

# Reflections

A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric

Volume 19, Issue 2, Fall/Winter 2019 - 2020

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*Reflections*, a peer reviewed journal, provides a forum for scholarship on public rhetoric, civic 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 scholarship on public rhetoric and civic writing, occasional essays and stories both from and about community writing and literacy projects, interviews with leading workers in the field, and reviews of current scholarship touching on these issues and topics.

We welcome materials that emerge from research; showcase community based and/or student writing; investigate and represent literacy practices in diverse community settings; discuss theoretical, political and ethical implications of community-based rhetorical practices; or explore connections among public rhetoric, civic engagement, service learning, and current scholarship in composition studies and related fields.



# Contents

Reflections: A Journal of Community-Engaged Writing and Rhetoric  
Volume 19, Issue 2, Fall/Winter 2019 - 2020

- 1 Editors' Introduction  
Laurie Grobman, Penn State Berks  
Deborah Mutnick, Long Island University Brooklyn
- 11 The Long-Term Effects of Service-Learning on Composition Students  
Chris Iverson, University of Connecticut
- 38 Heuristic Tracing and Habits for Learning: *Developing Generative Strategies for Understanding Service Learning*  
Laurie A. Pinkert, University of Central Florida  
Kendall Leon, California State University, Chico
- 66 The Muted Group Video Project: *Amplifying the Voices of Latinx Immigrant Students*  
Christine Martorana, Florida International University
- 81 Walking in Jamaica: *Exploring the Boundaries and Bridges of Rhetorical Agency*  
Brent Lucia, University of Connecticut
- 106 Public Art as Social Infrastructure: *Methods and Materials for Social Action at Environmentally Contaminated Sites*  
Jason Peters, California Polytechnic State University

- 130** Writing for Advocacy: *DREAMers, Agency, and Meaningful Community Engaged Writing (Course Profile)*  
Jeffrey Gross, Christian Brothers University  
Alison A. Lukowski, University of Wisconsin-Stout
- 141** Grantwriting Infrastructure for Grassroots Nonprofits: *A Case Study and Resource for Attempting to 'Return Stolen Things'*  
Zosha Stuckey, Towson University
- 170** Building an Infrastructure for a Jail Writing Community Partnership through Student Internships and Community Writing Projects  
Lara Smith-Sitton, Kennesaw State University  
Brody Smithwick, Lion Life Community
- 195** #BostonStrong/BostonStrong?: *A Personal Essay on Digital Community Engagement (Personal essay)*  
Kristi Girdharry, Babson College
- 208** Activist Archival Research, Environmental Intervention, and the Flint Water Crisis  
Julie Collins Bates, Millikin University
- 240** The Work of the Conference on Community Writing: *Reflections on the 2019 Philadelphia Conference*  
Adam Hubrig, University of Nebraska, Lincoln  
Heather Lindenman, Elon University  
Justin Lohr, University of Maryland  
Rachael Wendler Shah, University of Nebraska, Lincoln

## Book Reviews

- 269** Review of *Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Publics*  
Jacob Richter, Clemson University
- 277** Review of *The Adjunct Underclass: How America's Colleges Betrayed Their Faculty, Their Students, and Their Mission*  
Natalie Dorfeld, Florida Institute of Technology
- 283** Review of *Community Literacies en Confianza*  
Laura Gonzales, University of Florida
- 288** Review of *Field Rhetoric: Ethnography, Ecology, and Engagement in the Places of Persuasion*  
Mary Le Rouge, Kent State University
- 293** Review of *Social Writing/Social Media: Publics, Presentations, and Pedagogies*  
Megan Von Bergen, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- 299** Call for Submissions



# Editors' Introduction

**Laurie Grobman,**  
*Penn State Berks*  
**& Deborah Mutnick,**  
*Long Island University*  
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**W**e write this introduction for our fourth, coedited issue of *Reflections* at a historic moment between the passage of two articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump in the House and his possible (theoretical) removal in the Senate. This conjuncture comes just two months after the third Conference on Community Writing took place in Philadelphia in October. As coeditors of one of two affiliate journals of the Coalition on Community Writing, we had eagerly anticipated the conference and commissioned an article to review the conference as a way to take the pulse of community writing on the cusp of the 2020s (see Hubrig et al. in this issue). We cannot help noting—at the conference and in this Fall-Winter 2019-2020 issue of *Reflections*—that the work of community-engaged writing and rhetoric both exposes paths to justice in ways that distinguish it from many other disciplines and reproduces the same inequities that pervade life in and

out of the academy. In other words, our small but growing field is rife with both possibilities and limitations.

The articles in this issue use multiple methods from surveys, interviews, and case studies to participant ethnography, and from assessment of student learning outcomes to expanded assessment of community writing outcomes, instructors, and community partners. The issue not only includes archival research and the work of historical recovery but also the construction of new archives to capture today's tragedies, like the Flint, Michigan water crisis and the Boston Marathon bombing, providing a window into the processes by which silencing—sometimes but not always inadvertent—occurs. Among the nine articles, one course profile, and one personal essay, six include community-engaged writing pedagogies and critical service learning. These courses range from internships to a linked first-year writing and senior capstone course to professional writing. The projects demonstrate the imaginative, creative, and impactful work that can positively benefit all program participants and the communities we represent.

Two critical service-learning articles by Chris Iverson and coauthors Laurie Pinkert and Kendall Leon, respectively, focus on assessment in service-learning courses and first year writing. In “The Long-Term Effects of Service-Learning on Composition Students,” Iverson offers case studies of three former students who participated in a larger study he conducted at the University of Connecticut to determine the long-term effects of their experience. Although the students’ recollections differ from one another, they overlap in “their awareness of rhetoric as social, their commitment to effecting community change, and their belief that the service-learning experience affected them in subtle ways that nonetheless influenced their approaches to community action” (11).

In “Heuristic Tracing and Habits for Learning: Developing Generative Strategies for Understanding Service Learning,” Pinkert and Leon focus on what they call “heuristic tracing, a generative assessment strategy” that accounts for the fluidity and dynamism of university-community partnerships in ways that fill the acknowledged gap between service-learning’s impacts and writing programs’ traditional

assessment measures (38). Through their study at a large public land grant university of a new advanced composition offering with a required service learning component, they conclude that extending heuristic tracing to community partners may enable participants to position “assessment as an opportunity for collaborative, programmatic learning and change” and to better understand how community expectations for writing align with or diverge from their program’s aims (60).

This issue’s articles also employ multiple theoretical perspectives that open new ways of seeing and re-seeing. First, in “The Muted Group Video Project: Amplifying the Voices of Latinx Immigrant Students,” Christine Martorana borrows Muted Group Theory from the field of communications to help her Latinx and immigrant students understand why their voices about themselves and their communities are so vital. Martorana’s twenty-four college students, twenty-two of whom identified as Hispanic, created video messages for a local third grade class predominantly made up of immigrant students. Martorana writes: “Put simply, as our exploration of media depictions revealed, the stories told *about* immigrants were rarely told *by* them” (68). It was the power of her students’ first-hand knowledge—their “complete and real stories”—that led her to invite them to reflect on their own personal experiences and create videos for the third-grade Hispanic students that would enable both groups of learners to see their own “culture and language as valid and valuable sources of knowledge” (66).

Next, Brent Lucia takes us on a rhetorical and literal walk through Jamaica, Queens, in “Walking in Jamaica: Exploring the Boundaries and Bridges of Rhetorical Agency.” Drawing on Jeff Rice’s theories about networked spaces, Lucia suggests that rhetorical agents, while attentive to their own positionalities, may intervene in distorted and dominant narratives that re-inscribe marginalization. While teaching as an adjunct instructor in Jamaica at York College CUNY, Lucia witnessed the dichotomy between the dominant narrative of “promising stories of construction and revitalization through new development” circulating about this city (84) and the more complex, varied experiences he encountered there. He describes a recent walk through Jamaica’s streets, reflective of the city’s landscape and

history as well as his own positionality, and concludes, “improving our rhetorical awareness then means being sensitive to this fundamental dissonance between what we see and feel in our material worlds and what lives in our prevailing discourse” (84).

Then, in “Public Art as Social Infrastructure: Methods and Materials for Social Action at Environmentally Contaminated Sites,” Jason Peters brings together theories of artistic method, democratic engagement, and publics to illuminate the mobilizing efforts of a public arts nonprofit promoting environmental awareness. Peters draws lessons about the “material dimensions of artistic method” (109) from the work of a small nonprofit organization, UPPArts, aimed at cultivating environmental awareness. The organization’s collaborative arts program engaged the local community in making “nonexpert” knowledge in response to the experience of living near a contaminated urban watershed. Using field research conducted during his work with UPPArts, Peters contends that its annual culminating event, a parade known as the Urban Pond Procession, helped mobilize the nonexpert knowledge of a “public” that could advocate for its right to environmental remediation and protection.

This issue as a whole emphasizes the important work of social justice. In their course profile, Jeffrey Gross and Alison A. Lukowski describe “Writing for Advocacy,” a pair of 2018 community-engaged writing courses responding to the urgent political moment facing their Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students at Christian Brothers University (CBU). In an integrated first-year writing course and an upper-division English elective, students worked collaboratively on meaningful projects designed for public dissemination and presentation, resulting in “meet[ing] both institutional learning outcomes for effective writing and research as well as softer outcomes for socializing and professionalizing first-generation and DACA students” (131).

In another example of the work of social justice, Zosha Stuckey reports on her students who research, write, submit, and track grants for small, community non-profit organizations (NPOs) and have raised over \$229,000 going directly to their NPO partners. Viewing equity as way to “return stolen resources” (Marcus and Munoz 2018),

she describes a community writing project at Towson University in the Baltimore metro area involving students as grant writers and grant trackers for small, resource-poor grassroots nonprofits (NPOs). Though proud of the program's success, she also has concerns about the ethical implications of working through systems of oppression embedded in the "Non-Profit Industrial Complex" and calls on writing teachers and programs to take up grant writing in a way that "acknowledges the legacies of injustice in our communities, places students of color in leadership roles, and prioritizes work with under-resourced organizations that are led by folks *from* the community itself" (142).

Both at the CCW and in the pages of this issue, the field of community engaged writing and rhetoric continues its focus on reciprocity and undoing complex, traditional university-community hierarchical relationships. Yet we also see how complicated and even intractable this work can be. As Lara Smith-Sitton and Brody Smithwick make clear in their article about a jail writing partnership with a nonprofit called Lion Life Community, "when those who are struggling the most in our communities are lifted up, empowered, and given a voice, everyone benefits... [but] [i]f inmates are released only to be forever stigmatized as 'the other,' then Lion Life's impact stays confined to the jail" (190). Similarly, in "#BostonStrong/BostonStrong?" Kristi Girdharry notes that the very act of creating her digital archive of stories and artifacts shortly after the Boston Marathon bombing on April 15, 2013, may itself have inadvertently silenced people. Despite following a motto of "no story too small" in order to be inclusive, Girdharry concludes, "in Our Marathon's aim to represent communities affected by the marathon bombings, the archive also created a community of its own—one that we now see may have unintentionally silenced people" (203).

