

Best Practices in Precepting: Engaging & Mentoring Gen Z

Katie Cunningham, PharmD, BCTXP
Associate Professor | Director of Clinical Education
Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine & Science
Kathleen.Cunningham@rosalindfranklin.edu



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

1

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

- I have no conflicts of interest with ineligible companies to disclose



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

2

Learning Objectives

- Compare and contrast the defining traits of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z
- Examine factors that shape Gen Z's approach to learning and professional environments & outline strategies to effectively engage and mentor Gen Z learners
- Assess case-based situations and apply strategies to improve learning experiences



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

3

Made a mixtape from the radio	Pharmacy school lectures were not recorded	Has purchased something from the Tik Tok shop	Rode in the back of a station wagon with no seatbelt	Knows what "lowkey" and "cap" mean
Called someone using a rotary phone	Used a VCR	Saved files on a floppy disc	Communicates with emojis instead of words	Used a pay phone
Avoids phone calls & voicemail like the plague	Took an exam on a scantron	Free Space	Regularly listens to Podcasts	Had one house phone – and you had to talk to parents first
Watched Saturday morning cartoons	Knew phone numbers by heart	Remembers MTV playing music videos	Had a MySpace profile	Can still make the dial-up noises
Prefers email to texting	Died of dysentery playing Oregon Trail	Still takes notes on paper	Rented movies at Blockbuster	Used a phone book



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

4

Compare and contrast the defining traits of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Image AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2026 ChatGPT 4o

5

Generations

• How to define generations:

- Groups of people born within a 15-20 year span
- Members of each group tend to share common characteristics, preferences and values shaped over time

• Factors that shape generations:

- Historical events and shared experiences
- Technological advances
- Societal shifts (economic changes, political movements)



Why this matters: Understanding generational influences helps tailor communication, feedback and teaching strategies



Dimock M. Pew Research Center, 2019

6

Generational Timeline



Silent Generation
Born: 1928-1948



Baby Boomers
Born: 1946-1964



Gen X
Born: 1965-1980



Millennials
Born: 1981-1996



Gen Z
Born: 1997-2012



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Image AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2025 ChatGPT 4o

7

Question 1

What generation are you a member of?

- A. Silent Generation
- B. Baby Boomer
- C. Gen X
- D. Millennial
- E. Gen Z



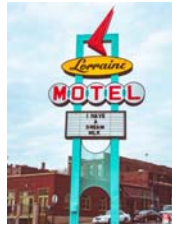
2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

8

Baby Boomers (Born: 1946-1964)



Vietnam War
(1955-1975)



Civil Rights Movement
(1954-1968)



Post-WWII Economic Boom
(1945-1969)

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Photo by Phai Truong from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/vintage-military-tank-displayed-outdoors-in-park-37336376/>
Photo by Gabriel Tovar from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/historic-lorraine-motel-sign-in-memphis-34878076/>
Photo by Stephen Fennell from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/classic-bank-building-with-columns-30767115/>

9

Baby Boomers

Approximate Age Range: 61-79 years old

- "Workaholics"
- Goal-oriented & achievement focused
- Career-driven
- Competitive & motivated

Work Ethic



- Prefer formal, structured communication
- Comfortable with traditional learning environments

Feedback



- Value clear hierarchy & defined roles
- Respect experience & quality leadership
- Prefer stability & thoughtful change

Leadership



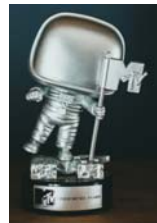
Preceptor Tip: Provide structure, respect experience, communicate expectations clearly

10

Gen X (Born: 1965-1980)



Fall of Berlin Wall
(1955-1975)



Rise of Cable TV
(1980s)



Latchkey Kids
(~1975-1995)

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Photo by Marcelo Gonzalez from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/historic-berlin-wall-remnants-in-a-park-setting-35660577/>
Photo by Jonathan Cooper from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/award-statue-in-the-shape-of-an-astronaut-118678277/>
Image AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2026 ChatGPT 5.5 Sol

11

Gen X

Approximate Age Range: 45-60 years old

- Self-sufficient
- Pragmatic
- Resourceful problem-solvers
- Value work-life balance

Work Ethic



- Do not require frequent feedback
- Prefer feedback that is purposeful and actionable

