COREY SEEMILLER
MEGHAN GRACE

GENERATION Z GOES TO COLLEGE

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I dedicate this book to the most important Generation Z person I know–my daughter, Kacey.

— Corey

To my grandparents, for supporting my love for learning. To my parents, for being my best friends and biggest fans.

— Meghan

GENERATION Z GOES TO COLLEGE

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Meghan Grace

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About this Book

We wrote this book because we wanted to share findings from our study, Generation Z Goes to College and other studies that would help educators, parents, employers, and students themselves understand Generation Z better. We wanted specifically to frame this book in the context of higher education because Generation Z is already in college. As programs, courses, processes, environments, and initiatives adapted to Millennials in higher education, we must be prepared to do the same for this next generation of students.

This book reports data from 295 sources, and incorporates findings from the Generation Z Goes to College study, for which both of us served as the primary investigators. A great deal of the findings presented in this book are from this study, yet we heavily supplement them with work from other scholars whom we cite throughout the book. The statistics, charts, graphs, and quotations of student perspectives that we do not explicitly cite come from our study.

About the Authors

Corey Seemiller has worked in higher education for more than twenty years in faculty and administrative positions. She has both taught and directed programs related to her areas of expertise, which include leadership, civic engagement, career development, and social justice. She currently serves as an assistant professor in the organizational leadership program at Wright State University and previously held roles including director of leadership, learning, and assessment at OrgSync, a campus management technology platform, and director of leadership programs at the University of Arizona. In 2008, Seemiller cofounded the Sonoran Center for Leadership Development, a 501(c)(3) organization that offers affordable and accessible leadership development training for individuals and groups in southern Arizona. She is the author of *The Student Leadership Competencies Guidebook*, to help educators design intentional curriculum aimed to develop students' leadership competencies. She also designed evaluation measurements for each competency, an online database that outlines leadership competencies needed by each academically accredited industry, a workbook, online competency self-inventory, and an iOS app. Seemiller received her bachelor's degree in communication from Arizona State University, master's degree in educational leadership from Northern Arizona University, and Ph.D. in higher education from the University of Arizona. She is a member of Generation X.

Meghan Grace received her undergraduate degree in communication studies from Chapman University. After receiving her master's degree in higher education from the University of Arizona, she pursued a career in student

affairs. She worked in leadership programs at the University of Arizona, where she taught courses in social entrepreneurship, event planning, leadership, and career readiness. She currently serves as the new member orientation director for Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, where she coordinates orientation events and educational programs. Meghan is a Millennial.

Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the many scholars and authors who have put forth seminal research that has contributed to the dialogue on generations, including Neil Howe and William Strauss, Arthur Levine and Diane Dean, Ron Zemke, Haydn Shaw, Chuck Underwood, and Tim Elmore. Generation Z authors, including Chole Combi who compiled stories of Generation Z as well as Tom Koulopoulos and Dan Keldsen who highlight how to work with Generation Z in the business world, have contributed greatly to our understanding of this generation.

Preface

We started our journey with Generation Z in summer 2013, right before the oldest in this generation were about to start college. Both of us at the time were working in a university leadership programs office, putting together programs, events, and courses for thousands of students each year. We were fascinated with the new generation of students before us. No one in higher education was talking about them yet. We knew if we did not pay attention to changing demographics, the leadership experiences we designed for these students might not be relevant.

Thus began our quest of trying to find information about Generation Z, a task that was quite challenging at the time. For one thing, very little research was available about Generation Z in general, with the exception of a handful of resources from market research agencies. And since this group of students was just entering college, there was not a base of research about them in the context of higher education. We decided in May 2014 that it was time to conduct our own study. We spent months fine-tuning our research design and filling out paperwork. And as with all other studies involving human subjects, our project required review and approval. We also logged many hours reaching out to create institutional partnerships to gather participants. We launched the study in August 2014.

