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Generation X: Redefining the Norms of the Academy
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Rebalancing the Work-Life Norm

**Generation X:
Redefining the Norms of the Academy**

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Generation X

The post Baby Boom generation – born between the early 1960's and the early 1980's – that is sandwiched between the Baby Boomers and the Baby Boomers' children (which means that the parents of Generation X were largely born during the Great Depression and WW II)

Now roughly 25-45 years old

Ethnically and racially diverse (about 1/3 are non-white or Hispanic)



Generation X Characteristics

In the late 1980's, when the label was first applied, this generation was said to be: apathetic, cynical, disaffected, uninterested in status or money

Now one hears a slightly different set of descriptors: self-reliant, value diversity, desire work-life balance, technologically savvy, attached to their work but not their employers



The Intersection of Cohort and Life Stage

When we think about a generation – or a cohort – we think about the characteristics of a group of people born at a certain time who share far-reaching experiences

But it is equally important to consider both the life stage of the cohort when these experiences occurred and the life stage of the cohort at the present moment

For those in Generation X, defining events happened either just before they were born or when they were very young (e.g., the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement) or happened 20 years later when they were young adults (e.g., the technology revolution, the end of the Cold War, and economic globalization)



Generation X Today

Today Gen Xers are roughly 25-45 years old – they are no longer single individuals, trying to figure out how they relate to the world – rather they have now entered a life stage when they are engaged simultaneously in career and family formation, and are deeply concerned about how those two aspects of their lives are going to relate to one another

Thanks to the defining events for their cohort, they are the first generation that has always assumed that both men and women will work simultaneously on career and family formation – and that this dual effort will characterize them for most of their adult lives



Rebalancing Work-Life

Supporting both work and family life is not a new issue for colleges and universities, but it was a considerably simpler issue when men worked and women took care of family life

Today's world looks quite different

- In the 2000 census, only 23% of U.S. families with children under the age of 18 included one working and one non-working parent – in other words, more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the adults in this country with children under the age of 18 are working and parenting at the same time
- In 2005, among full-time faculty in U.S. colleges and universities, women constituted 24% of full professors, 38% of associate professors, and 45% of assistant professors



Underlying Assumptions

We already have a lot of faculty supports in place for the work side of the work-life equation – what we need to work on now is the life side of the equation

We should think of faculty careers, and the accompanying desire to achieve work-life balance, as beginning in graduate school and continuing through retirement and beyond

We should remember that, for younger faculty in particular, work-life balance matters as much for men as for women

We should provide a multiplicity of support services and programs because one size definitely does NOT fit all



Policies and Programs at Princeton

Maternity leave

Automatic one-year extension of the tenure clock for each child

Work-load relief for the primary caretaker

Backup care program

Dependent care travel fund

Employee Child Care Assistance Program

Expanding on-campus childcare

Employee Assistance Provider Work/Life Program

Partner placement assistance



Additional Policies and Programs To Think About

Longer maternity leave

Adoption assistance

Part-time possibilities

Off ramps and on ramps

