

Sidney Lowe and Susie Skarl

Talkin' 'bout my generation

Exploring age-related resources

In the past few years, as technology has radically changed how we find and use information resources, library staff have begun to notice significant generational differences in the information-seeking behavior of library patrons. These frequent observations at the reference desk and in library instruction classes planted the first small seeds of our interest in this topic. Internet sites and online articles about generational differences are plentiful and focus on a wide range of subjects, such as learning styles, social behaviors, moral values, technological skills, marketing, communication, and workplace performance.

Generational categories are based on the time period in which a person was born, and there are variations in how they are labeled. For example, people who were born prior to World War II have been referred to as the "Silent Generation," "Veterans," "Radio Babies," or "Traditionalists." Some sources cite five separate generations, but most refer to only four. Depending upon which resource one is perusing, the generations are roughly represented as: 1) Traditionalists (born 1927–45), 2) Baby Boomers (1946–64), 3) Generation X, or Gen Xers (1965–80), and 4) Generation Y, or Millennials (1981–2000).

Regardless of the variations in generational birth dates or labels, we live in a continuously evolving world where generations of people are living and working longer than ever before. The electronic landscape is a fertile field for exploring and comparing a wide range of issues across age groups. We believe that the resources highlighted here represent a fascinating cross-section of generational themes.

Generational snapshots

- **AgeingHipsters.com—The Baby Boomer Generation.** This blog provides trends, research, comment, and discussion of and by people born from 1946 to 1965. It also covers 60s and 70s music, links to articles on Baby Boomer culture, health, and other issues of interest for "Aging Hipsters." *Access:* <http://www.aginghipsters.com/>.
- **Center for Generational Studies.** This organization provides a wealth of information on the recruitment, management, and training of various generations. The site includes a bibliography; "GenTrends," a regularly published newsletter; and free articles on topics ranging from interviewing Millennial applicants to managing and motivating the older generations. *Access:* <http://www.gentrends.com/index.html>.
- **Information Seeking Behavior and the Generations.** This summary is a chart provided by Eileen Abels that details characteristics that influence information seeking among Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, X'ers, and Millennials. The author also highlights the information-seeking preferences of the four generational groups. *Access:* <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/sections/rss/rsssection/rsscomm/virtualreferencecommittee/an07infoseekgen.pdf>.
- **MillennialGeneration.org.** Millennial-Generation.org is a blog that is an associate

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of Futurist.com. The blog provides resources and commentary on issues related to the large generation of “rising adults” born since 1982. *Access:* <http://www.millennialgeneration.org/>.

- **The Gen-X Files.** The Gen-X Files is written by Dave Sohigian and is focused on generational issues, especially those relating to the “13th Generation,” born from 1961 to 1980. The blog includes links to Webinars, charts, educational posts, and book recommendations for future research. *Access:* <http://www.thegenxfiles.com/>.

- **The Silent Generation.** This Web site, created by James R. Brett, focuses on the nearly 50 million Americans who were born to the “Silent Generation in America” from 1925 through 1942. In addition to providing characteristics and resources about this and other generations, the Web site provides lists of well-known “Silents” in science, technology, industry, arts, entertainment, sports, and politics. *Access:* <http://jamesrbrett.com/TheSilentGeneration/>.

Learning styles

- **A Vision of Students Today.** This short video, created by Michael Wesch, in collaboration with 200 students at Kansas State University, summarizes some of the most important characteristics of today’s students—including how they learn, what they need to learn, their goals, dreams, and hopes, and the changes they will experience in their lifetime. This video also indicates that there is a need for educators to design courses that involve students in more active learning and to provide collaborative learning experiences that encourage communication among students as part of the learning process. *Access:* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o>.

- **Cooperative Institutional Research Program at the Higher Education Researcher Institute at UCLA (CRIP): The Freshman Survey.** On an annual basis, approximately 700 two-year colleges and four-year colleges and universities administer the Freshman Survey to more than 400,000 entering students during orientation or registration. The survey covers a variety of student

characteristics: parental income and education, ethnicity, and other demographic items, in addition to financial aid; secondary school achievement and activities; educational and career plans; and values, attitudes, beliefs, and self-concept. The comprehensive results from these surveys are published each year in “The American Freshman.” *Access:* <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/freshman.html>.

- **EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI)—Learners.** ELI believes that its efforts begin with a consideration of the learner. The organization’s “Learners” section provides overviews and additional information on Net Generation Learners and Adult Learners, which deal the respective student populations’ demographics, needs, and learning styles, and expectations for teaching, learning, service, and support. *Access:* <http://www.educause.edu/ELI/EDUCAUSELearningInitiative/Learners/5670>.

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- **The Millennial Learner: Challenges and Opportunities, Sandra Y. McGuire, Louisiana State University.** McGuire’s PowerPoint presentation describes and defines Millennial Learners and offers teaching strategies that more fully meet their needs than traditional classroom approaches. Additionally, the author presents study skills that will help these students learn more effectively. *Access:* https://cbase.som.sunysb.edu/som/fac_retreat_uploads/85.pdf.

Generations in the workplace

- **Age and Generations: Understanding Experiences at the Workplace, Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, Christina Matz-Costa, and Elyssa Besen.** Due to recent shifts in the age composition of the workforce, a new understanding regarding generational issues in employment has begun to emerge. This report presents information about three different ways to group employees: age/generation, career-stage, and life course. In addition, the authors provide an overview

of some of the ways in which they measure the quality of employment. Finally, the authors discuss the similarities and differences in the employment experiences of the members of these different groups. *Access:* http://agingandwork.bc.edu/documents/RH06_Age&Generations_2009-03-20.pdf.

