

Dr. Marc Muñiz

Assistant Professor of Professional Practice

Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology

Course: Extended General Chemistry (01:160:166)

Website with bio and more info: <https://sasose.rutgers.edu/triad-coalition/who-we-are1/93-triad-coalition/who-we-are/231-marc-muniz-about>

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

A values affirmation intervention is a brief writing activity that asks students to reflect on values that are important to them. Such activities aim to address stereotype threat - a phenomenon that occurs when members of marginalized groups feel as though they have to perform at a very high level to either 1). Confirm existing stereotypes about their group performing better than other groups, OR 2). Go against existing stereotypes about their group performing worse than other groups. The stress response associated with stereotype threat can, in fact, inhibit performance. A values affirmation intervention aims to direct attention toward values that are important to students and away from a fixation on having to “prove oneself” based on the aforementioned stereotypes. They are most effective when administered ahead of high-stakes assessments such as exams.

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

What do you hope to achieve? 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?

Introductory (or “gateway”) STEM courses are environments that, often times, put students from underrepresented backgrounds at a disproportionate disadvantage for a number of reasons (stereotype threat, didactic instruction, lack of resources dedicated to first generation college students, lack of culturally conscious instruction or representation, microaggressive behavior from instructors or other students etc.). Therefore, any intervention that is effective at reducing the impact of these inequities should be given strong consideration by an instructor who is aiming to equitably engage students in the class and, therefore, produce equitable outcomes. My hope is that the implementation of this intervention, in conjunction with transitioning to a high-structure course format, narrows the achievement gap between students who are traditionally excluded and marginalized in STEM.

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

In the class I co-teach this semester (with colleagues Christine Altinis and Mary Emenike), the values affirmation task will be implemented at least three times during the semester (once before the first exam, once before the third exam, and once before the final exam). The task is administered online via the course learning management system (in this case, Canvas), and points are awarded to students based on effort. These points count toward a category of the course called “surveys etc.” that is worth 5% of the overall grade. The aim is to

provide an incentive for students to take the task seriously while also contributing to a decrease in the stakes regarding assessments (i.e. 5% of the grade that could otherwise be allocated toward moderate or high stakes assessments is now allocated toward assessments that are very low-stakes).

Students are expected to take no more than ~15 min. to complete the task.