In This Issue

TEACHING MILLENNIALS

CTE View—Dan Bernstein reviews characteristics of today’s students and discusses how designing effective instruction for them improves learning—no matter how you view millennials.

CTE News—CTE is pleased to announce the addition of a new Faculty Fellow for the spring semester.

Perspectives—Interviews with two KU professors who discuss ways to increase connections with students, including social networking, Twitter, and Google Wave. Pros and cons of these technologies are considered, as well as ways millennials may or may not be different from students in classrooms 15 years ago.

Millennials: The next Great Generation, or something else?

On October 11, The Chronicle of Higher Education published an article titled, “The Millennial Muddle: How stereotyping students became a thriving industry and a bundle of contradictions.” The author, Eric Hoover, sketched four specialists involved in the millennial debate:

Neil Howe, a former economic-policy consultant, is the author of several books, including Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation. Howe and co-author William Strauss identified seven traits they believed are typical of people born 1982–2004: special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured and achieving. Howe and Strauss suggested millennials would be a “hero” generation.

Jean M. Twenge, associate professor of psychology at San Diego State University, authored Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before. Twenge believes the “self-esteem movement” has led to a significant rise in narcissism among people ages 20–40.

Mark Bauerlein is a professor of English at Emory University and author of The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future. Bauerlein believes that today’s students have squandered the high-tech wonders available to them, and he cites several studies showing that today’s students read less and absorb fewer facts than their predecessors.

Fred A. Bonner, associate professor of educational administration and human resources at Texas A&M University, is the co-editor of a forthcoming book on diverse millennials in college. Bonner believes that Howe and Strauss’ work is useful but limited. Bonner states that during class discussions, his African-American and Hispanic students have described how some of Howe’s seven traits did not apply to them. They often say that the “special” trait, in particular, is unrecognizable. “Some folks are using this as a template and a cookbook,” Bonner says. “It makes it very difficult to see and understand variations because people who don’t fit the recipe may be viewed as outliers. That anesthetizes nuances.”

In this newsletter, we examine some pieces of the millennial puzzle. If you’d like to participate in a brownbag series CTE will host on this topic next spring, contact Judy Eddy at jeddy@ku.edu.
Millennials or not: Good instructional design and practice is good for all students

Dan Bernstein, CTE

Conversations around CTE often begin with a faculty member articulating a teaching challenge. These challenges arise for instructors who are well regarded by students and peers, and the challenges are most often framed as concerns about students: about their classroom demeanor, their skill in reading, their willingness to read, their desire for constant instructions and assurances, their demands for online materials and support, the limited amount of preparation they do before class, or even about being in class at all.

There is a flourishing national conversation about the origins of these patterns of behavior, with positions ranging from “students were no different 30 years ago” to “these students are a special product of growing up digitally.”

Educational demographers point out that we now serve a substantial cohort of students who would not have entered college 30 years ago, based on their high school performance and personal goals. Generation specialists document the ways that parenting has changed in the last 20 years, pointing to new attitudes and actions related to twenty-somethings’ continuing dependence on family. And all of these changes interact with a world of instant access through nearly omnipresent digital media.

Courtesy of a flurry of media coverage, we are being offered an explanation for the current challenges we face—these students are packaged as “millennials” and described as being collaborative, media savvy, tuned in to social connectedness, accustomed to well articulated support from adults, and expecting relatively immediate success. For the moment, let’s not worry about whether this stereotype accurately describes most of our students, or even whether any individual students manifest all of these characteristics.

Taken as a whole, the list from reporters of popular culture matches pretty well the challenges described by faculty members, so our task as instructors is to figure out how to design instruction with these students/challenges in mind.

Conveniently, many of the evidence-based practices in teaching that have emerged in recent years are reasonably well aligned with the students who enter our university now. Conventional stand-and-deliver lectures are not favored by these active students, and data support better engagement and retention of material when students actively search for information as part of problem solving. Project based learning, including organized teams for projects, generates richer learning and fits with the notion that students want to be connected with each other. Students generally learn more from seeking needed knowledge in library sources, including electronic databases and resources, than they do from listening passively to even the most well documented and organized lecture. By using active searching for materials, in the service of solving a problem connected with their lives, an instructor can meet the learning preferences of many students.

