

# Generation(al) Matters: Story, Lens, and Tone

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This essay tells a story of how “generation” came to matter in rhetoric and composition/writing studies; analyzes and advocates for “generation” as a lens through which to examine disciplinary studies and activities; and considers how we can productively engage in generational relations between individuals and groups. It adopts a framework of “hospitality” (adapted from Richard and Janis Haswell) to develop a concept of “cross-generational relations” as an aspirational category. An ethic of hospitality is proposed to facilitate respectful, productive relations among generational groups, which recognize and enact interdependence but allow for a wide range of stances and strategies of interaction in action and scholarly discourse.

## Introduction

When pondering how to contribute to this special issue, I was startled to realize that my career, the journal’s history, and the development of the discipline—rhetoric and composition/writing studies (RCWS)—had run in parallel for 50 years. I noticed uncanny correspondences and intersections among these timelines at key moments (Table 1):

Table 1

Self (LWP)	Journal ( <i>FEN</i> → <i>CS</i> )	Field (RCWS)
1971-72: entered field (graduate studies)	Spring 1972: first issue of <i>FEN</i> published	“around 1971”: beginning of discipline formation, first generation scholars (process; rhetoric revival)
1979: finished PhD; first article published (in <i>FEN</i> ); attended Ottawa conference	1982: <i>FEN</i> broadened focus from Freshman English to the study and teaching of writing	“around 1979”: discipline emerged (Ottawa conference; founding of doctoral programs, journals; first cohort of tenure-track hires)
	1992: new title <i>CS/FEN</i>	1990s: expansion, division, conflicts, disciplinary instability

1995: published article in <i>CS/FEN</i> on reproducing field in graduate programs	Fall 1995: special issue on doctoral education  1999: FEN dropped from title	1990s-2000s: Conversations around doctoral education as center of disciplinary definition and development
2009: “retired” and started post-retirement position; 2010: co-founded SIG for seniors and retirees		“around 2009”: wave of retirements accelerated and began to impact the field, higher education
2013-14: organized 1 <sup>st</sup> cross-generational conversation (CCCC) and initiated cross-generational project		2014: CCCC cross-generational task force (2014-2018) began work, including survey of retirees
2018/2020: published work on age/literacy and seniority	Spring 2021 issue: Intergenerational Exchanges; Pinkert and Bowen on results of retiree survey	“around 2018”: seniority studies; lifespan writing studies; age/literacy studies; nextGEN group formed  2020: SIG for Senior, Late Career, & Retired Professionals became CCCC standing group (SGSLR)  2022: Writing and English Studies Co-organizational Collaborative (WESSC) survey of graduate students and early-career professionals
2021-22: 50 years in field	2021-2022: 50 years of publication	2021-2022: 50 years of disciplinary development

In 1971 I went back to graduate school to study rhetoric and language, coinciding with the founding of *Freshman English News (FEN)* that year. Scholars like Martin Nystrand and David Fleming identify that year as the moment that a teaching practice acquired the potential to become a discipline.

In 1979—the year I finished my PhD and published my first article (in *FEN*)—I attended the Ottawa conference, a coming-of-age event for the discipline. It capped off a decade of disciplinary growth—a Cambrian explosion of doctoral programs and journals. My microhistory of the conference depicts 1979 as the watershed year the conference (and field) crossed into a new era (Phelps, “Ottawa”). In 1982 the journal recognized this by expanding its scope to encompass the discipline’s scholarly and teaching mission.

My second article (Fall 1995) in the renamed *Composition Studies/FEN* proposed that efforts to define the discipline had passed into a heterogeneous body of doctoral programs (Phelps, “Reproducing”). Contributors to this special issue joined an array of conversations about doctoral education amid divisions and conflicts associated with the growth and maturation of the burgeoning field, many of which showed up in the journal.

With the passage of personal and disciplinary time, generational themes gradually emerged in the field, intensifying with the “Age Wave” of baby-boomer retirements. Beginning around “2009,” the aging of the professoriate defined a new generational identity of “seniors,” many retiring from their positions but not necessarily from the field. I co-founded a special interest group (SIG) (now a Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Standing Group) to recognize this group and attend to its interests, but my larger concern was the consequences for all generations of this worldwide demographic shift, which could only be addressed together. Working with the SIG and younger colleagues, I initiated a multi-faceted project to foster cross-generational (“X-Gen”) conversations and activities (CCCC Task Force). At the other end of the age spectrum, the nextGEN movement asserted a generational identity for graduate students. Concurrently, new areas of study emerged to connect age, literacy, lifespan writing, and disciplinary lifecycles—now a focus of my own scholarship.

