

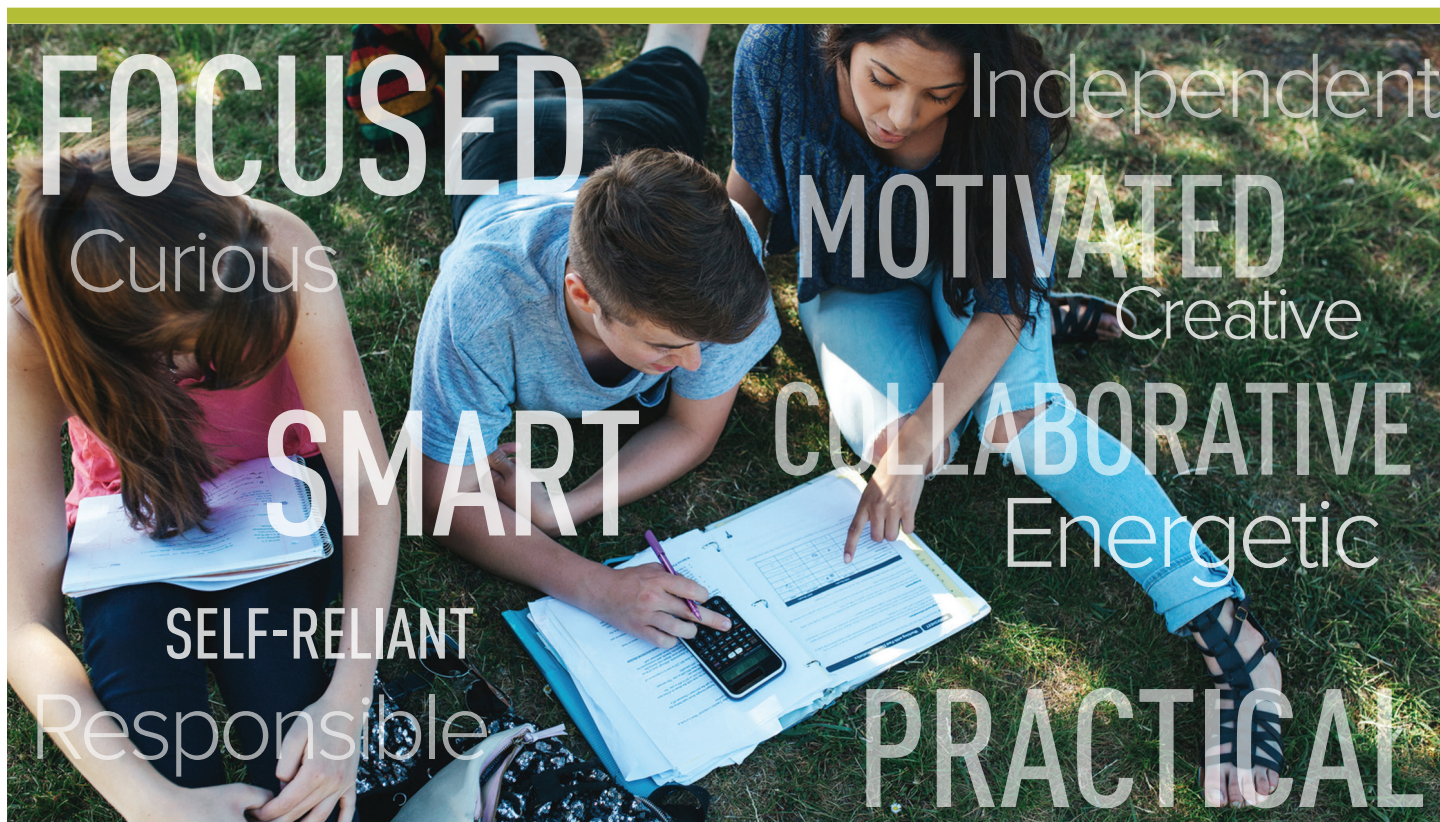
# GETTING TO KNOW GEN Z LEARNERS

EXPLORING GENERATION Z'S EXPECTATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION





# INTRODUCING GENERATION Z



Referred to as “The Sharing Generation,” the generation that’s “All Technology All the Time,” and “Born Digital,” Generation Z could not be more different than previous generations. Widely regarded as describing those born as early as 1995 or as late as 2012, Gen Zers’ oldest members are now in high school and college, and have ambitious plans for their education, their careers and their lives.

