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# SIMPLE- Values Affirmation

## Design Memo

Courses implemented and planned future implementations:

Spring 2021	01:355:201 Research in the Disciplines, 3 credits
Summer 2021	01:355:201 Research in the Disciplines, 3 credits
Fall 2021	01:355:101 Expository Writing, 3 credits 01:355:201 Research in the Disciplines, 3 credits

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

*The Values Affirmation Intervention, hereafter referred to as VAI, is an intervention administered as an assignment to students often before a high-stake assignment, quiz, or exam. The VAI focus on self-affirmation and in this context, we have used the VAI as a brief, written quiz where students can focus on values that are important to them and how those values fit into their lives. The VAI aims to destress in general but also to more specifically reduce stress connected to the social identity threat related to a certain identity or group membership. VAI may also help reduce stereotypical threat which is when an individual is identified with a stereotype of a group they belong to and often underperform based on perceived expectations of the stereotypes of their group.*

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

*The VAI is an assignment that anyone can take and “succeed” at, there are no wrong answers and each individual focuses on their values and the importance that they have in their lives. The*

*VAI may signal to a student that the instructor's interest in them goes beyond the discipline of the course. Asking a student what values they find important and why is a simple investment in student trust and confidence and may encourage students to engage in self-affirmation. If this could result in even a small reduction of stereotypical threat and lead to success for students that suffer from a sense of non-belonging and/or impostor syndrome then it is a small investment in time with a possible great revenue for students and faculty alike. The VAI may also help close the performance gap between majority represented and underrepresented students. In research writing classes for example, stereotypical threat may be in typically gender-related topics such as assumptions that males are more inclined to excel in certain STEM areas and that women might be more inclined to excel in the humanities and in writing and composition.*

**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?**

*Expository Writing (101) is a course that all Rutgers undergraduates are required to take (except for students who are awarded degree credits for AP exam scores of 4 or 5 in English). Many students are also required to take an additional writing course during their undergraduate education. The diversity of the students in the classes are therefore great with many students that are first-generation college students, international students with limited command of English etc. Many students come from underrepresented backgrounds that take classes with students from diametrically opposite environments. It may create an imbalance in the classroom where some students for example feel extremely comfortable addressing the instructor or engaging in class discussions while others may not feel comfortable talking to anyone as there may be an inherent sense of not belonging.*

*Whereas I have only implemented the VAI in a 200-level course so far, I am hoping that it will have an equally positive outcome this fall when I plan to implement it in a section of Expository Writing (01:355:101) as well.*

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

*Most courses in the Writing Program do not have exams and quizzes but essays, source evaluations, research proposals, etc. For the 201 class, Research in the Disciplines, that I taught in spring 2021, I decided instead to give the first assignment mid-semester immediately before Oral Presentations. Although the OPs only represent 10% of the final course grade, it is an assignment that often brings great stress to the most confident student. The second VAI quiz, which was identical to the first one was taken on the very last day of class as the Final Draft of the Essay was due the same day after class. The Final Draft represents 50% of the final grade. The VAI has taken less than ten minutes and for many students less than five minutes. This class was taught synchronously this semester and the VAI (based on Jordt et al. 2017 CBE*

*Life Sciences Educ*) was given as a quiz in the Canvas LMS which is the learning management system used in the Writing Program. To achieve full participation, the quizzes were given during synchronous class time and all attending students at each time participated. However, class sizes are small in the WP so participation for both instances was less than twenty.

*For my summer 2021 session of 201 Research in the Disciplines I have already given the quiz on the very first day of synchronous class and plan to implement it again before the Oral Presentation as well as on the day that the final paper is due. The enrollment is 19 students and all that were registered on the first day participated in the first quiz.*

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

*No points or extra credits will be given for the assignment(s) except for possible points in the participation category (10% of the final grade, the VAI would represent a small part of this grade).*

*For the course in spring 2021, no participation points were awarded but that may be needed as an incentive in the future.*

**What pitfalls should be avoided?**

*My students required truly little information about the VAI so I would refrain from explaining much more than that it is a quiz that does not affect any outcomes in the class but may rather benefit the learning community as a whole.*

*If possible, allowing students to take the quiz during class time may render better participation.*

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

*This was a concern of mine, that students would be less likely to complete or not engage well with the intervention due to not understanding the purpose. However, it was obvious from the first time that the Intervention quiz was given that students saw it just as another task that needed to be completed for class and asked no questions. They were given a very brief description of the SIMPLE group in very general terms and had no further questions.*

**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)**

*Perhaps after looking at some of my students' answers, I realize how open they have been and how much they have included as a "message" to whom they assume the intended reader is (i.e., their instructor). Many of them have left the kind of information about themselves that often is invaluable to me in their entrance surveys that I include at the very beginning of the semester. I only read a handful but many of them seemed to specifically speak about how their values have helped them maintain mental wellbeing during the pandemic. This has made me consider adding the VAI to the start of the semester as well, even though it will not precede a high-stake assignment it may alleviate some initial stress connected to the unknown of a new course.*

*It may be difficult to convince some of my colleagues that implementing the VAI may be extremely useful, while others will take a great interest in it. For some, it may just be difficult to consider the addition of another quiz, even though there is no need to grade nor read the answers.*

**Has implementing this intervention made you think about other potential areas in which you would like to improve equity and outcomes in your classes? If so, please describe.**

*Yes and no, this whole past year has made me think about how to improve equity, inclusiveness, and how that may affect learning outcomes in my classes. But one thing that implementing the VAI has made me think about is how I can incorporate other exercises that are inclusive for everyone regardless of prior experience, knowledge, and linguistic ability. As an instructor in the Humanities with many STEM students and with research writing courses that address STEM related topics this has made me consider how within the humanities and in small classes VAI can be optimized to render desired results for students.*