Common Ground Activity

Purpose
- Participants experience the breadth of differences that exist on campus
- Participants broaden the number of differences that they pay attention to
- Group development of comfort, connection, and greater safety

Set-up: Move the group into a large standing circle

Transition by facilitator: As we continue to get to know each other, we know that we are each unique individuals, AND, at the same time, we each are members of many different groups.

Directions to the group:
1. Anyone can call out a group, but you have to be a member of that group (e.g., Single parent family, Native American, First-Generation College Student, Veteran).
2. When someone calls out a group they identify with, that person takes a big step into the center of the circle.
3. Anyone else who also is a member of that group can move to the center of the circle.
4. Notice who is in the inner circle, and who is in the outer circle.
5. Then the inner circle steps back to rejoin the full group.

6. A couple of rules: First rule: Even if you are a member of a certain group that is “called out,” you don’t have to step in if you’re not willing or comfortable sharing with the group. Please pay attention to your thoughts and feelings about why you aren’t sharing that with the group. Second rule: No outing! If a group is “called out”, and you notice that someone who you think belongs to that group doesn’t move in, you can’t point that individual out or communicate to the larger group their affiliation. Everyone gets to decide if and when they move into the inner circle.

* NOTE: Give an example that is low risk: Who didn’t get enough sleep last night?, etc., to give students a sense of the exercise you are asking them to participate in.

7. As we do this activity, notice your thoughts, feelings, and reactions, as well as what groups get called

Guided Example Questions for Game that can assist in building momentum for the exercise:
(You can use these or allow the students create their own indicators.)

1. I have attended an event where I am the minority in terms of race/ethnicity.
2. I have attributed somebody’s behavior to their race.
3. I have called somebody or something “retarded.”
4. I have told a racist joke.
5. I have laughed at a racist joke.
6. I would request a roommate change if I knew he/she is gay.
7. I have been annoyed by people because they were speaking to each other in a language I did not understand.
8. I have called something “gay” that could not possibly have a sexual orientation.
9. I have attributed a bad grade to not being able to understand my instructor.
10. I have been asked for my opinion in a class discussion because of my personal affiliation to a group and assumed my opinion was considered representative of the entire group.
11. I have made fun of a non-traditional student. (Non-traditional = did not enroll in college directly after high school).
12. I have been impatient with somebody because of a physical disability he/she had.
13. I have judged somebody because of their social class/economic status. (Note: Does not necessarily
mean judging somebody in a class lower than your own.)
14. I have been called a hurtful name because of my race, class, sexual orientation, religion, or gender.
15. One of my parents was unemployed (not by choice) at some point in my life.
16. I was raised in a two-parent household.
17. I was raised in a one-parent household.
18. I have been on a vacation outside of the United States (foreign country).
19. I have felt uncomfortable about a joke related to my race, class, sexual orientation, religion, or gender.
20. One (or both) of my parents has completed college.

Discussion (VERY IMPORTANT!)
1. What did you notice during this activity? About yourself? About us as a group?
2. Do you think peer pressure may influence how people responded? How? Why?
3. If you walked into the center of the circle by yourself, how did you feel at that moment?
4. What was it like not being able to explain yourself?
5. Are there any differences that exist in society or on campus that we didn’t name?
6. What, if any, impact did doing this activity as a group have on you?