

New Orleans

LAKE PONCHATRA

Reflections Reflections

Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy

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WRITING THE BLUES:
Teaching in a Post-Katrina Environment

CALL FOR PAPERS

Peace: On the Frontlines of Non-Violence
Fall 2008

While the past six years has been marked by a "war on terror," alliances of university faculty, community residents and students have been creating classrooms, publications, and programs based upon peace and non-violence. Although the immediate cause of such work might be seen as the Iraq War, there is a much longer and richer tradition of peace and non-violence work than can be captured by the current moment. Nor is "peace" a concept linked only to war. Communities must also respond to gun violence, hate crimes, and internal conflicts. Working for peace, then, can also stand for the overarching struggle to overcome violence and build harmonious neighborhoods. With this issue, we hope to examine the nature and significance of such work and to explore the obstacles to openly taking on unpopular or contentious concepts of community.

We invite manuscripts that consider questions currently important to those engaged in working toward peace and non-violent pedagogies and partnerships:

- What types of local partnerships and classroom pedagogies are required to establish service-learning courses connected to national peace movements?
- What is the role of university-based courses in working with community organizations to end neighborhood violence?
- How can organizations which support victims of violence be integrated into service-learning/community partnerships?
- What is the role of specific religious or moral traditions in supporting students engaged in such work?
- What ideological/political issues are involved in placing students in controversial or contentious national/neighborhood efforts focused on peace and non-violence?

This issue of *Reflections* will explore through personal narrative, academic analysis, community writing, photography and artwork the ways in which university faculty, community members and students work towards a "non-violent world."

We seek papers of 20-25 pages that offer rich descriptions of actual practices, theoretical explorations of the nature of such work, or examples of project generated community-based materials. We are particularly interested in papers which bring these various elements together. Manuscripts should follow MLA guidelines and should include a 75-100 abstract. Please send inquiries to Steve Parks (sjparks@syr.edu) by May 1st.

Reflections

Reflections

Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy

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Reflections, a peer reviewed journal, provides a forum for scholarship on writing, service-learning and community literacy. Originally founded as a venue for teachers, researchers, students and community partners to share research and discuss the theoretical, political and ethical implications of community-based writing and writing instruction, **Reflections** publishes a lively collection of essays, empirical studies, community writing, student work, interviews and reviews in a format that brings together emerging scholars and leaders in the fields of community-based writing and civic engagement. We welcome materials that: report on research; showcase community-based and student writing and/or artwork; investigate and represent literacy practices in diverse community settings; discuss theoretical, political and ethical implications of community-based writing; explore connections between service-learning, civic engagement, and current scholarship in composition studies and related fields.

Submissions Electronic submissions are preferred. Manuscripts (10 –25 double-spaced pages) should conform to current MLA guidelines for format and documentation and should include an abstract (about 100 words). Attach the manuscript as a Word or WordPerfect file to an email message addressed to Steve Parks (sjparks@syr.edu). The email message will serve as a cover letter and should include your name(s) and contact information, the title of the manuscript, and a brief biographical statement. Your name should not appear in the manuscript itself or in accompanying materials such as syllabi. All submissions deemed appropriate for **Reflections** are sent to external reviewers for blind review. You should receive prompt acknowledgement of receipt of your piece, followed by a report on its status within six to eight weeks.

Contributors interested in submitting a book review (about 1000 words) or recommending a book for review are encouraged to contact the editors. We invite announcements and abstracts (200-500 words) describing current research projects and Classroom Sampler submissions (1000- 2000 words) describing exemplary course designs, assignments and activities and the theoretical perspectives that inform them. Articles published in **Reflections** are indexed in ERIC and in the MLA Bibliography.

Reflections

Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy

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Introduction

Reflections: Defining Community/Building Theories

Community is a tricky word: although it often connotes an inclusive and harmonious collaborative space, too often it signifies a site of struggle and negotiation, an attempt to find a common framework for conflicting and seemingly contradictory impulses. One of the marks of those active in “community literacy studies,” “service-learning” and “engaged scholarship” is the desire to place themselves in the struggle to build a common framework for collaboration and, within that architecture, to move forward towards building a shared notion of educational, social, and/or political rights.

Over the past six years, the United States has seen its sense of community imploded, rebuilt, fractured, and potentially rebuilt again. For many in our field, these challenges have called us to rethink our identities as scholars, teachers, community members, and citizens. The work which has resulted speaks not only to the ability of individuals working in common to respond to crises large and small, but also to the ability of our field to revise its pedagogical, scholarly, and programmatic commitments.

For the next three issues, *Reflections* will focus on the work undertaken in response to the recent national crises that have tested our understanding of community and community responsibility – Hurricanes Katrina/Rita, the War on Terror, and the debates over undocumented workers. While it is impossible to capture the full complexity of each moment, we hope to publish work that speaks to the multiple ways in which individuals and programs responded. In the process, we hope *Reflections* can demonstrate how the immediate and the long-term can stand in productive dialogue with each other. By juxtaposing efforts in response to sudden and dramatic needs, such as the crisis of Hurricane Katrina/Rita, with community-based work undertaken over a longer trajectory, we hope it becomes clear that each immediate crisis also speaks to systemic issues that precede and

unfortunately extend beyond the current moment. In this way, we hope that *Reflections* will demonstrate the multiple levels on which we must consistently act.

This focus on national crises will culminate with a special issue focused on theorizing the nature of community-based work in the current moment, edited by Ellen Cushman and Jeff Grabill. We will also publish a special on-line issue, edited by the Publicly Active Graduate Education Collective, focused on how the next generation of scholars understands its civic role as professors and citizens. (To see full descriptions of each issue, visit our website at <http://reflections.syr.edu>.)

Throughout each issue, we will aim to represent the full scope of intellectual work that emerges out of community/public school/university projects. For this reason, *Reflections* will continue its tradition of publishing a wide range of materials – scholarly articles, community studies, personal memoir, and photography – by a wide range of writers and individuals who are based in public school, academic, and community settings. In conjunction with traditional academic articles, we intend to feature student papers, photographic projects, oral histories, and other artifacts that represent the power of a particular project. By doing so, we believe *Reflections* can demonstrate the variety of voices, genres, and styles that mark community literacy.

As you read this issue on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and reflect upon the topics of four forthcoming issues, we hope you will consider not only work you might have produced in response to these national events, but also how other aspects of your work related to such longer-term issues as public schools, queer politics, urban poverty, disability rights, and homelessness might also intersect with and expand our understanding of community. We hope that *Reflections* can provide a forum for all the competing and complimentary elements that distinguish our efforts to build community.

None of these plans would be possible, however, without the efforts of departing *Reflections* Editor Barbara Roswell. As *Reflections* looks

forward, then, I want to acknowledge and express my gratitude to Barbara for work as Editor and to recognize her success in making *Reflections* a nationally respected journal. As I begin my term as Editor, I hope to work with the *Reflections* Editorial Board to ensure this progress continues. I am also very happy to welcome August TARRIER as Associate Editor and I want to express my gratitude for her willingness to sign on to the work ahead.

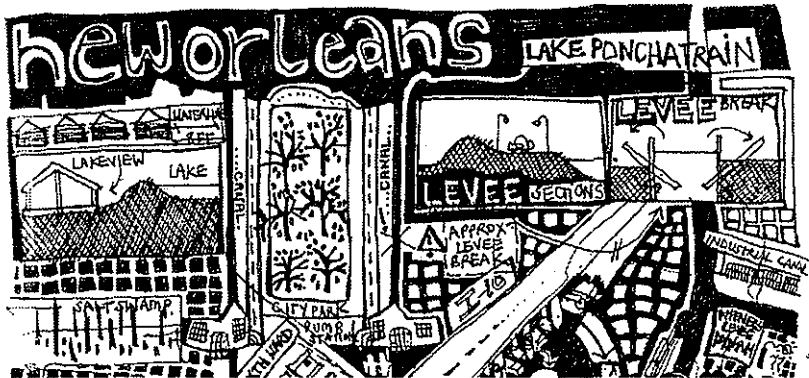
I also want to acknowledge Jan Cohen-Cruz, James McDonald, and Nancy Richard, without whose support in reaching out to the wide range of individuals and institutions this particular issue would not have been possible. I am also grateful to the *Journal of College Writing* and *South Central Review* and the *Journal for Civic Commitment* for allowing us to republish several articles. I hope the generosity and sense of collaboration demonstrated by these individuals and organizations will inform the spirit and ethos of *Reflections* in the years to come.

Kristi Johnson, George Rhinehart, Chris Palmer, Louanne Payne, and Beth Wagner have been vital in developing a solid infrastructure for the journal. As you visit our website, explore our online archive, read announcements on our listserv, pay your subscription dues on-line, and receive the journal in the mail, you should know their hard work and problem solving capabilities made this smooth operation possible. Denise Valdes, *Reflections* Graduate Intern, has also provided valuable insight into the emerging intellectual vision of the journal. I am grateful for all their efforts

Finally, I want to thank Eileen Schell, who as Chair of the Writing Program ensured that the institutional support necessary to take on this work was made available, and through her work at Nottingham Senior Living Community, has demonstrated how community-partnership work should be undertaken.

Steve Parks
Editor, *Reflections*





Writing the Storm
Part I



In the Wake of Katrina: A Brief Overview of New Orleans Colleges and Universities

James McDonald, University of Louisiana Lafayette

*
* Hurricane Katrina shut down nine colleges and universities
* in the New Orleans area right at the beginning of the fall
* 2005 semester, as students, faculty, and staff scattered across
* the country. Despite often severe damage from flooding,
* fires, and wind, all nine institutions reopened the following
* January, sometimes using FEMA trailers, hotels, and cruise
* ships to replace damaged buildings and lost housing. The
* stories of these campuses since Katrina are dominated by
* themes of loss, resilience, ingenuity, conflict, and renewed
* senses of mission and community.
*

If you teach at a college or university on the Gulf Coast, you expect the campus to close because of a hurricane from time to time.

Normally, the campus closes the day before landfall so that students, faculty, and other employees can prepare their house for the storm, help friends and neighbors, and perhaps pack and join the long, slow procession of cars, trucks, and vans headed for safer territory. If a hurricane is powerful enough and near enough, campus might be closed for a week while utilities are restored, debris is cleared, and repairs are made. Hurricane Katrina was big and strong enough to close the three campuses in Baton Rouge, LSU, Southern University, and Baton Rouge Community College, for a week, even though Baton Rouge was almost a hundred miles from Katrina's eye, and on its weak side. For me, fifty miles further west at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, August

29, 2005, was a cloudy day. A month later, Hurricane Rita would close UL-Lafayette for several days, but the eye would go through an evacuated Lake Charles, shutting down McNeese State University for a month, with some buildings closed for repairs into 2007. Those of us in Lafayette and Baton Rouge consider ourselves lucky.

I mention parts of Louisiana outside New Orleans damaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita because, if you live on the Gulf Coast, you feel obligated to remind people that two category 5 hurricanes beared down on Louisiana in the fall of 2005, washing away entire towns on the coast of Mississippi, in Plaquemines and St. Bernard parishes east of New Orleans, and in Cameron and Calcasieu parishes in the southwest corner of Louisiana and wreaking havoc along the coast from Alabama to east Texas. The combination of hurricanes strengthened by global warming, the massive erosion of the coastal wetlands, and government incompetence in maintaining levees and responding to the emergency devastated more than just New Orleans.

But, because of the length of time the city was under water, the number of people evacuated (many permanently), the threat to the unique culture of New Orleans, and the ways that the disaster exposed racial and class inequities in America, what happened to New Orleans was of a different magnitude. My assignment in this essay is to provide an overview of what happened to a small but important part of New Orleans, the college and university campuses in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

New Orleans is home to two state universities—the University of New Orleans, Delgado Community College, and the historically black Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO)—one two-year college—Delgado Community College—and five private colleges and universities—Tulane University, Loyola University of New Orleans, Our Lady of Holy Cross College, Dillard University (a historically black university), and Xavier University of New Orleans (the only

historically black Catholic university in the U. S.). When Katrina came ashore on August 29, the fall semester was just beginning on these campuses. Students were still making changes in their class schedules, and freshmen were still figuring out where their classrooms were and getting to know their roommates. A few days later, all eight campuses as well as Elaine P. Nunez Community College in St. Bernard Parish had announced that they would be closed until January and their students, faculty, and staff evacuated to locations throughout the U. S. along with several hundred thousand other evacuees.

The nine campuses suffered various damages, over \$1 billion dollars in property damage alone, with additional hundreds of millions in lost tuition and other expenses. The amount of physical damage to each campus, however, varied. The oldest parts of New Orleans were largely unflooded. New Orleans *Times-Picayune* columnist Chris Rose described this area, which extended from the Riverbend through Audobon Park and the Garden District to the French Quarter and into the Bywater, "a landmass the size of Bermuda, maybe, but with not so many golf courses." So Tulane and Loyola, near the Garden District, as well as Our Lady of Holy Cross, in Algiers on the side of the Mississippi River where the levees held, suffered comparatively little direct damage from Katrina, mainly wind damage and broken windows, although mold and mildew from weeks without electricity and air conditioning in the humidity of south Louisiana took a toll on library holdings and other facilities. The campus of the University of New Orleans was also largely above flood level, despite its location on the shore of Lake Ponchartrain in Lakeview, one of the most devastated areas of the city. UNO, however, suffered considerable vandalism and looting. A number of New Orleanians rescued from flooded homes were brought to the campus and abandoned there for days, locked outside the buildings, until, hungry, angry, and exposed to the elements, they forced their way into the buildings. A series of lootings followed over several days. Computers were stolen, and the campus bookstore was emptied of everything but its textbooks. Delgado suffered three to

six feet of flooding in 20 of its 25 buildings, over \$300 million dollars in property damage, despite the fact that the National Guard used the campus for its headquarters for several weeks.

The historically black universities, all located on lower ground, and Nunez Community College, closer to Katrina's eye in badly flooded St. Bernard Parish, fared even worse. The floodwaters at Nunez topped seven feet, damaging every building. Xavier had five to eight feet of flooding, with estimated losses of \$90 million, almost twice its endowment. Damage to Dillard, located near the London Avenue Canal breach in Gentilly, was more severe. The entire campus was under six to ten feet of water and had major fire damage, including the destruction of one building. Dillard's property damage is estimated at \$282 million with at least another \$64 million in tuition losses and other expenses due to Katrina, an amount that dwarfs Dillard's pre-Katrina endowment of \$45 million. SUNO's campus, located in the lowest part of New Orleans, was completely destroyed by flooding of ten to fifteen feet, followed by more flooding from Hurricane Rita's storm surge. SUNO's campus is being rebuilt from scratch and is not expected to reopen until Fall 2009.

Several New Orleans campuses chartered buses to evacuate their students as Katrina approached, but the students' evacuation did not always occur smoothly. One of Dillard's buses caught fire, destroying the possessions of 37 students, and 60 Xavier students were trapped in for five days in a dormitory when flood waters overtook the campus. Hundreds of colleges and universities throughout the U. S. mobilized to admit many of the 45,000 thousands of students evacuated from New Orleans, as their college administrators scattered across the country themselves worked out problems of transfer credits and financial aid. Thousands of evacuated students enrolled at nearby LSU, Southern University at Baton Rouge, and Baton Rouge Community College, with BRCC hiring displaced faculty from Delgado and Nunez and renting office space to provide classes for these students. Because damage

from Katrina delayed the beginning of the fall semester in Baton Rouge for a week, these students missed no class time. Students on other state campuses had to catch up with classes that had begun a week or week and a half earlier. Many students found it difficult to concentrate on their studies. Of the 850 or so evacuated students enrolled at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, only half completed the term, and many stopped attending within a week after enrolling.

Faculty and staff were paid their salaries throughout the fall despite the campus closures, with the notable exceptions of many adjunct faculty. Each school set up make-shift websites to inform students, faculty, alumni, and other employees and supporters about their plans and progress for recovery, and some established blogs so that students and faculty could communicate where they were and how they were doing and maintain some sense of community, especially since cell-phone and long-distance services in Louisiana were unreliable for most of the fall. UNO, Delgado, and Nunez organized on-line fall semesters beginning in October, somehow constructing electronic classrooms, training faculty, and enrolling students despite the scattering of technicians, faculty, administrators, and students throughout the country. Although only a small percentage of the fall enrollment took advantage of this distance learning, these classes were important in the schools' rebuilding efforts.

All nine institutions faced devastating financial losses and drops of enrollment, and several worried whether they would ever reopen. The historically black universities, SUNO, Dillard, and Xavier, were especially concerned about surviving the crisis. Xavier and Dillard faced devastating rebuilding costs with limited endowments. SUNO was vulnerable to arguments that a state-supported black university is a relic of segregated education and an unnecessary duplication of academic programs offered at UNO, despite SUNO's importance to New Orleans' African American community. College and university presidents worked to gather their key administrators

together in Houston, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, and other cities and towns, including little Grand Coteau, to organize campus repairs for January reopenings, raise funds, and reorganize their institutions in preparation for smaller enrollments and income.

Each institution declared *force majeure* or its equivalent to give the administration emergency powers to eliminate and reorganize programs and lay off or furlough faculty, including tenured faculty. Some institutions announced radical changes in their universities' mission, with the most far-reaching changes at Tulane and SUNO. Tulane president Scott Cowen announced what he called "the most significant reinvention of a university in the United States in over a century" when he unveiled Tulane's Renewal Plan. This plan eliminated many of Tulane's Ph. D. programs (including English), four engineering programs, its women's college, and eight sports, reorganized two of its colleges, and established a new Undergraduate College. With a new emphasis on undergraduate education, Tulane now requires all full-time faculty to teach undergraduate classes, requires community service work from all undergraduates, and requires all first- and second-year students to live on campus. SUNO eliminated 19 academic programs, mainly in the liberal arts (including the English major) but added seven new programs, including business entrepreneurship, medical records administration, and human development and family services as part of its new "community-based emphasis" to make the university more relevant to a rebuilding New Orleans. In effect, SUNO replaced much of its liberal arts curriculum with a career-oriented curriculum.

Although some faculty and staff retired or resigned rather than return to New Orleans, especially if their homes were destroyed, every campus conducted layoffs of faculty and other employees. Loyola, for example, laid off 19 professors. SUNO reduced its faculty from 161 to 91 after announcing furloughs of 55 faculty. Dillard cut the number of its faculty and staff in half. Tulane laid off 230 faculty (180 at the medical school and 50 at its Uptown campus) as well as

hundreds of part-time faculty and well over 200 support workers. Most of the program changes and faculty furloughs were decided with little or no faculty input or involvement, violating AAUP rules for dismissing tenured faculty. As a result, most New Orleans' colleges and universities are now under AAUP censure. Students and faculty vigorously protested many of the program changes and the lack of faculty governance in the decision-making. Some furloughed faculty have sued their institutions, and Loyola's College of Humanities and Natural Sciences passed a vote of "no confidence" in the president and the provost.

Classes resumed at every one of New Orleans' colleges in January 2006. SUNO, however, reopened on a temporary campus of 45 FEMA trailers a mile north of its permanent campus, where it continues to operate. Dillard University reopened in the Hilton Riverside Hotel near the French Quarter. The severe decline in New Orleans tourism enabled the hotel to provide Dillard with classrooms, housing, and offices, with some classes also meeting in the New Orleans World Trade Center. The other schools were all able to open their campuses, although the ground floor of Xavier's buildings were under repair and many parking lots and sports fields at UNO, Xavier, Tulane, and other campuses were filled with FEMA trailers housing university students and employees. Tulane arranged for some students to live on a cruise ship on the Mississippi River because of the expense and short supply of off-campus housing after Katrina. Although most schools had cancelled their fall semesters, Xavier and Our Lady of Holy Cross instead delayed the "fall" semester until January and began the spring semester almost immediately afterward, in May. After a long enforced "holiday" from classes, students and faculty at Xavier and OLHCC would not enjoy a substantial break again until Christmas 2006.

Total enrollment on the New Orleans campuses dropped from 45,000 in August to a little over 30,000 in January, with the public universities suffering some of the steepest declines in student populations. SUNO's

enrollment dropped from 3700 students before Katrina to 2037 in January 2006 and 2300 for Fall 2006. Dillard's enrollment decreased by 54%. Tulane's enrollment, in contrast, declined only 15% from the fall. Because it depends entirely on students living in the New Orleans area, Delgado Community College anticipated a 60% drop in enrollment and was pleasantly surprised that it lost "only" 35% of its enrollment when classes resumed, due to a strong Come Home to Delgado campaign; the establishment of tuition-free programs in construction technology, allied health, and shipbuilding funded by federal grants and corporate donations; and a recent increase in state university admission standards.

Considering the state of New Orleans' infrastructure at this point, the lack of housing, stores, restaurants, and even working traffic lights in much of the city and the work needed to repair campuses and return faculty and staff, most of New Orleans schools were pleased and relieved by these enrollment figures, especially at the number of first-time freshmen who returned to campus. UNO reopened in the middle of a largely deserted Lakeview, which became especially eerie at night because of the lack of off-campus street lights. The university added food services and other facilities to make up for the lack of restaurants and stores near campus. Campuses hired more counselors in response to the increase in post-traumatic stress syndrome, depression, and suicide in New Orleans after Katrina.

Although the schools were pleased with the number of returning students, they worried about the size of the freshman class for fall 2006. Each school faced what Xavier's President Norman Francis called "the momma factor" in recruiting high school seniors—their parents' fears about sending their children to a New Orleans with rising crime rates and uncertain hurricane protection. And, in fact, most experience steep enrollment declines in fall 2006. For example, Loyola's fall 2006 freshman class, at 447, was less than half the size of its pre-Katrina class of 950. Tulane's freshman class dropped from 1375 before

Katrina to 882 in fall 2006. SUNO's total enrollment dropped from 3700 in fall 2005 to 2300 in fall 2006. But every school experienced significant enrollment increases in fall 2007. Loyola recruited 670 first-time freshmen for fall 2007, for example, achieving 75% of its total enrollment before Katrina, while Tulane's 2007 freshman class grew to 1200. These increases have allowed the schools to rehire some of their furloughed faculty and staff and to advertise for new faculty. As a group, the enrollment increases at the nine campuses are outpacing the growth of New Orleans, whose population at the end of 2007 neared 300,000, almost 65% of its size before Katrina.

One of the most notable changes in the New Orleans colleges and universities is a much stronger sense of mission among the students, faculty, and staff on these campuses and a stronger bond between the general community of New Orleans and its colleges and universities. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of these institutions of higher education to the economic and cultural recovery of New Orleans (and of Nunez Community College to the recovery of St. Bernard Parish). Most campuses, on reopening, initiated new community service programs and alliances with other organizations, such as Loyola's NOAH Project and Tulane's Partnership for the Transformation of Urban Communities, to help rebuild New Orleans. A number of new students decided to go to school in New Orleans to become part of the rebuilding effort, often after spending a week or two in New Orleans with Habitat for Humanity or another charitable organization, and many returning students have become serious about community service. Many faculty also found their Katrina experiences transformative, their research, their teaching, and their service now shaped by a need to contribute to the recovery, a need to study what has been happening in New Orleans, and a need to tell its stories of New Orleans.

The faculty and students of the colleges and universities in New Orleans have gone through—and are going through—a wrenching experience that I find difficult to imagine from just 130 miles away.

It will take at least a decade we know the results of the rebuilding process of New Orleans and its colleges and universities and how the city and its culture will be changed by Katrina. If you are interested in helping one of these schools with their recovery, you can find information for contributing to a hurricane recovery fund on many of their websites.

Mourning Station

Angelle Scott, University of New Orleans

"And what a congress of stinks! . . . Nothing would give up life: Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath." –Theodore Roethke, "Root Cellar"

Our house sits in mud, no Pompeii. Nearly everything's awry: the shampoo is wedged in the blinds; the beds lie on their sides; thick water stands in cups, sheetrock droops away from beams. My clothes hang decaying in the bathroom where I left them. What can I tell the volunteers about my grandmother and me that they can't figure out when they excavate the remains?

Adult diapers, hundreds of orange medicine bottles (labels yellowed beneath their dusting of river clay, some bearing her name, some mine), breathing tubes, diaries, *Good Housekeeping*, and browned skeins of yarn spill from closets and litter the floor, all fetid with moisture. Where did she end and I begin? She ended in a home.

I still haven't begun to *dive into the wreck*, to dig and dredge myself out of this mourning station. The house breathes its last breaths as silverfish visit. I can feel the mold spores settling in my lungs, trying to claim me as they have claimed this space which used to be covered in flakes of her ashy skin.

Facing the Flood: The English Department as a High Axle Vehicle

Thomas Bonner, Jr., Xavier University of Louisiana

✦ Departments of English are generally known for the storms
 ✦ within and their failure to calm the seas with minimal
 ✦ casualties. Even in times of fair weather, they often appear
 ✦ rudderless. What can be said about English can at times be
 ✦ said about other disciplines. What happens to a department,
 ✦ really a university, when external forces completely overwhelm
 ✦ internal ones? On August 29, 2005, the flood in the aftermath
 ✦ of Hurricane Katrina laid waste to university campuses in New
 ✦ Orleans. What this paper will do is to indicate how it affected
 ✦ a single department of English, what steps were taken toward
 ✦ recovery, and how using the strengths of the discipline could
 ✦ have carried faculty and students through the waters to
 ✦ higher, more secure ground.

Departments of English are generally known for the storms
 within and their failure to calm the seas with minimal
 casualties. Even in times of fair weather, they often appear
 rudderless. What can be said of English departments, however, can
 be said about many academic departments. What happens, then, to a
 department—really, to a University or college—when external forces
 completely overwhelm internal ones? On August 29, 2005 the flood
 in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina laid waste to several university
 campuses in New Orleans.

My intent here is to establish a context for the disaster that disproportionately affected campuses of historically black universities,¹ indicate how the disaster affected the Department of English at Xavier University, chronicle the steps taken toward recovery, and show how, by employing its strengths, the discipline has the capacity to carry faculty and students through the waters to higher, more secure ground

Education has been important to New Orleanians of African American descent since early in the nineteenth century. Prior to the Civil War, they produced *Les Cenelles*, the first anthology of poetry by their race in the United States, most of the contributors having been taught at small private academies and religious schools. In the long aftermath of that conflict, three universities were established for the educating African Americans in the city: Southern University, Dillard University, and Xavier University. Their philosophies were closer to the academic views of W.E.B. Dubois rather than those of Booker T. Washington. My own institution, Xavier University, was established by Philadelphian St. Katharine Drexel and her order, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

These institutions originally had campuses on the outer borders of the city, but as it has grown, they now occupy areas well within it, but are in areas considered less desirable by the upper middle class. Every one of the three campuses flooded in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Water levels ranged from 5 to 10 feet, and Dillard University had two buildings destroyed by fire. Before the storm, these campuses provided stable green environments amid encroaching concrete and commercial interests. Xavier University lies between an elevated highway and a drainage canal, next to which is now a somewhat abandoned poor African American neighborhood. The University is trying to maintain its art department and social service operations there, part of a long-term effort to bring an improved architectural presence and more planted spaces amid the jam-packed and rundown cottages.

On the western side of the campus lies a commercial and retail district that includes tire stores, a bakery, food stores, cleaners, low-end clothing stores, and fast food outlets. Prior to the flood, the 4500 members of the Xavier community were active patrons of these businesses. Sadly, many of these are still shuttered, but the 3000 students who have returned are inspiring more openings. Of course, the recovery needs of the University have brought contractors and their employees into the neighborhood. Beyond that, the faculty and staff are investing in the city with their taxes, especially important in the loss of taxes from three destroyed middle-class neighborhoods.

The aftermath of the flood has emphasized the importance of the University in assisting the displaced. Like the instructions for oxygen masks received on board aircraft, the institution must place ensure its own survival before administering to its less able companions. As a result, trailers for staff, contractors, and workers fill parking lots and the convent on campus is housing faculty and staff. From her Virginia exile and then from the campus, Sr. Donna Gould has been organizing students to work with Habitat for Humanity. Graduate education courses are now on line to reach the teachers who are away from the city.

What does it mean to New Orleans that Xavier is back? It is a signal to families that higher education is returning in force to the beleaguered city. As important is the symbolic value that a major part of the city's African American culture has not disappeared: Michael White is playing his clarinet; *Xavier Review* has published a flood-themed issue; our President Norman Francis is chairing the state's recovery committee; our students are once again part of the milieu who walk on Royal Street in the French Quarter and on Magazine Street uptown. The other HBCUs are also making their marks—Southern University in New Orleans is assisting the recovery of the historic black, middle-class neighborhood Pontchartrain Park near its campus, and Dillard University, holding its spring 2006 classes in the riverfront Hilton

Hotel, reminded downtown visitors and office workers that African Americans are at the center of life and culture in New Orleans. These three universities, like the green that has replaced the dried and matted brown grass and muck, are offering hope in the face of devastation.

But what was the situation immediately following that terrible Monday when the winds ceased and the waters rose to historic heights from the edge of Lake Pontchartrain to within a few blocks of the levees of the Mississippi River? The Department of English was surrounded by five feet of water for nearly three weeks. The first floor Writing Center and offices were raised just enough to prevent water from damaging equipment and furniture. It was also dry enough that mold was only a minor problem. Our second- and third-story offices and facilities suffered some wind damage and rain driven leaks. The rest of the campus was not so fortunate. Power and water were not available anywhere. The campus was off limits to faculty from August 29, 2005 until January 9, 2006 when the President authorized access to offices. From October through this date, only recovery workers in the building trades were on campus.

English faculty and students were scattered across the country. Late Friday afternoon before the arrival of the Monday storm, the University administration had closed the campus and alerted everyone to check an emergency website and an out-of- area phone number for further instructions. Most people planned for three days away and a return to classes. It was soon evident that the cessation of the fall semester would be much longer than that. When I left on that Friday, it was for a last weekend away on the Gulf Coast before the semester really occupied me fully—the storm was in the Gulf but heading for the Florida panhandle. I had not been on campus for the late warning and as a result had neither phone nor address records of faculty and staff.

Unable to return to New Orleans because counter-flow from the city had been established by Saturday afternoon, my wife and I headed

for North Georgia to join our family. Rather than the usual three days away for a tropical event, we were gone for over two months. The month of September involved acquiring a laptop computer and working via phone and e-mails to contact the English faculty and staff. Professor Biljana Obradovic, our departmental webmaster, who was in Asheville, North Carolina, really helped us establish a "who's where" list. Because New Orleans—even Baton Rouge area codes—were not working or inconsistently working and because many faculty only had University e-mail addresses, it was difficult to establish and maintain contacts.

September involved answering basic questions of life, death, injury, property loss, and work interruption. Thankfully, no one suffered death or injury.

By October it was clear that the fall semester had been postponed or even cancelled. Many faculty were in contact with students via e-mail and phone. I suggested that faculty think about the incorporation of this experience in courses when we resumed classes. Some e-discussions followed. The University administration had begun debating plans on a reduction of faculty and staff. Some chairs, but not all, were asked to advise the Vice President for Academic Affairs on reduction plans. After working- hours on the last Friday in October when many faculty members were at SCMLA in Houston, e-mail was sent from the University to those faculty who were not being retained. The effective date was one month earlier, and thus there was no October paycheck for these faculty. There was no appeal process. The University had declared financial exigency and under Louisiana's Napoleonic code the usual AAUP procedures—committees to establish criteria for dismissals and establishing a process for appeals—did not have to be followed. A quasi-committee of academic administrators did recommend specific faculty reductions—50% in English—and as a result, it could be argued that there was a committee who set criteria and made recommendations accordingly. What stunned so many was

the manner in which the university President cancelled the contracts of all faculty and then invited specific faculty to sign extensions of their original contracts.

I returned to New Orleans in early November and administered the English Department from two coffeehouses—one with wireless connections and the other for meetings. Meanwhile, the University was being administered from three locations—one in Texas and two in Louisiana. After much confusion over financial aid implications for schedules, the administration decided to begin the second week of the fall semester in late January; the semester schedule had to be reconstructed to allow for students to continue in courses they had begun and for many students to change to new courses as a result of courses they had undertaken at different universities in the actual fall semester. Several English faculty volunteered to help advise students by email; course confirmations and new registrations by e-mail followed.

In the midst of this activity, displaced faculty were seeking positions and requiring letters of recommendation. In addition, I was checking on certain institutions for possible positions for these faculty. Because local land phone service, cell phone service, and US mail were often not available, queries and recommendations were sent via e-mail. By early December preview approvals of over 2000 transcripts had begun via e-mail, an activity that kept me in a coffeehouse for up to seven hours on most days through the middle of the month. During this time e-mail exchanges with remaining faculty to plan for the upcoming semester began. By January 9, 2006, the English office on campus had become available, but with no phone service and inconsistent e-mail. Classes began on the 17th to resume the first of two abbreviated semesters, the spring semester beginning in May and the concluding one in August.

Army Humvees with their high axles patrolled a city that slowly began to add population. Those high axle vehicles seemed to suggest that all along there was another way of addressing emergencies that might bring a city and its educational institutions to stasis. What could the University have done to prepare for a catastrophe? What could a single department do? For the Department of English the answer lay in the chief weakness that everyone involved experienced: failure of communication. What suggested a direction were the emergency procedures involving phone pyramids that I observed as a visiting professor at the United States Air Force Academy and that often amused this civilian. The department developed a form with contact information for faculty and staff to include local address, local phone, cell phone, University e-mail address, alternative e-mail address, a contact information for a person outside the local area, and an indication whether in an emergency evacuation the person might need transportation. This completed form would be kept as an e-document and a hard copy at a location other than the University. The Dean of the College and Vice President for Academic Affairs would receive updated versions of this data. It is obvious that the department chair should try to have regular contact with the academic administration of the University during emergencies. It is important to note that text messaging turned out to be far more consistently effective than voice communication on cellular transmissions.

During emergencies and evacuations, faculty and staff have now received directions to take office keys, grade books, and laptops with them. If there is enough warning, computers and other equipment should be moved away from windows, and if possible, above the first floor, perhaps some items only being elevated above the floor. And all should be covered with plastic sheets or bags. Vulnerable resources like books should be protected as well.

Course syllabi, especially during storm season, should reflect advice and direction for at least a week of work should there be

an interruption. Each semester all syllabi are now placed on the English website at the University, and all courses are registered in the Blackboard program. The University now has the capacity to place all network operations at a site distant from the institution.

During an evacuation, it is helpful for faculty and chair to be in contact after three days of class cancellations, and all should check the available University website daily for instructions and information. Since all students have a University e-address, faculty may be able to be in touch with their students directly during long interruptions. Lastly, one or two off-campus meeting sites should be established in case the campus is closed for an emergency. These should be generally accessible and likely not to be affected by a natural disaster—a hotel or a café on high ground, for example. It would also be helpful for disciplines to make arrangements with professional and scholarly groups to provide meeting space at conferences being held during an emergency evacuation. SCMLA was extraordinary in its efforts to help our department during the annual meeting last year in Houston, as we had conference participants as well as faculty and staff living temporarily in the Houston area.

While it is rare for disasters of this magnitude to occur frequently, they do occur, and when they do, the results can be chaotic in the short and long term. As uncomfortable as it might be, chairs of departments should plan for the process of a drastic reduction of faculty over a short time. Reluctantly, the primary criterion must be to retain the professors who are necessary for a functioning department with the basic fields and specialties covered. In addition, pressure should be brought to bear on the academic administration to have an AAUP-approved plan in place to address staffing reductions in an emergency. Even though the particular circumstances of the emergency will limit the full effect of that planning, the department and the institution will come closer to doing their best for the people involved by having a plan in place.

The essays and commentary that follow come from professors who wrestled with the confusions wrought by this disaster and how they made the disaster both a resource and a text for their students. In our readings we often speak of the heroic motifs found in the ancient narratives like the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. Our students, faculty, and staff have their own stories that rival those set in the Aegean and Mediterranean worlds in fact if not in art. Rarely has it been clearer that the ability to speak and write and be understood might be the high axles academics and others need to prevail during a disaster.

Notes

¹ The section on historically Black colleges and universities first appeared as part of the introduction in Eugenie L. Birch and Susan M. Wachter, eds., *Rebuilding Urban Places After Disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006.

Katrina in Their Own Words— Collecting, Creating, and Publishing Writing on the Storm

Richard Louth, Southeastern Louisiana University

- * Beginning with the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the author,
- * his students, fellow teachers, and Southeastern Louisiana, the
- * article focuses on lessons learned about writing and teaching
- * through the experience. The article tells the story of Katrina:
- * In Their Own Words, an anthology of storm stories by local
- * students and teachers that the author edited, and what he
- * learned from this experience about the limits of academic
- * writing and the value of voice. The final section focuses on a
- * risky English 101 assignment on writing music that grew out
- * of the storm, how this assignment led to a radio program and
- * anthology, and what this assignment taught him about seizing
- * the “teaching moment.”