Our goal was to learn the styles, motivations, and perspectives of Generation Z students to better work with them. Our plan was to analyze the data we collected and see what patterns emerged. Because of our role in supporting students, we hoped our data would help us answer a number of questions—for example: What social issues do students in Generation Z care most about? What

motivates them? How do they prefer to learn? What technology do they use? If our study could shed some light on these and other issues, we would be better able to design programs, develop curriculum, set up administrative processes, create marketing and outreach plans, and advise these students.

We have written this book as a way to share our findings and those from other studies to help educators, parents, employers, students, and anyone else interested in preparing for this generation as they enter college and adulthood. As with any other book, keep in mind that here you will get information from a specific viewpoint. Our perspective is that of two former student affairs professionals who not only have studied this generation but also have worked with Generation Z students directly. We designed the research and looked at the data we collected in a way that reflects our personal and professional experiences—and in a way that we hope will be constructive to others who wish to bring out the best in today's teens and college students. Corey is a seasoned professional with twenty years of experience in higher education, and Meghan is a new professional coming into the field shortly after graduate school.

We decided to share some thoughts on our respective generations separately to give readers a better idea of how each of us approached Generation Z initially and how we feel about them now after conducting our research.

Corey

I am a member of Generation X. Growing up, I had to figure out if I wanted to watch VHF or UHF television channels, my phones all had cords (some had dials too), and I learned to type on a typewriter. I was not very informed about world issues, although I was in high school during the Gulf

War. We watched Channel 1 in homeroom class, and that is about the only place I got the news.

Technology is not the only thing that has changed. Relationships seemed different then as well. I would stay up all night talking to my best friend on the phone because texting and social media had yet to be invented. Dating meant being asked out by someone in person or on the phone or taking the chance of a blind date set up by a friend. There were no online dating sites or matchmaking services to screen potential dates, and being able to search someone online before the date was not an option. As diversity seems the norm today, in the 1980s and 1990s, we were taught that diversity was something to tolerate rather than celebrate. During my coming of age, most gay people were in the closet, and the Women's National Basketball Association was not even in existence.

College was exciting for me because computers were finally a bit more mainstream, and I had access to one in my residence hall computer lab. But we still had to go to the library to read a journal article, hoping that someone had not misfiled the volume and issue we needed. One of the starkest differences about college then and college today was that a public education was very affordable. My tuition was so low at my state institution that I could make enough money in a summer job to pay for tuition for both upcoming semesters. With my resident assistant job and summer work, I was able to leave college debt free.

Fast-forward twenty years. I have now worked at a number of colleges, public and private, four year and two year, in different capacities. I have witnessed the traditional-aged college population make the transition from Generation X to Millennials and now to Generation Z. I was just getting used to Millennials, and now there is another demographic culture I need to understand. I have to admit that with this

new generation, it is sometimes frustrating to compete with their cell phones in class, be Google fact-checked during lectures, or get a very impersonal e-mail in text language the night before an assignment is due saying something like, "Am sick sorry have to turn in pper L8." But I have to check myself and think, "How can I capture this energy they have for learning?"

Yet it is refreshing to work with students who are informed and engaged in changing the world. I remember the chagrin I felt when I let students know about service hour requirements for our leadership program and a student asked if she could count the time she spends running her nonprofit toward the requirements. That day reframed my thinking about service and community engagement in ways I will always appreciate As I think about what this generation has to offer in college and afterward, I am excited and energized, and I feel that we are in good hands.

Meghan

Born and raised in the 1990s, I remember computer class being the best time of the school day and having to tear the perforated edges off printer paper. And while Mavis Beacon, the typewriting software, was supposed to be teaching me typing, there was nothing that helped me increase my words per minute more than staying up later than I was supposed to chatting with my friends on AOL Instant Messenger. Not having a cell phone until I started high school was pretty much the hardest fourteen years of my life, and today I'm not sure how I survived that long.