These developments had come together by 2021 to define a new salience for generational relationships and their complexities in all three timelines. In the Spring 2021 issue of *Composition Studies*, thirteen scholars participated in “Intergenerational Exchanges.” Two other articles feature generational themes: Zachary Beare’s on the WPA-listserv and a study of disciplinary lifecycles by Laurie A. Pinkert and Lauren Marshall Bowen (whose retiree survey originated in the X-Gen project). Together these inspired my response for this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue.

My essay unfolds in three parts. I’ll tell a story of how “generation” came to matter in the field; analyze and advocate for “generation” as a lens through which to examine disciplinary studies and activities; and consider how we can productively engage in generational relations between individuals and groups (tone). I use the term *generation/al* here generically, to refer to groups or social identities based on age/time, in relation to the field’s becoming over time. Later I’ll introduce more precise terms to talk about such groups and their relationships.

## Story

The mutual and intertwined aging of rhetoric and composition/writing studies (RCWS) and its scholars underlies a rising generational consciousness

over the last two decades. I want to trace its trajectory in a series of overlapping moments in which members of the field came to 1) experience “generation” (implicitly, age) as a social identity; and 2) frame the history of the field as a succession or progression of generations. This consciousness brings the potential for convergence or divergence between generational identity groups—terms I’m borrowing from other contexts to refer to directions that interactions among generations can take, based on their perception of inter-group differences.<sup>1</sup>

This story deserves to be documented fully in a proper history, but here I can only tell it as my own: in Kierkegaard’s phrase, how—“living forward”—I witnessed and perceived it and now, “understanding backward,” I make sense of it. Like the stories of my colleagues in the Intergenerational Exchanges or in collections like *Talking Back* (Elliot and Horning), the intersections in my chart aren’t arbitrary but reflect the kinds of relationships among individuals, generations, and sociohistorical location that connect age and time in a life-course perspective. Its first principle is that “the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their life-time” (Elder).

Here’s a roughly chronological overview:

- new interest in researching the twentieth-century development of RCWS as a discipline;
- attention to lived experiences of scholars, teachers, professionals as a dimension of that history;
- conversations *about* “generational” groups, their interests and relations, and disciplinary lifecycles;
- organizations, activities, and controversies that make generational identities explicit.

Not coincidentally, the field is now expanding the scope of its subject matter and approaches to account for age and time in literacy lives and its own work (Bazerman et al.; Dippre and Phillips; Bowen).

Why do both older and younger generations seek history? For one, disciplines need to establish and sustain continuity over time. That means, for older generations, recruiting and mentoring new members who will advance the field while preserving and honoring their legacy. Younger scholars, regardless of how much they bring new agendas, need to claim forebears. If the dominant ideas and people don’t fit, they look for others to justify their visions of the future. Thus in the 1990s new cohorts of scholars (trained rigorously in historical methods) turned away from taxonomies to develop a more complex, multifaceted understanding of disciplinary development in the twentieth

century. These “alternate histories” (in Kristopher Lotier’s account, revisionist and “local”)—replaced any single master narrative.<sup>2</sup>

Although they might argue against limitations of earlier historical scholarship, younger scholars recognized older generations as resources for their research—“the living memory of the field’s development” (Miller et al.). They sought out older scholars for interviews and oral histories (Detweiler; Detweiler and McGhee Williams); claiming their legacies, they helped gather older scholars’ work in collections and honored them with festschrifts and awards. Generational consciousness became increasingly explicit in genealogies (Miller and Miller et al. on the Writing Studies Tree), citation studies (Mueller) and studies of scholarly networks (Mueller et al.)

Fortuitously, these purposes complemented older scholars’ own impulses to capture their lived experience of the field’s development (Roen et al.; Flynn and Bouelle). Hoping to preserve their legacies, enrich historical accounts, and correct oversimplifications and gaps in the historical record, they’ve not only written about their memories but interacted with younger scholars in interviews, dialogues, oral histories, and collaborations. This synergy was dramatized in the 1996 Watson Conference, which brought scholars of different generations together to engage dialogically in—aptly named—“history, reflection, and narrative” (Rosner et al.). It perfectly represents the convergence of generational interests in historicizing the discipline.

