

U7+ Intergenerational Roundtables

Part One: Climate Change, Inequities and Intergenerational Justice
Co-hosted by Georgetown University and the University of Cape Town
Convened by Northwestern University and the U7+ Student Leaders Board
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This spring, 80+ students, faculty, and staff from 20+ universities in several different countries came together virtually at [the first U7+ Intergenerational Roundtable](#) to discuss climate change, inequality, and intergenerational justice. This roundtable was co-hosted by Georgetown University and the University of Cape Town, and convened by Northwestern University and the U7+ Student Leadership Council.

The event was originally scheduled for April 2021 but was postponed due to the fires that affected the University of Cape Town not far from the South African capital. As Tom Banchoff, the moderator of Georgetown University, said: "The University of Cape Town has our full solidarity in the face of the crisis and its consequences.

The U7+ Alliance is a network of global universities (40+ institutions) whose presidents met for the first time in Paris in 2019 and then again virtually last year. The idea for a series of three U7+ intergenerational roundtables was conceived by student leaders within the U7+ who convened a [U7+ 2020 Global Student Forum](#) last year. This idea was endorsed by university presidents at the U7+ Summit in November 2020.

The U7+ Intergenerational Roundtable began with presentations of general perspectives from faculty and students at the co-hosting universities. Next, all participants broke into fourteen small groups of four to six people to have discussions moderated by U7+ student leaders. Finally, all participants came together to share a summary of each of the fourteen small discussions. Here are some takeaways and recommendations from the first intergenerational roundtable:

- **Climate change is a problem that is already occurring today, and is no longer in the distant future.** As mentioned in Professor Joanna Lewis' presentation, scientists report that 2020-30 is the pivotal decade for addressing climate change to avoid further disastrous impacts of climate change that unevenly affect developing countries (e.g., like the fire that affected the University of Cape Town in South Africa a month ago). Participants discussed having a balance between planning for the future without losing sight of climate change as a problem today. "Thinking too far ahead can cloud the way we think about our generation. The earth is already in worse shape than it has ever been in the past," the students said.
- **Promoting transparency, respect, and open communication must be a priority.** As mentioned in the presentations by Koale Monaheng and Tyler Booth, transparency and respect for the voice of developing countries in particular is essential to putting forward effective policies. Students agreed that "it is important to make our efforts visible" in order to inspire, motivate and inform others.
- **We need to move away from the compromise mentality of climate change and towards an opportunity mentality.** Instead of focusing solely on economic issues, participants suggested taking a values-based approach implemented through sustainability education at all levels of learning. "This values-based approach is present in family dynamics and small community engagement, which is worth examining," they said.
- **We must strive to include many different people at the decision-making table in an equitable, diverse, and inclusive manner.** That is, different countries, backgrounds, ages, intersectionality, intergenerational, as mentioned in Olivia Kleiner's presentation. The exchange between different countries and ages adds to the quality of the information and will allow us to have different angles and perspectives to address the climate change challenge. "Youth must also be included in the decision-making process. It's not just about making them a side panel but involving them in the details of the decision-making process," participants proposed.

- **Suggestion to create U7+ funds and scholarships to support action.** According to students, faculty, and staff at several universities, U7+ should offer fellowships on climate change and the intergenerational future could help motivate and help others to get involved in their local communities. As well as U7+ can create a fund for low-income countries to finance climate initiatives. "A major effort comes from students, but also from the administration to create that first intergenerational connection," participants say.
- **Different levels of education need to be addressed.** This includes education at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, but also even higher levels of diplomacy and those who make important decisions. It is not only important to teach that we need to save the planet, but also to teach them skills and approaches (e.g., how to interact with policy, interact with the decision-making process). "We need to get youth to understand the decision-making process early so they can participate early to share their concerns," participants said.
- **Enforcement from a legal perspective.** Participants discussed the contentiousness of law and climate as a means to protect our generation and future generations. There are many different types of justice involved in climate change, as mentioned by Professor Britta Rennkamp.
- **More interdisciplinary research is needed.** Both in terms of perspectives in academia, but also integrating other stakeholders (i.e. policy makers, civil society groups). This needs to be done earlier upstream to help the later downstream effects. "More research is needed both to talk about the danger of our current approach, but also about solutions for moving forward." say participants.

The second intergenerational roundtable will be held on June 16, 2021 and will discuss [social science to address the global gender gap](#).