Searching for authentic and meaningful experiences, Gen Z is more independent than their predecessors – turning online to research their options, yet interacting with others for insight, but ultimately – and more so than in previous generations – making their own decisions.

Gen Z is different in other ways, too. They’re more

practical and financially driven than their millennial counterparts, and their preference for self-learning fuels a curiosity and concern about personal fulfillment and social impact.

This “Getting to Know Gen Z” report marks the first time Barnes & Noble College has shared our findings on the next wave of college students: Generation Z. We explored attitudes, preferences and expectations regarding their educational and learning experience. These initial insights are a springboard for colleges and universities to begin understanding the mindset of Gen Z as they prepare for their future, focusing specifically on their aspirations, college expectations and use of educational technology for their academic journey ahead.



**1,300**

Middle and  
high school students  
were surveyed



Students who responded were from

**49 STATES**

in both urban and rural geographies



All students were  
between the ages of

**13-18**  
years old

# GEN Z: CAMPUS BOUND



Research shows that each generation sees more value in a college education than the one before, and Generation Z is no exception. In fact, in our survey of current middle and high school students from across the country, more than 89 percent of respondents rated a college education as valuable. For them, college is seen as the pathway to a good job. Despite their natural independence, their ability to process massive amounts of information quickly qualifies them to be excellent students.

A sincere love of learning is also strongly present in Gen Z. Our respondents indicated they thrive when challenged and allowed to be more fully engaged in their education. It's an ambition they hope for and aspire to as they anticipate their college experience.

We predict those natural attributes will lead them to the college campus, where their uniqueness and quest for knowledge will present new challenges and opportunities for both educators and administrators.

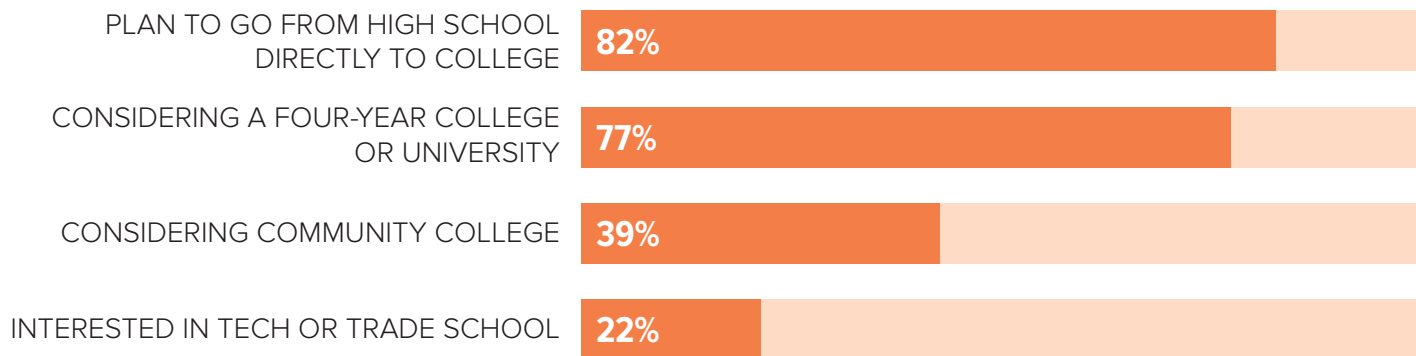


# PRACTICALITY GUIDES COLLEGE AND CAREER CHOICES

Gen Z is passionate about the importance and value of higher education, particularly in the way it provides access to the career that interests them and rewards them financially. And, while our respondents don't know exactly which school they'll attend, many have already formed their own opinions and ideas about their plans

after high school and what type of school they will attend. Regardless, their biggest reason for heading to campus is a practical one: many see college as the means to securing a good job. In fact, their number one concern related to college is whether or not they will be able to find a good job after graduation.

