



# A Booklet of Interactive Exercises to Explore Our Differences

Created by the University Committee for Diversity,  
Equity and Affirmative Action

October 14, 2011

## Introduction for Instructors

This booklet of exercises was designed after members of the Diversity Committee attended a two-day inclusive diversity training in January 2011. The initial goal was to prepare exercises to help train other members of the committee who could not attend the training, and to prepare all of us to offer similar workshops to the campus community at large.

The exercises within come from various sources-some inspired by the workshop we attended, some modified from the materials found on the internet or in dialogue with diversity experts, and some created on our own. All the exercises have been discussed and modified by the Diversity committee, which is committed to revising them further with feedback from future instructors and participants. We see this as a dynamic collection, which anyone can add to or offer suggestions about. While the exercises are intended to be offered sequentially for our diversity training workshop, they can be used individually as well, in classrooms, department meetings, and other group situations.

To ensure safe and effective use of these exercises, we offer the following guidelines.

The instructor should...

- have personally participated in the exercise prior to leading a group.
- feel comfortable with the exercise and leading the discussions it's likely to generate.
- feel comfortable with the group to which they are presenting.
- have a clear set of goals in mind that relate to the intent and scope of the group. That is, there should be an appropriate context for the exercises.

In general, we feel that the goal of these exercises is to stimulate productive dialogue about topics that are often difficult to talk about and about which people often make assumptions.

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This booklet offers a number of activities that can be used with any group to start a dialogue about differences in human experience, before dealing with more challenging issues of diversity such as oppression, inequality, prejudice, etc.

The goal is not to avoid those realities, but to offer an easier way to get us to think and talk about people who are different than us. These exercises can be used in classes, as part of ice breakers, for employee training, or to foster interaction with any group. You can use one exercise, several, or all of them together, though they generally get more challenging as they progress.

Our supposition is that diversity workshops can be viewed with resistance, fear, and/or the belief that those participating have nothing to learn. Instead, this model posits that any group or individual has diverse beliefs and attributes within them, and when faced with contradictions, in a non-confrontational setting, they will be more willing to use their insight and creativity to explore an issue or solve a problem. With this in mind, we gathered exercises that are intended to be:

<b>Active</b>	Participants <i>do</i> something, rather than simply talking about an issue or be talked to.
<b>Fun and intellectually challenging.</b>	Participants focus on tasks that do not directly confront their beliefs, but instead ask them to make choices using their intellectual and creative skills.
<b>Short and relatively easy to teach.</b>	Each exercise can be completed by participants in a short period of time and is designed to allow for discussion afterwards.
<b>Designed to learn about diverse perspectives.</b>	The focus of the exercises is positive, to better understand our differences in how we see the world rather than focusing on conflicts.
<b>Designed to solve puzzles, rather than lecture.</b>	The exercises require critical thinking and puzzle solving.
<b>Interactive.</b>	During the exercise or after, the group interacts, sharing experiences and insights.

We hope that this booklet of exercises is a helpful resource for allowing your class or group to view our differences in a positive way and create a more interactive, supportive environment.

Finally, there is a short survey in the back of this booklet. We would like you to share with us your experiences in using this booklet. Did it accomplish what we said? How can we improve the exercises?

Thank you for using this tool. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

***The University Committee for Diversity, Equity and Affirmative Action for AY 2010-2012***

## Exercise Listing

<u>Exercise</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Exercise #1	Disability Quiz	5-6
Exercise #2	Diversity Profile	7
Exercise #3	A Step Above	8-9
<b><i>Advanced Exercises</i></b> <b><i>(Additional time may be needed for discussion)</i></b>		
Exercise #4	Origin of Difference	11
Exercise #5	Crossing the Line	12-13
Exercise #6	The Common Body	14

## Exercise #1: The Disability Quiz

Place an X next to the conditions that you think represent a disability:

1. \_\_\_ You need to wear glasses.
2. \_\_\_ You do not speak the language in the country you are in.
3. \_\_\_ You are an adult who is 3.5 feet tall.
4. \_\_\_ You are an adult who is 7.5 feet tall.
5. \_\_\_ You weigh 100 pounds over your recommended height.
6. \_\_\_ You are out of shape and cannot run more than a block or climb more than a flight of stairs.
7. \_\_\_ You read slowly.
8. \_\_\_ You can't type.
9. \_\_\_ You're a poor speller.
10. \_\_\_ You don't know how to cook.
11. \_\_\_ You don't know how to read a map.
12. \_\_\_ You are HIV positive but have no symptoms.
13. \_\_\_ You stutter.
14. \_\_\_ You are afraid to leave your house or talk to strangers.
15. \_\_\_ You cannot drive a car.
16. \_\_\_ You are 93.
17. \_\_\_ You are 6 months old.
18. \_\_\_ You are addicted to a drug.
19. \_\_\_ Your leg is broken.
20. \_\_\_ You have an eating disorder.
21. \_\_\_ You are allergic to common things, like grass, or cats or dogs.
22. \_\_\_ You are female.
23. \_\_\_ You are male.

After filling in the worksheet, discuss how participants determined their answers. Are there different kinds of disability? Do some seem less socially acceptable than others? Do we think of some traits that make us unable to function as normal and others as not? Does a disability depend on how well our society adjusts to peoples' needs? Can you come up with a working definition of disability based on this survey? (It might be harder than you think!)

## Exercise #2: Diversity Profile

**Directions:** Put a check (✓) in all the appropriate boxes

In my environment,		White	Black/ African American	Hispanic	Asian	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Hawaiian Native or Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	LGBTQ	Disabled	Veteran	Male	Female
1	I am													
2	My Co-workers are													
3	My supervisor is													
4	My elementary school was predominately													
5	My teachers were mostly													
6	Most of my close friends are													
7	My dentist is													
8	My doctor is													
9	Other people who live in my home													
10	People who regularly visit my home													
11	My neighbors are													

**Discussion points:**

- This matrix can tell you a lot about your surroundings.
- Often, people find that their intercultural experiences are clustered; in the residence halls for instance. They often also are passive (one-way) and not interactive.
- Having this information on paper allows us to use them in new ways. Few other events force us to take stock of our multicultural interchanges.
- Most people don't bring this information into their consciousness. They subconsciously are convinced that they are fairly multicultural. It can be jarring to discover how homogenous our environment is and our environment has had and continues to have an effect on our beliefs.
- This matrix can give us ideas about how we might enrich our cultural environment and how to reach out to and get to know people who belong to different groups (Joining a club or community group that includes different kinds of people is an example).

### Exercise #3: A Step Above

In this exercise, have participants line up in a straight line, with room for them to move forward and backward. Have them move forward or backward, as instructed below, until the end of the exercise. In the end, people should be in various positions to each other, the most privileged in front.

Instructions to participants: In each case, take one step to move forward or backward each time. When in doubt, remain in place. Childhood is considered until you are 18.

1. Move forward if you are male; move backward if you are female.
2. Move forward if you are white or Asian. Move backward if you are of another race.
3. Move forward if you are able bodied; move back if you have a disability
4. Move forward if you had two living parents through childhood. Move back if you had one or no parent through childhood.
5. Move forward one step if you parents were married and remained married while you were a child; take a step back if they got divorced.
6. Move forward if they are still together; take a step back if they are now separated, divorced or widowed. (If both parents are deceased and were still married at the time of the first parent's death, take a step forward.)
7. Move forward if your family could always provide enough food growing up; take a step back if you didn't always have enough food.
8. Move forward if your entire family had health care insurance throughout your childhood; move back a step if at times some of your family didn't.
9. Move forward if your parents were always employed; take a step back if at times your parents were unemployed. (This could mean either or both, depending on what was the norm).
10. Move forward if your family owned their house; move back if you rented.
11. Move forward if you never had to move because of housing/living costs; move backward if you ever had to move for housing living costs.
12. Move forward if you lived in what you felt was a safe neighborhood; move back if you didn't feel safe in your neighborhood.
13. Move forward if you only moved once or not at all growing up; move back if you had to move several times.
14. Move forward if you were able to travel out of the US as a child; move back if you never left he country.
15. Move forward if your family could afford what you wanted for holidays and birthday; move back if they couldn't always afford what you wanted.
16. Move forward if you needed braces and could afford them; move back if you needed braces and couldn't afford them (Stay still if you didn't need braces)

