

Engaging Diversity through Perspective-Taking

Perspective-taking is the ability to engage and learn from perspectives and experiences different from one's own. Perspective-taking may occur in everyday conversations or structured experiences. Perspective-taking is a foundational skill within the University of Iowa's institutional learning outcome of personal and social responsibility. Any experience that provides us with an opportunity to see the world through another's viewpoint can provide perspective-taking. Perspective-taking can be more powerful through within the context of self-authorship, a lifelong process of coming to know oneself that begins in college. Self-authorship helps students answer the questions "Who am I?" "What do I know?" and "How do I want to construct relationships with others?"

Essential elements of perspective-taking include:

- Respect for differing viewpoints
- Ability to explore diverse world views, experiences, and viewpoints
Ability to support one's strongly held views with evidence
- Understanding how individuals come to different strongly held views based on their own experiences, histories, and cultures
- Valuing of diverse perspectives as an essential resource for learning, growth, and development

Students gain the ability to form their own grounded positions by "attending seriously to differing perspectives and developing respect and empathy for others' views even in the face of disagreement." Opportunities to engage in perspective-taking are a "crucial catalyst for intellectual and moral growth." (both quotes from AACU, p. ix, 2010).

Perspective-taking is an essential skill to successfully meet The Iowa Challenge. "*Stretch*" articulates an expectation that students step away from the familiar, experience new cultures and learn from people different from themselves. Respectful engagement with alternative views is also a critical job skill frequently cited by employers. Ultimately, perspective-taking skills provide the foundation for students to participate in more advanced levels of personal and social responsibility, including social justice, social change, and advocacy work.

The goal of our current project is to identify where we are providing students with perspective-taking experiences and opportunities. Opportunities may include informal peer interactions, student organizations, or classroom experiences. Indicators of perspective-taking experiences may be:

- Meaningful discussions of controversial and provocative topics
- Informal and unstructured peer interactions across difference
- Co-curricular programming around differing and less popular viewpoints
- Experiences around a common purpose where students engage with diverse others and views

Core question for students:

What experiences, programs, or practices on campus (in and out of the classroom) have provided you the opportunity to engage with different perspectives?

How did those experiences, practices, or programs help you grow and develop?

Are there particular topics or subjects that you have discussed with others that helped you engage with different perspectives?