

Introduction:

“This activity is going to be centered on implicit biases and microaggressions. What exactly are implicit biases? Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. Implicit biases do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs as they are gradually learnt (for instance- through inaccurate media portrayals), and difficult to identify, since they are often denied. These biases surface in the form of micro aggressions, which can have adverse effects. A microaggression is a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group. In order to better understand what microaggressions are, and why they should be eliminated, we will be conducting an activity that highlights the impacts internal biases can have on new international students” (Virginia Cabrera).

Facilitator Notes:

Please note that this activity has the potential to bring up traumatic experiences for some participants. It is important to understand and check in with your participants before facilitating this activity and do not use the activity if it will not teach and only further cause or bring up negative experiences for participants. The activity was originally developed to help domestic students understand hurtful microaggressions that many international students experience, so consider only facilitating the activity with a group of domestic students.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Define and identify microaggressions.
2. Understand why microaggressions may be harmful or hurtful to others.
3. Develop awareness to challenge personal assumptions that may lead to microaggressions, and demonstrate intercultural curiosity to engage in meaningful conversation across difference.

Time:

1 hour.

Group Size:

Pairs.

Materials:

Strips of paper each with one of the questions from Questions to spark conversation; strips of paper each with one of the Microaggression instructions; Participant Instructions (all in [Downloads](#)).

Facilitator note: Print out as many strips of paper as you need depending on the size of your group (you'll need as many questions to spark conversation as you have participants and half as many Microaggression instructions as you have participants).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Minimization

- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Empathy

- To interpret intercultural experience from the perspectives of own and more than one worldview.
- To demonstrate ability to act in a supportive manner that recognizes the feelings of another cultural group.

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Openness

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

Other Skills:

Friendship; Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; Emotional Resilience.

Activity Instructions:

1. Introduce participants to the activity via the Introduction on this document.
2. Ask participants to pair up (or pair them up yourself). Give one partner two strips of paper with separate questions to spark conversation and one strip of paper with one microaggression instruction to use when talking to their partner. Only the person with the microaggression instruction slip will know what to do, so remind partners not to share their instructions with their partner – simply follow them.
3. At the end of one round, participants will switch roles. The partner with the first set of slips will trade slips with a different individual (outside of their current pairing) and then pass them to their original partner without looking. Conversation will resume.
4. Debrief with the following questions:
 - What were some microaggressions you have heard or experienced, and what were some that surprised you?
 - Why do you think these statements are harmful or hurtful to others?
 - How could you change what you heard to convey the original message without the harmful content?
 - Were there any statements that you never realized were actually microaggressions?
 - How can your awareness of microaggressions help foster a more inclusive campus?
5. Conclude with the following:

“As you have just experienced, microaggressions can be extremely uncomfortable and hurtful. The first step towards curbing these microaggressions is to accept our internal biases and understand where they come from. Only then can we work towards mitigating them. It is vital that every international student and domestic student feels welcome and at home here at our beloved university. Being mindful of your verbal and nonverbal communication can help foster a more inclusive and respectful environment for new students. A lot of us are afraid of offending others but it is important we acknowledge we have said something hurtful and offer apologies. We hope that this activity helped open your eyes to microaggressions that you might not have known about and enable you to more effectively communicate with those around you” (Virginia Cabrera).