A generation on the rise

Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of Millennials Rising: The Next Greatest Generation, theorize that the generation born in the early 1980s through the dawn of the millennium is capable of leading a seismic wave of change in the world. It is a generation that is “unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse.” More important, stress Howe and Strauss, are the positive social habits of the millennials—a focus on teamwork, achievement, and good conduct—especially as these habits relate to their desire to effect social change both through their career choices and volunteer activities.

In 2000 the U.S. Census Bureau counted 72.3 million Americans under the age of 18 living in the United States, constituting nearly one-third of the population of the country. With numbers like that, the influence of the millennials is bound to be substantial. They are already changing the face of higher education, challenging colleges and universities to stay up to speed on technology by expecting wireless libraries, lectures available as podcasts, and downloadable online course materials. And now, as this generation begins graduating from college, it is becoming evident that the post-graduation choices of millennials are unique as well.

Making her own way

“Having that position as an ACE was life-changing,” says Rose. “I went from being someone who really cared a lot about one-on-one interaction, wanting to do counseling, to seeing job sites. There are all of these other issues that go into why a person would end up at a counseling office. It made me begin to really care about larger action, social change.”

She was so inspired, in fact, that she couldn’t bring herself to leave Bloomington. Searching for a way to remain with the service-learning office, Rose turned to the AmeriCorps program—a network of local, state, and national service programs that connects more than 70,000 Americans each year with service opportunities in education, public safety, health, and the environment.

Making a case for her position as an ACE supervisor, she applied for an AmeriCorps*VISTA position and was eventually awarded a one-year, full-time placement within the COPISL office in December 2005. VISTA, or Volunteers in Service to America, is the division of AmeriCorps that strives to bring low-income communities and individuals out of poverty.

After completing her year of service, Rose realized that she had much more to accomplish on campus, and she coordinated with her supervisor to make a case for a new position managing campus-wide civic engagement through the COPISL office, as well as the Student Activities office.

When asked about the theory that her generation is poised to bring about widespread social change, Rose is reticent to speak for her peers, explaining that she meets students every day who are not necessarily interested in becoming civically engaged, but she

notes that among her personal friends, it is the norm.

“My group of friends, they all work for either a non-profit or a local community business,” she says. “Most of them have been working for two years with three part-time jobs in non-profits because they love it. They wouldn’t do anything else.”

She goes on to explain that while students in her generation may or may not be more interested in social change than previous generations, the one thing she can say for certain is that the availability of opportunities for her peers to become involved has increased exponentially.

According to the Independent Sector’s New Nonprofit Almanac & Desk Reference, from 1977 to 2001 the number of Americans employed in the for-benefit sector more than doubled, growing from 6 million to 12.5 million. The average annual employment growth rate for non-profit organizations was 2.5 percent compared with growth for jobs in business at 1.6 percent and in government at 1.9 percent.

“The non-profit field has exploded, and I think because there are so many jobs out there that students are taking advantage of that,” says Rose. “And then Teach for America is huge, and students are going overseas and they say, ‘Well, I could do something like that, but do it through the Peace Corps.’ And students want to do it. They’re willing to not pay their college debts off so quickly because they want to do something engaging and fulfilling.”

“The world is different than when our parents went into the job market,” says Colleen Rose, coordinator of civic engagement for IU Bloomington. “You’re not going to get a job that’s going to be your job for the rest of your life. So why not do something that you’re excited about for a while?”

Being a difference

I grew up saying, ‘I want to be a difference in the world and in my community’ says Andrea K. Moore, BA’94, a graduate of IUPUI’s School of Liberal Arts. “Early on I was drawn to civic engagement with role models like Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, and Zora Neale Hurston. But I think my studies solidified my passions and organizational ties into action.

Growing up in Indianapolis with a family that spent time together taking care of community elders, shutting neighborhood