Student Interview #1 Feedback – Nathan Mack

Introduction

For this report, I chose to interview a student named Michaela at the University of Kansas. Michaela is currently a 19-year old in-state sophomore studying music education who was raised in a nearby community. This interview provided me with some valuable feedback as I evaluate college students in the 21st century, in particular relation to the findings presented in Levine and Dean’s book Generation on a Tightrope. We discussed many important topics, generally revolving around the topics of academics, student life, parents, and world issues. Overall, the most interesting finding from the conversation was that traditional-aged college students, Michaela especially, live within a bubble. They are optimistic, self-centered, focused on the ‘here and now’ and seek fun in their everyday lives. They feel disconnected from the outside world and feel that the past, the present and the future are all a foreign country. However, students feel that they can and will be prepared for the various challenges that will face them both in college and beyond.

Academics

Levine and Dean focus their conversation about academics first on outcomes and technology and second on the value of learning in one’s development; Michaela’s comments provided insight into college students’ feelings on these matters. Michaela mentioned that because she is studying music education, which is rather specialized, she noted that her experiences may be atypical. In terms of outcomes, Michaela mentioned that she is very focused on her future employment and that she sees college as a way to gain the skills necessary to succeed professionally. She would not take a job today without her degree, as the degree itself
and the skills associated are necessary to succeed **long term.** Regarding technology, she noted that her most meaningful academic experiences thus far at university have been in flipped classrooms that heavily utilized technology to stimulate learning. Michaela mentioned that perhaps institutions should implement similar programs across the board in order to harness the power and ubiquity of technology in students’ daily lives. Regarding academic learning, Michaela was very surprised that the most common grade is an A as she feels that she and her peers work extremely diligently to receive high marks on their work. She knows many students that have had to leave the university for academic reasons and finds the data shocking for this reason. When asked about cheating, she admitted that the practice was quite commonplace though particularly on tests and finals. The anxiety surrounding such high-profile, high-pressure situations leads students to cut corners in order to succeed. Finally, Michaela noted that she feels extremely satisfied and supported within the music department, but that most of her peers in larger degree programs do not receive the same level of attention. Without increased focus on individualizing the educational experience, she anticipates hardship for both students and institutions.

**Student Life and World Issues**

First and foremost, Michaela commented that students are focused on the here and now; they live in a bubble and are happy in it. Her perspectives echo that of Levine and Dean who mention that while students think globally, they act locally. She laughed as she said that she and her peers would all fail tests on national or even local issues as the only news they intake is from their Facebook feeds. She noted that the campus feels very tense as issues of sexual assault and race have become quite prevalent in the recent year and she thinks these issues matter nationally as well.
As Levine and Dean also noted, the campus is becoming less important to students as most of the social life at the University of Kansas occurs off-campus and students seek friends and social experiences within affinity groups. Michaela said that while the institution implements programming to encourage cross-affinity collaboration, students remain off-campus where they feel a sense of belonging within their particular social settings. The reason for this fact, in Michaela’s opinion, is because there exist simply far too many students and it is overwhelming to branch out and experience something uncomfortable. Further, the institution and the city have worked tirelessly to help students feel comfortable and as such ‘there is basically a place for everyone so you don’t need to go anywhere else.’ She also supported the fact that drinking and partying are extremely popular activities in college life. Students drink every day of the weekend (and more) and excitedly await the opportunity to interact with their peers in these settings. She knows that drinking and alcohol are a problem but she feels that it will ‘solve itself after graduation for most people.’

Parents

In sharp contrast to Levine and Dean, Michaela’s first and quick answer was that parents are not heavily involved in their students’ lives. She then thought further and added that parental involvement is indeed relatively high, though she stressed that today’s college students would prefer less interaction. She said that these four years college provide her and her peers with the opportunity to mature, grow and learn independence and that parents served as a hindrance to this process. She also indicated that if students are to succeed academically and personally, parents should do more to support them throughout the process.

The Future
Optimism serves as the primary word for Michaela’s sentiments about the future. She said that politically, socially and economically, the next few years will be pivotal as the US moves further into the 21st century. She mentioned that she feels so strongly about this fact probably because it is an election year. She feels confident that we, as a society, will make the right choice and will move towards what she notes as ‘progress.’ The primary detriment to her and her peers’ long term success is student debt, which she understands will impede her ability to succeed financially; nevertheless, she remained positive. The issues surrounding sexual assault and race will help us improve as universities and as individuals and that overtime, college students will learn more about the world around them and become more confident and comfortable in it. Her comments supported those of Levine and Dean in that while some behavioral evidence may seem to contradict, students today feel that they are prepared to conquer adult life and make a long term, significant impact in the world.