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# Teaching Millennials in the New Millennium

A Conference on the Theory,  
Challenges, and Opportunities of  
Teaching College-Age Students  
in the 21st Century

April 8, 2011

Trinity College  
Hartford, CT



The 2011 Teaching Millennials in the New Millennium Conference was sponsored and organized by the Center for Teaching and Learning at Trinity College.



Teaching Millennials in the New Millennium  
A Conference on the Theory, Challenges, and Opportunities  
of Teaching College-Age Students in the 21st Century



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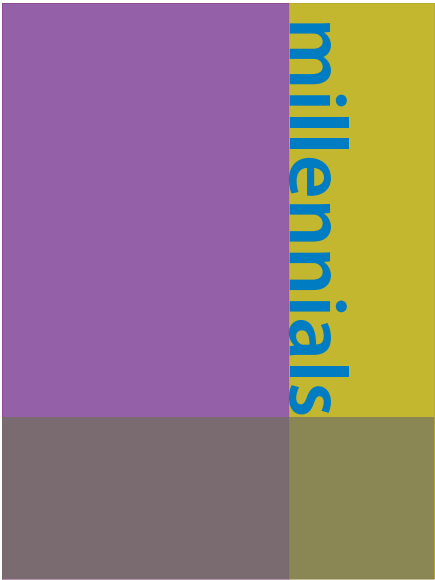
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Program-at-a-Glance

7:45 - 8:30	<i>Breakfast and Registration</i>
8:30 - 8:40	<i>Introduction</i>
8:40 - 9:00	<i>Who Are College Students?</i>
	<i>Looking at Today's Students</i>
9:00 - 10:15	<i>Competing Explanations (Panel 1)</i>
10:15 - 10:30	<i>Break</i>
10:30 - 11:45	<i>Competing Explanations (Panel 2)</i>
12:00 - 1:00	<i>Lunch</i>
	<i>The Implications for Teaching</i>
1:00 - 1:45	<i>The View from the Chair in the Classroom (Panel 3)</i>
1:45 - 3:00	<i>The View from the Podium (Panel 4)</i>
3:00 - 3:15	<i>Break</i>
3:15 - 4:15	<i>The View from the Disciplines and Programs (Panel 5)</i>
4:15 - 4:35	<i>Summing It Up</i>
4:35 - 5:00	<i>General Discussion</i>
5:00 - 6:00	<i>Reception (Alumni Lounge)</i>





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Notes




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Sessions

**Breakfast and Registration (7:45-8:30)**

**Introduction (8:30-8:40)** – Welcoming Remarks by **Rena Fraden**, Dean of the Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Part I:

**Who Are College Students? Competing Theories (Morning Sessions)**

Many voices argue that the students entering college today are “different” from people the same age a generation ago. Psychologists, sociologists, student services professionals, faculty, and just about everyone involved in higher education point to evidence of irresponsibility, anxiety, pressure, and uncertainty in student behavior; students seem less willing to take risks academically (but sometimes all too willing socially), more focused on grades and achievement, but less confident about the path they will take after college.

Are these differences real, or merely a matter of perception? And if they are real, what explains them? The morning sessions of this conference explore these questions by taking a snapshot of young people today and considering a variety of explanations offered for their behavior.

**Prelude – Looking at Today’s Students (8:40-9:00)**

**Testing Millennials: Does a Millennial Generation Really Exist? (20 min)**

Rachael Barlow, Trinity College, Social Science Center

Gary Reger, Trinity College, Department of History, Center for Teaching and Learning





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## Notes

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## Competing Explanations

In the next two panels, we consider competing explanations for the behavioral phenomena described in the first paper. Many theories have been offered: that today's students form a new "Millennial" generation with new personality characteristics resulting from their upbringing; that students belong to a developmental stage of "Emerging Adulthood" that is distinct from the early teen years; that the physical development of the brain sets boundaries on the emergence of metacognition; and that today's social environment has created new demands on college-age people requiring different responses from the past. Each of these views has been subject to critiques, ranging from the theoretical to the practical.

