

Cross-generational Valuing among Peer Academic Librarians: A Preliminary Report Following Up with Millennials

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This paper presents a preliminary analysis of survey research designed to elicit information about Millennial academic librarians, their most valued colleagues at work, and reasons why they value these colleagues, and compares the results to earlier findings reported by Munde and Coonin in "Cross-Generational Valuing Among Peer Academic Librarians."¹ This earlier study (2012) attempted to address a gap in the empirical research concerning generational roles in the academic library workforce, particularly with regard to Millennials. The number of responses from Millennial generation librarians to the survey created for the earlier baseline study was relatively small, and findings from the earlier study suggested additional research questions, so a follow-up study (2014) aimed at a larger pool was designed and undertaken.



Literature Review

Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of such titles as *Generations, the History of America's Future, 1584-2069* and *Millennials Rising*, are credited with developing and popularizing the 'generational theory,' in which differences among generations are treated in a cyclical fashion.² The majority of the literature that follows Howe and Strauss is largely concerned with human resource-related aspects of intergenerational attitudes and work habits generally. Smola and Sutton surveyed more than 350 individuals concerning generational differences in worker values and compared their results with those of an earlier study conducted in 1974.³ Their results indicate that generational work values differ, and also suggest that work values change

as workers grow older. Further support for this idea was found in a study commissioned by the American Psychological Association (APA) Center for Organizational Excellence, which found variances in the forms of recognition preferred by employees of different age groups. Employees age 34 and under valued all forms of monetary compensation less than older employees, and valued peer-to-peer recognition and one-on-one time with a supervisor more than older employees.⁴

Kowske, Rasch and Wile examine generational differences in work attitudes across five generations, looking for similarities and differences of Millennials when compared to prior generations. The study finds that generational differences at work are small over-

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all, at least with regard to work attitudes.⁵ Sare, Bales, and Neville (2012) provide insight into Millennials' perceptions of the profession as a whole.⁶ Neyer and Yelenik (2011) in "Boomer Meets Next Gen," include research into the mentoring experiences of librarians from several generational groups.⁷

2012 Baseline Survey and Findings

Research questions for the 2012 baseline study, "Cross-Generational Valuing Among Peer Academic Librarians," were

1. Do generational peers most value members of their own generational group, or members of other generational groups?
2. When considering a highly valued colleague, do generational groups most value the same or different characteristics?
3. If there are relationships among the generational group, the generational group of the highly valued colleague, or the most valued characteristic, do these relationships vary by institutional broad Carnegie classification and/or the library department to which librarians are assigned?
4. What, if any, intelligence might the findings suggest for assisting in the transmission of knowledge among academic librarians, especially from career-mature librarians to their younger colleagues?

A survey was e-mailed to a random sample of 6,000 academic librarians working in 736 institutions stratified by broad Carnegie classification. Seven hundred sixty-six respondents (12.8%) returned usable surveys. The survey asked for respondents' demographic characteristics including: chronological age group (31 years or less, 32-48 years, or 49 years or more), year the degree in librarianship was awarded, years of experience as an academic librarian (5 years or less, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, or 21 or more years), the departmental assignment (administration, IT/systems, public services, special collections, or technical services), and the broad Carnegie classification of the institution(s) in which they had

spent most of their professional careers (Baccalaureate, Masters I/II, Doctoral/Research). Survey respondents were then asked to "call to mind an academic librarian [they] greatly value at the present time as highly competent and effective," and answer three questions about this valued library colleague. The first two questions were to identify the estimated age group and career department of the valued colleague. The third question asked respondents to choose only one of six characteristics that would best reflect why they valued this library colleague

- Leading and influencing others
- Navigating the political environment to make positive change
- Facility with emerging technologies
- Having a strong work ethic and high job engagement
- Having deep knowledge of a specific discipline or subject
- Being open to innovation and flexible during periods of change

Broadly stated, the major findings of the study related to each research question were:

1. Early career librarians valued mid-career librarians more than senior-career librarians, while senior-career librarians valued other senior career librarians more than mid- or early-career librarians.
2. One-third of all respondents identified "Having a strong work ethic and high job engagement" as the most valued characteristic. Slightly more than fifty percent of respondents in the 31 and under age group chose it as the most valued characteristic; more than either of the other two age groups.
- 3.1. The broad Carnegie classification of the institution in which a librarian works was not associated with the age group of the valued colleague or the valued characteristic of the library colleague.
- 3.2. Irrespective of age, respondents valued same-department colleagues over those in other departments.

