Unit I: Evaluating Values

Personal Values Essay

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**Length: 700-1,000 words (2-3 pages) Rough Draft Due: August 30th**

**Follow MLA Conventions\* Final Draft Due: September 4th**

**\***double-spaced with one-inch margins, in Times New Roman, 12 font. See sample paper on D2L.

**the assignment**

Often, we think about arguing from a place of belief, i.e. “I believe [blank] to be true.” But our beliefs flow out of our values, which are the abstract concepts/ideals that guide our decisions, our thoughts, and yes, our beliefs. So, in order to really understand the foundation of our beliefs and opinions, we need to look to the values we hold, and—more important—determine which ones we prioritize. Many people share values, but we don’t always have the same hierarchy of those values. Assessing and communicating our own values is the first step to becoming more aware of the importance values hold and the ways that others’ values lead them toward beliefs and attitudes.

So, in class you will do a **values assessment**, through which you will identify some of your key values and associated items that both reflect and represent those values. Then you will **write a 700-1,000 word essay** about **ONE of your values** through the lens of the **important thing** that represents your value. You will also want to examine **where this value comes from**, **what it means to you**, and **why it is a priority** in your life. Also consider **how this value impacts your position on issues** and **how this value has lead you to meaningful action**.

Do not fall into the belief trap! If you find yourself taking a stance like “I believe in living alone,” then you’ve fallen away from values and into belief. Values are associated with whatever you deem good and right; in their purest form, they are less cultural and personal, and more abstract and universal. Our values come from our experiences being a human in this world; however, the values we prioritize often reflect the cultures we grew up in and the people who surround us. We cannot assume everyone prioritizes the same values as we do. Hence, it is important to learn to identify and explain our values. We do this through making these values personal by telling stories and tying our values to tangible important things, using those items/people/events to ground our values in the real world.

Keys to this essay will be specificity, detail, and a narrow focus. Even though values are abstract, in this essay, you want to avoid overly philosophical statements and generalizations. Stick with your own story. Your goal is to provide a focused depiction of your value, grounded in a specific story about a person, an item, and/or an event, that demonstrate to your audience (your instructor and the rest of the class) where this value comes from and how it guides your life, decisions, and actions.

**THE PROJECT PORTFOLIO**

Make sure you include in a two-pocket folder:

* Your values assessment
* Two drafts with your classmates’ comments
* Final draft (in MLA format) – also upload to D2L
* Self-participation assessment