Feedback



- Appreciate autonomy and trust
- Respect competence and expertise
- Value forward-thinking leadership

Leadership



Preceptor Tip: Offer autonomy, trust their expertise, tie feedback to outcomes

12

Millennials (Born: 1981-1996)



September 11, 2001



Columbine 1999



Rise of social media



13

Millennials

Approximate Age Range: 29-44 years old

- Team-oriented & collaborative
- Multitaskers
- Entrepreneurial
- Value flexibility, purpose-driven work

Work Ethic



- Expect frequent, real-time feedback
- Respond well to positive reinforcement

Feedback



- Prefer mentor-style leadership
- Value collaboration over hierarchy
- Prioritize prof. growth & development

Leadership



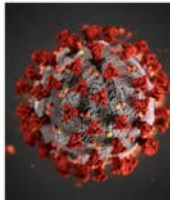
Preceptor Tip: Give frequent feedback, explain the “why,” foster collaboration by connecting work to team goals, purpose & growth

14

Gen Z (Born: 1997-2012)



Economic Recession
2007-2009



COVID-19 Pandemic
2019-2023



Social Justice



Digital Natives



15

Younger U.S Generations Are More Racially & Ethnically Diverse

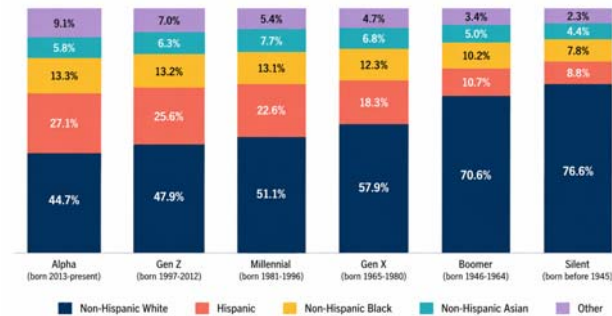
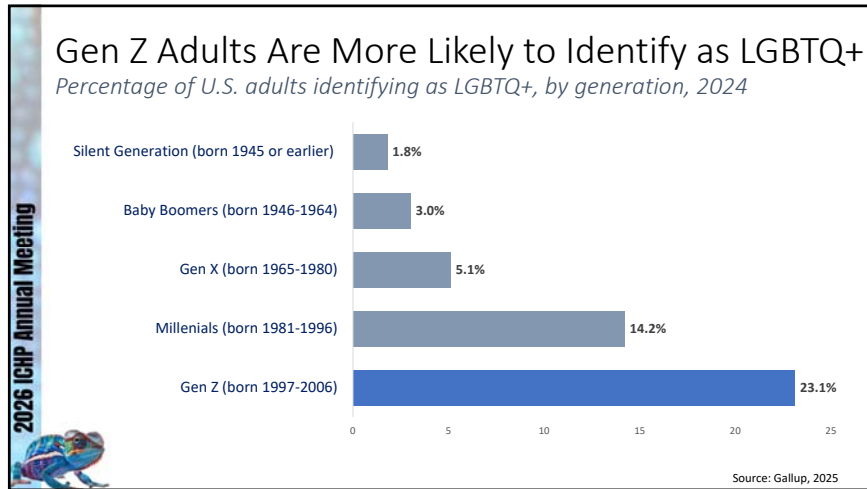
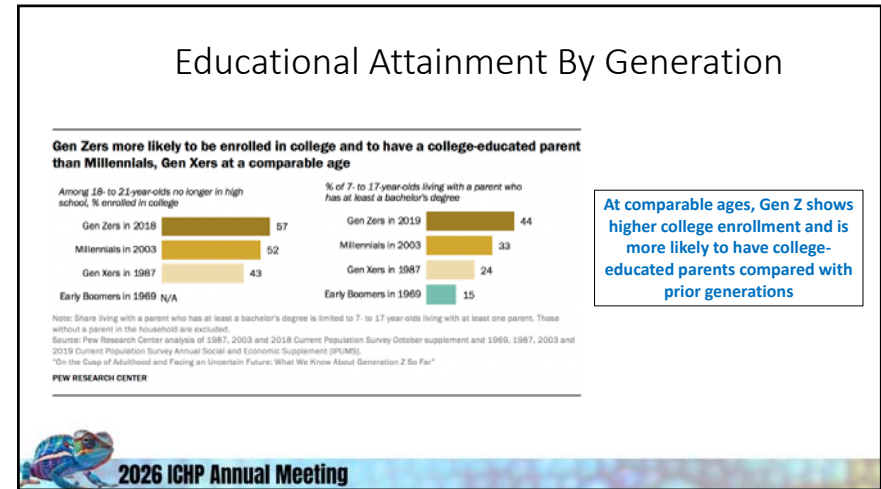