While dealing with ambiguity is a high end goal in all fields, few students arrive in university classes prepared to undertake sophisticated study without some instruction on how to give mature consideration to conflicting evidence or contrasting perspectives. Successful teachers are typically very transparent about how effective studying

continued page 2
CTE welcomes Bob Goldstein as Faculty Fellow

Bob Goldstein, Hass Distinguished Professor of Geology, will be a CTE Faculty Fellow in spring 2010. Goldstein joins Andrea Greenhoot, psychology; Dena Register, music; and Susan Williams, chemical and petroleum engineering, as Fellows.

Highlights of Goldstein’s work at KU include former chair of the Department of Geology, member of the University Committee on Promotion and Tenure, and member of CTE’s advisory board. He has often led seminars for new faculty, as well as breakout sessions on documenting teaching success at the annual KU Summit.

Goldstein’s work at CTE will be focused on developing donor support for CTE, programs for new faculty, and processes for peer review.

and learning take place, often modeling out loud how they themselves approach reading complex texts and thinking through problems with mixed evidence. This method of “cognitive apprenticeship” is very well suited for helping students get started, while the long-term goal of any course or program would be to wean them from that explicit support for every task.

As we continue to understand the students who join us at KU for their education, we can also remember that good instructional design and practice is typically good for all students. When we create course procedures that engage the prototypic millennial student, we will also likely be using instructional methods that have been shown to aid all students’ learning. It is worth remembering the concept of universal design; it comes originally from architecture, and it means that the design of a building integrates accessibility for all from the first planning. When we design for the qualities identified as useful for contemporary students, we also improve instructional design and learning for all students, not just those who match descriptions of millennial students.
Recently, CTE staff met with Pat Hawley, psychology, to talk about ways she’s tried to connect with students in her large child psychology course. Here are some highlights from that conversation.

**CTE: What are some ways that you’ve tried to increase connections with students in your large class?**

**PH:** One way is to meet students’ relatedness needs, that is, those feelings and perceptions of being connected to others. For example, when teaching a class of 400 + students, I immediately break the population up into smaller, stable “communities” of 50. Each day, they find their community (which rotates around the room) and sit with them. It’s important not to break friendship groups. That way, students can always sit with someone they know and enjoy. I do not discourage discrete talking during class, either. Generally they are simply relating to the material in a personal way, even if it ends in peals of laughter. Why shouldn’t they want to do that? We do whenever we are in groups! Faculty, too, strive to meet their relatedness needs in large anonymous groups.

**CTE: Do other strategies, like social networking, also meet that need?**

**PH:** That’s why I chose to use Facebook, because I understand that there is a huge distance between students and me. In a class of 400 people, it’s hard to personally meet relatedness needs despite my “community” strategy. Several years ago, when Facebook spread to college campuses, I was an early adopter and gave students the option to become my “friend.” It was easier for students to contact me on Facebook than in person. It brought boundaries down and allowed students to access me as a social resource. I was amazed at what they divulged to me through this medium. If necessary, I could hook them up to university resources or urge them to consult their parents.

**CTE: How did students respond to you on Facebook?**

**PH:** Students who were my friends on Facebook found me far less intimidating. As a consequence, they were more willing to approach me in class in a manner that suggested we shared some inside joke. When other students saw those friendly interactions, they were more likely to interact with me, too. Facebook frankly also met some of my needs—I was able to walk into the classroom knowing I had the good will of a critical mass of people.

That said, I think the Facebook ship has sailed. Especially now that Facebook is open to the adult world including parents, the novelty has worn off. It was a powerful tool when it was new, but it’s not a path that students tend to seek anymore. In the last year and a half, there has been a steep decline in students’ use of Facebook as a way to reach out to me.

**CTE: What do you think will replace it? Do you plan to use other technologies to meet your goals?**

**PH:** At this point, I’m not sure. I used Facebook for about five good years to enhance the overall atmosphere in the classroom. But now I feel that the distance between the students and me has increased because we don’t have that Facebook contact. I’m also five years older, and that undoubtedly plays a role, as well. I need to think of new ways to close that distance, because I think that I’m a more effective teacher when I can do that. If I close the distance, students trust me more and we can deal with harder material. What happens next will be up to students; they’ll need to construct what their next new thing is, and we can only hope that they’ll let us in on it.
CTE staff met with Nancy Baym to talk about ways she’s connecting with students in her communication studies courses. Here are highlights from that conversation.