Also reporting on a digital archive chronicling activist intervention, Julie Collins Bates notes that in the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, "black and working-class community activists joined together to test their own contaminated water, to protest, to distribute bottled water, and to fight for clean water for all Flint residents" (210). However, despite multiracial, working class coalition-building that was "vital to bringing attention to the Flint water crisis [ , ] ... in national

mainstream media coverage of the crisis, it was mostly a group of white Americans ... who were identified as the 'heroes' of the water crisis" (210-11). Like Peters, Bates addresses environmental injustice. While these injustices and many others like them precede the Trump era, they also highlight how much Trump's deregulation of environmental protections and greedy rejection of climate change exacerbate these issues and make them more urgent for community-engaged writing and rhetoric to participate in countering.

We believe you will see in these articles and essays the authors *doing the work while in the job*. This work, along with the job and the hustle, was the subject of Carmen Kynard's keynote address at CCW 2019. It is also the focus of Adam Hubrig, Heather Lindenman, Justin Lohr, and Rachael Wendler Shah's reflections on the conference in "The Work of the Conference on Community Writing." Weaving together their own and other conference participants' voices into a polyvocal representation of the third biannual meeting of the Coalition for Community Writing, Hubrig et al. argue that "carefully attending to differences in positionalities must guide our approach to understanding CCW and imagining the future work of the field" (243). Collectively, they ask what would happen if "we gave full voice" to the narrative of "frequently omit[ted] ... material realities that shape the work and mediate our relationship to it. Our bodies, our commitments, our efforts just to pay for any of this to happen—these are defining features of our lives and our work, but function in our scholarship as an absent parallel narrative" (254).

In other words, perhaps because of its rootedness in social and economic justice activism, the work of community-engaged writing enables us to come to terms with the material realities that shape and constrain the work we do. For it is in so doing that we can understand, to paraphrase Marx and Engels, that though we make our own history, we can never make it just as we please. The change we produce in community writing—or in any scholarly or community-based project—may be more incremental than transformational, but this work must continue and deepen. We must recognize the limits of what we've accomplished and the urgent need to do more and to do better, embracing and cultivating the knowledge, talents, and skills of our students, community partners, community members,

and ourselves. Thus, as one example, as we see even in this issue, despite the activist-oriented, transformational pedagogies and impact on the third graders with whom the college students worked in Martorana's use of Muted Group Theory and Gross and Lukowski's DACA advocacy project, Latinx students' status in the United States remains perilous. We are clearly a long way from protecting DACA and other immigrant students, or closing the huge achievement gap for Latinx Americans, who are half as likely to hold a college degree as non-Hispanic white adults, just as we are clearly a long way from solving the multiple crises of ecology, economy, and democracy unfolding in this era.

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In our initial call for submissions in 2017 after assuming the editorship of *Reflections*, we sought and hoped for submissions that would speak directly to the exigencies of the Trump era, then just beginning. Since then, the intensification of attacks on people of color, especially black people, Muslims, Jews, and immigrants, including the detention and deaths of children at the U.S.-Mexican border; the rise of white supremacist, nationalist movements; ever more visible, widespread sexual abuse; and the accelerating degradation of nature has also radicalized new layers of society, bringing hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets demanding democracy here and even more dramatically abroad, from Spain to Iraq to Chile to Hong Kong. In our 2017 call, our impulse was to encourage community-engaged scholars to draw out the connections between the local and the global, the work of writing and rhetoric and that of broader social and economic justice movements, and to capture the depth and breadth of activist responses to the crises of our time—all of which Trump's election and immediate anti-Muslim, racist, misogynistic, anti-democratic rhetoric and actions accentuated.

Interestingly, the response to the call was negligible. A few articles resonated with the sense of urgency we all felt in the aftermath of the 2016 elections, but most of the manuscripts we read, though reflective of interesting, important aspects of this emerging subfield, were unrelated to the call. Nor did they take up the entrenched, seemingly intractable socioeconomic and cultural fallout of world history that

long preceded Trump's election—what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) called *contact zones* in which “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (34). On the one hand, as coeditors of *Reflections*, we have come to more clearly see the limits of community-engaged writing and the many factors that constrain the nature and scope of projects with community partners and communities. On the other, for ourselves and for the field, we believe we must all become more critically conscious of geographical and thematic intersections—across social differences and sectors—and make and enact connections between local projects involving language, literacy, and cultural rhetorics and larger regional, national, and global issues. For, difficult and incremental though it is, the work of community writing contributes to the process of social change we all agree must develop and accelerate to solve the local and global crises we face as we enter the 2020s.

Finally, as editors of *Reflections* and panelists at the editors' roundtable at CCW, we applaud the deep commitment of our fellow editors to ensuring the publication of more inclusive, diverse journals and book series. Simply the number of new journals like *Spark*, *constellations*, *Latinx Writing and Rhetoric*, *enculturation*, and now, *Rhetoric, Politics, and Culture*, to be edited by Carmen Kynard and Bryan J. McCann, bodes well for these evolving practices. We look forward to continuing, increasingly in-depth conversations about editorship that concretely examine issues of inclusivity, representation, and publication practices as they emerge in editorial work.

## REFERENCES

Pratt, Mary Louise. 1991. "Arts of the Contact Zone." *Profession*: 33-40.

## NOTES

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# The Long-Term Effects of Service-Learning on Composition Students

**Chris Iverson,**

*University of Connecticut*

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*Over the last roughly twenty years, or between 2000 and 2019, scholarship on community writing has built upon a focus on service-learning composition courses to include the roles of writing and rhetoric in community engagement more generally, including necessary inquiry into the ethics of community engagement altogether. In this time, the longer-term effects of service-learning writing courses, specifically on college students, have gone unexamined. This study looks at three former students who took service-learning composition courses at the University of Connecticut to determine what, if any, long-term effects the experience had on them. The three former service-learners differ in how they recall their experiences, but they overlap in key places, such as their awareness of rhetoric as social, their commitment to effecting community change, and their belief that the service-learning experience affected them in subtle ways that nonetheless influenced their approaches to community action. This three-participant study, part of a larger project based on retrospective interviews with students formerly enrolled in service-learning courses, shows that such courses may not create dramatic change in students' rhetorical awareness or approach to community action, but the subtle changes they can promise informed the subjects in my study in unexpected ways over time.*

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Community engagement has enjoyed an increasing and evolving popularity in academia over the past decades. In fact, when Bacon and Roswell opened the first issue of *Reflections on Community-Based Writing Instruction* in 2000, they noted, “In the past fifteen years, American colleges and universities have embraced service-learning with active enthusiasm” (1). This acknowledgement signals that the benefits of community engagement had proven significant enough for writing studies to pursue community engagement in its own way and with its own journal—to be followed by *Community Literacy Journal* in 2006. Today, twenty years later, community engagement in writing studies has resulted in research, pedagogy, community action, a Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) position statement, and a biannual conference of its own.<sup>1</sup>

An example of this evolution can be found in the pages of *Reflections* itself; early issues focus almost primarily on service-learning, including the risks associated with a pedagogy that, when not mindfully designed and carried out, potentially treat community organizations and members as helpless “recipients” of service and send students the message that they have “done good” without reflecting on the larger social structures that cause inequalities that many community organizations already respond to actively and in an informed way. Over time, and as the field has further explored community engagement, focus has turned somewhat from classroom-based service to include other ways writing scholars can help bridge the gap between the academy and surrounding communities. A cursory glance at *Reflections* over time signals this shift. For example, the term “service-learning” last appeared in a *Reflections* table of contents in Spring of 2017, two years ago, and the term is no longer included in the full title of the journal: *Reflections: A Journal of Community Engaged Writing and Rhetoric*.

Of course, this does not mean that *Reflections* and writing studies in general have abandoned classroom-based community engagement, but scholars such as Herzberg (1997) and Mathieu (2005) have noted the problematic use of the term “service,” which can inspire a sense of half-hearted charity in students and send the message that communities lack their own agency to know what to do for themselves

and how to do it. Therefore, the conversation has necessarily expanded to include more forms of community engagement that need not include students, such as the work of Ellen Cushman (1998, 1999) and Deborah Mutnick<sup>2</sup> (2016), in which the writing and rhetorical moves of community members—however they define themselves—are the subject of study. Furthermore, recent issues of *Reflections* have included texts about classroom-based community engagement initiatives, though the term “service-learning” itself may not be used (Shumake and Shah 2017; Lindenman 2018). In short, articles about college classroom-based community-oriented pedagogy continue to appear in *Reflections*, though they do so in fewer numbers and with a broader definition of classroom-community partnerships than the term “service-learning” covered in 2000.

But alongside this focal shift in community engagement within writing studies, there has been research into classroom-based service-learning’s long-term effects on students outside of writing studies. For example, Astin, Vogelsgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000) collected longitudinal data from 22,236 undergraduate students from multiple institutions between 1994 and 1998. Their sample included those who took part in service-learning initiatives and those who did not, and Astin et al. found that, among other outcomes, the “[b]enefits associated with course-based service were strongest for the academic outcomes, especially writing skills,” that early service-learning experiences influence students to pursue service-oriented professions, and that some sort of community action in college adds significantly to academic, professional, and personal growth.<sup>3</sup>

They also found that service-learning, as opposed to other, non-course-based service, tends to benefit academic growth more than professional and/or personal growth, including self-efficacy and leadership, and that these findings depend heavily on the amount of critical reflection included in the activity and the opportunities students have to connect service and course material in service-learning courses. Astin and Vogelsgesang followed up on this research five years later to show that students and alumni tended to remain socially active after graduation, but that those trends were stronger in the 1990s than they were in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2005).

More recently, though, Tucker-Loner (2014) tracked college graduates who participated in a service-learning program at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, presenting case studies of ten former students in Washburn's service-learning program to support her claims that service-learning experiences in college promote social awareness and support the development of professional communication skills. Tucker-Loner's study, though it does not focus on writing specifically, supports Astin et al.'s findings that students make professional choices based on their service experiences, adding that students learn to become more socially active in both personal and professional spheres.

## **EXIGENCY FOR AND DESCRIPTION OF THIS STUDY**

In essence, research into service-learning outside of writing studies has proven fruitful since 2000, and this research is something we could further emulate in writing studies. Even though writing scholars have not yet focused on the longer-term effects of service-learning on students and alumni, many students have taken and continue to take service-learning composition courses, and it is worth examining the effect such classes had on them over time. Wurr (2010) conducted a text-based study on the writing students did in such courses, but since Bacon (1999) and others have reported that students stand to enjoy potential extratextual gains—such as social and ethical ones—a study of students' rhetorical, social, and ethical learning years after their service-learning courses is in order.

Therefore, informed by Tucker-Loner's work, as well as work in writing studies such as longitudinal research by Beaufort (2007) and Sternglass (1997), this article reports on three case studies of current and former UConn students to highlight their service-learning experiences. Each of these students took a service-learning course at the University of Connecticut, and each course fell under Deans' writing *for* the community paradigm (2000, 53), was designed to include critical reflection, and was taught by a faculty member other than me. I began this IRB-approved study by issuing a call for participants to current and former UConn students who had taken a service-learning course in composition. I invited roughly one hundred and fifty students to participate, and thirteen followed up for a one-time, in-person interview. My questions were open-ended because

I wanted respondents to have the chance to share with me details that they saw as significant. For example, I asked about generally memorable aspects of the course rather than specific projects, and I asked what they had to share that was most important to this study so they could make those choices on their own.

