

# Introduction

**Donald E. Heller**

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The forces of demographics have brought our nation to a critical point. The Baby Boom Generation, which has so influenced the country since the first Boomers were born as World War II was coming to a close, is beginning to near retirement. Kathleen Casey-Kirschling had the distinction of being the first Baby Boomer to file for Social Security benefits on 15 October 2007, an act one newspaper noted as being “one giant leap for her Baby Boom generation—and a symbolic jump toward the retirement system’s looming bankruptcy” (Wolf, 2007, 1A).

American colleges and universities as we know them today have been greatly influenced by the Baby Boomers. The great growth of higher education in the 1960s, which saw the creation of new community colleges and the expansion of public four-year institutions, was in large part driven by the demands for postsecondary training by Baby Boomers. Many of these college students moved on to become the core of the faculty teaching and conducting research in these institutions today. And like Ms. Casey-Kirschling, they too will soon be facing decisions about retirement.

But Baby Boomers are not the only generation of Americans who have, and are, influencing colleges and universities across the country. The two subsequent generations, Generation X and the Millennials, as they have been named, have also helped to shape these institutions. Members of Generation X, which followed the Baby Boomers and were born largely in the 1960s and 1970s, placed new demands on college faculty when they entered postsecondary education. Many of these students have become the younger cohort of faculty who are today helping to teach the Millennial Generation of students, those born since 1980. Millennial students, with their focus on multitasking and integration of technology into all aspects of their lives, have helped to shape the way that education is delivered. In some cases, this means replacing a mode of instruction that has largely dominated for centuries, the notion of the “sage on the stage,” or the lone faculty member standing up in front of a group of students.

The TIAA-CREF Institute 2007 National Higher Education Leadership Conference addressed these issues in a symposium titled, “Generational Shockwaves: Implications for Higher Education.” The conference drew

over 100 college presidents, faculty, and administrators to New York City on 1 and 2 November 2007 to hear a variety of speakers discuss these issues. The dialogue revolved around the impact of these three generations currently populating campuses: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials.

This book presents the findings from that conference, summarizing the presentations made by the college leaders who spoke there, as well as contributions from other leaders and scholars who have researched the impact of these generations on American higher education. The book opens (Chapter 1) with an overview of how different generations have impacted the country in general, and higher education in particular, during the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century. Neil Howe, the late William Strauss, and Reena Nadler describe each of the generations and how they have helped to shape—and have been shaped by—colleges and universities across the country.

D. Bruce Johnstone, the former Chancellor of the State University of New York System and President of the State University College of Buffalo, presents in Chapter 2 the perspective of a college leader on how the new generations of students are causing colleges to examine who they are and how they serve these students. He examines how what are often described as change-resistant institutions are able to transform themselves to meet these new demands. Following this examination of the impact of Millennial students, Ronald Ehrenberg turns in Chapter 3 to the impact of Generation X on colleges. He summarizes the discussions of a panel he moderated at the conference, which focused on how Generation X—largely represented on campus today by the younger cohort of faculty—has influenced the work environment for these young professors.

The impact of Generation X faculty is discussed further in Chapter 4 by Cathy A. Trower, a researcher at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She presents the work she has done on the demands for a changing workplace presented by this generation of faculty members. Unlike the previous generation, these new faculty have very different expectations for balancing work and family life, and Trower describes how universities are responding to these demands.

The next two chapters (5 and 6) focus on the Millennial Generation, who in large part make up the student body on most college campuses today. Donald W. Harward, former President of Bates College, summarizes in Chapter 5 the presentations from a panel on Millennial students that he moderated at the conference. Much of the discussion at this session revolved around the relationships between Millennials and their parents, as well as how Millennials use technology in their daily lives, and the requirements these relationships place on colleges and universities

today. In Chapter 6, Kenneth E. Redd, Director of Research and Policy Analysis for the Council of Graduate Schools, describes how universities need to adapt in the race for recruiting and retaining Millennial students on their campuses. As he describes it, the Millennial Generation has “rising diversity, aspirations, and wealth” in comparison to earlier cohorts of students. These changes, along with the other characteristics of Millennial students noted by other authors in this volume, have forced higher education institutions to adopt new enrollment management strategies and techniques.

From the subject of recruiting and retaining students in Chapter 6, Chapter 7, by Martin Finkelstein, focuses on recruiting and retaining the next generation of college faculty. Finkelstein, a long-time scholar of the American professoriate currently at Seton Hall University, begins by providing a brief history of how different generations of faculty have worked on our campuses. He then builds on Trower’s contribution by documenting how colleges and universities have adapted how they construct faculty employment arrangements. These changes have been driven, he notes, not just by the demands of the new generation of faculty members, but also by outside pressures facing colleges and universities.

In Chapter 8, Carol A. Cartwright summarizes the conference panel on the Baby Boom Generation and its impact on higher education. As noted earlier, Baby Boomers helped to drive the expansion of the postsecondary sector during the second half of the 20th century, and make up the core of the faculty (and administration) today. The presenters at this session, all college presidents, described how their campuses have evolved under the influence of Baby Boomers, and how they are likely to change in the coming years as more Boomers move into retirement.

Chapter 9, by Karen Steinberg, Phyllis Snyder, and Rebecca Klein-Collins of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, moves beyond the gates of academe to examine how the broader implications of the retirement of the Baby Boom Generation are likely to affect higher education. They note that many Boomers, in contrast to earlier generations, expect to be much more active during retirement and thus, will be looking to colleges and universities to provide them with lifelong learning. This will present both opportunities and challenges for these institutions.

Valerie Martin Conley, a higher education scholar at Ohio University, next (Chapter 10) addresses the fiscal and legal issues institutions and their employees will be facing as Baby Boomers move into retirement. Since Congress legislated the elimination of mandatory retirement for faculty approximately 15 years ago, the courts have put certain constraints on what colleges and universities can do with respect toward encouraging faculty members and other employees to retire. This chapter addresses some of

these constraints, along with the financial concerns faced both by the institutions and their employees.

The TIAA-CREF Conference included three breakout sessions, where the participants had an opportunity to discuss in a smaller group setting these generational issues. In Chapter 11, Mark Heckler of Valparaiso University, Virginia Michelich of Georgia Perimeter College, and Teresa A. Sullivan of the University of Michigan summarize the discussions in these breakout groups. The participants had a wide range of views about different generations of faculty and students, and how their institutions were responding to and were shaped by each.

In the concluding chapter of the book, Chapter 12, F. King Alexander, President of California State University, Long Beach, discusses some troubling trends in the higher education policy arena that threaten college access for future generations of college students. Alexander outlines the forces that are moving the nation in this direction, and provides recommendations for ways in which the country can recommit to the goal of promoting access for under-represented populations of students.

A note about generational definitions: you will observe that the authors of this volume use varying year boundaries in their classification of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. This is not unusual, as there is no standard definition of each agreed upon by researchers, journalists, and even demographers. For example, while William Strauss and Neil Howe (1991) define the Baby Boom Generation as those Americans born between 1943 and 1960, the United States Census Bureau (2001) uses 1946 and 1964 as the boundary years. Similarly, Strauss and Howe categorize Generation X as those born between 1961 and 1981, while the Census Bureau (Crowley, 2003) uses 1968 and 1979. As one article noted, “Generations have a natural fluidity—it can be hard to say where one group ends and the next begins. . . . If you aim for precision in defining a generation, you can end up being imprecise” (Bader, 2008, p. 3). Because of these differences, the chapters in this volume use varying definitions of each group, and these definitions are noted throughout.

## REFERENCES

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