



MIDDLE TENNESSEE
STATE UNIVERSITY.

CENTER FOR TEACHING AND MENTORING



Who Are Your Students?

Understanding Generation Z Learners and
Designing Courses for Success

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Learning Outcomes

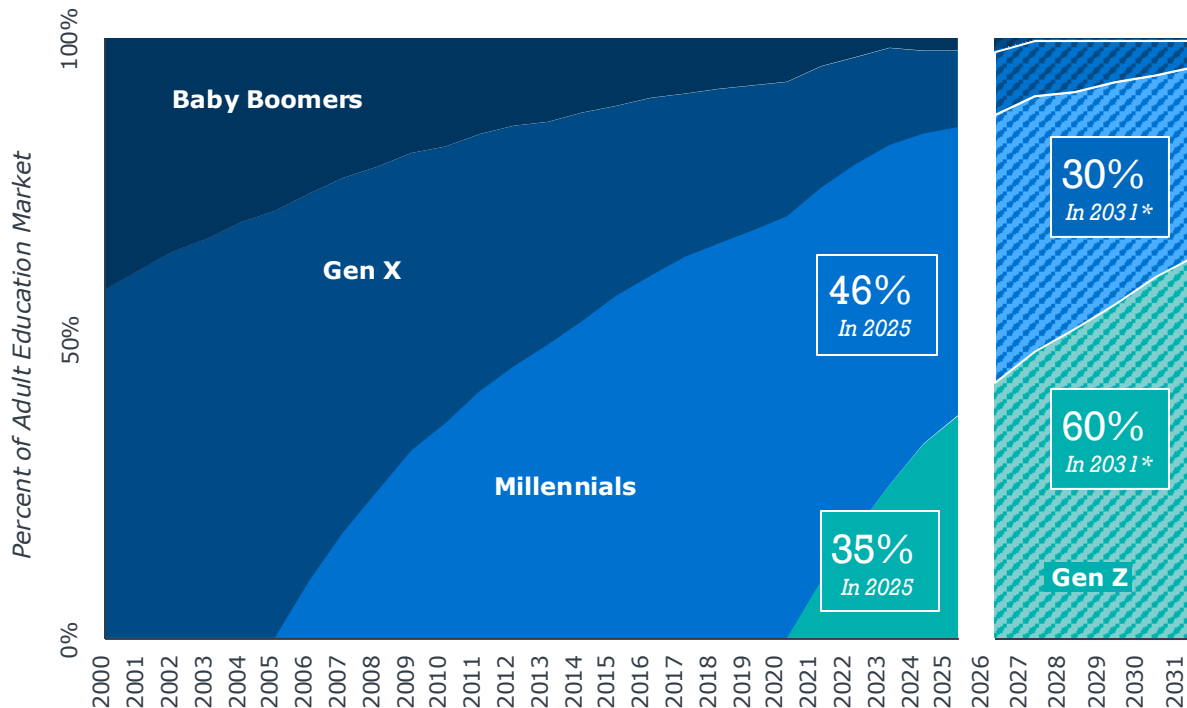
1. Identify research-supported learning preferences and challenges common among Gen Z students.
2. Apply at least three evidence-based teaching practices that support Gen Z learning and engagement.
3. Incorporate strategies that promote student success, belonging, and persistence.

Key Question: How can we teach effectively for students whose educational experiences differ significantly from our own?

Generational Takeover

Gen-Z Now Accounts for more than 1/3 of Adult Learners

Real and projected composition of adult learners by generation, 2000-2031



Today's Students

- Most traditional-age undergraduates are Gen Z (1997-2012)
- Digital natives
- Career focused
- Shaped by COVID-19
- Technology expectations

The Newest Generation Everyone Loves to Hate



Harsh Critiques of Gen Z...

Born 1997-2012

Ages 14-29

 **psyché**

2023

Why is Generation Z So Soft?



2024

The New Generation of Narcissism

**BUSINESS
INSIDER**

2022

**Gen Z mistrusts everything—
big business, government, and
other people**

...Mirror Those of Millennials...

Born 1981-1996

Ages 29-45

VANTY FAIR

2014

“Generation Wuss”

Young people are just too sensitive, too narcissistic, too stupid

TIME

2013

The Me Me Me Generation:

Millennials are lazy, entitled narcissists who still live with their parents

The Washington Post

2015

**Millennials don't trust anyone.
That's a big deal.**

...And Gen X ...

Born 1965-1980

Ages 45-61

Newsweek

1993

The Whiny Generation

Gen Xers may call themselves the “Why Me?” generation, but they should be called the “whiny” generation

NEW YORK

1976

The Me Generation

TIME

1990

Living: Proceeding With Caution

Why are today's young adults so skeptical?

Who is Gen Z Beyond the Headlines?



What People Say

"Gen Z job hops constantly and isn't loyal to employers."

"Gen Z is unmotivated and lazy."

"Gen Z has unrealistic salary expectations."

"Gen Z can't communicate and lacks soft skills."

What the Evidence Suggests



Early-career turnover is common, but Gen Z workers in 2024 had **longer tenures** at this stage than other generations in the past 15 years



70% of Gen Z report **learning new skills weekly** and 57% reportedly have a **side hustle**, yet many still struggle with accountability



Social media raises expectations, while inflation, housing costs, and debt make real life expensive; **salary demands reflect financial pressure** more than entitlement



Gen Z's soft skills may lag due to **lost in-person experiences and early-career development** during the pandemic; gaps will likely improve with more workplace exposure

“

We like to differentiate generations, but **human behavior doesn't change that much**. The mediums, how we grow up, and the platforms change... but what we want doesn't really change.”

Tiffany Zhong, Youth Trends Expert and Strategist

How Gen Z Learns Best

- Interactive
- Relevant
- Flexible
- Multimodal
- Technology-enhanced learning experiences

What Does Not Work Well

- Long passive lectures
- Vague expectations
- Delayed feedback
- Unnecessary complexity

Five Practices That Work



- Explain the why
- Break up learning
- Make expectations visible
- Give frequent feedback
- Build human connection

Supporting Well-Being

- Promote belonging
- Normalize help-seeking
- Connect students with resources
- Reduce cognitive and emotional load to support well-being

Technology and AI

- Design for thinking, application, creation, and reflection rather than simple recall
- Three course design questions:
 - Clarity
 - Engagement
 - Connection

The Bottom Line

Generation Z students thrive when courses are:

- ✓ Clear
- ✓ Relevant
- ✓ Interactive
- ✓ Technology-enhanced
- ✓ Relationship-centered
- ✓ Designed with purpose

The goal is not to teach to a generation.

The goal is to create learning environments where today's students can succeed.

The Student Perspective

- Recognize different learning styles
- Consider the student's full workload
- Make the "why" behind the assignment clear