

**From Extended Learning to One-And-Done Experiences:
Developing Experiences for the Next Generation**

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With new students entering our colleges and universities, higher education professionals continually see changes in behaviors, interests, communication, and sense of community on our campuses. Recently, with Generation Z beginning their experiences in college, many professionals are heightening their awareness of these changes and looking at the technological and social impacts that have influenced them. As we continue to explore these generational changes on college campuses, it is important we are proactive in seeking to understand the impact of these students' needs on the developmental opportunities we provide to each generation of college students.

With the variety of connections and interaction we have with college students, it is important to remember the depth it takes to empower growth and development in our students. Often to influence this learning, we work to create experiences that push students outside their comfort zone, which stimulates them to transition from one stage of thinking/development to another, or even triggers them to question what they know. But the issue we experience in creating this learning environment is it cannot easily be done in a 10-second Instagram story or a 20-minute workshop presentation – influencing development takes time. So this is why extended learning experiences have become a commonly used tool within student affairs through overnight retreats, 8-week learning programs, and intentional learning experiences that build upon each other. Working in the areas of leadership development and fraternity/sorority life, I often work to provoke deeper level learning through extended learning experiences, but recently the interest in this style of learning has begun to change.

With Generation Z being heavily surrounded in fast paced experiences and immediate answers to everything always available, these students thrive in environments that provide similar experiences. These students want to know the outcome before they start and are not always willing to sit around waiting for the cloudy unknown experience to find its purpose. Gen Z is more entrepreneurial than recent generations (Patel, 2017), which means they are ready to jump out there and start working toward their goals rather than waiting around to be told they are ready. Both of these needs deeply impact their interest in extended learning experiences – this generation is not as willing to jump into an unknown learning experience just because others tell them it is cool and they will make friends. This generation also doesn't have the need to discover they are leaders, because they already know they are; they are looking for experiences as leaders rather than 101 leadership trainings. In my work providing leadership

development experiences for undergraduate students, we are seeing these needs impact our programs through lower numbers of applications in emerging leader style programs and higher numbers of traditional aged incoming students applying for leadership positions within their first semester of college. Additionally, we are seeing drops in the number of students choosing to participate in extended learning experiences over all, and are thus wondering how we can continue to support learning in Generation Z.

To initiate deeper learning, we cannot always shorten programs and trainings to 10-minute webinars, so the question rises: How do we influence deeper level learning in this generation of students?

1. **Evaluate the intentionality in your extended learning experiences.** Just because your students are in a leadership role does not always mean that a retreat at a camp must be included. While there is value in overnight retreats and off-campus bonding, we often over retreat in student affairs. As programs, advisors, and audiences change, it is important to take a step back and evaluate the purpose of our extended learning experiences to make sure we are still purposely achieving those goals in an effective manner. If the same learning and development can be achieved through a two-hour workshop, we have to think about the costs of facilitating an extended learning experience (cost in finance, time, and buy-in of students).
2. **Tie extended learning to involvement goals.** Depending on the college campus, we push our students to participate in extended learning experiences (such as Greek 101 retreats and emerging leader programs) before they take on leadership roles. But with Gen Z wanting to take on experiences from the beginning, we often get better buy-in on extended learning experiences if it is a step after they take on their new leadership roles. So we are seeing college campuses taking on students earlier and lengthening their training periods to make sure their student leaders have all the training needed. Tying extended learning to their involvement goal creates a clear outcome of the experience for students, which helps increase buy-in.
3. **Start with one-and-done and grow to extended learning.** If you are still offering extended learning experiences outside of a direct leadership experience, you can also increase student interest and buy-in through smaller one-and-done programs that spark interest and clear goals for potential participants. Try hosting a small workshop that showcases the purpose of the extended learning experience or create a pop-up tabling program where students can try out activities similar to those in the extended learning experience.

While extended learning experiences will continue to be a development technique used in higher education, it is our duty to be proactive about understanding the learning needs of our next generation of students. We must look at the trends of these students and how we can get them comfortable stepping into experiences that are often unknown. The needs of college students are ever changing, but that is what makes our work in student affairs so interesting. It provides us the opportunity to continually learn about students, so we can help support continual learning in their lives.

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References

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