### Panel 1 (9:00-10:15)

#### Moderators:

Jim Trostle, Trinity College, Department of Anthropology

Erica Klein, Trinity College, Class of 2011, Psychology

#### **Connecting the Dots: Insights into Millennial Students from Learning Research (20 min)**

Michele DiPietro, Kennesaw State University, Department of Mathematics and Statistics, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

#### **Generation Me: Misery or Milestones? (20 min)**

Anne Law, Rider University, Department of Psychology

#### **Millennial Students and the Social Organization of College (20 min)**

David Reuman, Trinity College, Department of Psychology

#### **Questions and Discussion (15 min)**

### Break (10:15-10:30)





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**Panel 2 (10:30-11:45)**

**Moderators:**

Kathleen Archer, Trinity College, Department of Biology

Sarah Greenfield, Rider University, Class of 2011, Psychology

**Looking Inside the Mind of Millennial Students: What Do They Know or Not Know about Learning (20 min)**

Dina Anselmi, Trinity College, Department of Psychology, Center for Teaching and Learning

Nicole Dudukovic, Trinity College, Department of Psychology

**Diverse Millennial Students in College: Implications for Faculty and Student Affairs (20 min)**

Fred Bonner, Texas A&M University, Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development, Office of the Dean of Faculties

**Digital Natives? Web and Filmmaking Technologies, and Public Accountability (20 min)**

Luis Figueroa, Trinity College, Department of History, Programs in Caribbean and Latin American Studies, and Film Studies

**Questions and Discussion (15 min)**

**Lunch (12:00-1:00)**





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**Part II:**

**The Implications for Teaching (Afternoon Sessions)**

What do we as faculty, and young people as students, do with the ideas we explored in the morning sessions? Does it matter, from a practical point of view, whether any of these theories is “correct,” or should we be concerned with the day-to-day questions of teaching and learning, and let the theory go?

**Panel 3 – The View from the Chair in the Classroom (1:00-1:45 pm)**

What is the student experience? How do the views expressed in the morning panels jive with our own students’ lives and learning? On this panel three Trinity College undergraduates talk about their own sense of their peers, learning, and the challenges of the new century.

**Moderators:**

Allison Read, Trinity College, The Chaplaincy

David Tatem, Trinity College, Academic Computing

**Trinity Student Participants:**

Alexandra Aldredge, Trinity College, Class of 2011, History, Religion

Caitlin Crombleholme, Trinity College, Class of 2013, Theater and Dance, English

Andrew Page, Trinity College, Class of 2011, Mathematics

**Questions and Discussion (15 min)**





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**Panel 4 – The View from the Podium (1:45-3:00)**

And what do faculty see? Trinity College faculty talk about their sense of student life, how students think and learn and the challenges of teaching students in the new century.

**Moderators:**

Kat Power, Trinity College, Department of Theater and Dance

Mary Sullivan, Trinity College, Class of 2013, Public Policy

**The Challenge of the College Classroom for First-Year Students: Characteristics of First-Year Students and their Potential Transformation from Fall to Spring (15 min)**

Margaret Lindsey, Trinity College, First-Year Program

**The Challenge of Ambiguity (15 min)**

Sheila Fisher, Trinity College, Department of English, Office of the Dean of Faculty

**Advising the Millennial Student (15 min)**

Stefanie Chambers, Trinity College, Department of Political Science

**Lessons from the Court: Coaching the Millennial Student-Athlete (15 min)**

Jennifer Bowman, Trinity College, Department of Athletics

**Questions and Discussion (15 min)**

**Break (3:00-3:15)**





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**Panel 5 – The View from the Disciplines and Programs (3:15–4:15)**

How do faculty teaching in particular disciplines or programs manage the teaching and learning of today's college students? How do they inculcate the particular practices of thinking that are required to be successful practitioners of a discipline or engaged citizens of the world? What opportunities arise in teaching today's students?