During the same period, the centripetal forces that joined disparate interests and traditions to claim a place in the academy gave way to centrifugal forces that fractured its original “founding” unity around all sorts of differences (Phelps, “Reproducing”). While these conflicts at first presented as scholarly (theoretical, methodological, pedagogical) and then increasingly as political and ideological, generational change played a tacit role as young scholars sought to make their mark by challenging prior scholarship and overturning dominant paradigms. However, even as identity became a dominant theme in the field’s scholarship, these differences seldom became explicitly generational. One notable early exception was the exchange between Janice Lauer and Robin Varnum (Varnum; Lauer, “Response”) over a 1992 CCCC panel in which Lauer and other scholars referred to themselves as “first generation.” Varnum challenged this claim as neglecting scholars of the 1950s and 1960s for their roles in disciplinary history. Lauer responded that the panelists were offering oral histories, hers on the work of developing graduate programs. You see here early signs of generational divergence: older scholars trying to enrich histories with their reminiscences (and affectively, to be appreciated for their work); newer ones eager to complicate accounts of the field’s origin. Each makes legitimate points, but they’re talking past one another. Ironically, each accuses the other of discounting the work of previous generations. Lauer also makes explicit a

tacit generational dynamic she criticizes: “scholarship that launches itself by denigrating or misrepresenting previous work” (“Response” 253).

The wave of retirements that gathered steam around 2009, coupled with crises and pressures on younger cohorts in higher education, set the stage for the emergence of self-identified generational identity groups. These have tended to polarize at opposite ends of the age spectrum, obscuring the rest of the generational span. Seniors and graduate student groups have sought ways to assert their identity and support their interests in organizations, collectives, advocacy spaces, research, and narratives. These include, for seniors, the Standing Group for Senior, Late Career, and Retired Professionals in RCWS (see Pinkert and Bowen; Bowen and Pinkert); for graduate students, nextGEN, Digital Black Lit and Composition (often DBLAC), Writing Program Administrators–Graduate Organization (often WPA-GO) and Writing Across the Curriculum–Graduate Organization (often WAC-GO), and GenAdmin (Charlton et al.). Younger generations have foregrounded horizontal and peer mentoring over traditional mentoring (Browdy et al).<sup>3</sup>

When “generation” becomes a social identity for groups, many forces of divergence operate to separate them, as illustrated by the recent controversy around the WPA listserv and the nextGen response (Kumari et al; Beare; WPA-L Reimagining Working Group and nextGen Start Up Team; Glotfelter and Tham). However, in RCWS forces for convergence also seek to balance those of divergence among generations.

## **Lens**

### *Generational Identification/Identities*

Generation matters, beyond its role in disciplinary history and professional identity: it’s a lens we can turn on almost any phenomena we study, tools we use, and activities we engage in (see Yancey’s “Notes on Intergenerational Exchanges”). If our sense of generation develops from the nexus of age and time with individual, cohort, and historical context, its scope of application is potentially enormous. For example, writing instruction is a classic site of intergenerational relations, but these can’t be isolated from the complex web of generational identities and relations that every teacher and learner participates in across and outside schooling. I’m proposing we open that whole span to disciplinary inquiry.<sup>4</sup>

It’s impossible to ignore a lens once it becomes salient, but we need to deploy it with caution. While “generation/al” is useful as a generic term, it’s ambiguous (among many kinds of “generations”) and, when referring to disciplinary generations in our field, difficult to apply precisely.

“Generation” is laminated (see Prior); individuals participate in multiple generational systems that are foregrounded or backgrounded in particular situations and are reconstructed and renegotiated continually over the lifespan. Individuals entering a discipline are already generationally identified in their families and in popular culture (“social generations” like “Generation X”) and potentially in other life activities (like chess or sports) that are organized by an age and time-based nexus. These identities, intermingling and influencing one another, acquire reality from both external (systemic/sociocultural) and (inter)subjective (phenomenological) perspectives. To add to the complexity, generational and other social identities are intersectional, as evidenced by Martin J. Finkelstein et al.’s research on a “new generation” of faculty defined by demographic change (more diverse in race/ethnicity, nativity, and gender).

Keeping in mind that generational analysis has to account for these laminations and complex interminglings, how can we identify our field’s disciplinary generations? In popular culture, “generation” typically refers to individuals born within a span of dates, who share experience of transformational events (World War II, the digital revolution) and/or a cultural milieu during formative years: i.e., it places an individual by an intersection of age (birth cohort), time, and historical worlds. Generational talk in our field (“I’m a fourth-generation scholar”) has tacitly assumed an analogous nexus for disciplinary identity. In a traditional career arc, elements in the nexus align predictably: individuals enter through PhDs in the discipline, which frame a generation defined by age (youth), era in the field, and a cohort moving forward collectively up the academic ladder. Alternately, “generation” is sometimes rendered as descent: a mentor lineage or successive cohorts in a doctoral program.

But do these ways of identifying disciplinary generations work for RCWS careers? Consider the field’s membership. As Pinkert and Bowen demonstrate, RCWS scholars are atypical in their status and relationship to the academy and their heterogeneous career patterns. RCWS careers deviate from the presumed norm by scholars’ routes *into* the discipline and *through* their careers: crucially for generational identity, in terms of credentialing and timing.<sup>5</sup> The reasons include such historical disciplinary features as the labor situation with respect to First Year Writing; the gender imbalance (feminized); the role of community colleges; the recency of the discipline’s doctoral programs; the role of administrative work; and relations (of training or experience) with other disciplines or external workplaces. Despite growing more like other disciplines in many respects, RCWS careers still display these anomalies, some even exacerbated by recent trends in higher education, in patterns of labor inside the academy and work in disciplinary spaces outside it.