- 4.1. Mentor-protégé pairings between mid-career and early-career librarians might be more productive than pairings between senior-career and early-career librarians. Senior-career librarians might be advised to devote time to transferring their “deep knowledge of a specific discipline or subject” to mid-career librarians because the latter group reported it as a valued characteristic of senior-career librarians.
- 4.2. Work ethic and job engagement appear to be universal values, and counter a common social misperception that younger workers are disengaged, less responsible, or less diligent than older workers.
- 4.3. Career-mature librarians reported that “Navigating the political environment to make positive change” was not a valued characteristic; they may be unaware of its value to younger colleagues and should increase their efforts to pass this knowledge down.

Follow-up (2014) Survey and Findings

Statistical results and findings from the baseline survey suggested additional research questions, particularly with regard to academic librarians who were members of the early-career, group--the Millennial generation of academic librarians. Because the number of early-career librarians responding to the baseline survey was relatively small ($n = 71$, or 9% of total respondents), a follow-up study was designed to attempt validation of earlier findings with regard to Millennials and explore additional research questions:

1. Would early career librarians from a larger sample value mid-career librarians more than senior-career librarians at the same level found in the baseline study?
 2. Would early career librarians from a larger sample value “Having a strong worth ethic and high job engagement” at the same level found in the baseline study?
 3. Do early career librarians make conscious efforts to emulate the valued characteristic of their identified colleagues?
4. Where do Millennials work in academic libraries? That is, are they over or underrepresented in certain departments or divisions? Do they disproportionately populate functional departments or divisions that rely particularly on emerging technologies?

The baseline survey items were revised slightly for clarity and one additional question was added: Do you consciously try to emulate the valued characteristic of the identified colleague? The solicitation, with a link to the survey, was sent with to a non-probability (convenience) sample of more than 23,000 (duplicated) subscribers to 15 ACRL listservs. 835 usable responses were collected and analyzed. Compared to the number of usable responses (71) from Millennial librarians to the baseline survey, the response to the follow-up survey was a pleasant surprise. Potential factors that might account for the increase in responses include:

 - Sampling frame and method of distribution: Baseline survey was sent to a probability sample of 6,000 valid e-mail addresses of academic librarians, while the follow-up survey was sent to a non-probability sample including more than 23,000 (duplicated) subscribers to 15 ACRL listservs. Although the larger frame available in the convenience sample might be a better estimate of the population size, which is unknown, it biases the sample and limits the usability of the results, i.e., findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of Millennial academic librarians.
 - Subject line of the follow-up solicitation identified the target respondents specifically as Millennials and indicated special interest in their opinions. The subject line of the baseline solicitation read “Talk Back: Request for Participation in a Short Survey on Generational Values Among Peer Academic Librarians,” while the subject line of the follow-up solicitation read “Millennial Librarians—We Want to Hear from You.”

- Greater credibility of follow-up survey based on explanation in solicitation that the baseline survey findings would be published in *C&RL* and the follow-up survey results would be presented at ACRL conference 2015.
- Listservs may be a more “friendly” way to approach potential respondents than solicitations sent from a personal work e-mail address. The baseline survey was sent from the personal work address of one of the researchers. It could be that listserv subscribers feel affiliated with, or are generally more involved in their professional communities, and thus may be more willing to help a known community.

Did early career librarians from a larger sample value mid-career librarian more than senior-career librarians at the same level found in the baseline study?

Comparing frequency responses from the baseline survey with follow-up survey responses appears to support earlier findings. Millennials continued to identify

their valued colleagues most often as those ages 48 or younger; with the majority of the valued colleagues being mid-career librarians (those age 32-48).

Despite the fact that the follow-up survey used a convenience sample, a Chi-square test of the baseline frequencies against follow-up frequencies from both Millennial groups (baseline and follow up) was performed to check agreement between the two. The Chi-square was 2.6 and the *p* value was 0.2725, indicating that the results could have been due to random chance in 27 out of 100 trials—far too high to be considered reliable. Presumably, the variation is due to the migration of follow-up respondents who reported a higher percentage of valued colleagues in their same age group and a lower percentage of valued colleagues in the 49 and over group. This change in direction could have decreased the Chi-square score, and the reliability of the score.

Is “Having a Strong Work Ethic and High Job Engagement” the Characteristic Most Valued by Early Career Librarians?

In terms of frequency, Millennials, along with the other two age groups in the baseline study, most valued their colleagues for “Having a strong work ethic and high job engagement.” This characteristic was selected by the greatest number of respondents in all four groups (the initial three generational groups in the baseline survey, and again by Millennials in the follow-up survey), which suggests that work ethic and job engagement are indeed universal values, and may counter a common social misperception that younger workers are disengaged, less responsible, or less diligent than older workers.

