The Influence of Technology on College Student Values

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The word "values" is synonymous with other terms such as morals, ethics, standards and principles. Each generation seems to subscribe to a different set of values based upon the cultural trends. Coomes (2004) stated that "history and popular culture-play an important role in shaping the values, beliefs, attitudes, and worldviews of individuals and groups" (p. 18). Generational memoirs emerge that speak to the character traits formulated within that generation and consequently how those traits characterize other generations (Coomes & Debard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2003). Values emerge from a variety of environmental and social factors such as familial influences, the media, religion, peer influences, educational settings and politics. Values are personal and have a significant impact on how college students respond and interact with the world around them.

Values are acquired either through auditory or visual perception or a combination of both as a result of what individuals have learned or experienced. Today, college students have access to electronic mail, cell phones, Ipods, MP3 players, Blackberries, WiFi, notebooks, text messaging, instant messaging, on-line social networks such as Facebook and MySpace. Additionally, students have reality television with an overwhelming emphasis on competition and success at any cost; movies featuring "youth literally marked for destiny to live up to higher standards of conduct and achievement and thus become society-saving heroes" (Strauss, Howe, & Markiewicz, 2006, p. 128); proliferation of misogynic rap lyrics, violent video games, explicit and exploitive music videos of which they can download from their cell phones, all of which serve as potential influences of college students values. This article will focus on what college students are experiencing that may have some impact on the values they espouse as it relates to the amount of time using technology and time spent building relationships and community. There will also be some discussion about how students use technology in acquiring knowledge, the influence of cultural images and integrity.

Time: A Precious Commodity to College Students

You have heard the saying "there is not enough time in the day" or "time is valuable" or "use your time wisely." For today's college students, these common sayings take on a whole new meaning. One of my work-study students recently came into the office saying she broke a record by staying up until 5 a.m. in the morning typing a paper. Regularly she comes to work promptly and proudly proclaims how late she stayed up or rather how early she had risen. It is usually due to her social interaction in a variety of forums in the residence hall, whether on the computer for academic or social reasons. She even shares about how quickly she can text message her friends with one hand while driving and never looking at the key pad, which is congruent with one scholar who stated that "students multi-task as they listen to music, send messages and do homework…" (Sadler, 2007, ¶1). Arend (2004) would define the above behaviors as engagement. Whereas administrators may think students are wasting time, they view their investments in their activities as time well spent, especially when it comes to technological uses.

There are mixed reviews in the literature regarding college students' use of technology. Some studies focus on the benefits and blessings technology offers students, whereas others express some negative

views. Gemmill & Peterson (2006) asked the questions to what extent does technology disrupt and occupy the time of college students and does it contribute to their stress level. The findings from their study indicate that 25% of the students encounter disruptions from technology, which leads to higher stress.

Lloyd, Dean & Cooper (2007) conducted a study looking at a variety of technological media used by college students and the effects they had on their relationships with peers, scholastic involvement and wellness. Their study concluded that there are advantages and disadvantages --students can benefit and suffer from using technology. The positive benefits of using technology include knowledge acquisition, socialization and entertainment (Kvavik & Caruso, 2005; Lloyd et. al, 2007). The negative influences of technological use from their study indicated that students tend to be less healthy when their sole purpose is for entertainment, which has a "direct effect on their academic success, personal relationships, and wellness" (p. 492). Lloyd et. al (2007) specifically pointed out the need for student affairs professionals to understand how and why students are using technology and their overall goal.

An extensive study which specifically focused on freshmen and seniors found that students spend a significant amount of time on-line doing a variety of activities on a weekly basis: computers (11-15 hours); course activities and studying using electronic device (3-5 hours); creating, reading and sending IM's (3-5 hours); creating, sending e-mail (1-2 hours); surfing the internet for pleasure (1-2 hours); downloading or listening to music or videos/DVDs (1-2 hours); and playing computer games (1-2 hours) (Kvavik & Caruso, 2005). What does all this say about the values of college students?

