

Talkin' 'bout their generation...

Near the start of the Fall semester Beloit College releases its Mindset List for the incoming freshman class. This is the 15th time they have done this. Perhaps because I am getting older and the students (seemingly) younger, I find myself more amazed and more startled every time I read it. In fact I have come to view the issuance of the Mindset List as a significant transitional event - a rite-of-passage if you will - to the fall semester. This year there were 60 items on the list for the Class of 2017. Here are a few that I found particularly revealing - and unnerving.

To this cohort -

1. Having a chat has seldom involved talking.
2. Gaga has never been baby talk.
3. Rites of passage have more to do with having their own cell phone and Skype account than with getting a driver's license and car.
4. With GPS, they have never needed directions to get someplace, just an address.
5. They have always been able to plug into USB ports.
6. Their parents' car CD player is soooooo ancient and embarrassing.

For some of us it helps to keep in mind that many of the students entering college in 2013 (and graduating in 2017) were born in 1995! For those that are interested the rest of the list can be found at <http://www.beloit.edu/mindset/2017/>.

Going back to school in the fall is one of those memorable events – like riding a bike or going on a first date – that is common enough that most of us can associate and empathize with the experience. In some sense these events are rites-of-passage in that they mark changes in our lives. Other rites-of-passage that many of us experience include being confirmed, or becoming a Bar Mitzvah, and turning sixteen.

Although it might seem like graduating from college is a rite-of-passage, the data suggest it is not. According to the NY Times, only 30.4% of those 25 years and older have a Bachelor's degree (NY Times, Feb. 2012). Universal post-secondary education has a long way to go. Moreover, graduating from college shouldn't be assumed in the same way that we take for granted acquiring a driver's license and a high school diploma. Unfortunately, because of the cost of tuition, the amount of debt incurred, and relatively flat salaries for graduates, there has been some buzz about whether a college degree is worth it. To make matters worse there have been a number of indications suggesting that college graduates are not (being) adequately prepared. Whose fault that is – I'm not sure.

College is a time of change. For many it is the first time they are away from home, and the first time they have to manage their time. My guess is some are more successful at

this than others. It might be instructive to take a look at how college students use their time. The following is how full-time university and college students spend their days:

	Hours
Sleeping	8.5
Leisure and sports	3.7
Educational activities	3.3
Working	2.9
Other	2.4
Traveling	1.5
Eating and drinking	1.0
Grooming	<u>0.7</u>
<i>Total</i>	24.0

SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics (time use on an average day).

As can be seen, students spend on average 3.3 hours per day on educational activities. Assuming they take one day off this amounts to approximately 20 hours over the course of a week. When calculating credit hours a general rule of thumb is that students should spend 2-3 hours of study time for each hour spent in class. Using this guideline a student who is taking 15 credit hours, should be spending approximately 30 - 40 hours per week outside of class - plus the 15 hours in class - for a total of 45-50 hours per week on his/her studies. This is comparable to having a full-time job. As you can see there is a disconnect.

There are many reasons/excuses for the discrepancy – some are instructor-related, some student driven. For example instructors are often motivated by other duties - such as research, or the desire to be liked by students. Both of these might detract from the rigor that is needed. Students on the other hand are also distracted. For example, one study found that the time spent on Facebook was negatively related to overall GPA. Another found that first-year college students who used alcohol drank an estimated 10.2 hours per week, compared to studying only 8.4 hours per week. Also students have (self-) reported that alcohol/substance abuse has led to poor performance on tests or important projects, and was the cause of missing class. Working is sometimes posited as a reason that pulls students away from their studies – but in most instances it is a part-time job: about 1 in 5 works more than 20 hours per week according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

Parents, politicians, employers and others often bemoan the value of a college education. Like them, I worry about the preparedness of college graduates. What can we do? For one the professoriate must balance its responsibilities and maintain the rigor that is expected to earn a college degree. We have a responsibility to the parents, employers - and the students - to prepare them for a productive livelihood. Just as

engineering students must have a solid foundation in math and science, business majors must be well grounded in the matters that define commerce. Etc. Although students sometimes do not see it that way, we must prepare them for the challenges of a dynamic labor market. It is our responsibility to give meaning and value to a college degree.