The first thing I did when I returned to classes 10 days after the storm was to ask my Freshman English students to write about their experience. We sat in a circle as we had before the storm, and wrote together to the word “Katrina,” and then we shared. I was surprised then at how the writing sounded, but I am not surprised now. The writing was drained, lackluster, absent of detail. It sounded clichéd. Even my own. Yes, it felt good to talk about our Katrina experiences, but it surprised me how much trouble, as writers, we had telling our stories. Perhaps, I realized, we were too close to it. So we put aside writing about Katrina after that first day back and tried to turn our minds to other things, other memories. New students appeared, displaced by the storm, and old ones disappeared, and all

rules on absence, lateness, and due dates were forgotten. How could you hold a student responsible for a typed paper when her home still had no electricity? How could you mark a student absent when he had to fix his roof or meet a FEMA trailer or track down missing family members?

Though we were having trouble writing our own Katrina stories to each other, we realized that people outside our region longed to know what we were going through. Joan Anderson, a colleague and also Technical Liaison for the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project, had asked her Freshman English students to write their stories to German penpals through emails. This proved so successful that she suggested that the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project use its resources to create a blog for area students and teachers to tell their Katrina stories. Our initial aims were small—to give Writing Project teachers and students a reason and an audience for writing, as well as to give them a chance to write for themselves as part of a healing process. We devised a couple of simple prompts for writing about the storm, posted them on the blog, informed as many Louisiana Writing Project teachers as we could about the blog, and waited to see what would happen. Soon, stories began pouring in—powerful, simple stories of everyday experiences and impressions. What I had been having trouble producing in the classroom seemed to occur naturally when the internet became the vehicle and the audience was expanded to other disembodied writers on the blog.

Because the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project had produced two radio shows through the National Writing Project's "Rural Voices Radio," we knew the power of bringing writers' voices to radio, and so we approached Todd Delaney, Interim General Manager of our college station KSLU, about producing a program of hurricane writing. When we first approached him, many area students had not returned to school, some of our best teachers had lost their schools, and everyone's life seemed in disarray. Todd, however, was eager to take on this new

project, so we created forms granting us permission to use writers' work on radio and in print and began production using selected writings from the blog. Todd traveled across the state recording students and teachers and also set up times for writers to record in KSLU's studio. At first, we imagined a 15-minute program, but when Teacher Consultant and LSU instructor Robert Calmes volunteered to take lyrics written by students in my classes, turn them into songs, and record them, we knew we had something bigger (see below). Calmes recorded four songs at KSLU's studio, and at that point a full, 30-minute program began to take shape. The radio program "Katrina: In Their Own Words" was broadcast on KSLU on January, 27, 2006, during a ceremony for the writers, their friends, families, supporters, and school administrators. National Writing Project listeners from across the country, informed of the broadcast, tuned in to a simultaneous "live feed" on their computers. The show was broadcast again in March and also on the first anniversary of the storm in August 2006.

Because of the wealth of material, as the first anniversary of Katrina approached, I planned to edit an anthology featuring pieces from the radio show and blog entries. My intent was to provide copies for all of the writers and perhaps to print a few extra. When the National Writing Project learned of the anthology, they offered to fund a large printing for locals and also to send anthologies to every NWP site in the country. Almost overnight, the anthology was transformed to a large project with a short deadline, and I began soliciting additional essays and photographs to expand the book. Just as the radio show had come together through the addition of song, the anthology came together through the addition of photos, particularly a haunting picture of an American flag over a pile of debris on a decimated street on the book's cover. The book was eventually distributed across the NWP, sold at the NCTE, and reviewed by Susan Larson in the New Orleans *Times Picayune*. We even held a public reading and book release celebration for its teacher-authors in 2007.

Most publications are planned and most are “professional.” Ours was neither—and I think that is the essence of its success. Our production began because one teacher (Joan Anderson) who believed in the power of writing and the power of the Internet wanted to help her students heal. Our work featured the writing of everyday people and grew organically from blog to radio program to anthology as we realized how important the writing was and as we found new resources for making our work public.

Re-reading the anthology and reflecting on my experience editing it, what is my thinking now? Was there a paper included that prior to Katrina I would not have thought good? Was my concept of quality in writing affected by the experience? Would I change anything if I could? What have I learned?

When reading papers as teachers, it is easy to be caught up in the formalities of essay writing in assessing quality. We talk about writing as papers. We typically ask, is the paper organized, does it avoid cliché in its language, does it have original detail, a clear thesis, a natural conclusion? What does one do when confronted with 50 stories of a devastating hurricane, few of which have a formal thesis, some of which seem similar, most of which seem unpolished? This experience taught me to re-evaluate myself as a reader, teacher, and writer and see that some things are worth writing, and reading, even when (or maybe I should say specifically because) they do not conform to academic rubrics. What I came to realize through the experience of editing this anthology was the importance of the writer behind the writing, how some stories must be told, and the true value of audience and voice in authentic writing situations.

When I first looked at our raw material entries on our blog I read them as a teacher and did not see much potential. They seemed fragmentary, and many repeated tales of bending trees, bad traffic, fear stories that were almost clichéd for those who lived through the storm. To

appreciate their potential, I first had to discard my formal academic approach towards reading students work. These were not papers. They were not repetitive. They were not clichéd. They were honest writings by ordinary individuals trying to describe extraordinary experiences. Their stories mattered. Their individual voices mattered. And they mattered even in their similarity, for together they told a collective, powerful story. In addition, while we often talk about writing to real audiences in our English classes, I think that's often just talk. Here I realized were pieces that real audiences might appreciate, from locals who would want to hear their own experiences re-told, to distant Americans who could only experience and understand the storm through others words. Finally, as the radio program had taught me, behind each piece of writing, behind each common experience, was a n individual voice, and each voice was worth hearing. I had to learn to imagine those voices behind the writing, and in selecting pieces for the anthology, honor the voices. Thus, the anthology is organized around groups of voices teachers, young students, college students, singers.

Would I change anything in the anthology? Certainly. What I would have given to include a piece written by one of my students about her father's experience as a Wildlife and Fisheries officer who pulled bodies out of the flood and fought FEMA authorities at the Superdome. It was a powerful piece that had been revised into a polished essay for my fall class, but by the summer the anthology came about, the student had disappeared, and I could not track her down to get permission. There is no other piece quite like it in the anthology, and I feel its absence. I wish, too, that I'd been able to collect stories by people who were not part of the academic community—particularly New Orleans people—even though such stories might have changed the focus of the book. Three of the most compelling pieces in the anthology were by teachers who did not write for the blog but who contributed essays at my request during the summer. I wish there had been a few more essays by teachers and a few more like these, reflecting almost a year after the storm. And I wish that I'd been able to write more of my own

story, but I was so overwhelmed by the storm that I was unable to write about it at the time except in a short email to friends. Still, I am pleased with the anthology and how it was able to include the voices it does.

“The Music Assignment”— Katrina and Teaching

The turning point in the Katrina project came in November 2005 at the NWP Annual Meeting when I met Chris Gragg, an NWP Teacher Consultant from Oregon. Chris had created the “Deep Roots” project, which taught high school students how to write song lyrics and then connected them with professional musicians who turned their lyrics into song. After being inspired by Chris, I threw out my syllabus for the last two weeks of school, sacrificing a “literary paper,” and proposed to my students that we write songs.

I knew that I was taking a chance. The trouble with this idea was that I did not know much about music or about writing lyrics, and that there seemed to be little justification to teach song writing in an English 101 class. However, I just had this feeling—similar to the one I’d had so far with the Katrina project—that it was right, and that everything would somehow come together. And it did, in ways I could never have predicted.

To begin, I offered them a challenge: if they would be willing to try writing lyrics about something important to them, I would send the best songs to professional musicians I knew and try to get the songs put to music. After students agreed to the idea, I asked them to look back into their journals and circle powerful words and phrases. Then they did the same in their last paper, an “opinion” paper on something they felt strongly about. The exercise of going back and looking at their work with new eyes focused just on the language, in itself, proved invaluable to them as writers. We collected these words and phrases on the chalkboard and made a collective poem of them, talking about the poem’s language and meaning, and how the poem worked. I was

teaching them literary criticism through analyzing their own creative writing.

At this point, I brought in songs by the two musicians who had volunteered to turn my students' lyrics into music, and we examined the songs' lyrics for wording, focus, rhyme, rhythm, etc. We analyzed the lyrics as well and talked about each song's "point." Then we listened to them to see how the music added to the songs. I then gave the students their writing assignments, which combined creative with expository writing:

- 1. Write a song:** Lyrics for a song based on one of your recent essays or on one journal entry. Your lyrics are the words of a song. They should read like a poem and look like the ones we talked about in class. We will bring these typed lyrics to Response Group for revision suggestions next class.
- 2. Explain your song:** A sketch of 300-500 words on what you are trying to convey in that song. Your sketch should explain what your lyrics mean. What are you trying to say? What do you think it should sound like if played by a musician? What should be emphasized? What matters to you in the song? Why did you write it?
- 3. Copy a professional song you like:** Bring a photocopy or transcription of lyrics from a professional song you like. (Copy the lyrics from a song you like that really speaks to you in some way.)
- 4. Explain why you like that professional song:** A sketch of 300-500 words on what the musician is trying to convey in that song. Your sketch should explain what this song means. What is the musician trying to say? Why do you like it? What memories does this song evoke for you? (Tell an association or story behind it.) What matters to you in the song?

5. Bring the CD with the song on it to class: We should be able to hear a few. If yours is chosen and you read your piece about it, you can get extra credit.

Over the next two weeks, students brought their own song lyrics and sketches to “response groups” for revision suggestions. Simultaneously, they were creating one set of lyrics and two expository pieces—a “critical piece” explaining their lyrics and a more narrative “sketch” telling the story behind a professional song that meant something to them. Each student brought a CD to class with a favorite song on it, the typed lyrics, and their “sketch” explaining why that song was meaningful, and then they were invited to read the lyrics to class, read their sketch on the song, and then play the song while we all wrote in our journals to the music. This created a wonderfully diverse, yet harmonious, writing community where country, rock, soul, and metal vied for our attention.

What impressed me besides their writing was how my students truly wanted to share their favorite songs, and in doing so were eager to share their writing about these songs. Even while some expressed problems in creating their own lyrics, most were able to write impressive expository pieces about what they were trying to say in their lyrics. There were two other signs of success: 1) my weakest students did their best writing (and most eager sharing) on this assignment and 2) I truly looked forward to reading their writing and hearing their songs and stories.

So where did Katrina fit in this picture? While I didn't ask students to write lyrics about Katrina, I had asked them to write about something that was truly important and meaningful to them, and for many it was Katrina. What they had been unable to write about in September in their journals, they were now able to write about in song and in essays explaining their songs. Perhaps it was the distance in time, perhaps the new media, perhaps the community experience, but finally my classes

were able to address the storm experience in writing that was deep and powerful. From the 40 songs (and sketches explaining them), I selected a dozen to send to two professional musicians and from these, four songs were finally recorded. Two dealt specifically with Katrina, one was about love, and the last concerned a work of art we had viewed on a field trip. However, all four songs were used in the radio program because producer Todd Delaney was able to see something that I had missed—how songs not about Katrina still captured something of the storm and could contribute to the radio program.

What are the lessons in this music assignment that we all should note? Taking a chance, trying something new, finding ways to make an outrageous idea (writing lyrics) fit required course goals (expository writing) is still possible, even in college English. Giving students choice and ownership and letting students write about subjects they care about increases motivation, helps build the writing community, and seems to produce more powerful writing. A student is more likely to write well explaining her own poem to a class that doesn't know its meaning than explaining "Sailing to Byzantium" to a teacher who knows its meaning already better than she ever will. Combining creative writing with expository writing is possible, and the way each balances the other helps improve both. Using reflective sketches to help revise the creative piece is not only using writing in new, meta-cognitive ways, but also using writing to help produce better writing. Building one assignment organically out of another and thereby expanding the amount of writing is a natural way to provide more writing opportunities (and is easy to grade as one packet if the teacher uses portfolios). Giving students a chance to work with audiences outside the classroom (Internet audiences, musicians, etc.) can enhance their understanding of real world "writing situations," and publishing their own work—by having it read aloud, recorded, or anthologized—can add new dimensions to students' understanding and appreciation of writing.

As a writer, Writing Project director, book editor, and teacher, I was impacted by Hurricane Katrina and learned the following:

As a writer: Sometimes you have to wait, and that is okay. It has taken me almost two years, a radio program, and a book before I could really write about the storm in detail and in my own voice. I am very dependent on my journal, but in this experience my journal failed me. I think with those deepest experiences, if we write when we are too close to them, we are doomed to failure or to not writing true. Sometimes distance is necessary.

As a Writing Project director and editor: The Writing Project taught me the importance of teachers teaching each other and how we are all dependent on each other from kindergarten through college. It also taught me to recognize the value of ownership, choice, and diversity in what we do. When I think of *Katrina in Their Own Words*, I think of teachers who were willing to showcase their students' work and to write alongside their students. I think of writers who did not have to be made to write but who wrote because the topic was important to them and because they wanted their experiences to be shared and their voices heard. I think, too, how different their experiences and voices and talents are and how important it is for us to recognize and respect those differences.

As a teacher: You have to look for the "teaching moment," and be ready to go with it when it comes. I believe in taking chances, in serendipity, in the importance of being open to the moment, in trusting my instincts and trusting my students. I did a music assignment because in my gut I felt it was great. And with a little thought, I made it fit my curriculum. As a result, I received some of the best, most memorable writing I've ever had from freshmen. And also as a result, a blog which had been gathering dust was transformed into a radio program and a book. Take a chance and it may lead to significant

things you could never imagine. Which, by the way, is a good lesson to teach to your students.

The Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project, is one of about 200 National Writing Project sites in the country and one of five in Louisiana. All NWP sites are university-based programs that hold summer institutes for teachers to study the teaching of writing and support activities (such as workshops, retreats, electronic networks, etc.) during the school year to support writing teachers and their students.

Student Writing from *Katrina in Their Own Words*

Until Last Week

Ude Amobi, from Nigeria

Until last week, I only read novels and watched movies in which places were hit by very devastating storms called hurricanes. I never imagined in a lifetime finding myself in a similar disastrous situation. The word to describe how I felt when the storm hit would be utter shock.

I was at the 24-hour lab where I work as a lab attendant when the phone rang. I picked up the phone and it was my supervisor on the other line. She ordered me to go ahead and close the lab for the day as a hurricane was anticipated to hit the southeastern part of Louisiana. That got me a bit worried and anxious. I got home to my apartment and met some of my neighbors talking about the expected storm and how they planned to evacuate to nearby towns and states. I told them they were overreacting, that the storm was probably not going to affect us and hence, I had no intention to evacuate. Boy, was I wrong.

On the day of the storm, I was sleeping on the couch when I was brought back to consciousness by a sharp noise. I peeked through my window and for the first time ever saw the wind moving at almost 100 miles per hour. I instantly lost all the braveness in me and became

as frightened as a little child just thinking about how possible it was that I might not live to tell the story. I stood close to the window and watched the storm unleash its power. It blew my bike away from where it was parked and forced most of the trees to bow to its superiority.

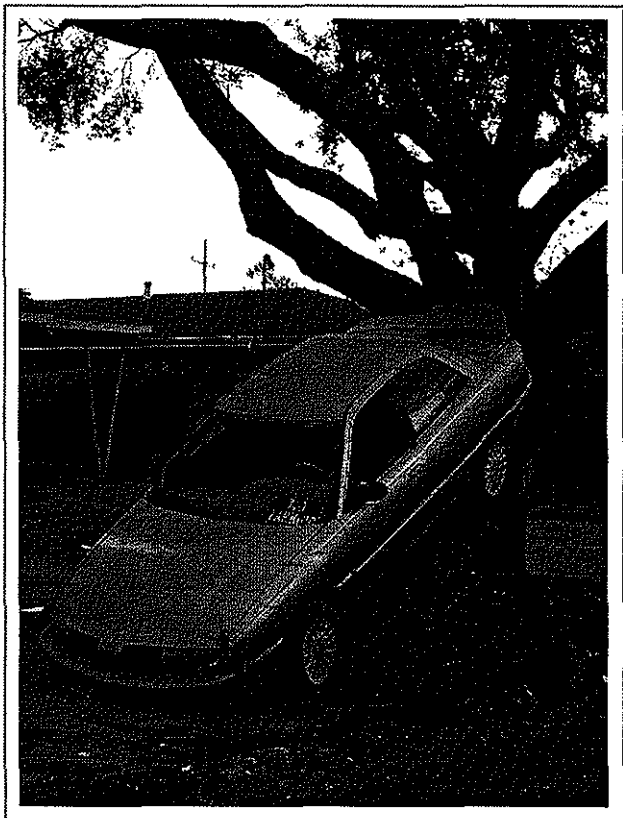


Photo Credit: Patty Steib

I was brought back to reality when the power went off abruptly in my apartment. I remember feeling like I was part of a horror movie. I reached quickly for the phone to call my family only to find out the

phone was dead. At that juncture, it dawned on me that I needed a miracle to stay safe.

I swiftly made my way to the room, lay down on the bed and basically blamed myself for not evacuating when I had the chance to. I went on my knees and prayed to God to keep me and others safe. That was the last thing I remembered doing. I woke up later that day excited, having realized I made it out safe. I headed for the window again, looked out and could not see the yard as it was covered with fallen trees and leaves. I also observed that some of the cars parked across the street were badly damaged by the trees that fell on them.

I took a sigh of relief and thanked God profusely for sparing my life. This experience was so horrifying and devastating that I would not wish it on my worst enemy.

What Happened To Me the Day of the Storm

Ty Booker

I don't watch much television, so to hear a hurricane was heading for Louisiana was a scare. Earlier in the week, I was talking to my sister and she had informed me a storm was brewing in the Gulf. I paid little to no attention because every storm since Andrew in '98 was supposedly due to hit Louisiana directly and didn't. As a matter of fact, Andrew is the only "big" storm I can remember. Vivid images come to mind: pine trees emitting their signature smells from the freshly cracked wood lie in the street like barricades. For about a week my family survived on Cheerios and Spam; it was all we had. Since then, a hurricane only meant a day or two off from school and Louisiana dodging the bullet one more time. Friday, August 26th, my cousin and I drove to New Orleans to pick up another relative. We took for granted the scenery and simple pleasures of the city. We never realized what lay ahead.

I have always been a hard-headed person, so this particular weekend I'd decided to stay on campus. My cousin traveled back to Baton Rouge alone to go to work while I stayed in Hammond, ignorant to the events that lay ahead. On Saturday, the calls flooded my cell phone. Everyone called to tell me about Katrina. Finally, after 20 phone calls, I decided to turn on the television. There she was: coming straight for New Orleans. I was only a city or two away. Every channel and every news bulletin carried the same, yet simple message: Get out while you can! As I watched her turn like a propeller, it all became a grim reality: we were going to be hit and hit hard. I had nowhere to go. Here I was on the fourth floor of Livingston Hall in my room with a Category Five hurricane headed for a city only 52 miles away.

I knew I needed to stock up on food if I was going to be here to endure the storm. Cayman's was closed, and the Lion's Den wasn't an option. The only thing I had was my SLU ID, so I decided to make a vending-machine run. After three trips to the electric snack havens, I figured that I had enough. The last time I walked across the barren, deserted parking lot, a man in Army fatigues caught my eye. Curiosity took over and I went to inquire as to why he was on campus.

He proceeded to explain that the Kinesiology and Health Studies building was being used as a shelter for ill people. As he continued to ramble on, my thoughts began to come into focus: this was serious. I pretended to listen, but only a few words stuck out in my mind: dorms closed, University Center, shelter. I thanked him, walked away, and those words formed themselves into two ton bricks, each falling upon me like rain; each one came faster than the one before. I realized he had just told me we had to evacuate the dorms and take shelter in the University Center. I panicked, packed up my belongings as if it were check-out time and waited for the all-call. At about 5:15 p.m., the clouds couldn't take the pressure as they succumbed to the rain, surrendering themselves peacefully without a fight. The wind picked up and there I was running to the University Center on North Campus

with the few belongings that I could grab. The wind began to howl like a werewolf in the night: this was the one! Katrina was here and she was as strong as two oxen.

I made it to the University Center soaked but safe. I looked around, found a spot and made myself at home. I drifted off into a deep sleep, the last peaceful night of rest I would get for a while. When I did awake, I heard University President Randy Moffett on the loudspeaker telling us that Katrina was in fact here and she was marking her territory all around us as he spoke. He told us we were in the worst two or three hours of the storm and we had no water or lights until the generators could be powered up. I went to the window that looked out on University Avenue and surveyed old oak trees thrown around as if they were small branches. As I took all this in, I couldn't help but think: this isn't the worst, this is only the beginning.

When we were let out of the University Center on Tuesday, August 29th, the water was on, but cold, and there was still no electricity. I came back to a dank, dark dorm room, but I was thankful to have survived and to have a place to call home to come back to. Later in the day, my cousin came back to pick me up; I was relieved and cried tears of joy. I was grateful to be back in Baton Rouge with my family and out of harm's way. However, once I arrived, I realized the devastation Katrina's wrath had caused along the Gulf Coast. When I turned on the television, I thought it was something unreal: I couldn't even have imagined what I saw—houses submerged to their roof, a whole city flooded. It was then that I thanked the heavens above for allowing me to be fortunate and it was then that I vowed never to take life's simple gifts for granted.

What Then Must We Do?

Nancy Richard, Delgado Community College

- * The article describes two service learning projects that
- * engaged our Delgado Community College students in a
- * sense of community that transcended their personal trials.
- * A regional accrediting agency afforded local conference
- * registrants the opportunity to participate in a Habitat
- * for Humanity construction project; more than a hundred
- * volunteered. What had been a diaspora of historical
- * proportions effected a new community spirit, one borne of
- * mutual loss and committed to restoration and rebuilding.

When the levees broke and the floodwaters came, the force pushed houses off their foundations, swept cars and boats into the trees, trapped people and their pets in their attics and on their rooftops. More than a thousand died. In news stories covered across the country, reporters shuddered at the Biblical proportions of what we had been warned could happen and refused to believe actually would. On August 29, 2005, we were reminded, in ways we are still trying to fathom, that Nature is capricious, that the day we've been given is the only one we may plan with any modicum of certainty. Past that, we are running on pure faith. So then, what do we do now, in the face of so much loss, so much uncertainty?

When my husband and I evacuated on Saturday, August 27, we took with us our dog, the three cats, and the usual assorted clothing for the usual three-day evacuation. We headed for our second home, the one where we will soon retire, some 300 miles to the northwest. What

followed would be anything but the usual. We watched the weather reports on Sunday, helpless as the massive storm roared toward the city. On Monday we sat in front of the television for hours, stunned, unable *not* to watch. We could get no specific news about our home in the suburbs. We imagined the house flooded, our 70-year-old oak tree dissecting it right through the den. When my sister called, panicked, her first question was, "Did you get Mama's wedding ring?" I had retrieved it in the rush to pack, but as I told my sister, I don't know why I did. We were evacuating again, for the third time in as many years. Why wouldn't we expect to return in three days with hardly a sign of rain awaiting us? We were prohibited from returning for weeks, but when we did, we found we'd been among the fortunate. Our house was intact, though the old oak was damaged beyond saving. We had electricity and within another month, phone service.

My friends and colleagues, however, were not so lucky. David and Sally and Paul and Yadi and Tom and Iva and Wendy and Betty and Craig and Cindy and Gayle . . . well, I've long since lost count of those who lost everything: their homes, the contents unrecognizable in a dark sludge, a refrigerator on its side, jammed against the front door, water lines to eight, ten, twelve feet. When I saw them for the first time, they were living with friends, relatives, in motels, out of their cars, and ultimately in FEMA trailers. But they returned, to a crippled city, to a college whose future was uncertain.

What I watched in my colleagues and in my students throughout the following spring and summer semesters was a daily reminder of what writers have long observed about the human spirit. In the face of what seem to be insurmountable obstacles, untold loss, they come to work, to school, exhausted and discouraged, but with persistent good cheer. They stop and chat in our classrooms and hallways to share stories, some of them comic, some heartbreaking. But they're here. So that, after all, is what we have learned to do. It is what *Times-Picayune* writer Chris Rose asked of the May 2006 Ursuline Academy graduates:

“You must never forget what happened here. You must take that experience with you into the world” (D-5). The work that is central to this issue of *Reflections* is testament to how we have done just that. We have told our stories. We have taken what has happened to us into the world: with both humor and sadness, with resilience, with wisdom. And we have done it with language.

Readers familiar with Peter Weir’s film *The Year of Living Dangerously* will recognize the character Billy Kwan’s allusion to Tolstoy’s lament, “What then shall we do?” As Jakarta disintegrates into chaos, the photographer recalls also Luke, Chapter 3: 10-11: *He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.* To the reporter who “can’t afford to get involved,” Billy Kwan admonishes, “You do whatever you can about the misery that’s in front of you. You add your light to the sum of light.” Surely displaced, traumatized, grieving citizens of Louisiana found comfort in the sum of light afforded by the kindness of others. Untold numbers of families and civic and religious groups took us in, fed and clothed us, helped get our children into school, offered us employment. Others, like the Virginia Tech students, came here during their Thanksgiving holiday to stand knee-deep in muck that had obliterated the ordinary possessions of ordinary families. They tore at walls of moldy sheetrock, where the water lines reached above their heads.

Still others worked with Habitat for Humanity to build Musicians’ Village, where local horticulture students provided the landscaping. Writers like Chris Rose, author of *1 dead in attic*, began to try to shape language into questions for which the answers were inadequate or nonexistent. And when schools re-opened, when classrooms began filling, many in temporary quarters, teachers let their students write, helped them to shape the language available to them into stories that contained, confined the greatest and saddest mystery they would ever face. Chris Rose’s own six-year-old daughter, asked by her first grade

teacher to write about her experience, had this to say, “There was a hurricane. Some people died. Some of them were kids” (D-5).

Of the poetry that emerged, one fine example is then University of New Orleans student Angelle Scott’s “Mourning Station.” (see page 16). Scott’s opening allusion to Roethke’s line immerses us in the universal truths of such visceral descents. What we face is the abyss that stares back, the unfathomable. The darkness of the abyss was the darkness of a post-Katrina city and region: weeks, months—and now more than two years for some neighborhoods—without electricity, the rank odors of death and mold, the starkness of a landscape of dead trees, neighborhoods bereft of all life: no dogs, no cats, no birdsong.

The grief was by no means limited to the immediate region. From two hundred miles away, in Lake Charles, Louisiana, Stella Nesanovich sat and watched television coverage of what had befallen her hometown, her childhood home in Gentilly. For this poet, helplessness and grief find substance in language in her “Streets of New Orleans,” in the shaping of what cannot otherwise be comprehended. Writers and those of us who are fortunate enough to write *and* to teach have long understood the real mystery of the process: our work in moving words around on the page is less an effort to be understood than to understand. Apart from whatever cathartic relief the act of writing affords, the process leads us to something new and unexpected, something learned. The discovery is too often an unpleasant one, but we write, anyway. We stumble in the dark, grope along cave walls (as a writer friend muses), until we bump into the thing we didn’t know was there. The works we have gathered here represent a myriad of responses to extraordinary events. But they are consistent in one significant way: all of these attempts to understand lead the writers to moments of revelation about themselves and their relationship to the rest of humanity, moments in which they acknowledge their personal stake in the city’s—the entire area’s—recovery. Every neighborhood is rife with stories of abandoned houses, the absence of those who never



returned, having nothing left to retrieve. For those who have chosen to remain here, the city will become what they can make of it.

When Habitat for Humanity responded to the city's immediate need for affordable housing, a number of community partners joined with them. One striking example of such partnerships is Musicians' Village in New Orleans's upper ninth ward. Integral to the cultural life of this great city, displaced musicians were able to return, thanks to this initiative, which originated with Branford Marsalis and Harry Connick, Jr. One photo of a completed row of homes features a volunteer from Delgado Community College's Horticulture Program and reveals hopeful, life-affirming paint colors: parrot green, sunset orange, and plum. The program's director, Bettie Abbate, and her students partnered in a service learning project to provide landscaping for Musicians' Village. Additional photos reveal the work in progress and a volunteer and new homeowner enjoying the landscaped yard. The following are excerpts of reflections submitted by Abbate's students, responses to the



project on two levels, as a horticultural learning experience and as an opportunity to participate in the renewal of hope for those less fortunate:

I do feel that this particular service-learning project was beneficial to us. Overall, it was a very enriching experience. The most rewarding feeling was seeing how appreciative the homeowners were. It felt so good participating in such a worthy cause. Likewise, the way our team worked so well together was a boost to my sense of harmony. I felt the 'community spirit' of our department back again, for the first time since Miss Katrina came to town. -DA

Looking back at the project for Habitat for Humanity, there is a lot that I got out of it. Starting with what this was really about, helping others that lost a lot of everything. With the installation of a small landscape project, it helps a home owner beautify their yard and also the N.O. area. Finally, it was self-gratifying to help others out during this rebuilding process. And I am looking forward to more projects to help out our community and N.O. -JR

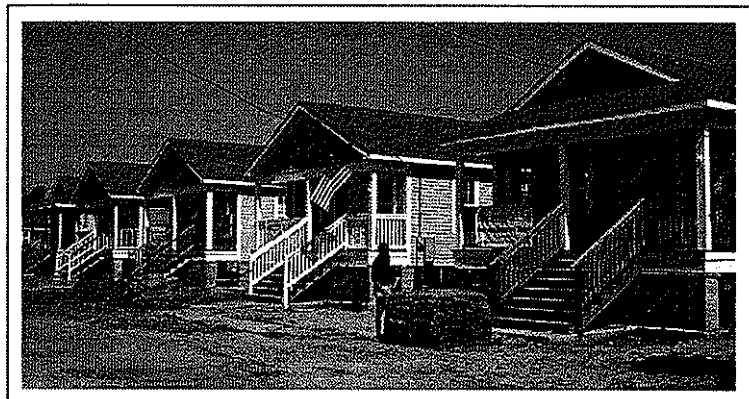
Working with the homeowner, Freddie Omar, was great. He wanted to know everything about the plants we chose for his house. After his morning class, he came back to his home and was ready to work. We actually let him plant the bedding plants. He was shown how to take them out of the pots, open up the roots, dig the hole and put them in the ground. He got his hands dirty, asked questions about the bedding plants he was putting down and how long they would last. We explained summer and winter bedding plants to him, watering, and why we chose the base plants we put in the beds. I was impressed that he was willing to learn and participate.

I was very pleased with the Habitat project because it provided many opportunities for me to work with multiple houses and designs. After working on my assigned house, I worked alongside my colleagues who

chose different designs and other plants. It was interesting to talk to them, ask questions about their specific plants and learn why they chose them. Some plants I was not familiar with so it was a new learning experience, while at the same time I was able to educate others on the plants that I knew about. Overall, I give the project an A+ for an excellent learning experience and opportunity to help in the rebuilding of New Orleans. -KT

What began as a hands-on, practicum level experience for Abbate's students became an experience in community engagement. In the beautifying of their fellow citizens' new neighborhood, they have gained, in one student's words, a "sense of harmony" and "community spirit."

The etymologies of "neighbor" and "neighborhood" are explicit about proximity. Before our catastrophic brush with natural disaster, few of the volunteers in local service learning projects would have considered themselves neighbors of those they sought to help. In post-Katrina New Orleans, however, our world suddenly became smaller. The larger political arenas of state and federal government mattered less than those around us, those who had suffered and lost, yet against all



reason, chose to return, to stay, to rebuild, to become part of the larger neighborhood that was the entire metropolitan region. As valuable as were the efforts of volunteers who crossed the country to gut *our* homes, once they returned to *their* homes, we were left with each other.

The horticulture student's recognition of the recovery of a "community spirit" is a cogent reminder of the value of service learning projects. Derived from the Latin *communitas*, which signifies a coming together as equals for a common purpose, the term community has special meaning for us now. A Cajun writer from the suburbs helps to build a home for a family she will never meet. A Cleveland transplant leads her English students through a project with long-term implications for the saving of our state's wetlands, once a formidable barrier between massive storms and our homes, our towns, our historic architecture. A college administrator, having lost her own home, its contents, and a car, volunteers at Musicians' Village and builds steps to a front porch. Here a once homeless musician will sit on pleasant evenings and greet his nearest neighbors, courtesy of the larger community of neighbors. The impact of such work reaches far beyond the transitory self-gratification a volunteer takes home with aching joints and a sore thumb. Along with the physical shelters of Musicians' Village, volunteers have also constructed new ways of thinking about community, about being our brothers' keepers, about the real spirit of solidarity, of *communitas*.

Bettie Abbate's own reflection about her students' service learning project adds another layer to our understanding of its significance:

In fall 2006, the HORT 113 (Environmental Landscape Improvement I) class partnered with Habitat for Humanity, Baptist Crossroads, and others to landscape homes built in the Musicians' Village in the upper ninth ward of New Orleans. In this first semester following the catastrophic Hurricane Katrina, twenty-five students enrolled and used their knowledge from this class to design and plant landscapes in front of thirteen houses.

The original plan for this project was to landscape the first five homes that had been completed by the beginning of the semester. The homeowners were living in those first five homes, and some were available for the students to interview in order to make plant selections based on their preferences for specific plant materials and colors. The class was very excited about this project after visiting the site and talking to the homeowners. The upper ninth ward was among those areas most devastated by Katrina. The opportunity to begin re-greening this landscape while learning through a hands-on project resulted in a wonderful learning experience for the class and for me as well.

Many challenges arise when projects take a class off campus, and this one was no exception. The class had to take initial measurements and analyze the site for the design. The challenge was that the homeowners were not available at the time of the class meeting. To accommodate them, some of the class members went on the weekend when the homeowners were available to meet. The additional time needed outside of class was necessary to begin the design phase of the project and was, in retrospect, a meaningful way for the students to begin to connect with each homeowner. This connection in the relationship between the client and the landscape professional helps to realize the vision of the finished project through the eyes of both stakeholders. Additional challenges included transporting materials to the site, a broken water main in front of the houses that flooded the area prior to planting, plant material selected for the design that was unavailable at the time of purchase, and guiding students and Habitat volunteers from other parts of the country into a cohesive work crew.

The problem solving required to meet these considerable challenges resulted in the most valuable lessons for my students. As an instructor I look for and engage my students in those "teachable moments" that crop up occasionally during planned lessons. I have learned that through service learning, "teachable moments" are built into each

project because the student is thrown into the real workplace. Those lessons include resourcefulness, giving supervision, getting along with others, cooperating, planning, delegating, and managing a project. These are all important life skills that make each of us successful on a daily basis, regardless of our occupation or vocation.

In addition to the skills and knowledge the students received through the service learning project, I would say that most of my students and I were enriched in ways that the sterile environment of the classroom cannot match. The ability to touch another human being from whom we might otherwise be far removed is indeed a precious gift that most of us would not readily seek out. To give one's talent, ability, or knowledge to that experience is to truly share oneself with another. That is what defines service learning. It is through that exchange that we become beacons of light and hope for changing a corner of our world. I can't think of a more worthy corner to change than our own beloved city that waits patiently to be restored.

This instructor's "beacons of light" are reminiscent of Billy Kwan's "sum of light." Abbate's students, engaged in the real spirit of *communitas*, have done what they could to relieve the misery before them, to restore a neighborhood so recently robbed of all hope. The symbolic acts of their profession are as meaningful as the flowerbeds, mulch, and shrubs they've left behind. In their visceral connection with the earth, in the restoring of life to an area stripped barren by floodwaters, these horticulture students have reminded us of our connection to each other. If we have paid attention, this is the lesson we are privileged to learn: everything good that comes of our region's rebuilding will come from the work of our own hands.

Just two weeks before Christmas, I had the privilege to work on a Habitat for Humanity project myself, this one across the river on the West Bank. I worked with a crew of academics, led by a young AmeriCorps volunteer who would soon begin her studies at Tulane Medical School. I installed hurricane straps and Tyvek wrap, carried

ladders, and swept up rusty nails. I hammered for hours, for a time in the rain, an activity that lends itself to much thinking. I recalled my English 102 student, who in the first semester following the hurricane, was living in her home's second floor rooms while she and her partner gutted and began the restoration of the flood-ravaged first floor. A year later Joey would email me from California, where they'd returned, saddened and frustrated by the lack of progress here, by the inefficiency and bureaucratic roadblocks.

In that class and others were students who shared FEMA trailers with too many family members, where *if* a computer existed, it was impossible to get work done. Others commuted from Baton Rouge, a trip that under normal—had we ever known normal?—conditions would have taken hardly more than an hour. But they were commuting along with thousands of others, so an exhausting three-hour commute to school or work and back again at the end of the day became just another post-Katrina story. Yet when they wrote, they said they'd learned something important about themselves. The loss of their belongings, their homes, had been grim, but then they all knew of others who'd lost family members, a grandfather found dead weeks later in the attic, a cousin whose remains were discovered beneath the rubble of a neighbor's garage. They knew there were bodies still in the morgue, unidentified, unclaimed. They were grateful to have survived, to have their families nearby, to have returned to work and to school. And I thought, too, of a single symbol of hope, captured by my colleague, poet David Cook in "Delgado Pond: Early Spring" on page 201 of this issue.