In a near tie with work ethic, Millennials valued their colleagues for “Having deep knowledge of a specific discipline or subject and willingness to share this knowledge with other librarians.” In the baseline survey, slightly more than 8% of respondents who commented took us to task for not including teaching/instructional ability as a choice on the list of valued characteristics. In the follow-up survey, we attempted to tease out potential response differences between

2012 BASELINE STUDY			
Age Group of Valued Colleague	Under 31	32-48	49 or over
Respondents 31 years or under (<i>n</i> = 70) Rank:	3 (4%) 3	44 (63%) 1	23 (33%) 2
Respondents 32-48 years (<i>n</i> = 285)	16 (6%)	142 (50%)	127 (44%)
Respondents 49 years or over (<i>n</i> = 415)	14 (4%)	163 (39%)	238 (57%)
2014 FOLLOW-UP SURVEY			
Age Group of Valued Colleague	Under 32	33-48	49 or over
Millennial Respondents only (<i>n</i> = 797) Rank:	78 (10%) 3	495 (62%) 1	224 (28%) 2
Note: In 2012 baseline study, $\chi^2 = 21.529$, <i>p</i> = 0.0002, <i>C</i> = 0.165			

TABLE 2
Characteristics of Colleagues Valued by Millennial Academic Librarians

2012 BASELINE SURVEY		Leading and influencing others	Navigating the political environment to make positive change	Facility with emerging technologies	Having a strong work ethic and high job engagement	Having deep knowledge of a specific discipline or subject	Being open to innovation and flexible during periods of change	
Respondents Under 31 years (n = 71)		6 (8%)	12 (17%)	2 (3%)	36 (51%)	7 (10%)	8 (11%)	
Rank within age group:		5	2	6	1	4	3	
Respondents 32-48 years (n = 281)		46 (16%)	39 (14%)	11 (4%)	86 (31%)	49 (17%)	50 (18%)	
Rank within age group:		4	5	6	1	3	2	
Respondents 49 years or over (n = 414)		76 (18%)	29 (7%)	30 (7%)	135 (33%)	44 (11%)	100 (24%)	
Rank within age group:		3	6	5	1	4	2	
2014 FOLLOW-UP SURVEY		Leading and influencing others	Navigating the political environment to make positive change	Facility with emerging technologies	Having a strong work ethic and high job engagement	Having deep knowledge of a specific discipline or subject and willingness to share this knowledge with other librarians	Being open to innovation and flexible during periods of change	Skill in providing bibliographic instruction to individuals and groups
Millennial Respondents only (n = 787)		118 (15%)	104 (13%)	24 (3%)	186 (24%)	184 (23%)	137 (17%)	34 (4%)
Rank within age group:		4	5	7	1	2	3	6

peer-to-peer teaching and teaching post-secondary students to use the library. This was done by adding “and willingness to share this knowledge with other librarians” to the “deep knowledge of a subject or discipline” item choice, and adding an additional item choice, “Skill in providing bibliographic instruction to individuals and groups.” The follow-up responses seem to indicate that peer-to-peer teaching is the valued characteristic more so than skill in providing library instruction to students.

Do Millennials Make Conscious Efforts to Emulate the Valued Characteristic of Their Identified Colleagues?

Overall, 90% of Millennials reported that yes, they do consciously try to emulate the valued characteristic of the identified colleague. Ten percent of respondents said they do not. Some characteristics may be more likely to be modeled by those valuing the characteristic than others. Agreement levels by the valued characteristics are indicated in Table 3.

“Navigating the political environment to make positive change” and “Leading and influencing others” received the lowest levels of agreement (88% and 85% respectively). Perhaps the behaviors associated with these activities are less attractive or more difficult to imitate than other characteristics. They may be more difficult to identify than other characteristics, such as “Being open to innovation and flexible during periods of change.” Or, Millennials might believe they don’t have the requisite position power to lead and influence others or to navigate the political environment. Are these behaviors invisible to Millennials; that is, they don’t have enough opportuni-

TABLE 3
Agreement to Emulating the Valued Characteristic by Millennial Academic Librarians

<i>Respondents chose a single most-valued characteristic (below) then reported whether or not they modeled the valued characteristic (across) →</i>	Yes	No	
Being open to innovation and flexible during periods of change	129 95%	7 5%	n = 136
Skill in providing bibliographic instruction to individuals and groups	31 94%	2 6%	n = 33
Facility with emerging technologies	23 92%	2 8%	n = 25
Having a strong work ethic and high job engagement	168 91%	16 9%	n = 184
Having deep knowledge of a specific discipline or subject and willingness to share this knowledge with other librarians	159 90%	17 10%	n = 176
Navigating the political environment to make positive change	92 88%	13 12%	n = 105
Leading and influencing others	100 85%	17 15%	n = 117
			N = 776

ties to observe the behaviors associated with leadership and organizational politics? For whatever reasons, it is certainly possible to value a characteristic, but not feel capable of imitating the associated behaviors.

