Book Review: Generation Z Goes to College

Ashlee Noblin

Tarleton State University

Shonda Sears

Tarleton State University

First-time in college students of today are an ever-changing population known as Generation Z, who were born between 1995 and 2010. The “digital natives” have been exposed to the internet, smart phones, and tablets their entire lives and they thrive in a technology-driven world. Their personal interactions primarily take place on a virtual platform, where they spend hours daily on various social media sites. The world they have grown up in has cultivated a need for social change and has driven them to take action. The book, Generation Z Goes to College, written by Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace takes a closer look at this generation.

The book begins with a brief background information on the authors providing insight on their perspective. They emphasize while generalizations can be made about generations they are not completely reflective of each individual. Throughout the first two chapters the authors introduce the readers to Generation Z. In Chapter 1 Seemiller and Grace take an in depth look into the characteristics of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. The chapter explains how these prior generations impacted the common personality characteristics and motivators associated with Generation Z. Chapter 2 focuses on the “common events and contextual factors” (p. 38) that have influenced Generation Z’s beliefs and perspectives.
The next set of chapters covers topics concerning communication, technology, and relationships. The authors begin Chapter 3 with an examination of the different communication channels most and least popular among Generation Z. They probe deeper into specific social media sites throughout Chapter 4 including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest and explore what each is used for and current trends. They point out that while many interactions occur through technology they still value face-to-face interactions. After examining how Generation Z communicates and uses technology, in Chapter 5 Seemiller and Grace consider the affect these trends have on Generation Z’s ability to create and maintain personal relationships. They focus on relationships associated with friends, family, and romance. Whereas technology might be seen as a hindrance for some, Generation Z views it as an opportunity to positively influence relationships.

Early in the book the authors explained a prime motivator for Generation Z is their concern for the world around them. Chapter 6 and 7 discuss the current state of the world and the impact it has on this generation’s desire for social change. Chapter 6 looks at their views on topics relating to the importance of education, finding employment they are passionate about, as well as human rights, racial equality, ever present violence, and political dysfunction. Chapter 7 takes these views and explores how Generation Z is putting its passions and ideals into action to make a change. These actions include taking on leadership roles in their community, creating businesses with social missions, and raising money for social causes. Seemiller and Grace find that this generation seems to have a strong desire to be actively engaged in the community in order to make the world a better place.
Chapters 8 delves into Generation Z’s leadership styles and who they look to as role models. Role models for this generation are typically individuals like parents, teachers, and coaches as opposed to bosses, religious leaders, and political leaders. Through a survey conducted by Seemiller and Grace, members of Generation Z self-identified as not having one specific leadership style but rather the ability to adapt to the environment around them. However, the dominant leadership style was found to be the “Doing style” of leadership, which plays a big role in their educational experience. Chapter 9 discusses how institutions can maximize Generation Z’s learning experience by integrating technology, understanding how they interact with professors and peers, and creating an ideal learning environment.

The authors conclude their research on Generation Z in Chapter 10. While there are similarities with previous generations they point out the need to understand the differences so that we can connect with them more effectively. They present six strategies to better engage these students in higher education, including relational, operational, instructional, programmatic, developmental, and technological.

For the next 10 years Generation Z will comprise the majority of the higher education population. This book notes they are a dynamic and complex generation. The information provided therein can help us create more effective relationships, communication strategies, and learning environments. Still, while many common characteristics have emerged through the research conducted by Seemiller and Grace, it should be stressed that not all individuals in this cohort are the same.

References