As I'd been hammering away at hurricane straps, my mind wandered from my students, the classroom, and our battered campus to the two-by-fours, plywood, and sawdust around me. I would never know the future owner of the home I worked in, but I'd become connected, secured my mark with each blow of the hammer. I recalled the words of Ernest J. Gaines, his reminder that our responsibility to the larger

community is an obligation that necessarily begins with knowledge: He who knows only his own house knows little of the community. He who knows only his street knows very little of the town. He who knows only his town knows very little of the state. And he who knows only his religion knows very little about man or God. (15)

As we cleaned up the Habitat site at the end of the day, when children were returning home from school, I heard a trumpet from a house on the next street, its roof sagging and still covered with a now tattered blue FEMA tarp. A child practicing. Long tones. Improving the embrochure, pitch, breathing, control. A young musician sitting in a poor neighborhood, engaged in the creation of the universal language that connects us one to another. I could still hear that child as I boarded the bus and we pulled away. It was raining, but a child was practicing. The irises still bloom and someone is still teaching music.

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Show and Tell

Katheryn Krotzer Laborde, Xavier University of Louisiana

› In 2006, a college professor found herself teaching freshmen
 › composition students during the fall semester at Xavier
 › University of Louisiana. This in itself was not unusual; what
 › was different was that this “fall” semester was starting in
 › January, thanks to Hurricane Katrina. Whether an out-of-
 › townner who rode out the storm on campus or a New Orleans
 › native who lost everything to the disaster, each student had
 › been affected in some way, as had their still-shaken professor
 › who was aware that, in time, not only would the shock wear
 › off but the all-important memories and stories would fade.
 › Throughout the semester Laborde shared her writing and her
 › photographs (most taken in her recovery work as an Exterior
 › Damage Assessor for the City of New Orleans) in order to
 › encourage students to share their own observations and
 › experiences in the form of journal entries and essays.

Standing before the class, I pulled out the pages I had shoved inside the gradebook. The pages came from writing I had done on my laptop during evacuation from Hurricane Katrina. I explained to the students that I had written down everything, thinking that I was recording history, knowing that I was living through an event that was as horrific as it was important, believing that no detail was too small to record.

I walked from around the podium and sat on the large oak desk. “This semester,” I told my students, “we will be writing about our

experiences as well as the experiences of others. "What you have lived through is important," I continued. "But as overwhelming and unforgettable as it seems right now, you will forget the little details, the very sights and scents that will bring this experience back to you in full color. That said, we will spend the semester saving these details in black and white. And one day many years from now, you'll be glad that you did."

And with that, we started a game of Show and Tell that would last through the semester. In a series of journal prompts and essay assignments, I showed them how I had experienced Katrina and encouraged them to do the same. I read my own words, I flashed my black-and-white photographs, and they responded by writing about their own experiences.

The next class day, I read to them. This time I chose a passage from an essay I had written about the Friday before the storm, a day that happened to be the last day of the first week of the fall semester – a semester that was about to be called to a sudden, unexpected end. I read to my students:

Earlier that evening, on my way to dinner and a movie with close friends, two of whom were colleagues, my cell phone rang. "Katrina's coming this way," Mom said. "I'm not taking any chances. Do you want to come with us?" Her call had come through to me effortlessly, clearly – luxuries that would be lost to us all in the days ahead. "Yeah, sure, Mom," I said, adding that I was driving and couldn't talk at the moment. Arriving minutes later, I mentioned my parents' plans to leave, and mine to join them. "Oh, I'm not leaving," William said. "We're just going to get a lot of rain." These details come back to me many days later, wrapped in a kind of peach fuzz haze reserved for childhood memories and hypnotic dreams.

My students wrote:

*Dear Diary, today is August 26, 2005
I just got out of class, like around five
My roommate and I were studying in our dorm
Until my mother calls and warns me about a storm
I ignore it and thought nothing of it
Until the weather man got on TV and told us to run for it.
Utterly confused
I turned to my roommate and said, "What to do?"
Now it's tomorrow and we still have no clue. –La'Kiraa Lillard*

August 28, 2005: My roommate and I woke up to chaos and commotion while the ladies of St. Katharine Drexel Hall rampaged down to the first floor for a hall meeting. The hall advisors warned us of a hurricane that was to hit the next day and told us that if we were to leave to remember the school rules, meaning our absences would count against us. Later that evening, we were called back for another hall meeting to let us know that if we were going to leave, to only pack three days worth of clothing. Yeah, right. –Erin Hill

Back in September, sitting in a crowded coffee house in Alexandria, Louisiana surrounded by other evacuees of both Katrina and Rita, all wrinkled and worried and tapping away on laptops, I had written about evacuation.

In January, I read to my students:

Evacuating an area located at the edge of a continent is not an easy procedure – there are only so many routes to take, and the panicky exodus involves hours spent in gridlocked traffic. Afraid that you'll run out of gas along the way, you choose to broil in your slow-moving car rather than run the AC. Before you leave, there are hotel reservations to be made or family and friends to beg for quick lodging. Pets only complicate matters since most hotels will not take them and allergic

relatives don't want them around. Everyone rushes in a rat panic to gas stations and drugstores. People are forced to split the precious little time they have between boarding up windows, washing clothes, and packing what they absolutely *have to* bring along in case this is The Big One.

I left early in the evening. I took the back roads and found Hwy 1. Even though all I had to do was stay on Hwy 1 until I made it to Alexandria, I cannot tell you how many times I would suddenly realize that I was no longer on that road, that the highway had somehow slipped away from me and I was on some other field-rimmed and dark road, going the wrong way. I came upon hitchhikers who seemed to appear out of the darkness magically in one moment only to evaporate in the mist just as quickly. I passed houses, darkened and sleeping, and cars lined up at the side of cinder-block bars whose names were announced in crude and heavy letters. All this I passed on the road, or maybe I mean roads, to Alexandria, to yet another hurricane escape weekend, the warnings of weathermen ringing in my ears.

My students wrote of their own experiences and those of their friends. They described evacuations riding out the storm, scenes of panic and tedium and terror. Some details were similar, but not one story was the same.

As I'm outside struggling to find a cab, a driver to pick me up and take me away from this place, a cab driver stops in front of me and my friend and asks, "hey, where are y'all going?" We say, "To Baton Rouge, will you take us there PLEASE?" The driver calls his dispatcher and asks, "Hey, how's the traffic going to Baton Rouge, Louisiana?" The dispatcher says, "It's bumper to bumper traffic, baby." He puts down his radio receiver and looks at us with guilt and worry in his eyes. He says, "Sure, I will take y'all!" We say, "OK, thank you. Our bags and the rest of our friends are outside that building," and we point. "Can you follow us to pick them up?" "Sure," he says. I run, run

like I'm running to pick up a bag of one million dollars and someone is trying to pick it up before me. As I run the wind blows in my hair; my legs move faster and faster; my high heels are coming off my feet.

—Latoya Wright

Through the years I tried to ride out the storm. Katrina was the worst I ever saw. Nights without sleep, I sat and looked at the stars. It was hot, no food, no water. How can we survive? But I did. I stayed until Thursday. —Van Le

My back ached from leaning on my suitcase all night long and I was cold. I didn't have much to cover myself with except a baby blanket I had brought along. The storm was just starting and the hall advisors told everyone to move to the fifth floor and sleep in the hall. Those who were lucky had dragged their mattresses all the way from their rooms to the hall. At that point I didn't know what was going to happen; all I could do was wait. Sleeping was far from my mind, so I sat there and listened to the wind and the rain outside. Finding a spot on the floor; I stretched out my legs and lay down. The floor was cold and hard and my ribs started to hurt; my hands became my pillow.

—Ismaelite Saint Felix

At about 9:00 Thursday morning, the US Coast Guard came to rescue the remaining students, faculty, and staff of Xavier University. After being ordered to gather a few more clothing items and valuables, the students were loaded onto boats and taken to the I-10. The drive out of New Orleans was torture. The students were told to hold their heads between their legs because police officers were afraid that New Orleans residents with no transportation would become jealous and start firing at the buses. The ride on the bus was said to be about 12 excruciating hours. —Devonte Williford

"Please don't leave him, and make sure he's OK," a mother of a friend told me over the phone. I agreed to because I was a good-hearted

person and I didn't want to leave him behind. I didn't want to leave anyone behind. But he wasn't the only one. Two of my girlfriends had also stayed and with them having such close ties to their families I knew it wasn't going to be easy for them to get through it. We played some games and did everything possible that didn't involve going outside or on the first floor. When times got rough and they couldn't stand it anymore, the girls started crying. I kept my faith alive and told them to do the same because they never knew who would be here to save us, but that there would be someone. —Elisha Johnson

When I evacuated in the middle of the night, I never dreamed that I wouldn't be back in three days time. Never. But three days grew to three weeks and then four before I was lucky enough to come home. Before that time came I found myself in a dark, rented apartment, sitting at the kitchen counter, staring out a window that opened to a view of a red brick wall that was a mere foot or so away, writing an essay for a publication interested in knowing what happens to writers after disaster strikes. I read to my students:

I was busy pacing around my third “home” in two weeks time – a furnished apartment in my ex-husband’s hometown—trying to figure out where I had put things. I had to make a series of phone calls to get the gas turned on, the cable connected.

I had to wash my laundry in the sink. When I was finished hanging clothes in the shower to dry, I had to apply for food stamps and FEMA assistance. I had to dash to the local newspaper office that was letting me check my email at lunch time. If that wasn't enough time (and it never was) I'd run over to the library and wait my turn for a 30 minute allotment. By then it was time to drive through a maze of small towns and ripe fields to pick up my kids from a school so different from the one back home.

Like my own children, many of the students found themselves in different schools while Xavier's campus was closed. They wrote:

After the whole hurricane thing, I set off to live in this place where I would be known for my situation. "Aww, she just came from Katrina. She needs assistance in coping with the stress and psych damage she's endured." That was how the administrators would introduce me to everyone. They made me feel worse about my whole situation than I already did. -Elisha Johnson

Some found that the hurricane had damaged more than the landscape.

When I left the city in August, I never imagined that I would be leaving behind my happy life with my boyfriend, but about a month and a half after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Ryan and I broke up. My life then changed drastically. I almost went into a state of depression because it was the first time that someone had ever broken my heart. The stress of changing schools during his first semester of college, losing everything to the flood and fire that burned down his home and not being able to see me was too overwhelming for him, even though he forgot to remember that I was going through a tough time, too. -LaShundra Hooker

When I came back to New Orleans, I had no job. I took a job as a Damage Assessor and as such I walked the wounded streets, measuring water lines and making note of damages. I took pictures of crumpled homes, toppled trees, toys dangling from slack electric lines, and thousands of ruined, discarded refrigerators that had been pulled to the curb and marked with messages of hope, humor or horror. I showed the pictures to my students and in their journals they described what they saw when they came back.

The first sign of destruction I witnessed was a billboard ripped apart, hanging over the ground. The only thing that could have stopped that thing from falling was God's graces. Over in the Holly Grove area there

were houses torn apart, but what made this area different was that one house appeared to have been moved from its foundation and relocated to the street. What made this sight even more startling was there were toys and clothing that seemed to belong to a child thrown around in every direction. This is when I realized the storm had spared no one. No man, woman or child could escape. —Darren Wallace

The first time I saw my parents' house, it looked like a haunted house; all of the windows upstairs and downstairs were broken up and the glass was in pieces. The second thing I saw was the inside of my parents' house. It looked like a bunch of monsters had had a quick party. —Hoa Tran

It was so hard to cross the Mississippi border, crossing into Louisiana, seeing trees thrown across highways, on top of houses and cars. Houses in the middle of streets, peoples' prized possessions thrown all across the sidewalks and streets. I sat in the car, staring at the devastated area, going into my subdivision. It was so horrible and I felt so torn up seeing that. My mom had just put the last down payment on a house that was built from the ground up. She had worked her whole life to get something she could call her own. As we approached our subdivision, I tried so hard to swallow a big knot in my throat and fight back the tears that were burning my eyes. My hands started shaking and my knees started knocking as we turned the corner to our house. As we pulled up in front of the door, what I saw was almost the worst thing I had ever seen. There were trees all over my yard and a big one that went right through my roof. I sat in the car for about five minutes and cried my eyes out. I had to put bags over my shoes because there was about two inches of mud inside my house. There were waterlines showing where the water had sat for a week or two. My dad measured it and it was almost five feet of water. All of our brand new couches, TVs, family pictures and important papers and materials were covered with mud and dripping wet. At that point I tried to put everything in God's hands. —Shavayza Fortson

Weeks passed and finally Melanie and her family drove back into New Orleans to see their house. The scene was unexplainable. She was terrified when she realized that the place that she grew up in was gone and that things would never be the same. Melanie felt her eyes well up when they pulled into the driveway. Her car was completely ruined – the windows were gone and swamp mud and grass covered her seats. The house looked like a jungle – there were mud and tree branches everywhere. Melanie felt as if she were in a dream, but as she stepped into the house, she knew it was no hallucination. The kitchen tiles were black, the wood panel floors were ripped up from the ground, and a repulsive smell overpowered the house. Her room had been looted and clothes were all over the place. –Huong Pham

We were all still in shock, but those who had lost their homes had it harder than others. Some students wrote of the realities of life in post-K New Orleans.

Living in a trailer was not the life for me. I was used to watching cable television and having privacy. I didn't have privacy because my mom could hear me throughout the trailer. Every morning, some men from FEMA came knocking on the trailer to let us know they were going to put steps on the trailer. Although we wanted steps, we couldn't get them just yet because the trailer we were staying in was for my mom's friend. We were still waiting for my mom's trailer to come and then we would push my mom's trailer back so we would have enough space for our trailer in the back yard. –Sabrina Moore

I am a native of New Orleans and as my family and I were removing our things from our completely devastated house, a tour bus passed by and I felt like an animal in a zoo. I felt that someone had taken my pain and was using it to earn money. Joyce Gibbs, my former neighbor who was also gathering her belongings, added, "As I watched the bus pass, I no longer felt like a human being. I felt as if I was a part of a circus, a freak show, even." –Patrick Dupart

They wrote about Katrina from any angle imaginable because I had asked them to, because I felt it was important that they do so. But after a while, a very real darkness began to invade the class.

Dark days and even darker nights defined the city. Great monuments and awe-inspiring sights were now reduced to nothingness. Though the statues and monuments still stand, they represent something much greater now. Places that were once filled with vibrant life leave nothing behind but a great memory. —Darren Wallace

How much could I take? How much could they? All of their teachers, I learned, had had the same bright idea to “teach Katrina” that semester and the students had grown sick of, and over, the subject. And when I read, over and over, the accounts of what the on-campus students had lived through and what the local ones had lost, I wondered if I had become their voyeur. Had they gotten the point of the assignment? Or were they simply being beaten down in this constant revisiting of hell?

At the moment that I had come to doubt the value of the semester’s work, I picked up a student’s portfolio and read:

Before Hurricane Katrina, I lost that fire inside me that keeps me going because I had nothing to write about. I had lost my ability to express with words. I did not have anything to read that would make me want to become better than what I am; I had lost my ambition for life. I felt that because I had lost my ambitions my life didn’t matter. I was living life with no purpose.

When Hurricane Katrina came, it was at that moment that I knew that my life would change. I knew that I had to appreciate life and experience as much as I can because I do not know when those blissful moments will end. I knew from that moment on I would have something to write about. Since I knew I would have something to write about, my determination came back and I felt like I had a purpose. My life is meaningful. —Shaakira Horbrook

Shaakira realized that her life was meaningful. In reading her words, I grew hopeful that the time spent reliving the ordeal in order to preserve the experience in all its shades of horror and despair had been time spent meaningfully, as well. A portion of this essay appeared as part of an article in *Poets & Writers Magazine*. Two other passages come from an essay that will appear in *Crossroads: The Journal of Southern Culture* (Mercer University Press) this fall.

When the Wind Blows: The Search for Normalcy During the Hurricanes of 2005

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Even though Lafayette, Louisiana is 150 miles to the west of New Orleans, the city was affected by Katrina, and its twin, Rita, in significant ways. While the eye of neither storm passed directly over Lafayette, we experienced a cosmology episode as the effects of back-to-back severe hurricanes made the world, if only for a short time, less rational and orderly. Based on personal experience as well as an analysis of student essays, this article is an attempt to articulate an essence of a liminal time. Exploring how we attempted to narrate this crisis can provide insight into the ways language works to make, and to simultaneously resist, the discursive event of trauma into a lived experience.

On Wednesday, September 21, 2005, as I was observing a first-year writing class at the University of Louisiana Lafayette (ULL) that was filled with evacuees from New Orleans, I wrote in my field notes:

Hurricane Rita brewing in the Gulf Coast

No one seems to be concerned about Rita, at least they weren't talking about it before class. I don't sense any raised anxiety levels, except my own. I don't know if I am more scared that I am going to leave and not be here to help Troy or that I won't be able to get back if something happens. The most concern I have about the house is the two old trees in the front yard.

They lose big branches even during thunderstorms. Class is exceptionally silly today (maybe nervous energy?)

Then, on Friday, September 25, from Dyersburg TN, I wrote:

Yesterday, at about 1:30 pm, I became an evacuee as the government issued a voluntary evacuation of Lafayette. What we packed: Maxine, Trevor, Oscar [cats], and Izzy [dog]. Cat food, dog food, litter box, cat litter, 3 pet carriers, 1 rawhide. Goldfish crackers, tortilla chips, peanut butter, pita bread, Pop Tarts, honey roasted peanuts, half a large chocolate chip cookie, three gallons of water purchased last summer in preparation for Hurricane Ivan; cat litter scoop; flashlight; D and C batteries; our fire safe box with our home owner's policy, social security cards, birth certificates, digital camera with pictures I snapped of the inside of our house right before we left, the most recent pay stub from each of our jobs; both our laptops and cell phones; car and wall chargers for cell phones; about 3 days worth of clothes, our medicines; my teddy bear; the 101 papers I collected last week; the reading I assigned for 509; daily planner (with all phone numbers and contact info for people); a bucket; some plastic bags; plastic cups; a blanket; toilet paper; paper towels; \$200 cash; American Express card.

This inversion of my own subject position—from researcher of evacuees to evacuee researcher—was the beginning of my thinking about the incredible power of natural traumas¹ like hurricanes to completely rupture the fabric of daily life. M.W. Seeger, T. Sellnow, and R.R. Ulmer define a trauma or crisis as:

a specific, unexpected, and non-routine event or series of events that create high levels of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten high priority goals including security of life and property or the general individual or community well-being. (qtd. in Spence, Lachlan, and Burke 656)

People who experience crisis events often have what is called a “cosmology episode,” an episode that makes “individuals suddenly and deeply feel that their universe is no longer a rational, orderly system” (Spence, Lachlan, and Burke 656).

Even though Lafayette, Louisiana is 150 miles to the west of New Orleans, the city was affected by Katrina, and its twin, Rita, in significant ways. While the eye of neither storm passed directly over Lafayette, we experienced a cosmology episode as the effects of back-to-back severe hurricanes made the world, if only for a short time, less rational and orderly. This article, therefore, is woven from many threads: my experiences as a person who had to evacuate, a teacher who had students who lost everything, an administrator who had to run a writing program in the midst of chaos, and a scholar/researcher who is still struggling to make sense of these events in academic and intellectual language.

Setting the Scene

Before attempting to articulate these experiences, it may be helpful to describe how this study came about. Within one week of Katrina coming ashore, ULL enrolled some 800 students from the New Orleans region. Because so many of the new students were first-years and needed English 101 and because all of our sections were filled with our own students who had started school three weeks earlier, we opened two sections of English 101 specifically for the “New Orleans students.”

On the first day of class for the New Orleans students, Ashley, the instructor, and I waited in the faculty lounge of the English department to welcome them. At 9:00 when the class was about to start, only four students were present even though the class roster showed that 29 students were enrolled. Ashley wondered aloud if the remaining students had been told to go to what would become the permanent classroom in the chemistry building. I ran over to the other building to

see if anyone was waiting. As I opened the door, I was shocked to see about 20 students waiting in the hallway. I offered to walk them back to the English building. As we were walking between the buildings, I suddenly became aware of the significance of what was happening. The students I was leading to the lounge had, less than a week before, been moving into their dorms in New Orleans, about to begin college. I was sure they were filled with the fears and excitement of many typical college freshmen. And now, a few short days later, they were about to start their English class at a school they hadn't chosen, wearing, for many of them, the only clothes they had to their name, living in dorms, or apartments, or homes overcrowded with family and friends, and many of them no longer had a place to call home. Yet, here they were, enrolled in college, determined to continue with their education even though their lives had been turned upside down. "Why are these students here, today? Taking first-year writing?" I asked myself. "This is important. Someone needs to be paying attention to this; someone should be a witness to this."

By the time the five minute walk was over, I decided I was going to be the one to observe and talk to these students. I quickly wrote out my IRB application, secured Ashley's permission to observe her class, and asked the students for their consent to see their writing and interview them.

On a subconscious level, during that walk between the buildings, I was perhaps hoping to investigate how the students were making sense of the trauma they had experienced. But at the time I honestly had no working hypothesis. Because of all the attention turned on the devastation and human suffering in New Orleans, I don't think any of us in Lafayette, residents or evacuees, thought that we had experienced a crisis. We were the fortunate ones who were not in the Superdome. We did not have to be cut out of our attics. We weren't sure our story was worth telling. As I explained my research to one of the New Orleans classes—all students who had evacuated from New Orleans—

the students said “Why do you want to study us? Nothing special happened to us. We are here [in Lafayette].” And on one level they were right. For all intents and purposes, the students who made it to ULL were safe; they didn’t even miss a semester of classes. However, with the benefit, now, of two years hindsight, I am able to start making sense out of both the data I collected as well as my particular subject position in the whole process.

In their article, “Presence in Absence: Discourses and Teaching (In, On, and About) Trauma,” Peter Goggin and Mary Goggin define trauma as “a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence” (LaCapra, qtd. in Goggin and Goggin 30), and they suggest that “*trauma* can only be tackled/approached/grappled with discursively; it is not until it is spoken/written that trauma is made present” (31). If the experience of trauma can only be conveyed through language, then the time during and immediately after both hurricanes was a pre-literate time for all of us. We were not able to translate our lived experience into words. During this liminal time, the ordinary, the mundane, felt extraordinary in some way. To be performing a normal task, like attending a faculty meeting, felt surreal. Senses were heightened; antennae were up. We felt *something*, but we couldn’t name it. The world was the same but different. For a time, the familiar looked skewed; there was something that couldn’t be named, something in the air, in the mood, in the environment. The rupture we felt, and it was a feeling that still defies description, was, as Michael Bernard-Donals explains, prior to language (81).

Nevertheless, as I struggle to make sense of both my own and the students’ experiences, all I have is language and academic tools, like theory. While we never may be able to fully articulate an essence of this time, I believe that exploring how we attempted to narrate this crisis can provide insight into the ways language works to and, at the same time, resists, making the lived experience of trauma a discursive event.

The Macabre Carnival

In southern Louisiana, inversions of the social order are not uncommon and happen on a predictable, annual, ritualized level. I am referring, of course, to Mardi Gras—though not the Mardi Gras that has been popularized by the *Girls Gone Wild* videos. I am invoking instead the traditional, Cajun country Mardi Gras that happens off camera. While Mardi Gras celebrations and hurricanes may seem unrelated on the surface—one is, after all, a festival and the other is a natural disaster, both events are linked by their ability in invert the social order as well as the ritualized performances that accompany both. Reading hurricanes through the lens of Mardi Gras, or carnival, helps to foreground the way in which the inversion of the social order caused by the hurricanes created a cosmology episode.

Mardi Gras, or carnival season, begins on Twelfth Night (January 6th) and lasts until midnight of the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. The history of Mardi Gras is long and can be traced back at least to medieval times and carnival. According to Mikhail Bakhtin the logic of carnival is the logic of “inside out,” of the “turnabout,” of “a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings . . . a ‘world inside out’” (11). This turning inside out is precisely what happens during country Mardi Gras as neighbors become masked strangers, honest men become thieves, and respectable citizens perform acts that, at any other time, would mark them as social outcasts.

Carnivals occur on specific dates, usually around religious feasts, and have a definitive beginning and end. Like Mardi Gras, hurricane season begins on a specific date, June 1, and has a specific end point, Oct. 30th. While a hurricane season may pass with little or no activity, hurricanes will strike and when they do, much like the activity surrounding a carnival, there is ritualized activity that accompanies them. One ritualized activity, for example, is boarding up the house.

In carnival, revelers mask themselves in order to protect their identities so they can perform mischief without fear of reprisal (Sawin); during a hurricane, people mask their houses with boards and shutters to protect them from the wind and flying debris. Both actions—the masking of revelers and the boarding of houses—are intended as safety measures. Mardi Gras masks also often have symbolic or personal meaning for the reveler (see Sawin). Similarly, it is not uncommon for homeowners who are boarding their homes to personalize the wooden “masks” in some way with either messages or symbols.

Another, perhaps more familiar image of both Mardi Gras and hurricanes is the parade or “run.” In country Mardi Gras, the parade consists of a group of masked men traveling through town on a specific route in order to obtain ingredients for the culminating gumbo. As much of the nation witnessed, especially as Hurricane Rita threatened Houston, hurricane evacuation can also be a parade-like experience as people travel on specifically marked routes to reach the safety of a soft bed and a hot meal. But, during a hurricane run, an ordinary drive becomes extraordinary. During the evacuations for Katrina and Rita, many, many people reported that a two-hour drive took ten or even fifteen hours to complete. And along the evacuation route, people exhibited carnival-like behaviors. In an interview I conducted with 18-year-old Margarita, she shared that while her family sat for hours on Interstate 10, they saw people standing on the side of the highway, urinating in full view of traffic. Other students talked about the sometimes frantic search for gas or food, and many evacuation stories involved the consumption of large amounts of alcohol—another common feature of Mardi Gras.

The carnivalesque rupture of Mardi Gras, though, is different from the rupture precipitated by a hurricane in a crucial way: In carnival, moments of rupture, of the world being turned inside out, lead to a festive spirit and laughter (see Lindahl). Hurricanes, on the other hand, produce the rupture and turning inside out of a carnival, but the end

result is not a festive release of tension and hostility. Folklorist Carl Lindahl suggests that carnival can be this time of disruption to the usual order precisely because there is an order in the disorderliness. In country Mardi Gras, there is a *capitaine* of the Mardi Gras who holds absolute authority over the Mardi Gras participants. While all the participants in the Mardi Gras don masks, the *capitaine* remains unmasked because he has ultimate responsibility for what happens during the run. According to Lindahl, during Mardi Gras, “hierarchy [is] thus supplanted but not subverted” (64). It is this faith in the order the *capitaine* represents that allows for the riders and the spectators to enjoy the disruption of the ordinary because they believe the *capitaine* will keep things from going too far. The *capitaine* is the link between the world of carnival and the everyday.

During and immediately following a hurricane, there is no symbolic *capitaine* to ensure that the rupture will not become too great, that the disorderliness will not become too chaotic, that the world will not turn completely inside-out. This is exactly what happened during the 2005 hurricane season: the world was turned upside down and inside-out, social structures broke down, hierarchies collapsed, and there was no *capitaine* to symbolize safety and order. During Mardi Gras, the *capitaine* can and does intercede if the revelers become too menacing (Lindahl 62). However, in the case of a hurricane, no human being can control the destructive potential of the storm. What we experienced during the 2005 hurricane season in southern Louisiana was a macabre carnival.

Looking for the *Capitaine*

It was during this macabre carnival that my students and I were searching for a *capitaine*—someone or something to impose, at the very least, symbolic order on the chaos. We were looking for a link between our world of the macabre carnival and the world before the storms. And many of us, myself included, turned to what was familiar, what was safe, what was known. This search for the symbolic

capitaine, I believe, is why 800 students were enrolled at ULL within a week of losing their homes. Education, it seems, could fill the role of the *capitaine*. Going to class could provide familiar structure to an otherwise chaotic time. I now believe that this is why I turned to research: Research was safe; it was familiar; it provided a regimen and a link to a time that made sense—a time before the storms.

At the beginning of this article, I shared a detailed list of the items I brought with me when I evacuated to Tennessee. I remember sitting in that Tennessee hotel room thinking that I should use the time to write about my thoughts and feelings about what was happening, to be reflective and profound, to capture the moment of what it felt like to be an evacuee who didn't know what was happening to her home, her friends, and her livelihood. Instead, all I could really bring myself to put into words was a rather mundane list of the things we brought with us. By listing my possessions—perhaps, depending on what the storm did, my sole possessions—I was trying to use language to write control into a situation that was far beyond my control.

The narratives from the students who evacuated New Orleans share a similar pattern. Consider the opening paragraphs of two personal narratives written in response to the prompt to write about a life-changing event.

After a huge hurricane Katrina, the busy city of New Orleans was terribly destroyed. This hurricane affected me as well as residents of New Orleans. Many family members, jobs, and places of residence have been lost. It really hurts me to see how a large city can be destroyed in such a short period of time. Many people were devastated by this event, and may never be the same again. (Katrina Charles.)

There have been a couple of events that have affected my life. One of the biggest and most recent is hurricane Katrina. This

event came out of the blue; nobody expected it and from one day to the other our lives were flipped upside down. Many people lost a lot, like houses and cars, but some others lost even more, their lives. Without any notice those who could had to evacuate; some others thought that this hurricane would be like the others. Then there were those who were unfortunate and didn't have enough money to leave (Darien Ruiz).

While both of these introductions are for a personal narrative essay, what I find interesting about them is that they are mostly written from a distanced, third-person point of view. While Katrina does use “me” twice in her introduction, the overall effect of her introduction is that of a report: Something bad happened in New Orleans and lots of people were hurt. In fact, if you did not know that Katrina was an evacuee, it would be possible to see her self-references as a simple show of empathy for people who experienced something horrible. Likewise, Darien’s introduction has a similar report-like quality, eliding his status as an evacuee. These narratives could have been written just as easily by students in Iowa or Maine as by student evacuees from New Orleans.

It may be easy to dismiss the lack of pathos in these introductions as symptomatic of novice writing. And, if I hadn’t lived the experience of the hurricanes myself, I may have made such a dismissal. Instead, what I see happening in these introductions is novice writers using language in a way they are familiar with—writing disinterested, third-person reports—as an attempt to exert some discursive control over the chaos of their lives. Much like enrolling in school in the wake of losing their homes, these students were trying to establish a link between the familiar world before the storm and the new and overwhelming post-hurricane world by employing a style of writing that was safe, familiar, and rational.

Even when a student attempts to address the current chaos in his life, his narrative focuses on the final few hours before his life changed. Consider the following from Clark Richardson, also a New Orleans evacuee:

Having to evacuate and basically start a new lie outside of New Orleans has indeed changed me, but before I get into that, I want to take a moment to re-live the last few hours I spent in my house.

Clark's thesis, that the hurricane has changed him, promises to get at what life has been like for him since leaving New Orleans, but instead, the rest of his essay focuses on his preparations for evacuation.

Although time was indeed of the essence, after I brushed my teeth I spent some extra time looking in the mirror and trimming my mustache. I find that weird because it didn't really need trimming, but I trimmed it anyway. Now that I think about it, I probably did that because in the back of my mind I knew there was a chance that my house and other valued possessions might be destroyed. For me, just being able to do something normal like shaving in the mirror helped prevent the severity of the situation from getting to me. It gave me the feeling that I would only be gone for a few days and that the condition of my house wouldn't be that bad, maybe just a little wind damage.

Clark's narrative ends with his family getting in the car and coming to Lafayette. He never does return to the post-hurricane world. Clark does provide some insight, though, into how his actions prior to evacuation were, on the one hand, illogical—trimming his mustache while his family was waiting for him to pack the car—but he also shares how this normally routine action brought him some comfort in the moments before his world would change forever. Clark's narrative

about the last few hours in his home is similar to the laundry list of items I brought to Tennessee; we were both using writing to capture moments in the crisis that we felt we were in control.

According to Goggin and Goggin, first person accounts of trauma—writing trauma—often serve a therapeutic function; “Testimony creates *presence in absence*” (35). If the experience of a crisis or trauma is outside of language, then the trauma or cosmology episode creates a void in one’s life narrative. Testimony, language, while never able to fully capture the essence of an experience provides a means to create a space for that experience to live. “Testimony is ‘a dialogical process of exploration and reconciliation of two worlds—the one brutally destroyed and the one that is—that are different and will always remain so’” (Laub qtd. in Goggin and Goggin 35).

In the days and weeks immediately following Katrina and then again after Rita, I sometimes felt guilty about concerning myself with the minutiae of running a writing program. Who really cares about what handbook the writing program will use next year when there are thousands of people living in your sports arena? Who wants to tell student evacuees that they have to abide by the same attendance policies as the other students or that they have to write their papers in order to pass their English class? But I am beginning to understand that going about these daily activities was important for the faculty, students, staff, and evacuees because, as an institution, we could provide a link to the rational, orderly pre-hurricane world. In many ways, the institution became the symbolic *capitaine* of our macabre carnival by not only imposing order but also by creating a space for us to start making discursive sense out of what happened. The institution helped us create a presence in the absence blown open by the fierce winds, rain, and floods that ruptured our world.

Notes

¹ Peter Goggin and Mary Goggin identify three categories of trauma: national, natural, and personal, noting that there can be overlap among the categories. Briefly, a national trauma is in the category of the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon or the assassination of JFK. A natural trauma is an event that is not necessarily malevolent in and of itself but nevertheless causes great suffering and pain as in the recent wildfires in California or, for the purposes of this article, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. And the third category of trauma is personal trauma. Crimes like rape or murder fall into this category. As with all classification schemes, though, the boundaries among the categories are fluid.

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Making It Up As We Go: Students Writing and Teachers Reflecting on Post-K New Orleans

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* In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, writing instructors at
* the University of New Orleans felt compelled to incorporate
* personal, social, and political aspects of the storm into their
* classrooms. In this article, individual instructors discuss a
* particular pedagogical approach assignment, class theme, or
* teaching strategy that we adopted, exploring its rationale and
* reflecting on our students' reactions and responses to place-
* based and civic-minded pedagogies during a time of crisis.

During the 2006 spring semester at the University of New Orleans, a group of writing instructors met to discuss our concerns and goals about teaching writing in a post-Katrina New Orleans. We understood that our teaching had to reflect the changing social, political, and emotional realities that all of us confronted daily—from the drive to campus through the ruins of once-vibrant neighborhoods to the massive recovery operations occurring throughout the city. In addition because of the university's location near several of the most devastated areas, we also had to consider the micro-recovery operations of people sorting through their mildewed belongings, many of them UNO employees, faculty, and students. Since the truncated Fall 2005 semester, dubbed “the Katrina semester,” writing instructors had immediately sensed the need to design writing assignments that made links to local concerns, national debates, and ongoing individual experiences and responses to the flood. So, for

example, students entered national and local debates on whether or not New Orleans should be saved, why they would stay (or not) in New Orleans after graduation, and what city neighborhoods should be rebuilt.

While working on her masters' thesis that argued for the importance of community- and place-based pedagogies, Celeste suggested the idea of preserving teacher and student materials we were generating in our post-Katrina classrooms. Since then, Celeste and Doreen have generated interest and participation among UNO students and instructors to contribute to the Writing After Katrina Archive Project (WAKAP). The goal of collecting these materials is to provide a resource for scholars, locally and nationally, in English Studies who have an interest in writing history and pedagogy, institutional history, trauma studies, and civic education. However, even more significant is that the collected materials reflect not only an array of narratives of the unfolding tragedy but also student and teacher engagement with the subsequent social and political issues that arose after the flood. Not only were students writing and researching on issues from timely trash pick-up to wetland restoration, but also interviewing people, observing reconstruction efforts, attending neighborhood meetings and commemoration activities, and conducting surveys on campus and off.

In his highly germane book *Composition and Sustainability: Teaching for a Threatened Generation*, Derek Owens asserts the need for composition studies to localize by re-envisioning the first year writing course as one "where students begin to view their personal and academic needs and desires through the lens of sustainability" (6). He claims that by concentrating on environmental issues that concern all of us, we can, among other things, counter the "placelessness" of college campuses which often functions as distinctly separate from their physical locations. In the aftermath of Katrina the division between academic and home life for all campus employees, students, and faculty, eroded as the campus itself became another representative

space of the emerging fragmented narrative of what happened after the flood. Being on campus that spring, seeing the effects of the flood—the emptied, eerily still campus, its buildings shut down for mold remediation, the closed Student Rec Center, where National Guard personnel had stayed while performing rescue operations, the broken vending machines which hungry evacuees had raided while waiting to be airlifted or bused out—perhaps unconsciously influenced our own reasoning for teaching Katrina in the classroom.

