frequently with “helicopter parents” who hovered over the college experience. Millennials and their parents were “happy to have their tuitions raised for better dorms, high-speed internet, and better food,” observes Jane Wellman, a longtime analyst of college costs. Not to mention climbing walls and lazy rivers.

Now, after spending much of the last two decades catering to millennials, colleges are seeing a new cohort arrive. It is called Generation Z (Gen Z for short), or sometimes iGen, the Homeland Generation, or Centennials (See “Who Is Gen Z?” on page 12). Born starting around 1995, the leading edge of this generation is only now making its way through college. Gen Z’s arrival went largely unnoticed by campus leaders, who talk about millennials as if they were still the prototypical undergraduates.

But to consider Gen Zers as simply an extension of millennials would be a serious misstep. Theirs is a diverse generation that grew up in an era of school shootings, the Great Recession, the Occupy movement, protests over police brutality, and the legalization of gay marriage — all streamed on their devices and followed through hashtags on social media — making today’s students worried about money,

anxious about the future, and more inclusive of differences in identity.

Gen Z represents a clear break from the past that has widespread implications for institutions.

One is tied to college costs. Unlike their predecessors, Gen Zers don’t want campus frills at any expense. They are wary of taking on debt and more willing to question the value of a degree and look for alternatives. Many remember their parents living through the recession, maybe losing their jobs or their homes. Despite the economic recovery of the past decade, financial security continues to weigh on their minds. They are interested in practical subjects with clear paths to careers.

**Gen Z represents a clear break from the past that has widespread implications for institutions.**

A second front is cultural. On campuses around the country, student unrest about broad social issues is a direct result of Gen Z’s arrival.

This is the most diverse generation in modern American history. Today's students are attentive to inclusion across race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and they want colleges to live up to those ideals as well. At the same time, Gen Zers are less receptive to the principles of free speech, especially when that speech offends their values. This has contributed to an uptick in requests for "safe spaces," reports of microaggressions, and protests against invited campus speakers.

A third set of implications is social. This new cohort of students is the first to grow up in the reign of the smartphone and social media. Many spend more time on their devices than they do in face-to-face encounters. This significant shift in social dynamics plays out in how young people develop relationships and manage friendships, as well as consume news and information. Some researchers connect the prominence of smartphones and social media to teenagers' rising reports of poor mental health.

Finally, the emergence of Gen Z will call for new approaches to teaching. Knowledge is everywhere for these students. They are accustomed to finding answers instantaneously on Google while doing homework or sitting at

**Knowledge is everywhere for these students. They are accustomed to finding answers instantaneously on Google while doing homework or sitting at dinner.**

dinner. They seek constant information and entertainment in YouTube videos much as previous generations read magazines or watched TV. They are used to customization. And the instant communication of texting and status updates means they expect faster feedback from everyone, on everything.

Rarely do beliefs and habits evolve so fast. "The changeover from millennials is one of the most pronounced ever," says Jean M. Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University, who dubbed this new cohort iGen in her 2017 book of the same name. Research shows less of a continuum, she says, or initially subtle differences that deepen over time, and more of a fundamental generational shift.

"Colleges and universities," Twenge advises, "need to serve iGen very differently."

That means less direct marketing to prospective students and more options for them to discover institutions on their own; more flexible learning opportunities including face-to-face, virtual, and most of all, experiential; and services that not only support students to graduation but help them navigate life afterward.

The arrival of Gen Z also coincides with colleges' increased attention to student success. That movement aims to raise retention rates and close gaps in academic performance through, among other strategies, enhanced advising and active learning. To pull that off, faculty and staff members on the front lines must understand incoming students and know how to reach them. Marveling at the sort of generational perspectives long catalogued in the Beloit College Mindset List isn't the same as handling delicate issues like trigger warnings and smartphones or laptops in the classroom.

Campus officials may also have to explain Gen Z to alumni who tend to view their alma mater as it existed during their

**Incoming students' preoccupation with the value and outcome of a degree could allow colleges to dispense with some of the bells and whistles aimed at millennials.**

undergraduate years. Complaints about "students these days" may require more of a response than they used to as colleges depend more than ever on donations. Indeed, at a handful of institutions, student protests over racial tensions and sexual assault have dampened or even derailed fund-raising campaigns.

For campus leaders, the transition to Gen Z holds both risks and opportunities, and certainly new costs. Incoming students' preoccupation with the value and outcome of a degree could allow colleges to dispense with some of the bells and whistles aimed at millennials and focus more on the core educational mission. But the generational shift may also require colleges to expand resourc-

es in financial aid, career development, and mental health, and to rethink their academic programs as students migrate from the humanities to more vocational fields like computer science, engineering, and health care.

Facilities across the campus may need to be renovated to meet the needs of a new cohort, to promote social interaction and innovations in teaching. The suite-style residence halls with private bedrooms so popular a decade ago suddenly seem outdated, as do academic buildings with lecture halls and classrooms with tablet-arm chairs.

While generational profiles offer insight in broad strokes, any cohort exhibits contradictions and plenty of internal variation. This new generation is more tolerant of differences, but its members will go to great lengths to avoid viewpoints that challenge their own. They are less likely to drink and have sex in high school, yet rates of binge drinking and sexual assault haven't declined in college.

The frontier of generational change can be an uncertain place. This report is informed by dozens of experts who study Gen Z, but the cohort is still just emerging. "While there are clear trends, some of this is a guessing game until more students of this generation experience higher education," says Arthur Levine, the departing president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, who has contributed to three books on different generations' behaviors and beliefs.

And yet college leaders can't afford to ignore

Gen Z. That is particularly true at four-year residential institutions competing for a declining number of upper-middle-class students. Higher education as an industry is under more strain than when millennials entered the picture nearly two decades ago, when the size of that cohort and the strength of the economy suggested that enrollments would continue to grow. Now financial pressures bearing down on colleges mean that for many, falling a few students short in admissions or watching a handful transfer because they are dissatisfied is the difference between a balanced budget and a deficit.

In the sections that follow, this report will help campus leaders understand Gen Zers and develop strategies to reach and serve them. It follows the student lifecycle, examining how recruitment can appeal to this new cohort, then describing how today's students learn, and finally, imagining what a campus should look like to serve them.

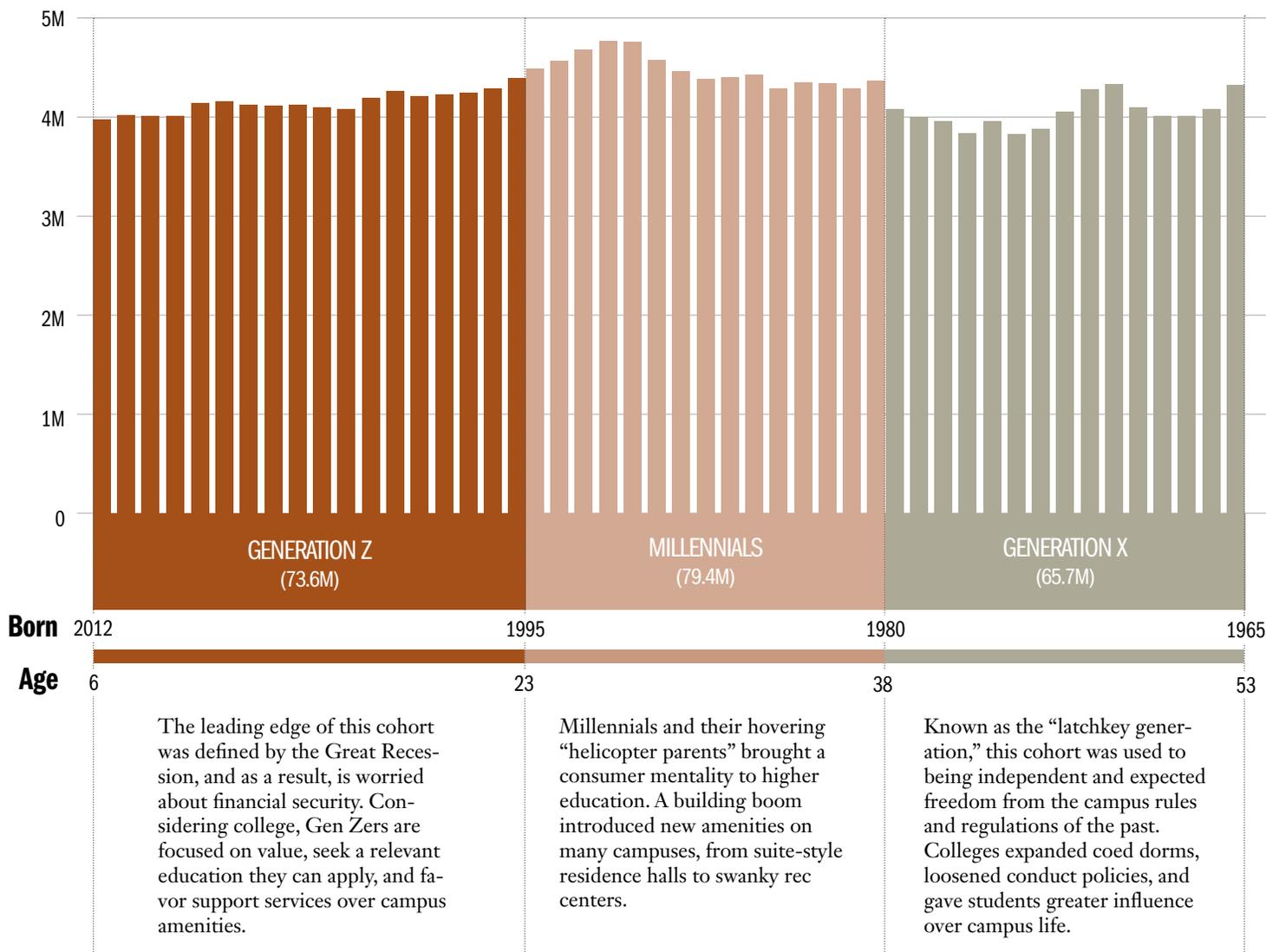
Gen Z marks a projected decline in the number of high-school graduates in many regions of the country, and comprises growing shares of first-generation and low-income students everywhere. That provides the impetus for campus leaders to attract a more diverse population, experiment with technology to engage students and improve learning, and design services to see them through. Reshaping higher education for this next generation will keep it relevant and valued in an evolving society.

# Who is Gen Z?

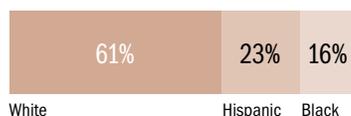
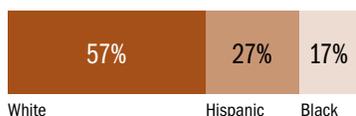
**D**EFINING A GENERATION, particularly its boundaries, is not an exact science. For instance, the millennial and baby boomer generations are often described as spanning nearly 20 years, and

Generation X only 14. Bounds sometimes shift as a generation ages to reflect perspectives shaped by major developments or events.