Image AI generated by Sharon Karina, 2026. ChatGPT 4.0
Adapted from: Pop-Facts Demographic Snapshot. Claritas. 2023. <https://claritas.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Pop-Facts%20NAE-Demographic-Snapshot-2024.pdf>

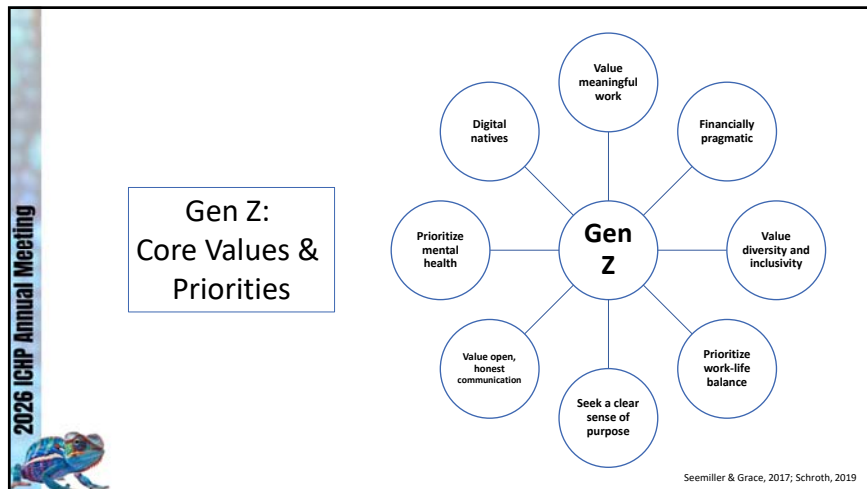
16



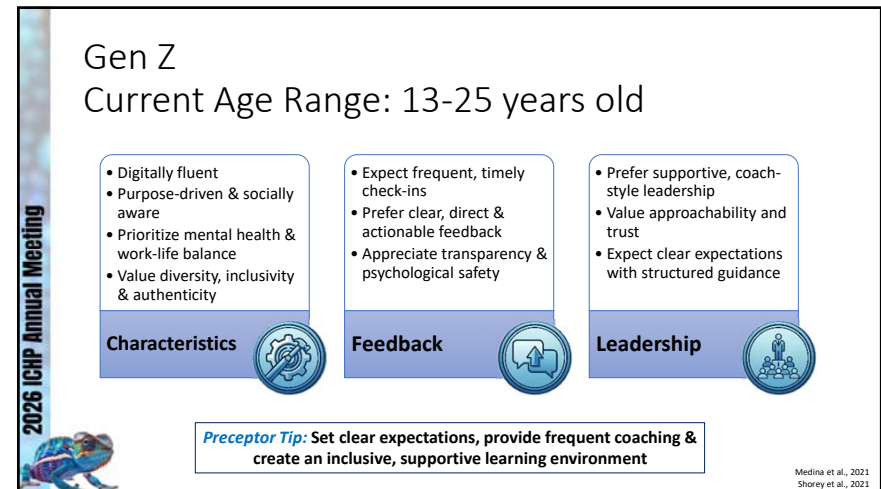
17



18



19



20

Examine factors that shape Gen Z's approach to learning and professional environments & outline strategies to effectively engage and mentor Gen Z



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

21

Factors Affecting Gen Z's Approach to Learning & Professional Environments

- Limited professional work experience
- Heightened focus on mental health & work-life balance
- Technology-integrated learning and communication
- Expectation of frequent feedback & clear structure

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Medina et al., 2021
Shorey et al., 2021