I did specifically ask whether participants were still in touch with their community partners and whether or not they were otherwise involved in community action, but again, I allowed respondents plenty of room to decide for themselves what kinds of activities they considered “community action.” Similarly, I avoided specifically asking questions tied to respondents’ identities so as to allow them to decide when the intersections of their identity affected their answers, and I did not ask participants for permission to explicitly share those identity markers in my study aside from asking them to provide a pseudonym and pronouns I could use to refer to them in the study. Of the thirteen interviews, I chose three to include here based on their engagement with the project and because they were examples of students who had taken their courses over the seven years between 2008 to 2015. Again, none of these three respondents had been my students, but I had met one of them, Skai, two years before our interview while we both worked at the University of Connecticut Writing Center.

I present the case studies here using references to existing service-learning/community engagement research to determine how their experiences sync with those of others, and I refer to threshold concepts (Meyer and Land 2003; Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015) throughout to determine if and how these service-learning experiences resulted in learning as measured and defined by current education and writing studies scholarship. These threshold concepts also show how/if this learning was transformative in such a way to be truly long-term learning. Meyers and Land (2003) argue that learning threshold concepts expand knowledge beyond what students can learn from their counterpart: core concepts. While core concepts build a body of necessary conceptual knowledge on a subject, they do not lead to a fundamentally different understanding of that subject. They use the example of the concept of signification in literary and cultural studies. It is troublesome to follow the reasoning from the

core concept of signification to the threshold concept that there are no positive terms because the latter displaces the previously “known” truth that words have concrete meanings in and of themselves. They move on to explain that threshold concepts must have certain characteristics, such as being transformative, (likely) irreversible, integrative insofar as they expose previously hidden relationships, often bounded by conceptual space, and possibly troublesome.

The first case study subject, Michael, had taken his course in the fall of 2008, and by the time of our interview, he had graduated from UConn and moved on to complete a master’s in literature in Chicago. Juneau took his service-learning course in fall of 2012 and by the time of our interview was completing a master’s in biology at UConn and applying to MD/PhD programs. Skai took her course in fall 2015 and at the time of our interview was a UConn senior taking graduate-level courses towards a master’s degree in public health.

### **THREE CASE STUDIES**

#### *Michael*

Michael took his service-learning course in fall 2008, graduating from UConn in 2012 with a bachelor’s degree in English. He called his attitude when he arrived at UConn “arrogant,” attributing that arrogance to his belief that writing was transactional and only done for a grade. For Michael, his “point of departure”—the “primary point of reference” he had for himself as a writer as he entered university (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014, 105)—was the mistaken assumption that his previous grades reflected a static and universally applicable writing talent, and his decision to major in English came from his experience in and outside of English courses. For example, he credited his love of reading as well as the discussions in his English classes as two main factors. He also attributed his decision simply to enjoying the larger discourse community of undergraduate English majors outside of the classroom. He pursued that interest to the completion of a master’s degree in literature in Chicago the year after graduating from UConn.

Michael did not recall much about his service-learning course, or at least not the service-learning component of it. He partnered with the No-Freeze Shelter, a homeless shelter in nearby Willimantic,

Connecticut, collaborating with his peers to write brochures for the shelter. And while Michael created public texts, the predominant outcome from his perspective is that he became more of a citizen-writer than he would have had he not taken the class. Indeed, when asked to reflect on the service-learning component of the class, he responded,

I guess, to put it kind of crudely, I'm a lot more leftwing now than I was back then. If you have the ability to write well, you should use writing to improve the station of people who are in some way deprived or suffering or oppressed. And whether you're sort of progressive or just way out in the anarchist zone, I do think that a sort of first-year writing experience that focuses on service-oriented stuff is important, especially because it's also helpful for people who don't want to be English majors. Like if you have to, later on in life write grants, if you have to, later on in life, I don't know, write a newsletter or anything, I think that the, the sort of more outward facing way of teaching is preferable to something else. (Michael)

Tucker-Loner notes that the participants in her study “collectively believed that service-learning leads to a broader sense of community awareness” (2014, 161), and that sense of awareness may be what Michael meant by his being “more leftwing.” Michael also echoes Tucker-Loner’s findings that students in her study credited service-learning with job opportunities in the future (2014, 159), but he sensed that combining service-learning pedagogy with writing had value insofar as it was, in his words, outward-facing and could make writing process knowledge more readily applicable for non-English majors. It is interesting that Michael credits his service-learning experience with affecting his politics and inspiring political action while he does not seem to recall the particulars of the classroom, including opportunities for reflection. Astin et al. (2000) find that critical reflection is necessary for these gains, but I interviewed Michael ten years after that critical reflection, and the effects in this case outlast the memories of the reflection itself.

Though no longer involved with the No-Freeze Shelter, Michael saw his experience as having shown him the value of social engagement

as a writer and student. In graduate school, for example, he joined a community initiative to bring trauma centers closer to a socio-economically oppressed neighborhood near his campus in Chicago. At the time of our interview, Michael worked for the UConn Health Center, editing promotional and educational documents and teaching summer writing workshops for rising first-year students through UConn Health. Michael opted to share with me his community-based activity out of what seemed like a sense of guilt for not keeping up with his work at the No-Freeze Shelter, but in doing so, he supported Tucker-Loner's finding that exposure to community action in college can lead to both career opportunities (2014, 159) as well as an increased sense of community awareness (2014, 161), as his work since college had been community-oriented.

Michael recalled the influence the attention to writing in the disciplines had on not only his decision of a major but also his writing during and after college. He recalled that peer review changed the transactional value he placed on writing: "exposing anything I write to other people and welcoming their feedback are two things that I value a lot more than when I first started writing as an undergrad." In fact, the sharing of texts with others also made him aware of the value of outward facing texts, which contributed to his more public use of writing as a college graduate for UConn Health, and he was aware of this change. This seems a far cry from the writer who came to UConn so confident that he would be able to write for a grade that he looked back years later to call himself arrogant. It seems as if Michael internalized the threshold concept that "all writers have more to learn" (Rose 2015, 59) over the years since his service-learning class. Indeed, when I asked him what else he would like to share to help me understand his first-year writing experience he added:

I now think that writing should sort of have a purpose and make an argument and sort of face outward into the world. Then chances are good that the first-year writing experience is sort of part of the preponderance of experiences that made that outlook possible. (Michael)

Though Michael did not solely credit the service-learning component of his first-year writing class with his post-graduation writing and community-oriented activities, he acknowledged community action as among the “preponderance of experiences” that shaped his values years later as a citizen-writer editing documents for the UConn Health Center, and as I will show, this idea of myriad experiences shaping students in their writerly and rhetorical growth echoes throughout the three case studies presented here.

Michael had been out of college longer than the other interview subjects in my study; he had been out of graduate school and in the workforce for a number of years by the time we talked. And so his comment about the amount and variety of experiences that have shaped him gave me pause. Michael seemed keenly aware of the post-college development that Beaufort (2007) noticed in her case study of Tim, where he learned discourse community knowledge (117), subject knowledge (121), genre knowledge (127), rhetorical knowledge (133), and writing process knowledge (138) in his engineering workplace setting that he had not learned in his undergraduate history career. Surely, Michael’s case study upholds previous findings that learning is dynamic and active (Yancey et al. 2014; Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 2000) as opposed to static and passive.

### *Juneau*

Juneau took his service-learning course in fall 2012 and completed his bachelor’s degree in 2016, majoring in Spanish and writing an honor’s thesis on the short stories of Jorge Luis Borges. At the time of the interview, he was pursuing a master’s degree, planning to complete in the Spring of 2018. When he entered UConn, Juneau saw himself as a writer with a distinctive style—he enjoyed comedy and what he called “analytics” writing—but he knew he had not yet honed that style. Juneau’s point of departure (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014, 105) was uncertain; he knew what kinds of writing he enjoyed, but he did not feel confident in his ability to write in his own voice. When I asked what was most memorable about his first-year writing course, he did not reflect so much on learning how to cultivate that voice, but rather on reading texts about the levels at which social change occurs.

[T]he thing that stuck out the most was a text we went over that discussed [pause] varying degrees of change you can make, and it was like systemic level, some medium level and then like, the ground level, and the ground level was like working in a soup kitchen. Systemic was like planning cities or legislative changes. And that was something I hadn't ever encountered before. (Juneau)

Here, though he did not recall the name of the text, Juneau recalled Morton's organizing model of charity, projects, and social change (1995, 19-32)—an activist heuristic that maps out the kinds of community action one can take and the kind and scale of effects that action can have, from local to systemic change—and he sensed that he could choose his actions based on the changes he wanted to effect. Six years after the course, Juneau also recalled the value of his final project for the service-learning course, where he, like Michael, wrote brochures for the No-Freeze shelter in Connecticut, an example of a *project*, as it attempts to raise awareness of a service that addresses the immediate, material needs of social inequity (Morton 1995, 21).

This project had a long-term effect on Juneau's thinking because he was writing about people and trying to elicit donations for the shelter: "I was trying so hard to accurately represent a nuanced version of some of the people at the shelter and selectively put things in that would maybe promote donations."<sup>4</sup> Like Michael, Juneau created public texts, and Juneau sensed his responsibilities as a citizen-writer quite keenly. Aware of the real-world consequences of his writing—the chance that his writing could elicit or discourage donations—Juneau felt pressure to accurately represent the residents of the shelter while appealing to those who may not have understood the root problems that cause homelessness. This was a problem of communication and context, as Juneau conducted interviews with No-Freeze shelter residents and felt compelled to "curate what [he] read and what [he] was getting in these interviews" to accurately represent the shelter residents' words while appealing to the possibly uninformed expectations of potential donors. Juneau's concern about this dynamic suggests that he had not yet encountered such direct and immediately important ethics of representation in his academic writing before taking on this project.

Juneau seemed eager—even before I asked about further community action apart from the course—to talk about his volunteer work teaching intermediate English to migrant farm workers in the Storrs, CT area, an activity he sought out as a Spanish major at UConn. He has also volunteered to stand in as a mock patient for clinical trials in the UConn Nursing Program. Kiely (2005) notes that service-learning can induce feelings of guilt, shame, and anger that can prove transformative for students, and if they reflect on the causes of these feelings, they can become more empathetic and socially active. Though Juneau does not explicitly link his current community activity to his first-year writing experience, he does credit the experience for giving him insight into the kinds of social change one can effect. When I asked whether or not he recommended a service-learning or community activity component for other writing courses, his answer was complex:

I don't know that [pause] I think [pause] maybe not. But I think I do my best writing when I'm alone, rather than working in a group. And I remember working in a group, and we all contributed, and it was a good group, but I think another alternative would be like writing specific for that class where you can do systemic change, like write to congressman or something like drafting letter after letter to hone what it is you want to get across. (Juneau)

Juneau described a situation in which individuals could work on their writing projects to submit to a larger body of texts that another student could compile and present to the appropriate people to effect systemic change rather than entirely collaborative projects, which he felt eliminated personal style from writing.

Juneau's awareness of genres and their rhetorical potential was reflected in his graduate work. In a master's program in molecular and cell biology, the writing habits Juneau developed in his undergraduate career continued to inform his writing. For example, he sought out workshops at UConn and Columbia University on narrative medicine, which he described as,

the idea that you can apply literary or critical analysis and, you know, close reading skills to, to patients. And if you teach physicians to analyze text and, and read subtext, and they'll be better at seeing things that don't immediately present themselves in their patients. (Juneau)

Juneau ultimately credited his literary education for helping him learn to write in the genre of narrative medicine, and felt that such training and narrative savvy make one better prepared and emotionally stable for patients who need that stability. Such a blurring of the lines between medical and literary writing genres and subsequent creation of the “narrative medicine” genre, as well as Juneau’s awareness of this process, reconfirm Wardle’s (2009) observation that “[g]enres arise when particular exigencies are encountered repeatedly” (768), and such an explicit encounter with the demands of genre that Juneau experienced writing for the No-Freeze shelter helped him note that awareness. In short, Juneau’s literary and writing education combined with his early experience writing for a public. And considering the needs of No-Freeze shelter residents informed his keen awareness of writing’s practical, ethical, and social outcomes.

