**Brian Hentz, Ph.D. “How Do You Teach Diversity?” Assignment**

**University of Connecticut Association for Business Communication 2019**

**Assignment**: *‘Aging Literacy’ for Culturally Competent Professionals: An Introduction*

I use this exploratory assignment—comprised on an in-class activity and out-of-class writing assignment—to introduce a unit on interpersonal communication and cultural competence in my undergraduate Business Communication class. Specifically, I use “cultural competence” here to refer to an awareness of one’s own cultural identity (i.e., tacit rules, norms, and values that govern meaning making) and the ability to learn from and collaborate with others who share different cultural identities.

***Anticipatory Set (Priming)***

The in-class activity consists of 2 parts. First, students in pairs complete the “Whose Line is It, Anyway?” portion. To do so, student pairs circulate around the room to read a series of phrases that I post around the room (see back of this sheet for reference). For each phrase, students are encouraged to identify who they thought might have said the phrase. If they believe the phrase was said by a younger adult about an older adult, then they write “OA” on a sheet that the student pair creates. Conversely, if they believe the phrase was said by an older adult about a younger adult, then they write “YA” on their sheet.

Students then complete the second part of this activity (wait to discuss responses to both parts of activity until students complete this second part). In this activity titled “Would You Approve?,” students answer “yes” or “no” to a series of statements that I provide on a separate sheet (see back of this sheet for reference) and are encouraged to justify their responses.

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I then facilitate a class discussion with respect to students’ responses and reactions to this 2-part activity. Key questions include: *What is “old?” What age do you consider to be “old?” How do you think you learned to carry these assumptions?*

As a segue, I then have students view the following AARP video: “Millenials Show Us What Old Looks Like” (URL: <https://videos.aarp.org/detail/video/4834178739001/millennials-show-us-what-%E2%80%98old%E2%80%99-looks-like---aarp>) and ask students to write a brief 1-paragraph summary of what they took away from the video, our discussion, and the in-class activity.

***Writing Prompt (Follow-Up Assignment)***I ask students to locate an article or advertisement in an online publication and explore how the article or advertisement demonstrates “ageism.” To complete the assignment, students must identify the rhetorical framework (e.g., audience, purpose, use) and situate the text in a meaningful context. In their responses, students should explore the following guided questions as well: *What is a*

*“ageism?” Where does ageism occur? How does society perpetuate ageism?*

In addition to helping students become more reflective practitioners and more responsive to rhetorical elements that underpin professional messages with respect to cultural competence, this activity andfollow-up writing activity can then dovetail into larger, more substantive projects (e.g., business plan) that require a sensitivity to aging-related issues.

**“Whose Line Is It Anyway?” Prompts**

* “They always stick together and keep their distance from other age groups.”
* “They’re entitled and they know it.”
* “They are hazards on the road.”
* “They’re always taking and never giving.”
* “They’re so opinionated; they think they have the answers to everything.”
* “They’re never satisfied, and they always complain about something.”
* “They’re so forgetful.”
* “They really need to act their age.”
* “You don’t want to hire them.”

**“Would You Approve?” Prompts**

* Would you approve of a woman who decided to have a child after age 60?
* Would you approve of a 70-year-old man who fathered a child?
* Would you approve of a 25-year-old adult who was wealthy enough to retire?
* Would you approve of a 14-year-old college student?
* Would you approve of an 82-year-old adult who still worked full-time?
* Would you approve of a 90-year-old college student?