Because the majority of UNO students live in the greater New Orleans area, their powerful responses to these place-based assignments illustrate the pedagogical imperative of attending to aspects of place—local, national, global—especially during a time of crisis. Relevant to the kinds of writing instruction undertaken at UNO is Jonathan Mauk's conception of 'academic third space' as being "born of the juncture between academic space and student ontology" (380). By this, he seems to suggest that context-based pedagogies reflect not only what students bring to the classroom, but what they can take away from it. This means 'carrying' the academia into places that matter to them. Whether specifically Katrina-directed, or not, our teaching practices opened up a space for viewing students' lives, insights, and opinions in tandem with our own: finding our affective responses mirrored in the other—confusion, despair, anger, resistance, spiked with occasional moments of supreme joy and hope—did not necessarily bring us closer together, but at least allowed for a form of recognition to emerge in the classroom that maybe hadn't been there before. Although national coverage of Katrina has diminished immensely in the past year, for residents of southeastern Louisiana the aftermath of the storm continues to affect our lives. Because of the university's urban mission to educate local populations, the need for the continuing development of creative and timely teaching practices that reflect the desires of both students and faculty remains.

Teaching Disaster Along the Mississippi, Fall 2005

Reggie J. Poché

In October 2005, a little more than a month after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I was asked to consider teaching a spring semester course on “disaster writing” at the University of Missouri—St. Louis, where I had been teaching as an adjunct instructor of composition and creative writing shortly after receiving an M.F.A. in fiction writing. Knowing that I am a native of New Orleans, Nancy Gleason, Associate Dean of UMSL’s Pierre Laclède Honors College, thought that I was in a unique position to fulfill one of the college’s goals—offering timely special topic courses that engage students in critical thought on contemporary culture.

How could I teach such a course? What would a course on disaster writing contain? Making sense of Katrina’s tragedy seemed to be beyond the power of human reckoning—or at least my own. After all, I was still grieving for my city.

I felt both cursed and blessed to be away from home while Katrina’s events unfolded, and I quickly resigned myself to the fact that moving back to New Orleans, which had always been my plan after graduate school, would be impossible. This Antediluvian Plan, as I referred to it, drowned. Teaching a course on disaster writing, then, would be a constant reminder.

I hesitated accepting the course offer for a day or two until I reread “Elegy for My City,” an article by the novelist Richard Ford, published on September 4, 2005, one among the many I collected in the weeks after Katrina. Ford’s heartbreakingly beautiful prose eventually led me to a rationale for the course. “In America,” he states, “even with our incommensurable memories of 9/11, we still do not have an exact human vocabulary for the loss of a city—our great iconic city, so graceful, livable, insular, self-delighted, eccentric, the one New Orleanians always said, with a wink, that care forgot and that sometimes, it might seem, forgot to care.”



The cultural relevance of Katrina had emerged only days after the storm made landfall, and many of our nation's best critics, artists, poets, and fiction writers were making contributions to the national dialogue soon after. Their work provided a starting point for designing a creative writing course, which I titled "Flirting with Disaster: Tragedy and the Arts." These men and women were indeed forming a human vocabulary with which we could comprehend one of our nation's greatest tragedies, and my students and I would join them. If I couldn't return home and help rebuild, I could at least bring an awareness of this disaster to a group of students.

On the first day of class, I told my eleven honors students (only two of whom were aspiring writers) that we would be participating in what I see as a literary tradition. From Faulkner's novella, *Old Man*, set during the Mississippi flood of 1927, to the Dust Bowl of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, writers frequently look for meaning in disaster. They may also use disaster to arrive at some greater truth, so the pain we all experience through tragedy is not wasted. I expected my students to be equally considerate when writing their own "disaster texts," and since great writers are great readers, they also read many works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry centered on either natural or personal disaster. We even considered the contributions of musicians and artists in our discussions.

Classrooms can be snow globes, hermetically sealed communities of student-thinkers who are reluctant to break the seal and allow the knowledge they have gained flood other aspects of their lives. For them, the classroom is a place to learn what is deemed worth knowing for that particular class, to get the best grade possible, and then to move on to something different. To safeguard against this mentality, I chose readings from several genres that all informed similar disaster themes. Voltaire, who wrote in response to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, and even Led Zeppelin, who covered the Delta blues standard "When the Levee Breaks," both have something to say about Katrina. Students

needed to see that philosophy, history, literature, and music—culture in general—cannot be compartmentalized the same way that Katrina's aftermath should not only belong to the people of the Gulf Coast. This was a national tragedy, a shared tragedy, the seeds of which were planted generations ago.

The great Mississippi River flood of 1927, probably the greatest natural disaster ever to affect our nation, served as our first case study. We read John Barry's masterpiece of nonfiction, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*, and complemented it with selections from Richard Wright, William Faulkner, Ernest Gaines, Zora Neale Hurston, and others, such as Delta blues musicians, who looked to this tragedy or comparable experiences when making their respective art. We also read contemporary responses to Katrina that were eerily similar. "We've learned nothing," a student said in class one day.

Later, students were then asked to write their own short works of fiction in which disaster was used to explore their chosen themes. Some wrote flood-inspired works; others had different tragedies to share. Then through poetry, students commemorated the Midwest flood of 1993, in which entire towns in Missouri and Illinois were lost.

Not surprisingly, poets were among the first creative writers to respond to Katrina, and I had the pleasure of witnessing students seeking out these poems in both online and print magazines and then sharing them with the class. We came upon the fall 2005 issue of *The Oxford American* in which "Requiem," a Katrina-inspired poem by Yusef Komunyakaa, appeared. It was accompanied by a hauntingly elegant photograph of a traditional New Orleans shotgun house by Michael Eastman, a St. Louis photographer. I asked each student to write his or her own requiem, but although these inexperienced creative writers produced poignant, sensitive verse worthy of praise, I realized that

the true value of this class lay in their enthusiasm for finding (and responding to) the latest Katrina-related prose and poetry.

Empathy was our greatest achievement. As writers themselves, they formed empathy for the professionals with whom they shared the same goal. In turn, they empathized with each other, with New Orleans, its people. I stumbled across a way to have students identify themselves as writers and take on the responsibility such a title entails. They took ownership of Katrina and didn't forget to care.

I brought this goodwill with me when I returned home a year after Katrina for an English instructor's position at the University of New Orleans. But in many ways, I sometimes feel like an outsider. My people, and nearly all of my current colleagues at UNO, were forever changed; they had experienced something I can only identify with through reading and my own writing, which I know cannot compare to having lived through the storm's aftermath firsthand. Additionally, since I don't want to be perceived as an armchair survivor, I am careful with how I incorporate many Katrina-related assignments into my UNO composition classes. At the University of Missouri—St. Louis, my students knew me as a well-informed citizen of the Gulf South, one who could help them navigate through the complexities of Katrina. Now, at UNO, and thanks to my experiences in Missouri post-Katrina, I like to think that I have a kind of dual citizenship.

My UNO students often express frustration over the misconceptions about New Orleans they perceive in the media—that no matter how well-intentioned, the rest of the country cannot seem to understand exactly what happened here and what continues to happen. I can provide these students with an outsider's point of view, and I frequently ask them to correct the inaccuracies and misrepresentations they encounter by writing their own responses.

I am often encouraged when I read these essays, written by civic-minded standard-bearers of a wounded and turbulent city. I tell them that they must protect and defend this remarkable fellowship in which they and countless characters of myth, history, and literature belong.

Writing Narratives, Rebuilding Lives, Spring 2006

Celeste Del Russo

When I returned to my post as a teaching assistant in Spring 2006, I immediately sensed a feeling of camaraderie in my writing classroom; that we had all experienced Katrina and had returned to UNO was a commonality we all shared. Returning to the classroom was no easy feat, especially considering that nearly half of my students had lost their homes and were still living in FEMA trailers, hotels, or in friends' basements. I did not want my class to be seen as just one more obstacle to cross on their way to recovery. Rather, I wanted students to realize the classroom as a space for writing in response to tragedy, and hoped this would be beneficial for them as they rebuilt their personal lives.

I saw the goal of the course, then, to get students to translate into writing what they already perceived as issues of local importance and personal relevance to themselves as storm victims and members of an affected community. The course design encouraged students to pull from a variety of local resources, including archives, their own experiences, secondary sources, and more importantly, the social spaces that make up their personal lives (i.e., their neighborhoods, places of employment, family circles, etc.)..

The first essay assignment of the semester prompted students to bring the Katrina Narrative Project¹ into the classroom and share their evacuation and return home experiences with their peers. Students first chose to interview other UNO students, co-workers, neighbors, family members, friends, or strangers and recorded this person's storm experiences which students later shared during class in small groups.

Students then wrote their own narratives, which would eventually be submitted to the KNP to become part of this historical archive.

In preparation for writing their own narratives, in-class writing became a routine activity; these “Where Y’at” sessions, as one student called them, asked students to describe the places they evacuated to, their first time home after the storm, their opinion of national media coverage, or what plans they had for their future at UNO or in New Orleans. Here is how some of them responded:

They are dealing with loss:

I came back a few days ago to see nothing but an empty house with only brick walls on the outside. The whole neighborhood had about eight feet of water. That was more than enough to destroy almost everything . . .

Being split up from families:

My mother, stepfather, and three-year-old sister are moving to Atlanta because my stepfather’s job in New Orleans was in jeopardy. I didn’t realize how very real it was until they were packed up, standing on our street, ready to head out. As I watched them drive down the driveway for the last time, I kept hearing my baby sister ask me why I’m not going with them.

Or experiencing survivor guilt:

The majority of houses are abandoned . . . When I walk down Oden Street in Gentilly, it feels as though I am completely alone in an area everyone deserted because of some disease. Although I am grateful that I was so fortunate to not have experienced such devastation after Katrina, I also feel guilty knowing other people are suffering.

Embedded in these personal narratives were opportunities for further readings, discussions, and writing assignments that continued to

“locate” students in conversations occurring in New Orleans, making student experience the groundwork for a more localized pedagogy throughout the semester. Through this narrative assignment, students stumbled upon the commonalities and differences of their Katrina experiences and were able to hone in on central topics of local debate—topics that eventually became the subjects of argument and research papers during the semester. For example, one student whose narrative was framed around the night she spent in her car on the shoulder of I-10, her eight-month old son in her lap, wrote an argument paper that called for changes in the evacuation plan, including when the city should call a mandatory evacuation. Another, whose mother was listed as a missing person after Katrina, wrote a research paper on the methods employed by the National Center for Missing Adults (NCMA) and reviewed the overall effectiveness of missing person databases; pulling from various news articles and her personal experience with the operators at the Katrina/Rita Missing Persons Hotline, she eventually presented a pro-con paper on city-wide and national efforts to locate missing loved ones. Lastly, a student who lost his Biloxi home to Katrina and who reflected upon this loss in his narrative, continued in a position paper defending his family’s choice to rebuild, and another, whose family was still waiting in mid-October for a FEMA trailer in Arabi, argued for more effective solutions for housing.

Not all students, of course, felt themselves so dramatically affected by the storm. Some students resisted the writing assignments and prompts and expressed the desire to write about topics unrelated to New Orleans; that students “needed a break” from the twenty-four hour Katrina coverage, is a sentiment a few students shared, “it’s depressing” is another. Others expressed the feeling that writing Katrina was irrelevant for them, because they had not lost their homes or had “not been affected by the storm.”

I felt troubled that some students did not see any connection between their current lives and a post-Katrina New Orleans, despite the fact



that many of them commuted daily through scenes of simultaneous devastation and rebuilding, and had no plans to leave the city and surrounding areas after they graduated. And though the effect of traveling and moving day to day through flooded and abandoned neighborhoods has the potential to leave one desensitized, I hoped that by encouraging localized writing, my students might resist this feeling to “shut-down” and instead think of themselves as key players in rebuilding their communities. Asking my students to ignore current events in New Orleans was like asking them to disregard the yellow water lines that mark the homes on their daily drives to campus; analogous to dismissing the portable classrooms and locked buildings on the Lakefront campus that, at the time, were marked for mold remediation; like asking them to buy earplugs so as not to hear the pounding levee repairs occurring right off campus. It just was not an option.

“Teaching Katrina” in the Composition Classroom, Spring 2006
Sarah DeBacher

Like many of my colleagues, I saw the return to the writing classroom, post-K, as an enormous opportunity. Writing had already played a role in my own healing process. Through daily emails with far-flung friends, in posts on my newly-created blog, and in a letter to the editor published in the Atlanta Journal and Constitution, I had been sorting through a whole host of what had previously seemed like un-nameable pains. Writing was helping me heal, and I looked forward to using writing in the classroom to help heal my students and perhaps even our city. I hoped that in having my students write about the storm, they could see what I did: the transformative power of writing.

Perhaps more than hope, though, I was driven by what felt like a duty to “teach Katrina.” Since our private and personal traumas had been so publicly co-opted, so erroneously retold by the media, I felt I had an obligation to “right that wrong” in my own writing, and have my

students do the same in theirs. So the question was, how could I teach Katrina?

Ordinarily, I preferred giving my students “open-ended” (purpose-driven) prompts to “directed” (subject-driven) ones. I believed that my students wrote best when they wrote about subjects that interested them, not ones I’d assigned. Like Donald Murray, I believed that my students needed to find their own subjects—that “it is not the job of the teacher to legislate the student’s truth” (5). So, with the rare exception of an in-class timed-writing assignment, my essay prompts provided a purpose for my students’ writing (and often, an audience,) but required that my students select subjects of their own. That first post-K semester, though, I questioned whether it was responsible to allow a student to write about any old thing when clearly Katrina was The Most Important Subject on any New Orleanian’s radar. After all, hurricane Katrina was the subject that defined us, and the one we had the power—through writing—to define.

So I returned to the task of teaching with the idea that I’d try something new. Instead of assigning “open-ended” prompts that allowed my students to choose their subjects, I’d give them their subject: Katrina. What I later came to realize is that I didn’t need to change how I taught writing in order to “teach Katrina.” In fact, I quickly learned that “assigning Katrina” would in many ways be a mistake.

For their first essay, I had my students write their own “storm stories” that I hoped they would submit to the Katrina Narrative Project. In them, they’d reflect on their experiences through narration, description, and analysis. My objective was to teach them to recognize the importance of expanding and/or omitting details according to their relevance to a central idea. I envisioned them zeroing in on the details of their narratives, reflecting on them, re-shaping them, and then crafting them into cohesive essays.

But as I read that first batch of essays, I very quickly recognized an all-too-familiar problem. My students had ended their narratives by tacking-on a paragraph of platitudes and generalizations that they appeared unable to connect to their experience. "Family is all that matters," they wrote. Or, "You don't know what you've got until it's gone." In some ways, these soapbox-conclusions were more "earned" by the narratives they'd written than they had been by some of my students in the past, but the failure to effectively analyze their experience was more widespread this time. What happened?

When I talked with my students in conference, I realized that the problem hadn't surfaced because they were unable to analyze *an* experience. After all, we had practiced the steps of analysis in class, and they'd been able to derive meaning from non-Katrina-related narratives we'd discussed. The problem was that they weren't yet able to analyze *this* experience. I'm not sure why I hadn't anticipated the problem before I forced the subject of Katrina on them. It became clear that they were too close to the experience to make sense of it, and in forcing them to try, I realized that I'd put some of them through no small amount of emotional stress (which I'd hear about, as many of my colleagues later did, in my student-evaluations.) Unlike the student whose boyfriend had dumped her on the eve of her tearfully writing "I am even stronger on my own," my students that semester hadn't made the poor choice of subject; I had.

My own issues, however, were similar to theirs: I wasn't far enough from the problem to see that I'd created it. So the first Katrina-specific essay I'd assigned hadn't worked out, I shrugged. So what? By that point in the Katrina-semester, I'd heard of so many inspiring essay prompt ideas, I was wholly wedded to making the directed-subject approach work. So I tried another.

This time, I asked students to write an essay that persuaded their readers to accept their proposal for rebuilding New Orleans. They

would need to do some research in order to understand the complexity of the issues surrounding their proposed ideas, and they'd need to organize those ideas for in-class, timed-writing.

Initially, the response to my assignment was positive. My students enjoyed reading and discussing articles and editorials published in local and national newspapers, and they seemed to get a kick out of making some rather radical proposals of their own. The assignment proved to be a good one for a careful discussion of audience-awareness, as well. Proposals likely to be granted by a New Orleanian might be rejected by, say, Utah's Senator Bennett (who famously dismissed the city's rebuilding as a waste). Proposals attractive to New England libertarians might get rejected by a single mother from Gentilly now living in Houston. The assignment produced some rich in-class discussions of appealing to an audience comprised of all of these people, and more.

As the date of the in-class writing neared, however, things fell apart. What happened, I think, was that by then (late Fall '05) "Katrina-fatigue" began to creep in. We were tired from living in a broken city. The stores and restaurants where we'd made our groceries were closed, many permanently; we were driving miles to find a working gas station; broken traffic lights and power outages were a fact of life; doctors, dentists, and hospitals were few and far between. The landscape was altered, though it appeared achingly whole, sometimes, in our dreams. And even if we had not lost everything like so many others, we knew (just as the media and those who fed on it told us) that we were bad, bad off. But we were also tired from *thinking* about all this. How would we get through it? Would people come back? How would individuals and neighborhoods recover? The only certainty, we began to realize, was that things would be this way for a long time.

In the midst of all of these feelings, and in the midst of this new reality, writing an essay about the city's recovery seemed almost like a cruel

joke, and my students said so. I tried to inspire them. Imagine the possibilities, I said. Think of the impact your writing can have! When my pep-talks didn't work, I simply commiserated. It was hard, yes, it was hard to write about these subjects right now, but let's do this good work.

When I finally got the poorly-constructed batch of essays, I saw that I'd forced them to engage with a subject they weren't prepared to confront. Their proposals (rebuilding levees *a la* Amsterdam, reinventing public schools, revamping the criminal justice system) while inspiring and heartfelt, lacked development. But why?

The problem was that the subject of rebuilding a city was too complex to address in one two-week/six-class unit (especially when two of those classes were committed solely to writing). In order to present reasonable proposals, they'd need the time to develop mastery of their subjects. They'd need to understand the legislative process, economics, urban planning, social and educational issues, etc., etc. And they'd need to do this in the midst of recovering some semblance of sanity in their day-to-day lives. As if to punctuate the impossibility of this feat, one of my students wrote at the end of a half-finished draft, "I'm sorry but I just can't write about this right now."

I was sorry.

After that semester, I decided to return to my old standby—the open ended prompt that required my students to generate their own subjects. Not surprisingly, Katrina-related subjects continued—and still continue—to show up in my students' writing. Last spring in my class, Katrina appeared in a student's letter to the editor of the Times-Picayune urging her absentee neighbors in a subdivision of New Orleans East to mow their overgrown lawns. In another class, a Latino student argued convincingly that the city's influx of immigrant workers (so criticized by our mayor and the media) was, in fact, a good thing. This fall, a student wrote a wonderfully-engaging informative essay about the fundraising and recovery efforts of her high school's

marching band. Each of these Katrina-related essays has shown me how much more successfully my students have engaged with the subject of the storm when they've done so on their own terms—when their subjects are self-selected rather than teacher-determined.

No doubt, the lackluster student writing I read during the Katrina-semester was not wholly the result of my attempting to “teach Katrina” through directed-prompts. In fact, I question whether any of us was ready to be back in the classroom while we were struggling to get through our day-to-day lives. Even after I returned to student-selection of subjects in the Spring of 2006, it seemed the quality of writing (and perhaps of my instruction) that year immediately after Katrina was comparatively poor.

Still, the condition of the city could not account for the train wreck that occurred in my classrooms that first semester after the storm. My students struggled then because of the way I tried to “teach Katrina.” They wrote poorly because I imposed a topic that they were not equipped to write about (at least not yet). In assigning Katrina as a subject, I had attempted to direct them toward discoveries I had already made in my own writing—toward what I saw as its potential meaning. And because I was so wedded to teaching what I believed my student's writing *should* be, post-Katrina, I failed to teach the possibility of what it *could* be. How much of that failure stems from a lack of faith in my students' ability to select “worthy” topics, from a selfish desire to push my own agenda, or from the pressure I felt to teach Katrina, I can't quite say.

I can say that if I had it to do over again, I would teach then as I do now and had done before—through the use of prompts that emphasize purpose and audience and call for students to choose their own topics. Now that I have returned to that approach, when my students choose to write about the storm, they do so with much greater success. And I believe that success comes from my students' understanding that it

is the writer's "responsibility," as Donald Murray put it, to "explore his own world with his own language, to discover his own meaning" (5). In supporting my students' exploration of their worlds (personal and public, local and global) I've discovered just how meaningful their Katrina-related discoveries can be when they confront the storm on their terms, not mine.

Commemorating the Katrina-versary, Fall 2006

Doreen Piano

In August 2006, during the intense media lead-up to the first year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's landing, I began to notice the growing number of listings of "Katrina-versary" events in the Times-Picayune for musical events, poetry readings, bell ringing and candlelight ceremonies, protest marches, lectures and roundtables, theater productions, even stand-up comedy. Each day the listings grew dominating the events listings like kudzu. With the fall semester starting, I knew that I wanted to incorporate these events into my writing classes, even though after a spring semester of plunging the depths of flood-related issues in my writing classes, I had decided to ease up on teaching Katrina. Not that the issues facing the city had become any less urgent, nor the student writing that emerged anything but amazing, yet as one student succinctly expressed it on the course evaluations: "Too much Katrina."

Teaching during the semester after Katrina was particularly bleak. Building damage such as the open wound of a ceiling where wires dangled freely in one of my classrooms was endemic and periodic black-outs and water main breaks disrupted the normal functioning of the campus. (For at least a month, members of my department were seen scurrying across campus to use other bathrooms since ours was defunct.) Besides that, the university declared financial exigency and departments across campus were bracing for programs cuts, hiring freezes, and even faculty furloughing. Student enrollment had dropped

by a third and many continued to take online classes from evacuation locations, leaving the campus devoid of any student life.

Once a naval base, UNO is not exactly a traditional-looking tree-lined campus. There is too much space between the buildings, too much sun, and the architecture is military spare, but before the storm the students seemed to make the space work for them by organizing outdoor activities and gatherings that made up for the uninspired campus layout. Walking on campus that semester where the distance between buildings stretched out in an endless unbustling sidewalk, I found it hard to believe that this was the same vibrant campus I had witnessed during the first week of classes in August 2005.

A year later, the campus seemed more lively, even though the FEMA trailer-filled neighborhoods surrounding the university continued to remind us of the difficulties of rebuilding. Despite the potential for resistance, I decided to use these commemoration events under the ruse of an observation paper, a writing assignment I often used early in the semester. Only this time, I had a secret agenda. In writing about one of these commemorative events, I hoped that students would also come to recognize the collective need to honor the loss and devastation that surrounded us as citizens of the city, members of the university, and survivors of Katrina.

So often in the past year when discussing whether or not New Orleans should be saved, the majority of students had responded with a resounding, "Yes," basing their arguments on its unique cultural configuration that always included music, food, ethnic diversity, performance, and of course, carnival season. For many local students, these images had been drilled into their heads for most of their lives. The assignment provided students the opportunity to actively work with those representations of New Orleans as 'unique' among American cities, having a culture like no other. However, I soon learned that even students from New Orleans and the surrounding parishes did not

often 'take advantage' of the rich culture that New Orleans ostensibly offered. Many eschewed carnival season all together and rarely went to the French Quarter for fear of crime and parking tickets. As Ball and Lau argue, the marginalization of studying local cultural production in the classroom often fosters student disinterest and "the inclusion of local texts, artifacts, and performances can in itself be a critical move that implicitly confronts the marginalization of place..." (275). I wanted to see if interrogating this concept of uniqueness through an observation exercise could be used effectively as a way for students to become more engaged with their city.²

It was not just student indifference, especially in a grim post-Katrina landscape, that inspired this assignment, but I myself had a personal stake in the matter. Having just moved to New Orleans three weeks before Katrina, I had only a handful of memories based on visits to a friend of what the city was like pre-Katrina. On returning to the city, I had some serious ambivalence, often reinforced by my colleagues' amazement that I had come back, about what exactly I was doing there. So, during the assignment's various stages of development, I employed Elizabeth Ervin's astute observation that as teachers we cannot expect students to become engaged citizens and participants if we ourselves are not by attending as many Katrina-versary events as possible. Additionally, we read and discussed an opinion piece written by a UNO colleague for the *Time-Picayune* about how she and her family were going to 'celebrate' the anniversary. Even more important was my realization that the note-taking I had demanded from the students as part of their drafting process was extremely difficult during ceremonies that were so emotionally laden. Discussing this issue with the class allowed us to question how objective we could really be at these events when our affective responses were often so strong.³

Reading over the finished papers that students contributed to the archive, I am struck by the variety of events people attended. Some intrepidly explored territory wholly unfamiliar such as the somewhat

uneasy account written by a returning student who joined a protest march led by Jesse Jackson from the Lower Ninth Ward to Congo Square. Others dovetailed the assignment with their own interests such as a young man who attended a stand-up comedy event. I chose Adrianna Hanrahan's essay because it captures the emotional intensity of that day for many survivors of the storm. Moreover, not content with attending one event, Adrianna attended three different and compelling events to formulate a rich portrait of the day's events.

Two Years Out, Fall 2007

Elizabeth Miller Lewis

In the harrowing days immediately following Hurricane Katrina's landfall, I, along with my fellow Gulf Coast residents, was flung into a twenty-first century American diaspora. As Chris Rose, the *Times Picayune* feature writer who has become the voice for the Katrina stricken, so aptly put it in the early hours of evacuation, we are indeed in uncharted territory with no map. During the past two years, we have been immersed in an unprecedented cartography project as we reconstruct our personal lives and the infrastructure of our city, addressing major issues such as housing, education, the criminal justice system, and medical care, along with numerous other concerns, for example, electrical service, reparation of gas lines, road repair, reinstallation of traffic lights—the list is endless.

I spent the initial stage of the six week evacuation in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and approximately five days after the storm I was invited to participate in a panel on Katrina at the University of Mary Washington. I was in a traumatic state as I addressed the student body of the university, not knowing whether my mother, who did not evacuate, or my brother-in-law, who as a fireman was a first respondent who had to remain in the city, had survived the storm. I had no idea whether or not my house had flooded; furthermore, on the afternoon of the presentation CNN aired footage of a fire raging out of control two blocks from my residence. Although I was stunned speechless by these

circumstances, I forced myself to go through with the presentation. I was not in a position to prepare, so I had to rely on my ability to improvise, and aside from providing the audience with a first hand account of my immediate experiences with the storm, the topic that I discussed impromptu and at great length (much to my amazement) was the state of education in the city.

As a native New Orleanian, I received my education in the public school system, so I am very familiar with the inadequacies of this system, which graduates many of our University of New Orleans students. In this regard, because of my empathetic connection, I am deeply committed to my UNO students. In fact, Katrina hit one week into the 2005 fall semester, and I became deeply worried about their whereabouts as I addressed the student body of Mary Washington University. Although very disoriented during the presentation, I actually became excited while discussing the prospect of the reconstruction of the educational system. Indeed, the complicated reconstruction of the public education system has become integral to the recovery process, and even two years after the storm, is still in the initial phases. My naïve enthusiasm was quickly tempered by the bitter realization that, as an educator, I myself would be faced with formidable tasks, for example, teaching online during the period of displacement in fall 2005.

Needless to say, the apocalyptic influence of Katrina has had a significant impact on my pedagogical approach and philosophy. In my online teaching of American and British literature courses during the Katrina semester, I drew many parallels between historical epochs and the post Katrina period, and I continue to use this approach in my literature classes. For example, in British literature, students consider how the philosophy of moral optimism in the aftermath of the French Revolution is relevant to our personal perspective during the recovery process. In American literature, we focus on the similarities between the challenges facing New Orleans during the post Civil War

Reconstruction period and the post Katrina period. The student writing assignments connected to these units of study in the Katrina semester were inspired, and I think that they enabled the students to examine the consequences of Katrina from a more objective positioning. I felt like this positioning was important, since we were all coping with acute post traumatic stress in the early days of the recovery process.

In fact, while the critical lens of Katrina informs my teaching approach and syllabus, I have never incorporated an exclusively personal Katrina narrative assignment in the classroom, in the attempt to help my students maintain a more objective point of analysis. However, in my composition classes, their personal experience is incorporated as support, namely, in the appeal to pathos, in their arguments. For example, over the past two years, I have assigned a range of topics that focus on the recovery process. In spring 2006, when we returned to the devastated campus, students were assigned to construct an argument defending their position to return to the University of New Orleans and discuss the major obstacles they faced upon returning. In their argument, they were required to indicate whether or not they would remain in the city after they earned their degree. In the following fall 2006 semester, students were assigned the task of determining which social issue was the most pressing in the recovery process, conduct the appropriate research, and defend their position. In the most recent semesters, spring and fall 2007, the assignments focus on social protest and the recovery process. After studying Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter From the Birmingham Jail," students decide which social issues warrant protest, conduct the appropriate research, and make recommendations for protest. Since there are numerous demonstrations that are ongoing in the city related to the issues of violence and public housing, students are able to use these references in their writing. In addition, they are required to follow through with several of their recommendations for protest, for example, by writing editorial letters and circulating petitions. While I have encountered some resistance to the Katrina assignments because of Katrina fatigue, I tell my students

that the recovery process is the reality of our lives and to ignore this fact would be academically irresponsible. Furthermore, I remind them that King insists that we have a moral imperative to address social inequity. In this vein, I am indebted to bell hooks for my belief that pedagogy is often an uncomfortable and painful process. At this juncture, my goal in the classroom, as a result of Katrina, is to inspire my students to social activism, an activism that is palpable and crucial to our recovery process.

As we New Orleanians struggle to restore and preserve the uniqueness of our cultural heritage during this reconstruction process, we are in a continual state of personal reinvention, from victims to survivors. Two years out from the storm, in all of my classes, I have started to encourage my students to consider the possibilities of the privileged vantage point that we have been afforded by this cartographic journey, namely, through the keen honing of global awareness. This perspective was illuminated for me in the summer of 2006, when I returned to Savannah, Georgia, the first stop of my evacuation odyssey immediately following Katrina, with my mother. When I informed a local gentleman that I was from New Orleans, he replied: "This [Savannah] is a dream; you are living in reality. Most people in the world, like you New Orleanians, are involved in a struggle for survival. In contrast, we, in Savannah and, in fact, the rest of America are living in a dream world."

Implications and Considerations

In the aftermath of the storm and subsequent levee failures, the rhetorical dimensions of "the local" that include a rich set of regional-related topics, individual and collective memories, and commonplaces have factored heavily into our teaching practices and subsequently our students' responses at the University of New Orleans. In fact, it was just such an idea that inspired Celeste to argue in her masters' thesis that the first year writing program at UNO should be redesigned to reflect the new realities in which we all find ourselves living and working and

learning in post-Katrina. In nearly two and a half years of writing after Katrina, our students' desire to move on and relegate the tragedy to the past is understandable. Many of us may feel the same way. However, we have an academic, civic, and even moral responsibility to continue Katrina-related dialogue and discussion in our classrooms and within the university at large. Attending a recent commencement, several of us listened to one speaker after another invoke the storm as a momentous occasion that forced a seismic change in our lives. How we continue to respond to the conditions we face as writing teachers and as locally concerned citizens must always be considered from the vantage point of where we are in the process of recovery. While the immediacy in which our teaching practices were situated directly after the storm forged a pedagogy in which improvisation became key to our classroom approaches, we now have the ability to perceive more measured ways of continuing to teach Katrina.

For those of us contributing to this article, it's clear that what unites our different approaches to the classroom is an acknowledgement of the value of the local. Tantamount to that is an investment in viewing the classroom as a public space—connected to the rich public culture for which New Orleans is known—in which issues relating to students' material lives are woven into historical and literary histories as seen in the pedagogies of Reggie Poché and Elizabeth Lewis, or in the localized pedagogies of Celeste Del Russo and Doreen Piano. Yet, as Sarah DeBacher's contribution points out, the delicate balance between imposing Katrina-specific assignments and allowing more space in writing assignments for Katrina to emerge as one of many possible directions a student's writing may take is illustrative of the need for us to be sensitive to the students we teach and the circumstances of their lives. However, this does not mean we should ignore their material realities. As Nedra Reynolds has argued, space and place influence the scene of writing; "the kinds of spaces we occupy determine...the kinds of work we can do or the types of artifacts we can create" (157). With this in mind, the question becomes: how do we sustain the vital

dialogue we began in our classrooms in the immediate aftermath of Katrina without risking student alienation or even worse, as the disaster becomes more remote, indifference to our ongoing changing realities that continue to be influenced by a post-Katrina landscape?

One answer would be that while the geographic and cultural specifics of our pedagogies are situated within the local, it's important, as many global studies scholars suggest, to keep in mind that the local is always mediated through and influenced by global conditions and circumstances. The tension between being at "ground zero" and viewing the ways in which discourses of New Orleans, the aftermath of the storm, and the recovery process are constructed and circulated nationally and internationally can provide new directions for our pedagogies that may consider critical frameworks that consider translocal connections of national and global environmental tragedies such as comparing the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to the 2004 tsunami within a framework of global warming and/or sustainability issues.

Additionally, the student materials collected in the Writing After Katrina Archive Project must continue to grow so that it represents the entire lifecycle of the post-Katrina period and even more significant adds a much-needed counter-narrative that conveys how residents of the afflicted areas responded to the crisis through writing. If we stop collecting these materials, Katrina will be recorded as a mere historic episode of death and grief and not a stimulus for progressive change. The archive is not meant to be a time capsule, a repository that will be opened periodically and treated as a curiosity. If students recognize how their writing can contribute to the larger national debates on social and political issues, they may learn something greater about the purpose of writing and the significance of their memories. Yes, we write as individuals, but our reading is collective. Consequently, the archive has the potential to showcase and safeguard the inheritance our nation will eventually gain from Katrina in the same way that narratives collected

from the founders of jazz have historicized, and even mythologized, our city's contribution to American culture. Katrina may ultimately offer an even greater contribution; she may even find a permanent place in critical dialogue as the feminist and civil rights movements have. With respect to those whose voices drowned, we must carry on and allow history to write the final page.

Notes

¹ The *Katrina Narrative Project*, created by Provost Frederick Barton, has facilitated the collection of interviews of Katrina survivors by students in English, History, Sociology, and Anthropology courses. The archive will be housed in the UNO library and accessed by future scholars, researchers, and anyone interested in learning about those who survived the storm.

² Additionally, I had several international students in a basic writing course who approached the assignment in a completely different manner—rather than using the event to reflect and remember, the international students learned a much different story from what they'd heard and read in their native countries. In fact, a local student brought two students to *Katrina Exposed*, a photography exhibit at the New Orleans Museum of Art, and acted as their native informant, filling in the details of the storm and answering their questions.

³ Not all students were enamored with this assignment and one student-observer at the UNO ceremony noted how bored people looked as if they had been forced to attend.

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Writing the Blues: Teaching in a Post-Katrina Environment

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The writing I received in my first-semester composition class at Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana, the semester immediately following Hurricane Katrina was stunning with respect to both student commitment and narrative sophistication. In this essay, I analyze a representative example of this writing entitled "Life During Katrina" by a student I have called "K." The student's essay developed a thesis, documented a chronology, increasingly included detail, naturally included dialogue, and reached a sensitive and sincerely reflective conclusion. Moreover, the student (like my other students in that class) was extraordinarily committed to revision, working diligently on issues of both grammar and clarity. My own conclusion to the remarkable post-Katrina student writing I experienced is that our teaching of Freshman Composition can be much more artificial than we really desire it to be. How to make first-year writing courses more meaningful to students is an imperative that I believe we must continue to explore.

It's strange sometimes how a phrase lingers in the mind and will not go away. As I drove toward Chalmette, Louisiana, for the first time, just five months after Hurricane Katrina, my mind could not wrap itself around the many thoughts that overwhelmed it. I wanted to turn back and go anywhere—anywhere but here. But I kept hearing this haunting phrase. It was not the first time I had heard it. It had been

there, hidden among all the thoughts and memories and hurts and pains. Just as I have done with most of the terrible things that have happened in my life, I placed it on a shelf in a back closet of my mind and tried to close the door. But every time I heard news about New Orleans, Nunez, and Chalmette or talked to one of my friends or colleagues in some other place, in some other time, the door opened, and there it was again: "Oh where, oh where have all my students gone? Oh where, oh where can they be?"

To calm the racing beat of my heart and the increasing pounding of imaginary waves in my mind as I drove across the Twin Span, I started repeating phrases and clichés I knew that related to water. I was amazed at how many I remembered.

- Fish out of water
- Blood is thicker than water
- Don't throw the baby out with the bath water
- Gone water does not mill anymore
- He is wet behind the ears
- In deep water
- It leaks water everywhere
- Plenty of water ran under bridges
- That is water under the bridge
- To have water up to the throat
- To drown in a glass of water
- You're a sitting duck
- You're in hot water
- You trouble the water
- Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink

I knew the location of one of my students. I was devastated when I received the news that she had drowned. I remember so vividly the last time we spoke. It was the Friday before the storm. We were preparing to leave campus and rehashing the first week of school. She had been in

several of my classes and struggled very hard to keep up with courses and work full-time in the maintenance department. I was very proud of her determination and dedication to her job and to her studies. That Friday as we discussed the first week of school and contemplated if we were going to have to evacuate for the storm, I turned to her and said, "We can't sweat the small stuff; life is too short." I remember waving to her as I drove from the parking lot. That was the last time I saw her.

