Millennial Faculty: Space Invaders “Invade” Higher Education

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(Snowy Egret)

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The Millennial student is a frequently researched and discussed topic in academia. In 2006 and 2008, faculty in sport management engaged in discourse on the characteristics and attributes of Millennial students during NASSM roundtable sessions (Cuneen, et. al., 2006; 2008), but what about the Millennial faculty member whose arrival is only a few years away? Adolescents who grew up playing Space Invaders are now in their 30s, the age of many new faculty hires. Does their entrance into the academy signal the long-predicted "generational shift" away from technophobia and toward technophilia?

This panel discussion is designed to provide a forum to introduce the Millennial faculty member, to provide information on aspects of faculty work that may be approached differently by Millennial faculty, and to share ideas about understanding communication and work style approaches that may differ by generation.

Millenials have been defined in a variety of ways, but a general consensus has them as individuals born between 1980 and 2002. Terms such as sheltered, special, confident, entitled, achieving, team-oriented, self-absorbed, technosavvy, and unwilling to pay their dues have been used to describe them (Lowery, 2004; Nicholas, 2008). They are the group that were given awards and recognition for participation alone and have been over-scheduled their entire lives (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Walker, 2009).

By 2013, Millennial faculty will be bringing new attitudes, behaviors, and expectations to the campus just as they brought unique nuances to the classrooms (Kelly, 2007). Since it takes a number of years to change culture within an institution, campuses should start their strategic planning 3-5 years before Millennial faculty arrive (Kelly, 2007). Technology, cultural differences, work style, and workplace support/development are all areas in which Millennials will have nontraditional expectations and approaches to their work.

Technology: Millennials, used to Internet transactions, will expect a high level of functionally for sophisticated portals (Kelly, 2007). For instance, computers have always been present in their education settings, thus they have an overall high comfort level with a variety of electronic communication tools. They are comfortable with Web 2.0, Blackboard, and other interactive applications and tools and will use them extensively in their teaching strategies (Diaz, et. al., 2009). Technologies available for this new faculty segment should be diverse, include discipline specific tools, and social media that future Millennial faculty may have used in his/her graduate work (Diaz, et. al., 2009; Walker, 2009). Millennials spend 16hrs/week on the internet (not including email), 40% create blogs, and 80% regularly read blogs (Tresser, 2007). Additionally, over 50% of Millennials rate instant messaging as their top choice of communication (McCasland, 2005). These characteristics that make Millennials technoliterate also make them impatient with those who demonstrate a lack of technological sophistication (Taylor, 2005).

Cultural Differences: Of the seven million multiracial individuals in the Unites States, 36% are Millennials (New Strategist, 2004). They also may be from diverse families that may include nontraditional family structures and a variety of ethnicities. Their global view of the world and understanding of the inter-connectivity of the worldwide market differs from past generations (Alch, 2000). Future Millennial faculty will likely place a high value on the continued internationalism of sport management. They may also seek out international collaborations, travel, and teaching opportunities and will expect administrative support to achieve these goals.

Work Styles: Millennials are highly goal oriented and interested in how to move up in the career and pay ladder (Walker, 2009). This cohort is also used to and embraces group work, so institutions may need to tout collaboration
in their recruitment ads and during faculty interviews. To attract Millennial faculty, programs should also highlight such things as learning communities, team teaching, and service learning (Kelly, 2007). As faculty members, Millennials will be more collaborative, optimistic, willing to try new technologies, more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertain outcomes, more cognizant of rules, and will feel comfortable and empowered to voice their opinions. In addition, they will also expect to have their specific roles clearly defined (Kelly, 2007), even though they will also expect flexibility and have more than one project going on at once (Erwin, 2009).

Office culture will be equally as important to future Millennial faculty as the work being accomplished (Erwin, 2009), and they will expect their supervisor to recognize the need for a personal life and the value of timely and constructive feedback (Erwin, 2009; Walker, 2009). According to Walker (2009, p. 75) “... they (Millennials) need to see the whole picture and how it relates to real life, with a timeline, clear goals, and measurable objectives of success laid out. Once this is done, chunk the tasks, give them the latitude to produce the work in a way that makes sense to them, and encourage them to take risks and be creative.”

Development/Support: Institutions and programs should avoid making assumptions about Millennial faculty's specific needs; they should instead develop and administer surveys to discover them (Diaz, et. al., 2009). Conference travel has been a traditional route for faculty development; however Millennial faculty will expect developmental activities and support to be part of campus life (Kelly, 2007). As a final caveat, Millennials do not respond well to direct criticism (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

To fully prepare for the integration of Millennials into the university faculty setting, administrators and current faculty alike must recognize the differences between Millennials and past cohorts of faculty, and be prepared with a plan on how certain aspects of the job can be adjusted to get the most out of Millennial faculty. Attendees will leave this discussion with an awareness of the Millennial faculty member, an understanding of the implications of Millennials entering the job market, and ideas on how sport management programs can prepare for their inevitable arrival.