It’s clear that no single model can be used to identify generations of RCWS professionals (not just faculty) without falsifying this complexity. The nexus-

based or genealogical models apply best to the elite who participate directly in vertical networks at research universities: they acquire their generational identity from doctoral programs and mentors and then educate the next cohort of scholars. (With social media and digital communication among graduate students, their nextGen cohort identity now transcends local programs.) But many RCWS careers, in their temporal messiness and unpredictable trajectories, don't fit traditional models, and even those that do may not look so conventional when closely examined.

Without consistent ways to distinguish disciplinary RCWS generations, generational research will need to adopt perspectives and choose criteria to fit methods to a particular purpose, situation, historical moment, or research question (see Urick). Examples might include point of entry/time working in the discipline; major shifts in scholarship, as in feminism's generational "waves"; or a transformative event.<sup>6</sup>

Such definitions may or may not correlate with RCWS scholars' *experiences* of generational identity. But it is phenomenological and intersubjective perspectives that matter in addressing intergenerational relations. We know generational consciousness has risen in our field, but it remains an empirical question exactly how and when RCWS scholars ascribe generational identities to themselves and others, and which identities are salient enough to articulate and act on as a group. Unsurprisingly, the voices heard most clearly about generational identity come from those who, by following privileged routes into or through the profession, have greater access to its public written and oral venues. Otherwise, generational consciousness seems to be largely binary—oldest vs. newest. The many individuals who fall in-between or outside these groups may have a very fuzzy sense of generational boundaries or disciplinary location. That means we need more nuanced understandings of generational experience to develop multigenerational models for justice and care that apply to all members of the field.

### *Generational Relations*

Despite all this, scholars do have some sense of generational identification that informs their thinking: for example, in a 2022 CCCC panel on intergenerational exchange, scholars identified themselves as "early career," "mid-career," "late career," or "retired" ("Mutuality"). I find it helpful to distinguish generational relations as follows, building on generation's generic sense.

- Intergenerational: refers to exchanges and relations among distinct groups or individuals experiencing their generational identity as salient in relationships. An *intergroup* perspective on generational relations highlights processes like "(group-based) categorization,

social comparison, self- and other-stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination” (Williams and Nussbaum 10), but generational groups (and interpersonal relations interpreted generationally) have the potential for convergence (emphasizing commonalities, reciprocal benefits, complementarity) as well as divergence (emphasizing difference, antagonism, conflict).

- Transgenerational: understands a discipline as analogous to a polity (Thompson) in which members’ sense of belonging to a community transcends their own experience/lives in it, so that they accept duties—“relations of obligation and entitlement”—to those who precede and follow them: “they are heirs to a legacy that is the work of many generations and they will in turn provide an inheritance for their successors” (2).
- Cross-generational: an aspirational category for productive, respectful relationships among co-temporal generational groups belonging to a transgenerational scholarly community, which recognize and enact interdependence but allow for a wide range of relations and strategies of interaction, along a spectrum from convergence to divergence. In scholarly communication, individuals engage in transgenerational exchanges that can extend these relationships (and mutual duties) beyond the bounds of contemporaneous lives.

## Tone

In her famous 1984 article on composition as a dappled discipline (“Composition”), and reaffirmed 30 years later (Vealey and Rivers 175-77), Lauer described the field’s “tone” as a distinctive feature: a mutually respectful, collegial ethos that has survived counterforces of discord as the field developed and diversified. Her examples of tone cast it in generational terms, for example, contrasting “new work that builds on previous work” with the adversarial tone of new scholars “carv[ing] out niches for themselves by enlarging loopholes in previous work” (“Composition” 27-28). And her claim for this tone in composition (RCWS) roots it in a transgenerational sense of community, one in which successive generations are invested in the past and future of a continuing, shared project of disciplinary inquiry and learning.

