

Examining



Diversity

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A project completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Health Education 471

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Examining Race

Examining Race in the Classroom

Many persons of color will attest to the high level of stress in the college classroom. They are expected to view the world through someone else's experience, often times being forced to negate their own. In addition, racial stereotypes prove to be a barrier to the learning process. Many times these stereotypes create an environment in which the persons of color are shut out of the learning process and the majority fails to appreciate the extent to which it has lost a vital, rich part of a discussion.

Race in the classroom is an important issue. If not dealt with at the onset of a term, the issues that do arise can become stressors to those of color in a classroom. This chapter examines race in the classroom and suggests three activities that can be used to promote the positive dimension to racial diversity within the classroom. For the purposes of this chapter, racial diversity is defined as the inclusion of students in a classroom that are American citizens with the following ethnic backgrounds: African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Alaskan Native.

Activity I: The Hunt for Skills

The following grids may be used as a diversity activity in any classroom. It allows the students to get to know one another, while at the same time enabling the instructor of the course to familiarize him/herself with the varied experiences of the group.

Procedure:

1) Create a table with two columns and seven rows. The items placed in the table will vary by course and intended use (for example, class strengths may be used), and should include a list of skills unique to the discipline in which the activity is used. For example in an English class, the list may look something like this

Has read at least three Shakespearean plays	Is a good editor
Has had a linguistics course	Understands Edgar Alan Poe poetry

This list of skills can be adapted for any course.

2) Ask each student to go on a "Scavenger Hunt." They are to fill in their grids by going around the room and asking their fellow students to sign their name in the box that applies to them. Each student may sign their name to more than one list. However, students may not sign their names to a person's grid more than once. Allow about ten minutes for this portion of the activity.

3) Finally, debrief the class. Ask the class if anyone has all boxes signed. You may provide a prize for anyone that does get the entire grid signed. Now, explain to the students that they have just set up for themselves a network of strengths. They have discovered what each member of the class has to offer the others.

Activity II: Interviews

The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate to students that each student's perspective is not only unique but also a vital part of a discussion of almost any topic. The form may be adapted for use with any course. This activity ought to be completed prior to a discussion over the chosen topic. Be sure that the questions chosen are broad and open ended. Because this activity is designed to be racially based it is important that the students are encouraged to interview persons of an ethnic background different than their own.

The interview questions ought to reflect the course topic. There should be no more than ten questions, and the student ought to be given at least four weeks to complete this assignment. This is definitely an activity that must be included on the syllabus.

(What follows is a sample of questions developed for an English class)

Person Interviewed: _____

Do you believe there is a lack of diversity in the textbook? What impact might this have on the text.

Do you feel that the inclusion of non-Caucasian authors in the text books should be required for [fill in the course title]

Activity III: Class Favorites

This activity was adapted from Worksheet 6 in Personal and Social Skills: Understanding and Integrating Competencies Across Health Content, by Dr. Joyce Fetro.

Procedure:

- 1) Create a grid with three columns and four rows. In each box place a "favorite" appropriate to the course.
- 2) Ask the students to fill in their grids. Allow about five minutes for this part of the activity.
- 3) Next, go around the room writing the responses on the board. Tally repeated responses so that a total for each response can be tallied.
- 4) Finally, debrief the class. Discuss with the students how alike they really are.

**This activity is also an ideal icebreaker. It is a great "getting to know you" tool at the beginning of a term. **

The following example is for a philosophy class.

Favorite Modern philosopher	Favorite Logic Principle
Favorite Theorem	Favorite Kantian Construct

Examining Multiple Cultures

Examining Multiple Cultures in the Classroom

Samovar and Porter define culture as: "the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving" (p.11).

Given this very broad definition of culture, the importance of intercultural communication has clear value to us as citizens of the world. "Intercultural Communication occurs whenever a message produced in one culture must be processed in another culture." (Porter and Samovar, p. 7). At the tail end of this millennium, the human race is having to redefine itself. In the face of the tremendous influence of different forces of change, all previous understandings of boundaries, physical and intellectual, need revision. This includes the invasion of electronic media and transportation technologies across the world. The world is no longer the place it used to be, even ten years ago. Scores of people travel, emigrate, and move to different parts of the world each day. The United States has also seen a heavy traffic of immigrants for nearly 700 years. A strong delegation of immigrants manifests itself at first as international or foreign students at universities in the United States. SIUC ranked among the top few universities in the US only a few years ago in international student enrollment and continues to admit students from nearly 186 countries of the world.

