In their own words: What 20-somethings think about department stores
By Sandra M. Jones
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The Chicago Tribune gathered 11 students in their early 20s from Loyola University in a classroom for an hour to hear what they had to say about department stores.

Few of the students considered the department store a part of their regular shopping routine. Some went when they had a gift certificate. Others would go when accompanied by their mothers or aunts.

The single exception was Nordstrom. Five out of the 11 students said they visited Nordstrom at least once every three months, the most by far of any department store. The main reason: customer service. The room lit up with stories about no-hassle returns and helpful sales clerks.

When each student was asked to name one thing that department stores could do to win them over as regular customers, two common themes emerged: improve customer service and make the stores easier to shop.

Here's a sampling of what some of the students had to say:

Jenna Gales, 21: "I don't typically shop at department stores. There's a lot of anxiety for me to walk in and see an entire store with 500 style of jeans. But if I see it pointed out already (for example in a magazine),
that's really cool. I don't feel as intimidated when I see a smaller line with selected styles for an entire collection. It doesn't feel quite so department store-y. It feels like a small store within a department store."

Celia Horemiotes, 21: "It's almost hard to break down what you're looking for because if everything is $25 and comes in the same size and color, it really can make your choices difficult."

Elizabeth Braun, 22: "The reason I buy (cosmetics) from department stores solely is that I grew up with my mom and my aunt buying their cosmetics from Estee Lauder and going to Saks Fifth Avenue and getting Christian Dior. My aunt, every time we go shopping, always goes into the department store, always buys the same cosmetics. But people my age may not be as inclined to do that because there are better deals and we're all about thriftiness now."

Marie Schnitzius, 21: "At least when you shop at Forever 21, it's probably going to fall apart after the third time you wear it, but at least it looks good"

Karan Almeida, 23: "I have a slightly different take because (as a guy) probably my sense of fashion is probably not up there. I don't go shopping on a regular basis. When I go, I want to buy everything. One stop shop and get out of there. Kohl's is really close by, so I go there.

Jessica Mihalcik, 21: (Speaking about department store locations.) "If it's not directly off the train, it's kind of almost not worth going. I do have a car, but I rarely use it. If it's not within a reasonable amount of time to get to, then it's not really worth my time."

Shawn Mayberry, 22: (Speaking about Nordstrom.) "I broke my mom's ear muffs. And I took them back and they didn't think twice. They just grabbed it and handed (a new pair) back to me. I think their customer service is great."

Amy Tolle, 21: (Speaking about cosmetics.) "I'll often go to the department store, shop around and find what works for me and then when I need to buy it again, I'll go to Sephora or Ulta and get a better deal."