That first morning as I parked my new Honda (the old one now had a tree growing out of it) in the same parking space where I had last waved to Liz, I felt like a long lost child returning home after years of exile. I was glad to be home, but I was still besieged with fear. I dreaded hearing the stories that I knew were waiting to be told. We had been scattered all over the country and the repercussions were enormous. I had faced so many obstacles in my own journeys, but I was especially concerned about my students. I hoped some were starting better lives; I figured some were struggling to survive; I knew some were dead.

I wasn't quite sure why I had returned, what I was going to see, or even what I hoped to offer. But I felt deep inside that I needed to be here. Maybe I needed to face my own demons. I felt as if I had heard Creole speaking to Sonny in James Baldwin's short story "Sonny's Blues." "He wanted Sonny to leave the shoreline and strike out for the deep water. He was Sonny's witness that deep water and drowning were not the same thing—he had been there, and he knew. And he wanted Sonny to know" (47).

And I wanted—no needed—to know. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, I had lived on the beachfront in Long Beach, Mississippi. Returning home to emptiness, mile after mile of emptiness, I knew what the blues were all about. I knew because I had been there: family members missing, lost home, no home, displaced, misplaced. Everything gone! I was alive and managing, but maybe I had to prove to myself that I was a survivor,

that I could forge a new life, that I could find, as Sonny did, “right there beneath my fingers, a damn brand-new piano” (Baldwin 47), a brand-new life.

Thus, I began my first semester back at Nunez Community College. Hurricane Katrina had completely devastated the area of Chalmette. Not one house or building had been spared. Everywhere I looked, I saw despair, defeat, and hopelessness. The buildings, the streets, the trees, and even the earth were scarred, and each of us bore those scars. Some were visible; some were hidden, but they were there nevertheless.

Most of the facilities at Nunez had been damaged by the storm. The faculty and staff were all squeezed together on two floors in the Arts and Science Building. In this tiny area, in every available space the faculty taught classes. As I faced my first class, I felt like Laura in her one room school on *Little House on the Prairie*. I was armed with my textbook and a piece of chalk. No computers, no PowerPoint presentation, no smart board. My students didn't seem to notice.

As students entered the classroom, they asked the same question: “How did you make out?” My answer was always the same, “My family all survived; everything else can be replaced.” Of course, I had to ask them the same question. The answers varied, but actually they were the same. In some way and to some degree, they were all affected.

As I planned my course outlines for all my classes that first post-Katrina semester, I had one general rule: try to stay away from Katrina discussions and present the course as I normally would. That strategy did not work. Inevitably, everything from how to write thesis statements to how to punctuate compound sentences ended with a Katrina story: a student in tears, another lost in a daze after her third funeral in one week, another lamenting the horrors of gutting the family home and finding a dead family member, numerous accounts of dealing

with insurance companies and FEMA, living with relatives, and living in a FEMA travel trailer.

Finally, I conceded defeat. Katrina had won, again! I had to find a way to incorporate the emotional trauma we were all dealing with and still teach composition. I am still amazed at the determination of my students. Considering all the problems, I am not sure how they made it to class. It occurred to me that they were using the class and school as a coping mechanism, just as I was. It was normal, and that is what we all needed— something to remind us that the world was still in motion, that life continued.



Photo Credit: Patty Steib

So, I varied my routine. At the beginning of each class, I allowed my students to talk. Students were encouraged to discuss any topic they wished, as long as it was relevant to the storm, to recovery, or to coping with daily life, or school. After the discussion students had to write a response based upon an agreed topic.

When I began teaching my classes, I did not know that Hurricane Katrina and I would become collaborators. In fact, she was probably the lead instructor. Everything I taught that semester was somehow

funneled through the “eye of Katrina.” I did not have to teach my students how to be observant, or how to develop tone, style or voice. Katrina had taught them this. I usually spend several classes working on development using sensory details. Hurricane Katrina had taught them more about sensory experiences than I could ever hope. Unknowingly, Hurricane Katrina and I had given them permission to speak; we had given them a voice.

As the class continued, I was amazed at the progress most of the students made. In the beginning, most of the discussions were somber, but we dredged onward. We discovered that most of us were living in FEMA travel trailers or some other less-than-desirable living arrangement that was not conducive for studying. I quickly discovered that being a FEMA trailer resident dulled the senses and caused many negative emotions. I needed space, and space I didn't have. I found it difficult to work or even concentrate in my sardine can. Some of my students had small or teenage children confined in that small space. Many of us became paranoid. Strange thoughts crowded the mind and blocked the oxygen needed to think clearly. “There is not enough air; too many toxins are in the air; it's going to blow up if I turn the propane gas on; there is not enough space to cook, to eat, to bathe; it's just too damn small.”

After listening, agreeing, and understanding my students' problems, we all decided that we would come to class as early as possible to complete homework. We all began spending as much time as possible at school. We became the FEMA Trailer Rat Pack (I'll forego our rats, snakes, and other critter stories for another day). In the process, the students bonded with each other and with me. We studied together, we shared helpful ideas, we shared storm-related information, and in a way we became an extended family. One day as I sat waiting for students to enter the classroom, I noticed an amazing change. Instead of the dazed looks, the frowns, the despair, I saw smiles; I heard laughter. It was just incredible to me that our open discussions and meetings together for a

few extra minutes had transformed from a lament to laughter. Instead of sadness or anger, we began to find humor in some of the insanity that was going on around us and directly affecting our lives. Insurance adjusters and FEMA became our favorite sources of amusement when we needed a good chuckle, a form of comic relief. After laughing at the absurdities, it was easier to deal with run-on sentences, verb tenses, or developing a main idea.

As I reflect on the first semester post-Katrina, it was exhausting, emotionally and physically. I faced and still face the uncertainty of my future in New Orleans, at Nunez, or on the Gulf Coast. But through it all, the first semester taught me many things about my students, and—more importantly—about myself.

Most of my students survived the semester. I recently saw one of my English 1020 students as I sat eating lunch at a local restaurant in Slidell. She is now living in New York and attending a prestigious university, majoring in communication. She thanked me for giving her the confidence to pursue her dreams. Not all my students managed as well. I feel somehow responsible for those who dropped out, or disappeared, or gave up. They were only a few. I feel I failed them somehow, but even those students taught me something: sometimes we have no choices; sometime we don't have control; I don't have all the answers; and hard work does not always guarantee success.

I thought I was strong, that I could survive almost anything. Katrina taught me differently. She taught me that I was human, that sometimes even I must concede defeat, at least to some degree. My old approach to teaching did not work in that first post-Katrina semester. I had to realize that once a new plot is set into action by a catalyst, it must play itself out. And as a result of that catalyst, a new norm is set. The old one may exist in our memories, but life will never be or can never be the same. I had to throw out my normal procedures and establish

something completely different. And that was a good thing. Hurricane Katrina forced me to become a better teacher.

Today, I am more flexible in my classes and changing the course syllabus to accommodate the different needs of my students is not such a big adjustment. I have always known that a strong foundation is one of the fundamental keys to learning. Katrina forced me to acknowledge that fact again. Sometimes I have to go backward and reinforce the foundation before I can make progress. Many of my students need this, and now it makes more sense than it did before. Katrina washed away anything and everything that did not have a strong foundation, from homes to relationships.

Now, almost two years later, I am still teaching at Nunez Community College. We made it through the first post-Katrina hurricane season without having to evacuate and without much worry, although the fear of another hurricane is always lurking in the back recesses of our minds. I keep a bag packed and all my personal papers in my car. We will never be as cavalier about hurricanes or leaving as we once were, for we all know that "it can come again; it can come again" (Baldwin 45).

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Student Essays

Kathleen Atatalo

Hurricane Katrina was a devastating time for anyone who lived in Louisiana, Mississippi, or anywhere along the Gulf Coast. People spent the next few months to a year moving around, trying to find a place that felt like home, and where they felt that they might belong. Most people simply wanted to go home, but home, as well as everything people had ever worked hard for, was gone. Hurricane Katrina was a very sad, emotional, and confusing time for everyone.

It was Saturday night, in the middle of the night, when my family and I heard on the news that there was no high or low that would direct Hurricane Katrina in another direction. I panicked; for the first time in my life, I wanted to evacuate. My mother and I cleared her Subaru of anything we would not need. It also had an oil leak and no brakes. In addition to the Prelude, which I had borrowed from my boyfriend, neither one of us were sure how far either car would get us. We packed clothes just for a couple of days and enough food for about a week. We then loaded up each car until there was no more room for anything but my younger siblings, their father, their grandfather, and ourselves. We got as far as Tulane when the Subaru's exhaust started to smoke; the smoke was so thick and dark that I couldn't see the car in front of me. We pulled over long enough to figure out if we were going to continue to drive or go to a shelter; we continued to drive.

We made it to St. Francis Ville, which is outside of Baton Rouge, when the Subaru broke down. My mother and I drove down the road for a little ways until we came to a campground; we rented a site and forced the car to make it to the site. Afterwards we asked around for the closest Wal-Mart or any store that would have tents and the closest place was an hour away. We unpacked the Prelude and everybody piled in; it wasn't until we got to Wal-Mart that we found out that the waters of Katrina had broken the levels and the city of New Orleans was beginning to fill with water. My mother as well as my younger siblings

started to cry; they cried because our home and everything that my mother had worked hard for was gone; we didn't know where anyone was or if they were doing fine; and we had no way of contacting any friends. We stayed at the campground for a couple of days and then the managers wanted everyone who didn't have an RV to pack up and leave the site. We did as they said, but weren't sure of where we could go, considering the car didn't want to budge, but my mother was able to get the car to start and it made it this time to Natchez, Mississippi.

The poor old Subaru finally broke down outside of a bar on the highway; this time the car didn't even start and we were stranded. As we sat to figure out what to do, the owner of the bar brought out cold drinks for all of us and asked if there was anything he could do. We thanked him and told him no. My mother and I left my younger siblings, their father, and grandfather there to find a gas station; when we got to the gas station my mother called my grandmother in Missouri. She explained the car trouble and where we were stranded. My grandmother sent my aunt and uncle out in two cars to come and get us.

We slept in the cars that night; I had very little sleep because I couldn't stop thinking about home. It really hadn't sunk in yet, so to me it just seemed like a bad dream I couldn't wake up from. We hadn't showered since the campground and we were sitting in the heat waiting on my uncle and my aunt to reach us. It took them 24 hours to get to us because of all the detours off of I-55 South. We packed up the cars and we headed back out, leaving the Subaru behind; we were thankful that the car had made it that far. We made it to Tennessee and decided we couldn't drive any further. We knew that it would be impossible to find one hotel that would have a vacant room, so we pulled into the Drury Inn and spent that night in the parking lot. After a couple of hours of being there we were awakened by a police officer, who had been called by the desk clerk. He asked what we were doing and we explained the whole situation to him; he told us to get our rest and leave in the

morning. We woke up and headed back on I-55 North around 7:00 in the morning; thankfully, the rest of the way there we had no problems.

We reached my grandmother's house, in Bloomfield, Missouri, around 6:00 that evening. We showered and I called my best friend Kim, who lives in Missouri as well. I spent a school year living with my aunt when I was in middle school. She was thrilled to know that I was still alive and out of New Orleans. She came rushing over to pick me up. I spent the next couple of days staying with her when my mother called and said that a couple from one of the churches had donated their farm house, on a gravel road, and that she had the keys to it. I was thrilled that we didn't have to stay with family members. Don't get me wrong. I love my family dearly; it's just all of us couldn't stay under the same roof that long; it would have driven us crazy. We spent the next few months dealing with FEMA, the Red Cross, and any other organization that was helping the victims of Hurricane Katrina. I enrolled at the only community college that we could find in our location. It was an hour away. I attended school there for about a month. When I first started most of my teachers felt that I was lying about being a hurricane evacuee, and that I was just too lazy to start school on time. After about a month of attending school, spending all day trying to find the organization or all day at the organization, I was getting depressed. I had stopped eating and sleeping, until finally I had a nervous breakdown, and withdrew from college. It still amazes me that it took almost a month before it really sunk in that there was no going home; there was nothing to go home to.

We stayed at the farmhouse until the beginning of January. We moved to Dexter, the next town over, because my mother was coming back home to work. There was no work in Missouri and the landlord of the farmhouse didn't feel that I was mature enough to handle a house and two kids. So we found a three bedroom house in town. It didn't have as big of a yard as the farmhouse did, but it had a big enough backyard to play in.

The next four months were hard. I attended school, worked, took care of the house, two kids, doctors' appointments and anything else that needed to get done. My mother would ask me everyday if I was fine and if I was sure I could handle things. I always told her I was fine, that I could handle it, but I couldn't. I was stressed; it was a type of stress that I never felt before. I couldn't sleep or eat; I had lost 20 pounds in just a few weeks. I couldn't ask her to come back because there is hardly any work in Missouri, and if you find a job, it means working your ass off for \$4.25 to \$6.50 an hour, even at McDonald's, and most of the jobs didn't give you more then 25 hours week. I don't know how anybody could live off of that. So I pretended like I was fine and just reminded myself that it was until the end of school, that I only had to do cope until the middle of May.

May finally came around and I was thrilled when school let out. My mother came up to Missouri. We all packed up the house and headed back to Louisiana a few days later. When we made it home I think it was the happiest moment in my life. All I can remember thinking is that I finally could get some good food, hear good music, and enjoy everything about New Orleans. Finally, I was home and home is where I was going to stay.

Although Hurricane Katrina was an emotional time for everyone and I wish that it hadn't happened, it made me realize that here today and gone tomorrow was more than just a saying—it really could happen to anyone in any situation. It also made me appreciate what I have in life because now I know that it can be taken from me. I appreciate the fact that everyone I know and love was able to evacuate and the majority of them are moving back and that my family is okay. We had lost everything but each other. Now because of Hurricane Katrina I appreciate my city and my home more because I can't see myself living anywhere but here. Even though before the storm I couldn't wait until I had the money to move out of the state of Louisiana, now I don't want to go anywhere else to live. So even though the storm did take

everything and we did have to start all over; it made me realize that I need to love and appreciate what I have because it's not going to be here forever.

Courtney Randazza

My experience was emotional. I'm sure everybody's was. My family left our house at 3 a.m. on Sunday. It was a scary thought just knowing that I might not even be coming back to my house. I still had some hope that maybe the hurricane wouldn't come. We stayed at a hotel in Hernando, Mississippi. Some of my relatives were with us so that made it somewhat easier. The next morning when we turned on the news, we found out that Katrina had destroyed everything and all I could think about was that everything I had known my whole life had just been wiped out.

The worse part was not knowing anything. There were still family members and friends out there and we didn't know where they were and we couldn't even get it touch with any of them. I kept thinking about my son and the fact that he didn't have a home. For days all we could do was just sit in the hotel and try to get in contact with people and figure out what we were going to do and where we were going to go. I was still in a bit of denial still thinking that there was possibly something to go back to but eventually I came to realize that my home was gone and now we would basically have to start over from scratch.

After we left the hotel we all stayed in a house in a place called New Roads. I hated it for many reasons. It wasn't home; it was also a small country town with nothing to do so not only was I depressed about the hurricane but now I was dying from boredom. It wasn't much fun sharing a house with about ten people. I love my family but after being stuck in a house in the middle of nowhere, I was ready to start killing everybody. We stayed there for about a month until we decided to settle in Denham Springs and start rebuilding our house in St. Bernard. I was still miserable, but I tried not to complain because at least we were in

a house which was more than what some people had but it was lonely out there with no friends or family around. By then everyone had gone there separate ways.

I did my best to make the most of it. I figured once we got some furniture in the house, it would seem a little bit more like home but I realized it's not home and even though we started getting new things there were stuff that I couldn't replace that bothered me. All of my pictures, little things I've saved over the years, things that I had saved since my son was born were all gone and I wasn't getting them back. My mom would tell me to try and make new memories but it was so hard because it almost meant that I would be starting my life completely over. I am not very big on change and that's probably one of the reasons why I didn't adjust so well in Denham Springs. I also didn't have my car so that meant no school or work for a while which to some people would be almost like a vacation but to a person like me who gets bored very easily, I was starting to get cabin fever.

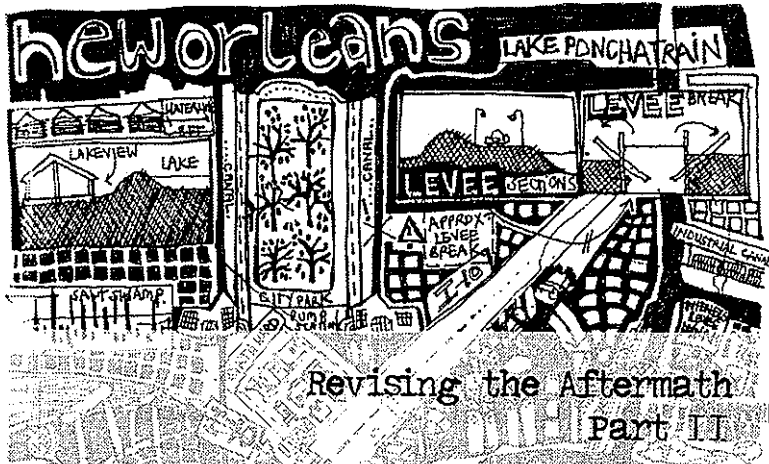
The holidays especially Christmas were extremely hard. I usually look forward to Christmas time but with everyone and everything gone, it was hard to get in the spirit but I put on my best front because I still had a little boy to think about.

Slowly but surely, things started to get better. The house was coming along. I finally got a new car so I was able to go see my friends on the weekends. It was weird going back to the house after seeing it full of mud and just completely falling apart. All of our stuff had been thrown out and the inside was completely stripped. Looking at the house like that made me think about when we first built the house in 1992. The outside was there but nothing on the inside. We were truly starting over. It was still the same house but it almost felt like I was in a different house. I still think about when I would drive around the parish with my dad and just look at everything that was destroyed. There were so many places that I had a lot of good memories of and they were gone

and I didn't even know if they would be back. I still can't get over how in just one day everyone's lives were completely changed. I would sit there and wish I could turn back time and go back to the way things used to be before Katrina. I wasn't too happy when I found out that some family members weren't coming back and that made me think of how I took all of them for granted because they were always near by so it wasn't a big deal how often I saw them. Now that they are not so close I miss them and wish that they still only lived five minutes away. Even all the hangouts aren't the same. Every weekend all of my friends and I would go to Daiquiris & Company. Now that it's gone and not coming back we started going to Daiquiris Paradise and it's strange because a lot of the same faces are there but the feeling is just not the same. In the afternoons I would go sit by someone's house and hang out and talk. Now I have to go sit in a FEMA trailer which doesn't exactly have that welcome feeling to it and if someone does have a house I have to drive thirty to forty minutes or maybe an hour to get there and I can only do that on the weekends if I have the time.

Last week I finally went to the cemetery to see my paw-paw who died three years ago and from that time I could never get it together to go see him after the funeral. I just couldn't accept the fact that he was gone but I decided to go. I sat there and talked about all the frustrations over the past year and even though he did not answer me back it felt good to talk to someone who wouldn't give the same old answers. Every day gets better. I'm glad to be home and see a lot of familiar faces. Most of all, I'm glad I'm in my house, the place where I grew up, the only place I really know.





The Streets of New Orleans

Stella Nesanovich, McNeese State University

on seeing the flooding after Hurricane Katrina

Thirty years after departing
the stucco house in Gentilly,
for a moment this morning
chatter ceased, an internal
space opened, like the stillness
when a dog's bark ceases.

As a child, I lived near an avenue
called St. Bernard in that city
with magical names, where saints
and muses share equal billing.
In that still space a sensuous flood:
the bricks of the Vieux Carré,

odors of molasses and coffee,
the chug of ships on the dark mix
of the Mississippi, churning
toward some port far from the city
of my birth, my youth, that place
now more water than earth.

CITYbuild Consortium of Schools: From Disaster Response to a Collaborative Model for Community Design and Planning

Sarah Gamble, CITYbuild Consortium of Schools, and Dan Etheridge, Tulane University

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* The CITYbuild Consortium of Schools is a consortium of design
* and planning schools based at the Tulane City Center in New
* Orleans, Louisiana. This group came together after Katrina
* through common interests in grass roots neighborhood
* recovery support. The article looks at the context in which
* such a consortium came to be, some of the results of the first
* two years of collaborative practice and some critical reflection
* on the goals and realities of this model of collaborative
* community design in a post disaster context.
*

Introduction

The following collage of words, images, journal excerpts, sketches and other textures is assembled with two goals in mind. The first is to communicate to the reader a little about the history and personality of the CITYbuild Consortium of Schools, founded in New Orleans at the Tulane City Center at the beginning of 2006. The second is to give some context to the reflections – on the modes and practice of our work over these first two years and the uncertainty of our future – which the writing contains. It is a complex story that we have compressed for this format and we have often made an assumption that people interested in our narrative have some experience with the complexities of university/community partnerships and therefore understand the dynamics of the working environments explored here.

The last two years that this body of work represents have been so busy, and the post-Katrina working environment so difficult, that we have had few opportunities to engage our peers in this format for critical reflection and it is an opportunity and process we are grateful for.

The CITYbuild Consortium of Schools' Members

University of Arkansas
School of Architecture

Boston Architectural College
School of Landscape Architecture

Design Corps

Georgia Institute of Technology
College of Architecture

University of Kansas
School of Architecture and Urban Design

University of Kentucky
School of Architecture

Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Department of Urban Studies and Planning

University of Minnesota
School of Architecture

University of Montana
Environmental Studies Program

Project Locus

University of Southern California
School of Policy, Planning, and Development

University of Texas at Arlington
School of Architecture

University of Texas at Austin
School of Architecture

Tulane University
School of Architecture

Washington University
College of Architecture and Urban Planning

Wentworth Institute of Technology
Department of Architecture

Excerpt from *Groundwork – 2006 Review*
CITYbuild Consortium of Schools' First Annual Report

The idea for the CITYbuild Consortium of Schools developed in the Fall of 2005 out of two post-Katrina conferences – *Reinhabiting NOLA* at Tulane University, and the *Arkansas Summit* at the University of Arkansas – held among national design-related university programs seeking a plan of action to address the unprecedented crisis in New Orleans. Recognizing that many were expressing the same desire to get involved, the seed was planted for the creation of a multi-disciplinary collective of schools working together to meet the complex recovery and rebuilding needs. The CITYbuild Consortium was initiated in January 2006 starting with 10 schools representing the fields of Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Planning and Policy, Real Estate Development, Historic Preservation and Environmental Studies. The role of host (and, in large part, generous first-year supporter) was taken up by the Tulane City Center at Tulane School of Architecture – a school grappling with its own difficult recovery issues.

After an evacuation semester teaching Tulane students at Arizona State University, I returned to New Orleans and Tulane in January 2006 and began working with Dan Etheridge and Alan Lewis of the Tulane City Center and Dean Reed Kroloff to define the mission, organizational structure and outline for procedures for CITYbuild. During the first 10 weeks of Tulane's re-opening we were overwhelmed (in the both the positive and negative sense of the word) by all of the expressions of interest and concern from people across the nation – faculty and students, researchers and documentarians – requesting tours, information and insight into the city, its history, and its condition. Everyone was essentially asking the same questions – “How did this come to happen?” and “What, if anything, can be done?” Answers were hard to come by.

We began to identify the needs of our communities and determine the skills and interests of remote design-related programs. Some schools made their own local contacts and developed projects, but looked to us for maps, collected data, guidance and logistical assistance. Other schools came to us without a determined project, community or need to focus on and we helped to develop connections for viable partnerships. (This required, and continues to require, a great creativity and capacity for quick but accurate assessment of skill sets and needs, for which Dan Etheridge has a truly remarkable gift.) Because there was no existing model for this type of inter-university cooperative entity, we were required to develop the terms of membership, procedures, and ethical standards for participating schools while initiating the documents and processes to become a non-profit organization. In March, thanks to Bryan Bell, we were joined by Design Corps Fellow Sarah Gamble, who offered invaluable leadership, dedication and creative vision in the critical role of CITYbuild Coordinator. By the end of Spring 2006 several schools had completed projects that would serve as exemplary models of partnership, process and execution for the projects to come.

At the end of Summer 2006, our partnering schools had built some of the first new construction projects in the entire city. We had also created a website to act as a centralizing repository for information and documentation, and we had our Member Council in place, which consisted of one representative from each CITYbuild member school. This formation was instrumental in harnessing a collective momentum at the beginning of Fall 2006 in which we saw new schools get involved, new partnerships formed and new projects developed with a greater sense of purpose and collaborative influence. We made great strides in moving from a reactive position of tactical response to a proactive position of strategic development. By creating a Community Partner Project Register to determine the specific community needs, we streamlined the process of identifying potential partnerships for schools. Additionally, during this time, we developed the organizational by-laws, the three-year budget, and we became incorporated in the state of Louisiana.

In November 2006, the first CITYbuild Member Council meeting took place in New Orleans. We saw for the first time the realization of what we had only conceived a year earlier and had been elusively working with in virtual and incremental form – a room full of people from across the nation at one table discussing what CITYbuild is and what it can and should be. We finished the year with an amazing body of work owing to the inexhaustible effort and talent of the CITYbuild-affiliated faculty and students and the inexhaustible spirit and determination of our community partners.

What started as an ad-hoc operation struggling to field requests for tours and information from a crippled city developed in one year into an organization comprised of 17 national schools providing design solutions and built responses for community recovery and redevelopment.

There is much to celebrate, as evidenced by the following pages, but there is still much to reckon with. In meeting with people and presenting CITYbuild and the affiliated projects at conferences and other events, I try to impress upon listeners that *now* is the time for the great work to be done. While it is impossible to express all of the gratitude for the “first responders” and to fully see how they provided life support for a city in critical condition, it is only now that the ground is ready for the substantial rebuilding to happen. Insurance and federal recovery assistance monies are just now starting to make their way into the hands of affected businesses, families and individuals; the lines of material supplies are getting back to capacity; city planning recommendations are being formalized; and emotional stability is returning along with hope. People and businesses are finding the means and the resolve to come home and get their lives going again. It has been slow to get here, but now is the time to have a significant impact on the redevelopment of a culturally rich, uniquely significant national treasure. We cannot afford to miss this opportunity. The substantial recovery of New Orleans is still a long way off and many of the lessons to be learned from this unprecedented situation are yet to come. I ask you to get involved.

Doug Harmon, CITYbuild Director, April 2007

Understanding Our Role and Responsibilities

The preceding excerpt of Doug Harmon’s introduction to *Groundwork: 2006 Review*—the first annual report for the CITYbuild Consortium—provides a good sketch of the beginnings and accomplishments of this new organization. As a member of the founding team, I read through this account and remember every step we took to get to where we are today. As good a job as Doug has done in summarizing this history, it is impossible to incorporate the sense of chaos on the ground in New Orleans that was prevalent every step of the way. There was no leadership from government entities, there were no blueprints for the type of collaborative work we were proposing, and people’s lives were devastated.

Add to this chaos the fact that we were proposing to assist people and organizations that had lost most if not all that they owned and were severely traumatized by the memories of the disaster. In short, it would be difficult to invent a situation with higher stakes when it comes to university/community partnerships. To add to the complexity of the situation we did not only have one or two schools to think about working together in this context, we had an initial group of 10 that had expanded to 17 schools by the end of the first year. It was clear we needed some guiding principles to effectively manage our collective efforts and uphold a standard of responsibility and stewardship we could all be proud of.

Amidst this chaos we all agreed that our most effective strategy would be to develop as simple a framework as possible. Given the limited time and resources available to begin the work, as well as the complexities inherent in the geographically dispersed partnership models we were proposing, this was also the only realistic possibility. The general two-step process outlined below is something I would like to claim was our intention from before we started working, and while this is basically what we were doing, it is only through some critical reflection at this stage of our organization that we are able to so clearly understand how we have been working.

Step 1: Matchmaking

The vast majority of architecture, planning and other associated schools that reached out to us at Tulane School of Architecture immediately after the hurricane were after two things. The first was information. Professors and students were looking for up to date information and had difficulty finding it. They were looking for data on a recently transformed place and wanted to compare the past and the present. We collected all the information we could find and established a data repository of maps, articles, etc., related to the city and recent developments and made it available to all CITYbuild schools. For those groups that traveled to New Orleans we organized guided tours

through the city for first hand exposure to the flooded neighborhoods and slowly recovering communities. The second service people were looking for was assistance in locating a community partner with whom they could engage in a curriculum based recovery assistance semester. These were the schools that felt a responsibility to do something to help the people of New Orleans, and also saw an opportunity to engage their students in a very real and very critical situation.

As Doug Harmon explained, we initially did all this on an ad-hoc basis. But as the calls continued to come we began to recognize the potential for these resources to have a significant collective impact for grass roots recovery efforts city-wide. At this stage we formalized our efforts and negotiated a collective ethical platform on which to base all of the work. This is the point where we applied the name CITYbuild to our collective efforts and where we reached out to our collaborators to pool resources and work together.

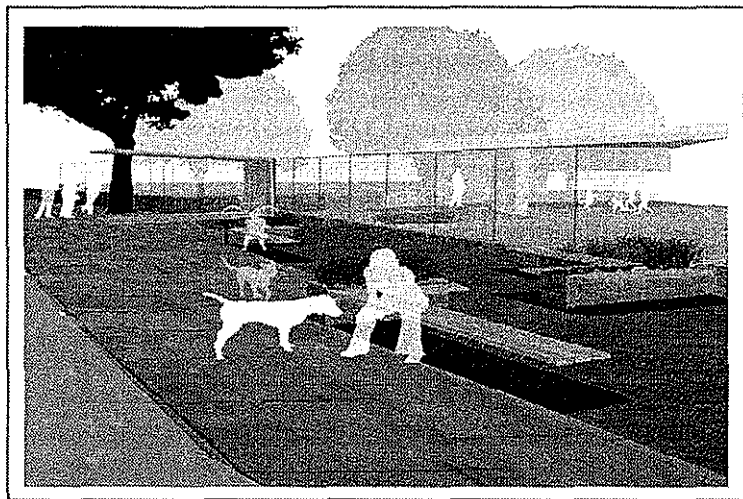
This is also the point where we looked more comprehensively at our role as “matchmaker” and what our responsibilities are to all involved. For this part of our work we adopted the principles of mutual benefit—i.e., if it does not work for both partners’ goals, then it does not work. From the perspective of the CITYbuild schools, our responsibility was to find a project that would facilitate opportunities for the professor to meet their curricular requirements. These requirements differed greatly from urban design scale issues, to technical building issues, to regional landscape issues. With these identified we were able to locate a community partner with an appropriate project for the group. Once we had set up this partnership, our responsibility for mutual benefit was primarily with the community partner, and in most cases it was as simple as clearly understanding the scope and scale of the proposed work and making sure that this was realistically achievable by the partner school (it was at this point that we joked about experimenting with online dating service software).

It is also important to articulate our efforts to promote the idea of long-term partnerships as part of the initial matchmaking process. We had multiple reasons for this strategy but the most important was our understanding of the learning curve (and associated productivity) for non-local schools working remotely with community partners. Essentially, we feared that schools might take an entire semester adjusting to working under these intense circumstances and be just at a point where they could engage in a meaningful partnership with a local organization before it was time for them to return home. If individual faculty members would make a longer-term commitment to a local organization, we could work towards a partnership that effectively advocated for the principles a given community organization was working towards. Two years into CITYbuild, I am very pleased with our results on this issue. We have multiple schools about to enter the fourth or fifth semester working with the same organization and the efficiency and effectiveness of these partnerships improves with every new group of students.

Step 2: Advocacy

After the initial negotiations (meetings with community groups, conference calls etc.) of the matchmaking process, our role at the CITYbuild coordinating office shifted into one I would describe simply as advocacy. At the beginning of the CITYbuild work, we felt this advocacy would be done almost entirely on behalf of the community partner. We understood the potential for faculty members to promise too much and walk away from unfinished projects at the end of a semester and we wanted to ensure this did not happen. We also understood that these community organizations were working in an environment where the demands on their resources exceeded anything they had ever accomplished by many orders of magnitude and they needed direct support to provide their school partners with the information needed. The latter of these issues was straightforward and simply required our attention when it was called for; the former, however, was more difficult to manage as we had little leveraging

power to enforce spoken commitments in a disaster zone. This was when the CITYbuild website was established. From our collective imaginations, this tool seemed the best way to enforce standards should the need arise and was a way of publicizing the initial commitments. The website developed as a place to report on the positive progress and also an appropriate place to call out those lacking follow-through. This strategy was not an invention of the CITYbuild office in New Orleans, but was considered important by all the founding schools.



We need to go on the record here as stating that time has shown that this issue never needed enforcement. The faculty group that came together to found CITYbuild was a self-selected group of people that were responding to their own principles in the first place. However, we all felt it important to not only protect the limited time and energy of New Orleans-based community organizations, but to maintain the quality of the work of an often marginalized field of research and outreach in design and planning schools around the country. Further, we learned that much of our attention to advocacy ultimately needed to be directed at our own peers in the wider design and planning

education community to ensure the work being done by these faculty members was duly recognized and that they were not penalized for an unconventional approach.

Towards these goals it became a priority for CITYbuild's first Director, Doug Harmon, to travel to conferences and symposia to promote this work. Many of the faculty that helped found CITYbuild are young and working towards tenure and some found themselves accused of things ranging from lacking academic rigor to the extreme case of being called ambulance chasers. This issue is one that we as a new and small organization do not, unfortunately, have a significant impact on and it is important to note that we are part of a growing movement in design and planning schools to engage communities and provide service to communities that lack the resources to engage professionals. We do, however, consider it important to speak with a single voice as a growing national consortium whenever an appropriate forum is available.

Conclusion

CITYbuild is a very simple idea, and while it has often been referred to as innovative, in the context of the time and place in which it was conceived it seemed like an obvious thing to pursue. The organization arose from an enormously complex situation full of chaos, promise, and uncertainty, yet the bare-bones intention of the Consortium was easy to convey to New Orleanians and professors from around the country, who then embraced the opportunity for collaboration. Thus far the results from these collaborations constitute a body of work of which the member schools and community partners are collectively proud. The impact statement from our first annual report –reprinted here – is a good quantitative summary of these results. We feel it is also an endorsement of our collective vision for this broad reaching collaborative agenda. However, while the impact of the built, physical work is easily celebrated, it is the intangible products that have perhaps had a more substantial impact on our participants (faculty, students,

and community partners) and the city on a larger scale. From the perspective of faculty and students it was the opportunity to engage in a cross-cultural exchange and be given some real opportunity and associated responsibility to participate in the life of a New Orleans community. For the community partners, the primary benefit beyond the delivered work was the knowledge that people were committed to helping them recover their lives and were willing to work for it. Those who are aware of the widespread feelings amongst New Orleanians of abandonment at the hands of government entities will understand the deep and lasting importance of this point.

At this point in our history, we match feelings of celebration with those of uncertainty about the future. CITYbuild has fostered collaboration, provided encouragement, and helped to maintain ethical standards for partnership. We have reinforced the responsibility of higher education to engage and assist devastated communities through intentional and responsible relationships across cultural and geographical landscapes. The Consortium has tackled uncertainties and produced positive outcomes demonstrating that academic rigor and design excellence lead to successful community-based work. CITYbuild has also openly shared participants' experiences and allowed others to learn from both the successes and mistakes. Yet as our nation's focus slowly shifts away from New Orleans and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, so does the focus of the academic institutions who facilitated the participation of their own faculty and students. If CITYbuild is to be maintained as a framework for design and planning schools to engage community based projects, the next couple of years are critical. If we cannot demonstrate the meaning and utility of what we do outside of the parameters of a nation shocked by Hurricane Katrina then our work will be celebrated as a successful disaster response mechanism. The nationwide faculty and students that initiated this experiment feel we have much more to offer and much more to learn than that.

Excerpts from Student Writing

On the way back to Kansas, I talked with my professor about how a few students in Kansas can help rebuild New Orleans. How could we begin to make an impact? The shade structure is something of a symbolic gesture. We didn't have the resources to build a house. Even if we did, how would that help? One family would have a place to stay while all the neighbors did not. We were trying to help a whole neighborhood—to give them something to be proud about. It would be a place to meet and plan and help each other, like neighborhoods in New Orleans have always done.

