

FIRST THOUGHTS—“WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE...”

1. Divide class into small groups.
2. Introduction: “I’m going to ask you to write some first thoughts about what it means to be a member of certain groups in our society. Think about everything you’ve seen, heard, or read about these groups. These are not necessarily things that you believe about the groups.”
3. Distribute sheets of paper with a different group listed on each sheet. E.g.,
Sheet 1: What does it mean to be overweight in our society?
Sheet 2: What does it mean to be a college athlete on campus?
Other categories you may wish to use are: rich, poor, Greek (fraternity/ sorority member), Californian, female, Eastern Kentuckian, International TA.
4. Groups brainstorm “first thoughts” and then share responses with entire class.

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.)