When I went to college, I was looking for the most beautiful setting I could possibly find and a school with a great reputation (so I could enjoy my four years and eventually get a great job after graduation). Eighteen-year-old me was pretty optimistic when I started at Chapman University in

sunny Orange, California. But twenty-two-year-old me was astounded and overwhelmed by the thought of student loan payments and this strange land called "the real world" so many people spoke of. I knew that graduate school was the path for me to continue exploring my passions and to narrow in on what my career would hold.

Little did I know that as I finished my graduate work in higher education and started my career as a student affairs administrator, I would come face to face with a new generation of students: Generation Z. I started to see, and sometimes became frustrated with, the way they behaved on campus, in programs, in organizations, and in the classroom. They were so close in age to my own generation but also so different. They would attempt to be my friend on social media and message me about assignments or meetings, neither act that I would have ever thought to do as a college student. I found myself not only sending an e-mail reminder to my student staff about our meetings but following up with a text message as well to make sure they showed up. Some students did not understand why I did not call them back when they called my office and missed their call. I had to explain that my landline did not have caller ID, so I would know if they called only if they left a voice mail, which a majority of the time they did not.

While their frequent and informal communication took me by surprise, I also realized they are intelligent and motivated to make a change in the world. Along with that, I found that as the new cohort of students would soon become the majority in higher education, there was still much to know and understand. In my day-to-day work, I interact mainly with first-year students who are part of the first wave of Generation Z. The more I interact with Generation Z, the more thankful and hopeful I become, knowing this smart, savvy, innovative, driven, responsible,

caring, and understanding group of young people will be taking on the real world soon.

Introduction

In 1995, exciting things were happening in the world. Pixar released *Toy Story*, the first completely computer-generated film.[1] George Foreman was still known for his boxing, not yet for his grilling devices.[2] Basketball superstar Michael Jordan returned to the National Basketball Association from retirement.[3] That year not only marks the time that the web had become worldwide,[4] it also serves as the beginning of Generation Z, the most recent generation to come of age. In 1995, they were making their first appearances in the world; today they are making their ways into the halls of colleges and universities across America.

Why Generation Z?

As Millennials end their reign as the majority in higher education, their parents, employers, educators, and advisors are just figuring out what makes them tick. But what worked for Millennials might not fit this new generation. To provide the most effective and beneficial experiences for Generation Z, it is crucial to know how these students think, what they are concerned with and care about, and how they prefer to be engaged.

Just as it took time to adapt to working with Millennials as they entered college (and some are still struggling to adapt), a whole new generation has shown up with a different set of needs. Levine and Dean's *Generation on a Tightrope* explored the Millennial generation and helped those in higher education be more effective in how they worked with and engaged these students.[5] Now, with the first wave of Generation Z students already in college, it is necessary to turn our attention to them.

Looking at Generation Z

Much of the buzz and conversation about Generation Z has focused on their teen years, not in the context of higher education. But it is now imperative to be prepared for what they bring to higher education.

In discussing Generation Z in this book, we have sought to interpret our data and the results of other social scientists' research in a way that will provide a better understanding of this cohort of students and capture their peer personality, which includes the common age range, common beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and perceived membership of the group.[6] Our goal is to explain and explore trends and similarities within Generation Z. It is important, however, to keep in mind that age and time period have effects on generational trends.[7] As a group ages, they may grow in and out of trends and behaviors, and particular events occurring in their lifetimes can shift their outlook and experiences.

Not every Generation Z student will align with every finding or topic in this book, and thus it is important to recognize and validate the differences among individuals in this group. Just because an individual falls within this generation does not mean he or she will exhibit all the characteristics of the generation in its entirety. The trends and behaviors we discuss are what we see as tendencies of the group, not decrees that every individual will act in accordance with. Therefore, we discuss Generation Z in the aggregate to best explain the generation as a group. We recognize that there are outliers but do not focus on them. Our hope is to better understand what makes this generation unique and provide insight into how to best engage these students during their time in higher education.