After I stopped recording our interview, Juneau and I chatted for a moment until he asked me to restart the recorder. Below is the transcription of this addition:

*[Interviewer]*

Juneau, you made a note about the first-year writing course and the service-learning aspect, I think, having an impact or an effect on you professionally?

*Juneau*

Yes. I think this course made me consider the level of impact I’m going to have with my job. And, while previously, I may have been looking at a minor or low-level impact—and I don’t mean to diminish the importance of it—to more of a systemic level impact. And I have been very intentionally trying to situate myself so that I’m going to be in a systemic level of impact in, in the jobs I’m looking for.

Juneau credits his service-learning experience with teaching him how much and what kind of effects his work can have on social change, again calling to mind Morton's (1995) charity, projects, and social change model. While this may not have instigated an identity as a social activist, it certainly had sway over how Juneau approached activism. In his pursuit of narrative medicine, Juneau both responded to what he saw as a need and shaped his own professional identity through writing, exemplifying the threshold concept, "Disciplinary and Professional Identities Are Constructed Through Writing" (Estrem 2015, 55). And while this identity construction did not happen in his service-learning class alone, the class seems an influential one in his undergraduate experience.

### *Skai*

Skai took her service-learning in composition course in fall 2015, and by the time she sat down with me, she was in her senior year, double majoring in cognitive science and political science, and taking graduate courses towards a master's degree in public health. In the spirit of full disclosure, I had met Skai two years before our interview, when she began tutoring at the UConn Writing Center and I began as the graduate assistant director. In her first year, she was an exemplary tutor, and in her second year, she earned the position of Writing Fellow, a competitive position in which selected Writing Center tutors are embedded into sections of first-year writing designed to support first-generation students or those from underrepresented backgrounds, a position she resumed in her third year as a tutor. Also in her second year, Skai co-wrote and co-presented a panel presentation on the value of Writing Fellows in first-year writing courses at the Northeast Writing Center Association (NEWCA) annual conference.

Skai identified as a writer long before coming to college, writing poetry and novels from the age of twelve, and still writing creatively at the time of our interview. Skai added, however, that she had developed her academic writing since she arrived at UConn in 2015 and took her service-learning composition course. In fact, Skai did not have to take a writing course when she got to UConn because her AP scores exempted her from the requirement, but she wanted to continue to refine her academic writing in her first year. She decided

to try the course for one week and leave if she felt it unnecessary, but she was glad she stayed. Skai's "point of departure" (Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014, 105) proved rather anomalous, as she was exempted from her composition course, but she elected to stay despite feeling equipped to handle college writing; for Skai, her writerly identity proved ever-emergent, and she reflected on that emergence metacognitively, noting the differences in expectations she had encountered as well as how she learned to address those expectations.

She pointed precisely to the differences between her high school writing instruction and the instruction that she experienced in college to explain the value of this experience.

I think the cool thing about that class is, instead of unlearning things in high school, we've replaced those with new skills that are more adaptable and more effective. And I really appreciated that from the first day. It was like, "We're going to talk about concision. And like, we've never spoken about concision before." So that's pretty much how that class went, and I stuck with it. (Skai)

With critical insight, Skai appreciated the course as a writing course, but her service-learning project also exposed her to new writing strategies that worked in conjunction with those that she practiced in high school. Skai partnered with the UConn Women's Center for her service-learning project and took on the task of redesigning one of the Center's webpages. Skai made clear that designing a web page is academic writing of a public text, noting that such work must be more deliberate and rhetorically aware than other kinds of college writing, as it will be public and serve the purpose of informing that public<sup>5</sup>.

[W]e did a website and a webpage. And these are all things, on the surface, that wouldn't seem like academic writing, but they're very purposeful. People need to read these things. And [web pages need] to be built in a way that people can understand them, whether it is a web page, or an oral history, or you having full interviews of people, asking them what they think about things and how you then use that source of information. (Skai)

Skai recalled being impressed with how varied the projects and work associated with them were as well; three years after the class, Skai recalled that one group made phone calls and another compiled oral histories and noted that all of these projects did truly academic work that needed to speak to an audience larger than that of the typical term paper.

Skai also recalled the work she did with the UConn Women's Center, and at the time of the interview, she was still in touch with her liaison at the Center. Since Skai concentrated on International Women's Rights in her political science studies at the time of our interview, this partnership was particularly important. Skai was also involved with other community action at the time of our interview, though she claimed this was not "entirely on purpose." She reflected on her work for internships and in her major, noting that she often began to think in more community-oriented or public ways, and her efforts tended towards making her work publicly accessible. For example, the summer before our interview, Skai had traveled to Seattle, Washington through her public health program to conduct community assessments, and she found herself wondering how the texts they created could work in a larger community:

I was also looking at how that community goes out of their way to make sure that the writing and the literature and graphics are culturally competent and connect to the people in that area. Because we went to communities around Seattle that were very ethnically diverse. So, do they have things in different languages? What do the graphics look like? Do the symbols and signs mean something? Can someone who doesn't speak English tell that this is compost, this is trash, this is recycling? And it really does influence a lot of my public health thinking when I'm thinking about community-based writing, because literature is communication. (Skai)

Skai very clearly understood how the course affected her in her writing as well as community engagement. Her comment that the community-engaged aspects of her work were not "entirely on purpose" suggests that she brought with her habits of mind (Sullivan 2014; Bacon 1999) that compel her towards social action in varied

contexts. That is not to say she learned these habits from service-learning alone; she began to develop those habits before her first semester at UConn. Regardless, her service-learning class could be one of many educational experiences that have shaped her as a citizen-writer to see the potential for social change in writing without having it explicitly pointed out for her.

When I asked what she could share with me that would help me better understand the long-term effects of her service-learning composition course, she noted that those effects continue to reveal themselves. She added that learning “kind of just sneaks up on you” and proceeded to tell me about her own writing style and the skills that she had noticed emerging in her peers as they continued to be socially active. Years after her service-learning course, Skai was aware of how the effects of her learning continued to emerge in unexpected ways, much like the way Michael cited his “preponderance of experiences” as more influential than a single course. Similarly, in her awareness of knowledge developing in a non-linear way, Skai demonstrates how “Writing Speaks to Situations Through Recognizable Forms” (Bazerman 2015, 35), as she and her peers demonstrated abilities to take on writing tasks as they entered new ones. This lack of immediate results, however, does not represent a discouraging finding for service-learning practitioners, as Eyler and Giles (1999) note, insofar as educators should not expect all or most of their students to experience dramatic and transformative experiences in one class, because these small transformations can affect a student’s trajectory and have significant influence over time.

### **ONE AMONG A “PREPONDERANCE OF EXPERIENCES”**

The three case studies above, though not themselves representative of all service-learners, offer some insight into what students and instructors can expect from service-learning components in composition courses. In fact, Michael’s claim that such courses represent one among a preponderance of experiences echoes throughout Juneau and Skai’s reports of their own. Similarly, Skai’s observation that learning “sneaks up on you” also helps explain these reports. For example, Michael did not expect to become socially active in graduate school, but found himself equipped to do that work when it became available, and Juneau found himself able to engage

with narrative medicine years after the service-learning course that challenged him to weigh the aims of his writing and create ethical representation of No-Freezer Shelter residents. Skai applied the habits of thinking socially about texts that she honed during her service-learning partnership with the UConn Women's Center.

An individual course is, after all, one among many, and

[w]e might not expect all, or even most, students to have experiences powerful enough to transform, but where programs engage students in important work in the community and provide continuous opportunities for reflection, service-learning may be a catalyst for a dramatic redirection of their lives. (Eyler and Giles 1999, 18)

Indeed, as Skai reminds us, learning “sneaks up on you,” and it would be a mistake to rely solely on reflections from students who are still in their undergraduate careers to discover the long-term benefits of service-learning, even early on in the college curriculum. Michael reported an inclination towards editing and creating public texts years after completing his undergraduate studies, and Juneau's emergence as a citizen-writer happened as he completed his Master's degree and considered what to do with his career and doctoral studies.

While Juneau contends that mandatory service-learning has drawbacks because of the potential for public failures such as those noted by Shah (2018) and Mathieu (2005), it also bears mentioning that one service-learning composition course is just that: one course. Responses in this study suggest that service-learning experiences early in the college curriculum have potential sway over the trajectory of a student's emergence as a citizen-writer, as in the case of Juneau and Michael. Some students, such as Skai, are on their way to that emergence with or without a service-learning course. Others could simply benefit from learning *how* to find that identity for themselves—learning to reach out to community members, for example—but that learning could happen on its own, especially if students feel compelled to find it.

## WHAT CATCHING UP WITH STUDENTS CAN TEACH US

These three case studies reinforce research on community-engaged writing that shows how students in service-learning composition courses develop writing-specific habits, such as rhetorical thinking and the ability to apply that rhetorical thinking to public texts as civic-minded citizen-writers (Bacon 1999; Deans 2000). Moreover, the case studies establish the long-term impact of service-learning courses on enabling students to sustain and further cultivate such habits. Even within this small sampling, the three participants showed enthusiasm for the benefits of service-learning in composition, but they each considered its use differently. Michael appreciated the exposure to “outward-facing” writing, which influenced his political activities as well as how he used writing at the time of our interview. Juneau explicitly noted an effect on his approach to community action insofar as it compelled him to think about how and in what ways such actions can effect social change; at the same time, he acknowledged that it might not suit every student. Skai, too, valued the service-learning experience, as it allowed her to engage with an on-campus community, learn how to write multimodally, and apply her already existing civic-mindedness to website design; and yet, again, she was already civic-minded before the class and would have likely pursued that education elsewhere if not in the service-learning composition course.

But Skai did not *have* to pursue it elsewhere. And by having that experience made available to her in a recognizable package—a college writing course—she was able both to integrate it into her curriculum and to learn about the intrinsically social aspects of writing. Although Michael and Juneau also had this course amid a larger college experience, they recalled the experience enough to participate in a study years later with a researcher they had not met before. This observation about respondents’ willingness to participate in my study leads me to a caveat about my methods: I invited over one hundred and fifty students to participate in this study, and these three are among the twenty who responded and thirteen who followed up with an interview. There was likely some self-selection by which students and alumni specially invested in education would be more likely to participate. Indeed, of the alumni I interviewed, all had either completed a graduate degree or were completing one, and many of the UConn seniors I interviewed were planning on graduate school.

This study presents an opportunity to look into the service-learning experiences of college writers and determine what they themselves value from that experience. My dissertation research includes a larger study in which I apply the same scrutiny to 13 students and alumni, four of whom did not take service-learning courses, and one who took a service-learning course at one of UConn's regional campuses in Stamford, CT. In the future, informed by this study, it would be telling to conduct truly longitudinal studies of such writers over the course of years, in the style of Beaufort's *College Writing and Beyond* (2007) and *Writing in the Real World* (1999) as well as Sternglass' *Time to Know Them* (1997). Studies into the experience of students examined through social science lenses could test this study's finding that service-learning is one among the many potentially significant educational moments students will encounter and explain more about its use in populations based on race, class, and gender, and ability. Finally, my study did not contend with technology, and since college classrooms increasingly acknowledge the multimodal nature of digital writing, a look into digital service-learning projects could further contextualize what we know about service-learning.

