The most typical way to think about demographics is to consider distributions of the characteristics of people and to look at those distributions in a comparative sense across either time or location. In the United States, the demographic trends are found through the national census completed each decade and through the tracking of other research centers. Consider a few recent trends, many drawn from results of the 2010 U.S. Census:

- The United States is anticipated to be a "majority minority" nation by 2050. This shift is driven especially by the growth in the Hispanic population, which has been steadily increasing through both immigration and reproduction patterns. By 2050, it is estimated that the Hispanic portion of the U.S. population will grow to as high as 29% ("A Milestone en Route to a Majority Minority," 2012).
- Married couples now constitute less than half of all American households, and only one fifth of households are the traditional image of married couples with children. This pattern marks a sharp contrast to the middle of the twentieth century—in 1950, 78% of households included married couples and 43% of households were traditional nuclear families ("Married Couples Are No Longer a Majority," 2011). Interestingly, though, U.S. household size has grown because of the increase in multigenerational households ("Census 2010: Household Size Trends," 2011).
- The rural U.S. population is now the lowest it has ever been—16% now compared to 72% a century ago. In contrast, a third of Americans live in cities and over half of Americans live in suburbs. The fastest-growing places in America are small cities in the suburbs of large metro areas in the Sunbelt region ("Rural U.S. population lowest in history," 2011).
- In 1930, 5.4% of the U.S. population was 65 years or older; by 2007, the number more than doubled to 12.6% of the population. It is anticipated that by the year 2050, more than 20% of the U.S. population will be 65 or older ("Statistics on Aging," Administration on Aging, 2007).

In terms of sheer description, then, the United States is a dramatically different place than it was in decades past, and these different descriptors of who we are, where we live, who we live with, and how long we live lead to dramatically different experiences as we encounter organizations and communicate in them. For example, consider the issue of age. Scholars often divide populations into **generational cohorts** that indicate similarities in birth year and associated similarities in experience (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Thus, my mother's experiences as a member of the "World War II Cohort" are very different from mine as a member of the "Late Baby Boomer Cohort" or my daughter's as a member of the "Millennial Cohort." In terms of work experience, members of the World War II Cohort are known for dependability, long-term employment, and relationships with organized labor. Members of my cohort are known for their ambition but also their cynicism. Members of my daughter's generation are coming to be known as technologically savvy but also a bit spoiled in the ways of work. Clearly, a similar demographic analysis could be applied to ethnicity, family structure, social class, or household location.