I doubt that New Orleans will ever be the same as it was before Hurricane Katrina. I know I will never see it the same way. But now I have spent time in one neighborhood, getting to know it. And I have seen the resiliency of its people, rooted to their land and ready to fight to grow back against all odds. It is because of those people and their love for their city that I have hope for New Orleans. —*Emily Moisan, Seventh Ward Shade Structure, University of Kansas School of Architecture and Urban Design*

When we arrived at the site, we immediately started our project with two design charrettes focusing on the interior layout of the PEC [People's Environmental Center] and the demonstration gardens located along the front and side of the building. Not only will our project become an important educational center for the community, but it is also inspiring change as it progresses. This is the most rewarding aspect for me because once change has started, others will soon follow. Just by building, I can have an effect on the whole context of a neighborhood. This gives a very new meaning to the word "site" for me, one that I would never have learned without leaving the studio and academic research behind – coming to a real site within a community that has real need. —*Kennan Rankin, People's Environmental Center Wentworth Institute of Technology Department of Architecture*

Ronald Lewis was my only substantial connection in New Orleans to a resident whose home had been destroyed by Katrina. He is unequivocal in his distrust and disillusionment with the city planning process. "No more dots," he kept saying, referring to the little stickers that he has put on endless maps at endless meetings to indicate where a school or fire station might go. At a UNOP meeting, he caused a stir by telling the facilitator that he could do her job. "I can get up there and ask you what you want and write it down on a list." Ronald is understandably suffering "charette fatigue." He refused to vote for a planner at the Tuesday meeting because he refused to make an uninformed vote. And he doesn't believe it would have made a blind bit of difference anyway. In this broader context it's interesting to consider the politics of the House of Dance and Feathers, whose opening was on Saturday. Ronald should be moving back into his home of 29 years as I write this, just before the one year anniversary of Katrina. The goal of renovating his house and building his museum anew was to generate grassroots energy and action in the neighborhood, and in doing so to attract the attention of the media and the city at large. —*Lucy Begg, House of Dance and Feathers, University of California, Berkeley; Branner Traveling Fellowship*

Working with actual materials gave me a confidence in architecture like I had never experienced. I began to understand the process of building. I began to pay attention to detail because each decision was a design choice, down to the welds and details for the lettering. Piece by piece the stage was coming together and the group knew it. We could feel a sense joy and pride. Taking part in the design/build studio left me looking for more opportunities in my community, whether it was Habitat for Humanity or Design Corps. I was eager to begin another hands-on project. —*Simon Mance, Seventh Ward Mobile Stage University of Kansas School of Architecture and Urban Design*

Impact – 2006 Measures of Effectiveness

The CITYbuild Consortium has included and assisted:

More than **30** national and international design-related programs (19 states, 3 countries; see list below) involving over **60** university faculty and more than **600** visiting students: conducting research, participating in community design workshops, generating design proposals, and participating in local service projects

Over **40** related national university courses that have been dedicated to New Orleans recovery in: Architecture; Landscape Architecture; Urban Design, Planning and Policy; Real Estate Development; Historic Preservation; Environmental Studies; and Service Learning.

Over **75** (avg. 1/week) CITYbuild tours, lectures and presentations have been given locally and nationally to promote the work of CITYbuild-affiliated work and raise awareness for the effective and intelligent recovery of New Orleans.

In 2006, approximately **16** structures (from urban furniture to multi-family housing) were built or rehabilitated, comprising over **7,400 sq. ft.** of new construction. Additionally, there were more than **200** designs and project proposals generated and delivered to various local agencies. There are currently **20** design proposals to be constructed in 2007.

CITYbuild has worked with over **20** local organizations, community leaders and agencies.

CITYbuild Consortium built work and service projects have contributed over **\$250,000** in dedicated resources to the communities of New Orleans (not including associated costs of school travel, design service hours, presentation materials, and labor) resulting in an estimated **\$1.5 million** in total economic impact.

Flushing Out the Basements: The Status of Contingent Composition Faculty in Post-Katrina New Orleans—and What We Can Learn from It

Nicole Pepinster Greene, Xavier University of Louisiana

* In recent decades, higher education has increasingly relied on
 * contingent faculty to teach multiple sections of composition
 * courses with low pay and few benefits. Administrators
 * have argued that institutions need these faculty to protect
 * tenure-track faculty in times of financial difficulty and to
 * manage fluctuating enrollments. When Hurricane Katrina
 * forced universities and community colleges to declare
 * financial exigency or force majeure, contingent faculty were
 * the first to be terminated. However, their dismissal did not
 * protect tenured and tenure-track faculty. Moreover, without
 * contingent faculty, the Xavier University English Department
 * successfully managed to staff composition classes in the
 * first semesters following Katrina, a period of uncertainty
 * and fluctuating enrollments. This success shows that the
 * employment of large numbers of part-time faculty cannot
 * be rationalized. Furthermore, faculty should strive to
 * integrate part-time colleagues into the academy, and
 * administrators should follow the example of departments
 * which have successfully converted part time positions into
 * tenure-track appointments.

As anyone who is familiar with New Orleans knows, the city has no basements since most of it lies below sea level. But the title of this paper refers to Susan Miller's chapter on the status of

part-time, adjunct faculty entitled “The Sad Women in the Basement” in her 1991 book, *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition*. Although I must emphasize that I have met very few “sad” adjunct teachers of composition, that such a large group of faculty exists at all, particularly in the “Humanities,” is lamentable; indeed, over half of all faculty teach off the tenure-track (Schell and Stock 5). Miller is correct, therefore, in positioning this group of composition faculty in the basement of the hierarchical structure of academia, since they are often hired to ensure the security of tenured faculty. She is also accurate in gendering this group as predominantly female.

Before I continue, I also want to clarify my use of the term “contingent” faculty. I use this word as does Eileen Schell in *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers: Gender, Contingent Labor, and Writing Instruction* since “contingent” accurately describes the working conditions of non-tenure-track faculty. These faculty are hired semester by semester, or perhaps for a period of one to six years, and teach more courses and more students than tenured faculty. Their pay is often *not* pro-rated on full-time faculty pay; they receive few if any benefits; they are assigned courses two or three days before the start of the semester, and they are frequently denied the luxury of choosing their own texts or writing their own syllabi. Some institutions operate under a bifurcated system of tenure-track and temporary faculty, while others use a trifurcated system of tenure-track faculty, temporary faculty, and then permanent or “retained” instructors whose positions, we have been assured, are as secure as tenured faculty.

While most English faculty deplore the exploitation of their colleagues, we often accept the argument promoted by upper-level administrators that we need contingent faculty to deal with the uncertainty of first-year enrollments and to provide a cushion of security for tenure-track faculty when enrollments drop or when institutions face financial uncertainty. Consequently, I wanted to investigate just how contingent faculty fared in post-Katrina New Orleans. As you will see, the fate of these

colleagues has not been surprising, but whether the reason for their existence—to shore up the security of tenured faculty and address the problem of fluctuating enrollments—has really been proven, remains doubtful.

To see what happened, I looked at the status of contingent, non-tenure track faculty before and after Katrina in one community college, two private universities, and one large state university.¹ When the fall 2005 semester began at Delgado Community College, thirty contingent faculty were hired to teach English and developmental composition. (Eight of these were brand-new hires; only one of this group returned.) Immediately after Katrina in fall of 2005, Delgado held a special, tuition-free “online classes only” semester and hired no adjuncts. In the spring and summer semesters of 2006, Delgado rehired one faculty member. Then in fall 2006, the college hired eight contingent faculty; five were part of the original thirty from fall 2005, but one was a completely new hire, and two taught several years ago at Delgado. Altogether this has resulted in a loss of twenty-two contingent faculty.

At the University of New Orleans, the situation was a little different. I was not able to get exact numbers; however, I was told that all contingent faculty were laid off after Katrina and then about eleven were rehired in spring 2006. Pre-Katrina contingent faculty taught approximately 45 sections out of 350—about 13%; in the fall post-Katrina semester, they taught 23 sections out of 230, 10%—so here too, there has been a considerable drop in the numbers of contingent faculty.

At Loyola University, Kate Adams reported yet another variation. Two fulltime (temporary) instructors decided to leave New Orleans and the university. Two part-timers were let go. One tenured faculty member teaching composition also left in 2005 and another left in 2006. By fall 2006, three fulltime temporary composition instructors had been hired, and one part-time instructor was reinstated. They planned to hire fulltime tenure-track faculty at MLA in December 2006.

In August 2005, at Xavier University, we enjoyed our largest first-year enrollment on record. We had one full-time continuing instructor, four contingent faculty on one-year contracts teaching full-time, and one part-time faculty member. All of these were let go after Katrina and none have been rehired. In fall 2005, we also had two new tenure-track hires. However, one of these positions was terminated after Katrina, but our colleague was rehired in May 2006, for one semester, and in fall 2006 was fully reinstated as tenure-track faculty. I want to highlight the fact that both these tenure track faculty had already been employed at Xavier as contingent faculty. In the English Department we have been particularly successful in transferring contingent faculty to tenure-track positions, a situation that should be happening everywhere.

But numbers certainly do not tell the whole story, and so we should take a quick look at the lives of our colleagues following their dismissal. First, of the six non-tenure faculty let go, four were women. This exactly matches Miller's statistics that "two-thirds of people who teach writing are women" (124-25). Gender statistics at Delgado are similar. Nancy Richard reported that, in fall 2005, two-thirds of their contingent faculty were women; a year later that number stood at fifty percent. Not surprisingly, contingent faculty tend not to be homeowners. Only one of Xavier's six contingent faculty owned her home; thus these faculty not only lost their jobs but they also received little or no compensation from insurance companies. As Schell has pointed out, "It is they who suffer the most in the wake of budget crises, an unstable job market, and the erosion of working conditions," (*Gypsy* 13) and we should add, Hurricane Katrina.

Now more specifically, I want to relate the story of one of my colleagues: to ensure some anonymity, I'll call her "Jane." Jane came to our department in 2004 as a very experienced teacher of composition. She had taught for several years at Delgado Community College, and friends there often told me how lucky we were to have her. Apart from being an outstanding teacher, she was also an invaluable

colleague on the composition committee. Hurricane Katrina destroyed Jane's Lakeview apartment and all its contents. She evacuated to live with family in Houston, where she immediately found work at Houston Community College and the downtown campus of the University of Houston. A few weeks later, in September, she became a Hurricane Rita evacuee. At the end of October, she received notification that she had been laid off from Xavier University; in fact, like other university employees, she discovered that she had been officially terminated at the end of September. Jane found an apartment in Houston and continued working the rest of the year, trying to make ends meet as a part-time temporary instructor at several institutions.

Eileen Schell has calculated that an instructor who is paid \$1800.00 a course and teaches a full-time load earns \$12.00 an hour when grading, preparation, and office hours are included ("What's" 332). This figure does not include the travel time that Jane would have spent commuting in Houston between one institution and another. In comparison to an adjunct's pay, the hourly rate for a union carpenter in Louisiana is \$15-\$20 an hour; \$35.00 an hour in Illinois. While working all year, Jane also began applying for a full-time position in an upper New York state community college. Apart from her credentials and references, her new employers were impressed that she had been willing to finance her own travel across the country for the interview. After investing a lot of money in postage and travel, she secured a full-time job. Jane is now settled in New York State and has also been admitted to the very prestigious low residency MFA program.

Since it is obvious that the contingent faculty were severely affected with job losses as a result of Katrina and Rita, did they serve their purpose? First of all, did they cushion the blow to tenure faculty? The answer is No! All four institutions furloughed tenure-track and tenured faculty. At Xavier University, contracts for all tenured and track-track faculty were initially voided, and then most but not all were rehired by November 2006, and tenure was subsequently reinstated. Salaries

for these faculty continued to be paid. Three of the universities had declared *force majeure* or financial exigency—Loyola did not since it suffered minimal storm damage—and under that declaration of *force majeure* or financial exigency “the university is not strictly bound to honor faculty tenure or seniority as far as layoffs or reinstatements (Mackin 50).

Thus throughout New Orleans, faculty are still questioning the meaning of tenure since, in some cases, tenured faculty were let go while more junior faculty were retained. As a friend and former colleague noted when I met him at a June 1 party marking the start of a new Hurricane season: “The president took the opportunity to get rid of dead wood, old wood, and trouble-makers, and I fit all three categories.” I am not in a position to judge the accuracy of his comment, but I do know that it was a little too self-deprecating. Like other furloughed faculty, my colleague discovered that while Katrina had disrupted all aspects of his life, she also provided him with fresh opportunities. He was hired by another Louisiana university where he is now establishing a new PhD program in his field.

In adopting this corporate model of running a university dependent on a “flexible,” i.e. “disposable” workforce, upper-level administrators, as they so often do, once again miscalculated the dedication and collegiality of their faculty. When we returned to Xavier after Katrina and realized that some of our co-workers had been terminated, a colleague of senior rank himself suggested that it would have been preferable for senior professors to have taken a pay cut rather than suffer the loss of their colleagues.

Taking as my model the Special Interest Group for Non-Tenure Track faculty of the Conference for College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in which I participated for several years during the 1990s, I want to emphasize that this paper should not be read as an opportunity for “whining.” In raising these problems, I aim to see what we have

learned from this experience and how we can move forward within our academic communities to improve the conditions of contingent faculty. There are many resources available for adjunct faculty and administrators who are concerned with these issues. For example, CCCC's publication, *College Composition and Communication*, includes a newsletter, *Forum*, specifically for contingent faculty. A recent *Forum* bibliographic article published a list of websites devoted to contingent faculty, including the Modern Language Association website (McDonald and Fox). In addition, I can describe a few ways in which the English Department at Xavier has proceeded. First, and most importantly, our current and former chairs have been successful in hiring contingent faculty as tenure-track faculty when a position in their specialty becomes available. This must always be our first goal. Second, faculty on one-year appointments at Xavier are not paid by the course but receive a full-time salary and health benefits, and they are compensated for their former teaching experience. Thirdly, contingent faculty are always treated as full-time, tenure-track colleagues; they are welcomed to participate in the professional and social life of the English department. They attend departmental meetings and social gatherings, serve on committees if they wish, and play a major role in the decisions made by the composition committee. Their integration is perhaps facilitated by the fact that all of us regularly teach composition classes, a situation which narrows the divide between tenure-track faculty and contingent faculty. Having been without contingent faculty during the whole of 2006, with the exception of one faculty member for one semester, you might want to know how we have survived, and how composition courses have been staffed.

We have done very well. Of course, we have missed our friends—the department is a much quieter place with a little less laughter. Yes, since Katrina, all tenure-track faculty have been teaching composition every semester, sometimes even two sections instead of perhaps one or two composition courses a year as we did before Katrina. This commitment to first-year teaching at all levels, from developmental to honors,

is in keeping with the mission of Xavier University. Furthermore, this common teaching responsibility has further strengthened our collegiality. For example, the week of the 2006 SCMLA conference, at the request of our chair, we devoted our departmental meeting to sharing ideas on best teaching practices in first-year composition.

Even though we hired no contingent faculty in fall 2006, and despite the fact that our chair had to schedule multiple sections without the flexibility of calling on part-time faculty, our class sizes in composition remained steady at pre-Katrina levels, proving that an English Department can function very well, perhaps better, without contingent faculty teaching composition. In view of this success, I hope that we will be able to show the administration that the need for part-time contingent faculty has become redundant. Perhaps then, we can at last brick up and fill in those uninhabitable basements once and for all.

Notes

1. My research was facilitated by the help of Kate Adams, Professor of English and Director of Freshman Writing at Loyola University, Nancy Richard, Professor of English and mentor to adjunct faculty at Delgado Community College, and Peter Schock, Professor of English and Department Chair at the University of New Orleans, and, of course, my colleagues, present and past, at Xavier University of Louisiana.

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When Students Care: The Katrina Awakening

Cristina Kirklighter, Texas A & M—Corpus Christi

- This paper examines how first year students at a South Texas
- Gulf Coast university became engaged as researchers and
- writers in investigating the multi-dimensional issues that
- impact hurricane victims and their communities. Working
- with a number of faculty from their learning community
- and beyond who helped them see the cross-disciplinary
- implications of Hurricane Katrina and Rita, many of
- these students succeeded not only in creating a scholarly
- conversation on this topic in class, but demonstrated a
- compassion for others in their research. Through their
- research projects, many of them developed a research
- obsession that was manifested when they learned to care.

“It would be horrible if we could dream about a different world as a project but not commit ourselves to fight for its construction.”

—Paulo Freire, *Letters to Cristina*

I often include the above quote as an epigraph on my syllabi every semester, but this past semester in my first year writing class, where students from a Texas Gulf Coast university researched and wrote about hurricanes, Freire’s quote took on special significance. Last spring, I became interested in learning more about New Orleans Latino/a survivors and discovered that over 150,000 Latinos/as were of Honduran heritage. My mother and many of my relatives immigrated to the US from Honduras, and they would watch news reports as the

destruction of hurricanes continuously plagued their impoverished homeland. As a teenager in the 1970s, I remember volunteering to gather food and clothes at the Honduran embassy in Washington D.C. as yet another hurricane struck Honduras. As an adult, I knew that many Hondurans immigrated to New Orleans after the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. And then seven years later a hurricane struck their second homeland, New Orleans. Most of them left New Orleans for other parts of the country and some returned home voluntarily and involuntarily. This past summer as I contemplated a theme for my first year writing course, hurricanes kept cropping up. I became obsessed with my research and it began to creep into my teaching. I wondered if my students might also become obsessed. After all, we are only eight hours from New Orleans. Our beautiful university rests on a Gulf Coast island. This island and the campus incurred the wrath of Hurricane Celia in 1970. Maybe, I said to myself, students would care about this topic. In the next moment, I envisioned eyes rolling upwards once I announced the theme of the course. I could see the students' apathetic yawns as they responded to my research on Hurricane Katrina. I remembered the echoing voice of a faculty member who said that students these days are self-centered and don't give a damn about helping their communities. I heard the nagging reminders from certain composition scholars that students should be free to choose any topic they wished for their research, and I should not limit their choices.

Despite all these encroaching voices of negativity, the voice of the liberatory teacher who believed in her students' capacity to care won out: the theme of the course would be focused on hurricanes (see <http://critical.tamucc.edu/wiki/DrKirklighter/English1301ClassFall2007>).

At the end of the semester when I reviewed my students' portfolio overviews, I found that there was overwhelmingly support for the topic of hurricanes. The majority of the students chose to research either Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita. Some students from the inland parts of Texas knew very little about hurricanes before the

course. Their words were similar to what this student majoring in psychology said after doing extensive research on the collective trauma of Hurricane Katrina survivors: “Before beginning portfolio two, I really did not have much knowledge of hurricanes, nor did I care about learning more about them. Just like any long-term project, I became emotionally attached. I often now find myself watching anything on TV about Katrina, just because I know so much about it and it generally interests me.” This student was from Austin, Texas, where tornadoes are the norm. Other students from the gulf regions of Corpus Christi, Galveston, and Houston were affected by hurricanes at personal and familial levels, and their research gave them an outlet to articulate deep-seated concerns about the hurricanes in their area. While they noticed the diminishing media coverage of Hurricane Katrina and Rita, these hurricanes were still with them as they recalled in class discussions the evacuation plans of Galveston and Houston, the many New Orleans survivors that attended their schools, and the family stories of hurricanes that have become a part of their survival heritage.

Fortunately, students in my class had the opportunity to learn about hurricanes from other classes since my composition class was part of a political science learning community. Most of the students took the same classes together in composition, seminar, and political science. I asked the political science professor, Dr. Carlos Huerta, to spend some time in the large lecture talking about the government’s role with Hurricane Katrina and hurricanes in Texas. I worked closely with the students’ seminar leader, Robin Schubauer, in connecting their hurricane topics with her class. Coincidentally, Lazlo Fulop, the director of an award winning nonfiction documentary on Hurricane Katrina entitled *Tim’s Island* was a professor at our university. We showed his documentary in the composition and seminar class, and he agreed to talk to the students about his film and another film he is working on about the reconstruction of New Orleans. As a Hurricane Katrina survivor and researcher, he made it real for them, and they inundated him with thoughtful questions.



I have taught first year composition classes consistently for fifteen years, but there was something about these eighteen-year-old students that was different as they became increasingly engaged—and, yes, obsessed—with their research. At the moment, I can only explain this difference as something I see when a group of academic researchers is fully engaged in a particular scholarly conversation. A number of students selected topics on Hurricane Katrina that related to their major. The end result was that we had a community of Hurricane Katrina researchers who discovered the medical, psychological, economic, environmental, racial, educational, and governmental disasters that plagued New Orleans and beyond. I also witnessed a change in several students' political views. In Texas, we have a number of students who are pro-Bush supporters, and faculty would often complain about the conservatism of our students. I remember one pro-Bush student who quietly asked me to review some of the research he found on Bush's handling of Hurricane Katrina. He asked me if I thought this research he had uncovered might be true. I encouraged him to pursue his research with multiple sources and then make his decision on what he thought was the truth. He came to me a few weeks later and said that his research led him to change his views on Bush. I had several conservative students renounce their support of Bush and side with Hurricane Katrina survivors and their criticisms of this administration. I have to wonder if this political conversion had something to do with the act of caring on the part of the students. Through their research and the research of others, they learned to care about New Orleans. I wonder if they wanted to distance themselves from those who did not evince this acceptable level of caring.

With this class still fresh in my mind, I have only begun to understand what happened during this brief semester. It is the beginning of another research obsession connected to the complexities of caring.

The Challenge of Community: From Culture to Learning in New Orleans

Amy Koritz, Tulane University

* The goals of community-centered courses in universities are
 * often in tension with ensuring that a community acquires
 * tools and knowledge useful to its own development and
 * preservation. In *Community Cultural Development*, an
 * undergraduate seminar taught at Tulane University, the
 * attempt was made to harmonize these goals through
 * creating profiles of elders and tradition bearers of the
 * Treme Community in New Orleans. Included are responses of
 * students to the class and their work in the community, along
 * with examples of the community profiles they created. This
 * work is framed by an overview of the course and its project
 * that places it in the context of emerging tensions in Treme
 * and the civic engagement movement in higher education.

Two central themes propel the following discussion. The first involves the challenges of teaching community-centered courses at a research university—even one such as Tulane that has publicly declared its commitment to community service as a required component of the undergraduate curriculum. The second addresses how to ensure that in the process of doing so a community acquires tools and knowledge useful to its own development and preservation. The dual imperatives of these goals, one focused on pedagogy, the other on community, often sit in an uneasy alliance, forcing the content of the classroom and the priorities of communities into a struggle

for dominance. The story told here is one of a generally successful *détente*, achieved through a combination of timing, chemistry, and planning. The more common narrative in my experience, however, is one of barely contained disarray, as students attempt to complete a semester-long community project—or perhaps just get their required hours in—while community groups try to fit untrained student help into short-term slots to address long-term needs. Add to this the additional time required of the professor to develop and maintain relationships with community partners, ensure that the bureaucratic requirements of the university are met, and integrate the uncontrollable variable represented by those partners into a coherent course—particularly one in the humanities—and one can reasonably wonder why anyone with any ambitions for an actual career in academia would bother.

Before answering this question, with the help of my students, let me describe what we did. “Community Cultural Development” was an undergraduate seminar offered by the English Department at Tulane University in the fall semester of 2007. This class was intended to fulfill a new “capstone” requirement and help students fulfill the new service learning requirement instituted post-flood. Those were its institutional motivations. My own reasons for developing and teaching this particular class were more complex. Briefly, these included the fact that issues involving cultural policy, the role of the arts in community development, and the relationship between aesthetic values and everyday cultural practices were not being addressed anywhere in my university’s curriculum at a time when rebuilding the city’s cultural infrastructure was imperative. In addition, artists were taking leadership roles in some community development organizations, and community-based arts were emerging as a curricular focus at other area universities. Teaching a course that would integrate the intellectual questions surrounding the role of the arts in community with an aligned community-based project seemed a necessary and obvious thing to do. The project this class undertook involved identifying and documenting the importance of cultural traditions and practices in the Treme

neighborhood of New Orleans. I and my collaborators, Pat Evans, a long-time community organizer and current head of the International Project for Non-Profit Leadership at the University of New Orleans, and Carole Rosenstein, formerly a Research Associate at the Urban Institute and currently on the faculty of SUNY Buffalo, believed that such work was a necessary first step towards enabling this community to use its cultural assets for its own benefit.

This class was a refreshing way to end my studies as an English major. Something that had been growing in me during the course of my college career was the feeling of paralysis. Having analyzed the human psyche through literature, and thereby analyzing also history, culture, and society, and through it issues of gender, race, relationships, all these things, I felt at times pointlessly educated and hopelessly useless. I was able to think plenty, but not do anything. —*Caroline Ng*

Since returning to New Orleans in January 2006, I had been searching for how best to integrate my work as a university professor with the now dramatic needs of a devastated city. Several criteria emerged as important to this decision: first, it was important to be able to build a research as well as a teaching agenda around any community-focused work. A genuine partnership, however, depends on all parties benefiting. Approaching my role in a community as disinterested benefactor to the needy masses, or alternatively, as benign exploiter of the laboratory of community in the service of student learning or the creation of new knowledge would not define me or my students as *partners* with our community. Second, and in part because of this, it was important to develop partnerships more or less aligned with my area of expertise. Thus, although the needs of the city in domains such as housing, health, and economic development were severe, they were not fields in which I had the right skills at this time. At the same time, the cultural sector was being marginalized, even ignored, in both the rebuilding plans of the city and the university's community-focused initiatives. As a humanist with publications in the fields of dance,

drama, and literary studies, for me a focus on the arts and culture made sense. Finally, my relationships with Pat Evans and Carole Rosenstein contributed community organizing and cultural policy expertise that made it possible to shape a project devoted to integrating community development with strengthening the arts and culture in neighborhoods. With their help, I wrote a proposal that won the project a small amount of funding from the Tulane Center for Public Service.

This proposal initiated the *Living Cultures Project*, a mechanism for gathering resources and knowledge about and for neighborhood-based cultures in New Orleans. Although New Orleans is an internationally treasured center for the arts and culture, and cultural tourism is a key focus of the city's economic redevelopment plans, planning efforts have overlooked the role of the arts and culture in strengthening neighborhoods and building communities. New Orleans neighborhoods hold the roots of its precious cultural traditions and have important cultural assets in their Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs and other community-based organizations. These associations are vital to ensuring that the city maintains the kind of dynamic, living culture that not only feeds a thriving cultural and tourist economy, but also directly benefits its citizens. While these goals are acknowledged in official planning documents, strategies have not been articulated for implementing and sustaining community-focused cultural development initiatives. As a small first step in rectifying this oversight, one intended to give voice and visibility to the individuals that hold in their memories and practices the living cultural traditions of New Orleans, my students spent the semester in conversation with long-time residents or former residents of a single, historic New Orleans neighborhood. They created profiles of these individuals that will be returned to them to contribute to this community's ability to shape its own public identity for its own purposes. Several of these profiles are appended to this essay.

The syllabus created for “Community Cultural Development” included readings on community arts, cultural policy, the role of culture in development, and the relationship between art and citizenship. It required students to lead class discussions, write four short reflection essays on their work in the community and two more or less traditional academic papers. Students focused their community work on a rapidly changing neighborhood in New Orleans called Treme. Our goal was to collect personal narratives and information about the cultural traditions of this community from residents and former residents who were seen as culture bearers, elders, and leaders. This information would then become part of an archive for the community to use in pursuing its own goals of preserving and strengthening its cultural traditions—partially, perhaps, through the development of cultural heritage tourism programs that would bring resources back to those creating and maintaining these traditions.

Speaking with Benny Jones, founder of the Dirty Dozen Brass Band, the Treme Brass Band, the Black Men of Labor Social Aid and Pleasure Club, and a participant in various other cultural organizations throughout the city, reinforced how dedicated those culture bearers really are. Playing music isn’t about the money or the fame, but primarily about the community, the culture that lives in the streets, in the music clubs, in the pews of the churches, and deeply governs generations of lifestyles of the people who participate. —*Ivana Staiti*

Treme is a historically African American—actually what we in New Orleans would call “Creole”—community just north of the French Quarter. While scholars have engaged in detailed debates about the meaning and composition of the Creole population in New Orleans, on the street the term is used to refer to a mostly middle-class, Catholic, sometimes lighter-skinned, group of African American citizens with multi-generational roots in the city. In addition, while Treme has been described as the oldest continuous community of free people of color in the United States, it has always been home to whites as well. It was

first settled in the early nineteenth century on land originally owned by Claude Treme, and became known for its concentration of tradesman, artisans, and musicians. In the 1960s the community was decimated by two urban redevelopment projects—a new raised interstate that divided it in two and destroyed the tree-lined African American business district along Claiborne Avenue, and the demolition of a ten block area just north of Rampart Street (Campanella 215). Eventually, this area became home to a theater and park which includes the historic Congo Square (where during slavery African Americans were permitted to drum and dance). Long-time residents of Treme are still upset about these losses, which are exacerbated by the fact that currently the park remains closed to the public—two years after the flood waters receded. Nevertheless, the Treme community remains rich in cultural assets, including Congo Square. It is home to the New Orleans African-American Museum of Art, Culture, and History, the Backstreet Cultural Museum, the Treme Community Center, the offices of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival Foundation, and St Augustine Church, the first African American Catholic Church in the city. Much of its housing stock is historic, and because of its proximity to the French Quarter and the fact that it suffered only moderate flooding after Hurricane Katrina, it has become an attractive neighborhood for affluent home buyers.

When community activist Al Harris led a tour for my class through the neighborhood, he pointed out not only the prevalence of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses, but also the high level of ongoing renovation of these buildings. One newly renovated Creole cottage, he told us, was now on the market for upwards of \$300,000. In the words of a website sponsored by the New Orleans business community as a way to attract new residents to the city, “as gentrification moves relentlessly out from the French Quarter, Treme is being seen more and more as a diamond in the rough. . . . Treme is a neighborhood in transition, which smart investors have already begun to realize” (www.makeneworleanshome.com). Gentrification brings with it benefits and problems. While a more affluent population can lead to a reduction

in street violence and other problems associated with poverty, it also forces changes in social norms and expectations regarding public behavior and use of space. As existing residents are priced out of their housing, the cultural traditions that give the neighborhood its distinctive identity leave with them. The cultural ambiance that helped make the neighborhood attractive to outsiders in the first place is thus threatened by the influx of these new residents. At the same time, those newcomers may find the idea of living in a community steeped in rich cultural traditions more appealing than embracing their actual practice, adding another threat to their survival.

This possibility became reality on October 1, 2007, when two musicians were arrested in Treme for parading without a permit. In an incident alluded to by several of the individuals my students spoke with, a street procession led by a brass band, in memory of another musician from the neighborhood, was halted by police in response to “unspecified complaints.” According to coverage in the local newspaper, “Monday, at about 8 p.m., nearly 20 police cars swarmed to a Treme corner, breaking up a memorial procession and taking away two well-known neighborhood musicians in handcuffs” (Reckdahl). Long time residents of the community understand that this manner of honoring the dead is deeply ingrained in their common traditions, and they respect the use of public space in their neighborhood for these processions. As an Op-Ed column by local journalist Jarvis De Barry explained, reflecting on a 2001 memorial parade in his neighborhood: “Had the crowd of people following the trumpeter down the center of Treme Street secured a parading permit? No more than you’d secure a permit to send a card to a bereaved friend or express your sorrow with a phone call.” The police disruption of such gatherings follows a pattern of conflict between communal uses and governmental control of public space that preceded Katrina. In Treme, however, demographic changes have exacerbated the problem, increasing long-time residents’ fear for the future of this and other cultural traditions that define the identity of their community. Moreover, this particular incident made it more likely

that my students—all of them easily recognizable as outsiders in this community—would be greeted with increased suspicion.

The biggest surprise for me was that my interviews went much better than expected, and I was pretty impressed by the wealth of information.

Coming into the interviews with both Fred Johnson and Barbara Lacen Keller, I was worried that my classmates and I would be met with suspicion and even hostility. If I were a long-time member of a historic New Orleans neighborhood, particularly one which has been having recent difficulties with outsiders who do not understand the cultural traditions of the community, I'm sure that I would be pretty wary of a couple of Tulane students coming in to interview me for their class.

—Julie Dabrowski

While several of the individuals we would have liked to include in our project declined to participate, because Pat Evans had strong relationships with trusted community members, we lost fewer than I had feared. The outrage that followed the arrest of these musicians, moreover, contributed to the creation of a new taskforce by the New Orleans City Council charged with reconciling the importance of such cultural expressions to the city's recovery with the concerns of the police to maintain public order (Egler). I could not have planned a more powerful illustration of the ways in which cultural practices serve as catalysts and symbols for larger social processes. The juxtaposition of abstract dilemmas facing us in the classroom—cultural change versus preservation, for example—with their actual manifestation in this neighborhood, organically connected the intellectual with the practical domains of our work. This is, in my view, the ideal towards which civically engaged teaching and learning should aspire.

This ideal also defines for me the location of courses such as this in the context of a research university such as Tulane. The work of this class took place in what Donald Stokes has termed "Pasteur's quadrant." While Stokes is concerned with the sciences, his analysis, as Judith

Ramaley has argued, is relevant to the university as a whole. In the sciences, some research is done purely for the sake of the knowledge it creates, with no consideration of its usefulness in the world. Other research is undertaken for the opposite reason. In this case only the usefulness of its application justifies the work. Between these two extremes lies the example of Louis Pasteur, who not only wanted to understand the processes he explored “for their own sake,” but also was highly motivated by his desire to apply that knowledge to real-world problems. Likewise, this class was not solely devoted to community engagement in Treme. We struggled throughout the semester with large conceptual issues—from the benefits and liabilities of cultural globalization to the relationship between aesthetic values and social status. My impression was that most of this class had had few opportunities in their college careers to grapple with such questions. At the same time, we were confronted constantly by the need to see and respect the implications of our answers to such questions for the lives and experiences of actual people in an actual community. We did not have the luxury of pursuing our intellectual interests in complete abstraction for the world beyond the classroom, but neither were we so constrained by the practical that we could not reflect on the abstract issues of value and choice that culture embodies.

I think [this course] fits very well into the English major. If you're an English major, what sort of jobs are you going to next – one where you have to present yourself and give interviews. Maybe not give interviews, but definitely a communication-based field, so you need a stepping stone of sorts. Also, when I was doing the interview transcription, I heard voices, I saw syntax, I noticed details – all the sorts of things you learn in creative writing classes. It also covers things that English majors don't get to do a lot of in college – economics, sociology, and a broader overview of the world that you're headed out into. It's a lot more practical than a course like Jane Austen. --*Ada Bidic*

Ada's comment comes from a longer conversation we had during class one day about whether a course such as this one belongs in an English Department. This question arose from an earlier conversation with another student, Emily Hohenwarter, who had interviewed a few of us for a feature story she was preparing for a journalism class. She had asked me whether I thought it problematic to list "Community Cultural Development" as an English class. I wanted to know what the rest of my students thought.

I took the class to fulfill a requirement, but stayed in it because the coursework genuinely piqued my interest. It's not often that so many disciplines are integrated and combined with one-on-one time with outside communities. Because of this, I'm very glad to have stumbled into Community Cultural Development. —*Emily Hohenwarter*

While my colleagues in the English Department have been generous in permitting me to teach courses that focus more on civic engagement than on literary analysis, I often worried that the canon-focused understanding of literary studies still dominant in the discipline would create pressure to shift my teaching back in this direction. Perhaps the new value assigned community service after the disaster of 2005 has shifted our collective perspective, or perhaps the momentum of the civic engagement movement in higher education has become strong enough to provide the necessary legitimacy. In any case, for the students in this class, the disciplinary purity of its content and approach was clearly not an issue.

I don't think I've ever been in a two and half hour class before that has more to talk about when it's over. We've had three articles to talk about before, and we've gotten through half an article in two and a half hours, just because there are so many branches and so many webs, and things to grasp onto that aren't in the article. There were ways to argue for the author, or against the author, and eventually we got to incorporate it with real-life experience. We got to experience a different community



that was not examined in writing by someone else who saw, analyzed, and then wrote. We actually got to do the seeing and analyze on the fly.

—*Todd Springer*

That fact should teach those of us in the Humanities disciplines something about how to reclaim the public legitimacy of our fields. The powerful connections students saw between classroom and community, and the ways in which they benefited from this interaction, however, tell us little about how, or whether, the community experienced comparable benefits. Unless substantive follow-up occurs, I doubt that it did.

As outsiders and students, we do not have the resources, power, or time to actually help sustain the culture and the people of Treme. Although our motives are good, we must take a step back and realize that what we are doing served the purpose of allowing people's voices to be heard. —*Natasha Mamuel*

If we do not build on the work done in this class in ways that are community directed, it will end up constituting yet another example of the short-term engagement endemic in university service learning programs. Were this to occur, it would not be because those of us involved lacked commitment. It would be because the institutional structure of universities, including curriculum, research expectations, the type and focus of staff support for civic engagement, and the inability to register the value of relationship-building and project development with non-academic organizations finally place too many obstacles in the way of sustainable, mutually beneficial partnerships. Until and unless it no longer requires extraordinary risk and effort on the part of professors to pursue serious, equitable civic engagement, such work will remain marginal and inadequate—at least in research universities.