This report defines Gen Z as its most prominent



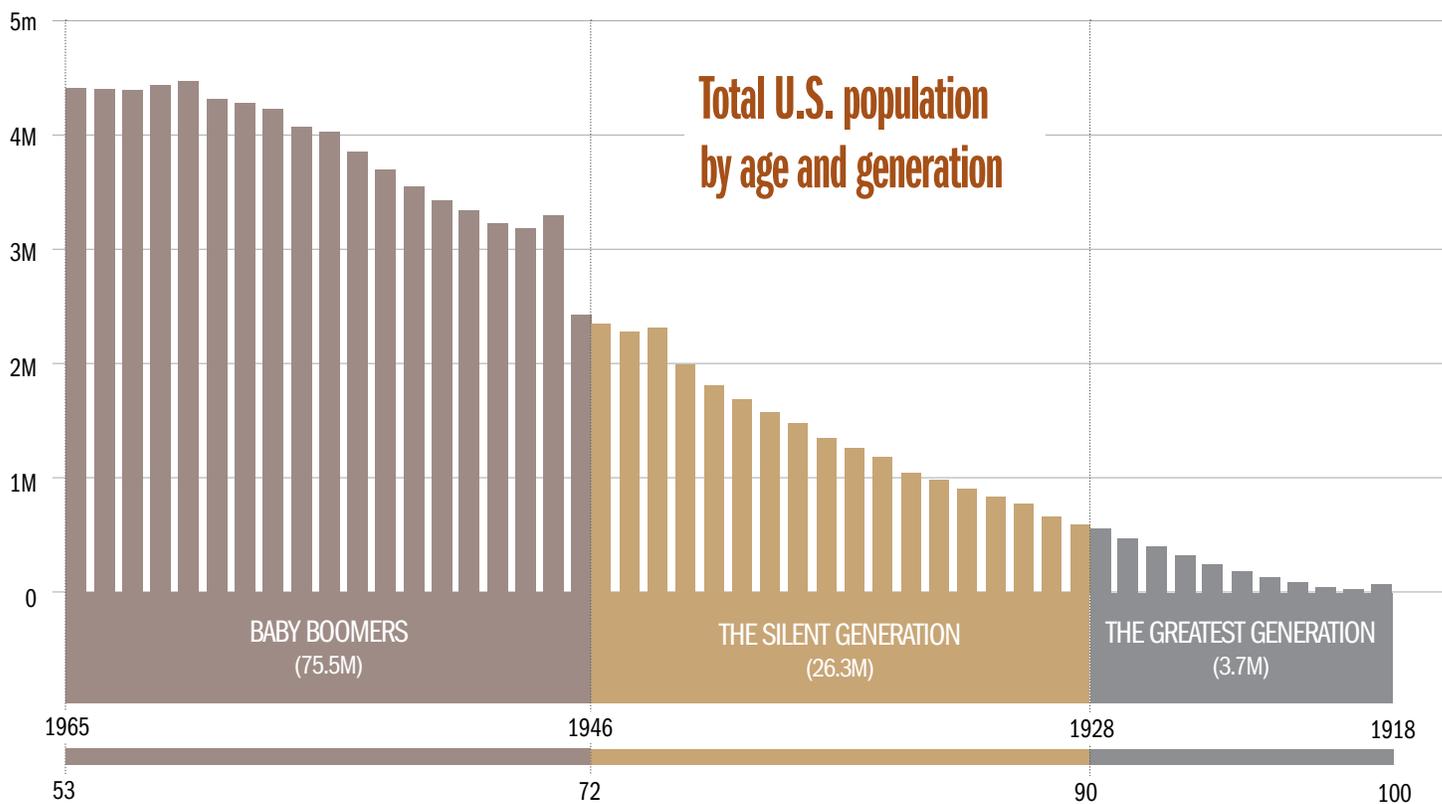
**Race**



Source: US Census Bureau population estimates, 2017

research does: as people born beginning around 1995 and ending in approximately 2012. Slight variations among researchers mean not all surveys align, and we attempt to convey those differences.

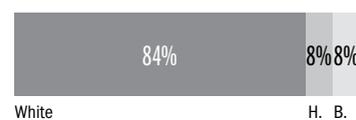
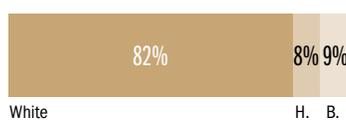
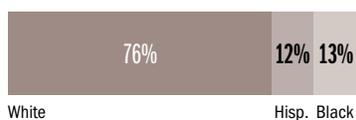
Here is a picture of where Gen Z fits in the American population and in higher education.



The arrival of the baby boomers on campuses coincided with an expanded federal role in financing a college degree. Those new dollars led to a flurry of activity, including growing enrollment, new construction, and the transformation of state teachers' colleges into regional universities. Student protests roiled the nation.

A generation sandwiched between two more prominent ones, these people continued to expand access to higher education, and a series of court decisions began to integrate colleges, opening up opportunities for women and African-Americans. The space race boosted interest in engineering, math, and science.

This generation came to define the modern idea of "college access" as veterans of World War II flocked to higher education on the GI Bill. American campuses started to transform from bastions of the elite to institutions that served a broader swath of the population with a wide-ranging selection of academic programs.



## SECTION 1



Rob Crandall, Alamy

# The Recruitment Funnel

**A**S COLLEGES strive to meet their enrollment and tuition-revenue goals, two major challenges loom. First, demographic shifts mean fewer traditional-age students to go around. Second, four-year institutions are generally set up to attract millennials, a generation that is now in its 20s and 30s. To compete successfully, colleges have to adapt to the interests and needs of a new cohort.

The strategy must start at the top of the “recruitment funnel.” Every year, colleges spend a considerable sum buying tens or hundreds of thousands of high-school students’ names, mainly from testing companies, to pursue those students with letters, emails, and recruitment pitches in other forms. That model of student recruitment came of age in the 1980s, with the introduction of enrollment management and marketing consultants, and the cycle repeated with a regular rhythm a few times throughout the academic year. Now, thanks to new technology, filling the top of the funnel never really stops for more- and less-selective colleges alike, turning the traditional admissions calendar into a year-round endeavor.

## TAKEAWAYS

**The value and relevance** of the degree are crucial to Gen Z, which is more skeptical and pragmatic than the millennial generation.

**Getting a job** is the top reason today’s students enroll in college, and they are moving away from the humanities toward more professionally oriented majors.

**Debt aversion** means this generation expects transparent pricing and tuition discounts.

**Services** are the new campus amenities, and Gen Zers want convenient access to career development, tutoring, advising, and mental-health resources.

**Social-media habits** are shifting, as this digital generation prefers Instagram and YouTube.

Millennials were the first to experience that shift, and in many ways they drove it. The advent of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram meant that prospective students could glimpse campus life without ever opening a viewbook. Virtual tours on colleges' websites let applicants forgo a visit until a few weeks before deposits were due, if then. Net-price calculators mandated by the federal government made it easier to estimate college costs, so families could come up with a short list based on how much they were able or willing to pay. And the Common Application enabled seniors to apply to multiple institutions with a click of a button, despite varying levels of interest.

All of those developments over the last decade and a half have made admissions less predictable for colleges. As applications went up, yield — the share of accepted students who enroll — dropped. Campus officials stretched budgets to invest in enrollment management and marketing. They “segmented” prospective students to personalize pitches, hired older millennials to run social-media feeds, and replaced traditional print viewbooks with interactive versions.

Efforts to draw millennials extended to campuses themselves. In a building boom, more than 131 million gross square feet of residence halls and student-services space opened on campuses between 2000 and 2013, according to the facilities consulting firm Sightlines. The high point came in the middle of the last decade, just as millennial enrollment surged. The most high-profile projects appealed to the consumer mentality of students who wanted rec centers with climbing walls, student unions with top-notch food, and residence halls with private bedrooms and bathrooms arranged in suites.

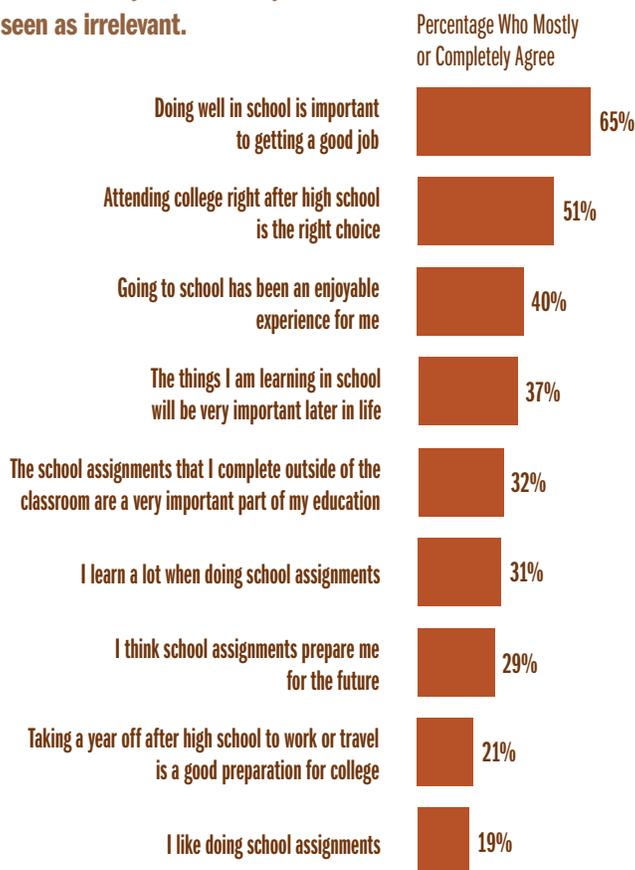
Now many campuses are saddled with construction debt and deferred-maintenance backlogs. More generally, institutions' expense growth is catching up to or even outpacing their revenue growth. A quarter of public colleges reported declining revenue in 2017, while the same proportion of private colleges ran operating deficits. The financial headwinds come as forecasts show stagnation and decline in the number of high-school graduates nationwide. The graduating classes between now and 2023 will each produce fewer students than in 2013, the previous high point.

The numbers problem has been looming for some time. But many colleges have yet to modify the academic offerings, student services, and campus amenities that were designed for millennials to suit the needs of Gen Z.

“This is a generation emerging

### FIG. 1.1: SKEPTICAL ABOUT EDUCATION

Gen Z often has a negative opinion of school heavily influenced by material seen as irrelevant.



Source: Harris Poll/Pearson, 2018

# Tailoring Admissions to Gen Z

**C**OLLEGE admissions is slow to change. Some elements of the process date back decades, and much of the technology and marketing strategy is based on the preferences of millennials. Gen Z has different expectations for the college search and campus experience, like pinpointing campuses based on major early on, says Matthew J. Krov, associate vice president for product management and enrollment marketing at Ruffalo Noel Levitz, a higher-education consulting company.



Matthew J. Krov

Here are three ways he says colleges can consider adapting admissions for incoming students.

## Recognize how they signal interest

More than 90 percent of students say they indicate interest in a college in their junior or senior year of high school, according to a survey by the company. Yet admissions offices report that about a third are “stealth applicants,” or students who have no contact with a college before applying. Historically students have shown interest by responding to a postcard or filling out a form at a high-school visit. Members of Gen Z like, follow, or subscribe. “There are degrees of signaling interest,” Krov says, “and those degrees may collectively reflect the degree of their affinity.”