## GEN Z FUTURE PLANS



## TOP 3 FACTORS IN CHOOSING A COLLEGE



CAREER  
PREPARATION



INTERESTING  
COURSEWORK



PROFESSORS THAT CARE  
ABOUT STUDENT SUCCESS

## TOP 5 WAYS GEN Z RESEARCHES COLLEGES



1. USE ONLINE COLLEGE RESOURCES  
(e.g., College Greenlight, MyMajors, College Board)
2. VISIT SPECIFIC SCHOOLS' WEBSITES
3. GET ADVICE FROM TEACHERS/COUNSELORS
4. CONSULT WITH PARENTS/FAMILY MEMBERS
5. TALK TO FRIENDS

# PRACTICALITY GUIDES COLLEGE AND CAREER CHOICES

“I want to go to college to get a better job, gain a new perspective, interact with others from different backgrounds, broaden my experience base and develop a network to help me advance in the future.”

Female, older teen



Preparation for college is already well underway among Gen Z students – almost half of older teens (16-18 years old) have already taken a class for college credit, and 84 percent of younger teens (13-15 years old) plan to take a course for college credit before they graduate high school. Although these classes are considered more difficult and faster-paced, 64 percent of students like them as much or better than their regular classes, noting the extra challenge, a love of learning, and critical thinking as reasons why.

After college, more than 40 percent of Gen Z respondents seek careers that suit their specific interests, and tend to envision careers in technology, such as computer science and video game development. Many of these teens are getting a jump-start in entering the working world as entrepreneurs; more than one-third of Gen Z students either currently have their own business or plan on having one in the future. Young teens are especially entrepreneurial; teens ages 13-15 are twice as likely to currently have their own online business compared to older teens.

49%

Have already taken a class for college credit (older teens)

84%

Plan to take a course for college credit (younger teens)

64%

Like advanced classes as much or better

35%

MORE THAN ONE-THIRD OF GEN Z STUDENTS CURRENTLY OWN THEIR OWN BUSINESS OR PLAN ON HAVING ONE IN THE FUTURE

“AP classes are challenging, and I like challenges. They will better prepare me for college and life.”

Female, older teen

# COLLABORATION AND LEARN BY DOING DRIVES ENGAGEMENT

“Studying with friends is helpful because we all have different ideas to share and discuss.”

Male, younger teen

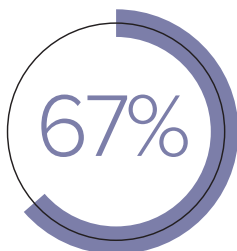
Gen Z students flourish in any learning environment where they can flex their aptitude for self-reliance and their ability to self-educate. Predisposed to learning and conducting research, they are prepared to make their own decisions based on that research – a distinct difference from previous generations who rely more heavily on friends and family.

Although they are very independent and technologically savvy, Gen Zers value face-to-face interaction and collaboration. They also make no distinction between devices or online territories. For Gen Z, learning is one continuous, multifaceted, completely integrated experience – connecting social, academic and professional interests.

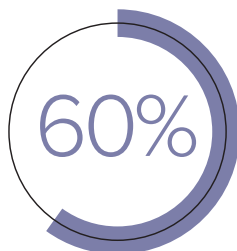
## STUDENT STUDYING PREFERENCES



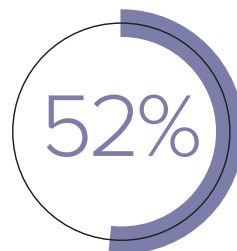
Study with friends



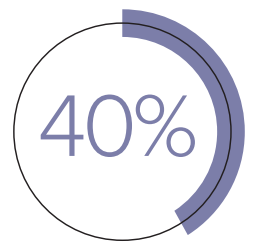
Say studying together makes learning more fun



