From the Editors

This volume of New Directions for Teaching and Learning addresses theories and practices surrounding the entitled, self-absorbed students called Millennials. Stereotypical Millennials are often addicted to gadgets, demand service more than education, and hold narrow perspectives about themselves and those around them; when seen through this lens, Millennial students can understandably frustrate the most dedicated of professors.

The contributors to this volume show how new and better educational outcomes can emerge if professors reconsider Millennials. First and foremost, many of these students simply don’t fit their stereotype. Beyond that, the authors urge faculty to question commonly held assumptions, showing them how to reevaluate their pedagogical practices, relationships with students, and the norms of college classrooms. Contributors focus on practical means to achieve new and more evocative outcomes by treating Millennial students as serious collaborators in the learning process, thereby helping those students to more closely identify with their own education. The assignments that professors give, the treatment of topics that they broach, and the digital tools that they ask students to employ can shift students’ concerns away from a narrow focus on impersonal, technical mastery of content and toward seeing themselves as Millennial thinkers who fuse their lives with their learning.
From Entitlement to Engagement: Affirming Millennial Students’ Egos in the Higher Education Classroom

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From the Series Editor

About This Publication
Since 1980, New Directions for Teaching and Learning (NDTL) has brought a unique blend of theory, research, and practice to leaders in postsecondary education. NDTL sourcebooks strive not only for solid substance but also for timeliness, compactness, and accessibility.

The series has four goals: to inform readers about current and future directions in teaching and learning in postsecondary education, to illuminate the context that shapes these new directions, to illustrate these new directions through examples from real settings, and to propose ways in which these new directions can be incorporated into still other settings.

This publication reflects the view that teaching deserves respect as a high form of scholarship. We believe that significant scholarship is conducted not only by researchers who report results of empirical investigations but also by practitioners who share disciplinary reflections about teaching. Contributors to NDTL approach questions of teaching and learning as seriously as they approach substantive questions in their own disciplines, and they deal not only with pedagogical issues but also with the intellectual and social context in which these issues arise. Authors deal on the one hand with theory and research and on the other with practice, and they translate from research and theory to practice and back again.

About This Volume
Millennial students (those born between 1982 and 2001) come to our institutions with different needs and experiences than previous generations. Millennial students tend to spend more time with technological gadgets and use them in ways that give them an almost instantaneous response to questions or problems. These students can be frustrating to faculty who might be more accustomed to a different response from students. This volume outlines some practical methods for teaching and learning that can perhaps be used by faculty to reevaluate pedagogical practices and rethink the norms of a college classroom in the twenty-first century.

Catherine Wehlburg
Editor-in-Chief
Editors’ Notes

When the two of us met in 1991, we both were teaching first- and second-year writing courses; we regularly discussed the lack of true student engagement in our courses. Students were excited about their fraternities, churches, political activism, and whether the Memphis Tigers won the previous night’s basketball game; yet, they were relatively unmoved by the opportunities provided within their formal educational pursuits. During our time working at Memphis State—now the University of Memphis—we regularly huddled in our basement office in Patterson Hall, lamenting the lack of involvement and conspiring to motivate more substantive intellectual, aesthetic, and emotional connection between our courses and students’ lives. Our means to motivate seemed sure: We regulated attention from our students, and we demanded that they be in the right place at the right time with the right set of notebooks; these mid-1990s regulations and demands compelled still, quiet, and focused receptivity.

Over the years, students have changed in their norms, values, and expectations. Our overregulation of old became ineffective with Millennial students. As we came to realize this new landscape created by the unique needs of Millennials, the tenor of our discussions waned from traditional overregulation and reinforcement of hierarchical power structures and grew toward student liberation and engagement of a personalized ego involvement—a level more interpersonally powerful than mere achievement of grades, adherence to syllabus-driven policies, and accumulation of accolades from those in positions of authority. Tradition and overregulation suppress Millennial students’ sense of self; suppression contradicts the type of exaggeration of self that we came to value.

Purpose of This Volume

Millennials are those who were born between 1982 and 2001 (Rickes 2009). They began entering the hallowed halls of the academy about 12 years ago. The purpose of this volume is to bring readers into the conversation that the two of us have been having over the course of the past decade, as we continue to find problems in traditional overregulation as a means for teaching this new generation of students. Our deeper approach—an approach that fundamentally occurred at the ego level—is based in passionate action, zeal, enjoyment, flow, and the surprising intellectual rigor that expands from this seemingly loose learning space. This approach
requires students to see the relationship between self and other in new ways. Aiming to bring this approach to fruition has become a meaningful path for us, as we hope it becomes for the readers of this volume.

Yes, this deeper approach motivates changes at the level of instructional methods, and many chapters of this volume will address those methods; but method change without innovative reconsideration of the implied social contract that reinforces conventional norms of the university classroom will ring thinly with Millennials. Learning will be hindered. Indeed, the college classroom is at the nexus of immense social change. It is a change that Millennial students willingly and emphatically push through. Our choice is either to fight it, thus raising Millennial students’ sense of entitlement, or to cooperate with it, finding new avenues and raising to new heights the opportunities for ego-driven engagement. The ideas within this book focus more on organically changing the norms that students and professors have come to expect on a college campus. By changing the norms, inventive ways of learning will emerge.

**Theoretical Frame of This Volume**

Chapters 1 and 2 delineate concepts and themes that become a strong theoretical base for this volume. Here, we wish to explicate a few more concepts that might enhance an understanding of the book.

Ego liberation and engagement do not simply mean “letting the students run the classroom.” Instead, productively affirming students’ egos offers new opportunities for deep learning and ever-strengthening intellectual rigor. Ego is the term that we use to promote the notion that students should feel entitled to express themselves and their own essence in the classroom. That is, this volume is not overly concerned with the denotative ontology of ego; rather, for us, ego represents a sense of enlightened solutions that allow students to affirm themselves and be affirmed by professors.

Another concept that undergirds almost every chapter in this volume is the notion of positive affirmation through classroom relationships, particularly between students and the professor. Through relationships, authoritarian and dominant tendencies of professors are lessened. For instance, this volume lends no credence for professorial attempts to create compulsions by holding grades, scholarships, or other credentials over a student’s head as a point for manipulation. Similarly, the many ideas in this volume encourage students to set aside their own sense of entitlement in order to better capitalize on opportunities for engaging themselves by becoming a part of the enterprise of learning in college classrooms. Faculty and students share responsibility for the patterns of entitled student behaviors now seen in higher education classrooms. Both the professor and Millennial student have draconian and empathetic powers upon which they can act.