International students bring with them sets of issues unique to their populations. Problems of a communicative nature occur almost inevitably for them and have begun to be addressed in a manner unprecedented. The following activities are designed to be conducted in the classroom. The activities compel the participants to immerse themselves briefly in "other" cultures and see themselves as others might.

Activity I: The Nacirema People

The purpose of this activity is to acquaint students with a "sense of culture" that is new and different from their usual. By doing this exercise they will gain insight into what international students come up against when they arrive to study in the United States.

Procedure:

You are visiting a foreign land called Nacirema. Its people practice some customs with which you are unfamiliar. Indicate your reactions in the following manner:

Write a 1 if you feel this practice should be abolished.

Write a 2 if you feel this practice should be changed.

Write a 3 if you feel this practice should be left as it is.

A. The Shrine:

The focal point of the Shrine is a box which is built into the wall of the hut. In this box are kept many charms and magical potions, All are believed to be essential to live. The Shrine has potions for specific ills and is often overflowing with these magical packets. The Nacirema have so many of these packets that the purpose of each potion is forgotten. It could be said that retaining all these magical materials in the Shrine box will in some way protect the worshipper.

B. The Latipost:

Horace Miner, the famed American anthropologist, notes a ritual where members of this tribe are taken to a large temple called a "Latipost." Here, a variety of experiments are performed on each native by medicine men and attending maidens. Many natives fear these Latiposts and stay away from such treatments.

C. The Talking Tree:

The Nacirema believe that their lives are governed by "The Talking Tree." This tree has been carved into to let the voice of life out. The voice, as observed by Horace Miner, tells the natives stories of their past, present and future. The Nacirema believe in the "voice" to the extent of copying everything they hear from it. At certain times of the year the natives carve small figurines to symbolize the meaning of the talking tree.

D. The Sacred Rac:

The Nacirema people have an overwhelming preoccupation with the care and feeding of the rac- an animal much like a bull in size, strength and temperament. It is a social obligation to own at least one, if not more, racs. Unfortunately, the rac is not very healthy and usually does not live more than five to seven years. The Nacirema must provide costly offerings to specialists whenever the racs fall ill. Although the rac may be used as a beast of burden, it has many habits which would be considered by other cultures as detrimental to the life of the society. The excrement of the rac is exceptionally foul and totally useless. Finally, the rac is prone to rampages in which it runs down anything in its path, much like stampeding cattle.

Evaluation:

The symbols in this exercise are thinly veiled. The Shrine is the typical Medicine Box or Cabinet found in every American home, the Latipost is a hospital, the Talking Tree is the television and the Rac is the Car. These are objects of value in American society. Here is an opportunity to view them from the "outside" and if students are able to suspend their disbelief for the duration of the exercise, they could learn a little about themselves, how others see them, and how they often tend to look at peoples of other cultures.

Activity II: Intercultural Readiness Profile Test

Procedure: Fill out this profile and find out how ready you are to cope with new experiences that are confusing, unpredictable, frustrating, and even maddening. Read the following questions, and answer each one as you honestly believe you would react. Choose only one answer for each question. The score for each answer will be given after you complete the exercise.

1. In a foreign port, you are a passenger on a bus crowded with many people. You have to get off at the next stop. You signal the bus driver, and he slows the bus down but doesn't stop. You jump off while the bus is still moving past your stop.
 - a. You are puzzled and resolve to watch other people getting off buses to see how they signal the driver to stop.
 - b. You shrug your shoulders and walk away.
 - c. You become angry at the bus drive and yell a few foul words at the bus as it departs.

2. Your Chinese friend invites you to his home to meet the rest of the family. Another guest, an elderly Chinese man, arrives at the same time as you. You both enter the room where the family is waiting. The other guest greets the grandfather, then the father, and finally the son (your friend). It is now your turn to introduce yourself.
 - a. You greet your friend and hope he will introduce you to the rest of the family and the guest.
 - b. You hesitate, then turn to greet the family in the same order as you saw the guest do.
 - c. You notice that the other guest greeted the grandfather first, then the father etc. but you assume they have met before. You greet your friend first.