**Moderators:**

Lida Maxwell, Trinity College, Department of Political Science, Trinity Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies

Ashley Meilleur, Trinity College, Class of 2011, Psychology

**Science Writing, Wikis, and Collaborative Learning (15 min)**

Mike O'Donnell, Trinity College, Department of Biology

**Poetry, Close Reading, and Self-Critique (15 min)**

Ciaran Berry, Trinity College, Department of English

**A Place for Civic Engagement (15 min)**

Carol Clark, Trinity College, Department of Economics

**Questions and Discussion (15 min)**





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**Summing It Up (4:15-4:35)**

**Concluding Remarks**

Anne Law, Rider University, Department of Psychology (10 min)

Jerry Watts, Graduate Center at City College of New York, Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean (IRADAC) (10 min)

**General Discussion (4:35-5:00)**

Moderators:

Anne Law, Rider University, Department of Psychology

Jerry Watts, Graduate Center at City College, IRADAC

**Reception (5:00-6:00)**





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Abstracts

**Dina Anselmi**, Trinity College

**Nicole Dudukovic**, Trinity College

*Looking Inside the Mind of Millennial Students: What Do They Know or Not Know about Learning*

**Abstract.** Metacognition, or insight into one's own learning process, may be critical for academic success. In this presentation, we cover some of the key metacognitive processes, discussing the areas in which college students often struggle. We address the questions of whether these metacognitive deficiencies are related to brain maturation, developmental stages or educational shortcomings and whether there are any metacognitive issues that are unique to millennial students (i.e., generational effects). Finally, we consider whether millennial characteristics should influence the ways in which we attempt to teach metacognitive skills to the current cohort of students.

**Rachael Barlow**, Trinity College

**Gary Reger**, Trinity College

*Testing Millennials: Does a Millennial Generation Really Exist?*

**Abstract.** Since Howe and Strauss (2000), many commentators have taken for granted the existence of a "millennial generation" characterized by a series of traits shared by persons born between 1981 and 2000. Some researchers have noted some problems with the definition of this generation, particularly its sweeping encompassing of all people born in this period, regardless of sex, race, or socio-economic class (for instance, Grigsby 2009). In this paper we test the robustness of the millennial generation concept on two parameters. First, we recalibrate "generations" by shifting the start and end years and then test to see whether the survey data support the standard configurations. Second, we disaggregate the data along dimensions of sex, race, and socio-economic class, to test whether millennial traits are stable across these disaggregated groups. We suggest further research avenues to explore more deeply the robustness of the millennial generation concept.



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## Abstracts

**Ciaran Berry**, Trinity College

*Poetry, Close Reading, and Self-Critique*

**Abstract.** Placing Robert Frost’s oft misread “The Road Not Taken” at its center, this paper will consider some of the challenges and opportunities involved in teaching poetry writing and reading in the millennial classroom. Given the increasingly mediated space in which the millennial student lives, how does one approach the challenge of teaching close reading, particularly in classes focused on poetry, where the literary text is arguably at its most dense and difficult. Given the allegedly timid nature of the millennial student’s relationship to criticism, how does one teach the value of doubt to the process of creative writing and critical thinking? How, more broadly, does one foster in one’s increasingly interrupted students the search for the sort of quiet, curious, meditative space in which their best ideas, creations, or attachments might begin to manifest themselves, that space Rilke advises his young poet to “go into” searching for the reason that bids him to write?

**Fred Bonner**, Texas A&M University

*Diverse Millennial Students in College: Implications for Faculty and Student Affairs*

**Abstract.** While many institutions have developed policies to address the myriad needs of Millennial college students and their parents, inherent in many of these initiatives is the underlying assumption that this student population is a homogeneous group. This presentation is significant because it addresses and explores the characteristics and experiences of Millennials from an array of perspectives, taking into account not only racial and ethnic identity but also cultural background, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status differences—all factors contributing to how these students interface with academe.



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#### Abstracts

**Jennifer Bowman**, Trinity College

*Lessons from the Court: Coaching the Millennial Student-Athlete*

**Abstract.** There are specific characteristics of millennial students which influence professors in the classroom; many of those same factors are manifest in the realm of intercollegiate athletics and influence how coaches interact with student-athletes and encourage them to excel at their chosen sport. This presentation will cover current coaching strategies designed to reach and engage the Millennial student-athlete as revealed through interviews with current Trinity College coaches, in addition to a review of the limited literature on the subject of coaching millennial student-athletes. The over-involvement of parents, the specialization of sports at a young age, the over-scheduling of events and, the lack of ownership in the process of improving physical skills all indicate a need for a fundamental shift in the approach of the collegiate coach.

