General Population Attitudes:

In a 2006 report, Pew provides the results of the most recent in a series of studies (conducted with Gallup) called the Ladder of Life. It measures Americans’ perceived success and anticipated levels of future success (i.e., optimism regarding the future). Some excerpts:

- 49% indicate they expect the quality of life they will lead in five years will be higher than the current quality of their life
- Sharpest downturn in personal optimism that Pew and Gallup have found in 40 years of conducting this study
- Analysis indicates little correlation between satisfaction with one’s own current quality of life and one’s satisfaction with the current state of the nation, but there is correlation between feelings about the current state of the nation and feelings about one’s personal future quality of life
- Groups most optimistic about the future include
  - Younger adults
  - Blacks
  - Hispanics
- Groups who say they have made progress
  - Younger adults
  - College graduates
  - People with higher income
- Present ladder of life
  - 41% place themselves on the top three ladders of life
  - Whites rate themselves higher than Blacks or Hispanics
  - College graduates higher than others
  - Women higher than men
  - Republicans higher than Democrats
  - Married people higher than singles
  - Higher income levels higher than those with lower incomes
  - Correlations between work satisfaction and assessment of personal progress
- In 2002 the same survey was administered internationally
  - Americans in middle to upper middle of the ranges compared to other countries
  - Americans more optimistic than most of Europe, the Middle East and Latin America; less optimistic than Africa and Asia

Generation Next Attitudes:

Generation Next is the 18-25 year-old cohort (sometimes called the DotNet Generation). Excerpts from Pew’s 2007 study (conducted in October, 2006) of their attitudes:

- Outlook and World View
  - Enjoying life
84% think they have good to excellent quality of life
93% are pretty happy to very happy
74% think their lives will be better in five years (59% for older people)
84% think they have better educational opportunities
72% think they have better access to higher paying jobs but
  • 47% think they have a better chance at financial security than people their age had 20 years ago
  • 31% think it is easier to buy a house today, while 62% thought it was easier 20 years ago

Worries and concerns
  30% list money and finances as their most pressing problem
  18% indicate that getting into college, paying tuition, handling class loads and graduating are their most important problems
  16% list job security as their most important problem
  74% listed problems in their own life as most pressing, and only 2% listed problems related to the outside world as most important

68% view their generation as unique
25% list people they know as their heroes and role models; 14% list entertainers; 8% list political leaders; 6% spiritual leaders; 19% list none

Self-assessments – compared to young adults of 20 years ago they think their generation does more
  Casual sex (75%)
  Engage in binge drinking (69%)
  Use illegal drugs (63%)
  Provide community service (37%) (compared to 42% who think their generation does less service)
  Votes (34%) (compared to 49% who think they vote less)

Most important goals in life
  81% to be rich
  51% to be famous
  30% to help people in need
  22% to be community leaders
  10% to be more spiritual

Technology and Lifestyle
  Technology use – much higher use of real-time technologies, such as instant messaging and text messaging, than other age cohorts
  Social networking sites
    54% have used social networking sites
    44% have created a profile
    72% think people post too much personal information on the net
  Technology’s impact
    Good
      • 88% think it helps workers (e.g., email)
      • 69% think it makes people more efficient
      • 64% closer to friends and family
      • 69% makes it easier to make new friends
• Bad
  • 84% makes people lazier
  • 67% makes people more isolated
  • 68% makes people waste time
  o 45% view the growing number of immigrants as positive change in the workplace, compared to much lower positive rates by other age cohorts

• Family ties
  • 40% still live with parents
  • 50% communicate with parents daily
  • 63% have more contact with parents than any other family members (other than spouses if married)
  • 73% receive financial help from parents
  • 64% receive help from family with errands

• Daily life
  • 46% are in school (32% in college and 3% in graduate school)
  • 19% attend school and work part time
  • 12% attend school and work full-time
  • 85% exercise regularly
  • 48% drink alcohol regularly
  • 37% smoke tobacco
  • 10% use illegal drugs
  • 54% have a tattoo, nontraditional hair color, or body piercings other than in their ear lobes
  o 46% think it is acceptable to download or share music or video without paying
  o 41% think it is acceptable to smoke marijuana
  o 25% are Catholic (down from 29% in the 1987 survey)
  o 20% list no religion (up from 11% in the 1987 survey)
  o 63% believe in evolution