CTE: Have you used Facebook in your classes as a way to communicate with students?
NB: I tried. About two or three years ago I set up a Facebook group for a class. Maybe 5% joined the group, and then there was no discussion in it at all. I had hoped that they could at least communicate with each other, and they really didn’t. So I found it ineffective for bringing students in. I do use Twitter a lot and several of my undergraduate students follow me on Twitter. Twitter doesn’t have to be mutual; you can follow someone who doesn’t follow you.

CTE: How do you think your Twitter following benefits your relationship with students in your classroom?
NB: I think it’s always good for students to realize that their professors are human beings and not just robots with one focus, which is teaching this class. It depends on what kind of self you’re presenting: if all you’re doing is complaining about your students or something like that, it’s not going to work so well. I think it’s good for students to see that we have lives and we’re real people. The fact that it can humanize us can increase the sense of connection.

CTE: Do you think there’s any online communication form other than basic email that can function the way some professors want Facebook to function?
NB: I’ve seen people set up class blogs that work. I have a friend at San Francisco State University who teaches a course in digital literacy, and he has people blog and Twitter and use Flickr and all of that, but they’re taking a class in how to produce those materials competently. So it’s a pool that’s already interested in and committed to that topic.

I think Google Wave has potential, but people aren’t on it yet because it’s invitation only. With Google Wave, you can group people together into what’s called a wave. People can post comments and reply to each others’ comments, and they can also share documents, embed videos, and embed links. You can do it real-time. Actually, your letters show up as you type them—you don’t even have to hit send—and then they are archived and continuously there so you can go catch up on what people were talking about when you weren’t there. Unlike most chat programs where it’s all sequential, you can go back and reply to a post. It allows for fairly sophisticated reply and response and ongoing conversation. And you can make new waves. So, if you had a class and eight people were doing a group project together, they could make a wave and use it to discuss the project and embed materials and links. It has great potential for classroom use, but it has a fairly steep learning curve. I’m not sure that it’s really going to work without giving students a lot of guidance.

CTE: If Google Wave did become more open and intuitive, would you consider using it in your classroom?
NB: Yes, I think I would if I could anticipate that people would use it. One of my hesitations with any of these programs is that you are requiring

I think it’s good for students to see that we have lives and we’re real people. The fact that it can humanize us can increase the sense of connection.
students to sign up for a corporate account of some kind that you have no control over, and I don’t think it’s right to require students to give information to Facebook or to Google or to any other company. I’m uncomfortable with requiring them to invest in a particular corporation, especially something like Facebook where you have to give your real name.

CTE: *Do you think instructors actually create a better learning environment by reaching out to students’ social networking forums, by “bridging the gap” between professor and student?*

NB: I’m skeptical. Maybe this is going against the grain, but I think there’s a lot to be said for clear boundaries between a teacher and a student. I believe that there should be mutual respect, but also a certain distance. It’s great if a student comes to me and wants some kind of support. I’m going to do everything I can for that student. But I don’t think it’s my place to be involved in his or her personal life, any more than I think it’s appropriate for a student to be involved in mine. I think this is a learning environment and our interaction should focus on learning. I don’t see any logical or theoretical reason why putting more friendship-like interaction in the relationship would lead to enhanced learning.

CTE: *One of the last things I wanted to ask is whether you think there is any difference between millennial students and those who came before?*

NB: I can’t say that I’ve noticed a big shift in the way our students are now and what they were 15 years ago. Sometimes I think these things are just marketing terms to sell workshops and books. I’ve tried doing some of these things that are supposed to work with millennials, and they haven’t. For example, I love the concept of student driven collaborative learning. I think it’s a great idea. But my experience has been that many of our students want to be told what to do and how to do it and when to turn it in rather than being self-directed. And to some extent, I think my experience has been that when you ask them to be self-directed and self-motivated, they think you’re cop- ing out on your responsibilities to organize and run the course. As much as I love the sound of all these ideas about how to work with today’s students, when I’ve tried to implement them, I don’t find that my students are saying, “Yes! All right! Self-motivation! Give me the reins!” I wonder if that’s our student body or if it’s across the board or if I just haven’t figured out how to do it successfully. I don’t know. I’m not convinced that there’s some kind of shift.