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Reaching Millennials

Paul DeVries

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After nearly a year's worth of research focused on millennial students, much of what I found highlighted a subject that is largely misunderstood and self conflicting. Despite this enigma, one fact is undisputable, their predilection towards emergent technology and the communication that it affords. Much of this communicative technology is proffered as immediate, asynchronous, collaborative and multi-sensory. Millennial students, those born after 1982 have become prodigies of this tech environment. They are connected 24/7, a connection that allows unprecedented access to almost any word ever written. It should be noted that this technology has allowed millennials to multi-task, a trait that can sometimes be misconstrued as antisocial.

Our students are no longer living in a world where knowledge is power, but rather the distribution of knowledge. Consider this, it took television 13 years to reach a population of 50 million, but just two months for Facebook (increase in subscribers from 350 to 400 million.) For millennials, technology has become the social equalizer. It has allowed them equal access to search, distribute and create regardless of age, race, gender and social status.

So how does all of this impact millennial educators? I believe that there is significant disconnect between many educational institutions and millennial students. Scores of students (the 58% who actually graduate,) are experiencing a curriculum that is irrelevant, boring, unengaging and residing in an age where industrial pedagogies still reigned supreme, an education unlikely to prepare them for a life and career in the 21st Century. I'm sure many readers would refute this statement, arguing their classes are engaging and relevant "We teach the fundamentals, all our students can cook upon graduation." But are these fundamentals, the same ones taught 30 years ago, preparing our students for our world or theirs? At a recent convention I attended, a passionate educator retorted that if \$60,000 prepares a student for menial tasks, then we as educators should be ashamed. Meaning that, after a substantial monetary investment at a culinary school, students should be able to complete much more than an entry level position.

Unfortunately for us we can no longer depend on an endless supply of high school graduates to swell our freshman ranks. As the American culinary industry has expanded, so have our student's choices. Today they have hundreds of school choices and of course the internet. Consider the following: University of Phoenix boasts over 200 thousand students, graduating more MBA's than Harvard. MIT along with over 200 universities have almost their entire school curriculums accessible online, for free. Open Culture, another virtual entity, currently offers over 250 liberal arts and science courses all gratis. Contributing schools include Stanford, Yale, Berkeley, and UCLA.

If you thought textbooks might be an issue search Wiki Books, they currently host over 2,400 books written in over 100 languages. The Open library Project has to date scanned 1.7 million books, with the aspiration of scanning every book ever published. Still not impressed? I recently searched

Google for “how to cook,” the gargantuan site hit 89 million text sources and 421,000 videos. YouTube’s first video for the same search had been viewed over 770,000 times. A random search for “how to braise,” turned up countless matches, with the first ten being viewed over 80,000 times. One caveat to all this; not one video was from a culinary school! So what’s my point?

We are fast approaching our own zenith, a point where we need to seriously start looking at what, and how we teach. To begin to substantiate a curriculum that commonly shoulders our students with over \$30,000 in debt. We need to discard the industrial model of pedagogy and engage our students in their world not ours. We need to integrate collaborative, real world project based learning which supports a 21st Century economy, whilst utilizing technology to support, not supersede curricular goals. With graduating students owing more than \$714 billion in loans, we need to ask ourselves; are we doing the best we can to justify this expenditure? Can we substantiate each and every part of our curriculum? Are we equipping our students with the requisite skills to find success in the new 24/7 inclusive workplace?