3. You (an American) are in Athens and need to change some dollars to drachmae. You enter a store and show a \$ 20.00 bill to the cashier and she jerks her head up and down as if to say "OK." You hand her the twenty. She looks puzzled and hands the money back.
 - a. You figure that she doesn't like Americans, give her a dirty look and leave.
 - b. You give her the twenty back again and add 50 cents for a tip.
 - c. You find an English speaking Greek to help out.

4. You are at a bar in a foreign city. At one point, you need to use the restroom. You ask a bartender to tell you where it is. He points to the exit. You walk outside and find no restroom, only the wall of the building. A number of men and some women are using the wall as a toilet.
 - a. You are disgusted and decide to return to your hotel immediately.
 - b. You don't want to expose yourself. You decide to wait and go back to the bar.
 - c. You decide this is the custom and you join the others at the wall.

5. You are visiting your company's branch in Madrid, Spain for three months. You have invited your Spanish colleague and his family to your apartment for supper. The food is prepared and ready by 7:00 p.m., but your guests don't arrive until 9:00. Your food is soggy, burned and quite tasteless by now.
 - a. You don't say anything, but serve your guests the soggy, burned food, thinking this will teach them not to be late.
 - b. You are angry and tell your guests how rude they have been to you.
 - c. You offer refreshments, suggesting that you all go to eat out. You tell them that you ruined the meal and that you are very sorry.

Your scores:

1. a:3 b:2 c:1
2. a:2 b:3 c:1
3. a:0 b:1 c:3
4. a:2 b:1 c:3
5. a:1 b:2 c:3

The higher you score, the more ready you are to take on an intercultural encounter. You have a high sensitivity to other cultures and seem to look beyond yourself when it comes to intercultural interactions.

Examining Disabilities

Examining Disabilities in the Classroom

Much of the current policy found on university campuses is based on two significant pieces of legislation: The Americans With Disabilities Act and The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, PL90-480. Also commonly known as the Architectural Barriers Act, this act made sure that buildings financed with federal funds are so designed and constructed as to be accessible to and usable by those with disabilities.

Activity I: Visual Impairments

An activity that all instructors can integrate into the classroom is the examination of visual impairments. Instructors may begin by informing students about factual information regarding the visually impaired. Smith, Austin and Kennedy (Inclusive and Special Recreation Opportunities for persons with Disabilities, 1996) outline several pertinent visual impairment facts, including:

- 1) Legal blindness occurs when an individual's vision is 20/200 or less in the best eye with the help of corrective lenses. Individuals with periphery vision of less than twenty degrees are also considered legally blind.
- 2) Only 5% of the individuals classified as "legally blind" have no vision or light perception.
- 3) Most visual impairments are present at birth. However, visual impairments that occur after birth enable the person to utilize mental images based on their past experiences with sight.
- 4) If a visually impaired individual is placed within a positive educational environment, their language, motor, and cognitive skills will remain virtually unaffected.
- 5) People with visual impairments are usually unable to read Braille. The few individuals who use Braille read much slower than persons who are able to read visually. Very few persons reading through Braille are able to read over 150 words per minute.
- 6) "Blindisms" is a term used in relation to the visually impaired which refers to small body movements like eye pressing, body rocking, and head shaking, which is most often seen in children.

Procedure:

After the instructor has gone over the basic facts about visual impairments, it would be beneficial for the students to experience the disability first hand. By allowing the class to experience the impairment firsthand, the students will become familiar with the world in which the visually impaired operate. After dividing the individuals into groups, the instructor will give each group a different visual impairment. Visual impairments can be replicated with the aid of special eye glasses that exhibit the various degrees of visual impairments. The glasses are designed to simulate the effects of total blindness, legal blindness, blindness in one eye, or limited peripheral vision. If special glasses are not available for use, blindfolds may be utilized to create the experience.

An sample activity that each group may perform while visually impaired is the "throw and catch" activity. Instruct each group to form a circle and then distribute a Nerf ball to each group. By allowing group members the opportunity to throw and catch the ball with the individual simulating the impairment, they will be able to see the difficulties a visually impaired person must face.

