



Who are today's students?

The 70-million-strong Generation Y in the U.S. has been the subject of countless studies and articles, for good reason. Like their Baby Boomer parents before them, Gen Y is changing the world. Since most of today's college and university students belong to this generation, they're exerting their influence on campuses as well as the workplaces they enter after graduation. On the basis of sheer numbers alone, it's not enough to understand the needs of only U.S. learners.



Generation Y in India (426 million) is six times as big as Gen Y in the U.S. In China, there are 218 million people born in just one decade, 1980-1990. In a highly networked world that becomes more globally integrated by the day, the college campus is where these massive populations of young people come to live and learn.

As residents in the world's hottest centers of economic growth, young people in India and China are active participants in the rapid evolution of their countries. More of them are urbanized and becoming educated than ever before.

To gain insights into the youngest generation that's entering the global workforce, Steelcase completed primary research in India and China this year, building on a study of Generation Y in North America done in 2009.

Across countries, young adults share some similarities. First and foremost, they're all participants in the convergence of technology that has increased global communications and widespread access to information, as well as shifted wealth and opportunity. The college-age generation is adept at multitasking and using technology, and they're more connected to each other and people outside their own country than any previous generation. They're all socially minded, eager to embrace more active styles of learning. And they all expect education to be a practical springboard to career opportunities.

Generation, of course, is as much about geography as chronology. Young adults

who were born and raised in different countries have unique histories, traditions, and memories that make their behaviors and aspirations distinctly their own.

In India, career aspirations for educated people are shifting rapidly from civil service, engineering, and medicine to computer science and other technology fields. As India evolves into a global technology center, it's no longer necessary to leave to acquire specialized education. Thousands of private technology training centers have sprung up in cities and towns. Although the business world came to India during the past decade in search of its low-cost service capabilities, it's now increasingly coming to tap into core competencies in technology.

Now the most tech-savvy generation in the world, Gen Y in India is ambitious, impatient, and status seeking. They strive for differentiation through education, reputation, brands, technology, and especially money. Proud of their nationality, they intend to bring their country forward in the 21st century as a way of achieving recognition and success. In some ways, their fascination with Hollywood and Bollywood movies can be considered a way of seeing their own lives come to reality.

In China, there's no equivalent Gen Y. The generation born between 1980 and 1990, the closest equivalent, is known as Post-80s. It's the first generation of the one-child rule. Compared to their parents ("The Lost Generation") and grandparents ("The Traditionals"), the Post-80s have grown up in a time of peace and prosperity. They're enjoying the benefits of economic

reform, open markets, and "capitalism with a Communist twist."

From fashion to music to cars and games, China's youth are consumers who are eager to absorb what the world has to offer. Their materialism and all the attention they've enjoyed as only children have earned them a nickname: "Little Emperors." Attendance at universities is booming. As they strive to create their own identities based on their interests, they sometimes experience conflict with embedded traditional values that emphasize harmony and blending with society. As a result, discussion of ideas and opinions – a bedrock of education in the western world – isn't as firmly established in China. But the evolution is underway.

U.S. colleges remain the world leader in higher education, and it's not unusual for the top American universities to have 10-25% of their students from overseas. Of the roughly 3 million students at foreign campuses in 2007 (the latest available data), 20% attended U.S. colleges.

Global shifts are underway, however, as wealth becomes more distributed.

While young people in India and China are passionate about many aspects of western culture, it's a mistake to assume that translates into a desire to become westernized. Part of their energy and confidence is a belief in their own country's ability to become a world leader and their own ability to be active participants in that rapid evolution. ○