I include a personal note here because it adds to the exigency of examining student benefits of community-engaged writing, and I hope it will inspire further inquiry into that benefit by considering intersections of race, gender, and socio-economic class, specifically. This study, and the questions it seeks to begin answering, have been on my mind since I taught a service-learning course in 2013 at a school in which the student population was largely people of color, first-generation, and otherwise marginalized populations in academia. When I introduced the service-learning activities for the class, I noticed an improvement in students' engagement with their writing; they seemed to care more when their words had the potential to reach a wide audience and effect some change, and the contents of final course projects were informed by what students learned outside of the classroom. However, one student from the class lost their home during the semester. I first wondered how we could arrange for this student to stay in the class, but when they made the informed decision to drop, my attention turned to why they made that decision and whether the class itself was part of the problem. After all, I was asking a student to dedicate time beyond the minimum required contact hours per week to community service while this student was

facing hardships I could not understand. I could not help but notice the brutal irony there.

Thus, although my research into the pedagogy that I have seen work well continues to focus on the good of classroom-based public writing courses for students, stressing the importance of mindful planning and flexibility in service-learning classes, it also underscores the importance of examining critically and closely the effects of service-learning partnerships on community members and organizations. After all, if there were little chance that students in a service-learning class could grow personally, professionally, and civically because of their courses, then true community/student reciprocity (Deans 2000) would be impossible; designing such partnerships to benefit community members and students would pose unjustified risks to communities and students alike. Similarly, if students resisted critical awareness of the social and structural oppression and privilege that cause the problems they encounter, then any student gains would defy that reciprocity, again putting community organizations and members at risk of representing helpless recipients of the academy's ostensibly "good" works.

Much service-learning scholarship contends that the pedagogy fosters deeper, more reflective comprehension of social inequalities and inspires social action among students (Eyler and Giles 1999; Astin et al. 2000; Tucker-Loner 2014). However, my findings are somewhat different. The three case studies presented here suggest that service-learning may not be the tool to teach students that they *should be* socially active, but rather to teach them *how to be* socially active. Barriers to engaging in social action often arise from a lack of experience with it that, in turn, produce resistance based on preconceptions rather than experience. Service-learning in composition can introduce writers to socially engaged activities they would not necessarily encounter otherwise and could possibly resist. It can also help writers grasp threshold concepts in writing, such as audience, genre, and disciplinary identity, and apply these to their plans for social action. Knowledge about social inequities, and even a basic understanding that there are ways to address them, represent the core concepts that students can bring with them to college. When

that knowledge becomes transformative is when those students can learn the particulars of social action and how to do it.

One of the threshold concepts specific to writing studies that proved transformative in this study was “all writers have more to learn” (Rose 2015, 59) insofar as it allowed Michael to move past his self-described “arrogance” and realize that his writing is not intrinsically valuable without an audience there to read it. He himself signaled that this was a transformative realization when he reflected on what he had learned since his first-year writing class and described how writing can face outward, and how a writer can and should be aware of the effects of public writing. Similarly, Juneau learned that “writing addresses, invokes, and/or creates audiences” (Lunsford 2015, 20) when he had to consider public perception of the outward-facing texts he wrote to solicit donations for a community organization, and Skai explained precisely why web pages are academic and social texts that require rhetorical awareness to compose.

Much of the learning Michael, Juneau, and Skai shared was transformative. Whether they learned to reflect on themselves as dynamic writers, what kinds of action they could take through writing in the moment, or what they could do with writing in graduate school or their careers, they recognized some fundamental change in their understanding of writing and rhetoric that allowed them to engage in social action through writing. In other words, their knowledge about social problems and action gave them incentive to write publicly, but the transformative learning they did in college enabled them to do so. Therefore, this study suggests that service-learning does not “convert” students to activism—many students already care about social inequities—but rather has the potential to combine social action and reflection to educate the already “converted” to be more effective and mindful activists, writers, and rhetors.

The three case studies presented above also suggest that students can grow rhetorically after early exposure to community-based study, and I hope to see (and go on to conduct) further study of these effects and how they do or do not change based on the intersections of student identity, institution, and the passage of time. If a service-learning course amounts to one among many experiences that shape writers

over the years, then I see real value in learning how that experience can inform those writers (perhaps in unexpected ways), and what these writers can teach us as university stakeholders, faculty, and administrators as we continually reconsider the field of writing studies and the teaching of writing, as well as what we consider to be valuable writing/rhetorical knowledge.

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## NOTES

- 1 The Conference on Community Writing is sponsored by the Coalition for Community Writing; also see the CCCC Position Statement on Community-Engaged Projects in Rhetoric and Composition at <https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/community-engaged>.
- 2 In addition, Mutnick's 2018, "Pathways to Freedom: From the Archives to the Street" describes student involvement with community archives, but does not highlight the first-year writing classroom, though it shares in the spirit and goals of service-learning scholarship of the 1990s and early 2000s.
- 3 See also Kiely (2005).
- 4 See Lunsford's (2015) threshold concept, "Writing Addresses, Invokes, and/or Creates Audiences (p. 20) in Naming What We Know.
- 5 See also Wenger (2019)

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# Heuristic Tracing And Habits for Learning: Developing Generative Strategies for Understanding Service Learning

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*Higher education research has demonstrated the positive effects of service-learning on students, with particular attention to the increased attainment of institutional outcomes such as retention and graduation. However, traditional assessment models, focused on measuring outcomes, offer few strategies for developing a holistic understanding of service learning environments. In response, this article outlines the process of heuristic tracing, a generative assessment strategy, which can be used to make visible the experiences that can not only support students' learning gains but also value the engagement of all service learning participants—including instructors and community partners. Heuristic tracing can help stakeholders better understand the habits, attitudes, and experiences of learning that are central to service learning pedagogy.*

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## **UNDERSTANDING SERVICE LEARNING— WHAT'S MEASURED; WHAT'S MISSED?**

In recent years, increased empirical assessments have demonstrated the positive impact of service learning pedagogies in

meeting institutional outcomes for student success, specifically with regard to retention and graduation rates (Lockeman and Pelco 2013) and undergraduate student GPA (Mungo 2017). In addition, service learning experience has been identified as a predictor for students' developed sense of persistence, which leads to increased reenrollment rates (Reed, Rosenberg, Staham, and Rosing 2015). Service learning's impact in this regard has been shown to be equally efficacious for full and part-time students (Reed, Rosenberg, Staham, and Rosing 2015), and for students of color (Mungo 2017). It is no surprise then, that college campuses and their respective instructional faculty continue to invest resources into such endeavors.

Running parallel to the connection of service learning to broader institutional concerns (e.g., retention, graduation rates, etc.), we have seen a similar broadening of the conversations about effective writing pedagogy. Scholarly conversations have embraced the necessity of integrating students' experiences and measuring student and program success through more than achievements of course-level outcomes. One document that evidences this shift is the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (Council of Writing Program Administrators et al. 2011), which reframes the conversation about "college readiness" by emphasizing the kinds of experiences with and attitudes toward learning that benefit developing college-level writers. According to the *Framework* (2011), the habits of mind—openness, creativity, curiosity, engagement, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, and metacognition—offer "ways of approaching learning that are both intellectual and practical and that will support students' success in a variety of fields" (1). The characteristics outlined in the *Framework* highlight the discursive shift toward inclusion of habits, attitudes, or characteristics that cannot be measured in the same way as traditional course-level outcomes, which tend to focus on students' mastery or demonstration of skills.

For many of us who have been employing service learning pedagogies in college-level writing classes, the attention to "habits" such as engagement and persistence seems somewhat intuitive: they are the kinds of attitudes we've been attempting to foster even if we've never articulated them as such. However, knowing how to account for the role and relevance of these habits in high-impact courses such as those

that integrate service learning and writing can be difficult (Kuh and O'Donnell 2013). Krzus-Shaw (2017), for instance, notes the evidence of developing habits in her discussion of her service learning class: “though not necessarily a stated course objective, I would also argue that [students] were demonstrating a number of ‘habits of mind,’ which have been repeatedly linked to long-term college success” (360). Krzus-Shaw suggests that habits such as “perseverance, creativity, engagement, and responsibility, among others” were evident in her students’ interactions; yet, she had no systematic way to trace their emergence because the cultivation of habits could not be captured through existing course or programmatic assessments.

As program leaders and instructors who contributed the integration of service learning in a subset of our program’s first-year composition courses, we felt resonance with Krzus-Shaw’s observations about the misalignment between service-learning’s impacts and our program’s traditional assessment measures, so we sought a strategy that would help us examine the dynamic environments created by service-learning pedagogy.<sup>1</sup> Our first-year writing courses were offered by an English Department on the main campus of a large, public, land grant university with a research intensive classification. At the time of our project, the university enrolled approximately 40,000 students (30,000 undergraduate and 10,000 graduate and professional students); the first-year writing program enrolled approximately 6,000 students each year and offered four different courses that met the same graduation requirement for writing. The program director decided to integrate service learning into the “advanced” composition option for first year students, making service learning a required component and distinguishing feature for this course.

In the new service learning-focused version of this composition course, instructors and students partnered with community organizations to write *for* or *with* an organization as a course project (see Deans (2000) for discussion of models including writing “for,” “with,” and “about”). Students and instructors, for example, produced community-facing videos and documents for City Hall and a local nature preserve. This approach necessitated that instructors and students continuously respond to the variables that arose as the service learning projects unfolded, developing and honing new skills

as they were needed. Therefore, much of the learning that took place for participants happened in the moment and was situationally responsive, akin to a stance. Capturing learning in these courses then became particularly challenging under assessment models predicated on measuring predetermined outcomes.

In this article, we outline heuristic tracing, a strategy that re-envision assessment as a site through which we can better understand the habits of learning that are integral to service learning. We use the term *heuristic traces* to suggest that the habits are traceable without becoming the objects of assessment and that program participants can collaboratively contribute to the articulation and redefinition of these habits for learning. Such an approach aligns assessment practices with service learning's "intention to... ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring" (Furco 1996, 5) and moves the conversation away from *measuring only student learning* toward *listening to all program participants*. This shift in the focus of assessment is necessary for those who aim to better understand the environments, conditions, and contexts that support meaningful service learning engagement.

## **DISTINGUISHING HABITS FOR LEARNING FROM LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Throughout this article, we use the term "habits" to describe attitudes and dispositions that have been linked to effective learning. The *Framework* (2011) provides a well-developed, although not exhaustive, series of such habits or behaviors that support successful learning in writing. While we want to call attention to similar habits for service learning, we are not suggesting that service learning instructors make these habits, such as curiosity or persistence, the outcomes for their courses. We maintain that course outcomes and habits for learning are separate but productive parts of program design and development.

This differentiation between outcomes and habits is important. Scholars have pointed to problems with positioning habits as outcomes. For example, Kristine Johnson (2013) cautions, "when habits of mind are outcomes, we must assume that they can be taught—a position that could again lead to ideological and political exclusion" (536). Asao Inoue (2019) reminds us that the move away

from ranking outcomes becomes deceptive if the habits are used by departments as another mechanism through which to judge student performance. Additionally, we believe that positioning habits *for learning* as if they should be outcomes *for demonstration* changes their potential. Course outcomes are often positioned as something we expect students to demonstrate and, therefore, ask them to perform. However, when we ask students to perform habits such as curiosity, so that we can measure it, the activity students perform is no longer curiosity: curiosity cannot really be curiosity once it is mandated by an external force. Rather than substituting habits for outcomes, we seek to reposition the habits as an important facet of learning alongside course outcomes, using heuristic tracing to understand how students who are engaged in service learning articulate their learning experiences.