Lauer’s discussion offers a discipline-specific precedent—and “tone” as a useful shorthand—for exploring qualities of cross-generational relations in the field. I defined a category of “cross-generational” relations earlier as aspirational: imagining an authentic attempt by generationally identified individuals and groups to engage in relations across the spectrum from divergence to convergence in mutually productive ways. This formulation acknowledges the

necessary role of both divergence and convergence in scholarly interactions and discourse, treating these forms of relationship as ethically neutral (i.e., I don't equate Lauer's "tone" with convergence).<sup>7</sup>

I asked myself, what resources does the discipline have to develop concepts and strategies for cross-generational relations? I'll answer this question differently for two means and contexts for enacting cross-generational relations: embodied, material action and scholarly discourse (meaning here exchanges among scholars over primarily textual, but also oral public inquiry).<sup>8</sup> However, as an overall framework for analyzing both contexts I'm adopting the concept of "hospitality" as developed by Richard and Janis Haswell, originally for pedagogical relations (teacher/learner, writer/reader). Its foundation is a traditional notion of hospitality as a reciprocal relation of friendly welcome, mutual respect, dialogue, and exchange of gifts between stranger-host and stranger-guest, who treat each other as equal in dignity, potential, and human worth, despite inequalities (asymmetry) between them.<sup>9</sup> The "[r]ules governing the traditional relations between guest and host included swapping of information, unspoken assumption of social equality, unspoken assumption of the equal validity of differing customs, and a respect for privacy" (*Authoring* 261). The Haswells specify three postures of hospitality: intellectual, which welcomes reciprocal learning through exchange of ideas, experiences, and perspectives; transformative, whereby host and guest both willingly risk being destabilized and transformed by their exchanges; and *ubuntu*, through which host and guest recognize in each other a common humanity that transcends differences of identity, experience, and culture (*Hospitality* 8, 53-55). From their rich, complex elaboration of this idea I've selected a list of features I will draw on to characterize a "hospitable tone" in cross-generational relations:

- the roles of host and guest: upon first encounter, they meet as strangers; relation is asymmetrical; roles are reversible (in an encounter or over time), can evolve beyond hospitality into long-term relationships
- mutual respect: despite asymmetry, host and guest meet as equals (valuing one another's "singularity" and "potentiality": see *Authoring* for more on these concepts)
- disidentification: valuing difference but "looking through social identities to the singular Other" (*Hospitality* 14)
- exchange of gifts, including information/ideas/knowledge/learning
- hospitable spirit (attitude, disposition, ambience): generous, open, compassionate; creates a sense of "ease" to enable risk-taking.<sup>10</sup>

## Action

To examine how hospitality operates in action—embodied, material modes of cross-generational interaction and exchange—my resource is disciplinary practice: specifically, evidence of practices in RCWS that exemplify *beneficence* in generational relations, meaning actions that advance the interests and well-being of the other (generational group or individual).<sup>11</sup> Broadly, such actions may be regarded as gift-giving, but they also include affective components of hospitality in action like empathetic listening. I'm borrowing this definition from medical ethics, where, usefully, beneficence is paired with a concept of nonmaleficence (do no harm) as well as two other principles relevant to hospitality: autonomy (respect for persons) and justice (Varkey; Bester). Unlike the doctor-patient model, though, in the hospitality framework beneficence is expected of both host and guest— reciprocal between generations.

RCWS has a historical claim to a habitus of beneficent or hospitable action directed toward others (cross-generationally) in two modes: group to group and individual to individual (although the line between them blurs: “the interindividual-intergroup split. . . [is] a dialectic that is continuously in play across all our interactions [Williams and Nussbaum 288]).

The group to group examples I'm thinking of are the plenitude of means by which the (host) field welcomes and supports emergent scholars (as strangers) to the field through a variety of material and symbolic means, sponsored by professional organizations and their sub-groups or affiliates. The “gifts” offered to younger generations by groups like the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Rhetoric Society of America (RSA), the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), and the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) have been steadily increasing over the years. They include grants for research, career advancement, and travel; recognition through awards; workshops, institutes, and meetings (orientation, welcome, group mentoring) targeted toward newcomers; opportunities for in-person and virtual dialogue; and access to positions in professional organizations. Most of these efforts (presupposing a traditional career arc) focus on early career stages; very little generational help has been offered for later career stages or alternate forms of advancement (one exception is the RSA Career Retreat for Associate Professors).

Although these forms of beneficent action may appear to be one-way gifts (from elders to younger generations), they exemplify hospitality because there is an exchange of benefits within the common project of building a transgenerational community. Broadly, older generations (as noted earlier) are invested in sustaining the field through recruiting and supporting new members, especially in their own lines of work and specialties. Besides continuity, they also

have a futurist interest in encouraging innovation and change, in part through diversifying people and ideas entering the field.

I must acknowledge, of course, counterexamples of maleficent intergenerational actions in RCWS, although these are hard to distinguish from endemic (and interdisciplinary) academic practices of inhospitable behaviors, ranging from exclusion, exploitation, deception, and incivility to bullying (Elder and Davila). Although multidirectional, such behaviors often exploit age-related inequities in rank, power, and authority. Recently, as senior and very junior groups have begun to identify themselves generationally and pursue divergent strategies, there is a potential for intergenerational conflict or competition to become negative in tone and consequences.