Obviously their time is important and it is spent doing what they value and appreciate most. Student Affairs professionals can glean that accessibility and convenience are important to college students as the above study illustrates. Arend (2004) noted similar sentiments when she pointed out that students can obtain library resources on-line rather than walk across campus or they can avoid face time with a faculty member by e-mailing him or her instead. The time students invest on using technology speaks volumes regarding its importance in their normal flow of life.

Community and Relationships

Millennials value community in a range of contexts as a result of their team-oriented personality (Howe & Strauss, 2003). The millennials "seem most comfortable in group activities and in group settings" (Lowery, 2004, p. 91). College students create community as they are surrounded by cell phones, television, digital players, game consoles and computer screens (i.e. on-line social networking). Guidry (2006) contends that on-line communication and interaction is transformative, healthy and normal for college students. He further believes that it contributes to the students' identity development as students' build lasting relationships from their engagement in on-line activities.

Is Integrity Lost While Using Technology?

Chickering & Reisser (1993) talk about developing integrity as a developmental process that college students will experience. One of the features of developing integrity has to do with congruence, described by the authors as "matching personal values with socially responsible behavior" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 237). There is recognition by some students that they exhibit incongruence. For instance, some students acknowledge that they listen to explicit rap music that is counter to their individual value systems, but believe that as they develop and mature after graduation that they will "eliminate forms of behavior and entertainment that is not consistent with the value base handed down to them by their parents or the moral framework they reconstructed during their college years" (Gallien, 2002, ¶29). College students recognize the incongruence, but it is does not appear to

be relevant to them at this stage of their development. Students go through great lengths to hear music even to the point of violating the federal copyright infringement laws (Strauss, Howe, & Markiewicz, 2006). According to one report

> The Recording Industry Association of America…sued 405 computer users whom the industry group has accused of trading copyrighted files at 18 colleges. Each of the defendants, industry lawyers say, swapped songs on i2hub -- a student-run file-sharing system that lets users exchange data at lightning speed over Abilene, the Internet2 consortium's network. (Read, 2005, p. A37)

This speaks to the risk students take to obtain music by any means necessary. There is a clear disregard in submission to the laws. However, times have changed and the industry has gotten smarter. Students have more legal options to obtain music (Hansell, 2007). Arguably, there is some effect on the choices, behaviors and values that college students ultimately exhibit after long term exposure to certain genres of music that tends to perpetuate violence, promiscuity, illegal activity, etc. However, that is an area that deserves further exploration beyond the scope of this article.

Images from the Media: What They See is What They'll Become

A universal question that is often asked during our formative years is what do you want to be when you grow up or who is your role model? The responses are not all that uncommon because you hear the usual answers, such as teachers, firefighters, parents, older siblings, grand parents, truck driver, policeman, pro athletes, celebrities, etc. It is uncommon to hear that a person wants to grow up to be a criminal or any other role that society in general would consider morally objectionable. However, college students are seeing everything the world has to offer ranging from unparallel natural disasters, explicit rap videos to terrorists in our home land, changing family structure, celebrity meltdowns and their addictions, indictments of Catholic priests due to sexual abuse of children, record deaths of soldiers in the Iraqi war, political scandals to the most diverse group of presidential candidates in the history of America. The media has been the ultimate contributor to the viewing pleasure as well as to the dismantling of values among our youth.

Implications

Technology certainly has made an indelible mark on history and today's generation of college students whether for good or for bad, we are challenged as a profession. It is a clear characterization of our students, which is what separates each generation from the next. As we recognize the challenges, we should equally consider the opportunities we have to be more creative and innovative in connecting with our students by providing services and programs that assist us in understanding the values that shape them. Since we have learned that technology serves as a vehicle for building relationships, social support with family and friends and just mere entertainment (Gemille & Peterson, 2006; Kvavik & Caruso, 2005; Lloyd et. al, 2007) institutions will value what student's value in an effort to attract them and retain them. As one writer says "the evidence is painfully clear: students expect campus services to be ubiquitous, universal and useful" (Moneta, 2001, ¶4). Hence, our best work may be accomplished communicating over e-mail or by using Facebook.

Values are being shaped by what students are hearing and seeing. College students have a multitude of visual images to stimulate their perception as well as to impact their values, attitudes and beliefs. Although there are some positive expressions, the negative prose has far greater consequences.

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