This activity will allow the students to actually experience firsthand a real life disability and how this disability can affect an individual's life. After all students have gone through the activity, the instructor has several different options that would encourage the class to think about their experience. These options include class or group discussions, or small summary papers geared towards evaluating the different types of visual impairments. As stated earlier, the instructor may have to remind students of their distinct advantage over individuals who have been born blind and do not have any mental images of their surroundings as do individuals who have experienced life visually.

After getting some student response, initiate discussion regarding whether people with visual impairments should be given the chance to do and experience life in the least restrictive environment. By giving some examples about the ways that the visually impaired overcome the day to day obstacles, we are able to see how they accomplish their goals. Have students consider the problems they may encounter in trying to get from their home to the classroom. After some responses, have the students think about different ways that the building is setup, and how it is accessible or not accessible to the visually impaired. Try to inform students about the ways in which visually impaired persons use other senses like hearing and touch to help overcome their disabilities. Use an example like the elevator. Have your students think about when they ride in an elevator. Explain to them about the relation of the elevator buttons and how most have raised numbers on the button panel or are in Braille. Many of today's elevators have sound bells to allow users to know the direction of travel and a ring at each floor. They also use color to indicate the direction the elevator will move.

Activity II-A Look Into Learning Disabilities

An activity that all instructors can introduce into the classroom is the examination of learning disabilities. Today, more than ever, students with learning disabilities are entering colleges and universities to gain higher education. It is becoming more important for institutions to provide the needed accommodations to allow these individuals to experience and obtain a college education in the least restrictive environment.

A great way instructors and students can learn and see first hand about learning disabilities is by watching a 70 min. film called How Difficult Can This Be? The Frustration, Anxiety, Tension (F.A.T.) City Workshop by Richard D. Lavoie, Director at Eagle Hill School Outreach. Lavoie states that 6-10% of the children in the United States have learning disabilities.

F.A.T. City Workshop is a very informative video which allows instructors and students the chance to see in the eyes of learning disabled person. In the video, Mr. Lavoie has a classroom full of parents, educators, psychologists, and social workers to help show the frustration, anxiety and tension that a student experiences in his or her day-to-day functions. Lavoie leads the participants throughout the workshop, allowing them to become familiar with ways in which students learn and the problems they experience.

After watching the 70 min. video, allow students to have a class/group discussion about their feelings related to the F.A.T. City Workshop. At this time, the instructor could call upon the SIUC Achieve Program which is an excellent information source about learning disabilities and the ways the university accommodates this special population. By having a representative come from this program, it would allow the students the chance to have their questions answered by a knowledgeable source.

Activity III- Wheelchair Sports Awareness

An activity which all instructors can introduce to their students is Wheelchair Sports. Start off introducing the class to the historical developments of wheelchair sports. Smith, Austin and Kennedy (1996) outline three primary factors about the historical development of wheelchair sports. These facts include:

- 1) New medical breakthroughs which are allowing individuals with physical disabilities to live longer lives.
- 2) Determination and spirit to overcome organizational and personal difficulties which also allows them to be able to participate competitively.
- 3) The establishment and on-going expansion of Wheelchair Sports by the help of recreation professionals.

After going over the primary factors about wheelchair sports development, the instructor should spend a short amount of time talking about the benefits of wheelchair sports. Smith, Austin and Kennedy (1996) list three primary benefits of wheelchair sports. They state wheelchair sports helps with participants' growth and development, the public awareness about the sport, and best of all it gives motivation for others to get involved.

At this time, the instructor can do one of many things to allow the students the chance to see and experience first hand the physical demands of playing wheelchair sports. By obtaining three to six wheelchairs and an open gym, the instructor can allow the students to use the chairs and experience the physical requirements needed to get around. By dividing the class up and letting the groups play wheelchair basketball, they will also get a feeling of a competitive sport.

If wheelchairs are not available to the class, then the instructor may elect to take the class to a rolling Saluki basketball practice or game. The rolling Salukis are a group of individuals who are very competitive and are rated high in the county in the sport of wheelchair basketball. This would give the students a chance to see the physical and skill demands needed to play wheelchair basketball.