However, divergence is a necessary predicate to forming generational identities, and it has potentially positive benefits. Divergent strategies like separation and competition, used to express a group identity and pursue common goals, can be healthy elements of cross-generational relations as long as they remain nonmaleficent. (Indeed, relations within a generational group can be hospitable, as in peer-to-peer mentoring and horizontal networks.) But overall, in generational group relations, convergent actions tend to outweigh divergent ones, if we look at the historic patterns within our professional sites of interaction. I suggest multiple reasons for this:

1. RCWS members do share a transgenerational intellectual project and community, which is the basis (according to Thompson) of a rational, life-time transcending interest in transgenerational justice.
2. Age, as many observe, is a unique kind of social identity in that it isn't fixed: it is reconstructed (indeed, transformed) constantly as individuals and cohorts pass through the same phases of aging as their predecessors: in effect, becoming the "other[s]." In Ruth Ray Karpen's words, "unlike race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other cultural categories that divide us, age is the one thing that unites us all . . . For the benefit of both society and the individual, young people need to learn to see old people as a mirror of their future selves" (55).
3. As Karpen affirms, generational groups are intrinsically interdependent, complementary in their changing needs and interests and the gifts they can offer each other.

This interdependence among generations isn't just practical. There is a hospitable disposition toward dialogue, mutual caring (even caregiving), and affective bonds among professional generations, as with familial ones. This disposition is present, but more abstract in group to group beneficence than

in direct interpersonal relations, which I will exemplify in our disciplinary practice by mentoring, as depicted in the collection *Stories of Mentoring* (Eble and Gaillet). In documenting the scope and variety of their mentoring experiences, contributors enlarge and transform the traditional apprentice model of this relationship. I see this collection as a capacious representation of the host-guest relationship in all its complexities, risks, potential corruption, and—at best—profound mutual value. It shows how, unlike beneficent group action in RCWS, still largely flowing one-way, the field’s interpersonal concept of mentoring has evolved to aspire to the host-guest relation in its mutuality and reciprocity, as well as in many other qualities: asymmetry but equality of worth; reversibility of roles; respect for persons in their singularity and potential; friendly, welcoming spirit; and the capability of developing into deeper relations as colleague, friend, collaborator. Although much mentoring remains one-on-one, the host-guest framework is modified in this reimaged practice to multiply relationships in collaboration and mentoring networks and, generationally, to recognize mentoring as multidirectional: peer-to-peer and vertical; multigenerational rather than binary (see Eble and Gaillet, “Reinscribing”).

Krista Ratcliffe and Donna Decker Schuster’s chapter lays out a non-utopian case for pragmatic interdependence: in which mentoring “effects are envisioned as flowing in all directions and benefiting everyone involved, albeit in different ways and to different degrees” (248). By recognizing differentials (asymmetries) in experience and power, “commonalities and differences among people become visible and serve as sites of agency” through interdependence: i.e., “everyone may learn how one’s own agency arises in conjunction with the agencies of other people and institutional structures” (248–49). But many chapters in *Stories of Mentoring* (as well as responses from younger scholars to seniors in *Talking Back*) demonstrate the bonds of affection that arise cross-generationally when their interchanges are conducted in a hospitable spirit—generous, caring, with humility and ease. Looking at mentoring alongside group to group action tells us that beneficent action in the field needs to become more thoroughly multigenerational, multidirectional, and fully reciprocal in dispensing care and justice. In particular, both middle generations and seniors, who are subject to ageism in the broader culture (and the academy), need attention to their practical and affective needs as well as appreciation and opportunities to offer benefits to other generations.

Much of what I’ve described here reflects personal experience in watching generational identity groups cycle through divergence and convergence, reflecting emergent understandings of their interdependence and desire for communication and connection. The SIG I co-founded (now SGSLR)—originally for retirees but soon broadened to encompass late career and senior professionals—has benefited (like other identity groups) from the divergent

strategy of separation: articulating its distinctive identity and pursuing its own “special interests” and needs. But the SIG quickly realized that seniors couldn’t thrive purely as an enclave, so they sought out other generations for interactions and mutual help (compare nextGEN founders’ comments in Glotfelter and Tham’s interview). From this grew the X-Gen project, whose task force report lays out a menu of ideas for pursuing cross-generational connections and communication (CCCC Task Force). It began strikingly in 2013 with a CCCC “cross-generational conversation,” in which Shelley Rodrigo and I asked people sitting at cross-generational tables to compile lists of what they wanted from and could offer to other generations. As participants left the room, they stopped to exclaim how much they enjoyed this rare opportunity to meet (hospitably) and encouraged us to pursue both further conversations and the practical action items they had proposed. Unfortunately, this agenda has so far had too little uptake, given major disruptive events and urgent concerns that have recently taken up all the disciplinary attention space. But there are local projects like the BRAWN network (see Brereton and Gannett), as well as the Spring 2021 issue of *Composition Studies*. The opportunity remains, and the desire: in Zhaozhe Wang’s words, “I do not think we as a disciplinary community have done enough to frame our trans-generational exchanges around the notion of ‘partnership’ and foster trans-generational collegiality. . . . We wish for more” (161-163).