Overview of the Generation Z Goes to College Study

Our Generation Z Goes to College study aimed to uncover characteristics, outlooks, and trends of current college students born 1995 or later as they relate to their experience in higher education. We examined:

- Their characteristics, styles, and motivations
- How they learn, engage, communicate, and form relationships
- Pertinent social issues and outlook on life

The study was approved by the University of Arizona Human Subjects Protection Program, which is aimed at protecting human subjects in research studies.

Institutional Partners

In order to include as many college students born in 1995 or later as possible, we cast a wide net to solicit institutional partners using three recruitment strategies during July and August 2014. First, we sent an e-mail describing the study with a call for institutional partners over a number of professional e-mail lists in student affairs. These were:

- American College Personnel Association, Commission for Student Involvement
- National Clearinghouse for Leadership Programs
- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Student Leadership Programs Knowledge Community
- OrgSync, Administrator's Club
- 2014 National Collegiate Leadership Conference Advisor Listserv
- 2014 National Leadership Symposium Participant Listserv

These lists are connected to associations and events in which one or both of us are networked, which allowed us to easily access student affairs professionals at a number of institutions.

Second, we posted a call for institutional partners on social media, including the Student Affairs Professional Group on Facebook (16,300 members) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Student Leadership Programs Knowledge Community Facebook (1,300 members).

Finally, we reached out directly through e-mail and LinkedIn messaging to connect with potential institutional partners based on our networks. This approach entailed sending personalized messages to fifty individuals.

Through this process, we secured fifteen institutional partners. For each contact person at our partner institutions, we provided e-mail content and the survey link to forward to students. Table I.1 lists each institutional partner we sent the survey link to and details on the population and the sample.

Table I.1 Institutional Partners for the Generation Z Goes to College Study

Institution	Four Year/Two Year	Public/Private	Enrollment	Geographic Location	Population	Population *N*
						Sample *N*
Wingate	4	Private	2,163	North Carolina	All first-year students	500
University of Central Florida	4	Public	53,401	Florida	First-year LEAD scholars	262
Sacramento City College	2	Public	27,171	California	First-time students	3,375
University of Illinois	4	Public	43,881	Illinois	Residence life	2,220
Cal State-San Bernardino	4	Public	17,852	California	All first-year students	2,724
University of Connecticut*	4	Public	25,029	Connecticut	First-year program instructors	150
University of Arizona	4	Public	38,767	Arizona	First-year leadership students	579
Oklahoma State University	4	Public	23,033	Oklahoma	First-year students living on campus	4,000
Glenville State College	4	Public	1,721	West Virginia	Student support services students	185
Fairfield University	4	Private	5074	Connecticut	Random first-year students	100
Harper College	2	Public	15,711	Illinois	All students	2,600
Sonoma State University	4	Public	8,546	California	Students in freshman learning communities	300
Michigan State University	4	Public	47,071	Michigan	Study of the environment Living Learning Community	100
Winston-Salem State University	4	Public	64,27	North Carolina	First-year students living on campus	836

| Oakton Community College** | 2 | Public | 12,087 | Illinois | NA | 1 |
| SUNY Brockport | 4 | Public | 8,490 | New York | First-year students | 600 |

Participants

The Generation Z Goes to College study was conducted between August and October 2014 and solicited students from fifteen partner institutions. Students were sent an e-mail from an administrator in their own institution inviting them to complete the online survey. Each institutional contact determined which student populations would receive the survey link (in many cases, it was based on institutional permission or access). We began the survey with 1,223 students; 1,143 of those met the qualifications of being born in 1995 or later. Individual measurement responses ranged from 614 to 759 for quantitative measurements and 618 to 685 for qualitative measurements, and declined between earlier measurements and later ones. Table I.2. describes the number of responses analyzed in each measure.

