Policy Statement 93

This We Believe About Generational Issues in Education and the Workforce

Today's adult workforce includes people who range in age from 18 to 70+ years creating an age-diverse workforce and spanning the following generations:

Generation	Born	Percent of Workforce
Silent/Traditionalists	1925 to 1945	8%
Baby Boomers	1946 to 1964	44%
Generation X	1965 to early 1980s	33%
Millennials/Generation Y	1980s to early 2000s	15%
Generation Z	Early 2000s to present	----

The **Silent Generation** lived through the Great Depression, World War II, and the New Deal. As a group, they are loyal and patriotic; they value respect for authority, personal sacrifice, civic pride, and frugal living. As a result of the challenging times in which they were raised, this generation brings a strong work ethic, determination and commitment, and the belief that success is earned.

Baby Boomers' perspectives were shaped by the Martin Luther King, Jr. and Kennedy assassinations, the civil rights and women's movements, Watergate, and the Vietnam Conflict. Boomers want to be successful in their careers and are often motivated by financial and material gains. Boomers are competitive and like to be challenged—traits that make them hard-working employees.

Generation X (Gen Xers) often grew up as "latchkey" kids; they were impacted by working mothers, single-parent homes, and increasing violence portrayed in the media. These factors contribute to their independent and skeptical nature. They have strong technical skills and are motivated by accomplishments rather than the number of hours at work. Gen Xers are amenable to change and prefer flexible schedules. They are entrepreneurial, pragmatic, and creative.

Millennials, the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in the workforce, are optimistic and engaged. They trust institutions but are skeptical of authority, expect to advance rapidly in the workplace, use technology to remain in constant contact with others, and are focused on achievement rather than personal development. Millennials seek balance between their work and personal lives. They have a strong social conscience and want to help others.

Generation Z is still shaping their perspectives and attitudes. They are growing up with global conflicts and economic uncertainty, and they are digital communicators. This generation is not yet working; how their characteristics will impact the adult workforce is unknown.

To minimize inter-generational conflicts, instructors need to implement instructional strategies for effective classroom environments and prepare students to be successful in the workplace.

INSTRUCTIONAL CHALLENGES

Instructors and students differ in their generational characteristics. Currently, the majority of instructors are Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials. Instructors may struggle to engage students of other generations effectively if the teaching and learning styles are incongruent.

Technological proficiency should not be assumed based on age alone. For example, students well versed in the use of mobile devices may not be as familiar or confident with business computer applications or have a solid understanding of how to access, evaluate, analyze, or present information.

Learning style preferences differ by generation:

- The **Silent Generation** prefers teacher-centered lessons and responds well to positive reinforcement. These students need to connect what they know to what they are learning and understand how the two are related. They work well in groups but want to be respected for their experience and knowledge. Although these students are "digital immigrants," once they learn technology, they know it well.
- **Baby Boomers** value structure and guidance; they relish competition with classmates. Boomers tend to be optimistic, responding well to both traditional teaching methods and active learning techniques. Although they did not grow up with technology, Boomers use technology extensively in their personal and professional lives.
- **Gen Xers** prefer active learning while working alone or in small groups; they like to be assigned a task and then given the freedom to complete it in a way that they think is appropriate. Gen Xers are comfortable with technology and often use it to streamline their work.
- **Millennials** are very social and accustomed to having input in decisions. They are open to learning new applications, building relationships online, and integrating technology into daily life. They enjoy group work, want to be respected as equals in the learning process, and prefer active learning projects with an instructor nearby to provide assistance.
- **Gen Z** students are motivated by activities linked to their goals. They need frequent feedback and respond favorably to positive reinforcement rather than constructive criticism. Gen Z students seek instant gratification and want quick responses.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Although non-traditional learners are evident at the postsecondary level, Millennial and Gen Z students make up the largest portion of today's student population at all educational levels. Instructors should be prepared to use a variety of methods to provide directions and feedback quickly, such as text

messages, tweets, Facebook posts, blogs, or other technologies. Some Silent Generation and Boomer students may be challenged by these technologies, favoring more traditional methods.

Younger generations prefer engagement over lectures, videos over books. These students value options and choices that allow them a measure of control in their learning. Case studies and other problem-based activities that focus on contemporary issues provide opportunities for students to be engaged, make decisions, and solve problems. These methods are also effective with older generations who can contribute real-world experience.

WE BELIEVE…

Inter-generational perspectives enhance learning and working environments; students and instructors must learn to understand and appreciate differences among classmates and co-workers.

Generational diversity in the classroom and workplace may be an obstacle to collaborative environments. Instructors need to be mindful of generational learning preferences and adapt their teaching styles accordingly.

To be successful, students must be educated to apply technology effectively and use communication channels appropriate for their audience.

Therefore, **we believe** business educators are challenged to fill a critical role in ensuring students are prepared to be effective communicators and collaborators in an inter-generational world.