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# Meeting the Needs of Generation Y Students – A study of Student Expectations

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### Overview of Study

The Office for National Statistics note enrolments on higher education courses has risen annually since 1998. Over 70% of such enrolments are from Generation Y students, yet there is little evidence to suggest universities are adapting to the specific needs of this social group.

There are three major characteristics of this millennial group: 1) They are racially and ethnically diverse, 2) They are extremely independent because of divorce, day care, single parents, latchkey parenting, and the technological revolution that they are growing up alongside, and 3) They feel empowered; thanks to overindulgent parents, they have a sense of security and are optimistic about the future. In response to these characteristics, the societal group have significantly different expectations of university provision.

This study examined the attitudes and expectations of such incoming students, particularly assessing their preferences in terms of delivery style, assessment methods and personal and professional development opportunities.



#### Traditionalists 1920 – 1943

Prefers formality, authority, social order, hierarchy

#### Generation X 1969 – 1981

Loyal, information driven, seek feedback, accept routine

#### Baby Boomers 1944 – 1968

Defined by post war optimism and values, hard working, conformist.

#### Generation Y 1982 – 2001

Require balance, connected, self confident, entrepreneurial, goal oriented, independent, bored by routine.

In today's society a typical organizations workforce is made up of four generations: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. (Redmond, 2008).

Learning providers must develop strategies to understand and meet the needs of these leaders of the future (Eisner, 2005; Paul, 2004; Francis-Smith, 2004; Johns, 2003; Martin and Tulgan, 2001; Raines, 2002).

Redmond (2008) suggests a Generation Y Learner requires:

- Lots of Challenge and Choice
- Access to mentors and inspirational leaders
- Social Networks and Social Learning
- Optional Attendance
- Work Life Balance
- Opportunities to lead and be entrepreneurial



Furthermore, research undertaken by Schonfield and Honore in 2009 suggests, Gen Y learners prefer the following:

Hands on Learning, Working in small groups, Working alone, Learning from professionals, Technology enhanced learning, Multimedia learning, Distance Learning, Interactive classroom sessions, A variety of tasks, Collaboration, Simulation, Blended Learning, Experiential Learning, Networking to facilitate learning, Personalised Learning, Enquiry based learning, Skills Development, Learning through managing others.

### Methodology

Using a focus group comprising first year undergraduate students, this study examined the attitudes and expectations of Generation Y learners, particularly assessing their preferences in terms of delivery style, assessment methods and personal and professional development opportunities.

### Conclusions

Findings generally support those of Schonfield and Honore, (2009), particularly emphasizing the need for increased skills development, work related learning, research into practice and enquiry based learning opportunities. Students expressed a dislike for traditional lecture sessions over use of e-learning, and a preference for 'hands on' learning, tasks variety and interactive classroom-based sessions.

The research participants particularly valued self-managed student projects incorporating activity based experiential learning. This provided welcome opportunities for learners to work with others and present findings to external parties as well as University tutors.

Research participants further noted a need for session learning outcomes to be explicitly linked to career aspirations.

Preferences particularly reflected a desire to influence the direction of their leaning and for it to lead to demonstrable outcomes which are acknowledged by University tutors.

### Summary of Focus Group Findings

Preferences	Dislikes
Activity based learning	Lectures
Practitioner led sessions	Use of DVD's
Interaction	Large group lectures
Group presentations	Over-use of Blackboard
Relevance to career aspirations	Over-use of multi-media
Directed study activities to be more recognised in formative assessment	
Individualised assessment	
Opportunities to express own views	
Opportunities to apply knowledge	
Continual formative assessment with regular feedback	
Variety in learning activities	
Flexible learning space	
Working in small groups	
Enquiry based learning	
Learning through managing others	