• Politics and Policy
  • Voting
    • Voter turnout (percentage of registered voters who vote) of this generation increased from 2000 to 2004 (and appears to be increasing in the 2008 primaries compared to 2004 levels)
    • 49% were certain they were registered to vote
    • 44% always or nearly always vote
    • 42% feel it is their civic duty to always vote (compared to 62% of the general public)
    • 26% follow events in government and public affairs most of the time
  • News
    • 23% read newspapers regularly
    • 48% watch television news regularly (13% watch “The Daily Show” regularly)
    • 23% listen to radio news
    • 25% get news online
  o More affiliated with Democratic leaning (48%) than Republican leaning (35%)
  o More liberal (self-labeled) than older cohorts
Less cynical than older cohorts about government; more pro-government than older cohorts; less likely to embrace sweeping change and more likely to favor leaders who seek compromises to problems

More liberal on social issues but do not appear to have a unique issue agenda

More supportive of strong environmental policies

52% feel immigrants strengthen the country today, and 67% feel the growing number of immigrants strengthens our society; both are the highest levels of any other age group

74% favor privatizing social security

40% feel government regulation of business does more harm than good, the lowest criticism level of all the age groups, and 52% feel businesses strike a fair balance between profits and public interest, the highest level of agreement

13% say U.S. should increase defense spending

67% say relying too much on force leads to hatred and more terrorism

Values and Social Issues

33% support affirmative action (versus 19% for the rest of the population)

47% favor legalizing same sex marriages

Similar views to the general population on abortion issues

Barometer of Modern Morals:

A 2006 report by the Pew Research Center reported the results of a survey of Americans and their attitudes toward moral wrongs. The survey asked whether certain behaviors were morally wrong. The results indicated the following were moral wrongs (the percentage of people holding the view are in parentheses and the second percentage is of people who do not think this is a moral issue at all; selected demographic information follows some of the results):

- Married people having an affair (88%) (7%)
- Not reporting all income on tax return (79%) (14%)
  - 23% of liberals, 22% of Independents, and 17% of Catholics did not see this as a moral wrong
  - Higher family income earners (over $75,000) felt this was wrong compared to lower income earners (under $30,000)
- Drinking alcohol excessively (61%) (31%)
  - Education – 43% of college and 74% of high school found this morally wrong
  - 55% of the 18-49 year olds and 80% of the over 65 year olds found this wrong
- Having an abortion (52%) (23%)
  - No difference based on gender
  - 73% of white Evangelicals, 35% of mainline Protestant, and 57% of Catholics felt this was a moral wrong
  - 68% of Republicans and 43% of Democrats found this as a moral wrong
- Smoking marijuana (50%) (35%)
- Homosexual behavior (50%) (33%)
  - Gender – 58% of men and 43% of women perceived this as a moral wrong
  - Education – 36% of college grad and 63% high school grad found this as a moral wrong
• Sex between unmarried adults (35%) (37%)
  o No real gender difference
  o Education – college (26%) and high school (43%) grads found this wrong
  o Religion – white Evangelicals (60%), mainline Protestants (24%) and Catholics (27% found this wrong; 47% of Catholics did not see this as a moral issue
• Overeating (32%) (58%)

Working Mothers:

A 2007 Pew report compared changes in attitudes of mothers toward work outside the home. The report noted that the labor force participation of mothers, after rising for most of the past half century, remained relatively unchanged in the ten years since the last survey. Some findings in the report:

• 21% of working mothers, and 16% of at home mothers, felt that full-time work was ideal for them, compared to 32% and 24%, respectively, with the same attitude in 1997
• 60% of working mothers, and 33% of at home mothers, felt that part-time work was ideal for them, compared to 48% and 37%, respectively, with the same attitude in 1997
• 19% of working mothers, and 48% of at home mothers, felt that not working was ideal for them, compared to 20% and 30%, respectively, with the same attitude in 1997
• On a self-rating scale, the more mothers worked outside the home, the lower they rated themselves on the effectiveness of their parenting
• Public attitudes toward trends in marriage and parenting are mixed
  o 66% indicate single women having children is bad for society
  o 59% feel unmarried couples having children, and 50% feel same sex couples raising children, is bad for society
  o 44% felt it was bad, and 43% felt it made no difference, if unmarried couples lived together without marriage
  o 51% felt it was good if people married at older ages
  o 36% felt it was good for fathers to stay home with children
  o 29% thought it was bad for society, and 13% thought it was good, if women never had children
  o 42% of all adults (45% of men and 38% of women) felt it was best for children if their mother did not work outside, while 9% felt it was best if the mother worked full-time