## Give them a checklist

As colleges tried to increase applications and yield in the last decade, admissions practices diverged, creating confusion in the marketplace. Now half of high-school seniors and even more juniors surveyed expect a how-to guide to accompany application materials. “Gen Z has been conditioned to know what information is a necessity, when it’s necessary, and what to do with it,” Krov says. Admissions offices may need to outline what exactly they are asking of students and why it’s important.

## Involve parents from the beginning

More than 80 percent of parents say they are engaged in the college search as early as students’ sophomore year of high school. Involving them during a campus visit or when a student applies “no longer cuts it,” Krov says.

with different concerns, different ambitions, that when coupled with demographic changes in the country, is significant for how we plan for the future,” says Eric Maguire, vice president and dean of admission and financial aid at Franklin & Marshall College, in Pennsylvania.

This section will lay out how Gen Zers are approaching the college search: their appetite for an educational experience relevant to their future prospects, their attention to value, their expectations for more services than amenities, and their communication habits. While Gen Z is relatively new to campuses, incoming students are already indicating they want something different from a college education than their predecessors did.

## What Students Want out of College

Members of Gen Z don’t expect a trophy just for showing up. That trope about millennials reflected their reputation on campuses for overconfidence and a sense of entitlement: They supposedly wanted an “A” for completing an assignment and planned on a degree delivering a good job.

The reality of that last point has partly shaped the relative pessimism that has come to define Gen Z. Its mem-

**“They’re not convinced things are going to go their way. They think the system is rigged.”**

bers saw their older siblings and friends remain under- or unemployed months or years after college graduation. This generation has lower expectations, says Jean M. Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University and author of the book *iGen*. “They’re not convinced things are going to go their way. They think the system is rigged.”

Young people’s skepticism extends to how relevant formal education is to their future. Less than a third of Gen Zers report learning a lot when completing school assignments, roughly half the share of millennials who now say they did, according to a Harris Poll of 2,500 people ages 14 to 40 conducted in partnership with the education company Pearson in 2018. The younger cohort is also unlikely to think that assignments prepare them for the future (29 percent) or that the things they learn in school will be very important later in life (37 percent). What students learn and how it’s relevant to life after graduation haven’t always been at the forefront of admissions marketing, so institutions need to consider refocusing the pitch.

In the college search, Gen Zers differ from millennials in other key ways. An institution’s academic reputation has long been top of mind for prospective students, but so too for Gen Z is its reputation for social and extracurricular activities. That now ranks in the top three factors students weigh in making their decisions, according to an annual survey of freshmen by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles. In the recent past, that factor wasn’t in the top five. The cost of a particular institution, whether interpreted as the sticker price or the final bill, is as influential as financial aid.

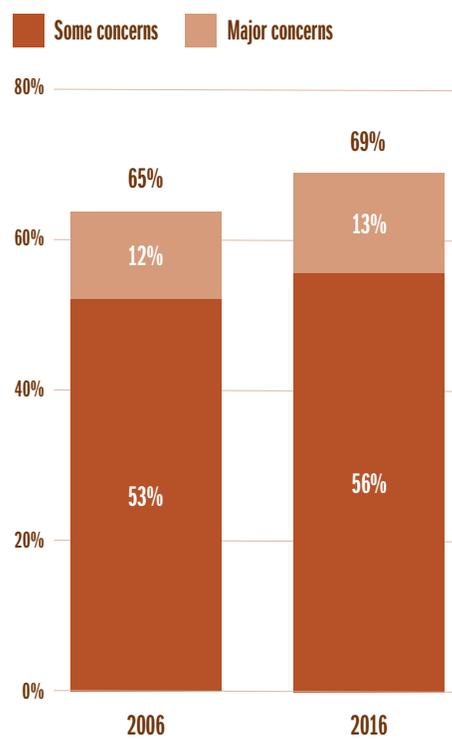
Campus leaders must follow national trends while recognizing the attributes of their own target populations. “What matters is the individual student,” says David Strauss, a principal at the higher-education consulting firm Art & Science Group. “A campus constituency is not this national set. It’s your own constituents. You need to know them and what they want.”

## Money and Value

The Great Recession was formative for this new generation. Even as the price of college steadily rose over the last decade, many parents took out home-equity loans to finance their children’s degrees. But the housing-market crash in 2008 curtailed that widespread practice while the traditional-age undergraduate population was still composed of millennials.

**FIG. 1.2: WORRIED ABOUT TUITION**

Percentage of college freshmen who say they have concerns about paying for college



Source: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California at Los Angeles

In survey after survey, today's teenagers say they worry about how to pay for college. According to the College Board, the average sticker price of tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions is \$20,770, a figure that has risen by more than 60 percent since the year 2000. At private colleges, the total price is \$46,950, up nearly 40 percent over the same period.

In the study that was the basis for the book *Generation Z Goes to College*, more than 80 percent of nearly 1,200 students across 15 campuses said they were concerned about the cost of higher education. For nearly one in five, it is the No. 1 societal concern, above such things as climate change, unemployment, and health-care costs. "Always stressed" about finances is the reality for one in four members of Gen Z, according to the Harris Poll. Among those who haven't gone to college, three in four cite financial concerns as their top reason.

Encouraging more financially needy high-school graduates to enroll in college is already a challenge for institutions, and it will only get more difficult given the rising numbers of lower-income students in the public-school pipeline. Some 69 percent of students from higher-income high schools enroll immediately in college, compared with 54 percent of those from low-income schools, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

On the whole, today's students are "fiscally conservative" says Corey Seemiller, an assistant professor of organizational leadership at Wright State University and a co-author of the *Generation Z* book. Their views on personal finance have been shaped not only by the Great Recession but also by seeing their millennial counterparts take on student debt and struggle in the job market. The result is that Gen Zers are debt averse. Less than a fifth of teens expect loans to be the main way they pay for college, according to a survey by Northeastern University and American Public Media's *Marketplace*. And less than half of freshmen who started college in 2016 took out loans, compared with 61 percent in 2001, according to the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI).

"The good news for students is that loans are down," says Ellen Bara Stolzenberg, the institute's assistant director for research. "The bad news for institutions is that merit aid is up."

**Their views on personal finance have been shaped not only by the Great Recession but also by seeing their millennial counterparts take on student debt and struggle in the job market.**

Incoming students expect a deal, and colleges have led them to believe they can get one, thanks to an uptick in tuition discounting in the wake of the 2008 recession. The tuition-discount rate — the average share of published tuition covered by institutional aid — reached a high of 50 percent for full-time freshmen at private colleges in 2017-18, according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers. That's up 10 percentage points in just the last decade. Over all, the average tuition-discount rate for all undergraduates at private institutions also hit a record, 45 percent, up from 37 percent a decade ago.

Another difference now compared with the recent past is that students attending not only private colleges but also public four-year institutions expect discounts. Deep cuts in state appropriations over the last decade and slim growth prospects for local applicant pools have prompted public colleges to cast a wider net, using discounts as an enticement. The average discount rate for public-college freshmen reached 16 percent in 2017, according to a study by Ruffalo Noel Levitz of its clients. For out-of-state students, it was even higher: 23 percent. An analysis by HERI found that between 2001 and 2016, the percentage of freshmen at public colleges who reported at least \$10,000 in merit aid more than doubled.

So while campus leaders may worry about the financial sustainability of tuition discounting going forward, students have grown

accustomed to the practice. Whether because of ability or willingness to pay, a still substantial but smaller share of the more recent cohort, HERI found, planned to rely on family resources to pay for the first year of college.

Here are four approaches institutions should consider in appealing to money-conscious Gen Z students.

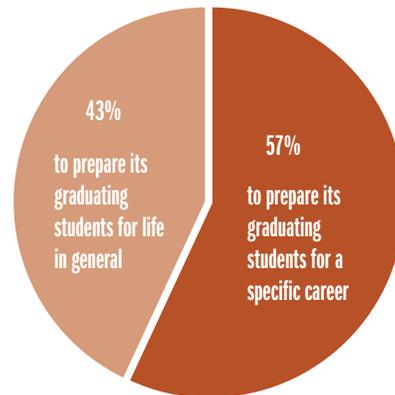
**Emphasize the value of the degree.** Highlight programs that differentiate your institution from others and that are either covered by tuition or help defray the cost of a degree. “Colleges need to say that this is what we can offer you that you can’t get somewhere else,” Seemiller says. For instance, Drexel and Northeastern Universities and the University

of Cincinnati have paid co-ops; Paul Quinn College has become a work college; the College of Wooster, University of Maryland, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute offer intensive project-based research experiences; and Goucher College requires students to study abroad, providing vouchers to help with extra expenses.

**Publish better graduate-outcomes data.** Vague tallies like 90 percent of graduates are employed or enrolled in graduate school six months out are no longer enough, especially if the response rate is low. American University, among others, has built an extensive website to show by academic program where graduates are employed and what their average salaries are.

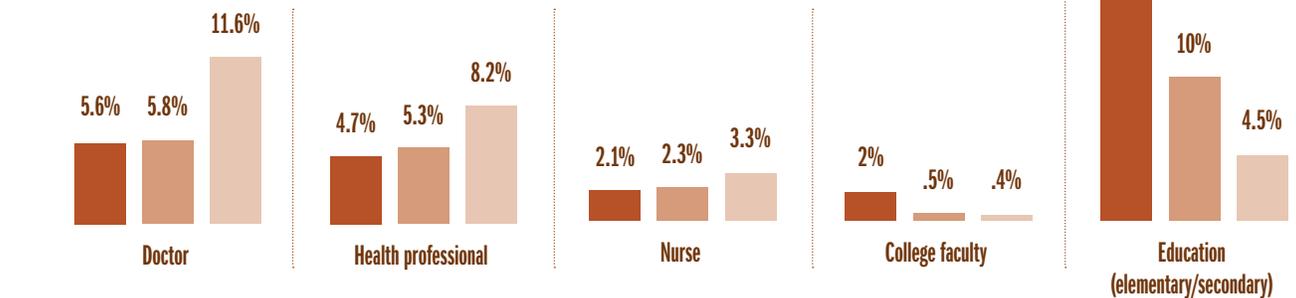
**FIG. 1.3: GEN Z VIEWS COLLEGE FOR CAREER PREPARATION ...**

Which of the following best describes your attitude toward the goal of college?



**... WHILE JOB ASPIRATIONS ARE ALSO SHIFTING**

1966 1990 2015



Source: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California at Los Angeles

**Offer price transparency.** Dozens of colleges, including Miami University of Ohio and the University of Dayton, give incoming students tuition guarantees, locking in for four years the initial rate.

**Develop new pricing models.** Introduce discounts for students who take classes at less popular times, say in the late afternoon or on Fridays or weekends, which could also help campuses better utilize classroom space. Or base price not on seat time but on progress toward a degree, which might provide an incentive for students to complete their degrees on or ahead of time.

## Majors and Career Fields

Reaching Gen Z is a matter not only of recruitment, but of attractive offerings. With limited resources, colleges must decide which programs to add, expand, scale back, or eliminate. Focused on value, this generation puts great stock in major, and the choices of today's students are a departure from the past. An apparent path to a career can be especially important to low-income students.

