

# Dog-Food Treats

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**Applicable Courses:** Any course in which diversity is taught.

**Approximate Time to Complete:** 5–10 minutes.

**Purpose:** To illustrate the automatic nature of stereotyping and the tendency for people to base their judgments of others on outward appearance.

**Materials:** Box of dog-food treats and a palatable, realistic substitute for them.

**Description:** This activity would be ideal to use as a tool to introduce a lecture on diversity or cultural competence. It works best if implemented at the beginning of the semester. Purchase a box of dog-food treats, preferably a box that does not have a picture of the dog food on the box. Open the bottom of the box and empty the contents. Fill the box with something edible that resembles a dog treat as much as possible, such as coated nuts, party mix, or chocolate candy (See Figure 1). Be sure to discretely secure the opening of the box. To draw the students into the activity, briefly tell them a story about your dog (or the neighbor's dog if you do not have one) and how you enjoy purchasing treats for him or her. Improvise on the story as necessary. Ask the class if they have ever eaten dog treats, and then proceed to eat one. Ask if anyone would like a treat, as well. Observe their reaction. Usually, there are signs of disgust or surprise. Debrief the students on the truth. Next, relate their reactions to how people judge others by what appears on the outside, not what is inside.



**Figure 1** Replacing contents of box of dog-food treats with party mix.

Discuss how people use skin color, race, gender, or age to make judgments about individuals whom they do not know. Automatic judgments are often flawed, and stereotyping is an unconscious process. Being aware of one's potential to stereotype is an initial step in becoming open minded about diversity issues.

**Insights:** If used appropriately, this simple teaching tool can have a significant impact on students' awareness of stereotyping. ■

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