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## Design Memo

### **What is a values affirmation intervention, and what does it aim to address?**

Values affirmation intervention (VAI) is an instructional strategy that aims to give the message to all students that their values matter in class and in life. By giving an opportunity to students to think and write about their values such as perseverance, confidence, independence before high-stakes assessments students are empowered to be equipped with an “I can do” attitude and have a greater confidence before taking exams.

### **Why might you want to implement the values affirmation intervention in your course?**

#### **What do you hope to achieve?**

Some of the reasons to implement VAI in my course include incorporating an alternative assessment that value students’ unique backgrounds and the individual experiences they bring to the course. Unfortunately, some students experience math anxiety and some experience test anxiety. In order to address these obstacles that may adversely affect students’ performance, I choose to incorporate VAI as an alternative assessment that I am very passionate about as an educator. I hope that students reflect on their values that make their unique personality and by focusing on the things that matter to them on an individual level they can find correlations between their values and the personalized path to their success in my course. One of the reasons why I chose to incorporate the VAI is to support students’ commitment to their own success by improving self-belonging and inclusiveness. Especially, during the pandemic, this type of support

is what is needed to improve student learning outcomes. I hope that students receive boost and confidence by participating in this optional assessment to hopefully improve their performance in my course.

**Why did you decide to incorporate values affirmation intervention into your class? How is it useful to you as an instructor? How is it useful to students?**

My personal teaching philosophy include addressing the whole-person. I like incorporating alternative assessments that does not offer one-fits-all perspective. To me, teaching and learning is not a one-fits-all concept! I am a big fan of alternative assessments and have been developing & integrating them in my courses. When I learned about the VAI Faculty Support Group it appealed to me since it is well aligned with my professional interests of developing and integrating alternative assessments. In addition to assessing students' conceptual mastery in Calculus, I chose to assign optional VAI assignments to cultivate a learning environment that values everyone's contribution. Students appreciate the opportunity of extra credit and the fact that I read & review & share their responses anonymously enabled a more close-knit learning environment. Students enjoyed the fact that there are no right or wrong answers (unlike a Math problem) and participation matters in my course.

**How does the values affirmation task fit into your class? How long does it take for students to complete?**

I incorporated the VAI strategy into my Math 136: Calculus II for Life and Social Sciences course as optional Canvas quizzes before each midterm during the Spring 2021 semester. For each midterm exam, I included a different format such as video, audio or written to improve the diversity in the format and offer more opportunities to participate to the assignment. I transformed the original VAI task to be more applicable to the math learning in a way to appeal to the students more. This included focusing on the perseverance in problem solving teaching

standard and reminding students that the values they have perfectly fits with learning and exceling in Mathematics. It took 10-25 minutes to complete the assignments depending on the depth of the information students choose to provide about their values.

**How should points in the course be assigned for students' work on the values affirmation assignment(s)?**

The assignment was optional for students and there are no right or wrong answers. Therefore, the assignment itself valued efforts and participation. I added 2 points to each 100-points midterm based on student participation to each VAI assignment. The students who choose not to participate did not get penalized, so this group of students were exempt.

**What pitfalls should be avoided?**

One of the pitfalls was that the assignment may become redundant by including the same questions as if the answers would be different in such a short time. In order to avoid this, I incorporated additional questions and additional format for the assignment each time and relate the values to the course content and learning.

**How do we explain to students about the purpose of the activity (if at all)?**

I briefly introduced the VAI strategy in a lecture before assigning it to the students. I remember not using the word “intervention” so I would not introduce any potential negative attitudes towards the strategy. I stated that this is a research proven instructional strategy to boost student confidence before a major assessment with the aim of improving the outcomes. After this brief introduction, I sent Canvas emails before each VAI assignment reminding students that the assignment is available in Canvas and due within a specific time frame.

**What, in your view, is the most important thing to know about implementing this type of intervention? (e.g., if you were telling a colleague about it who had never implemented it before)**

In my professional opinion, as educators, we need to embrace the idea that education is not a one-fits-all concept. By incorporating different instructional strategies such as the VAI we are giving opportunities to our students who have different backgrounds and skillsets that their willingness to contribute to class matters (and valued). I have learned that many students value independence, perseverance and empathy (specifically empathy is what we need right now as we are going through the pandemic). I have seen and heard students who might be uncomfortable to participate in a live class through the video submitted for the VAI assignment. These type of “out-of-the-box” assignments contribute to a productive learning community that we all strive to cultivate.