For several decades, incoming students were remarkably consistent about wanting to explore. HERI's long-running national survey of freshmen found that from the 1980s through the early 2000s, the No. 1 reason students attended college was to learn about things that interested them. But beginning in 2008, as the Great Recession took hold, those attitudes shifted. For the last decade, incoming students have said that the top reason to go to college is to get a better job.

And the careers they aspire to are not necessarily in the traditional job market. The stagnation of some fields and concerns about maintaining a livelihood as industries swiftly expand and contract are leading students to create their own opportunities. Some 42 percent of Gen Zers say they expect to work for themselves, found the survey by Northeastern and *Marketplace*.

A shift toward practically oriented majors has meant fewer students in the humanities, national data show. A decade ago, nearly 8 percent of all undergraduates chose one of the so-called big four humanities majors: English, history, philosophy, or a foreign language;

**“They don’t care about the rock-climbing walls built for millennials and boomer parents. Services are the new amenities.”**

today less than 5 percent do. The number of students majoring in history has dropped by 44 percent since 2008, while political science and sociology are down by more than 20 percent.

“This is a decline that started with the 2008 recession, but rather than recover with the economy, it accelerated in 2012,” says Benjamin M. Schmidt, an assistant professor of history at Northeastern University who spent two years with the American Academy of Arts and Sciences analyzing trends in bachelor's degrees.

What are students choosing to study instead? The health professions, computer science and engineering, biological science, and sports management, among other fields. Not only is Gen Z migrating to different majors, but more than half of today's students say their No. 1 factor in choosing a college is whether it offers a particular major or academic program, according to Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Up from 36 percent in 2010, that is now the company's top-rated factor in college choice.

## The End of the Amenities Arms Race

Because Gen Z is frugal, with an eye for value, today's students tend to be less enamored of the facilities and amenities of last decade's building boom. “They don't care about the rock-climbing walls built for millennials and boomer parents,” says Jeff Kallay, chief executive officer of Render Experiences, a firm that consults with colleges on campus visits. “Services are the new amenities.”

One reason for the shift is that sports and exercise are lower priorities for Gen Z.

Youth participation in the four most popular U.S. team sports — basketball, soccer, baseball, and football — has fallen by 4 percent in the last decade. The percentage of inactive 6- to 12-year-olds, or those who took part in no physical activities over a yearlong period, jumped from 16 percent in 2007 to 20 percent in 2012, according to a survey by the Physical Activity Council, a trade group for the fitness industry. Nearly half of teenagers did not play on any sports team in the last year, an increase from a decade ago, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Those trends will affect campus programming as well as intercollegiate athletics, where it's a major source of recruitment.

The services Gen Zers want range from career development to tutoring to mental health — and on terms that are convenient to them. Often that means on-demand virtual services available on mobile devices, in much the same way that students can download a book in seconds or stream a movie whenever they want. But the physical environment also could better appeal to today's students, with more “one-stop shops” that consolidate services like financial aid and the registrar, as well as more flexible spaces to study, eat, and hang out.

One area of campus ripe for change to attract prospective Gen Z students is housing. If the Ritz-Carlton was the model in recruit-

## A Campus Tour for Gen Z

**A**DMISSIONS officers have long called the campus tour the “golden mile” or the “million-dollar walk” because few things matter as much in student recruitment. That's why the tour has become not only about conveying information, but selling an experience.

As generational preferences change, so should what the campus tour emphasizes. Jeff Kallay, chief executive officer of Render Experiences, a firm that consults with colleges on campus visits, has this advice for tailoring the tour to Gen Z.



Jeff Kallay

### Customize the experience

This new generation is accustomed to getting the information they want when they want it. Some campus tours are too generic for Gen Zers, many of whom may be considering a college because of a particular major. “They want more specifics on academic programs than millennials did,” Kallay says. At Ohio State University, for instance, prospective students can opt in to tours of individual colleges on certain days. Technology can also help, say with a general tour in person and a closer glimpse through an app.

### Focus on academics and careers

“Millennials would do what the tour guide told them,” Kallay says, “but Gen Z students and their parents will walk off tours.” Guides should skip awkward, staged moments like selfies in front of an iconic building, he says. Show this relatively frugal, practical group academic buildings and the career center, and bypass expensive amenities built for millennials that “Gen Z and their parents think they’ll be paying for,” Kallay says.

### Make the Wi-Fi easy

Gen Zers and their parents may want to look up information while on tours. On too many campuses, the Wi-Fi network signal is weak on parts of the tour or requires multiple steps to log on.

ing millennials, college officials now need to consider the Hampton Inn version for Gen Z: simple but with modern conveniences. “You can have A/C and Wi-Fi without walk-in closets and en-suite kitchens,” says Thomas Carlson-Reddig, a partner at Little Diversified Architectural Consulting. “Expenses are driving student decisions about housing.”

Indeed, when Georgia State University opened a new bare-bones residence hall, it filled up faster than did other campus housing. The triple rooms in Patton Hall offer 191 square feet per resident compared with 443 square feet in apartment-style suites. The university has since converted two local hotels using the same basic concept.

### Reaching Gen Z

Understanding and appealing to Gen Z is one thing; communicating with the new cohort is another. Not only have the needs and interests of today’s students changed, so too have the ways they receive and consume information. “The attitude from colleges is that we’ve always worked with 18- to 22-year-olds. We know how to do this,” says Julie Lythcott-Haims, a former dean of freshmen and undergraduate advising at Stanford University and author of *How to Raise an Adult*. “It’s a little bit of arrogance.”

Gen Z is also making decisions about college earlier, putting more pressure on institutions. In 1999 about 15 percent of students in HERI’s freshman survey said early-action or early-decision programs were important in their college choice. By 2015, that figure had more than doubled, to 33 percent.

While colleges were quick to adapt to the web in the mid-1990s, they were slow to adopt social media a decade later. Now, after ramping up their social-media presence and outreach to applicants in the last 10 years, admissions officers need to contend with the evolving

social-media habits of Gen Z.

Take Facebook, which was founded in 2004 on a college campus, and remains the most popular platform for millennials, according to the Harris Poll. It’s fallen out of favor

**“The attitude from colleges is that we’ve always worked with 18- to 22-year-olds. We know how to do this. It’s a little bit of arrogance.”**

among Gen Z. Only 63 percent of Gen Zers say they use Facebook, preferring YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat. About half spend an hour or less on Facebook a day.

YouTube is where eight in 10 members of Gen Z, according to the Harris Poll, go to watch their version of television, get tips on video games, or obtain information on products, including colleges. It’s also increasingly where teenagers turn to supplement their formal learning by watching courses or finding help with homework.

To recruit students in this new generation, colleges must recognize their attitudes and habits and adapt offerings and messages accordingly. Emphasizing value, relevance, and campus services will help institutions compete for a dwindling pool of traditional-age students. When they enroll, professors must be ready to engage them in coursework. In the next section, we will explore how today’s students want to learn.

## SECTION 2



iStock

# Teaching Gen Z

**T**HE TRADITIONAL-AGE STUDENTS arriving on campuses now grew up with access to infinite information on the internet, changing the role of formal instruction. A college education for them needs to teach not just content, but skills and habits of mind. It should impart not just facts, but information literacy.

Some innovations in teaching, like the flipped classroom — a model in which students first encounter material on their own, often in videos online, then use class time to deepen their understanding through exercises and discussions led by a professor — suit the habits of incoming students. Nearly six in 10 members of Gen Z identify YouTube as their preferred learning method, and almost as many say YouTube has contributed to their education, according to a Harris Poll of 2,500 people ages 14 to 40 conducted in partnership with the education company Pearson in 2018.

Yet today's students don't want to learn exclusively via digital devices. They favor a mix of learning environments and activities, both face-to-face and online. That requires experimenting not only with technology, but also pedagogy. For example, active learning — the student participation and direct engagement often seen in flipped classrooms — holds promise to improve academic performance. Transparent teaching, which makes explicit the expectations and purpose of coursework, appeals especially to low-income and first-generation students. Learning outcomes like critical thinking and analytical reasoning have become paramount, perhaps more vital than subject knowledge, and curricula need to evolve accordingly.

## TAKEAWAYS

**A blend** of traditional face-to-face, digital, and online learning suits today's students, who don't believe technology has unlimited potential in the academic setting.

**Independent and collaborative work** are both important to Gen Zers, who want some control over their options.

**Applying concepts** is vital to today's students, who value experiential learning, such as research projects and internships.

**Soft skills** are in demand in the labor market, and Gen Z is especially interested in entrepreneurship.

This year a commission convened by the Georgia Institute of Technology issued the findings of an 18-month study about what the university should look like by 2040. “Whole-person skills that emphasize meta-cognition, communication, synthesis, drive, persistence, and other character values” should take precedence, the commission wrote. The goal: to prepare students to thrive in a fast-changing world. “Graduates will spend their entire professional lives,” the commission said, “in workplaces transformed by a modern industrial revolution.”

And the college journey for Gen Z is largely about the career on the horizon. That means institutions must adapt to modern economic forces, including artificial intelligence and automation, which threaten to displace not only blue-collar workers but college-educated employees in knowledge industries. The gig economy is also on the rise. On both fronts, today’s students need the communication, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial skills — the so-called soft skills — to compete. A recent study by the work-force analytics firm Burning Glass Technologies found that recruiters are increasingly screening for soft skills on top of a college degree.

Above all, Gen Zers want an education they can apply. “Students today are used to learning on demand about things that are relevant and useful in their lives,” says Will Richardson, an author of several books on education. “They’re getting short-tempered with being asked to learn stuff for a particular grade or to get credit for a class. Too many colleges are still doing their best not to honor that student agency.”

Meanwhile, several colleges are making

bold moves in new directions. Plymouth State University recently transformed its existing colleges and academic departments into seven clusters, like Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Health and Human Enrichment, designed around regional strengths and industries, with a curriculum focused on practical experience. Ball State University promotes what it calls immersive learning, in which students collaborate with classmates and a faculty mentor on an interdisciplinary project to solve a problem or create a product with a community partner.

This section will explore Gen Zers’ habits and preferences when it comes to learning: They want a say in creating their own blend of independent and group work and experiential opportunities, but with a professor leading class. And while they are digital natives, they don’t believe technology has unlimited potential to enhance education.

## How Students Want to Learn

Professors have been redesigning courses for centuries to engage students, adopt innovations in teaching, and adapt to new trends in their disciplines. Perhaps the biggest change in course design in recent years is the influence of learning science, or the interdisciplinary study of instructional methodology. The growth of distance education and buzz around massive open online courses (MOOCs) several years ago accelerated digital experimentation even in traditional face-to-face classes. Instead of being created by a single professor, many introductory and gateway courses are now developed by a team that includes instructional designers, who are adept with technology and knowledgeable about pedagogy.

**Institutions must adapt to modern economic forces, including artificial intelligence and automation, which threaten to displace not only blue-collar workers but also college-educated employees in knowledge industries.**

Many campuses now feature some type of teaching-and-learning center that uses research and analytics to support faculty members' efforts. Purdue University's Center for Instructional Excellence, for example, has overhauled more than 400 courses, each with a team of six people. In addition to three faculty members and a staff member from the center, a typical team includes an IT specialist and a librarian, a useful adaptation to Gen Z, whose members often need to develop their information literacy.