**Stefanie Chambers**, Trinity College

*Advising the Millennial Student*

**Abstract.** For generations, students have relied on their college faculty advisors to help them navigate the complexities of academic life. Research on Millennial students suggests that today's college student is distinct for their ambition, conflict avoidant personalities, overdeveloped sense of following authority, and close ties to parents. In this paper I discuss the implications of these characteristics as they relate to the role of the faculty advisor. Although the hallmarks of good advising might remain stable for students of various generations, the research on Millennial students provides an opportunity to evaluate some of the unique traits associated with this generation and how they influence our effectiveness as faculty advisors.



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## Abstracts

**Carol Clark**, Trinity College  
*A Place for Civic Engagement*

**Abstract.** Generational theorists argue that Millennials are performance-oriented students who focus on facts, avoid failure at all costs, and shy away from open-ended learning activities that are perceived as high-risk endeavors. Yet, at the same time, this generation is also purported to be a generation of collaborative learners who are team-oriented and value volunteer work. How might we, as teachers, employ this openness to engage with others in order to foster more critical, independent thinking? This paper explores the pedagogy of community engagement as one strategy for accomplishing this objective. Drawing upon the community learning literature we provide evidence that students can be encouraged to re-think their own role in the learning process and, as a consequence, move away from a more fact-driven analysis and towards a more independent model of learning. The second part of the paper examines the empirical evidence from students' own experiences with community learning both at home and abroad.

**Michele DiPietro**, Kennewick State College  
*Connecting the Dots: Insights into Millennial Students from Learning Research*

**Abstract.** Theories about Millennial students abound, but mostly they characterize collective cultural traits of the generation, like multitasking, technosavvy or narcissism. Educators turning to these theories for guidance on how to teach this generation find little help. Part of the problem is the disconnect between generational theory and learning science. This paper aims to bridge this gap and bring learning research, in particular from the subfields of intellectual development and metacognition, into the discussion, to uncover how certain social and parenting trends have affected students' preparation for the complex cognitive demands of college learning and to suggest specific pedagogical strategies.



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#### Abstracts

**Sheila Fisher**, Trinity College  
*The Challenge of Ambiguity*

**Abstract.** Andre Maurois wrote in relation to Voltaire: “It is certain that a system imbued with perfect clarity has few chances of being a truthful image of an obscure and mysterious world.” This could be a motto for literary studies. Words are multivalent, and their very capacity for ambiguity is the stuff of which literature and literary criticism are made. Students love literature and are drawn to it because it involves interpretation and seldom yields “perfect clarity”; they love it because of, not despite its ambiguity. This paper argues that millennial students are no more averse than their predecessors to wrestling with ambiguity, at least in literature, because in this “obscure and mysterious world,” students can find the space for their own readings, opinions, and voices. What is more, in this space, we can teach them effectively how to find and use evidence to support their interpretations and ideas. This paper will venture to suggest that millennials may actually find the realm of ambiguity even more comfortable than did previous generations. Because of the textual superfluity of the web, they learn from an early age that knowledge is fragmented and fragmentary and that there is no single consistent answer.

**Margaret Lindsey**, Trinity College  
*The Challenge of the College Classroom for First-Year Students: Characteristics of First-Year Students and their Potential Transformation from Fall to Spring*

**Abstract.** This paper will focus on two of the characteristics often assigned to Millennials: “special” and “protected.” It will highlight observations from classroom teaching, reports from fall semester First-Year Seminar faculty and academic mentors, and interviews with spring semester students on academic probation over the ten years of working with the First-Year Program at Trinity. The paper will deconstruct the mindset of many first-years when they arrive at Trinity (and at similar institutions), describe some of the stumbling blocks to their academic success, and will offer several recommendations for “transforming” the first-year student from a “too special for school” high school student into a college student who no longer seeks protection from the “pain” of working hard, but rather embraces it in search of academic success.



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## Abstracts

**Mike O'Donnell**, Trinity College

*Science Writing, Wikis, and Collaborative Learning*

**Abstract.** Pedagogical research shows that inquiry-driven, collaborative learning in science works best in attracting and retaining science students. Generational theorists tell us that Millennials are team-oriented, risk-averse digital natives. Current thinking in science education has much in common with current thinking on how best to teach millennial students. This paper describes using wikis in the science laboratory to collaboratively write laboratory reports. Using peer reviews and group discussion, the focus is not only on the content of the finished lab report, but also on science writing as a creative and iterative process. Collaborative writing with wikis plays to the strengths of millennial students while helping improve their ability to reflect on their own learning and on the process of science.

