Net Generation Students: Why They are Different, and Teaching Strategies that Help Them Succeed

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Presented to Student Affairs and Campus Life
April 5, 2012
A quiz

Students today are

- a. More focused, harder-working, and more polite than ever
- b. Less focused, lazier, and less civil than ever
- c. Neither of the above
Objectives

- Identify the key characteristics of today’s students, focusing on Net Generation students
- Discuss how these characteristics affect classroom performance
- Offer best practice solutions
Are Today’s Students Different?

THE DUMBEST GENERATION
How The Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future
*OR, DON'T TRUST ANYONE UNDER 30*
MARK BAUERLEIN
And others believe the Internet is degrading our minds...

*What the Internet is doing to our brains*

*by Nicholas Carr*

*Is Google Making Us Stupid?*
"Over the past few years I’ve had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory.

"My mind isn’t going—so far as I can tell—but it’s changing. I’m not thinking the way I used to think. I can feel it most strongly when I’m reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I’d spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose.

"That’s rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel as if I’m always dragging my wayward brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle."
Carr’s view is supported by surveys of reading

- We are reading less
  - Among 17-year-olds, percentage of nonreaders doubled from 9% to 20%

- Reading scores for adults have deteriorated, notably among the best-educated groups
College students often lack academic preparation

- Majority of students are not ready for college-level material after high school
- 40% of all students who enter college must take developmental courses
- Over the last decade, the amount of time needed by students to complete developmental courses has been increasing
Misconceptions about the necessity of working hard

- Instructors believe that full-time students *should* prepare for class 25 hours per week
  - Only 11% spend that much time
  - And 65% percent study 10 hours or fewer per week

- Time spent studying has steadily declined for the last four decades

- Although success is important to them, expectations about success are often unrealistic
  - The equation “effort → success” is often unclear to them
What students are doing

Time use on an average weekday for full-time university and college students during the traditional school year (September through May), 2005–09

Total = 24.0 hours

- Sleeping, 8.4
- Educational activities, 3.6
- Leisure and sports, 3.5
- Work and work-related, 2.9
- Traveling, 1.5
- Eating & drinking, 1.0
- Grooming, 0.8
- Other, 2.3

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
Classroom courtesy is declining

- Incivility can take several forms
  - Annoyances
    - Coming late to class
    - Cell phone use
  - Monopolizing classroom time with personal agendas
  - Psychological intimidation
    - Threatening to take complaints to department chairs
    - Threats of negative course evaluations
  - Worse case: threats of or actual physical violence
Another quiz!

Given all the challenges we face, we should feel

- a. despair, hopelessness, and depression
- b. anger, annoyance, and irritation
- c. it’s time to consider a new field of work
- d. none of the above
The good news

- Many of our difficulties are caused by the increase in access to post-secondary education
- Our students are more interesting and stimulating than ever
- But our students *are* different, and they require different teaching approaches
Key characteristics of Net Generation students

- Independence
  - They are used to seeking out answers on their own
- Emotional and intellectual openness
  - They are prolific social communicators
  - They are happy to bare their souls online (e.g., Facebook)
  - They enjoy doing things in groups
- Innovativeness
  - Ready to try things out, like the next technology
- Immediacy
  - View the world from 24/7 perspective
  - They expect immediate answers
Net Generation students have different thinking styles

- Better visual-spatial skills
- Learn better through discovery than by listening to information
- They like doing things more than talking and listening about things
- Act first, ask for help later
- Less linearity in their thinking
- Better at synthesizing information
Net Generation students are multitaskers

- They are used to doing multiple activities simultaneously
  - But they process information at less depth
- They shift attention rapidly between tasks
Net Generation students have different views of knowledge

- All sources of information are deemed equal
  - Instructors
  - Web sources
  - Facebook friends

- Fellow students are seen as more credible than instructors in terms of determining what is and isn’t important

- Expertise is undervalued
Net Generation students are tech savvy

- 98.5% of traditional-age college students own a computer
  - One-third own both a desktop and laptop
- 20% of younger college students began using computers between the ages of 5 and 8
- Students spend an average of 21 hours/week online
  - 9% spend more than 40 hours/week
What are the implications of Net Generation characteristics for teaching?

- Use learner-centered, rather than teacher-centered, techniques
- Avoid traditional lectures, and embrace discovery learning
- Encourage student collaboration
- Incorporate the use of technology
- Always keep in mind: *It’s less about what students know; it’s what students can learn*
Strategies that address Net Generation students: Technology-based solutions

- High impact, low cost technologies
- *Anyone* can learn them
- Cyberphobia can be dispelled
Interactive Classroom Technology: Student Response Systems

- Hardware/software connecting instructor and student
- Changes nature of the classroom dynamics
- Provides immediate feedback to instructor
Creating Class Blogs

- Sets of personal online, chronological commentaries
- Readers may respond, creating perception of interaction
- Instructors may
  - Comment on current events
  - Reflect on teaching/learning
- Students may
  - Create their own blogs
  - Post reactions

![Growth of Blogs (2003-2008)](chart.png)

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<th>Sep-03</th>
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<td>New Blogs per Day</td>
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<td>120,000</td>
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Source: Technorati; Dave Sifry
Podcasts: Building “Lectures to Go”

- Software/hardware that allows downloading of audio and visual files from the Web to
  - Web browser
  - iPod
  - Cell phone

- Educational uses
  - Presentation of ancillary material
  - Digital recordings of lectures
    - Make up for missed class
    - Convenience of on demand lecture
    - Perceived improvements in retention
    - Perceived improvement in test scores
    - Easier review of material
Sample podcast system: Tegrity

- **Instructor experience**
  - Instructor records lecture
  - Recording (and accompanying PowerPoint slides) are uploaded to Tegrity website
  - Synchronization of audio and visual inputs
  - System stores and indexes every word on PowerPoint slides

- **Student experience**
  - Students can search across lectures for specific terms
  - Slides that include the term appear, along with accompanying audio
The bottom line

- Net Generation students are different from prior generations of students
- They require new teaching approaches
- Instructors must determine best pedagogical practices for their specific population of students
Staying in touch

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