

## Students — like icebergs — different than first impressions, expert says

July 25 2005

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Most freshmen moving into college and university residence halls around the country will experience for the first time living with people vastly different than they are, but a Purdue University expert says students should look at this as an opportunity.

James J. Foster, who has worked with students in residence halls for more than 30 years, says students should remember that there is much, much more to other people than what they see in first impressions.

"I ask people to think of an iceberg," says Foster, administrator for diversity education with Purdue's University Residences. "When you look at an iceberg, you can only see 10 percent or 20 percent of it – the rest is hidden below the water. With people, you can see their skin color, their gender, the way they dress, but when you get a chance to get to know them, you can start to see everything that is hidden below the surface of the water."

At most universities, and particularly in the close living environment of a residence hall, diversity does not just mean difference in race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, he says.

Diversity also includes traits such as different religious or political views, family backgrounds, areas of the state or country where someone grew up, commitment to studying and learning, and simply looking or acting different. Students should understand that they might find themselves uncomfortable around people who are different in these ways

as well.

Foster says one of the most important things students can do to become more comfortable with new and different people is to understand their initial reactions. It is impossible for individuals to keep themselves from making that initial snap judgment, but if they are able to recognize what those judgments are, they can look beyond them, he says.

"We can't stop our minds from jumping to what they are going to jump to when we meet someone new," Foster says. "The important thing is for us to understand and expect that initial judgment, so that we will be able to overcome it. There are so many stories about roommates who thought they had nothing in common and took the time to get to know each other and are now best friends."

Source: Purdue University

Citation: Students — like icebergs — different than first impressions, expert says (2005, July 25) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-07-students-icebergs-expert.html>

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