Where do Millennials Work in Academic Libraries?

The distribution by departmental or divisional assignment of Millennials appears to reflect the overall distribution within the general population of academic librarians.

Understanding that follow-up survey data was derived from a convenience sample and will not generalize to the entire population of Millennials, the calculated Chi-square was 33.20 with a *p* value = <0.00001, indicating an association between the two data sets that cannot be accounted for by random chance. The Cramer’s V statistic for Table 4 is 0.1454, which indicates a moderate association. Standardized residuals shown indicate the administration department or division accounted for the greatest variance.

The significant differences in frequency responses occurred in the column for administrative depart-

ments or divisions (as indicated by the standardized residuals in these cells). This seems like a normal career pattern if you accept that library administration job announcements require a certain number of years of experience or are often achieved through internal promotion after a certain number of years of experience. It does not appear that Information Technology and Systems departments or divisions are disproportionately populated by librarians 32 and younger. At some level, IT skills may have become more integrated into regular duties of all academic librarians.

Respondent Comments

Respondents to both surveys were able to add comments about their identified colleagues. Of the 365 comments received on the baseline survey, the largest percentage (42%) elaborated on their choice of valued characteristics by adding examples to illustrate the characteristic. A number of respondents (17%) reflected discomfort with being asked to choose only one valued characteristic, asserting that the identified colleague possessed in equal measure a number of the proffered characteristics. Slightly more than

TABLE 4
Distribution of Millennials in Library Departments or Divisions

2012 BASELINE SURVEY				
Career departmental assignment (all age groups)				
Administration	IT/systems	Public Services	Special Collections	Technical Services
61 (8%) <i>+3.43</i>	36 (5%)	493 (64%)	50 (7%)	127 (17%)
2014 FOLLOW-UP SURVEY				
Career departmental assignment (Millennials only)				
20 (2%) <i>-3.43</i>	34 (4%)	552 (68%)	86 (11%)	115 (14%)
Note: Figures in italics (<i>-3.43 and -3.43</i>) are cell residuals contributing to the Chi Square score. Positive residuals indicate frequencies far greater than expected, and negative residuals indicate frequencies far less than expected. This is not surprising, as Millennial academic librarians may not have had enough years of work experience to hold administrative positions in their libraries.				

8% of respondents who commented took us to task for not including teaching/instructional ability as a valued characteristic choice. Of the 260 usable comments received on the follow up survey, the largest percentage (57%) mentioned the valued librarian's willingness to support, encourage, share knowledge and experiences, and mentor the respondents. Slightly more than 23% commented on personal traits such flexibility, positivity, passion, warmth, or enthusiasm. Nine percent commented on work habits, work ethic, and job-related characteristics such as organizational skills, and the ability to "get things done." Eight percent commented in some way on the identified librarian's knowledge of the profession. A small number of respondents (2%) reflected discomfort with being asked to choose only one valued characteristic, asserting that the identified colleague possessed in equal measure a number of the proffered characteristics. A small percentage (1%) of respondents who commented were displeased by some aspect of the survey's construction. One enlightening comment referred to the question concerning emulation of the identified librarian: "I realized after taking this survey that I should be trying to emulate her. Thanks!" A word cloud from follow up survey comments was prepared and word frequencies are visualized in Figure 1.

It may be useful to note that the word "mentor" used in the context of comments nearly always appeared as a verb and almost never as a noun. That is, Millennials might appreciate informal *mentoring* (particularly from those who are open, flexible, helpful, engaged, interested, willing, and knowledgeable), but may not be seeking a *mentor* in the sense of establishing formal, long-term relationships within a structured program. They may be searching for short-term instrumental support rather than long-term professional or career guidance and counseling. Informal mentoring is more likely to support the mentee's goals than the organization's goals, which are often the priorities supported in formal, structured mentoring programs.

Preliminary Reflections and Take Away Messages

Based on a preliminary analysis of the results and comparison with earlier survey results, we offer the following points for consideration:

- Almost three quarters of Millennial respondents (72%) to the follow up survey identified their valued colleagues as being age 49 or under, confirming the preference expressed in the baseline survey.

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