It's not the characteristics of Gen Z, but the findings of the emerging field of learning science that shape most course redesigns, says Daniel Guberman, an instructional developer at Purdue. "We know so much more about how learning works," he says. "It's not a generational thing. It's taking advantage of the practices and tools that help how we learn, and this current generation just happens to be the recipient."

This cohort of self-starters also has its own learning preferences and needs. From interviews with researchers and the results of several national surveys of teenagers, four main themes emerge to guide campus leaders and faculty members considering how to further orient the academic experience to this generation of learners.

### Gen Z needs professors to take the lead.

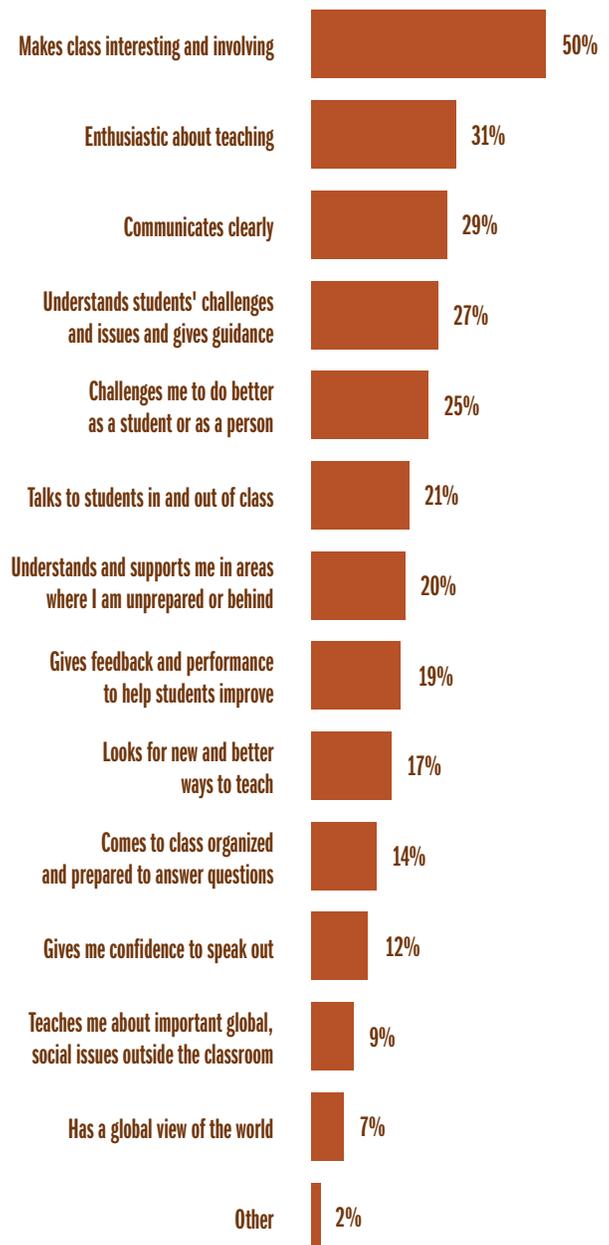
In an active-learning environment, the instructor is not the sage on the stage, the saying goes, but the guide on the side. That arrangement is well suited to today's students. "They want the professor to be a guide," says Corey Seemiller, co-author of *Generation Z Goes to College*, "and they need a guide." But not just any guide. They want professors who are enthusiastic, involve students in their learning, understand them, and most of all, give feedback quickly on assignments.

This is a generation that grew up under No Child Left Behind and the Common Core, which introduced sweeping guidelines for learning. While Gen Zers are eager for more say over what and how they learn, many of them are not ready for that challenge when they first enroll in college. Just as students binge-watch television programs, Seemiller says, they believe they can binge on learning, too. Instead of assigning a paper due at the

end of the semester, she and her co-author, Meghan Grace, say in their book, faculty members should make a portion of the paper

## FIG. 2.1: GEN Z'S IDEAL INSTRUCTOR

What do you like most about your favorite teacher/professor?



Source: Harris Poll/Pearson, 2018

due each week, even if it's only one page, to allow for steady progress. "This approach," they write, "will allow Generation Z students to slow down the bingeing mentality."

### **Gen Z wants a mix of group and independent activities.**

Group work is integral to active learning, but students may want to puzzle through material on their own. They like options. "My ideal learning environment is one where I can participate with the group only if I choose," says one student in *Generation Z Goes to College*.

Among different ways to learn, in-person activities with classmates topped the list

for Gen Zers in the Harris Poll. And they are social learners: Four in 10 say they have developed friendships with people all over the world thanks to collaborative, technology-enabled learning. But outside the classroom, this generation seems to prefer to work individually over being in a group. If Gen Zers run into trouble, more than seven in 10 say they would try to figure things out on their own rather than ask a professor.

Faculty members can engage today's students by designing courses and structuring classes to toggle between group and independent learning. Instead of moving from newly introduced material right into a discussion,



Vickie S. Cook

## The Gen Z Classroom

**T**ECHNOLOGY has been integral to the daily lives of many of today's teenagers since they were toddlers. But when they come to campus, they're looking for a mix of virtual and face-to-face learning, says Vickie S. Cook, an associate professor and executive director of the Center for Online Learning, Research, and Service at the University of Illinois at Springfield. That requires a new approach to synchronous learning (at a set time) and asynchronous learning (at your own pace). "This generation doesn't distinguish between the two," Cook says. Here are some of her tips for developing an effective educational experience for Gen Z.

### **Let students tell their stories using their tools**

Provide learning outcomes and let students determine how to meet them using technology. Encourage them to document their learning through YouTube, podcasts, blogs, or even video games. Use the resources students create — for example, a video on how to solve a math problem or conduct a biology experiment — for peer advising. This "near-peer" model can be effective because students identify with the advisers.

### **Create immersive environments**

Take a cue from medical schools at Case Western Reserve University, the University of Nebraska, and elsewhere that use virtual and augmented reality to let students interact with patients before they enter a hospital setting. In other disciplines, such technology lets students apply concepts as they learn them and demonstrates the relevance of the material.

### **Build flexible learning spaces**

Study rooms and other spaces on campuses that encourage group work should be configured with movable walls and furniture to adapt to independent use. And look for underused space in hallways where writable surfaces can be added to walls, as the University of Southern California did in a new building for its school of communications and journalism.

Seemiller suggests that professors consider giving students some time to reflect on their own first. For group assignments, professors could make each student responsible for a fraction of the project.

**Gen Z favors hands-on, experiential learning.**

Given their focus on careers, it's not surprising that today's students are drawn to apply new concepts. They seek project-based-learning and undergraduate-research opportunities to hone crucial, marketable skills.

Most of all, Gen Z is looking for some integration between academics and practical experience. In the study underlying *Generation Z Goes to College*, nearly 80 percent of almost 1,200 students surveyed across 15 campuses said it was important that the undergraduate curriculum include real-world activities such as internships. While many colleges have expanded internship opportunities and other career development in the last decade, they tend to be more of a complement to than a central element of the curriculum.

For too many students, college is a series of disconnected experiences: the classroom, the dorm, the extracurricular activity, the internship. Wagner College, in New York, is one place trying to better integrate students' education and personal development. As part of the Wagner Plan for the Practical Liberal Arts, students spend about three hours a week at a field site, typically a business or nonprofit, that corresponds to a campus learning community. In a tutorial, the students discuss and write about the connections between their coursework and outside activities.

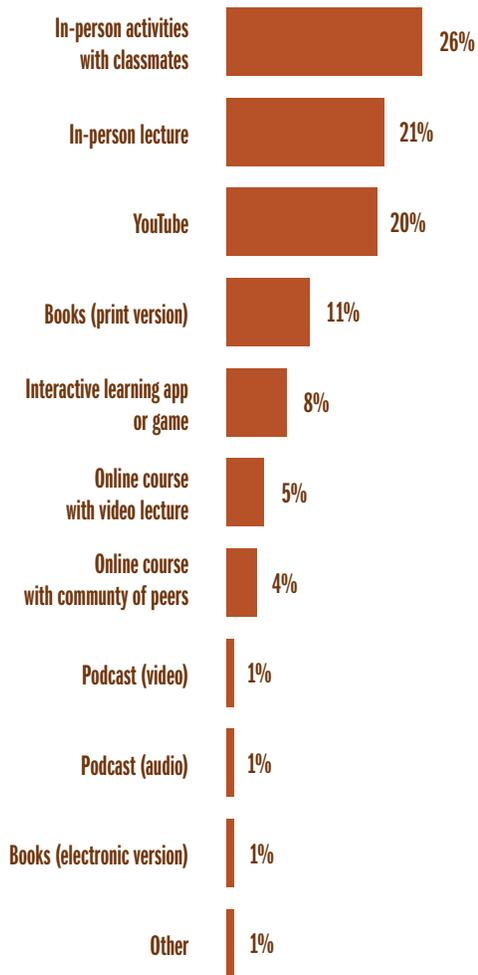
**Gen Z students aspire to be entrepreneurs.**

Students today are gravitating toward build-it-yourself careers. And they want to develop the skills to pull that off. "People will create the jobs of the future, not simply train for them," Jonathan Grudin, a principal researcher at Microsoft, said at a roundtable last year on the future of work by the Pew Research Center and Elon University.

The Great Recession and the evolving economy have shown this generation that traditional careers, even steady ones like accounting and law, lack the security they once had.

**FIG. 2.2: GEN Z'S TOP WAYS TO LEARN**

**Which of the following methods/platforms is your preferred way to learn?**



Source: Harris Poll/Pearson, 2018

Or maybe an internship or other work experience in students' freshman or sophomore year helps them decide that a certain field isn't for them. Nearly three-quarters of Gen Zers think it's important for colleges to teach students entrepreneurship, according to a survey by Northeastern University and American Public Media's *Marketplace*.

Colleges are responding to students'

enterprising aspirations by offering more such courses and activities. The University of Southern California, for example, opened the Jimmy Iovine and Andre Young Academy for Arts, Technology and the Business of Innovation with the goal of blending traditionally separate disciplines: art and design, technology and engineering, and marketing and business. Stanford University created StartX, a nonprofit dedicated to incubating businesses. And the University of North Carolina, the University of Maryland at College Park, and Case Western Reserve University, among others, sponsor start-up competitions and maintain a business incubator and accelerator on their campuses. Many institutions have also developed maker spaces, or open workshops full of tools like 3-D printers and welding stations, for students to tinker.

## The Promise and Limits of Technology

There's no doubt about it: Today's students are reliant on technology, especially mobile phones. They spend more time on their phones than millennials do, with nearly half of Gen Zers saying they are always on the devices and a similar share saying they'd feel lost if they left them at home, according to the Harris Poll.

But while technology is almost always at hand, it doesn't suit every need. Despite a deep affinity for smartphones, today's students don't necessarily see them as a learning tool. Even though tablets like the iPad and Microsoft Surface were introduced in their childhood — and some schools bought them for every student — only about a quarter of Gen Zers use them frequently, the Harris Poll found. While nearly three-quarters say they use a laptop regularly, the role of that device in the classroom has become a point of debate.