Table I.2 Number of Responses Analyzed in Each Measure

Measurement	Sample N
Characteristics of Generation Z	759
Styles in working with others	749
Motivations	728
Learning styles and preferences	701
Communication methods and preferences	685
Social media use	673
Friendships and relationships	665
Social concerns/cares	618
Politics	618
Optimism	614
Spirituality	614

Since demographic questions were included at the end of the survey, only those who completed the entire survey responded to the demographic questions, which was 613 participants. Table I.3. outlines the demographic data of those participants.

Table I.3 Demographic Data of Participants (in percent)

Race/ethnicity	
African American or black	10.11
American Indian or Alaska Native	5.87
Asian	5.87
Hispanic	17.78
Middle Eastern	1.14
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1.96
White	76.18
Gender	
Man	30.83
Woman	69
Transgender	.16
Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual	91.03
Bisexual	5.21
Gay or lesbian	3.26

Instrument Design

Participants were asked to complete an online survey that included both quantitative measurements (multiple choice and "select all that apply") as well as open-ended questions to gather qualitative data. The topics included self and peer group characteristic descriptions, learning styles and environment preferences, communication, relationships, social media use, leadership styles, social issues and engagement, and spiritual and political outlook. Some survey measurements were created using models and scales from existing literature.

Learning Styles

The four learning styles from Kolb's Experiential Learning Model were used to develop the descriptions of learning styles (also called learning approaches). Converging was renamed Practical, Diverging was renamed Imaginative, Accommodating was renamed Experiential, and Assimilating was renamed Logical. These changes were done to make the names of these styles easier to understand for the participants. For more information, see:

Kolb, A. Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning and Education, 4*(2), 193–212.

The text for the styles was taken from:

Businessballs.com. (N.d.). *Kolb learning styles*. http://www.businessballs.com/kolblearningstyles.htm

Multiple Intelligences

Gardner's multiple intelligences model was adapted to serve as the list and descriptors of learning methods:

Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice*. New York: Basic Books.

Language descriptors for each intelligence type was taken from:

Bixler, B. A. (N.d.). *A multiple intelligences primer*. http://www.personal.psu.edu/bxb11/MI/MultipleIntelligences_print.html

Optimism

The two measurements of optimism and outlook questions were adapted from the Life Orientation Test. The measurement, "I am optimistic about my future," was adapted from "I'm always optimistic about my future," and "I believe good things will happen for me" was adapted from "Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad." These adaptations were done because the first measurement appeared too extreme with the word *always*, and the second appeared too middle of the road.

Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A re-evaluation of the Life Orientation Test. *Journal of Personality and School Psychology, 67*(7), 1063–1078.

Data Analysis

Quantitative questions were analyzed by looking at response percentages for each measurement. Some findings were reported using only the percentages at either end of the spectrum (e.g., disagree versus agree). In other cases, response categories indicating a favorable or unfavorable response were combined for analysis and reporting (e.g., very concerned and concerned versus not concerned). The margin of error was calculated for each measurement to consider when comparing percentages. In addition, some measurements were analyzed by comparing means. *T*-tests for statistical significance were used for any analysis that involved comparing means. Qualitative responses were analyzed using a content analysis process. Responses were coded into one or more themes and then interpreted for analysis.

Limitations of the Study

As with any other study, this one had its limitations. First, although we attempted to cast the net wide, we could include in our sample only students from institutional partners who were interested in participating in the study. We attempted to reach out across the nation to include a variety of institutional types for partnership, but in the end, we worked only with institutions that were willing to participate. Because of this, the institutions we partnered with are not entirely representative of higher education. We did not have any single-gender institutions, historically black colleges, religiously affiliated institutions, or for-profit colleges. In addition, with only fifteen institutional partners, not all states were represented, although students came from a variety of states regardless of where they went to college. Another limitation is that the number of students in this study is not representative of the Generation Z student population in its entirety, and some institutions are overrepresented and some underrepresented in terms of participants. Because of this, the demographics of the sample may not reflect the exact demographics of Generation Z.

Other Research We Used

To offset these limitations, this book also presents research findings from four additional types of sources: higher education studies, national polling data, market research, and studies about adolescents.