### **Scholarly Discourse**

The field’s resources for examining intergenerational relations and defining hospitality in scholarly discourse are almost limitless: virtually all of rhetorical theory offers relevant concepts. In a kind of strange loop, much rhetorical scholarship has been devoted to debates over convergent vs. divergent models of scholarly exchange, especially as they intersect with feminist controversies over argumentation as violent or agonistic vs. peaceful or dialogic. But these seem to have reached an impasse (see Lloyd). The same is true in a parallel argument within academic feminism regarding models for generational relations; for example, Kathleen Woodward rejects a Freudian, two-generation-model based on “struggle for dominion” for a three-generation maternal “heritage of care for the next generation” (151-52), but ultimately decides to move away from familial models entirely and calls for alternate models. Host-guest relations in hospitality offer such an alternative, which has the advantage of allowing for both convergent and divergent modes of generational relationships (and was originally applied by the Haswells to writer-reader relations). Like Lloyd, I want to account for the fact that vigorous conflict is an essential feature of intellectual networks, which test ideas against one another in a limited attention space (Collins); but so is the dependence of new schol-

arship on prior scholarship, whether building on its findings and concepts or critiquing them. Convergence can be synergistic, but it also risks stagnation if it doesn't challenge the status quo: "conflict. . . can be fundamental to rendering possible processes of social change and innovation" (Valentim 594). Scholarly discourse, therefore, needs to operate flexibly across the range from convergence to divergence, allowing for (in Lloyd's words) "articulations of possibility, openness, community, as well as expressions of frustration, antagonism, and group identity" (103). In C. Jan Swearingen's wonderful phrasing, "She who would speak must speak (*eiro*) irenically at times, eristically at others, elenchically with some opponents, maieutically with the young and tender hearted, and inescapably with the irony of those who believe in the incompleteness and incommunicability of thought that relentlessly necessitates dialogue" (158).

The question of hospitality in scholarly discourse becomes, then, not how to balance or choose between divergence and convergence, but how scholars engage one another in either mode—in what spirit or tone. That is really the crux of objections to what Lloyd calls "dichoto-negative rhetoric": not the mere fact of conflict but the way it dismisses and disrespects other scholars and their work in service of "winning" the competition for intellectual dominance. (That goal is often tacitly generational, as both Lloyd and Lauer imply.) Lloyd's proposal for applying a fuzzy, multivalent logic to reading other scholars' work is a pragmatic methodological solution to cultivating openness and reducing the potential for inhospitable tone. But principles of hospitality run deeper than critical method.

At heart, the "moral axis" (Haswell and Haswell, "Hospitality," 17) of an ethic of hospitality is treating the Other as an embodied person, with all that implies: understanding each unique human being as on a trajectory of learning and becoming, filled with rich potential for growth and change. Risking themselves in scholarly writing makes persons vulnerable, which is why hospitality asks more of us than respect or even civility; its welcoming spirit offers kindness, openness, concern for the other's well-being. That is what Alexandra Hidalgo is asking for (and trying to practice) in responding to a *College English* article about the work of herself and her colleagues: "I want you . . . to know that real human beings with lives and families are affected by the words we write and that those human beings feel wounded when we express ourselves in ways that unkindly portray them or their work (2-3). In teaching graduate students, she tells them, when citing and discussing another scholar's work, "to imagine that they are sitting across from that person, uttering the very words they wrote about them and holding their gaze, seeing their reactions as their words settle. At some point, they are likely to end up at some committee, panel or dinner with any living person they cite" (6-7).

Written scholarly discourse is inherently inter-generational because, unlike generational actions, which typically occur in the here and now among living scholars, it extends scholars' "meetings" outside the temporal bounds of co-presence. Scholars encountering one another as host and guest, writer and reader, are not co-present in time and, in fact, their texts transcend their own lifetime, as well as other boundaries like discipline and place. So, thinking trans-generationally, we need to revise Hidalgo's advice to mean acting "as if" the textual encounter could become an in-person meeting—and to take into account, even for living scholars, their lives over time. But the conventions of written scholarship make it hard for writers and readers—as hospitality requires—to perceive and address one another as unfinished persons with unrealized potential, that is, as living and changing. The present tense used in citing scholars fixes their work—and the scholar-author—in a timeless space that becomes identified with the current moment in which it is read and cited. This convention leads to a double erasure of cited scholars as living in time: first, from the life course perspective, as human beings whose thought is shaped by their generational location in history and the exigence of a historical moment of writing; second, as authors who continue writing and developing as scholars, unpredictably, after a time-bound piece of their thinking becomes public. Like the light from stars, a scholar's words reach us only over time; by then, they are already speaking for that person's former self.