The emphasis on listening to students and making space for their articulations of learning repositions learners as contributory experts rather than novices, in turn, positioning those who usually take up the expert role (the faculty, the program director, the assessment team) as learners who need to understand the ways of knowing that are being enacted by others and themselves. Service learning assessment is ripe for such reenvisioning of roles, as service learning courses themselves aim to instill collaborative skills in course and project design, and thusly, service learning assessment should account for this pedagogical feature. Heuristic tracing offers a mechanism through which the participants can collectively contribute to an understanding of the habits that foster their learning because this strategy does not have to begin with a predetermined set of habits that are confirmed. This generative possibility for heuristic tracing promises a different positioning for the habits of learning. Through heuristic tracing, habits for learning are not merely static but rather dynamic and reinvented through the tracing process. This shift moves away from the problematic suggestion that “all it takes to be ‘successful’ is to have the ‘right’ habits” (Summerfield and Anderson 2012, 545) and toward a recognition that understanding the habits demands understanding those developing them. Such engagement of learners as contributors furthers Brian Huot’s argument to involve students in “instructive evaluation” by inviting them into the assessment process (2002, 69). The focus, however, is not on their involvement in the evaluation of their work but rather their involvement in articulating of their

learning experiences, knowledge-making practices, and developing expertise in the context of service learning.

To support the differentiation between habits and outcomes, we adopt language of “emergences,” highlighting the more fluid process of the habits coming to be through a specific environment of learning, rather than the causal relationship that outcomes suggests. This move also supports an approach to writing assessment as part of an ecology in which students are treated as “agents in the ecology” (Inoue 2015, p. 84). By allowing service learning students and instructors to reflect on and respond to questions about themselves as situated writers and learners, rather than focusing on their texts or service projects, we aim to shift assessment dynamics. Such a shift is especially pertinent for service learning environments and other engaged learning environments where knowledge work is distributed among students, faculty, and community partners (Getto, Leon, and Rivait 2014).

## KEY ELEMENTS OF HEURISTIC TRACING

Heuristic tracing builds upon Cushman, Getto, and Ghosh’s (2011) concept of “heuristic stages,” which they use to describe a framework for ethically producing digital compositions with community partners. The heuristic stages process “begins with meaning-making practices already in place in the community being represented... [and then] products and practices are developed in deep and respectful collaboration with and in light of existing practices...” through increased understanding of heuristics, or ways of knowing, within that community (173). Similarly, we see *heuristic traces* as evidence of emergent ways of knowing that can be made visible by adapting new practices within existing assessment structures.

While the specific environments in which heuristic tracing can be used will vary from institution to institution or course to course, heuristic tracing involves three key elements:

1. Heuristic tracing recognizes the contributory expertise of program participants.
2. Heuristic tracing prompts reflexivity through its design.

3. Heuristic tracing examines participant narratives for emergences of habits, dispositions, or strategies.

Much like the heuristic research methodologies that Sullivan and Porter (1993) describe as important to the field of Professional Writing, our approach was interactive in its implementation. We were not simply “reporting on” practices but also providing a space in which participants could conceptualize, articulate, and potentially change their practices, and implementing an allowance for the program to shift and change dynamically as heuristic tracing. In this section, we outline the key elements of heuristic tracing as a strategy, and we contextualize these elements by describing the ways we implemented them. Although we were unable to include community partner data at the time of our tracing, we see potential for tracing community partners’ experiences, an opportunity we further discuss in our conclusion.

*1) Heuristic tracing recognizes the contributory expertise of program participants*

Heuristic tracing positions all participants as potential contributors to a better understanding of the learning context. This approach acknowledges that learning, knowledge-making, and meaningful engagement take a range of forms for students, instructors, and community partners. When the attention shifts from measuring learning to understanding its contexts, program leaders can acknowledge the potential for a range of participants to contribute new knowledge and new ways of understanding habits for learning. In order to acknowledge the expertise of all program participants—a goal often cited in service learning pedagogy—heuristic tracing engages participants in constructing and revisiting their own articulations of learning. This inclusive approach is crucial because even the resistant student who says she isn’t learning or the community partner who may not have gotten exactly what they expected out of the partnership has important insights to offer about the obstacles to effective engagement.

In our tracing, we worked to expand the typical targets for assessment, including not only students but also instructors. This expanded focus supports the positioning of instructors as learners (Leon, Pinkert,

and Taylor 2017) and suggests that, if we take instructor learning seriously, our assessment designs should, too. To meaningfully engage students and instructors, we designed qualitative survey responses, journal prompts, and interview questions that acknowledged participants as the experts regarding their experience and allowed them to articulate their experiences of learning. As heuristic tracing allows the procedures of assessment to become more broadly learner-centered, we see potential to not only focus on what students *and* instructors learn about writing and learning/teaching but also on what service-learning partners learn about community engagement.

*2) Heuristic tracing prompts reflexivity*

By engaging participants in an examination and articulation of their learning experience, heuristic tracing is, by design, a reflexive activity. We know that reflection is vital to learning in writing and in service learning courses because reflection allows learners to connect learning across both learning spaces and time (Yancey 2016). Heuristic tracing creates the conditions for tracing the habits by employing assessment strategies that prompt reflexivity. In asking students, instructors, and/or community partners to describe and reflect on their experiences, heuristic tracing not only highlights their expertise, but also initiates learning through dialogic focus on their coming to be as writers, teachers, and engaged citizens (Hallman and Burdick 2018).

*3) Heuristic tracing analyzes participant narratives for habits*

Heuristic tracing relies on the collection of participant narrative, but it recognizes that participants can be prompted to not only share but also reconsider their narratives through carefully crafted combinations of open and closed ended questions. Unlike typical outcomes-based assessments which often involve scoring of writing, heuristic tracing involves the collection of narratives—written, verbal, or otherwise constructed. In our case, we engaged instructors in writing and articulating their narratives through a combination of open-ended journaling prompts distributed throughout the term in which they were teaching and a focus group interview that revisited the topics about which they'd written, allowing them to reflect and reframe their earlier narratives. Additionally, we engaged students in writing their narratives through qualitative survey questions

that asked students to reflect on their writing experiences, scenario-based questions that asked students to connect their learning across spaces, and quantitative questions that asked students to rank important learning outcomes. Such an approach allowed us to attend to habits for learning as they emerged within students' reflections on their learning. By shaping the quantitative rankings around our program's existing learning outcomes, we were able to measure students' perceptions of disciplinary and programmatic learning. By using qualitative questions, we enabled students to reflect on their experiences with writing, and thus were able to trace more emergent types of learning that extended beyond our programmatic outcomes. For example, in the qualitative responses that asked students to reflect on their experiences in FYC and to identify what they found to be most valuable about the course, students revealed aspects of learning that were not reflected in our programmatic outcomes, such as an increased awareness of education's purpose and the value of writing outside the classroom. This engagement of students' own articulations of learning can be especially instructive in service learning classrooms because of the emphasis on helping students apply their learning to contexts outside of classrooms.

## **IMPLEMENTING SURVEYS, JOURNAL PROMPTS, AND INTERVIEWS AS HEURISTIC**

Our implementation of heuristic tracing gathered data from 275+ students and three instructors in service learning and non-service learning first-year composition courses. To make space for narratives, we collected data from students and instructors through closed and open-ended survey questions. While modified versions of the instruments could be distributed to community partners, this article reports only the tracing of student and instructor responses collected in the four service learning sections that we studied. Instructors and student participants completed separate surveys; additionally, instructors responded to journaling prompts during the terms in which they taught their course and participated in a group interview after the conclusion of their course.

To prompt reflexivity, the student survey moved away from asking students only about their current composition class and instead asked them to *describe* three writing situations (one academic, one

professional, and one social). This strategy allowed us not only to see what kinds of scenarios students described for their writing but also to see how the service learning students positioned their service learning projects (as academic, professional, or social), if they mentioned them at all. After the students described their writing scenarios, the survey then asked them to quantitatively select and rank factors that were most important to their success in each of those writing situations. (See Table 1.) The list of factors contributing to successful writing was not exhaustive because, in an attempt to avoid survey fatigue, we tried to keep the list relatively short.

**TABLE 1: FACTORS INCLUDED ON STUDENT SURVEY**

What others had previously said or published about my topic
What others would think of my ideas
My ability to meet my reader’s expectations
The ability of my writing to address larger problems beyond the classroom
Learning about myself in the process
Using the best medium for the message
Knowing how people usually write this kind of document

The factors we included were intended to be student-friendly adaptations of concepts included in our first year writing program’s Goals, Means, and Outcomes (GMOs), which focused on students’ growth in rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking/reading/writing, writing processes, knowledge of conventions, and technology. After ranking relevant factors, students were asked to *reflect* on the strategies that they used to make each writing situation successful, providing narrative descriptions in students’ own language of the ways that they employed the factors that they prioritized. Asking students to identify what they wrote in each of the scenarios and to explain what made it effective in their own words also served as a reflective moment for students, as they had to develop language to describe their writing and/or articulate what made it effective. It also positioned the students as experts who could articulate factors for success. In an effort to see how students’ learning may or may not be

connected to what they were learning in their composition courses, we included a final question that asked students to *describe* the most valuable thing that they learned in their composition course during the current semester. This helped us to situate classroom-based learning and course outcomes alongside the learning and habits that students described in relationship to the writing scenarios. Overall, this design gave students an opportunity to reflect back on their writing experiences and use their own language to describe those experiences, and gave us as program leaders an opportunity to learn how students characterized their learning. This reflexive component was integral to tracing the habits for learning that emerged.

Recognizing the contributory role that instructors could play, we focused our interactions with instructors on the kinds of learning they might do as they began teaching service learning courses. At the beginning of the semester, three instructor-participants took an online survey delivered to them via email. The survey incorporated both qualitative and quantitative questions about the participants' roles as teachers, the role of reflection in their classes and their teaching, the most important things that students learn in their writing classes, as well as a problem that they encountered in their writing classrooms and their strategies for solving it. In addition to the initial online survey, instructor-participants also received emailed invitations to respond to four brief writing prompts about their teaching experiences during weeks 3, 6, 9, and 12 of the semester. (See Table 2.)

**TABLE 2: WEEKLY WRITING PROMPTS FOR INSTRUCTORS**

Week	Topic	Writing Prompt
Week 3	Planning	Briefly describe the service learning components in your course for this semester. At this point in the semester, do you foresee yourself making any changes to your initial plans for the course? Are there still aspects of the course that are not yet solidified?
Week 6	Reflection	Since the beginning of the semester, what kinds of reflection are your <i>students</i> doing? What has been the purpose of the reflection and has this changed in the past six weeks? Do you anticipate changing the role student reflection plays in your course? Since the beginning of the semester, what kinds of reflection have you done <u>as an instructor</u> ? How has this influenced your teaching?
Week 9	Teacher's Role	What role have you found yourself, as a teacher, playing in the writing classroom in the past few weeks? How does this compare to your initial survey response?
Week 12	Learning	What are the three most important things that students have learned in your class this semester? What did you learn as an instructor?

