

Common Ground Exercise

This exercise is intended to focus our attention on the commonalities and differences in our experiences. All the statements can be modified, but the exercise is not intended to reveal participants' sexual orientation, or information that many students may prefer to keep private. Facilitators need to emphasize that participation is optional (not mandatory) and the purpose is to stimulate dialogue about how to effectively and respectfully foster greater inclusion on campus.

Instructions

Instruct all students to stand in a circle with nothing in the center of the circle.

The facilitator reads a statement and then pauses. Students step into the circle when a statement is read that is TRUE for them. Everyone steps back out before the next statement is made.

Facilitators can either lead the group in discussion after each statement or ask participants to jot down ideas that come up for them when they observe the differences.

Suggested Statements

There is more diversity at the College of Charleston than there is in my hometown. (Facilitator: How do you feel about this?)

I have two friends of non-Christian faiths.

I am concerned that I am judged because of my religious affiliation or lack thereof.

I have had a conversation about racism in the past week. (Facilitator: With whom? How did this go?)

There was very little ethnic diversity in my high school.

I can say thank you in more than two languages.

I have lived in a multi-racial household. (Facilitator: What are the benefits of this or challenges?)

I have a friend who is transgender.

I feel that there are aspects of my social identity that some of my peers do not/would not understand.

I fear for my own safety on a daily basis. (Facilitator: Does this have to do with gender, identity, past experiences?)

I have experienced being the only one of my so-called “race” in a class at CofC.

I would like to share an insight I have gained from having a friend or family member with a disability.

I have never been in a romantic/intimate interracial relationship.

I have been in more than one interracial relationship.

I am more likely to talk about racism with people of my own racialized group.

I am more likely to talk about racism with people who are not of my racialized group.

I believe we need to have more conversations about sexism/gender discrimination.

I avoid having conversations about sexuality issues out of fear that I might offend someone who is LGBTQAI.

I have heard or witnessed a homophobic or disrespectful comment without doing anything to confront it?
(What could you do differently next time?)

I feel that difficulties I have with my school work will be attributed to my gender or racial/ethnic identity.
(Discuss stereotype threat)

I am very interested in having a more diverse friendship network. (Facilitator: What will it take to make this happen? Does it feel strange to try to make this happen?)

Debrief

- Did the exercise alert you to any differences in the levels of safety or emotional security that your peers might be experiencing?
- Did the exercise help you to understand anything about differences in power and privilege?
- Would a greater awareness of these power and privilege differences make for a better campus life?

Closing Share one thing you observed that you have in common with a classmate that you didn’t know before this exercise (You might want to tell the students at the beginning that they will have a chance to name this in the closing).

For further instructions or suggestions for modifying this exercise, feel free to contact Dr. Kristi Brian briankj@cofc.edu 843-953-6452 in the Office of Institutional Diversity.