The future, though, is more hopeful than the previous paragraph suggests. National networks of professors, administrators, and staff in higher education have emerged that advocate articulately and persistently for civic engagement as a core strategy in pursuing the educational mission of colleges and universities. Moreover, scholars have developed increasingly sophisticated and nuanced ways of describing the ways in which publicly engaged work contributes to the knowledge creation at the heart of their research agendas. George Sanchez's Boyle Heights Project, for example, explored the history of a multi-ethnic Los Angeles neighborhood by engaging residents and former residents in the co-creation of that history. Such a strategy can create rich scholarship while simultaneously altering how universities and communities understand their relationship (Sanchez). Acting on a similar insight into the potential power of civic engagement for both learning and knowledge-making, Nancy Cantor, Chancellor of Syracuse University, initiated a campus-wide examination of how what she calls "scholarship in action" should be understood and rewarded at this institution (Phelps). The national sweep of *Imagining America's* examination of tenure and promotion policies in light of public scholarship, meanwhile, will create a common knowledge-base and language for discussing this crucial obstacle to a more widespread practice of civically engaged research and teaching in the arts, humanities and design disciplines (Ellison). As Ira Harkavy, Director of the Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, once told me, solutions to these common concerns are finally local. While I can learn from the experience of George Sanchez in L.A., what works in New Orleans may not be quite the same. Likewise, the tenure and promotion policies that Syracuse University develops to reward civically engaged scholarship and teaching may not fly at Tulane. The same flexibility and sensitivity to context required by successful community partnerships will be required to develop the array of courses, policies, programs, and institutional structures that will support effective civic engagement practices across the diverse

landscape of higher education. My work this semester with the students in Community Cultural Development affirms, however, the powerful potential of civic engagement to strengthen learning in the service of our shared communities.

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Bruce Barnes

By Emily Hohenwarter



Photo Credit: Ivana Staiti

Bruce Barnes isn't a born-and-raised New Orleanian, but he's embraced the Big Easy, his adopted city, as if he were one of its lifelong residents. Barnes, a ranger at the National Jazz Park on North Peters Street in the French Quarter, has become entrenched in New Orleans tradition since his arrival—he's a lead member of the Treme district's Skull and Bones Society,

and as his alter-ego Sunpie, with his band the Louisiana Sunspots, Barnes has played to acclaim all over the nation with regular New Orleans Jazz Fest appearances.

"I grew up in the woodlands of Arkansas and moved here in 1987. I was fresh out of Huggies Supremes," Barnes says about his move to New Orleans. "I came here as a park ranger, and I wanted to be a professional musician and work in the wetlands. Live out my dreams in New Orleans. I quickly realized that my university was going to be on the corner of Orleans and Claiborne Avenue. That's where I went to school at. It was mostly night classes, but I had day classes also."

For Barnes, this place where he received his informal education in music and culture — the Treme neighborhood — is a vital vein of traditions in New Orleans. But he's not opposed to the changes that he's seen take place over the years. For Barnes, "gentrification" is not a bad word; it's just part of inevitable change, which can manifest itself as either good or bad for the community.

"If you want to change, vote for change," Barnes says in response to what he feels is the overuse of the word 'gentrification'. You want

to vote people in who understand you culturally. You have to keep a dialogue alive.”

Although Barnes embraces change, he does support upholding cultural traditions. Within the Northside Skull and Bones Gang, in which Barnes is second chief, customs dating from more than 100 years are kept alive through specific dress styles, behavior and membership requirements.

“This is a gang that’s been around since about 1819,” Barnes says, mentioning that the exact date of the group’s founding is unknown. “We dress as skeletons. We make paper mache heads. We’re skeletons from head to toe. We have fun while we’re doing it. We go in people’s houses. We wake up the Treme neighborhood Mardi Gras morning. Death is unexpected, believe me.”

The Skull and Bone Gang does more than just startle sleepy Treme residents before dawn on Mardi Gras morning. “We make noise. We play percussion instruments, I sing songs. I’ve composed some skull and bones songs,” Barnes says.

Keeping in line with tradition, there are certain requirements for membership in the gang. Women, for example, aren’t allowed in the group. “It’s an African-American men’s group. If you try to do things in a traditional way, sometimes it’s hard to explain to people that it’s not about exclusion, it’s about keeping up the tradition,” he says, referencing the men-only composition of the gang. “I don’t try to be a Baby Doll. But I love me some Baby Dolls, don’t get me wrong.”

Also, to maintain its autonomy, the Skull and Bones Gang does not conform to Mardi Gras Indian traditions. “When we see Mardi Gras Indians coming, we greet them,” Barnes says.

“We mess with them. They try to make you run through their protocol, but we don’t do that. We do what we want to. You can’t tell death what

to do. We always respect the chief for who he is, but run through their protocol? No.”

Besides his experience as part of the culturally-rich Skull and Bones Gang in Treme, Barnes has also experienced New Orleans—and the Treme neighborhood— as a musician. An accomplished drummer, accordionist and legendary harmonica player, Barnes sees the city as an ideal shaping ground for young artists.

Barnes, like other New Orleans immigrants, benefited from his adopted city’s laid back, inclusive atmosphere. He now considers New Orleans home. “One of the beautiful things about New Orleans and the Treme neighborhood is that the musicians, people who are culture bearers, are easily accessible,” he says. “They were very willing to pass along their knowledge, traditions, things that were really a part of that neighborhood. Really all over the city.”

Fred Johnson

By Ada Bidiuc



Photo Credit: Ada Bidiuc

We met Fred Johnson, head of New Orleans’ Black Men of Labor and a prominent member of the community of Treme on a November night, at his offices near the Quarter. He was willing to grant an interview to two rather green and overeager Tulane students, Miss Dabrowski and I, to talk about the heart of his city – the neighborhood of Treme.

Mr. Johnson’s voice resonated, measured and commanding, his vowels painting pictures. He wasted no time assuring us that art, music and a sense of community were not going

to disappear from the Treme. He discussed the historical origins of Treme's culture in the segregated South, and his own background.

"The culture we grew up in is perhaps one of the cultures that's held and maintained by the indigenous people, the poor people, because of segregation.

"It forced people to become very artistic and very self-sustainable because they were not accepted in other environments. So you had to work in your environment and be creative and make things enjoyable and pleasurable and very artistic to the eye. So you worked in your neighborhood. My cultural experience goes back to the early sixties, when I was old enough to follow the Mardi Gras Indians. So we grew up in that neighborhood having Mardi Gras based on segregation."

For Fred Johnson, community and business are inseparable. The birth of the Black Men of Labor actually came about after the death of musician Danny Barker, when another Treme society – The Bucket Men – buried Mr. Barker and decided to bring jazz back to the street, where it had started. He spoke about the importance of elaborate burial rites in the African American community in New Orleans, and the roots of brass band music. The character of the Treme, however, was formed by very diverse influences – from African art to rural southern art forms. Social and Pleasure Clubs, groups formed to foster different interests in the community, adopted and created various forms of cultural expression according to personal preference.

"In social and pleasure clubs," said Mr. Johnson, "some people mimicked white people and wanted to square dance or do-si-do and that kind of stuff, and then you had other people who wanted to go to the street with a street band. So, contrary to what people say, all people are different whether you're white or black— not all white people like the same thing, all black people don't like the same thing. Some of us like to do this, some of us like to do that. Some of us like it hot, some of us

like it cold. So you had a very healthy mixture of what came out of that Treme area.”

In response to our questions about the future of these unique traditions in the Treme, Mr. Johnson discussed gentrification, the physical and socioeconomic change in the architecture and layout of the community, and the discouraging disparities between groups that want to resume their way of life and are able to, and those who face too many obstacles in reclaiming their homes.

In regards to the newcomers filling Treme, we asked if he believed new traditions would form from these fresh influences, or if Treme would have to fight to preserve the old ways. Mr. Johnson was adamant about the necessity for continuity and respect for the practices that define the neighborhood.

“If you move into a neighborhood and you’re not familiar with the culture of that neighborhood and a brass band come up the street at 8 o’clock at night you’re gonna have problems with it. You’re going to say, ‘this is not why I bought a house in this neighborhood.’ It’s not going to kill it, you just figure out another way to do it.”

As the interview concluded, Fred Johnson seemed weary. When we had arrived, he was just exiting another meeting; now it was late at night, and another group of New Orleans folks were waiting to speak to him. Despite the vast amount of work Mr. Johnson faces in rebuilding his community during this upheaval, he remained optimistic, forceful and uncompromising about his vision, and about the sacred nature of tradition.

“I think that some things in life work in opposites. Now, what you got to be clear about is that the record says: nothing stays the same, everything must change, nothing stays the same. The young become the old, because mysteries do unfold. Because that’s the way of time. Now, changes, you’re going to have changes. You gonna have young guys

who don't want to play traditional music. Will there be a tradition? Yeah. Depending on what era you came out of, you gonna look at that and say, that's not the tradition – but it's going to be the tradition according to those that are trying to keep it at that time. If you look in any culture, you will see, with the old people coming out and the young people coming in, they don't have the aspiration to keep the old guard, they want to go to the new guard. You see. So in that exchange is the loss."

Mr. Johnson continued: "So when you say, will the culture die, no, the culture won't die. Will it change? Yes. Die? No."

We exited with a feeling that forces beyond our control and understanding were at work, shaping the lives of generations to come – people whose community was being reborn before our very eyes. The Gulf breeze ruffled the tops of the palm trees; the sound of music came from Chartres as we walked to our car. A few levels up, in a glass-walled building where a few office lights shone like far away ships on a dark sea, Fred Johnson went to his next meeting. Treme took one more step forward.

Providing Context: Service Learning in a Community College Composition Class

Wendy Rihner, Delgado Community College

- Two problems catapulted Wendy Rihner into service learning:
- Hurricane Katrina's destruction of Louisiana's coast and the
- lack of context plaguing so many college composition courses.
- Rihner undertook a service-learning project with an English
- Composition II course in the spring of 2007 that radically
- changed her pedagogical philosophy. "Providing Context"
- discusses Rihner's desire to provide her students with a context
- for writing argumentative essays while raising awareness of
- the ecological disaster that is unique to Louisiana.

Last semester a colleague put me on the defensive. "Why bring your birdwatching into the classroom? Isn't that what you do to take your mind off of this place? Besides, students won't identify with that," she admonished me. I had just proudly announced to her that the next semester my English 102 class would undertake a service-learning project, the first of its kind. They would write a persuasive proposal, urging local politicians to support and fund Louisiana's bid to join the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Areas Program (IBA), a state-by-state bird habitat conservation plan.

"This semester, my students will put English 102 to good use," I boasted.

"Wow, that's neat," she responded flatly, "but who has the time to do extra work during the semester? God, isn't grading enough?"

Her questions were not unreasonable. I do teach five sections of composition each semester. Very few educators outside of the community college and very few from Delgado Community College, where I teach, know the enervating workload English instructors face. We have hard jobs and so many of us need that distinct separation between avocation and vocation. For many years, watching birds and working on coastal conservation issues have been my refuge from essay grading, my respite from reading some very insipid essays. Yet how could I admit to another instructor that I share some of the blame for the vapid essays I collect? After Katrina, a long simmering resentment of the English instructor I had become burned off the last of my creative juices. My instruction lost its verve, my assignments grew pointless without any context, and consequently, my students suffered from writing in the vacuum I created. Even as I fled the city before the storm, I had hoped the fall semester of 2005 would find me inspired once we returned from evacuation. I desperately needed an energy transfusion. But then Katrina blew in, eating up more of our coastal landscape. Her damage brought about a new urgency in everyone. I figured I would capitalize on that urgency, add a spotlight on bird habitat issues, help students polish their persuasion skills, and ultimately raise community awareness of a threat shared by all in Louisiana. I felt recharged.

Had I not been overwhelmed by an impregnable optimism, I would have registered my irritation with my colleague's inquest and answered her question with a question: why shouldn't composition teachers incorporate service-learning into their courses? Aside from offering proofreading skills and a smattering of critical thinking skills, most composition classes, I fear, are moving toward irrelevance. I needed to convey to students that writing means more than completing an anti-death penalty research paper for a decent grade. Because so many of my students come from communities with no voice and no clout, they need to be able to take a stand on the impending ecological disaster that is Louisiana's vanishing coastline. They may not care a jot about

birds, nor should they have to, but they care about economics, and more important, they fear the prospect of losing their homes to the Gulf of Mexico. Despite the unpleasantness of commingling business and pleasure, I finally found a context, at least for English 102

In October 2006, Delgado invited Tulane University's service-learning program director to campus to conduct a half-day faculty workshop. My dean suggested that I attend. Perhaps for the first time in a very long time, I brought a pen and paper, my ideas, and some energy to a professional development workshop. After that workshop, I signed up for a four-week faculty service-learning seminar to take place in November and had a new syllabus for the designated English 102 course by early December. Before Christmas, I identified the community partners who would participate in the project: the Louisiana Bird Resource Center (LSU) and the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Areas Program, the beneficiary of the persuasive proposal. The holidays approached, so I sat back and waited for the New Year. Even before the semester began, I knew that this one service-learning assignment would allow me to meet my goals: to provide a much-needed context for writing, to give students a real-world writing opportunity, and to reintroduce engaged citizens back into the community. No scales fell from my eyes, and no booming voice knocked me off my mule, but I knew this was my road to Damascus experience.

Before class met in January, I determined that the first half of the semester would be devoted to the proposal. I asked the community partners to visit class early in the semester to provide background information not only on birds and bird habitat but also on the agencies themselves. I then divided the roster into five groups and assigned each group a responsibility, for I felt the scope of this proposal could very well overwhelm students and consequently immobilize them. I identified three content groups: one would research the appeal Louisiana holds as an ecotourism (or avitourism) destination; another

would compile a few statistics on the profits Texas, Alabama, and Florida make from bird watchers; a third group would investigate coastal erosion issues threatening humans and birds alike. A fourth group would compile a list of elected officials' and tourism officials' addresses (and later compose the cover letter that would accompany the brochure when we mailed it). Finally, the fifth group was responsible for design, selecting photographs and determining the layout that would transform our text into an attractive, readable brochure.

At the end of January, the students met with their groups, and within a week and a half, the content area groups completed their research tasks. The layout team researched the available software for pamphlet design, and the "address" group identified the politicians most likely to be interested in the economic or ecological benefits of an IBA Program in their home parishes. We were ready for the community partners' visits.

On February 12th, the representative of the Louisiana Bird Resource Center came to class to discuss bird watching in general, its economic and recreational benefits, and the rich bird life found in Louisiana (nearly 450 resident and migratory species). On Valentine's Day, the director of the Louisiana Important Bird Areas Program visited class and gave a Power Point presentation that briefly traced the history of the IBA Program but focused primarily on how a well-funded program in Louisiana would draw attention to our coastline by preserving crucial habitat. Bringing the two community partners to class alleviated any of the logistical concerns that often arise in a service-learning course, and despite my concerns about student boredom, everyone enjoyed our partners' Power Point presentation. Additionally, the content groups supplemented the research they had already gathered.

It took several class meetings to turn research into useable text. Everyone in the content groups had to draft two paragraphs based on the research he or she had gathered; they photocopied those drafts and disseminated them to the class. Working together, we closely

examined each paragraph, adding, deleting, mixing and matching until we had three effective sections of text. The brochure started to take shape. Because habitat conservation plans contain scientific terms and complex ideas, I saved the most important section of the brochure, the one outlining the IBA Program, for last as a hands-on exercise for the entire class. From the National Audubon Society's website, we downloaded, read, translated, paraphrased and summarized the salient material we thought would most influence our readers. This work was tedious at times, but I have never felt more fulfilled as a writing instructor.

I don't believe a writing handbook can offer a more effective lesson on collaborative writing, paraphrasing, summarizing, revising and proofreading for a particular audience than can a service-learning writing project. Audience—what a beautiful word! We all learned this semester that even the most difficult writing tasks become much easier when we know our audience's needs. With an audience in mind, learning writers must focus on style, format, tone, and even the type of support needed to support their argument. Moreover, knowing that I would not have the final say over the brochure, the class wrote with their editors (the community partners) in mind. Mysteriously, grammar and mechanical issues became extremely important; no one neglected to flex her proofreading skills. This semester, my class stepped out of the classroom and into the world of the professional writer. Indeed, our persuasive brochure removed the limitations usually set by teacher-as-reader assignments.

The teacher-as-reader, perhaps even the students-as-readers, assignments keep students within academic boundaries. Consequently, many composition classes float in isolation not only from other academic disciplines but also from the real world. Context is lacking in so many writing courses, and maybe we should look to the textbooks we require students to purchase. Once the semester is finished, how many students will continue to read the *New Yorker*-style essays so

many of these texts anthologize? Are we guilty of trying to create miniature versions of ourselves? I believe many of us are, and that might be due to our training in literature and not composition. Again, at the outset my class showed no great enthusiasm over the idea of writing about birds, but once the students recognized their chance to voice their concerns to some important people, the context mattered.

Incorporating a service-learning component in a composition course, therefore, may quell some of the “What does this course have to do with me?” attitude instructors often encounter. How many times have my colleagues and I lamented the self-absorption of so many of our 20-something students? I certainly have spewed enough vitriol about that lost generation. We are not alone in our grief. Jean Twenge, a San Diego State University psychology professor, has the research to back up our complaints. She argues in her book *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before*:

Far from being civically oriented, young people born after 1982 are the most narcissistic generation in recent history. Thirty percent more college students showed elevated narcissism in 2006 compared to 1982, making current college students more narcissistic than Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. (qtd. in Arns)

The causes for this narcissism are many. Yet, are educators partly to blame for this narcissistic tendency toward disengagement? Frank Newman, author of *Higher Education and the American Resurgence*, believes we are. Perhaps more than declining test scores, we should be concerned that America's educational system has not provided “the education for citizenship” (qtd. in Gottlieb and Robinson). Just by integrating one experiential writing assignment, instructors can make learning more meaningful, writing more relevant, and subsequently, a student's role as engaged citizen, more pronounced.

I may not have completely fought off student apathy this semester with one persuasive brochure, but I know that I reached some students. Their reflection essays written at the end of the semester reveal a lot. Mary reports honestly, "I was ashamed of how uneducated I was about my own home. I feel this brochure has made an impact on me." Merrily, an especially energetic and enthused student claims: "Therefore, if the senators and the mayor start supporting IBA projects I will be able to tell everybody: "Hey, my English class and I gave them that idea!" I guess that makes us, my class and me, true pioneers of the IBA movement."

Mary and Merrily remind me that my teaching has not linked learning with citizenship. I have taught thesis and development well, I can teach subject-verb agreement blindfolded, but I have neglected to show students how their reading and writing skills contribute to community. John Dewey conveys in *Democracy and Education*, that "a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated" (Dewey). His words have special resonance at the community college. After all, the mission statements of nearly every community college nationwide indicate their desire to return good people to the community. Delgado's mission statement asks that students "think critically" "demonstrate leadership," and "be productive and responsible citizens." How do writing courses fulfill a college's mission statement? We have met the "think critically" part, but I am not sure about how our writing courses fulfill the other two. Reading and writing are one thing; reading, writing and applying, however, maximize student success and create change.

Their reflection essays also ask students if they felt they developed a voice, if they felt they made that proverbial difference by working for the common good. Nancy responds: "I feel like I have more of a voice on what happens in my community, but also like I have learned some very important and necessary tools towards being able to have my voice heard and make a difference at any level." Antonio, ever the



confident young man, writes, “Yes, I feel this brochure will impact our community. Yes, I know I have a voice that has to be heard, and that is going to be heard through this brochure.”

Finally, I understand the many questions and even the hesitance many English instructors have about service learning. A few of my fellow instructors told me that they were slightly perplexed about the feasibility of service-learning in a composition classroom. When word spread that I would be Delgado’s first English instructor to participate in the pilot service learning program, I fielded questions about logistical issues. “Don’t most students go off campus to volunteer somewhere?” they asked. “Don’t they have to work at some community center for 10 hours a week or something?” But one of the beauties of service-learning is that it can be shaped to fit any syllabus, any course. Logistics pose no problem. Yet, I would be remiss if I did not reveal that familiarizing students with the birds of Louisiana and bird habitat issues took a great deal of time and effort. That had to be done first before we could make the connection between a bird’s need for an intact coast and mankind’s need for the same. Beyond knowing that birds sing in the morning and mess on the roofs of their cars, many of my students’ knowledge base extended no further. Perhaps the biggest mistake I made in organizing this project was having students jump into it at the outset of the semester. Easing into would have allowed more time to discuss argument and would have also prevented resistance on the part of some students. Those are valuable lessons learned.

Finally, if anyone should still wonder how service-learning fulfills a composition course’s requirements, he should look to the American Association of Community College’s *A Practical Guide for Integrating Civic Responsibility into the Curriculum*. A table entitled “Essential Civic Competencies and Skills,” reads much like the master syllabus of any argumentative writing course. The intellectual skills required of an engaged citizen—analyzing, interpreting, summarizing, presenting information—do not differ from our expectations of students. A

competent citizen and an “educated” student share participatory skills: learning cooperatively, gathering information, listening to others. Any student who has polished verbal and written skills can bring about positive change in the community (Gottlieb and Robinson).

In closing, I wonder how many students sitting in a persuasive writing course get to see the powerful influence of their writing. How many students think anyone other than their instructor and perhaps a few diligent and curious classmates will read their research papers? And if the 20-something crowd is as narcissistic as Twenge contends, wouldn't such students want the attention such a project would bring?

Because we stand now at a point in Louisiana where all living things are threatened by an eroding and sinking coastline, I could not spend another semester focusing solely on abstract, distant topics that students usually do not relate to anyway. Experts say we, and “we” includes mankind and birds, have ten years before everything south of Interstate 10 is beachfront property. Even though conceiving and organizing this project taxed me and stunned students at first, the payoff has been worth it. My students produced a beautiful four-fold pamphlet, and we have already mailed it to the governor of Louisiana, the mayor of New Orleans, local tourism officials, and a few dozen state senators and representatives. And by the end of the semester, I will learn whether the National Audubon Society will use the pamphlet as a communication tool for their Mississippi River Delta program. Now, how many writing students can brag about that?

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Writing the Wrong: Choosing to Research and Teach the Trauma of Hurricane Katrina

Daisy Pignetti, University of South Florida

As I am a New Orleans native and doctoral candidate in the field of rhetoric and composition, Hurricane Katrina has forever impacted both my personal and academic lives. Relying upon the work of Sandra Gilbert and other trauma theorists, this essay presents a microcosm of my dissertation. It offers examples from New Orleans bloggers who chronicle their post-Katrina rebuilding efforts, and analyzes how writing in generative, online spaces calls worldwide attention to a city still suffering. It also reflects upon my attempts to make Hurricane Katrina a teachable moment, and discusses the lessons I have learned when students react without empathy to assigned readings.

It is remarkable that a city can be both torn asunder and also find a measure of salvation in the same name: Katrina. To the people I spoke with, Katrina is a noun, an adjective and even a verb. But one thing it isn't is simply a hurricane.—Dave Zirin

Outsiders may struggle to understand Zirin's point, but if you are a New Orleans native like myself, the trauma of Katrina follows you everywhere, even if you didn't experience any water damage and especially if you are not living in New Orleans right now. The guilt of not being there to help—onset by the fact that every New Orleanian I have ever known has had (and is still having) his or her life affected by the storm—is overwhelming. But as a young

academic in the field of rhetoric and composition, I have discovered ways to do my part to find these Katrina stories and have them heard by the academic community.

Ever since 9/11, when what happened on an ordinary workday permanently changed our nation, the media are hypersensitive to react quickly and to bring us the “breaking news” surrounding a disaster from several different locations and camera angles. But when Katrina happened, the levees broke, and water literally got in the way. The newscasters did what they could, but—and I’m no exception—audiences soon became bored with the looped coverage and increasingly frustrated with the slow government response. Anniversary specials and celebrity efforts attempt to keep the story alive on our television screens, but the real stories of post-Katrina living are happening online in the hundreds of locally authored blogs that have begun since the Fall of 2005. In fact, it is through these blogs that anyone can read—by nature of the blog medium as a chronicling one—more complete, longitudinal narratives detailing the processes of recovery. For many transplanted and displaced New Orleanians, reading this type of writing produces what I call the “dot calm effect” because these bloggers are sharing details that the traditional media rarely address yet bring about so much relief for those who are desperate for authentic glimpses of the city they will forever love.

Currently, these examples of online writing are at the core of my dissertation, a work that itself is an example of what literary critic Sandra Gilbert defines as “writing wrong.” By referencing the web postings shared daily by local New Orleanians and Gulf Coast residents, my goal is to illustrate the power with which those with Internet access—a population that continues to grow every year—are “remembering, testifying, and reorganizing” just as they are “reiterating and striving to repair or readjust” (Gilbert 87). As Gilbert’s memoir *Wrongful Death* intends to expose the medical malpractice that killed her husband in a routine surgery, what my examination of these cyber-

literate citizens aims to prove is that their voices have inspired more visible, tangible, and emotional recovery than the government or traditional media ever could accomplish.

Reading the work of these bloggers, who have no qualms about sharing their personal stories of evacuation, relocation, return, and subsequent frustration with living in post-Katrina New Orleans, also proves Gilbert's argument that "the effort to write (record) and right (rectify) wrong involves both fear and ferocity" (87). Take, for example, the writing of a blogger going by the name Gently Girl; she has an entire category of posts dedicated to the rebuilding of her home. This is an excerpt of a post written in May of 2007, nearly two years after Katrina hit:

We gave willingly as dutiful citizens, but then there came a storm in August, 2005. Our protections against such storms, promised by the same Nation that was destroying our lands, freakin' damned FAILED, AND MANY OF US DIED OR BECAME HOMELESS. Our world, our little part of it, almost died. Many voices called for our death, but we would not hear them. We are rebuilding OUR land.

Our place almost died. Can you understand that statement? Look around what you perceive as your community being totally gone. Can you stomach that? That your friends, neighbors, shops and eateries are wiped from the face of the Earth? To know that the faces you have known for years are no longer next door or around the corner? To realize that the children (who you hated because of their pranks and noise), are no longer in the place their parents lived in? That they aren't there to remind you of the continuity of culture? That you are no longer a part of the Dance of Life? Can you imagine that in the place where you live? Can you?

While many trauma theorists write about how victims often “actively stop themselves from telling their stories” (DeSalvo 24), Gentilly Girl proves otherwise. The date of her post is significant, particularly as an example that demonstrates Sandra Gilbert’s point that in retelling the tale, she realizes she is “‘still at the same subject,’ still engaged in the same fearful and fierce activity—writing and seeking to right a mortal wrong” (86-87). In fact, Gentilly Girl’s ferocity in always referring to Hurricane Katrina as the “Federal Flood,” a man-made disaster rather than a natural one, pushes readers to recall that it was not the storm’s 125 mph winds but the numerous breaches in the federally built levees that caused the flooding that left eighty percent of the city under water.

As is often the case, what I am researching has found its way into my classroom teaching, and Gentilly Girl’s writing emphasizes the place attachment and social commentary that I find valuable for upper-level creative nonfiction students to discover. Pointing to texts written by various New Orleans-based authors prompts these undergraduates to distinguish how writers from a localized place can attract outside readers by providing extended examples and concretizing the subject matter. When these students then go on to write their own place essays, they must engage in both cultural and self-examination; employ scene-setting, dialogue, and description; and think carefully about audience. Many students have thrived when challenged in this way to reflect upon places and the complex relationships they have with them. I hope that this success is due not only to my asking them to write in a way they have never been asked to before but also because I have set an example through my passion for my hometown and its recovery after Hurricane Katrina.

Sharing these Katrina-related blog posts with my students has not always been easy, though, even at a Florida university where one would expect the students to have some familiarity with the woes of hurricane evacuation, FEMA, and coastal erosion. I was shocked when a student assigned to respond to an essay by New Orleans newspaper writer,

Chris Rose, wrote: "Katrina was not the worst thing to ever happen. The people who stayed there got what they deserved... Common sense seems to escape many of the people living there. I, for one, do not care to hear about this rubbish. Whining never gets anyone anywhere." Knowing the student who wrote this was very much aware that my own parents had evacuated and still lost everything upset me greatly, but I stepped back and reevaluated both my lesson plan and her writing as just that, an academic text. The latter's flaws are obvious; this student gave no support to her opinion, made hasty generalizations, and inaccurately summarized Rose's text. However, as a teacher and researcher also dealing with survivor's guilt, I became insecure and began questioning my place project—was I forcing my students to read too much Katrina-related prose? Was I asking them to think about something they did not want to consider, and was that why some reacted with emotional, visceral, and underdeveloped responses?

Before I returned this set of papers and opened my office door for a meeting with this student to discuss how to frame an analytical reader response rather than one laden with a judgmental tone (something this particular student went on to do in subsequent essays, even those having nothing to do with Hurricane Katrina), I turned to the WPA-listserv with my questions hoping to elicit advice from fellow compositionists. Many responses came from across the nation and all reminded me to distance myself, especially since such lack of compassion pains me personally, and try to see the issue from the student's point of view. Because I had invited my students to speak their minds, this was a successful exercise if this student truly felt comfortable in making these remarks. However, there is always a lesson in audience to be learned. Because I am the grader, perhaps future assignments like these, where emotionally charged writing can result, can be better discussed in small groups where their peers can quickly evaluate the writing and offer alternative reactions. Allowing such discussions to happen makes these moments teachable ones, and if I plan to continue to include trauma-related readings, I need to prepare

myself and my students to distinguish between compassionate and disparaging uses of tone as argumentative strategies.

Ultimately, this incident reminded me once again of the value of expressing one's trauma. Again referencing Louise DeSalvo, "Often...trauma remains undisclosed because, though people would like to discuss it, they can't or won't because they fear punishment, embarrassment, or disapproval or because they can't find an appropriate audience" (24). If I were to purposefully censor my course and not include Katrina stories, then I would be silencing the voices, including mine, of people who so desperately need to be heard. Still, I am currently revising my lesson plan to include a greater range of readings—not just those written in a literary nonfiction style—so as to contextualize the event. While my previous focus had been on powerful narratives that evoked emotions, I feel students may respond more positively (and perhaps more sympathetically) if also exposed to texts that demonstrate the historical, economic, and racial inequalities that lie just beneath the surface and under the guise of a natural disaster. As my student proved, it is easy to judge people when they are a faceless group, but when you actually hear the stories—stories that cross all racial and class lines—many of those judgments no longer make sense.

I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to apply my academic background in order to forge ahead with a scholarly examination of such a national event. As sociologist and communications scholar Carolyn Ellis writes in her 1995 book *Final Negotiations*, "It seems sensible to make a project out of this, to pretend that something positive is happening. Writing soothes me. Recording the events frees my mind and body to relax. Knowing that the details are recorded keeps me from going over and over them, to see if I can force a different outcome" (Ellis 153). Hers is a heartbreaking story of her relationship with a man who is dying of emphysema, and while it is a story of losing a partner, it is also the story of Ellis living dual lives—one of caretaker

and the other of young academic. Her words so fittingly apply to my experience as a transplanted New Orleanian feeling helpless yet driven to make some sense of the disaster, which is why I knew I had to dedicate my dissertation to exploring Hurricane Katrina and the public writing that has come out of it. While this dissertation may be more personal than most, and could be critiqued for its emotional examples and liberal use of the first person, like *Gentilly Girl*, I could not deny myself the chance to write about the impact of the storm upon my life.

Just as we will all see firsthand at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in April, New Orleans is still a city that celebrates its local culture whenever possible. Its literary tradition may be familiar to most of us, but I encourage all of us who appreciate authentic discourse communities and writing groups to take a new look at the city, particularly as it creates ways to pursue the long road of recovery it still has ahead of it.

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Disaster Pedagogy/Building Communities: From Wikis and Websites to Hammers and Nails

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* Mercy College professors in Toledo, Ohio responded to
 * Hurricane Katrina through a disaster pedagogy. Students in
 * composition classes created research wikis and participated in
 * email dialogues and exchanges with University of New Orleans
 * students. A new course, *Service in Action: The Sociological
 * Impact of Hurricane Katrina*, was also created involving an
 * alternative, volunteer-based spring break trip. This reflection
 * explores how communal engagement is shaped, augmented,
 * and challenged by the use of emergent technologies, and
 * how, through the lens of service-learning, students may find
 * their own voices, coming to recognize that they have the
 * power and where-with-all to effect change.

In Toledo, Ohio, close to the border with Canada, we watched the
 devastating landfall of Hurricane Katrina. On the surface, it seemed
 as if we were well removed from the catastrophe, but such an
 attitude did not hold water when we really considered what it means
 to be a citizen of the United States. The key word here is *United*.
 What affects our Southern neighbors will ultimately affect us as well
 – economically, socially, politically, emotionally. Hurricane Katrina,
 for us, as for many educators outside of Louisiana and Mississippi,
 presented a powerful teaching and learning moment. Not only did the
 hurricane play a central role in our composition classroom for several
 semesters, but it prompted the creation of a new course, *Service in*

Action: The Sociological Impact of Hurricane Katrina, entailing a service-learning trip to help with hurricane disaster relief efforts, a trip that is being repeated in Spring 2008.

The first part of our dual efforts of classroom teaching and service-learning centered on composition. In the classroom, our response to the continuing crisis involved a hybrid literacy, as described by Thomas Deans, where students write about/for/with the community, using computer-mediated collaboration. As W. Michele Simmons and Jeffrey T. Grabill explain in a recent article in *CCC*, “the issues that most communities face as they imagine who they are and what they might be require what rhetoricians have always understood to be acts of invention,” that is, “rhetoric is how we come to know who we are” (423). We wanted to stretch our definition of community outside of the classroom and to engage in dialogue with survivors in Post-Katrina New Orleans. Our students wanted to know what role they might play in a trauma that seemed on the surface to be remote and disconnected from their daily lives. However, through the immediacy of a joint project with students at the University of New Orleans (UNOLA), we co-created a “contribution-based pedagogy” (Hamer 68) in which the dynamic context fosters meaning, empathy, and, conceivably, agency.

For our composition project, we set up an exchange between Mercy College students in Toledo, Ohio and UNOLA students. Many of the UNOLA students were still homeless, some living in FEMA trailers or sharing apartments with numerous others. For the first part of the project, the UNOLA students created a blog of their own Katrina trauma narratives to which our students were given access in order to generate responses and craft commentaries. These interactions nurtured examination of our students own cultural frames of reference. The following semester, we, along with our UNOLA colleague, had our students conduct email interviews with each other, exploring outsider/insider perspectives and other cultural issues. These exchanges prompted our students to produce a research Wiki. This

Wiki incorporated their reflections on their email dialogues and wove a tapestry of both qualitative and quantitative research. The Wiki and blog became *ekphrastic* spaces, opening up what Robert Miltner calls “collaboration as conversation” (par. 1 ff). In this conversation, our students flowed between responder and respondent, producer and consumer. Renee Fountain asserts, “Wiki pedagogy is literally – and figuratively – ‘in-the-making’. Wikis, both in and by their ontological existence, circumvent traditional power/knowledge relations” (10). Though the Wiki demanded intense individual effort, even more importantly, it refocused engagement on the community level, often in challenging ways, subverting the “social norms and practices” we assumed in our courses as well.

This cross-institutional collaboration bears out, in essence, what Bill Anderson suggests: that “the context in which students engage in interaction impacts the nature and extent of that interaction.” Whether in spite of or because of the virtual context, our students validated the UNOLA students’ narratives in desperately needed ways just as their trauma and survival stories demanded of our students critical awareness of the lives of others. Their dual positioning thereby opened a window onto the ethical through their “response-ability” and reflection on it. The contact also made literally visible to our students Brock et. al’s conclusion that “There is no ‘transparent’ lens through which we render ‘pure’ interpretations of others and their lived experiences” (58). On a practical level, other than word-processing, none of our students had computer experience, so the pitfalls of online collaboration and its accompanying technologies was a lesson on its own (for all of us). Our students came to recognize, as Alison E. Regan and John D. Zuern discuss, the “asymmetrical distribution of technology resources” and the necessity for ethical interrogation of these disparities. Finally, our cross-institutional collaboration using in-the-making technologies helped to cultivate some of the most important skills our students need

to be involved, rhetorically capable members of our local, national, global, and college communities.

At the same time that the composition courses were working online with UNOLA students, many of our students were expressing the desire for even more direct methods of contact. The impetus to connect with hurricane survivors through service was ripe within our Mercy College community. Faculty, staff and students raised generous monetary and material support, yet the desire remained to offer help face to face. Clearly, the experience of the Gulf Coast residents touched the hearts of the Mercy College community in Toledo, Ohio. We linked this heart connection to academics as a way to help make sense out of the issues that surfaced in our engagement with Katrina and our disaster pedagogy, thus prompting a radical change in direction of our spring break service-learning trip.

Our first step was to contact the Archdiocese of New Orleans and the Diocese of Biloxi, who provided us with the connections we needed for our Service in Action: The Sociological Impact of Hurricane Katrina course. The 8-week course included an “Alternative Spring Break” experience consisting of a week long trip to the Gulf Coast to work with social service, social justice, and faith based organizations that served hurricane survivors. The Northwest Ohio community enthusiastically backed the trip, with funding coming from all over the state: Mansfield Hardware, Dayton’s Sisters of the Precious Blood, and region-wide Lathrop Construction Company. Students also kicked in \$200 each. Staff, faculty, administrators, and students drove 18 hours south in crowded vans. One student, describing her arrival, wrote:

The city was starving for a sense of relief as we circled what used to be the streets of many homes and well-known businesses. The people held an overwhelmed expression on their faces as they went through the rubble of their personal belongings. Most of us did not expect to see that much

devastation six months after the storm originally hit. Our eyes were truly opened to the reality of this natural disaster along with the compassion and desire to help that filled our hearts.