Like to exchange new ideas with friends



Like to help their friends learn



Study with friends in person and online

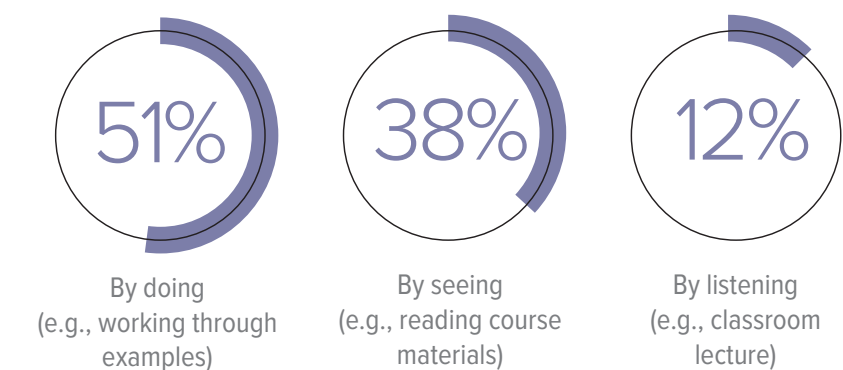
Respondents cited Skype as the top online tool to study with friends.

# COLLABORATION AND LEARN BY DOING DRIVES ENGAGEMENT

Whether working together or independently, both older and younger teens prefer to learn by doing. More than half of respondents said they learn best by being hands-on, while 38 percent learn by seeing.

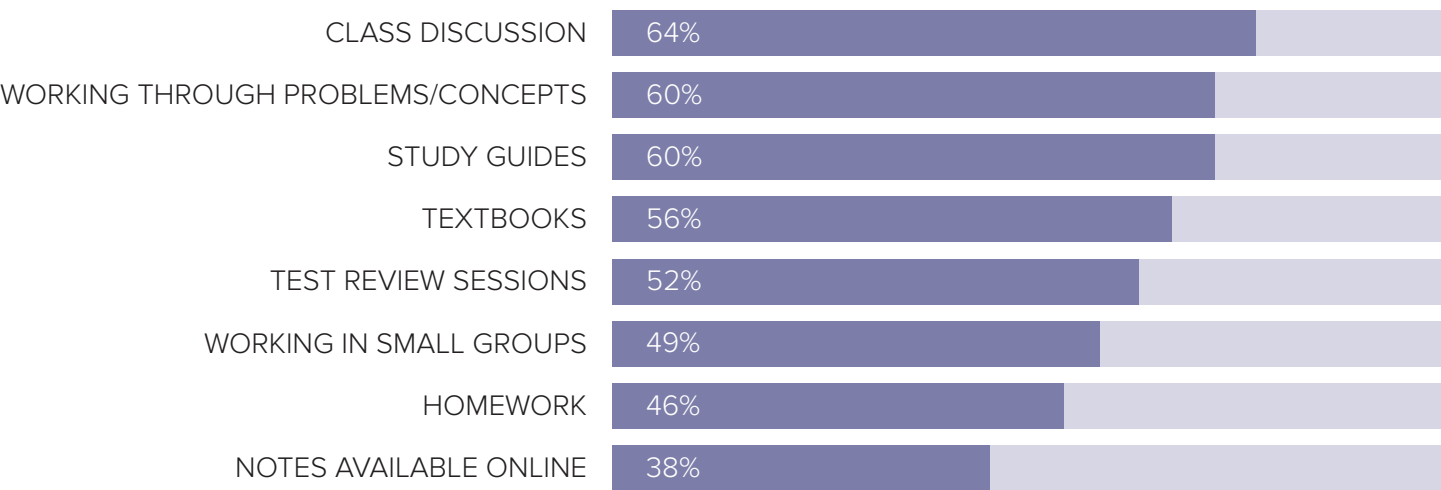
When it comes to classroom learning, students find class discussions are the most beneficial. Working through examples of a problem also topped the list, which further supports Gen Z’s desire to learn by doing.

## HOW DOES GEN Z LEARN?



When asked what teachers could do to make learning more fun, helpful and interactive, students responded in a variety of ways. Using more technology, more hands-on learning and more individual attention topped the list.

## MOST HELPFUL TOOLS FOR LEARNING



“Being hands-on or using interactive devices is the best way for me to learn. Technology is important to use because it keeps you current with our daily lives.”