Examining Sexuality

Examining Sexuality in the Classroom

Sexuality issues in today's society are being talked about more and more. The idea of creating an understanding and a tolerance to gays, lesbians, and bisexuals has become a very sensitive area. However, to appreciate diversity university wide, it is important to apply these issues to a classroom and environment. Lately, many issues have become public and hotly debated. The key to understanding, and in order to understand, we must open the lines of communication. Even within the legal system, sexuality issues are starting to take place in the courts. The military's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy was the most recent aspect of tolerance. Also, the recent debate by the Southern Baptists and their boycotting of Walt Disney World, Inc., because Walt Disney offers insurance benefits to partners of gays and lesbians, has received national attention. Finally, many states are in the process of determining whether or not they will recognize homosexual marriages or unions. Again, this has had national attention with a Methodist minister conducting a union between two women; ultimately, he was cleared by the church for any wrongdoing. Does this mean even the church is starting to become divided on the issue of homosexuality? Only time will tell.

The following teaching strategies are geared toward the college classroom; however, they can be utilized anywhere you deem necessary. There are teaching strategies for every type of classroom and every type of major. The fact is homosexuality is not just an issue for the social sciences field. At some point and time, every individual on the planet is going to know someone who is homosexual. The key is sensitivity and understanding. Encourage your classes to participate in discussion. Ask them to write reflective papers on the activity presented in class. The key is, try to get a discussion and try to get written responses so you know they are thinking with an open mind. You yourself have to have an open mind in order to facilitate discussion.

Activity I: A Personal Introspection

Most of us grew up with fear and negative attitudes toward homosexuality. If one views homosexuality as a healthy alternative, then interactions with people will reflect openness and acceptance. If one believes homosexuality is an illness or perversion, this too will be reflected in relationships. Consider the following questions, then encourage students to share their experiences. The purpose is to investigate the roots of their values, not necessarily the content of their opinions. By answering these questions you may find areas where students can use further information and consultation to help develop work or school relationships with others.

1. What did you learn from your family about homosexuality or gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgendered people (consider family attitudes, experiences, religion, gender roles, career and family expectations)?
2. What has been your life experience with homosexuality or lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered people (consider friendships, peer attitudes, television, teacher, books)?
3. Which part(s) of your personal history were most important in shaping your attitude toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgendered people?
4. Were there any significant events in your life that challenged your view of homosexuality?

Activity II: Heterosexuality Questionnaire by Martin Rochlin

This questionnaire reverses the questions that are very often asked of gays and lesbians by heterosexuals, allowing one to gain some insight into how oppressive and discriminatory a "straight" frame of reference can be to lesbians and gays. Assist students in discovering how difficult it is to explain what comes naturally to them, and how offensive it can be to have to defend yourself to others.

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual?
3. Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase you may just grow out of?
4. Is it possible that your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?
5. If you've never slept with a person of the same sex, is it possible that all you need is a good lesbian/gay lover?
6. To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies?
7. Why do heterosexuals feel compelled to seduce others into their lifestyle?
8. Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Can't you just be who you are and keep it quiet?
9. Would you want your children to be heterosexual, knowing all the problems they'd face?
10. A disproportionate majority of child molesters are heterosexuals. Do you consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers?
11. Even with all the societal support, marriage receives, the divorce rate is spiraling. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals?
12. Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex?
13. Considering the menace of overpopulation, how could the human race survive if everyone were heterosexual?
14. How can you become a whole person if you limit yourself to compulsive exclusive heterosexuality and fail to develop your natural, health homosexual potential?
15. There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed that might enable you to change if you really want to. Have you considered aversion therapy?

Activity III: Just a Thought

The next two pages are designed to trigger discussion in the classroom regarding societal issues on homosexuality. They are designed to be open ended, allowing students to reflect and share their opinions and feelings in a participatory fashion.

1. 74% of all Americans favor protecting homosexuals from job discrimination. Where do you stand?
2. 68% of Human Resources Professionals say they would ask employees to stop telling anti-gay jokes. How would you respond to this request?
3. Out of 5,852 hate crimes reported in 1994, 5,084 were against homosexuals. Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?

When you're straight . . .

* You get looks of admiration when you hold your partner's hand.

* You get a tax break for being married.

* You have a life

* Standing up for your rights makes You a participatory citizen

When you're lesbian or gay . . .

You get spat upon and jeered at when you hold your partner's hand.

You can't GET married

You have a "lifestyle"

Standing up for your rights makes you a "militant homosexual".

For the straight folks who don't mind gays but wish they weren't so blatant
By Pat Parker

You know some people
got a lot of nerve
sometimes, I don't believe the things I see and hear.