17. Move forward if one of your parents living with you had a University degree. Move back if neither parent had a degree.
18. Move forward if both your parents had University degrees. Move forward if one or more has an advanced degree—MA or PhD.
19. Move forward if your parents spoke more than one language.
20. Move forward if a parent helped you regularly with homework; move back if neither helped you regularly.
21. Move forward if your parents could pay for most or all of your University. Move back if they could pay only little or none.

**Discussion questions for A Step Above:**

1. What do you see around the room? Who do you see in the front, middle and back?
2. In what ways do the people near you reflect or not reflect your community?
3. How do you feel about where you are relative to the others in the room? How do you feel about where others are in relation to you?
4. What went through your mind as you moved forward and backward?
5. Which of the statements did you find most meaningful or eye opening? Why?
6. Which of the statements, if any, hurt? Why?
7. What does your position in the room say about societal messages about your worth and the worth of people with similar privilege levels?
8. How has privilege affected you, your family and your community, in terms of opportunity and access?
9. How are social class and privilege tied to prejudice?

**Additional instructions:**

1. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, take one step back.
2. If you were taken to art galleries, museum, sporting events or plays by your parents, take one step forward.
3. If your school was conducted in a language which was not your first language, take one step back.
4. If there were more than 50 books in your house when you grew up, take one step forward.
5. If you attended private school or summer camp, take one step forward.
6. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward
7. If you were told that you were beautiful, smart and capable by your parents, take one step forward.
8. If you saw members of your race, ethnic group, gender or sexual orientation portrayed on television in degrading roles, take one step back.
9. If you move through the world without people being afraid of you, or thinking of you as a potential threat to their safety, take one step forward.
10. If your parents told you could be anything you wanted to be, take one step forward.
11. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, ethnicity, ability, gender or sexual orientation but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.
12. If you were ever the victim of violence related to your race, ethnicity, ability, gender or sexual orientation, take one step back.

# **Advanced Exercises**

**Extended Time May Be Needed  
for Discussion**

## Exercise #4: Origins of Difference\*

In this simple exercise, the leader facilitates a discussion based on one of the questions:

When did you first become aware of differences between the sexes?

When did you first become aware of differences in race?

When did you first become aware of differences in sexualities?

When did you first become aware of differences in class?

When did you first become aware of differences in abilities in people?

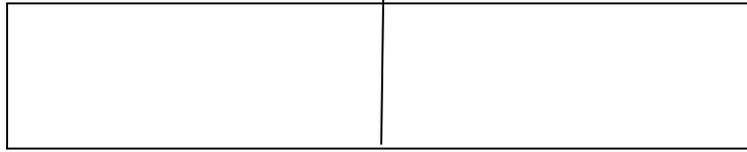
To do this successfully, a few ground rules are needed: First, everyone is to talk about *their own* personal experience. The point of the exercise is not to necessarily talk about attitudes or prejudices toward groups—although those may come up—but to just recognize when we became aware of difference. The moment may be first hand, when a participant saw and recognized someone different than themselves, or second hand, by overhearing a conversation, watching people in film or on TV. If participants can't remember the earliest time, just ask them to tell of a time they remember when they were aware of the difference.

After, discuss how the exercise made them feel or think—had they considered how they learned about difference before? How was it listening to other's histories?

\*Additional time may be needed for discussion.

## Exercise #5: Crossing the Line\*

In this exercise, have participants stand up in an open space. Divide the space in half with an imaginary line,



or create an imaginary long line (AB) to represent a continuum:

A \_\_\_\_\_ B

Make the following statements, one at a time, clearly designating one side of the space to represent one half of the statement and the other side of the space to represent the other. Have participants move individually to the side that best represents their beliefs or desires.