The gifts that writers and readers of different generations can bring to one another depend, in part, on these very differences in their relation to time and history: as the Haswells put it, the guest "promises news from a different world—the world of a different generation, age, gender, class, or ethnicity, and the world of that singular person's experiences, hopes, mullings, insights, and interpretations" (*Hospitality* 54).

"One way or another, we all live intergenerational exchange; it's how we live it, and what we learn from it, that matters" (Yancey 168). Knowing what hospitality expects of us is one thing; living it consistently in times of great tension and stress is another. When practicing it becomes most difficult, I remind myself of these precepts—passed on to me by a former student from her mentor—posted in my office: "BE FAIR. BE KIND. BE BRAVE."

## Notes

1. The terms "convergence" vs. "divergence" are attributed by Angie Williams and Jon F. Nussbaum to communication studies, where they describe how people accommodate others' communication styles, but Joaquim Pires Valentim uses divergence as I do, more broadly, to discuss intergroup relations.

2. For graduate courses in 2014 and 2017, I collected alternate histories. I see many as fractal representations of the field, since even the most local, micro-level, or

specialized claim a relationship to the field as a whole. A growing number of alternate histories seek to historicize the contributions, experiences, and rhetorics of groups defined by their social identities (race and ethnicity, gender, ability, sexuality, and so on). Others view the whole through a particular lens, e.g., technology, instructional programs, labor, research methods.

3. My 1995 FEN article “Reproducing Composition and Rhetoric” anticipated and argued for cross-institutional networking among graduate students to overcome the apparent incommensurability of visions of the discipline expressed in their doctoral programs. I hoped then that the Consortium of Doctoral Programs in Rhetoric and Composition could play a facilitative role in “creating collegiality horizontally among graduate students so that they will not encounter one another as strangers but will reproduce the discipline as a human community linked across programs, institutions, and differences by discourse, common information, intellectual exchanges, collaborative projects, and friendships” (125). Instead, those networks have developed organically as an expression of generational consciousness and identity.

4. This reflection on “generation” as a lens is based on my own observations, but working on this essay introduced me to sources of theory and research on intergroup relations (Ana Figuerido et al.; Valentim), generational identity (Urick), and intergenerational communication (Barker et al.; Williams and Nussbaum) that could prove fruitful for the discipline’s future research on generational identity and relations.

5. One of the five principles of life course theory is timing: “The developmental antecedents and consequences of life transitions, events, and behavioral patterns vary according to their timing in a person’s life,” (Elder, Jr.) such as the timing of motherhood or military service relative to education or professional advancement; the timing of life transitions relative to age-norms or to disruptive social, economic, or technological change. Timing (relations among age, life stages, credentialing, and positions) is often unconventional in RCWS careers, including my own.

6. See Marek Kwiek’s study of academic generations in Poland before and after the fall of communism in 1989. One can imagine studying pre- and post-Covid pandemic RCWS generations.

7. My view of the roles played by divergence and convergence in scholarly (specifically, generational) relations is influenced by the complementary views of Randall Collins and Mary Catherine Bateson regarding how intellectual networks function: see Phelps, “Ottawa” 66-68.

8. Scholarly discourse in this sense is only a subset of all the professional discourse we engage in, including the discourse required to accomplish actions. Everyday professional discourse in departments, organizations, and across digital space has major issues with tone (it could benefit from a hospitality ethic), but falls outside my parameters here, generational relations among scholars in the discipline.

9. The Haswells’ idea of hospitality as an “asymmetrical” relation is complex. I take this to mean, first, the intrinsic nature of the host’s role as insider welcoming outsider; but, more deeply, that human relationships always involve inequalities (i.e., lack perfect symmetry) in multiple respects (age, social status, rank, power, expertise, experience, empathy).

10. “Ease” translates Giorgio Agamben’s term “*agio*”: “ease, opportunity, coziness”; hospitality sets people at ease by giving others “elbow-room” to learn, change, realize their potential (Haswell and Haswell, *Hospitality* 178-180).

11. I’m following Johan Christiaan Bester in viewing beneficence as a hybrid concept, incorporating the views of both host and guest as to what constitutes the beneficiary’s interests or well-being.

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