In one camp are professors who see the devices as a distraction, who believe students are using class time to update social media or shop online. "College students learn less when they use computers or tablets during lectures," Susan Dynarski, a professor of education, public policy, and economics at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, wrote in a 2017 *New York Times* op-ed. She cited a bevy of studies showing that students distract

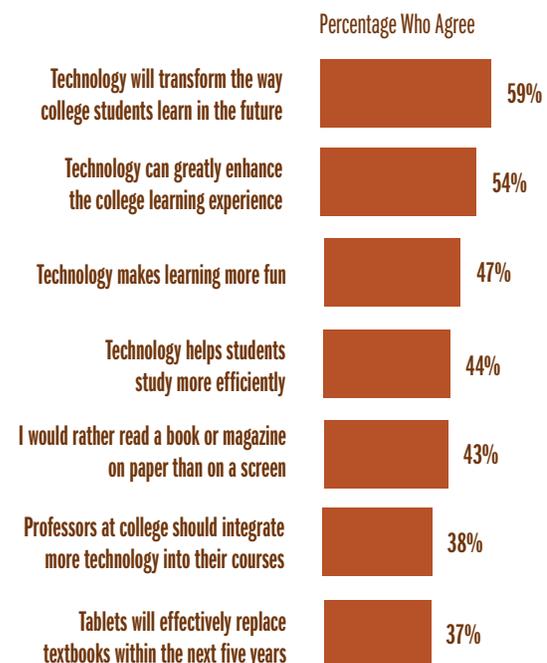
their classmates when they have laptops open and retain more when they take handwritten notes. Other professors say that the devices are a symptom, not a cause of distraction, don't want to police students, and find that technology can help engage them, especially those with disabilities.

Just as class isn't necessarily better with smartphones out and laptops open, the power of video isn't absolute. Findings about the medium's popularity among Gen Z don't mean colleges should flip all of their courses. "There are many ways to make a course more engaging beyond flipping it," says Guberman at Purdue. Professors can experiment with clicker technology for real-time student feedback, workshops among students in class, or small-group discussions, among other techniques.

Indeed, students themselves are skeptical that technology has unlimited potential in the

### FIG. 2.3: GEN Z'S TAKE ON ED TECH

Gen Z is generally skeptical about whether technology improves learning.



Source: Harris Poll/Pearson, 2018

academic setting: Only about half of Gen Zers in the Harris Poll agreed that “technology can greatly enhance the college learning experience.” Social media and e-portfolios rank lowest among tools college students wish their instructors used more, according to a survey last year by Educause, a higher-education IT association.

To teach Gen Z, flexibility is key. That’s to allow for individual and group work, as well as technology and other forms of active learning. Campus leaders should consider updating classroom space accordingly. Some institutions are remodeling old-fashioned lecture halls and replacing classrooms full of standard desks with swivel chairs and wheeled furniture. Others are constructing new classroom buildings with open, flexible spaces, as well as high-tech ones.

When Oregon State University, for instance, constructed a new academic building in 2016, it filled the facility with new-fangled lecture halls and classrooms. The largest room in the Learning Innovation Center looks more like a sports arena, with 600 seats in a circle around a center stage surrounded by giant screens, like jumbotrons. Several aisles and open spaces enable professors to roam around as they talk, or to check on students. The university this year plans to release the results of a series of studies on whether the new classrooms have improved learning.

Also crucial to students’ engagement and retention is advising, where technology is similarly a tool, not a solution. An increasing number of colleges are deploying technology to help students choose courses and to provide them with early alerts of academic trouble. But more than half of today’s students say they prefer to receive coaching in person, in

**To teach Gen Z, flexibility is key. That’s to allow for individual and group work, as well as technology and other forms of active learning. Campus leaders should consider updating classroom space accordingly.**

one-on-one sessions, according to a survey conducted by the Center for Generational Kinetics along with Civitas Learning. Only about one in 10 like online advising or receiving texts when they need help.

To teach Gen Zers, colleges need to give them options — to learn independently or in a group; and virtually, in a classroom, or out in the world, applying new concepts and skills. Today’s students want an active role. Of course, an effective educational experience goes beyond academics, and learning now happens everywhere students are. In the next section, we will consider how campus life can support the personal development of this new generation.

SECTION 3



André Chung

# Campus Life

**T**HE RISING COST of higher education is in some measure a function of rising expectations. Students and families want a lot out of the college experience, and lawmakers have called for better outcomes. In recent years, institutions' spending on student services has surged. According to federal data, that category of spending per student grew faster than any other over the decade from 2006 to 2016, jumping 27 percent at four-year private colleges and 42 percent at four-year public colleges.

During the height of millennial enrollment, many institutions went on a building, hiring, and programming spree. They put up swanky new residence halls, rec centers, and other facilities; they brought on full-time academic advisers, prevention educators, and other student-affairs professionals; and they developed orientation activities, leadership training, residence-life programs, and the like.

How much of what's in place fits the interests and needs of Gen Z? Some campuses may find themselves stuck with amenities (and the personnel running them) that this pragmatic new generation doesn't necessarily value.

For years, the field of student affairs has operated with the philosophy of "giving students what they want, not what they need," says Cynthia Avery, assistant vice president of student life at the University of San Diego. "This generation comes to us with more challenges and needs. We need to think creatively about what we offer them, but

## TAKEAWAYS

**Gen Zers spend** more time alone, in virtual exchanges, than socializing in person, and may benefit from nudges in that direction.

**Today's students** may seem younger and require more guidance and personal development than members of prior generations at the same age.

**Career services** that are customized and integrated into the campus experience will have the most impact on Gen Z.

**A healthy campus** goes beyond recreation to wellness, as mindfulness and meditation can promote students' mental and emotional resilience.

**Balancing respect** and free speech is fraught for a generation raised to recognize the harms of bullying.

### FIG. 3.1: FEWER TEENS USING DRUGS

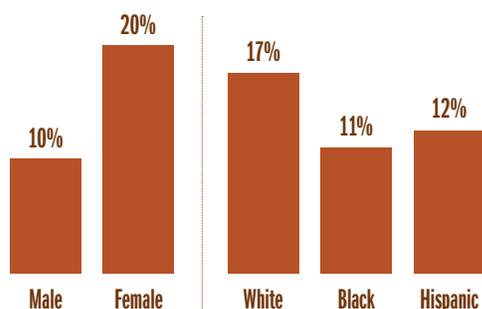
Percentage of high-school students who ever used select illicit drugs



Source: CDC, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007-2017

### FIG. 3.2: ELECTRONIC BULLYING

Percentage of high-school students who reported being electronically bullied in the past year



Source: CDC, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007-2017

the problem is, I don't think anyone is quite sure what to do quite yet."

Emerging research on Gen Z suggests some places to start (hint: fewer comforts, more supports). Today's students are looking for services from career development to mental health. They expect virtual access to resources like financial-aid counseling and fast, reliable Wi-Fi everywhere. And they may be fine with simpler housing while benefiting from more common spaces, especially flexible, mixed-use rooms that promote interaction with classmates and professors.

If today's students seem younger, that squares with the theory that Gen Zers haven't

gained as much life experience as members of prior generations had by the same age. "Students are coming to college more like 14-year-olds, not 18-year-olds," says Jean M. Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University and author of the book *iGen*. Studies indicate higher narcissism and lower empathy levels. As teenagers, lower shares of Gen Zers work, drink, experiment with drugs, and have sex. A more diverse college-going population means lower average familiarity with the norms of higher education. All of that raises the stakes for personal development as part of the campus experience — more guidance on issues like study habits and wellness.

As student services ramped up for millennials evolve to serve Gen Z, campus practitioners and generational experts identify three areas in particular need of a makeover for today's traditional-age undergraduates.

### Career Services

While many campuses prioritized career planning in recent years in response to rising expectations about the return on investment, that realm still competes for attention and money within student or academic affairs. One of those two divisions typically houses career services, but either is often focused on more pressing challenges. What's more, nearly all programs in those divisions focus on undergraduates on campus, while career services occupies an in-between position — serving both students and recent graduates.

Given Gen Z's view of higher education as preparation for a job, career services must continue to evolve. In particular, the rising number of low-income students coming out of high school in the next decade will benefit from career development as early as the college search, given that their decision to apply or enroll may be based on certain majors and corresponding career paths.

If institutions fail to provide career services to Gen Z, several alternative providers are positioning themselves to fill the void. So-called bootcamps have emerged to provide what they call the "last mile of training" between college and a job.

## “Students are coming to college more like 14-year-olds, not 18-year-olds.”

Companies such as Koru, Galvanize, and Fullbridge, among others, provide short courses in computer coding, business basics, and the “soft skills” needed in the workplace. Even universities themselves are getting in the game: Northeastern University started its own bootcamp with short courses in cloud computing and data analytics.

Further transforming career services for Gen Z requires four key elements.

### Promote early, consistent participation.

Career services can no longer be seen as a sequestered office that mostly seniors visit. Rather, it should be integrated into broader student-success efforts designed around routine scheduled interactions like course registration. As campus leaders strive to retain students and see them through to graduation,

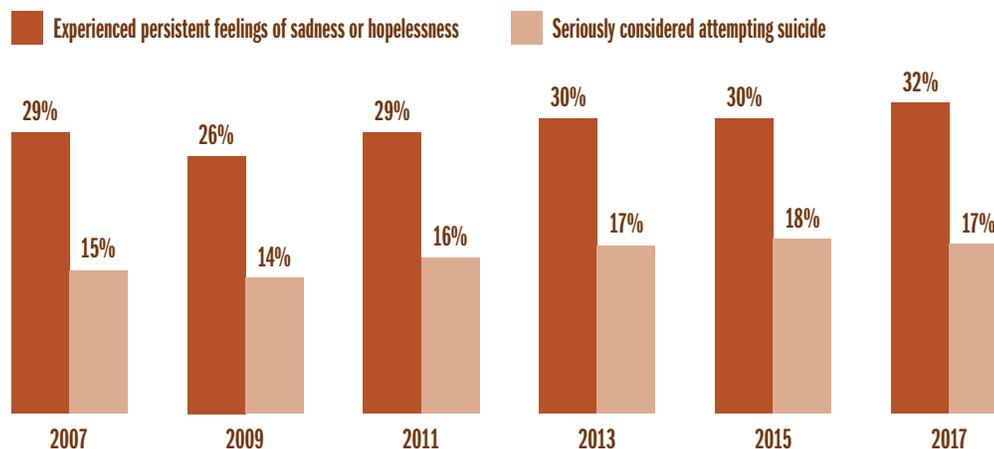
support for the transition from college to career should begin early in the freshman year.

While many colleges have recently added career development to freshman orientation, others have already reversed course on that because students are inundated with information in their first few days on campus. An example of another approach is the Stevens Institute of Technology’s video series introducing students to the resources there. “We expect first-year students to know how to use the career center,” Lynn Insley, executive director of the Stevens center, said at a conference this year. But why should they?

