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Introduction to Political Science Research Methods (01:790:300)
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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?

I decided to incorporate a values affirmation intervention into my class because I worry about the effects of stereotype threat on my students' performance and experience in my Introduction to Political Science Research Methods course. This course is a quantitative course and has a high failure rate (at least in the social sciences). I decided to incorporate a values affirmation intervention because it is an evidence-based approach to overcoming the negative effects of stereotype threat.

The values affirmation intervention is likely most beneficial to my students, particularly those who are susceptible to stereotype threat. In a way, I think it is also beneficial to myself as an instructor because I often reflect on my graduate school experience where I was the only female graduate student in my cohort. I would often be teased about my gender and how my gender would affect my ability to succeed in the quantitative courses. I didn't know about stereotype threat back then, but when I reflect on my experiences as a graduate student I am certain that gender stereotypes affected my performance on course exams and qualifying exams. I don't want my students to find themselves in a similar situation.

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

The values affirmation will fit into my class as a weekly assignment. I have two weekly assignments for my online research methods course. Each assignment is worth 10-points, and is worth 50% of their course grade. This should take students about 10 minutes to complete.

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

See answer above. I will award points based on completion of the assignment.

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

A values affirmation intervention is a low-stakes assignment where students reflect on their personal values. What is important to them? What do they value? This reflection is meant to pull them from the minutia and rigor of the course to remind themselves of who they are, what they value, where they came from, and where they want to go. On a physical level, this reflection can calm students and serve as a grounding exercise before a major high-stakes assessment. One of my favorite yoga phrases is "root down to rise up." It means finding your balance and grounding yourself before you rise up to a more challenging position. To me, a value affirmation intervention is the equivalent of this yoga phrase.

What pitfalls should be avoided?

We discussed in our faculty group that we may not want to repeat this values affirmation more than twice. Instead, we could incorporate a few variations of values affirmation exercises in our

courses. One member of the working group mentioned that students could just copy and paste their responses if they have to do the values affirmation more than once in the semester. So if we are going to give the values affirmation twice, then we suggested the second time that we might ask students to connect their values to the course. How might their values serve them in this class or major? Or future jobs?

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

I remember reading that the effect of the values affirmation intervention is reduced when students are aware of the intent of the intervention. I think an explanation would almost serve as a reminder of stereotype threats (like women are less adept at math compared to men) and mitigate the positive effect of the values affirmation intervention.

Here is how I prompted students:

“Hi All,

I have designated our class this week as a Mental Health Day. Some of your classmates, or perhaps you, are going through really difficult times. I want to remind you that you are NOT alone in your struggle, and that there are people who want to help support you through your difficult time.

Please spend ~10 minutes participating in this individual reflection activity. This is a graded lecture activity, and will count toward your "Online Lecture Activities" course grade. You will receive full credit if you complete the activity. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

After you participate in this discussion, please take time OFF from class this week. At a minimum, you have three hours of "freedom" from this particular class this week. You have my permission, in fact my full support and encouragement, to NOT do anything related to our class this week. Take some time to breathe.

And finally, please remember that there are resources on campus to help support students. Please share this with your friends and encourage your friends to use these resources too. Asking for help can be one of the hardest but most important decisions you ever make. Here is a good starting place: <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>”

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)

I would want my colleagues to understand how quick and easy it is to implement a values affirmation intervention in their classes! It takes very little time to set up the Canvas activity and very little time to grade (if at all)...but the benefits of this easy activity are substantial for the students!

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

Yes! While a values-affirmation intervention is an evidence-based approach known to reduce achievement gaps, it is like putting a band-aid on a major wound. I would still like to learn more strategies to improve equity and learning outcomes for my classes. I am still concerned about achievement gaps in my quantitative courses and I would like to discuss methods of engagement and retention for all students.