The Millennial generation (people born in 1980 and later) will soon begin to make its mark as college and university faculty members. Immersed in technology all their lives, they will bring unprecedented levels of experience and comfort with the tools that earlier generations have had to adapt to. They will also bring new attitudes, behaviors, and expectations. The ways that institutions adapt to differences between Millennials and previous generations and capitalize on their strengths will have long-term implications for every institution.

John O’Brien, vice president of academic affairs at Century College in Minnesota, says the differences between Millennials and previous generations will have implications for institutions’ technology use, faculty recruitment and development, and collaborative work and decision making.

O’Brien cautions about overgeneralizing an entire generation; however, he points out that research on Millennials indicates that as a group, they are more collaborative, tend toward optimism, are willing to try new technologies, and are more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertain outcomes than previous generations. They also are more cognizant of rules and feel empowered to assert their viewpoints. (For example, as students, they are more likely than earlier generations to appeal a grade all the way up to the president of the institution, if necessary.)

When researching the potential issues associated with Millennial faculty, O’Brien found that “nobody is talking about it” yet, because they are still focused on Millennial students. But it’s important to consider these future faculty before they arrive because the planning that needs to occur to handle the changes associated with this new generation will take years. For four-year institutions, the first wave of Millennial faculty should arrive by 2013. For community colleges, where many faculty often are not required to have doctorates, the wave will arrive sooner.

Institutions will need to create a technological environment to meet the Millennials’ expectations and plan for the cultural differences they will bring. “Everybody knows that you don’t change a campus culture overnight. It takes a number of years to develop genuinely collaborative environments and to create some of these technology infrastructures,” O’Brien says, which is why he recommends incorporating these issues into strategic planning three to five years before the Millennials’ arrival as faculty members.
TECHNOLOGY

The most obvious difference between Millennials and previous generations is in the area of technology. There have always been some faculty members who enthusiastically adopted new technologies, but for many new technologies have been something to deal with rather than to embrace. As Millennials enter the academic workplace, the conversation will likely shift from faculty coping with new technologies to faculty pushing the envelope when it comes to experimenting with emerging technologies in their teaching, O’Brien says.

This shift is already happening, O’Brien says. At Century, approximately half of the current faculty have been hired in the last five years, due to a wave of retirements. Where once it was an effort to get faculty to use technology, faculty hired in recent years are advocating for new technological capabilities, asking questions such as “Why can’t we do this?” and “When are we going to be able to do that?” If your campus does not anticipate and meet the expectations of Millennial faculty members, such questions will be more common, and if the institution doesn’t have adequate answers, faculty recruitment and retention could suffer, O’Brien says.

As students, Millennials have come to expect sophisticated portals like they experience when they conduct any number of transactions on the internet. While most institutions do have portals or are in the process of implementing portals, in most cases these portals are not at the level of functionality that Millennials expect. Amazon.com, an example of the level of functionality that many Millennials take for granted, uses technology to customize the view of the website for an individual customer, based on his or her previous searches and purchases. “Then if these new faculty come to a campus and find a portal that amounts to stone knives and bearskins, they’re going to be pretty disappointed,” O’Brien says.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Although technology is the most obvious and expensive area of change required of institutions to meet the needs of Millennial faculty, it is not the most important, O’Brien believes. “Technology is easy to point to, but most of the research on Millennials talks about things like collaborative learning and collaborative work environments, and I think a lot of these new faculty will be interested in things like learning communities, team teaching, and service learning,” O’Brien says.

Demonstrating this commitment to collaboration will be an important factor in recruiting faculty. Interestingly, O’Brien did an informal analysis of advertisements for faculty positions listed in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and has found that few institutions tout collaboration in their ads.
“It was really surprising that given how much we talk about collaborative learning and learner-centered education, the advertisements that colleges put forth very seldom seem to be intentional in trying to appeal to faculty with these characteristics that we talk so much about being so important. You don’t see a lot of attempts to create a picture of a campus that is intentionally trying to appeal to a certain kind of faculty. As you start a conversation along those lines, I think it can have some interesting implications for how we recruit and hire,” O’Brien says.

Based on research and anecdotal information on Millennial students, Millennial faculty will likely respond better to a collaborative governance structure than an authoritative one, O’Brien says.

In addition, Millennial faculty likely expect more clearly defined faculty roles and policies than currently exist at many institutions. “I think its incumbent on colleges to make sure that there are very clear rules. I think it’s time for colleges to revisit a lot of policies. Intellectual property is a great example. These faculty are going to expect to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and they want to know what the rules are, and then they’ll follow them. But if you’re a campus that doesn’t have intellectual property policies but expects faculty to generate a number of online courses, then there may be a disconnect there,” O’Brien says.

Century College uses what they call Teaching Circles to create a collaborative environment for faculty. These teaching circles consist of groups of six to 10 faculty members who receive stipends to discuss issues that affect the college, including things such as academic integrity, integrating technology, e-folios, etc. “We’ve gone out of our way to create faculty development structures that specifically focus on intentional collaboration and cooperation,” O’Brien says.

O’Brien recommends that institutions explore ways of creating faculty development opportunities to suit the needs of Millennials, which may mean a shift in focus and resource allocation. For example, at many institutions faculty development has traditionally focused on traveling to conferences. “I think faculty development may become increasingly focused on the campus environment in terms of how we work together as a campus community. Campuses should look at their budgets for faculty development and see how much is spent in endeavors that result in genuine collaboration among faculty or maybe what percentage of faculty development funding is invested to support work with emerging technologies,” O’Brien says.

Preparing for the next generation of faculty needs to be an institution-wide effort, and each perspective is essential. The deans, who are doing the hiring, will need to find ways to communicate with faculty candidates that the institution has the characteristics they’re looking for, and department chairs will be directly involved in creating collaborative environments within the departments. The administration needs to facilitate a strategic planning process that ensures Millennial faculty’s unique
needs are considered. “Changing a campus culture is a three-to-five-year process, and the best way to start is within the context of strategic planning. Instead of starting with the question ‘What are our goals?’ perhaps this conversation should start with, ‘What kind of environment do we want to have for our students and faculty?’” O’Brien says. “And what kind of campus culture is needed to attract and keep excellent new faculty?”

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