**Personalize services.** Most colleges segment career services by class year or major. But not all students in those groupings are in the same place career-wise, says Andy Chan, vice president for innovation and career development at Wake Forest University. In much the same way as colleges are using algorithms to recommend courses to students, some campuses are customizing career services through technology platforms and apps offered by companies like Handshake and Symplicity. “Students are accustomed to suggestions and nudges in so many parts of their digital lives from Amazon to Netflix,” Chan says, “that we need to figure out how to

**FIG. 3.3: MENTAL HEALTH TRENDS FOR HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS**

Percentage of high-school students who:



Source: CDC, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2007-2017

# Campus Programming for Gen Z

**S**TUDENT DEVELOPMENT is one of the distinctive elements of American higher education. Four-year residential institutions in particular offer robust programming to extend students' education outside the classroom and help them grow as people. How could those efforts best serve Gen Z?

Surveys of this new generation point to helpful approaches. Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace polled nearly 1,200 students on 15 campuses for their book *Generation Z Goes to College*. Seemiller, an assistant professor of organizational leadership at Wright State University, has this advice for college leaders as they consider their offerings.



Corey Seemiller

## With recreation, prioritize wellness

If the past decade was about climbing walls in the rec center, the decade ahead will be about wellness services, including mindfulness, meditation, even massages, as Johns Hopkins University offers on Mellow Out Mondays. "When we talk about mental health, colleges jump right to counseling services, and we miss out on holistic wellness," Seemiller says. Too often the rec center focuses purely on exercise rather than stress management. Consider coordinating resources, Seemiller says: "Campuses need a comprehensive approach to health and well-being."

## Flip the programming

Just as professors have flipped classes by making lectures available in advance and dedicating class time to discussions and problem solving, student-affairs professionals need to do the same with campus programming. "With the ability for Generation Z students to access an abundance of information online, the need for educational programs and presentation sessions may become less relevant or alluring for them," Seemiller says. Events typically held in residence halls or the student center could then become more of a learning lab for students to come together and apply information they've learned through websites, videos, and other sources.

## Focus on student engagement

Because members of Gen Z live much of their lives online, campus programming should go beyond simply gathering students together for pizza parties or game nights and allow for deeper and sustained engagement. Overnight and travel programs or student activities that meet regularly can "help students make real-life connections rather than rely solely on their friends in the digital world," Seemiller says.

do the same.”

**Get students in the workplace.** Exposure to a professional setting is key, especially for students who haven’t worked in an office before. Contacts help build networks, and internships are especially valuable: Employers go on to hire about half of their interns as full-time employees, according to the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University. At Stevens, all freshmen and sophomores are offered an opportunity, complete with structured reflection, to shadow alumni at their jobs.

**Teach hard and soft skills missing from the curriculum.** Because more students now come to college without any work experience, institutions need to be more deliberate in developing soft skills like communication and problem solving. At the same time, preparation for certain industries means mastering specific hard skills, too. Denison University developed an online tool called OnBoard with a series of 60 units across 11 different tracks, including how to manage spreadsheets, review financial statements, and write professional memos. The courses are offered between semesters and during the summer to let students focus on career development without the pressures of academic work.

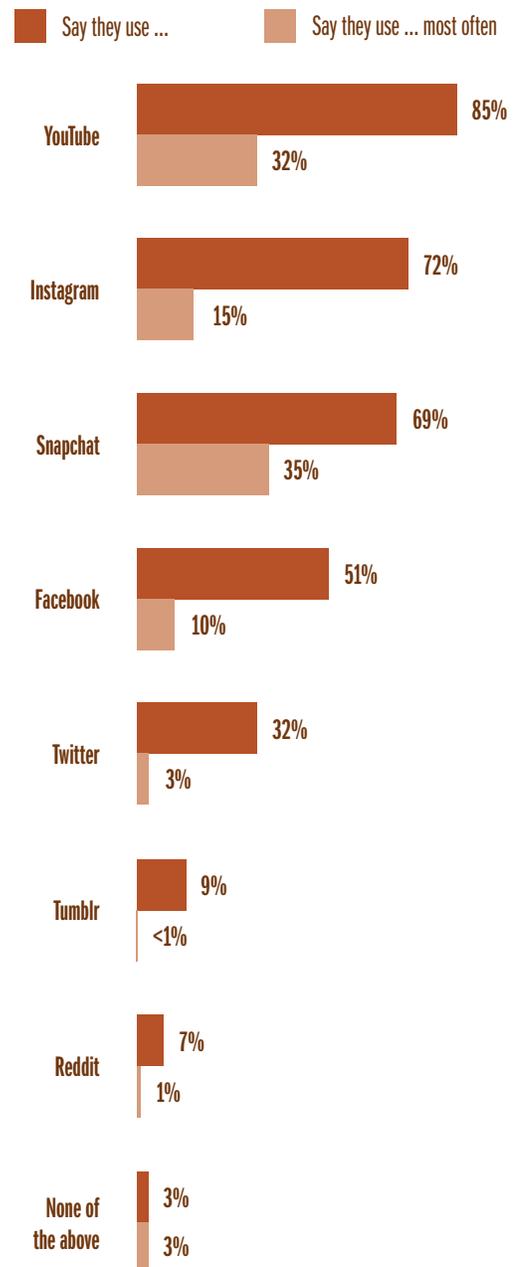
## Social Life

Gen Z is coming to college less seasoned than previous generations. Teenagers today tend not to go to the movies with friends, hang out at the mall, or spend time at friends’ houses; most go out with their parents and communicate with their friends digitally, according to the Monitoring the Future study of teenagers and young adults run by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. This trend started with millennials and accelerated within Gen Z: High-school seniors now are going out less often than eighth graders did as recently as 2009.

Gen Zers are not just doing less in-person socialization. About half as many high-school seniors today go out on dates compared with their Gen X parents, according to research by Twenge for the book *iGen*. Today’s teenagers are having sex at lower

**FIG. 3.4: TEENS' FAVORITE ONLINE PLATFORMS**

Percentage of U.S. teens who:



Source: Pew Research Center, 2018

rates, fewer than 15 percent have ever used select illicit drugs, and nearly four in 10 high-school seniors in 2016 said they had never tried alcohol at all. What this means for colleges is that incoming students have had little chance to practice living independently, navigate relationships, or learn to moderate high-risk behaviors. Student-development programs and prevention education should adapt accordingly. Along with sexual-assault training, for example, today's students may need conversations about consent and healthy sexuality.

Increasingly, colleges are extending freshman orientation to deal with the myriad issues they must address with today's students. Orientation at the University of Oregon, for instance, spans a six-week period the university has dubbed "the starting block." It's an array of mandatory and elective activities meant to familiarize students with campus resources, as well as help them make new friends. Nearly one-third of colleges now offer an extended orientation, according to the Association for Orientation, Transition, and Retention in Higher Education. Some campuses are designing activities for Gen Z that put students in small groups with interactive tasks to get them to know one another

**Research shows that students who develop friendships and identify mentors early on are more likely to graduate and find success after college.**

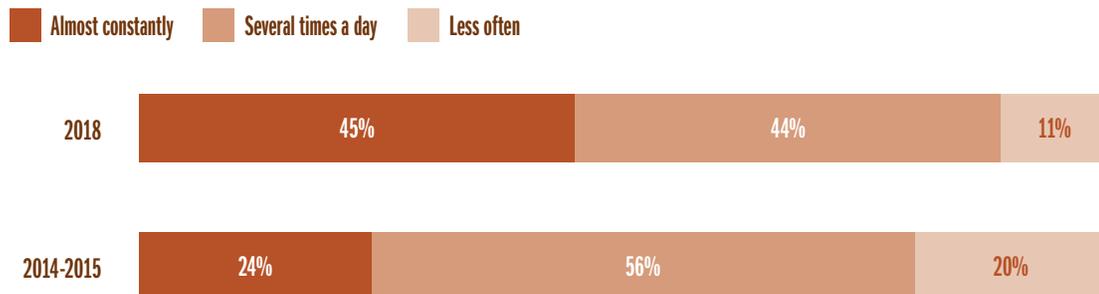
and communicate face-to-face instead of through technology.

Research shows that students who develop friendships and identify mentors early on are more likely to graduate and find success after college. For first-generation and low-income students, that can be particularly difficult, because they start out with lower social capital, says Laura Hamilton, an associate professor of sociology at the University of California at Merced and author of *Parenting to a Degree: How Family Matters for College Women's Success*.

Here are some approaches colleges can take to promote more face-to-face contact and socialization among Gen Zers.

### FIG. 3.5: THE ONLINE GENERATION

Percentage of U.S. teens who say they use the internet, either on a computer or a cellphone



Source: Pew Research Center, 2018

# A New Approach to Mental Health

**R**ATES OF DEPRESSION and anxiety among teenagers and young adults have shot up in recent years. One-third of college students report having felt so depressed within the last year that it was difficult to function, according to the National College Health Assessment. More than half report feeling overwhelming anxiety. And incoming students are struggling as much if not more: The shares of high-school students who experience persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness (32 percent) and have seriously considered attempting suicide (17 percent) have risen steadily over the last decade.

Campus counseling centers have a hard time keeping up: The number of students seeking appointments has grown much faster than enrollment, according to the Center for Collegiate Mental Health. Campus groups like Active Minds are raising awareness and helping students help one another and themselves.

Nance Roy, chief clinical officer at the Jed Foundation, which promotes emotional health among college students, has this advice for institutions.



Nance Roy

## Reduce the stigma

Some 80 percent of Gen Zers experience mild to moderate anxiety or depression, yet only 20 percent are getting help. Campuses need to build a culture that makes conversations about mental health normal and seeking support natural.

## Encourage more face-to-face interaction

Gen Zers live in a digital world where everyone posts only their best selves, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Campuses need to call out that phenomenon (at the University of Pennsylvania, it's called "Penn Face") to put social media in perspective. Programming can connect students in person and help them form meaningful relationships. Consider declaring some spaces device-free zones.

## Allow opportunities for failure

To Gen Z, failure is a catastrophe rather than an opportunity for learning and growth. Students rarely see good models of failure in their daily lives because parents and teachers often hide their mistakes. Try highlighting in campus publications a diverse set of student and alumni experiences, not only the most traditionally successful. Suggest that professors give assignments that allow for iterative feedback without grades attached.

**Make roommate assignments.** Stop honoring roommate requests and assign at random. Duke University announced such a change this year out of concern that too many freshmen were selecting roommates with backgrounds similar to their own based on social-media discussions before they arrived on campus.

**Get students out of their rooms.** Design fewer residence halls with private bedrooms and kitchens, to nudge students to spend time in common areas and eat in the dining hall.

**Make faculty members more present.** Locate offices in central areas of academic buildings rather than off in quiet halls. Require professors to keep their doors open during office hours, or to hold them in a more visible location, such as the library. Consider huddle rooms near classrooms for students and professors to chat before or after class.

## Campus Speech

If incidents like protests of controversial speakers and requests for “safe spaces” seem more common nowadays on campuses, chalk it up partly to Gen Z’s attitudes toward free speech, according to several recent polls of today’s students.