22

Limited Professional Work Experience

Fewer early employment experiences among Gen Z

- ~19% of 15-17 year-old Gen Z report holding a job compared with ~30% of millennials at the same age
- **Contributing factors:**
 - Increased competitiveness for higher education
 - Greater parental emphasis on academics
 - Expanded access to structured extracurricular & enrichment programs

Educational & workplace implications:

- Developing comfort with professional norms and workplace interactions
- Ongoing learning around expectations related to communication, accountability and workload
- Benefit from explicit guidance to support engagement, confidence and retention



Schroth, 2019

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

23

Strategies to Address Limited Work Experience

- Set clear expectations early
- Provide structured onboarding & orientation
- Normalize learning curves and early-career development
- Use frequent, actionable feedback
- Discuss power skills
- Emphasize skill-building & gradually increase independence



Preceptor takeaway: Structured onboarding, supportive guidance and gradual autonomy help learners build confidence and competence

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Medina et al., 2021
Image AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2026 ChatGPT 4o

24

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Heightened Focus on Mental Health & Work-Life Balance



- **Contributing factors:**
 - Greater awareness of mental health
 - Increased academic and professional pressures
 - Experience with disruption and uncertainty (pandemic, economic stressors)
 - Expectation of boundaries between work, learning and personal time
- **Educational & workplace implications:**
 - Value supportive, psychologically safe learning environments
 - Prefer clear expectations and predictable schedules
 - Benefit from proactive check-ins
 - Increased engagement when well-being is acknowledged alongside performance

DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020; Shorey et al., 2021

25

Strategies to Support Mental Health & Well-Being



- Foster a positive, inclusive learning environment
- Promote mutual respect and psychological safety
- Demonstrate an interest in learners as individuals (within professional boundaries)
- Normalize check-ins and asking for help
- Be transparent, honest and consistent in communication
- Model kindness, professionalism and balance

Preceptor Takeaway: Supporting well-being isn't about lowering standards - it's about creating an environment where learners can meet them

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020
Image AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2025 ChatGPT 4o

26

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Technology-Integrated Learning and Communication



- **Digital natives:**
 - Grew up with constant access to information
 - Comfortable with virtual and hybrid learning
 - Regular use of social media and digital communication tools
 - Expect efficient, technology-supported workflows
- **Educational & workplace implications:**
 - Prefer clear, concise communication
 - Benefit from guidance on professional communication norms
 - Need support in evaluating quality information

Shorey et al., 2021; Isaacs et al., 2020

27

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Strategies to Integrate Technology



- **Intentionally incorporate technology into the learning experience:**
 - Use short, focused educational videos
 - Assign pre-recorded content (education sessions, code response reviews)
 - Use brief pre-assessments or knowledge checks (online forms or quizzes)
 - Leverage the learner's strengths
- **Leverage secure digital tools for communication and collaboration:**
 - Use secure messaging platforms for patient discussions
 - Share cloud-based documents for DI questions, task lists

Preceptor takeaway: Curated videos, pre-work, and secure shared tools help reinforce concepts, support communication, and streamline feedback while maintaining professionalism

Shorey et al., 2021; Medina et al., 2021

28

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Expectation of Frequent Feedback & Clear Structure



Contributing factors:

- Feedback-rich educational environments
 - Detailed rubrics, frequent assessments, specific learning objectives
- Digital culture with real-time responses
- Reduced informal learning during virtual and hybrid training periods

Educational & workplace implications:

- Prefer clear expectations, goals and success criteria
- Benefit from brief, regular check-ins rather than infrequent formal evaluations
- Increased confidence and engagement with timely and actionable feedback
- Greater efficiency and performance when structure is established early

DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020; Medina et al., 2021
Image AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2025 ChatGPT 4o

29

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Strategies to Provide Feedback & Structure

- Set clear expectations on day one
- Use brief, frequent check-ins
- Make success criteria explicit
- Provide structured milestones
- Explain the “why” behind expectations
- Maintain consistency



Preceptor takeaway: Clear expectations and brief, frequent feedback build confidence, efficiency, and professional growth

Medina et al., 2021
Image AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2025 ChatGPT 4o

30

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Question 2: Which of the following factors has most influenced Gen Z's approach to learning and professional environments?

