**Values Response Essay**

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One of the assignments I used for Writing 312 (Persuasive Writing) was the Values Essay, which asked students to interview someone with whom they disagreed on a particular life choice in order to better understand why that person had made that choice. The written assignment then synthesized the interview-ee's experiences and core values that led to their decision. In a post-assignment reflection, students often mentioned how eye-opening this process was—so often they couldn't conceive why that person had made that decision, but after listening, it not only made sense but engendered more empathy in the student for that person and their beliefs about the world. The major follow-up assignment to that was writing a Rogerian argument to a classmate on a specific issue on which the two students disagreed. This provided students with a live opportunity to interact with an opposing audience and to draft and revise based on feedback from someone who really did hold an opposing opinion. Again, in reflection, students often commented on how that live audience influenced their drafting process in a way they might not have experienced had they just been imagining an opposing audience. Basically, I think we can easily make up caricatures of our audiences when we're writing persuasively, and having that hands-on experience can be really beneficial in filling out the complexities and nuances of an audience (and thus make persuasive writing more effective).