Higher Education Studies

The main source of data for this book was the 2014 Generation Z Goes to College study, but other higher education sources, including Northeastern University's Innovation Imperative study on Generation Z students and the Higher Education Research Institute's Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) findings, were particularly useful. We worked directly with the Higher Education Research Institute to disaggregate the fall 2014 CIRP findings to only those in the age range of Generation Z providing us with a nationally normed sample of more than 150,000 students.

National Polling Data

Polling data, studies, and reports from entities such as Pew, Gallup, and the US Census also provided valuable insight.

Market Research

The first studies done on Generation Z emerged from market research, which is not surprising since many businesses likely want to understand their consumers and clients in this generation better. Research came from such areas as banking and real estate, but also emerged from market research companies assessing trends of this generation.

Studies about Adolescents

Given that these students were recently adolescents, we chose to look at studies that took place in the last few years focusing on the adolescent population. This was helpful in looking at trends of this group over time. For example, we found that 65 percent of Generation Z college students dislike or only somewhat like engaging in phone calls. This is no surprise given that according to a Pew poll of teenagers in 2010, phone calls were already considered "old school" technology.

Notes

[1] IMDB. (1995). *Toy Story plot summary*. Retrieved from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114709/plotsummary

[2] For more information about George Foreman, go to http://www.biography.com/people/george-foreman-9298881

[3] For more information about Michael Jordan, go to http://www.biography.com/people/michael-jordan-9358066

[4] World Wide Web Foundation. (2015). *History of the web*. Retrieved from http://webfoundation.org/about/vision/history-of-the-web/

[5] Levine, A., & Dean, D. R. (2012). *Generation on a tightrope: A portrait of today's college student*. San Francisco: Wiley.

[6] Strauss, W., & Howe, N. (1990). *Generations: The history of America's future*. New York: Morrow.

[7] Strauss & Howe. (1990).

Chapter 1
Who Is Generation Z?

Generations, much like cultures, have their own attitudes, beliefs, social norms, and behaviors that define them. For some, Generation Z students might seem as if they are from a foreign land. Judgmental attitudes, lack of understanding, and stereotyping are barriers that might stand in the way of older generations in understanding this new culture.[1] Natives to the digital and online world, Generation Z will soon fully inhabit higher education and then the workplace, taking on roles that will influence the physical world beyond the screen. Before diving deep into the culture and personality of Generation Z, it is important to take a look at what characterizes and makes this generation unique.

Back in My Day …

> "Every generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it."

> *George Orwell*[2]

Each generation has experienced being "kids these days," but as every new generation emerges, it is subjected to a certain level of disdain from older generations. Could the disdain be coming from the fact the new generations are indeed disrespectful and lazy? Or is it that those in older generations do not fully understand who these young people are and how social rules are changing because of them? In order to embrace and engage Generation Z, it is critical to understand who these students are and what makes them different.

Older generations create the environments that younger ones are raised in, so to fully understand Generation Z, it is important to start by understanding the generations that came before them.

Baby Boomers

The Baby Boomer generation gets its name from the surge of babies born after the end of World War II, between 1946 and 1964.[3] During the war, many men who would otherwise be fathers were busy fighting. As the war ended and troops returned home, there was more stability for the country and certainty for families, and thus began the boom of babies.[4]

Postwar America experienced a healthy economy; consumerism was seen as the cure for the Great Depression and the minor recessions leading up to and through World War II.[5] Baby Boomers grew up with the philosophy that hard work is the path to success[6] and the goal was to achieve the American dream of having their own houses, cars, and material possessions.[7] Driven by ambition to succeed, advance, and earn,[8] Baby Boomers are characterized by a strong traditional 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. work ethic.

Boomers also saw the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam war demonstrations unfold before their very eyes, and the oldest participated in the unrest. They have gone on to become parents, some to Generation X, but primarily to Generation Y, also known as the Millennials. At the time of this writing, the 74.9 million people in the United States are Baby Boomers.[9]

Generation X