**David Reuman**, Trinity College

*Millennial Students and the Social Organization of College Education*

**Abstract.** Although Millennial students are touted as team-oriented and skilled in collaborative work, effect size estimates of relevant cohort effects are small. Rather than just dismissing the team-oriented characterization of Millennials as an exaggeration, this paper conceptualizes team-orientation and collaborative skills as modifiable characteristics of all college students; it advocates for the systematic application of research-based cooperative learning practices in college classrooms in order to improve all students' collaborative skills, achievement motivation, and academic performance. Principles underlying effective cooperative learning strategies are well established, but not frequently implemented fully in college classrooms. This paper examines challenges of applying cooperative learning in small seminars and larger lecture classes at the college level.





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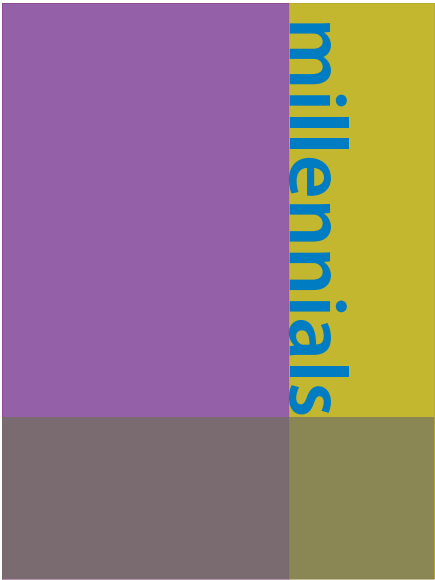


Teaching Millennials in the New Millennium  
A Conference on the Theory, Challenges, and Opportunities  
of Teaching College-Age Students in the 21st Century



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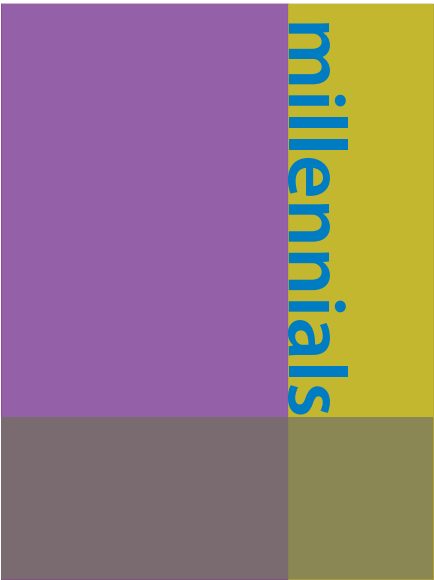
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## Teaching Millennials in the New Millennium

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## Acknowledgements

The Teaching Millennials in the New Millennium Conference was organized and sponsored by the Center for Teaching and Learning at Trinity College. We would like to extend our appreciation to the following individuals and College offices for their contributions to making this conference a success: Chris Guilmartin and the staff in the Events and Buildings and Grounds offices; Julie Totten and the staff at Chartwells; Phil Duffy and all his staff in Media Technology; Susan VanVeldhuisen in Accounting; Alejandro (Alex) Lerma III, Jose (Joey) Lopez, Jr., and Nichole (Nicki) Strack for their willingness to put in extra hours helping to assemble our conference material; Caroline Deveau in Communications for her help with our conference webpage; Michele Jacklin in Media Relations for her many efforts to help us reach a wider audience; and Kent Patashnick in Information Technology for his help in building our registration form. Our sincere thanks to you all.