- Growing up with immediate access to information and technology
- Experiencing significant social and economic uncertainty
- Increased emphasis on mental health, inclusion, and well-being
- Entering education and the workforce with different expectations around feedback and communication
- All of the above



31

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Preceptor Takeaways

- Structured onboarding, supportive guidance and gradual autonomy help learners build confidence and professional competence
- Supporting learner well-being does not mean lowering standards – it creates the conditions needed to meet them
- Curated videos, pre-work, and secure shared tools reinforce learning, support communication, and streamline feedback while maintaining professionalism
- Clear expectations paired with brief, frequent feedback promote confidence, efficiency, and professional growth



32

Assess case-based situations and apply strategies to improve learning experiences



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Image AI generated by Katie Cunningham, 2026 ChatGPT 4o

33

Scenario 1

- APPE student on 1st clinical rotation on general medicine service

• Situation:

- During the 1st week, the student is highly motivated and engaged and seems genuinely excited to be on rotation
- Despite arriving on time, **the student states they are unable to work up 2 patients before rounds**
- When presenting patients, the student:
 - Reads off every single lab value they looked at
 - Has difficulty identifying and prioritizing the patient's problems
 - Struggles to formulate concise, actionable recommendations



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

34

Think – Pair – Share

- What early-career factors might contribute to this student's approach?
- How could you help the student prioritize information and manage time effectively?



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

35

Discussion

- **What early-career factors might contribute to this student's approach?**
 - Limited prior exposure to real-time clinical decision making
 - Fear of making an incorrect recommendation
 - Prior educational experiences that emphasized completeness over prioritization
 - Unfamiliarity with time constraints and workflow expectations on rounds
 - Desire for reassurance
- **How could you help the student prioritize information and manage time effectively?**
 - Have the student observe you working up a patient & discuss your thought process
 - Set clear expectations for pre-rounding prep time per patient
 - Provide a checklist of "must review" data
 - Have the student initially focus on one or two key recommendations per patient

2026 ICHP Annual Meeting



36

Scenario 2

- PGY1 resident in the MICU
- **Situation:**
 - Resident is well-prepared, has strong baseline knowledge and is motivated. However, as the rotation progresses, they become increasingly frustrated by variation in expectations among different ICU preceptors
 - For example:
 - One preceptor expects the resident to run every recommendation by her before discussing with the team
 - Another prefers the resident to take initiative and intervene when appropriate while on rounds
- The resident expresses uncertainty about how assertive to be and worries about being perceived as either too passive or too aggressive depending on the preceptor



37

Think – Pair – Share

- How can residents be supported in adapting to different preceptor styles?
- How might inconsistent expectations affect resident confidence and performance?



38

Discussion

- How can residents be supported in adapting to different preceptor styles?
 - Set expectations as a team → if there is variation ensure it is communicated
 - Encourage learners to ask clarifying questions when expectations vary between preceptors
 - Model flexibility by demonstrating how recommendations may be framed differently for different providers
 - Use shared handoff tools or documents so preceptors can communicate expectations and learner progress across the team
- How might inconsistent expectations affect resident confidence and performance?
 - Creates uncertainty about what meeting expectations looks like
 - Increases cognitive load as learner adjusts to different preceptor styles
 - May undermine confidence despite strong clinical skills
 - Can lead to hesitation and decreased initiative



39

Scenario 3

- APPE student on a clinical rotation
- **Situation:**
 - The student starts the rotation motivated and engaged. He is always professional but over a couple weeks his performance becomes inconsistent. He remains professional, but seems fatigued, quieter during discussions and slower to complete tasks
- **Unbeknownst to the preceptor the student is:**
 - Caring for a sick family member at home
 - Commuting an hour each way to the site
 - Working every weekend for financial reasons
- **Expectations remain high but the preceptor:**
 - Does not ask about the student's adaptation to the rotation
 - Does not check-in regarding workload, well-being or external stressors
 - Focuses feedback solely on task completion and efficiency
- The student hesitates to disclose personal challenges, worrying that doing so may be perceived as unprofessional or an excuse



40

Think – Pair – Share

- What opportunities exist for preceptors to create space for disclosure without overstepping boundaries?
- What role does psychological safety play in this scenario?
- How can preceptors support learners while maintaining professional expectations?