After the exhausting drive and the emotional impact of arrival, students wanted to jump in more than ever. During that week, our volunteer service included removing downed trees and brush, cleaning a warehouse for storage of donated items, ripping out new drywall so poorly hung in one home that it needed replacement again, delivering shingles and removing debris from roofing jobs, and gutting houses so that repairs could finally begin. Still, in the end it became questionable who the beneficiaries were: the people in the communities we served or ourselves. As one student put it, "in giving, you will always receive. I went to the Gulf Coast to give. Yet this experience gave me more than I could ever have imagined."

But service-learning is not simply doing a service based project; it is a pedagogical approach to the delivery of content. It is used in conjunction with other modes of teaching such as lecture, discussion and traditional writing assignments. Therefore, volunteering to help hurricane survivors would not be enough to truly qualify as service-learning. Because Mercy College of Northwest Ohio is a Catholic college whose mission and vision include a call to be for others, our service-learning approach needed to be rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition of social concern, but at the same time needed to emphasize the academic underpinnings of this Alternative Spring Break trip.

We therefore looked to the guidelines offered in the *Service-Learning Course Design Workbook* from the *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* and collaborated with several departments, including English and Allied Health, to enhance academic learning through solid course objectives, reflection, analysis, and assessment. Using a WAC foundation, the course incorporated the disciplines of Sociology and Religion/Spirituality, using service-learning as a major pedagogical

method. The learning objectives we wanted students to achieve by the end of the course included relating college core values to the study of social issues; recognizing the responsibilities of citizenship afforded, even demanded, by higher education; exploring vocation as it relates to profession, civic responsibility, and service; and developing personal and professional goals for service. We then evaluated the course and its accompanying service efforts using a variety of assessment methods, including theological reflection, journaling, presentation to the whole college, and short essay writing. Surprisingly, the learning outcomes actually exceeded the learning objectives of the course. Our students certainly emerged from this experience with a strong sense of civic duty. One student wrote:

Early September of 2005 my heart ached and bled for the people on the rooftops, the people in the rivers that used to be streets and for people who lost their love ones. My heart bled more profusely when more people suffered and died after OUR country let them die. What can I do? How can I possibly help? I am a single mother struggling through college. Yet, those were MY people suffering in the south. I had no money. I could not abandon my daughter to just leave and go to help. I felt powerless. I went from not knowing how to give what I feel that I am obligated to give to being put right smack in the middle of [the Gulf Coast]. Having this opportunity was a blessing in every way.

This new civic-mindedness offered a framework for our students to look more closely at the structures in place, or, as was often the case, were not in place. Haskvitz supports this point by saying that through service-learning, “students not only complete the community service but also study the organization that they work for or the problem that they seek to solve” (163). As one student wryly commented, “We may argue who is at fault for the hurricane aftermath. We may put blame on individuals or politicians who rightly deserve some blame. Yet the

people that we helped and the people who we met and talked to . . . know that their blessing and survival does not come from FEMA or President Bush. Their survival and blessings comes from community.” Almost every volunteer we encountered was from a charitable organization or group. We didn’t see any of the government-supported aid we expected to find. People were still living in tents; FEMA trailers were in short supply as were the basic necessities of life, such as grocery stores. Students witnessed first-hand the practical and political breakdown of infrastructures across racial and economic boundaries.

At the end of the day, the most important lesson, as clichéd as it might sound, was all about change. In *Change Forces*, Michael Fullan reinforces our experience of the change process as complex, adding that “you can’t mandate what matters” (22). We might have started with some vague idea of what we would encounter, but the results really couldn’t be predicted, especially when most of the professors were facing the disaster for the first time at the same moment as the students. We might have certain expectations or intentions, but we were also continually surprised at what might affect any one person. For example, during our week, our students, quite on their own, noticed how overworked the kitchen staff was from feeding all of the volunteer groups. They volunteered to get up at 5 a.m. and cook breakfast to give the staff at least one morning’s rest. As hard as our students were working physically, we would not have asked that of them. Their actions changed the entire atmosphere.

Working so closely together in response to disaster helped students to define themselves as a collective. In the student and faculty writings, we noted that people mostly relied on terms expressing their shared identity, such as “we,” “us,” and “our group.” For example, one student wrote, “Our group didn’t feel called to help rebuild the whole city in one week (because this process of rebuilding will take years), but to give those victims down south some relief from their burden. Only so much devastation can be cleaned up within a week’s time, but helping

another carry their burden is the least we could do for the people we met." Another person wrote:

I do not think there was a one of us who did not see death, or have someone talk to us about death that week. Everywhere we turned you could see evidence of dying: Dead trees, businesses gone, homes lost, lives shattered. The symbol on the side of homes identifying if anyone had died in that particular home. The stories we heard from victims who had lost a loved one.

These reflections also revealed student (and faculty) learning as transformative. In our course assessment, we recognized the success of our approach as being in part attributable to what Robert Selman calls the developmental readiness of the students. Their openness to and engagement with the learning process culminated in "mutual sharing" and the formation of "complex relationships with others" (qtd. in Woehrlé 40). Another student wrote:

A woman who had been emotionally hurt by the loss of her son approached me with her story. I was able to listen to her with compassion as she explained her situation. She was comfortable telling me about her own encounter with the storm and how it affected her entire family. Even though we had never met each other before we seemed to be connected by the comfort that I gave her in return for the burden she shared with me. After having left the place that we met, I began to feel the pain and suffering that she had within her, run through my entire body. It was an experience that I will never be able to forget. She had touched a part of my spirit that I had yet to connect with. It was the experience of the Gulf Coast that changed the nature and condition of my own heart.

In conclusion, communal engagement experienced through the lens of service-learning also prompted Mercy College students to find their

own voices, to discover that they matter in this world, and to recognize that they have the power and wherewithal to effect change. They now know that justice includes helping to remove obstacles hindering others from finding their own voices so that collectively they are about liberation not only for themselves, but for all those who find themselves living in a state of oppression.

When the members of the trip returned home, they discovered that the computer, the tool that assisted in community building at a fundamental level in the classroom, continued to sustain this burgeoning community and connection to their experience. Although from different perspectives, students returning from the trip and students who remained in Toledo recognized that events significant in American culture(s) are shaped, augmented, and challenged by the use of emergent technologies, such as Wikis; furthermore, we learned that the *layering* of various computer technologies is an important contribution to the composition curriculum. The “horizontal knowledge assemblage” (Fountain 10) of Wikis and blogs, coupled with direct experiences and structured reflection, also figure in the preparation of student-citizens who, in the words of Charles Bazerman, “can responsibly represent, reflect on, and act in the worlds they inhabit and rebuild.” It is our hope that they carry these learnings into the leadership and partnership roles they will take on within their schools, neighborhood communities, nation, and world.

Two years after the violence of Hurricane Katrina and the immediate outpouring of public support, New Orleans and other Gulf cities are still struggling in the face of waning public attention to their ongoing efforts at revival. However, because our college truly entered into dialogue, on the screen and face-to-face, those hurricane-ravaged cities are never far from our minds and hearts. We even have a student from New Orleans still attending our college. For the Mercy College 2008 Alternative Spring Break trip, we are heading back down to the Gulf Coast. Our wish list is for those we hope to help. We connected with

the Archdiocese of New Orleans' program Operation Helping Hands which specifically targets those affected by Katrina who don't have insurance. We will be living on a volunteer floor at a homeless shelter and concentrating our energies in the Lower 9th Ward. We plan on doing everything from yard work to painting. We plan on being agents of change, actively helping to reclaim life for the city of New Orleans, because, as one faculty member put it, "we know the story does not, and will not, end with death. I believe that the survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have not allowed death to be the final word."

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Is There Civic Community in America?

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Few of my students knew people from either the New Orleans area or those who had moved to Michigan following Hurricane Katrina. I learned of housing problems that arose from slow payment by government departments responsible for the beleaguered New Orleans residents. So like many teachers around the country, I thought that current events would lend themselves to “teaching moments.” However, I noted that in order to raise my students’ level of civic awareness, it would be important for them to look at their own state and city. Many times by studying the needs of our neighborhoods we can connect to the plight of people who live far from us. To underscore this lesson, I frequently refer to Martin Luther King’s writings in part because he worked for civil and human rights and in part because much of my own self-identity is linked with the ideology of being a person engaged with others. Furthermore, many students’ writing and learning takes off when they can see themselves as part of a community with which they can engage—as a participant or agent for change. To demonstrate what I mean and what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. taught in many of his writings, I frequently use King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” in which he frequently refers to the concept of the interconnectedness of humans as a tool in his lessons on the need to work together for a common good. When questioned about his presence in Birmingham, Alabama he said:

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice

anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial “outside agitator” idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

The students in the Detroit classrooms were not as well versed in King’s writings as they were in the distinctions between classes and races. Many of the students were African American and represented the middle-class as well as working-class families from which they came. In a sense, the class divisions highlighted in the news reports were all too familiar for these students. Others students came from immigrant working-class, middle-class or rural families. None had read King’s works, although most knew about King, as he is an icon of the civil rights movement in the US. As I hoped, discussing King’s message along with the news coverage of Katrina’s aftermath helped students visualize the need for the kind of action King advocates, as they could see the discrepancy between the needs of the displaced and the quality and quantity of help offered by local and federal government agencies.

As part of a service learning writing experience, I asked students to select from the various agencies listed with the Student Leadership Development Institute Program at the University of Detroit Mercy (see <http://www.udmercy.edu/ldi/>). Students had a good selection of agencies from which to choose. Most of these agencies had dealt with social issues that paralleled the needs of people in the New Orleans area; a further parallel was that the need for the agencies’ work was the result of a poor response from government—local and federal—to the needs of poor, undereducated, and underemployed people. The assignment required that students help the agencies with their missions and then to write about what they learned. Future research on issues they discovered facilitated the academic writing component of the

learning unit. Additionally, because of mission of the Leadership Development Institute, students learned the importance of reaching out to others in need—to give back to the communities in which they lived. Many of the students helped out in soup kitchens, by feeding the homeless, or in park and recreation departments, where they worked alongside those who aided youth in the area, or in women's shelters and centers that distributed clothing to the poor, and even in food trucks which brought sandwiches and bottled water to areas where homeless gathered. Others worked at adult literacy centers as aides to the teachers. All students gained insights that reinforced the

As I worked with these students, I reflected on the fact that currently there are no "national" media outlets that can function as they once did. However, teachers can continue to teach service, critical thinking, and civic community by piecing together what passes for news with local issues that students can work to solve. In doing so, we can help to create a community of sorts that would be worthy of the values our country once not only espoused but practiced.

When Life Gives You Lemons: Katrina as Subject

Bonnie Noonan, Xavier University of Louisiana

I am writing from the position of what Stephen North categorizes in *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* as a practitioner.¹ For practitioners, knowledge in composition is generated not only theoretically or through research—quantitative, qualitative or historical—but also (in fact, primarily) through reflective practice in the classroom. In this paper I would like to make my small contribution to the moldy, waterlogged, wind-whipped, recently erected Katrina Room in what North refers to as the Practitioner's House of Lore.

I titled this paper “When Life Gives You Lemons” (obvious, I know) because it was the first thought that came to mind when our Composition Director at Xavier University suggested a “Writing and Katrina” SCMLA panel. However, it seemed appropriate because when we returned to the classroom in December 2005 (a scant three months or so after America's worst disaster flooded our university and our city) for two compacted, back-to-back semesters (three for the students who attended other universities during our “hiatus”), I was surprised by how much our exhausted, traumatized Xavierites wanted to write. Trying to return to a semblance of normalcy despite ongoing renovations on campus and the utter devastation of surrounding neighborhoods, I gave my first, first-semester composition assignment as usual.

I assigned a narrative essay of approximately 500 words, its point, as stated on my assignment handout, to “focus on a salient event from

your life, distill it to its details, and reflect on how that event fits into the larger picture of your experience.” I like this type of assignment because it obliges students to choose their own topic (I like to emphasize self-direction), because it’s hard to plagiarize, and because it’s easier for them to write in their own voices (which I can then work with) when they’re telling their own stories. On the other hand, I don’t like this assignment because I can wind up with a personal revelation (or confession) of an experience about which I don’t particularly want to read or with which I am not qualified to deal. More importantly, however, I often find that most college freshmen are just too involved with living their lives to be able to reflect on them.

Nonetheless, I assigned the essay. The following class day, when the first student, with an all too familiar expression of distress, raised her hand, I was prepared to offer advice on “choosing a topic” and “focusing your chronology.” However what the student said, and what the other students quickly corroborated, was that she had already written 700 words and was only one quarter of the way through her paper—what should she do? After a moment’s hesitation, I replied, “Write on.” It felt imperative.

I now want to explicate for you a representative narrative example—this one from an out-of-state student, unfamiliar with hurricanes, who became stranded on campus (along with about 350 other students and staff members) when evacuation buses failed to arrive on Xavier’s campus as promised. The student’s 16-page paper—typed, double spaced, 1” margins—is entitled “Life During Katrina.” The student—I’ll call her “K”—begins her essay with a precisely situated entry—*“August 27, 2005: I was trying to get some much needed sleep when my roommate Tiffany’s phone rang at 8:37a.m.”* After a detailed account of the events of the day, the entry concludes, *“Everything was happening so fast. It seemed like just last night we were out partying at some club on the West Bank, and now everyone was leaving in a big hurry.”*

The next entry, dated August 28, 2005, begins to show the naturally arising conflict between life-as-normal and life-as-not that will drive K's narrative to its ultimately reflective conclusion: "*I woke up early in the morning thinking that I was going to be leaving to go to Arkansas, but those plans quickly changed. Come to find out, my bus out of New Orleans had been canceled.*" Drawing on her memory of being trapped in the dorm, she writes, "*As the day went by, I noticed the weather was starting to change.*" Over the next day, August 29, 2005, the naturally arising conflict continues to develop:

*I heard a loud knock at the door around 3:30 in the morning. I looked around and noticed the electricity had gone out because I had gone to sleep with the TV on and the trees were vigorously shaking back and forth. A few hours passed, and I was awakened by a loud noise, which was the elevators going back and forth due to the strong winds. When we went inside one of the rooms, we could see the storm in plain view because the blinds were already up. It looked so **unreal**. It seemed like the wind had picked the water up and was blowing it like a wave. It was so **amazing**, and in a weird way it was pretty. We decided to go to the second floor to my room so we could get a better view of the storm. When we got to my room, I went to the window and **I was just speechless**, because the storm was just **breathtaking**. The water was clear and moving very fast down the street toward Xavier South.*

Notice how K has had to struggle to find words to express her observations: *unreal, amazing, I was just speechless, breathtaking*. At the same time, it is her direct recall of detail that is the more expressive, even contemplative. The wind picking up the water and blowing it like a wave, the clear water moving very fast down the street: these images lead her to the ironic revelation that there is beauty in the power of the storm.

Moreover, her observations on the following day, August 30, 2005, lead her to a naturally arising comparison as the dire nature of her situation begins to become clearer. She writes,

All I could do was stare at the water and pray that the Lord would pull me out of New Orleans because I didn't know how much I could bear. I grabbed a bag of chips to eat, opened the window, and just stared at the water that was once pretty, but was now brown with all types of junk and living animals inside. I was wondering why the water went up and didn't go down since the storm was long gone.

Again, notice the precision of K's recollection. It was specifically a bag of chips that she grabbed in order to hold on to life-as-normal against the terrifying images of life-as-not.

When the conflict reaches its natural apogee, that is when K realizes that life-as-not-normal has prevailed, her chronology crystallizes into a terrifying moment, a moment she distills into the details of actual dialogue:

I went up to one of the police officers and asked, "Why did the water go up?" She turned and looked at me like she was really tired and said, "The levees breeched." I then asked, "Don't New Orleans have pumping systems?" "They're not working," she said. "Well, is someone coming to get us?" "Eventually."

Recalling this moment, K takes the authority to write in her own conversational, not teacher-directed voice as she asks, "Don't New Orleans have pumping systems?" Imagine the recalled terror and sense of hopelessness reflected not in an authoritative use of her own voice but rather in a loss of surface-error control as K writes about the continuing day: "When everyone found out that **there was water was**

in the hallways, they started to go to their rooms and to go sleep or to stare at their walls.”

In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* Elaine Scarry writes that subjecting a person to torture (the primary source of pain in her book) unmakes that person’s world.² Everything that has been real, actual, existent in that person’s world dissolves, fades, dies as the body focuses on dealing with pain. The body in pain must then begin to remake the world. I believe that is what my students were doing: not only telling a compelling story, but also remaking a world with the utmost detail and precision that had literally been unmade, both inside and out.

As K’s narrative progresses to its naturally arising denouement, she begins to pull back from her own personal crisis to see a larger picture of her position in the world: *“August 31, 2005: I ran to the last bus because I knew that there would be a long line for the front ones. I turned around and the sight made me feel so sad. All the locals were being held back by soldiers with guns looking at us leave while they had to stay.”* Surely the privilege inherent in her status as college student—albeit one attending a minority university on financial aid—had never quite so dramatically revealed itself before.

K concludes the narrative of her harrowing experience with the type of epiphany composition teachers love to read:

September 2, 2005: We arrived to Grambling at about five in the morning. The Grambling staff passed us some papers so we could let them know where we were going and how we were getting there. As I made my way in, I noticed they had the TV on and that’s when I saw it; residents were being rescued via helicopter through their attics. A man was crying about how his wife was gone; people were walking through the

dirty water that was filled with everything from dead bodies, rodents, snakes, and alligators. The water had reached twenty five to thirty feet in some of the residents' homes. I then realized no matter how much you think you got it bad, someone has it worse. Yes, this epiphany can certainly be deemed clichéd, but for K, it is honest and heartfelt, backed up by experience, capably recalled from memory, and finely detailed in writing—so finely detailed that the writer's underlying water motif has progressed from *unreal* to *brown with all types of junk and living animals inside* to the detail expressed in the above passage.

In her presentation entitled “Who Cares? How Do Feminist Ethics, Especially the Ethic-of-Care Theories, Figure Into the Academic Work Ethic?” at the 2006 SCMLA Women’s Caucus Breakfast, Mary Trachsel from the University of Iowa noted her desire to motivate students to write meaningfully rather than as a “circus trick” or as a way to “check off an assignment.” What this exemplary post-Katrina writing has revealed to me—perhaps as dramatically as K’s position of privilege was revealed to her—is just how artificial, how painful, how forced ordinary freshman composition writing can be, and I rededicate myself to finding ways to engage my students in writing that is both constructive and dynamic for them.

Notes

- ¹ Stephen North, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann, 1987).
- ² Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987 [1985]).

Delgado Pond: Early Spring, 2006

David Robert Cook, Delgado Community College

Delgado pond in early spring
Still littered with Katrina-downed tree limbs,
Dead and rotting storm tossed branches—
All the surface covered with debris and
Luminescent green pond scum—
The mallards have flown to clearer water somewhere
Far away
But,
Ah!
At pond's edge
Blooms one
Solitary
Blue
Louisiana
Iris

Review

Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum

by Eli Goldblatt

Research in the Teaching of Rhetoric and Composition Series.
Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007

Ann E. Green, Associate Professor of English, Director of Gender Studies, Saint Joseph's University

In the fall of 2007 I taught an evening college course at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia. Such evening courses often serve returning adult students and this course was typically diverse. Ten of the seventeen students were Black, four had home languages other than English (Chinese, Turkish, Spanish, Patois), three were born outside of the United States, fourteen were women, and fourteen were not the traditional college age. At least two had first studied at local community colleges. While the apparent diversity of the room was evident during the first class, it wasn't until I got the first set of papers and noticed the range of writing strengths that I wondered what, exactly, had brought them to this particular course at this particular moment. What were their histories as writers and readers? How could I design a course that worked for them as learners? Eli Goldblatt's important book, *Because We Live Here*, asks similar questions and gives writing teachers and program administrators insight into the complex but often overlooked connections among individual students, the university, and the community that can be leveraged for student success. In Goldblatt's words, "Is there something about the

demography, geography, or social psychology of a region that should affect the instruction and investigation pursued inside of a given campus?" (11).

Because We Live Here foregrounds the relationships among writing programs, high schools, community colleges, and nonprofits and asks writing program and administrators to consider how such relationships affect our work. Further, it urges WPAs to consider not just what our students bring into our writing programs but what we *do* in the surrounding community. This is an anti-ivory-tower book that invites us to engage more broadly with program building in order to better connect the university and the community. The interweaving of Goldblatt's stories as he builds relationships and reflects on his commitment to the community of Philadelphia makes the writing itself engaging. Implicit in *Because We Live Here* is an emphasis on *time* itself as central to building the connections that Goldblatt describes. The book chronicles events that begin with the "Literacy: Because We Live Here" conference in 2000 and extend to 2006. But it is also clear that the research in *Because We Live Here* would not be possible without Goldblatt's 18+ years in the city of Philadelphia, which triggers questions about what the academic job market does when it asks graduate students to write dissertations on literacy practices in particular places and then sends them across the country for faculty positions.

Because We Live Here uses the Temple University writing program and its relationship to Philadelphia as a case study for how metropolitan universities can build connections with the community. Through shared programming, informal and formal networking, and a good bit of what Goldblatt refers to as "lunch" (brainstorming conversations over coffee or sandwiches), Goldblatt advocates for non-hierarchical, reciprocal partnerships between the university and the community. Goldblatt argues that through deep alignment and literacy sponsorships,

universities can collaborate with partners in ways that acknowledge their mutual self-interest.

The book opens with a thoughtful chapter on how writing “within, across, and beyond” the curriculum works. Drawing from Dewey, Goldblatt argues that those on the margins—basic writers, English as a second language learners, non-traditional students of various stripes—can do the most to show us what works and what doesn’t work in our writing programs. In addition, Goldblatt, drawing from Dewey, contends that our role as WPAs includes developing, “a constellation of abilities that help students become both productive individuals and engaged social beings” (15). While Goldblatt makes this argument for writing programs, *Because We Live Here* would be a useful text for various people within the university who are committed to building university-community connections. The work that we do within an institution is only a part of the work we must do; building connections outside of the institution is necessary part of creating “productive individuals and engaged social beings.”

The second and third chapters delve into Temple’s relationships with the high school and community college students who feed most of its student population. By focusing on several area high schools, Goldblatt highlights the ways that urban and suburban high schools prepare students for college. He describes his extended visits and relationships with one urban school and one suburban school, both with excellent teachers but quite different curricula. From conversations with teachers and students, an examination of curricula and assignments, and time “hanging out” at the schools, he concludes that the urban school’s curriculum centers on control, on doing what you need to do to keep your nose clean, while the suburban school’s curriculum centers on continuity, on what middle class students need to know for college.

What is more interesting than how the urban and suburban schools differ is the way that Goldblatt models building bridges between high

schools and colleges. Goldblatt visits these schools not as an observer but as an ambassador from Temple. In one high school he answers questions about college writing expectations from students who want to be scientists and engineers; in another he works with the school and the Temple admissions office to discern whether a good student from the urban school would be better served by coming directly to Temple or transferring after two years at a community college. The relationships that Goldblatt builds with individual teachers and administrators help him to create the dialogue that he finds necessary for literacy sponsorship.

By presenting Temple's relationships with the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), Goldblatt argues that "deep alignment" between the community college and the four-year university must go "beyond articulation agreements and the automatic acceptance of course equivalences" (96). To bridge the divide, Temple and CCP had a "Deep Alignment" conference attended by faculty in both schools; they sponsored a teaching exchange where a Temple faculty member taught basic writing at CCP and a CCP faculty member taught basic writing at Temple; and they developed an exchange of writing assignments so that CCP faculty and Temple faculty could see how assignments in an equivalent course (first-year writing) differed across institutions. Important to these conversations was an effort on both sides to level the playing field. Meetings took place at both Temple and CCP, and faculty who attended each discussed the assumptions that grounded each assignment. By building relationships with community colleges and creating ways for cross-college conversations about the teaching of first-year writing, Goldblatt's work breaks down the barriers that isolate one institution from another. In doing this, Goldblatt offers a model of cross-institutional connection that works against the fragmentation and separation that characterizes much of higher education. Here, too, I am reminded of just how complex a conversation about assignments among institutions can be. For example, in order for the faculty exchange to take place, union contracts needed to be navigated across

institutions, and it is beyond the scope of Goldblatt's work to consider the plight of part-time faculty who might teach at Temple and CCP, and perhaps another area school or two. If notions of sponsoring literacy rest within the home institution, then perhaps we can learn a great deal from part-time faculty who regularly wind their way among several different institutions.

In the chapter titled "Alinsky's Reveille," Goldblatt draws on Saul Alinsky's work in community organizing in Chicago to question how composition courses can best serve the local community. Alinsky held two ideas dear that Goldblatt applies to his work: a belief in relationships with community members and a belief that each group works in its own self-interest (acknowledging implicitly that self-interest is not a bad thing). Goldblatt describes hanging out in the community and building relationships: having hamburgers in diners and coffee in bodegas with community leaders; bringing Temple students and students in an adult literacy program together to talk about education; serving on the boards of nonprofits. This is important work for two reasons: first, it is a necessary part of knowing one's community; and second, it is often difficult to make this work visible to the university because it does not fit neatly into categories of research, teaching, or service. It takes time to do this work. And time, or at least the flexibility of having some day-to-day control of one's work hours, is a gift that academic life provides. However, having coffee with a community partner on a Friday afternoon does not show up on an annual report and is difficult to quantify. *Because We Live Here* shows us a model of how to combine teaching, research and service in a way that will "count"—both in the community and to the institutional powers that be. The actual writing of *Because We Live Here* serves as an important account of what work with community partners is like. For example, Goldblatt and several members of area nonprofits form a loose affiliation called the "Open Doors Collaborative," a group of folks from adult education programs who would work together to

“develop a curriculum that promotes critical thinking, independent inquiry, communication skills, and leadership ability within the specific context of . . . North Philadelphia” (136). The “Open Doors Collaborative” wrote a grant together that they didn’t submit, talked for eighteen months about adult education, and ultimately broke up because of various structural changes to the nonprofits. While the collaborative did not achieve any concrete goals, such as a successful grant, the work that Goldblatt began there has led to a longer-term partnership between Temple and Proyecto Sin Fronteras, the educational wing of a local nonprofit. Goldblatt’s work opens up questions about what internal structures are needed to support the often invisible work of university-community collaboration, and also points up the reality that nonprofits do not work according to university timetables.

Because We Live Here focuses on the local networks that sustain the university and articulates a new vision for building community connections. Whether seen from the perspective of a WPA or a teacher of literacy, that vision prompts us to rethink our work in communities—not only as researchers but also as citizens—and to question what makes such relationships sustainable. The book also points us toward related opportunities for scholarship on, for example, the impact of No Child Left Behind on the students who are now attending our universities, collaborative means of assessment, and the influence of race, class, gender and sexuality on university and community collaborations. Specifically, institutional and cultural racism need to be unpacked through research into the community and university relationship. Goldblatt’s work suggests the need for more case studies of particular university-community partnerships, more careful examination of what happens as student learners and local citizens interact in community-based classes, and continued attention to how pedagogy changes as university-community relationships develop.

Review

***Sine Cera: A Diverse City Writing Series Anthology:
Two Old Guys From Brooklyn
Salt Lake City, SLCC Community Writing Centre***

Nick Pollard, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK

Writing centres do not often publish the work of people who attend them. Perhaps this is a paradoxical omission that this anthology may help to remedy, since it demonstrates the value of showcasing workshop writing. The pieces in *Sine Cera: A Diverse City Writing Series Anthology* are, as Series Coordinator Jeremy Remy says, “pieces that might have been left unheard” from a community “built around our words,” a selection of snapshots with all the personal intimacy that you might experience as someone explains to you the pictures in their family album. The collection includes many forms of writing, letters and anecdotes as well as poems and stories. The writers are of all abilities; irrespective of this some of the selections engage you poignantly or in a belly laugh or demand that you look at them again to see what you almost missed, and even the shortest pieces tell a good story.

Peggy Dean’s “David” is one example, recounting in just 182 words of everyday realism how a working class knight rescues a distressed damsel. Martha Carter’s “My Life” is another briefly told story of love found in hard places. Perhaps in other circumstances such straightforward autobiographical truths would be the reason these stories might be passed over, but they also indicate the challenges

the writers have dealt with in getting to where they now are. Near the beginning of her story Carter writes about how she and her mother moved to Tempe Arizona: “We got on the bus and went to the Apache Hotel. We paid for a room with a kitchen in it. We stayed there a long time.” These stories don’t say much directly about how hard life might be, but you can read it clearly enough in these stark, unembellished details.

A good number of the contributions illustrate one of the fundamentals of good writing, which is to write about what you know. Many, consequently, deal convincingly with family experiences. “Evie’s Story” by Chanel Earl is a deft tale that begins in a child’s fantasy world and crashes out of it into an adult realisation as a young girl comes to grips with her mother’s terminal illness, managing at the same time to convey the strength of the relationship with her father and the sensitivity with which he tries to help her understand what is happening. Cyndi Lloyd describes the dilemmas her gay brother faces in getting his family, which has strong ties to the Church of Latter Day Saints, to accept his sexuality and identity. Kenneth Koldewyn’s “Grandpa Vern aka My Bill Gates” warmly explores how the relationship he shared with his cool Grandpa led to his learning how to use computer technology. Raymond Briscoe deserves the accolade for the funniest selections in his droll anecdotes of travel experiences with his family.

As an exercise, a writing centre publishing this material is doing a great deal for its students in generating their confidence and encouraging their pride in their work, as well as demonstrating to other writing group members that they can achieve similar recognition. As a broader principle, it is vital to any writing program. As Willinsky (1990:186-7) remarked nearly a couple of decades ago “publication is the principal post-writing activity for the serious writing program; it is intended to demonstrate a regard for the students’ work, treating their word as if it counted in the world.”

Works Cited

Willinsky, J. *The New Literacy: redefining reading and writing in the schools*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Review

Who Says? Working-Class Rhetoric, Class Consciousness, and Community

William DeGenaro, editor

University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007

Tom Deans, University of Connecticut

Little did I know how fascinating a group of workers pouring concrete could be. Yet Dale Cyphert's rhetorical analysis of the practice makes it so. Really. Her interpretation of the "dance of decision-making" that workers perform as they shovel, pour and level reveals a cultural logic of cooperation that stands in sharp contrast to middle-class assumptions about individualism, instruction, and order. On this worksite knowledge is collective and problem-solving is shared; tacit rhythms rather than explicit dictates govern action. Roles are assumed but quickly improvised as the situation demands. No one teaches the new kid what to do, yet all grow aggravated at how he waits for instruction. No one says more than a few words; in fact, verbal communication signals that something has gone wrong with the preferred rhetorical dynamic. Clearly we are far from the overtly persuasive, language-driven, individualistic features of traditional rhetoric.

This is but one of fifteen essays gathered in *Who Says? Working-Class Rhetoric, Class Consciousness, and Community*, two of which adopt a similarly anthropological approach to a specific workplace culture (of long-haul truckers, of migrant workers). Several others take a different

tack, critiquing pop culture representations of working-class people. The most pleasant surprise among those is Kathleen LeBesco's sharp, energetic analysis of fatness and working-class rhetoric. She explains how the bodies and behaviors of Rosanne Barr and Anna Nicole Smith trigger a nexus of cultural anxieties about gender, class, sexuality, assertiveness and consumption.

Five of the essays reach back into labor history, and most of those have a documentary feel. Such is the case with James V. Catano's telling reflection on how the heritage tourism in a former Pennsylvania steelworking town, which mixes memorializing the old mill with economic development, folds together a variety of (often conflicting) civic, personal, political, and economic discourses. Anne F. Mattina reaches back earlier into the twentieth century to examine how gender, ethnicity and ethnicity shape (and limit) the rhetoric and agency of activist women in the 1909 garment strike in New York City, the 1912 millworker strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and the 1913 silk worker strike in Patterson, New Jersey. In a similarly strong piece, Melissa J. Fiesta analyzes the commonplaces of Jane Addams' settlement house rhetoric.

Studies of specific jobs and historical moments are leavened by pieces that offer more general treatments of working-class rhetoric. Most notable among those is Kristin Lucas's argument that the tropes of "providing and protecting" govern the "occupational narrative" of working-class identity.

Not all of the essays are entirely successful. The collection features two on collective memory as it relates to steelworkers. The first (by Catano) is so much more eloquent than the other that we have to question why both were included. The essay on migrant farmworkers is an earnest but ultimately thin thematic analysis of oral histories published by another scholar. And I just couldn't get any traction on the chapter that weighs different approaches to workplace risk communication.

About half the contributors to this volume come from departments of Communication, the other half from departments of English. Readers will find plenty on rhetoric but little on writing. One exception is Steve Martin's analysis of a series of comic books published by the Congress of Industrial Organizations in the 1930s and 1940s, but even there we see texts published by union leaders for workers rather than written by workers. Perhaps the absence of writing is to be expected, given that the book does not promise to address journalism, schooling, or literature; moreover, the lifeblood of everyday working-class culture is talk and action. Still, I wondered, shouldn't writing *by* workers also merit consideration by rhetoricians?

While several kinds of media are ably represented in this collection—everyday talk, oral history, formal oratory, music, museums, comics, television—treatment of at least one important medium is absent: photography. Consider, for example, how our perceptions of the working classes have been shaped by Lewis Hine and Walker Evans, whose haunting black-and-white shots of child labor and high-rise steelwork and rural poverty cannot help but come to mind when we think of laborers in the twentieth century. Such photos not only inhabit our collective memory; they also fueled national campaigns for labor reform.

Pointing out such omissions might not be entirely fair. After all, no single collection can cover a field that aims to examine language, persuasion, and class consciousness among the working classes, not to mention how the broader culture perceives and represents them. And coverage isn't really the main point here anyway because this book presents itself as a kind of manifesto or invitation for what could be. It makes the implicit case for an emerging field or, perhaps more accurately, an interdisciplinary space where rhetorical criticism, history, communications and anthropology can meet to focus on the language of labor. In that sense it seems to be making a bid parallel to the one women's studies made a generation ago and that disability studies has

made more recently. I'm not confident that working-class studies will gather the same momentum as women's studies, but that has yet to be seen.

Julie Lindquist closes the book with a meta-treatment of the methods and purposes of doing empirical research on working-class people and places. This serves as a bookend to DeGenaro's introduction, in that both pieces deal with meta-matters of why and how we should take working-class studies seriously. DeGenaro's introduction opens with a ritual move of canon critique, taking Aristotle (and by extension the whole Western rhetorical tradition) to task for being elitist and therefore in need of correction by voices long tamped down (as the uppity "Who Says?" of the book's title suggests). He then casts working-class rhetorics as the next logical step toward inclusiveness, following on the heels of how scholars forty years ago introduced "the new rhetoric" and more recently have given "alternative rhetorics" their due.

Lindquist reflects on the methods and ethics of ethnography. The chapter title promises a conclusion, yet we don't find her looking backward to the essays in the collection; instead she looks forward, affirming that an anthropological approach to studying working-class rhetoric is complicated but worth undertaking. The most gratifying part of Lindquist's piece for me came when she anticipated a question that had been on my mind from about mid-way through the book: How is analyzing working-class rhetoric different from doing basic Marxist critique? Her take is that the "ethnography of working-class rhetoric can help mediate between projects of Marxist anthropology, which assumes structural determinants of linguistic practices, and postmodern anthropology, which questions scientific validity and assumes contradictions" (277). I also wondered how such scholarship would distinguish itself in the crowded fields of anthropology and labor history, which Lindquist likewise addresses by noting that "rhetoric emphasizes what is strategic and hortatory—agentive, purposeful discourse, language that people use to explain themselves to themselves

and the world. To study working-class rhetoric is to position oneself as listener of a group's articulated theory of itself, and to project this theory back into the field of social relations" (279).

Readers interested more in ethnography than rhetorical criticism could bypass this collection and go straight to monographs such as Lindquist's own *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar*; Ralph Cintron's *Angels' Town: Chero Ways, Gang Life, and the Rhetorics of the Everyday*, or Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. But those looking for a sampling of how working-class studies can be drawn into the orbit of our scholarship can delight in the variety of topics taken up.

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Democracis, y Libertad, pero para quien?/Democracy and

Freedom, but for Whom?

Spring 2009

In the midst of contentious political and cultural debate university/neighborhood alliances have developed models that help build local support and educational access for a variety of immigrant populations. In the process, they have built programs that offer an inclusive and multi-lingual definition of community. Published in both English and the language native to individual authors, this issue of *Reflections* will feature academic essays, policy analysis, memoir, photography, and artwork designed to feature the diversity of voices and programs engaged in supporting the success of immigrant populations in the United States.

Writing Theories/Changing Communities

Summer 2009

Much of the research literature on community writing and teaching responds to the pragmatic need for such projects to accomplish real work that meets the goals of various partners—community organizations, university faculty, undergraduate students, and other stakeholders. The very nature of the work also requires an understanding of how we can employ, adapt, and create theories that articulate the role of community writing projects in producing knowledge "useful" to the academy, the larger culture, and the body politic. Such an articulation challenges us to explore how the terms "engaged scholarship," "public intellectualism," "public work," and "service learning" not only reframe our immediate work as scholars/teachers, but also reframe our broader work as neighbors, community members, and citizens.

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