To contextualize the survey responses with additional narrative explanations, we invited instructors to participate in a follow-up group interview regarding their teaching experiences. The group interview was based on the instructors' survey and writing prompt responses, and included the following questions:

1. How do you think your students perceived you and your role?
2. In your writing responses, you indicated a shift in your role when teaching service learning. What made you feel like you needed to make this shift?

3. A lot of your reflection is about your role in the classroom. How did you think about your relationship with the people outside the classroom (community members, service learning partners, etc.)?
4. In your writing responses, we noticed an emphasis on your position within the classroom environment. Can you elaborate on how service learning changes the environment of the classroom?
5. Now that the semester is over, do you have any further reflections about your experience teaching service learning for the first time?

While the collection of narrative responses took additional time compared to the typical close-ended and outcomes-focused assessment techniques, this qualitative data enabled us to hear student and instructor values and also prompted a reflective cycle of learning and collective knowledge-making for all participants—including those of us assessing. Such collection of qualitative assessment data aligns well with similar moves to expand or reframe the role that assessment can play in writing programs (Broad 2003). By implementing heuristic tracing, we situated assessment as an activity to support what Scott and Pinkert have called integrative techne—“a capacity for intentionally enacting, connecting, and articulating learning as a principle-driven, adaptable, and cross-contextual knowledge-making experience” (Scott and Pinkert forthcoming 2020). An integrative techne framework aligns well with heuristic tracing as it recognizes that learning is honed, developed, and habituated through practices and experiences. Our approach then is one grounded in the fundamental assumption that the participants in our service learning classrooms—the students, the instructors, and the community partners—have valuable insights to share, and that these insights can (and should) drive not only our curricular purpose but also our intentional design of moments through which all participants can articulate and connect their learning across contexts.

## **HEURISTIC-TRACING AT WORK: EMERGENCES OF SERVICE LEARNING**

In the following sections, we draw on the narrative responses to provide examples of students’ and instructors’ own articulation of three particular habits for learning that emerged within our

programmatic assessment: engagement, persistence, and flexibility. As noted above, we collected multiple types of data from both students and instructors. Using context clues, we analyzed responses for topic chains that articulated habits—activities, strategies, and dispositions—for learning. After identifying and coding these articulations, we completed a second level of analysis using Grounded Theory to develop an open coding schema (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2013) that identified the habit(s) on which the activities, strategies, and dispositions centered. An open coding schema allowed for the analysis to follow the participant-generated data in this study.

The examples we discuss in the following sections reveal how habits for learning emerged as learning practices enacted by both students and instructors—and served as experiential examples of habits rather than as static, assessable “states of being” (O’Neill et al. 2012, 545). The collection of such qualitative responses also enabled us to construct narratives of experience that shed light on the conditions that facilitated learning in these service learning contexts.

*Emergences of Engagement as a Condition for other Learning Activities*

Participant narratives repositioned engagement as an integral link between different learning activities for both students and instructors. For example, when reflecting on the most valuable learning outcomes of their composition courses, students in the service learning courses described their engagement with the greater community and their attempts to use writing to address community problems. The *Framework* defines engagement as “a sense of investment and involvement in learning” and suggests that engagement is fostered through experiences in making various connections. Such connections may be made between their own ideas and those of others, between the meanings they bring to a project and those that emerge through experience, and between students’ newly gained understandings and their decisions to take action.

Engagement also emerged within our results as students emphasized “deep” learning in their composition classrooms. One student in particular wrote that she learned to “dig deeper” and “find hidden meanings.” Another student noted that “composition isn’t just about creating perfect papers.” Yet another student connected learning

the “deeper purposes” of composition with addressing community and civic problems. Among other indications of learning related to engagement with the course, other responses focused on writing as action, writing as discovery, and writing as a “messy process” that involved leaving one’s “comfort zone” to take risks. While these students did not always use the word engagement to describe their feelings, habits, or activities, their responses highlighted that being engaged is a necessary precursor to a willingness to take risks and identify complexity.

The instructors participating in our assessment similarly described conditions for engagement as they reflected on the shifts in their teaching roles after adopting a new service learning pedagogy. In the initial survey prior to teaching their first service learning course, one instructor noted a problem in his teaching as struggling with student motivation to complete a group project. The instructor’s response was to have the students regularly check in to ensure that the project deadlines were being met. While this most likely resulted in increased engagement with the course and the project, it is telling to see how engagement was seen as vital to their service learning courses. Rather than just implement check-ins, the instructor described re-evaluating their pedagogical approach, which included an active relocation of themselves and their positioning in the service learning class as a necessary condition of student engagement.

The re-evaluation of their pedagogy included an active relocation of themselves in the classroom metaphorically and figuratively. More so than in their previous “traditional” first-year composition courses, the instructors indicated taking a “hands off approach” to teaching in order to encourage engagement—an approach that, at first, may sound antithetical to engagement but that, in fact, encouraged students to engage anew. In a weekly journal response, one instructor described a scene where they sat up on the window sill, out of the way, so the students would become more actively involved in discussion and project planning, explaining, “now’s the time when they do their work, whereas they’re not actually engaged the other times.” During our follow-up group interview, all instructors reflected on how the physical relocation of their own teacher bodies prompted a shift in the learning environment. When reflecting on the necessity of

taking a step back from being at the center of the classroom, one instructor added: “[the students] are responsible for doing their service. If I’m telling them what to do, then they’re not engaged...” The instructor here draws a parallel with students doing service and being engaged: throughout the instructor responses, the two are treated as interconnected.

Although instructors did not specifically name engagement as an integral student learning experience in their initial surveys, the need to foster engagement became a centralized experience for all of the instructors we interviewed. Arguably, engagement also emerged as a learning experience for instructors. In their initial surveys, instructors indicated that they planned and taught their courses by speaking with other instructors and drawing on past materials or experiences. While teaching their first service learning class, instructors explained, they were adapting their pedagogy in the moment in response to the rhetorical situation of the class, the service learning project, and the classroom environment, as it related to fostering student engagement. Instructors learned to be more engaged and responsive teachers of writing as their students also participated in engaged tasks and projects.

*Emergences of Flexibility as Both Response to Writing and Concept for Writing*

When asked to identify the most important outcomes from their service-learning course, our student-participants often mentioned a kind of flexibility that appears to result from “writing for an audience that is public and not just a teacher” and writing for “a larger audience than in the classroom.” As we would speculate, writing for these audiences allowed students to respond to the current situation at hand and determine how best to communicate to a given audience. One student engaged in a local government-based service learning partnership explained: “I think the most valuable thing I learned about was professional writing and interaction. I wrote many things that were ultimately sent out to a partner working for the city government...I developed some real world experience in communicating and meeting the expectations of someone other than my teacher.”

To write for outside audiences, students learned that they had to be adaptable in terms of what they expected to know and write for in an English class. As one student indicated, she had expected to write more traditional papers but learned that “there are so many places for writing outside of the classroom. Writing doesn’t always have to be in the form of a literary analysis or research paper.” Writing for an audience other than the teacher also necessarily assumes that students must adapt their writing and be willing to take on different styles, tones, and genres for those audiences. As we analyzed the responses, we saw traces of a willingness from students to be flexible as they address diverse audience expectations and develop an understanding of how that ability adds value to their learning. This perspective on flexibility aligned well with the description outlined in the *Framework*: the ability to “adapt to situations, expectations, or demands” (2011). The *Framework* ties the habit of flexibility to approaching writing in ways that are dependent on task and audience, situating expectations such as citation conventions within larger contexts, such as academic disciplines or writing exigency, and reflecting on choices one makes in response to a given writing scenario.

However, when adding to this our understanding of conditions for flexibility, students noted that flexibility was not only a habit they might develop in response to situations but also to a newly found understanding of writing as something that is in flux and not pre-determined. For some students, flexibility meant moving away from composition as production to composing as “discovery,” with effectiveness as something that is contestable and changeable in interactions with different audiences and purposes. This required “thinking outside of the box” and, as one student noted, using different mediums: “I learned that composition isn’t just about writing perfect papers but is rather the creating of something using many different mediums.” Learning what to use and how to create within different contexts and mediums appears to be a habit of flexibility facilitated by service learning, as students saw writing as an unfolding process with means and ends that may not be clear from the outset. As one student explained:

There are multiple ways to approach a problem, and at times, the best way doesn’t make itself apparent until when it’s inconvenient.

Though I would never recommend procrastinating, there were moments when, because I waited a bit longer than I would have liked, the final project was much more efficient and attractive. It may have made the project more difficult as a whole, but the end result benefitted because of it.

In a way similar to students' responses, flexibility for instructors involved learning to adapt their pedagogy to fit the new rhetorical situation of the classroom. One instructor wrote that more so than in their other classes, their service learning project (and class) was less planned ahead of time. Indeed, teaching service learning seemed to facilitate the instructors relying less on predetermining how and what students would accomplish and more on allowing learning to unfold, with students taking on more agency for the learning. Another instructor attested that when she moved away from the front of the classroom, students ended up taking charge and getting everything planned. She reflected in our group interview that, "maybe we needed a day like that where my external authority needed to be removed in order for that to happen." A third instructor added that service learning was "a lot about trusting them [students] to take responsibility." For the instructors, teaching a new pedagogy went hand in hand with becoming aware of the value of flexibility as a teacher.

#### *Emergences of Failure as Integral to the Development of Persistence*

To see the success of being engaged and flexible means that the students had to follow through with their choices to reach course goals and to see their writing in action. In other words, they had to develop "persistence: the ability to sustain interest in and attention to short- and long-term projects" (*Framework* 2011). A student response provides a useful analogy: "[the writing for my service project] was a little different than just what I had written before. Using analogy, it was like now I solved and built a house using my Math and Science knowledge whereas before I only solved for equations and problems for Math and Science." To see the house built means that students cannot stop part way; rather they must be persistent in order to achieve their goals, and as another student indicates, not shy away from the oftentimes tedious diligence it may take to ensure success:

The most valuable thing I learned is the need for attention to detail when composing. When you are writing for a public audience, every rhetorical detail of your piece makes an impact and must be carefully considered. Taking the time to scrutinize every element of your work can pay dividends in terms of accomplishing the goal of persuading [sic] your audience.

Although the student couches persistence and diligence in terms of “persuading your audience,” this student’s response evidences a willingness to fully engage in the process of writing and to see both the short-term (attention to detail) and long-term (accomplishing the goal) persistence required of this process.

Another element of persistence that emerged across the students and the instructor data sets was the acknowledgement of failure as a learning outcome for the course. Congruent with students who described writing as a “messy process” that involves risk-taking and necessitates “being unafraid of failure,” instructors also all noted in their responses how they had learned the value of “failure before success”—and for giving space for this in the classroom. This pushed instructors to “grapple with challenging ideas, texts, processes, or projects.” Instructors noted that, more so than in their previous “traditional” composition courses, students in their service learning courses revised and revised again until a project was “professional.” Revision was not tied to a preset required number of instances—you’ll write three drafts and then a final version—instead, it was responsive—we’ll keep revising until it’s in a format that can be shared with the community partner. This recognition of necessary flexibility in response to service learning also paralleled instructors’ processes for course planning. Instructors noted that their course planning shifted away from predetermined calendars and guidelines to instead, as one instructor participant put it: “emphasize how a capable writer must figure out for him/herself what characteristics a given piece of writing should have based on its rhetorical situation.” Redefining themselves as primarily facilitators in the service learning classroom, instructors indicated having to take a step back to allow students to discover their own answers to problems; giving this space to students enabled them to become more responsible for their own learning.