U.S. Religious Affiliations:

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a survey in January, 2008 to estimate the size of religious groups in the U.S. This effort built on the foundations of prior attempts to estimate affiliations. Prior efforts have either aggregated self-reported statistics from the religious bodies themselves (e.g., Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches) or to survey people (e.g., the National Opinion Research Center or the Gallup Organization). The Pew survey questioned a representative sample of more than 35,000 Americans. Some of the key findings:
• More than 28% of Americans have left the faith in which they were raised in favor of another faith or no faith at all
• The number of people who say they are unaffiliated with any particular faith today (16%) is more than double the number who say they were not affiliated with a faith when they were between the ages of 18-29
• 25% of people between the ages of 18-29 indicate they are not affiliated with any faith tradition at this time
• 32% of people who change religious affiliation are between ages 18 – 29; 28% of those who change are college graduates
• Midwest demographic dispersion of religious affiliations closely resembles the survey results; the Northeast has the greatest concentration of Catholics, the South the greatest percentage of evangelical Protestant churches, and the West the greatest number of people who are unaffiliated
• Catholicism
  o Constitutes 23.9% of the U.S. population (fairly constant at about 25% of population since 1972 – see General Social Surveys)
  o Defined as all respondents who said they are Catholic, regardless of their specific beliefs or how regular they are in receiving the sacraments
  o Has experienced the greatest net loss as a result of affiliation changes
    ▪ 31% of Americans indicate they were raised Catholic
    ▪ 24% describe themselves today as Catholic
    ▪ Approximately 10% of U.S. population are former Catholics
    ▪ 2.6% of population has changed affiliation to Catholic
  o Catholics outnumber Protestants 46% to 24% as a percentage of immigrants
  o Catholics have a retention rate of childhood members (people who were raised Catholic) of 68%, compared to those raised Hindu (84%), Jewish (76%), Orthodox (73%) and Mormon (70%)
  o Demographics
    ▪ Catholics are evenly dispersed across all the age cohorts (about 25% of each separate group) of the U.S. population
    ▪ Age distribution of Catholics
      • 18 – 29 18%
      • 30 – 49 41%
      • 50 – 64 24%
      • over 65 16%
    ▪ 58% of U.S. Latinos are Catholic
    ▪ 65% of Catholics are White and 29% are Latinos
    ▪ People who claim they are Catholics are dispersed about the same as the general population in terms of education levels, except a higher percentage (17% Catholic v. 14% general) have less than a high school education
    ▪ Marital status
      • 58% of Catholics are married, compared to 54% of general
      • Catholics report living with a partner or being divorced at close to the same rate as the general population
    ▪ Family size
      • Catholics report the number of children at home
None – 61% v. 65% for general population
1 – 13% same as general
2 – 15% v. 13% for general
3 or more – 11% v. 9% for general

- Mormons (21%), Muslims (15%), and religiously unaffiliated (12%) report the highest percentages for families with 3 or more children, compared to Catholics in 4th place

Comments:

The present decline in a sense of optimism about the future, which is concentrated more in older cohorts, may have some impact on attitudes toward giving to non-profit organizations. The general attitudes of the Gen Next cohort should be considered in revising curricula, course preparation and student services. The loosening of traditional moral perceptions on such issues as alcohol, intellectual property, and sexual practices will have impacts on non-academic life issues for students. Religious affiliation, especially for those claiming to be Catholics, may create new pressures on Catholic universities. The large number of Latino Catholics, both in the current population and in the growing immigrant population, could create opportunities for new educational programs to address their needs.

Sources:

Pew, “Sex, Drugs and the 1040” (3/28/06)
Pew, “Fewer Mothers Prefer Full-time Work” (7/12/07)
Pew, “A Portrait of Generation Next” (1/9/07)
Pew, “Looking Backward and Forward, Americans See Less Progress in Their Lives” (9/06)