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

41

Discussion

- What opportunities exist for preceptors to create space for disclosure without overstepping boundaries?
 - Brief, routine check-ins
 - Asking open-ended, non-invasive questions (How are things going? How does the workload feel?)
 - Setting the expectation that support and communication are welcomed
- What role does psychological safety play in this scenario?
 - Enables learners to speak up before stress becomes overwhelming
 - Otherwise, learners may struggle silently and disengage
 - A lack of check-ins can unintentionally signal that personal well-being is less important
 - Small gestures of empathy can significantly increase trust and openness



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

42

Discussion

- How can preceptors support learners while maintaining professional expectations?
 - Maintain clear expectations while offering flexibility when appropriate
 - Help prioritize tasks and projects
 - Adjust timelines or scope when feasible without lowering standards
 - Encourage use of support resources
 - Reinforce that seeking support is part of our professional responsibility, not weakness
- Support and accountability are NOT mutually exclusive



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

43

Conclusion – Teaching & Learning with Gen Z

- Key Gen Z Characteristics Influencing Learning:
 - Enter professional training with limited work experience
 - Value clear expectations, structure and frequent feedback
 - Are digital natives who integrate technology into learning
 - Place strong emphasis on mental health, well-being and work-life balance
 - Seek purpose, transparency and psychological safety in learning environments



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Images AI generated by Katie Cunningham, 2026 ChatGPT 4G

44

Conclusion – Preceptor Pearls

- Structure and clear expectations can accelerate learning & growth – not dependence
- Technology can enhance efficiency and engagement when used intentionally
- Brief, frequent feedback supports confidence and professional development
- Teaching power skills requires modeling
- Supportive environments help learners meet high standards, not avoid them



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

Images AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2026 ChatGPT 4o

45

References

1. Dimock M. Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. Pew Research Center. Published January 17, 2019. Accessed November 12, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>
2. Kennard J. Learning & development: Across the generations. Training Journal. Published March 21, 2017. Accessed November 12, 2025. <https://www.trainingjournal.com/2017/business-and-industry/learning-development-across-generations/>
3. MarketingCharts. US population distribution by generation and race/ethnicity in 2024. Accessed December 12, 2025. <https://www.marketingcharts.com/charts/us-population-distribution-by-generation-and-race-ethnicity-in-2024>
4. Jones JM. LGBTQ+ identification in U.S. rises to 9.3%. Gallup. Published February 20, 2025. Accessed August 15, 2026. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/656708/lgbtq-identification-rises.aspx>
5. Parker K, Igielnik R. On the cusp of adulthood and facing an uncertain future: What we know about Gen Z so far. Pew Research Center. Published May 14, 2020. Accessed August 15, 2026. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far/>
6. Seemiller C, Grace M. Generation Z: Educating and engaging the next generation of students. About Campus. 2017;22(3):21-26. doi:10.1002/abc.21293
7. Schroth H. Are you ready for Gen Z in the workplace? Calif Manage Rev. 2019;61(3):5-18. doi:10.1177/0008125619841006
8. Medina MS, Pettinger TK, Niemczyk M, Burnworth M. Teaching A to Z for a new generation of pharmacy learners. Am J Health Syst Pharm. 2021;78(14):1273-1276. doi:10.1093/ajhp/zxab174
9. Shorey S, Chan V, Rajendran P, Ang E. Learning styles, preferences and needs of Generation Z healthcare students: Scoping review. Nurse Educ Pract. 2021;57:103247. doi:10.1016/j.nepr.2021.103247
10. DiMaggio MJK, Hudacek SS. Educating Generation Z: Psychosocial dimensions of the clinical learning environment that predict student satisfaction. Nurse Educ Pract. 2020;49:102901. doi:10.1016/j.nepr.2020.102901
11. Isaacs AN, Scott SA, Nisly SA. Move out of Z way Millennials. Curr Pharm Teach Learn. 2020;12(12):1387-1389. doi:10.1016/j.cptl.2020.07.002

AI Disclosure: Select images and graphics in this presentation were created with the assistance of OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT-5.6 Sol), 2026.



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

46

Best Practices in Precepting: Engaging & Mentoring Gen Z

Katie Cunningham, PharmD, BCTXP

Associate Professor | Director of Clinical Education
Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine & Science
Kathleen.Cunningham@rosalindfranklin.edu



2026 ICHP Annual Meeting

47