Have you met the woman
who's shocked by two women kissing
and in the same breath,
tells you that she's pregnant?
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

Or this straight couple
sits next to you in a movie
and you can't hear the dialogue
Cause of the sound effects.
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE SO BLATANT.

And the woman in your office
spends your entire lunch hour
talking about her new bikini drawers
and how much her husband likes them.
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT

Or the "hip" chick in your class,
rattling a mile a minute-
while you're trying to get stoned in the john,
about the camping trip she took with her musician boyfriend.
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

Or you go to an amusement park
and there's a tunnel of love
and pictures of straights painted on the front
and grinning couples coming in and out .
BUT GAYS SHOULDN'T BE BLATANT.

Fact is, blatant heterosexuals are all over the place.
Supermarkets, movies, on you job, in church, in books, on television
every day and night, every place-even in the gay bars.
And they want gay men and women to go hide in the closets

So to you straight folks, I say-Sure, I'll go if you go too,
but I'm polite, so, after you.

Examining Gender

Activity II: He Said, She Said

The goal of this activity is to start a dialogue between genders with the intention of demystifying some aspects of gender differences. The following procedures apply:

Divide the group into two sub-groups, males and females. Ask the females to make a list of questions they've always wanted to ask the males, and have the males do the same for the females. Exchange the questions, and let the groups give answers.

Adaptation: This activity can be occupation and/or topic specific. Perhaps questions could be directly related to why they entered that degree program and the stereotypes that follow their gender (i.e. for engineers, what stereotypes come with being male or female; for political science, same issue).

Activity III: Portrayal of gender in the media

The goal of this activity is to review the gender types portrayed in the media, and its impact on student interactions. The following procedures apply:

Bring in a series of pictures of men and women from different media types: magazines, television, movies, etc. Ask the group to give their impression of what they see. Have the students respond to the following questions:

1. Do you like what you see? Why or why not?
2. What would you need to do to look like him/her if you wanted to?
3. Would you marry someone who looked like this? Why or why not?
4. Would you like to work for someone who looked like this? Why or why not?
5. Would you like to have an immediate family member look like this (mother, sister, brother, father)? Why or why not?

Investigate the differences in responses for men and women. Also, have them discuss the differences in acceptability (i.e. they would marry someone who looks like this, but wouldn't want a sister who looked like this).

Examining Non-Traditional Students

Examining Non-Traditional Students in the Classroom

Older students face a unique and oftentimes difficult set of circumstances while trying to complete a degree. For many, school includes juggling spouses, children, and full-time employment, in addition to attending classes and studying for exams. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale uses the following guidelines to define the Non-Traditional Student.

1. Entering higher education at an older age than the traditional, just out of high school, freshman.
2. Returning to higher education after having ‘stopped out’ at least once.
3. Married, divorced, widowed, and/or a parent.

Activity I: Communicating With Older Students

Instruct students to list stereotypical views they have held or heard their friends say about non-traditional students, and vice-versa. Then pair a non-traditional student with a traditional student to have them discuss these views. Then have the students report back any information they received through their conversation to counteract those stereotypical views.

Activity II: The Changing Face of the Classroom

Recently, the news has covered an issue concerning the great number of non-traditional students returning or entering college. An article entitled “Students 40 and over enroll at record level.” Some of the main points of the article were:

Enrollment of students aged 40 and over more than tripled between 1970 and 1993, from 5.5% of students in 1970, to 11.2% in 1993. Some of the primary reasons given for this jump include, waning job skills (i.e., skills don’t match the needs of today’s workplace), a desire to enhance careers, a need to keep up with information and industry technology changes, and to satisfy changing lifestyles. Also, the article pointed out that 79% of non-traditional students are enrolled part-time, with 57% working at least 30 hours per week. The typical 40-plus student is white, female, and married. Non-traditional students tend to have better grades than younger students.

Consider the following questions with the class:

1. What are your personal opinions about any of the above points?
2. How do you think this trend is affecting your college career (now or later, if you’re planning an advanced degree), if at all.
3. Do you expect to be a part of this trend in the future?

Encourage non-traditional students to discuss their college experience. For traditional students, ask how having non-traditional students in class has helped (experiences, decision making, etc.). Assign the students to groups to discuss and share their answers to these questions. When possible, combine non-traditional and traditional students in the groups.