Male, younger teen

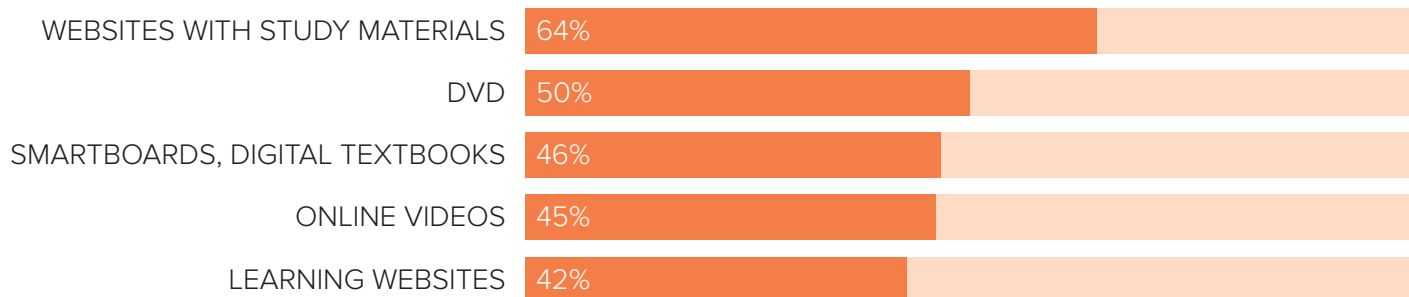


# THE FUTURE OF ED TECH IS NOW

Gen Z wants engaging, interactive learning experiences. They want to be challenged, they want to be empowered to make their own decisions, and as digital natives, they expect technology to play an

instrumental role in their educational experience. While traditional textbooks still reign supreme, there's no denying that the future of educational technology, or "ed tech," is now.