- **Decoding Generational Differences: Fact, Fiction . . . or Should We Just Get Back to Work?** by **W. Stanton Smith**. Smith's chapters include the following discussion topics related to the multigenerational workplace: the great technology divide; attitudes toward big business; coaching and career connections, and several other issues relevant to generations in the workplace. *Access:* http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/us_Talent_DecodingGenerationalDifferences.pdf.

- **Mixing and Managing Four Generations of Employees**, by **Greg Hammill**. The author of this online article for *FDU Magazine Online* notes that this is the first time in American history that we have had four different generations working side-by-side in the workplace. Research indicates that people communicate based on their generational backgrounds. Each generation has distinct attitudes, behaviors, expectations, habits, and motivational buttons. Learning how to communicate with the different generations can eliminate many major confrontations and misunderstandings in the workplace and the world of business. Along with discussing the issues and problems associated with four generations working together, for each generational category, Hammill provides a chart for personal and lifestyle characteristics, and one for workplace attributes and values. *Access:* <http://www.fdu.edu/newspubs/magazine/05ws/generations.htm>.

- **What It's Like to Work with Me: Generational Diversity in Office and Team Environments**, **National Institutes of Health Work/Life Center**. The purpose of this government-based resource is to increase knowledge and understanding of four generations (Veterans, Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y); to enhance comprehension of how generational differences affect people in the

workplace; to promote skills for intergenerational communication; and to develop skills for managing diverse working styles across generations. *Access:* <http://hr.od.nih.gov/worklife/documents/GenerationsAtWork.pdf>.

Technology and generations

- **GenerationBlend.com**. Rob Salkowitz is a writer and consultant specializing in the social implications of new technology. His recent publication, *Generation Blend: Managing Across the Technology Age Gap* (and Web site by the same name), explore how generational attitudes toward technology affect issues as diverse as recruitment and retention, employee training, management decision-making, collaboration, knowledge sharing, work/life balance, and ordinary workday activities. *Access:* <http://generationblend.com/>.

- **Generations Online in 2009, Pew Internet and American Life Project**. The results of this survey are based on data from a series of telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International, primarily between August 2006 and December 2008. According to the survey, over half of the adult Internet population is between 18 and 44 years old. But larger percentages of older generations are online now than in the past, and they are performing more activities online. *Access:* <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/Generations-Online-in-2009.aspx>.

Social behavior/communication

- **A Boomer's Guide to Communicating with Gen X and Gen Y**. *BusinessWeek* author Karen Auby provides a comparison on the working styles of Generation X and Generation Y workers. In the article, she addresses generational issues, such as technology, compensation, collaboration, work ethic, attire, socializing, and other relevant topics. *Access:* http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/08_34/b4097063805619.htm.

- **Communication Key to Cross-Generational Relationships**. In this *Business Leader* article, Jeremy Stoltz notes that with four generations (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers,

Gen X, and Gen Y) actively working together, experts contend that one element critical to success as a society is these different age groups' ability to effectively communicate. In addition to summarizing the generations' characteristics, the author provides tips for communicating with each group. *Access:* <http://www.thebusinessledger.com/Home/Archives/CommentaryViewpoints/tabid/86/newsid415/478/Communication-key-to-cross-generational-relationships/Default.aspx>.

- **Tips to Improve Interaction Among the Generations: Traditionalists, Boomers, X'ers and Nexters.** Values can collide when members of generations learn and work together. This article provides a better understanding of today's generations—Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Y—and offers tips for successful communication among the groups. *Access:* <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/intergencomm.htm>.

- **Today's Generations Face New Com-**

munication Gaps—USATODAY.com, Denise Kersten. The author notes that she has come across several career books that address the widening generation gap in the workplace, due to four distinct generations working together. In this article, Kersten provides a comparison of communication styles of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X'ers, and Millennials. *Access:* http://www.usatoday.com/money/jobcenter/workplace/communication/2002-11-15-communication-gap_x.htm.

- **Understanding and Appreciating the Communication Styles of the Millennial Generation, Jenna Reith.** According to Reith, generational culture is one very important aspect in developing personality and communication. In this article, the author highlights important influences on the communication styles of Millennials, which include diversity, their parents, educational trends and challenges, psychological issues, technology, and popular culture. *Access:* <http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas05/Vistas05.art70.pdf>. ¶

("By the people . . ." cont. from page 399)

of the committee's progress and relaying any information back to the committee. Additionally, library administrators can use their network of contacts to help locate the keynote and any other speakers.

Fourth, encourage and celebrate programs developed by library staff. In 2007 and 2008, the planning committee announced the conference theme and associated tracks to employees but made no stipulations about possible programs. Staff educated, entertained, and amazed everyone with their interpretations of the days' topics. These presentations allow staff to develop, use, and highlight their creativity as well as hone their public-speaking skills. Nearly one-third of the OSU Libraries staff now actively participates in various aspects of the In-Service Day.

Finally, the planning process should allow each year's planning committee to add their unique touch to this annual event. While we have a successful template for developing an

In-Service Day, it is not so rigid that it constrains either the planning committee or the program presenters. In 2008, several groups asked to provide poster sessions, something that had not been done before. The committee agreed, the sessions were a resounding hit, and they will likely be incorporated into future In-Service Day events. This willingness to seek and adapt to new ideas will keep the event fresh and exciting.

OSU Libraries believes its In-Service Day can serve as a model for other libraries seeking innovative ways to educate, train, engage, and connect with staff across departments and branches. While it may not be feasible for other libraries to develop a day-long event, some significant time dedicated to an In-Service Day event of this nature is well worth the investment.

Note

1. Karyle Butcher, e-mail message to OSU Libraries staff, October 29, 2008. ¶