

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# The New Generation of Students

## How colleges can recruit, teach, and serve Gen Z

**A** new generation of students has arrived on college campuses. Known as Gen Z, this cohort marks a break from even the recent past in terms of diversity, attitudes about money, and use of technology.

Now, institutions that have spent the last several years catering to millennials must pivot to appeal to the traditional-age students poised to enter higher education over the next decade and a half.

Gen Z is the most diverse generation in modern American history, and its members are attentive to inclusion across race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The Great Recession and its aftermath focused Gen Zers on the value and relevance of a degree. The purpose of college for them is to help launch a career. Gen Zers also see technology as an extension of themselves with respect to how they communicate, consume information, and learn.

No generation is a monolith, and research on Gen Z is just emerging. But campus leaders must pay attention,

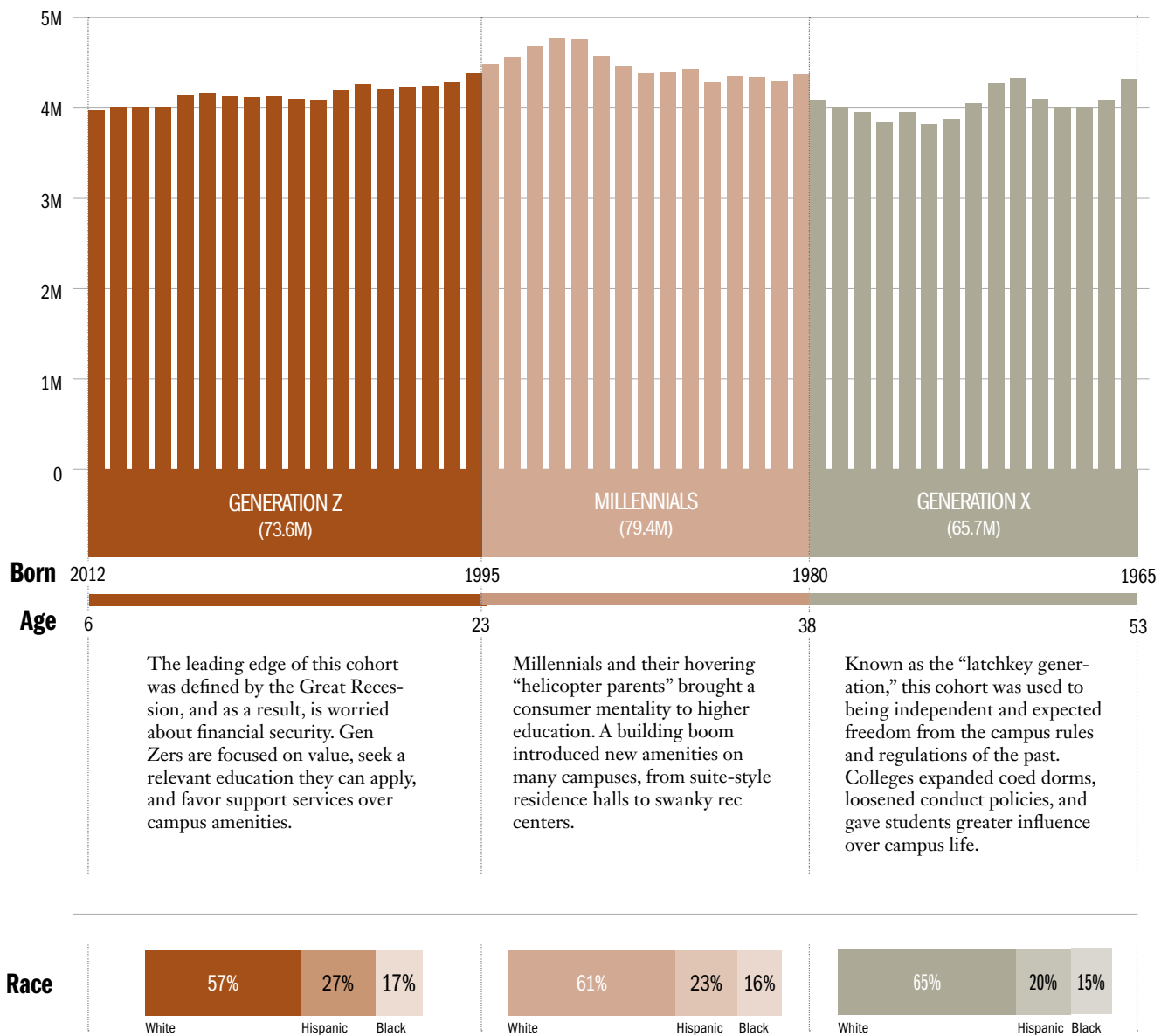
as this new generation coincides with a shrinking pool of high-school graduates and increased expectations for student success. To help colleges better understand this new cohort, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has published its latest in-depth report, *The New Generation of Students: How colleges can recruit, teach, and serve Gen Z*. This executive summary highlights how the report, which was published in September, presents insights into the mind-sets and motivations of Gen Zers and describes how colleges can best reach and serve this new generation of learners.