If you have a continuum from A to B, participants can decide *where along the line* they want to stand, suggesting how strongly they support the one statement or the other. Otherwise, you can make them choose one side or the other (the tougher option). You can pick and choose which statements are appropriate for your group members, and add additional ones as is appropriate. Phrase the statements in a way that does not judge either side.

1. Generally, I am comfortable with my body/Generally, I'm not comfortable with my body
2. Generally, I like being with other people/ Generally I like being alone
3. In my spare time, I'm often socializing/doing activities by myself
4. I tend to gravitate to those similar to me/I tend to gravitate to those different than me
5. I seek out cultural experiences that challenge my beliefs/ I prefer cultural experiences that support my beliefs
6. I feel comfortable sharing meals with those who have different customs or restrictions/ I don't feel comfortable...
7. I feel comfortable around those who served in the armed forces/ I feel less comfortable around those who...
8. I feel comfortable around people with disabilities/ I feel less comfortable around with people w/ disabilities
9. I feel comfortable around those of a different race/ I feel less comfortable around those of the same race
10. I feel comfortable around those of a different sexuality/ I feel less comfortable around those of a different sexuality
11. I feel comfortable around those with very different political beliefs/ I feel less comfortable around those...
12. I feel comfortable around those much older than me/ I feel less comfortable around those much older
13. I feel comfortable around those much younger than me/ I don't feel comfortable around those much younger
14. Most of my friends are the same race as me/ I have friends of many races
15. I have friends of different races/ generally, my friends are the same race as me

16. I have friends with different sexualities/ generally, my friends share the same sexuality as I have

17. My friends are a range of ages/ generally, my friends are the same age as me

*Discuss reactions to what participants saw and felt within during the exercise. End with the following:*

I was completely honest in this exercise/ I adjusted my position based on what I thought others would think...

\*Additional time may be needed for discussion

## Exercise #6: The Common Body\*

Ask participants to tell the group about one unique thing about their body, not caused from an injury or activity—that is something that ‘naturally’ occurred. They can show the group as well, if they feel comfortable. At first, people may not think they have an answer. You can offer examples, such as being double jointed or being able to move in uncommon ways, having an unusual patch of skin or birth mark\*\*, having extra or missing parts.

As you go around, you might notice that some people who thought they had a unique part of their body really share that trait with another person in the room. People might also gradually remember other things about their body. If someone can’t think of something, go on and come back to them later.

After the exercise, ask about initial reactions. Did the exercise make them think differently about themselves or the group, or about how normal the human body is?

Possible directions of conversation:

1. You might ask how many would have their bodies changed if there was surgery to do it? Ask them to think of examples when people have altered their bodies to fit into the norms of our culture. What are their reactions to that?

2. You might ask them to consider how they think of people more extremely different than them, people with diseases or syndromes or disabilities. Can they imagine these people also being content with their bodies and not wanting to change them?

3. There are studies of blind people who, with surgery, were given sight as adults. Many of them had a hard time adjusting to their new sense. Some did not like the lack of privacy that sight created when they came to realize people were watching them all the time. Some had a hard time learning how to use their eyes and preferred to keep their eyes closed. Some even wanted to return to blindness.

If you were told you were missing a sixth sense most other humans had, would you want it ‘restored’? If you did, it would ‘flood’ into your brain, constantly, like your other senses, but more powerfully because it was new and unusual.

4. There are people born who are not clearly male or female. Their bodies differ from the norm of what it means to be female or male. They are known as intersex children. Often they are surgically changed soon after birth, so that they look more ‘normal’, though there is nothing ‘wrong’ with them. They do not get to be a part of the decision. Do you think intersex children should be surgically altered? Would you have your child altered if they were intersex? What if they were physically different in some other way that was not harmful to them but was outside of the norm?

5. If scientists discovered that they could determine a child’s sexuality (gay straight or bi) at birth and could alter it, would you have your child changed if it was not what you were expected or wanted?

\*Additional time may be needed for discussion.

\*\*Note: if someone points or talks of an oval scar on their shoulder as a birthmark, it is most likely a TB shot given to them at birth. You might bring this up and discuss, non-judgmentally, what it means to have had our bodies changed at birth, and to not know about marks on our own bodies.