

FIRST THOUGHTS - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

by Stan Brunn, Geography & UK 101 Professor

I began my diversity session by asking each student to write down three facts/characteristics about themselves that were unique to them and them alone. After a few minutes I asked each to read one of their statements. I used these statements to illustrate how individual and different each one of us is, and how we accept each other with these different characteristics in mind.

Then I passed out small pieces of paper to each student; they drew them like cards. They were asked to read the statement and tell the class their "first thoughts." The ensuing discussion was very enlightening, and we continued it the next week. The following are statements I used for discussion on diversity.

What are your first thoughts?

You have a friend who wishes to join a fraternity.

What are your first thoughts?

You have a friend who wishes to join a sorority.

What are your first thoughts?

You have found out your roommate is an African American.

What are your first thoughts?

You have found out your roommate is white.

What are your first thoughts?

You have found out your roommate is gay.

What are your first thoughts?

You have found out your roommate is a Catholic.

What are your first thoughts?

You have found out your chemistry teacher is Jewish.

What are your first thoughts?

Your history teacher is from Appalachia.

What are your first thoughts?

Your math teacher is from China, and you cannot understand her.

What are your first thoughts?

You are in a restaurant with a small group of friends who are telling ethnic jokes about blacks on campus.

What are your first thoughts?

You are with a small group of friends meeting before UK 101, and they are telling sexist jokes about UK female students.

What are your first thoughts?

You have been asked for a date by someone who has a physical disability.

What are your first thoughts?

Your psychology teacher has visible physical deformities. (She walks with a limp and has two fingers missing on her left hand.)

What are your first thoughts?

Your roommate is dating someone who is Jewish.

What are your first thoughts?

Your roommate refuses to drink alcohol at a party.

What are your first thoughts?

You saw a Latino athlete sleeping in your geography class.

What are your first thoughts?

You witnessed a Japanese student cheating on a Spanish exam.

What are your first thoughts?

Your engineering professor is a woman from New York.

What are your first thoughts?

Your geography teacher has assigned all students to visit an African-American church service.

What are your first thoughts?

You have been excluded from playing a pick-up football game because you are white.

What are your first thoughts?

You have not been invited to attend a social event because you told the sponsor you were from Appalachia.

What are your first thoughts?

Your best friend wants you to go on a blind date with a student from California.

Processing Questions for First Thoughts (Some questions excerpted from “Facing Difference: Living Together on Campus” discussion guide, 1990.)

- a. How easy was it to come up with these responses? How did we learn them? Do you think most people believe all of these stereotypes? If you're in one of the categories, what did you think of the responses?
- b. What is a stereotype? (A stereotype is a preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of people without regard for their

individual differences. Stereotypes can be negative or positive. Yet even positive stereotypes can have a negative impact and feed into prejudice.)

- c. Why do you think stereotypes are created?
- d. What do you think or feel when stereotypes are directed toward you?
- e. What do you think others feel or think when they belong to a group where others relate to them on the basis of stereotypes? E.g., African American; Hispanic or Latino; Asian.
- f. Has a stereotype, either positive or negative, ever been applied in your presence toward you or a group with whom you identify? If yes, how did you handle this?
- g. What are the results of stereotyping?
- h. What can you do to assist people to rethink their views about stereotyping others? (Divide into pairs; give 2 min. to brainstorm and share with class.)