Gen Zers generally endorse the ideals of free speech and campuses that are a marketplace of ideas. But when speech challenges their values, students are likely to support limits such as free-speech zones, speech codes, and prohibitions on hate speech. In a survey this year by Gallup and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, scarcely more than half of college students said that handing out literature on controversial issues is “always acceptable.” More than one-third said that shouting down speakers was acceptable at least sometimes. And one in 10 said it was sometimes acceptable to use violence to prevent someone from speaking.

Some scholars have posited that one reason today’s students are ambivalent and even hostile to the concept of free speech is that they were raised with anti-bullying

campaigns. They equate offensive speech to bullying, Erwin Chemerinsky, now dean of Berkeley Law, and Howard Gillman, chancellor of the University of California at Irvine,

“They are deeply sensitized to the psychological harm associated with hateful or intolerant speech, and their instinct is to be protective.”

wrote in *The Chronicle* in 2016. “Compared to when the two of us were in middle and high school in the 1960s and ’70s, there are much greater efforts to avoid making young people feel bad about themselves,” they wrote. “They are deeply sensitized to the psychological harm associated with hateful or intolerant speech, and their instinct is to be protective.”

Striking a balance between maintaining a respectful campus and defending free speech presents one of the most difficult tasks for campus officials in adapting to Gen Z. Recently the nonprofit consultant Ithaka S+R released a set of guidelines on free speech and student activism based on discussions among campus leaders at the William G. Bowen Colloquium on Higher Education Leadership last fall. Distilled here are some of the recommendations for colleges.

**Reaffirm a commitment to free speech.** Free speech and academic freedom haven’t been major topics of discussion at many institutions for some time. Articulating the institution’s values for all to hear can be useful.

**Distinguish between free speech and harassment.** Clearly explain what actions violate policies. Even in incidents that draw

the most attention, follow those policies to be — and be seen as — consistent.

**Develop policies for invited speakers.** A process for inviting and making campus facilities available to speakers and for addressing disruptions may help avoid last-minute problems.

**Seize teaching moments.** Engage students, faculty members, and alumni in discussions of institutional values of free speech and develop curricular components reflecting the history and philosophy of free-speech principles. Most of all, use these opportuni-

ties to model intellectual dialogue regarding opposing views.

Support for today's students isn't necessarily hand-holding. It's upholding an institutional responsibility to help Gen Z — the most diverse generation in modern American history — succeed academically and personally. This moment of transition in higher education coincides with the student-success movement, the emergence of learning science, and a new front in the campus culture wars, all posing risks and opportunities for institutions. Campus leaders must adapt to help this new generation meet its potential.

## ABOUT THE DATA WE USE

Research on Gen Z is only beginning to emerge. This report relies on interviews with generational experts and campus practitioners, along with demographic data and a series of surveys, both longitudinal studies and recent snapshots. The latter limit comparisons between generations because they do not control for age. But the snapshots are useful for asking some questions not included in the longitudinal studies.

Among the surveys we cite most frequently throughout the report:

**The Harris Poll**, a one-time survey of 2,500 people ages 14 to 40 conducted in partnership with the education company Pearson in early 2018. This recent snapshot asks very specific questions on education.

**The Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey**, a well-known longitudinal study administered annually by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles. Created in 1966, this survey of students' characteristics, habits, and attitudes was most recently based on responses from 137,456 first-time, full-time freshmen entering 184 baccalaureate institutions.

**Generation Z Goes to College** is a book published in 2016 by Jossey-Bass for which the authors, Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace, surveyed nearly 1,200 students on 15 campuses about their needs and expectations for higher education.

**Monitoring the Future** is a longitudinal study administered by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor that has polled high-school seniors since 1975, and eighth and 10th graders since 1991.

# The Path Forward

**T**HE GROWTH in higher education from the late 1990s to the beginning of this decade was spurred primarily by millennials, the largest generation to enter college since the baby boomers. For residential four-year institutions in particular, that period brought higher enrollments, building sprees, and new academic programs. Students generally thought of themselves as customers, public expectations soared, and colleges sought to satisfy families and accountability-focused policy makers, raising prices with enough confidence that the market could bear it.

The last of the millennials, however, graduated from high school around 2012. Those who went straight to college are already done. Meanwhile, Generation Z has arrived.

As with the transition to any new cohort, its qualities are just beginning to emerge. From demographic trends, surveys, front-line observations, and an expanding assortment of Gen Z books and experts, campus leaders are picking up hints of what they will face with each incoming class.

The portrait taking shape is of a generation more diverse than any previously served by American higher education. By 2030, white students will make up only half of high-school graduates in the United States, according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. The number of Hispanic students is projected to increase by 50 percent, with growth across the country. As patterns of college-going

broaden by race and ethnicity while the pool of high-school graduates shrinks over all, the recruitment of prospective students must get broader, too.

What's more, if current income trends continue, Gen Z will be one of the most financially needy cohorts to enroll in college. Already family incomes have stagnated as the price of higher education has shot up. Now, in roughly half of states, more than 50 percent of K-12 students come from families earning less than \$40,000 a year, which typically makes them eligible for a federal Pell Grant.

Demographic trends are somewhat easier to track than attitudinal shifts. But technology, the economy, and other factors have already been influencing this generation's ambitions and what they want out of college. Gen Z's leading edge — traditional-age students now on campus or about to arrive — was defined by the Great Recession. As several surveys and studies show, the housing crash and resulting economic downturn made today's students more skeptical, money conscious, and focused on their own financial futures than millennials were, particularly in terms of paying for college and planning their careers.

Gen Z is also a product of technological change. Millennials came to college with all sorts of devices, requiring institutions to extend Wi-Fi across campuses and professors to rethink policies on laptops and smartphones in the classroom. Gen Zers are so attached to technology that they

don't necessarily think of it as such. They turn to YouTube to learn new things and shift between modes of learning as fluidly as students of previous generations turned the pages of a book. And yet technology is not always a net positive. Researchers connect young people's increasing reports of loneliness, anxiety, and depression with the ubiquity of smartphones. On campuses, today's students need support: They are keenly interested in services like counseling, academic advising, and career planning both virtually and face-to-face.

Some of what Gen Zers want from higher education reverses what the system spent years putting in place for millennials. In the past, as generations cycled through, colleges added new amenities and offerings and raised tuition to pay for it all. Rarely did campus leaders stop doing things or scale them back, and if so, it took years.

This time seems different for campus leaders. Not only are the changes brought on by Gen Z coming quickly — rather than continuums, experts see pronounced shifts — but the prospective-student pool is dwindling. Many colleges find themselves in too precarious a financial position to start several new programs and hire staff members to run them. As they plan for Gen Z, institutions may need to rethink strategies and prioritize differently to meet the needs of today's students.

First, they approach the college search with a practical mind-set, attentive to value and relevance. How much will a degree

## Gen Zers are growing up more slowly in some ways, and colleges may have to help.

really cost? How much debt will that mean taking on? Which majors and other opportunities will help land a job? In the recruitment funnel, formal structures are passé, as today's students demonstrate interest by, for instance, liking photos on Instagram rather than responding to a postcard or showing up for a tour.

Second, this new generation favors an educational experience that blends online and face-to-face instruction, independent and group work, and the liberal arts and professional skills training — all with immersive elements and an experiential bent. Disciplinary silos, separate online divisions, and clear delineations between academic and co-curricular offerings are obstacles to transforming learning to suit these students.

Finally, Gen Z is likely to reframe student affairs — again. Student success and personal development are both key, as this new generation learns to navigate higher education and realms in which today's teenagers have less experience than their

predecessors: drinking and drugs, sex, work, and even daily social interaction. Gen Zers are growing up more slowly in some ways, and colleges may have to help. Conversations about free speech are fraught but vital.

In the coming years, as colleges tweak programs and services and experiment with new approaches to attract and retain Gen Z,

campus leaders need to stay focused, gauge progress, and promote iterative change based on what works. The risk is too great for institutions to stay the course. Unlike with millennials, there won't be ever more students to fill the gaps. And the student-success movement demands results including parity across racial and ethnic groups.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Segment the student pipeline

Gen Z is far from a monolithic group when it comes to backgrounds, habits, and ambitions for college. Through surveys, focus groups, and data mining of current and prospective students, institutions need to categorize the various groups making up this roughly 17-year cohort, assess which segments they want to serve, and design and market offerings accordingly.

### Prioritize strategic enrollment management

Demographic projections show a drop in the number of well-off, well-prepared high-school graduates. Reaching Gen Z will require new approaches that demand an innovative strategic plan that includes enrollment objectives, the attributes of your institution's ideal students, an updated playbook for recruitment, and markers of success.

### Prepare for a faster planning cycle

As Gen Zers come through college, their attitudes and habits may continue to shift, especially as technology and knowledge evolve. Traditional campus planning cycles that occur every five or 10 years or coincide with a new presidency won't be able to keep up. Campuses need to move to more frequent planning regimens that lay out near-, medium-, and long-term strategies.

Higher education has successfully adapted to evolving generational attitudes and ambitions in the past. Fifty years ago, colleges built many of the modern structures of student affairs to welcome the wave of baby boomers. For Gen X, institutions loosened regulations to treat an independent cohort as young adults. An array of amenities

appealed to millennials and their parents. Gen Z presents new challenges and opportunities in the midst of a fast-changing society and economy. Only if campus leaders are aware of what this new generation wants and needs, and are willing to act quickly, can they successfully maneuver through the decade and a half ahead.

## **Update communications vehicles**

Campuses must organize communications teams to follow the preferences of Gen Z from recruitment to the campus experience to alumni affairs. Varied, sophisticated social-media habits affect everything from how prospective students demonstrate interest to how they interact with professors and advisers. Investing resources in communicating effectively pay off in enrollment and retention.

## **Engage faculty to transform learning**

In recent years, institutions have improved teaching-and-learning centers to help professors redesign courses to incorporate the latest research on learning science, as well as new technology. Now campus leaders must expand those efforts to appeal to a new generation of learners who want a mix of online, traditional face-to-face, and experiential, project-based learning.

## **Focus on student services**

Gen Zers need support services like advising and counseling all throughout the college journey. That means such services can't be merely added on, but rather must be fully integrated into the student experience. Many institutions have expanded orientation, for example, into the freshman year, to guide students on academic progress, sexual consent, and wellness. Today's students would benefit from virtual and in-person services with regular touchpoints.

## Further Reading

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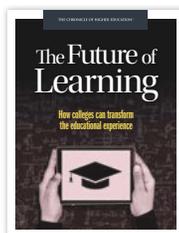
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## Related Publications

*The Chronicle* produces a series of in-depth reports for campus leaders. Here are a few complementary titles.

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How colleges can transform the educational experience

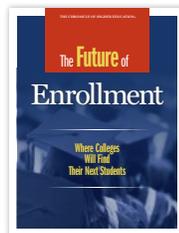


Widespread attention to student success, along with the rise of education technology, is pressuring colleges to modernize teaching and learning. The traditional sink-or-swim ap-

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### The Future of Enrollment

Where colleges will find their next students

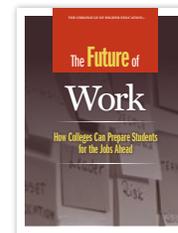


The changing pipeline to higher education demands that colleges pursue new directions. They must extend their geographic reach, recruit through digital marketing as well as school and

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