## ED TECH IN THE CLASSROOM

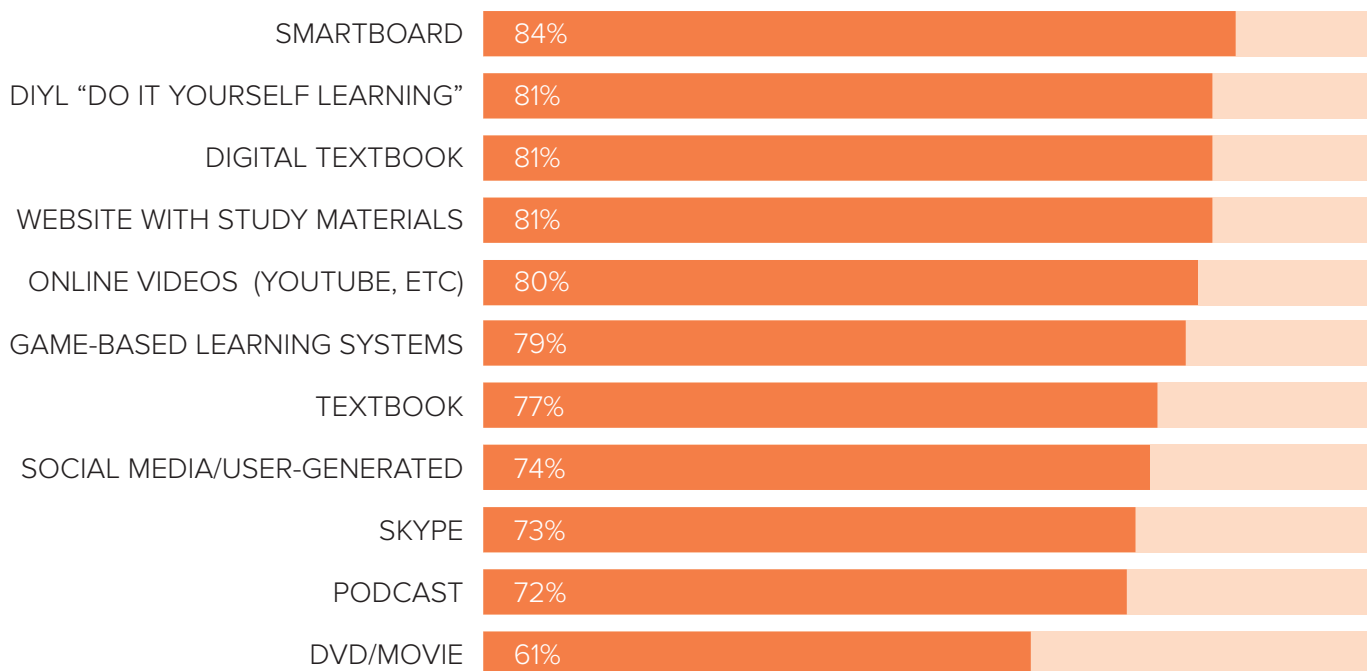


Across the board, students responded positively to ed tech tools, citing the following as being the most helpful tools.

It's not just students who find value in educational technology. In a recent SurveyMonkey survey of a few hundred parents of students in grades K-12, more than 75 percent indicated that educational technology has a positive influence on their children's learning. The biggest benefits parents stated: it's engaging and interactive, two characteristics Gen Zers themselves told us are extremely important.

**Top websites/tools  
for learning include  
Khan Academy,  
Skillshare  
and Canvas**

## HELPFULNESS OF ED TECH TOOLS





# WHAT IT ALL MEANS

The results of our study show that Gen Z has strong opinions and preferences for how they learn and what they expect from their educational experience. These insights present colleges with several significant opportunities to attract and influence the ways the next generation will connect to their college experience.

Being remarkably independent and self-reliant opens the learning experience to include new ways of presenting course material both in and beyond the classroom. To capitalize on Gen Z's ability to self-educate and co-create content, traditional learning materials could be supplemented and enhanced with digital opportunities. It's why Barnes & Noble College encourages fully integrated, campus-wide solutions with our campus partners' technology platforms such as their Learning Management Systems (LMS), while also researching and pioneering innovative learning practices to foster closer cooperation and collaboration between students and faculty.

While they define themselves in digital terms, Gen Z also craves an environment where they can share with and co-create their education with their peers. These traits offer colleges greater opportunities to connect with their students in even more exploratory and meaningful interactions in everything from their recruitment outreach to the development of stronger career preparation programs. This generation's inclination toward sharing and exchanging ideas might also lead to more successful open learning opportunities from the campus hub of the college bookstore to the distance learning opportunities of cloud based platforms.

Because of their ability to discover, self-educate and process large amounts of information quickly, incoming students are smarter than ever before, which makes now the perfect time for the education industry to embrace and implement the next level of innovation.

## GEN Z AND MILLENNIALS: KEY DIFFERENTIATORS

### Finances vs. Fulfillment

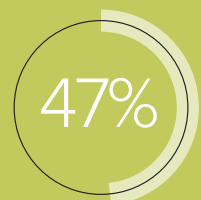
Gen Z tends to be more financially driven than Millennials, who are more likely to define success in terms of personal fulfillment than financial statements. Gen Z, however, sees a college education as the path to a good job, and cites financing their education as one of their top concerns.

### Interest vs. Impact

Both generations want to feel personally satisfied with their education and career choices, but have different priorities for achieving this satisfaction. Gen Zers want their futures to reflect very specific, personal interests. Millennials, however, tend to be more extrinsic, and seek to make an impact on others. Millennials are also more likely to volunteer than Gen Z.



Millennials who volunteer



Gen Z who volunteer

# ABOUT BARNES & NOBLE COLLEGE



Barnes & Noble College is a strategic partner to more than 736 campus bookstores nationwide, serving more than 5 million students and their faculty. We serve as a complete support system provider, offering a customized, multichannel retail experience; affordable print and digital educational content; career and peer-to-peer learning services; and innovative technologies that enhance the student and faculty experience.

Everything we do is grounded in research designed to better understand the thinking, behaviors and expectations of current and future college students and faculty. Our goal is to make the campus bookstore relevant for the students, faculty, alumni and communities we serve.

For more information, visit [www.bncollege.com](http://www.bncollege.com).

For questions about the “Getting to Know Gen Z” study, please contact us at 908-991-2620 and [info@bncollege.com](mailto:info@bncollege.com).

**BARNES & NOBLE**  
COLLEGE