## Who is Gen Z?

Defining a generation, particularly its boundaries, is not an exact science. Bounds sometimes shift as a generation ages to reflect perspectives shaped by major developments or events. This report

defines Gen Z as its most prominent research does: as people born beginning around 1995 and ending in approximately 2012. Here is a picture of where Gen Z compares to recent generations.

## RECENT U.S. POPULATION BY AGE AND GENERATION



Source: U.S. Census Bureau population estimates, 2017

### Three Key Areas of Impact

Gen Z represents a clear break from the past that has widespread implications for institutions. The report delves into three areas where this impact is being felt and changes must be made.

**The Recruitment Funnel:** As colleges strive to meet their enrollment and tuition-revenue goals, two major challenges loom. First, demographic shifts mean fewer traditional-age students to go around. Second, four-year institutions are generally set up to attract millennials, a generation that is now in its 20s and 30s. To compete successfully, colleges need to focus on a new group of students, one that's more practical and more focused on relevant academic programs and support services than on bells and whistles. They shop for good value, appreciate price transparency, and want to estimate their return on investment as specifically as possible. Gen Z seeks convenient resources for tutoring, career development, and mental health, for example, with on-demand virtual services available on mobile devices.

**Teaching Gen Z:** This is a generation accustomed to learning by toggling between the real and virtual worlds. Today's students reflexively turn to YouTube for information, yet don't believe technology has unlimited potential in the academic setting. Above all, they want an education they can apply. They prize project-based learning and undergraduate research that will hone crucial, marketable skills for life.

**Campus Life:** Gen Zers tend to want fewer comforts and more supports; they may be fine with simpler housing while benefiting from more flexible spaces that promote interaction with classmates and professors. Today's students come to campus less seasoned than previous generations, which raises the stakes

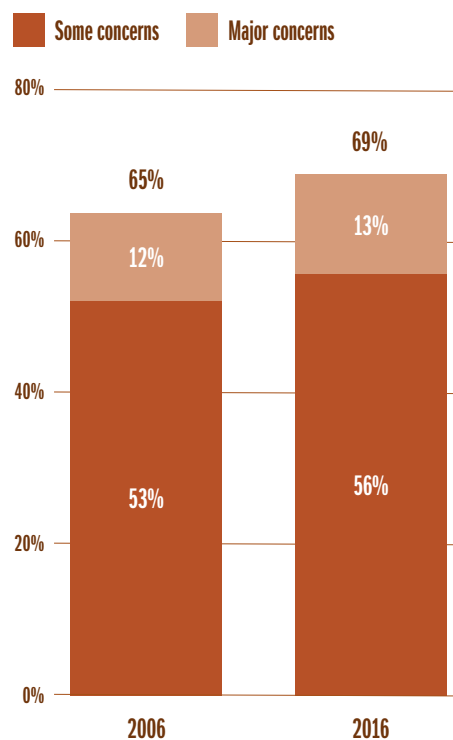
for personal development as part of the college experience — more guidance on issues like study habits, wellness, and free speech.