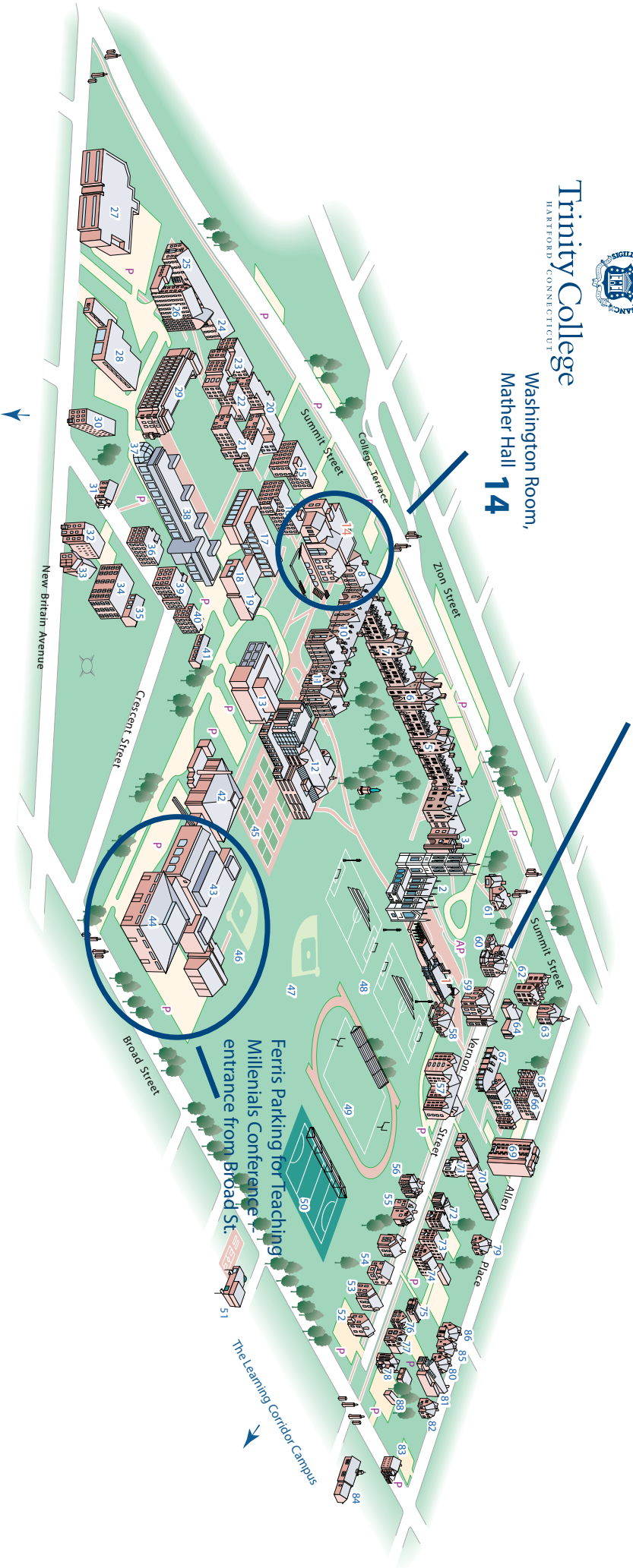




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Washington Room,  
Mather Hall **14**

Smith House



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Students in the 21st Century

### Information for Visitors

Admissions and Career Services Center - **1**

Mather Hall Front Desk - **14**

### Parking

Admissions Parking - **AP**

Park in any area marked **P**

### Staying on Campus

**Smith House** [60], 123 Vernon St., (860) 297-5241.

The Smith House is a Victorian-style guest house located on the campus of Trinity College. It offers a harmonious atmosphere for meetings, overnight guests, and receptions in a splendidly restored home in a beautifully landscaped setting. The facility has a 64-seat dining room, conference rooms accommodating 8-10 people, sitting rooms, and four guest rooms. All guest rooms have a private bath, cable TV, phone, wireless Internet, and air conditioning.

### Stores, Restaurants, and Services

The Cave Café (Mather Hall) - **14**

College Bookstore (Mather Hall) - **14**

Food Service Office (Mather Hall) - **14**

Funston Café (Raether Library and Information  
Technology Center) - **12**

Koepfel Student Center/The Bistro,  
109 Vernon St. - **58**

Mather Dining Hall (Mather Hall) - **14**

Post Office (Mather Hall) - **14**

Smith House, 123 Vernon St. - **60**

Trinity Community Child Care Center - **37**

Underground Coffeehouse (Mather Hall) - **14**





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