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## Mixed reaction to 'My lazy American students' column

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By Matt Rocheleau, Globe Correspondent

A Babson College professor said she drew mixed reaction from colleagues, students, and alumni who felt an op-ed piece she wrote for the Globe last week painted the small private college in a bad light.

In the guest column, “[My lazy American students](#)” published Dec. 21, adjunct professor Kara Miller said U.S. students often lack the work ethic of their international peers and cited personal experiences as examples.

“Some people at Babson thought it was a comment on Babson, and it wasn’t at all,” said Miller in a phone interview Thursday with the Globe. “All I was trying to say is that we [Americans] can all do a little better ... and it’s not about any one place in particular.”

Several Babson professors and an administrator have discussed the column with her already, and though not all of them agreed with her, Miller said she feels she has the school’s support.

“I think that makes sense as an institution of higher education to support people speaking freely,” she said.

A spokeswoman for Babson declined to comment earlier this week.

Babson students had already departed from the Wellesley campus for winter break before the column hit newsstands and before it became a viral Web discussion topic extending far beyond Boston.com. So, save for a few e-mails Miller has received from students, she is not entirely sure what reaction she will be greeted with when classes resume in late January.

But, “If people bring it up, I’d certainly be happy to talk to them about it,” said Miller, who taught history and rhetoric this past fall and will teach a media class this spring.

“It’s important for [students] to know I think everyone is an individual,” grades them as individuals, and does not judge students based on whether they are American or international, she added.

In fact, she said the best student she’s taught in her one and a half years at Babson was American.

Miller, 31, said she has been a freelance columnist for The MetroWest Daily News for around six and a half years. In her first-ever piece in the Globe, online readers responded with over 500 comments both heavily criticizing and praising her stance. The op-ed column quickly became the most e-mailed story of the month on Boston.com and has been e-mailed by readers nearly twice as many times than the second most e-mailed story in December.

Miller’s [follow-up column](#) brought another 200 plus comments from readers

“I was never expecting this kind of reaction,” said Miller. “Some [commenters]

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are very nice, but it's also kind of scary to read people talking about you like that."

She said her column likely plugged into two emotions that triggered such a tremendous response: it hit home for Americans who are generally concerned about their country's place in the world and, she said, it also struck a nerve for those who feel it's wrong, or unpatriotic, to criticize American students.

"I think when you care about your country, you want it to be better than it is and as good as it can be," Miller said. "I love what I'm doing and it's because I love what I'm doing that I want to improve it."

And while she criticized American students' work ethic, she said students from the U.S. tend to be more creative.

"I think in American education, and probably at home, we don't ask students to work particularly as hard as other countries do ... In order to be competitive we have to adopt that work ethic a little bit more," she said. "We want our creativity to be combined with their work ethic."

Though, "It's hard to balance those things," she said.

Miller, was born in New Hampshire, briefly lived in California, moved with her family to Weston, and was raised in Carlisle from age 7 on.

She attended Carlisle public schools before making a difficult transition to the Groton School, a five-year, highly-selective private college preparatory boarding school in Groton.

In 1999, at age 20, she said, she earned a bachelor's in English from Yale one year earlier than the typical four-year degree because she had earned enough college credit from advanced placement courses she took in high school.

Since graduating and before joining Babson, Miller has also interacted with students in jobs at the admissions offices at Yale University in New Haven, Conn., and Brown University in Providence, R.I. She has taught SAT courses for Kaplan, first-year English at Tufts University and worked high school students through College Match, a non-profit organization that helps low-income students get into college.

Miller said she has received a master's and doctoral degree from Tufts in English.

She said in her two columns that American students, more so than students from abroad, are guilty of flirting, falling asleep and succumbing to various distractions in class. So, was Kara Miller, an American herself, a lazy student?

No, she said. Though there were likely instances when she could have tried harder or paid more attention, overall, she said "I would say I was a pretty motivated student all throughout my career."

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