### Views on Finances

One area of specific concern for this generation are finances. In survey after survey, today's teenagers say they worry about how to pay for college. According to the College Board, the average sticker price of tuition, fees, room, and board at public institutions is \$20,277, a figure that has risen by more than 60 percent since the year 2000. At private colleges, the total price is \$46,950, up nearly 40 percent over the same period. According to one poll, one in four members of Gen Z describe themselves as "always stressed" about

#### WORRIED ABOUT TUITION

Percentage of college freshmen who said they had concerns about paying for college



Source: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California at Los Angeles

finances, and another study found that for nearly one in five, the cost of higher education is the No. 1 societal concern.

Here are four approaches institutions should consider in appealing to money-conscious Gen Z students.

**Emphasize the value of the degree.**

Highlight programs that differentiate your institution from others and that are either covered by tuition or help defray the cost of a degree.

**Publish better graduate-outcomes data.**

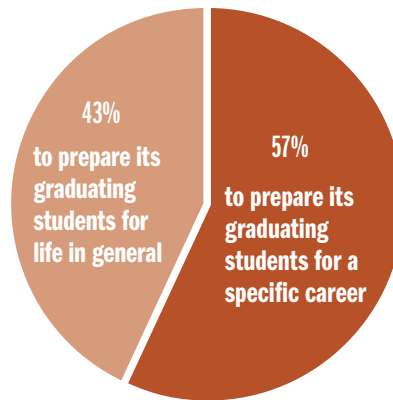
Vague tallies like 90 percent of graduates are employed or enrolled in graduate school six months out are no longer enough, especially if the response rate is low.

**“They don’t care about the rock-climbing walls built for millennials and boomer parents. Services are the new amenities.”**

**Offer price transparency.** Dozens of colleges give incoming students tuition guarantees, locking in for four years the initial rate.

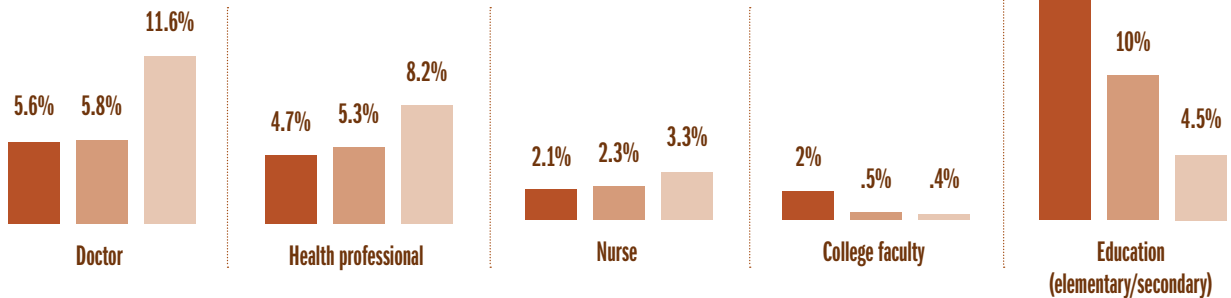
**GEN Z VIEWS COLLEGE FOR CAREER PREPARATION ...**

Which of the following best describes your attitude toward the goal of college?



**... WHILE JOB ASPIRATIONS ARE ALSO SHIFTING**

1966 1990 2015



Source: Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles

**Develop new pricing models.** Provide discounts for students who take classes at less popular times, say in the late afternoon or on Fridays or weekends, which could also help campuses better utilize classroom space. Or base price not on seat time but on progress toward a degree, which might provide an incentive for students to complete their degrees on or ahead of time.

### **Views on Majors and Career Fields**

Focused on value, this generation puts great stock in major, and the choices of today's students are a departure from the past. An apparent path to a career can be especially important to low-income students. With limited resources,

colleges must decide which programs to add, expand, scale back, or eliminate.

### **Success With Gen Z**

In the coming years, as colleges tweak programs and services and experiment with new approaches to attract and retain Gen Z, campus leaders need to stay focused, gauge progress, and promote iterative change based on what works. The risk is too great for institutions to stay the course. Unlike with millennials, there won't be ever more students to fill the gaps.

*The Chronicle's* latest deep-dive report, *The New Generation of Students*, will give readers the insight they need to start making the changes to reach, teach, and serve tomorrow's students.

[Purchase the Full Report](#)

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