The learning experiences evident within the above examples depend upon instructors and students acknowledging that habits of mind like engagement, flexibility, and persistence cannot be artificially extracted from one another. Tracing habits for learning within the practices and sentiments of students and instructors reveals the ways in which students engage with the world around them and learn to see writing as integral to that engagement. Habits for learning, in these instances, are not predetermined outcomes, but rather heuristic traces that emerge within both students' and instructors' reflections on learning.

### *Emergences and Implications*

Through heuristic tracing, we developed a better understanding of the environments that would support our students' and instructors' development in service learning courses. For example, by understanding students' descriptions of engagement and instructors' redefinition of engagement, we were better able to prepare service-learning instructors to consider the ways that engagement in an active, service-learning classroom might, in fact, appear very different from their expectations. That is, actions that they might have traditionally perceived as disengagement—leaning on the wall, sitting on the windowsill, etc.—could be purposeful physical moves that removed the teacher's embodied authority in order to reinforce the shared responsibility of all members of the service-learning class. This insight had implications not only for adjusting teacher training but also for reexamining other programmatic processes such as teaching observations in which certain kinds of activity and certain teacher placements are sometimes privileged.

Additionally, by understanding the integral role that failure played in the service learning classes we studied, we developed new ways to help instructors make time and space for failure and to communicate to students the expectations for their work and its quality. This often involved emphasizing that writing situations beyond the classroom require constant, regular revision and revisitation across many moments and across different writers. The reimagining of the students' roles and the potential of their "failures" to help answer a question or develop an alternate strategy, further aided students and instructors in reimagining their roles as contributors rather than

culminators—a positioning that better reflects the reciprocal nature of the service-learning relationships our program aimed to cultivate.

## **LEARNING TO SEE HABITS OF SERVICE LEARNING THROUGH HEURISTIC TRACING**

Heuristic tracing helped us understand habits of learning as they emerged within the service learning contexts of our composition program. By including students' reflective responses alongside reflections from instructors, heuristic tracing enabled us to gain a broader view of learning across all participants in the service learning classrooms. While many assessments focus only on student learning, our combined participant pool of instructors and students offered valuable insight into the relationship between instructor and student learning. Habits for learning, in this case, were not limited to students; they were just as recognizable in instructors' reflections: both instructors and students tended to espouse their learning—about engaging with audiences outside the classroom, adapting to community expectations, and persisting with multiple revisions for better results—in ways that aligned with the habits of mind.

As we noted earlier, at the time of our tracing, we were working not only to expand the kinds of activities included in programmatic assessment but also to expand the participants. Through heuristic tracing, we were able to extend inclusion to instructors with the intention to include community partner data in subsequent tracing activities. While this article does not report on our tracing with the community partners involved in these service learning courses, we see great potential for integrating the narratives of community partner experience to triangulate and contextualize the student and instructor narratives. Additionally, we imagine fruitful possibilities for activities such as focus groups that include members from each group of participants—students, instructors, community partners, and program leaders—in order to facilitate conversation and reflection that draws from a range of expertise and experience with the service-learning activities. By including further data from partners, we might consider whether the habits that emerged were productive (or not) for the community partners involved and whether these emergences aligned or conflicted with their goals and approaches, especially as the habits that are typically defined in formal statements or scholarly

conversations tend to privilege school and career readiness (Gross and Alexander 2016). For example, in the course in which students worked with partners at city hall to develop videos that raised community awareness of local history, our informal conversations with the community partners highlighted the levels of experience expected of students who may or may not have had previous access to structured support for composing videos. Heuristic tracing could have structured opportunities for community partners to articulate these expectations, allowing the partners to teach the students and instructors about those expectations and to learn about the limits inherent in partnering with a composition course as opposed to an advanced one.

By extending heuristic tracing to community partners, composition program participants might better understand community expectations for writing and the ways those expectations align with or diverge from their program's aims. Such contextualized learning about local community perceptions could help program leaders to develop outreach regarding the possibilities for composing and/or to integrate broader community perspectives into the ways they articulate and create program goals. By creating mechanisms for involving all program participants in articulating service learning's value and understanding the elements that are key to its effectiveness, heuristic tracing offer a meaningful, participatory model of engagement and assessment.

Opening programmatic assessment to heuristic tracing also better reflects an ecological model of classroom environments. We end this article with a claim then, that heuristic tracing ultimately endeavors to shape service learning environments. For us, heuristic tracing productively affirmed beliefs we had about the affordances of service learning, as well as what made the classroom experiences in these service learning and non-service learning courses distinct. At the same time, it shifted our perception of the primary learning outcomes for students and helped to highlight what students valued about effective writing inside and outside of the classroom. In this way then, heuristic tracing is an assessment approach that is less about measuring what we or students know in order to uphold our student learning outcomes, and more about positioning assessment

as an opportunity for collaborative, programmatic learning and change. Such opportunity for change is not unique to service learning contexts, and we see great promise for the practice of heuristic tracing in other high impact learning environments that seek to harness context and environment as catalysts for habits of learning that are often left untraced.

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## NOTES

- 1 We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Kathryn Trauth Taylor to the collection and preliminary analysis of the student and instructor data that is discussed throughout this article. Katie was an invaluable member of the initial research team whose insight shaped our development of the strategies we describe here as heuristic tracing.

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# The Muted Group Video Project: Amplifying the Voices of Latinx Immigrant Students

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*During the Summer 2019 semester, Writing & Rhetoric students at Florida International University, a public Hispanic-Serving Institution in Miami, Florida, engaged with Muted Group Theory to both understand and challenge the silencing of immigrant voices. Specifically, the FIU students, the majority of whom identified as Hispanic, created video messages for a local third grade class predominantly made up of immigrant students. The videos spotlight the students' personal experiences with immigration, incorporate multiple languages, and explore themes such as cultural diversity and welcoming immigrant students into the classroom. Following the creation of the videos, the college students participated in a video chat with the third graders. This article offers an overview of the video project, student reflections, and guidelines for future pedagogical implementation. In addition, I reflect on the importance of pedagogical flexibility in the classroom and the ways in which multilingualism can expand our understanding of multimodality.*

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## TEACHING RHETORIC AT A HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION

Traditional pedagogical practices in the US public education system often discredit, ignore, and/or devalue Latinx experiences (Medina 2013; Montgomery and O’Neil 2017; Villa and Figueroa 2018). This can happen in two ways: first, by excluding Latinx cultural and linguistic practices, pedagogies promote the “the silencing of Latinx students’ voices” (Montgomery and O’Neil 2017, 42). Second, when pedagogies do include Latinx experiences, they are often framed by a “public and institutional rhetoric of cultural deficiency” (Medina 2013, 53). Both of these practices ultimately discourage Latinx students from viewing their culture and language as valid and valuable sources of knowledge.

This is especially significant at the institution where I work: Florida International University (FIU), a designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in Miami, Florida. As of July 2019, FIU’s “About” page describes the school as a public research university with approximately 54,000 undergraduate and graduate students, over 60% of whom identify as Hispanic.<sup>1</sup> Thus, one of my priorities as an instructor within FIU’s Writing and Rhetoric Program is to work against the “rhetoric of cultural deficiency” by making pedagogical decisions that value my students’ diverse languages, situated knowledge, and cultural experiences.

This goal remained in the forefront of my mind as I prepared to teach Rhetorical Theory and Practice during the Summer 2019 semester. According to the course syllabus, Rhetorical Theory and Practice is an upper-level undergraduate course that aims to help students “analyze rhetorical principles, ideas, and terminology in local discourse practice.” As I considered the fact that twenty-two of the twenty-four students in that class identified as Hispanic, I kept mulling over the phrase “local discourse practice.” What might this phrase mean with these particular students?<sup>2</sup> What work could we do that semester that would meaningfully integrate their local

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1 Here, I use the term “Hispanic” to reflect the language of the Hispanic Serving Institution in which I work. However, in line with Jasmine Villa and Taylor Figueroa, I primarily use the term “Latinx” “to reflect the fluidity of identity markers” (2017-2018, 70) throughout this discussion.

discourse practices? I discovered one answer in a community-based project I call the Muted Group Video Project, a digital project in which the college students created video messages for a local third grade class predominantly made up of immigrant students. The project showcases the college students' experiences growing up in an unfamiliar culture and their thoughts on what it means to have an immigrant identity.

## **MUTED GROUP THEORY, HISPANIC IMMIGRANTS, AND THE MEDIA**

The Muted Group Video Project is rooted in a rhetorical theory called Muted Group Theory, a perspective first introduced to the field of Communications by Cheris Kramarae in 1981. According to Kramarae, "since accepted language practices have been constructed primarily by men in order to express their experiences, women have thus been muted" (Barkman 2018, 3). Since Kramarae's initial discussion, Muted Group Theory has been used to conceptualize the discourse practices of other marginalized groups, including prisoners, graduate students, and entry-level employees. Subordinate groups such as these often find "their speech is disrespected... their knowledge is not considered sufficient...their experiences are interpreted for them by others" (Barkman 2018, 55). Although Muted Group Theory can and has been applied to diverse groups, given our local context, our discussion of Muted Group Theory circulated around the silencing of Hispanic immigrants.

As we discussed Muted Group Theory, the students described times in which they had felt muted by media reports, and it quickly became clear how deeply this theory resonated with their experiences. As a class, we first made a list of the inaccurate stories being told about immigrants: immigrants are lazy; immigrants are stealing jobs; immigrants are uneducated. We then found news articles and reports that perpetuated these stories. Given the position of the current White House administration on immigration, we did not have to look further than the "Immigration" page on the White House website. Here, we found remarks, videos, and other written documents that cast immigrants in derogatory ways. For instance, as of May 2018, according to the current President and Vice President, immigrants are "aliens...threatening lives" and the reason that "drugs pour across our border." They are "gang members and criminals...some of the

worst people anywhere in the world.” I gave the students time to work in small groups and discuss the rhetoric of these texts, asking them to consider, for example, the undertone of phrases such as *illegal alien* and *undocumented immigrant*. I prompted them to discuss which of these phrases they prefer and why. As I circulated around the room, I could hear students sharing with one another the ways in which these depictions of immigrants contradicted their own lived experiences.

When we came back together as a class, we returned to Muted Group Theory. We recalled that Muted Group Theory highlights the ways in which marginalized groups often find that “their experiences are interpreted for them by others” (Barkman 2018, 55), and we discovered that the theory offered a productive lens for us to more fully understand the silencing of Hispanic immigrants. Put simply, as our exploration of media depictions revealed, the stories told *about* immigrants were rarely told *by* them. As a result, these stories were often slanted, inaccurate, and harmful depictions of immigrant identities, “not the complete and real stories” (Villa and Figueroa 2018, 74). However, the stories I heard during the small group discussions were “complete and real stories” told by people with first-hand knowledge, and so I invited students to reflect on their own personal experiences with immigration.

## **REFLECTION, LOCAL COMMUNITY, AND THE MUTED GROUP VIDEO PROJECT**

First, students had the opportunity to write about their personal experiences immigrating to the United States. I also explained that if someone was uncomfortable writing about these experiences or did not have a personal experience to share, they could instead write a reflection on the small group work we had completed earlier in class. When students finished writing, I asked if anyone wanted to share their experiences aloud.

Several students were quick to respond. Ana<sup>2</sup>, for example, recalled feelings of “isolationism, loneliness, [and] voicelessness” when she first came to this country and the ways in which her parents worked

<sup>2</sup> For privacy reasons, student names have been changed throughout this discussion.

multiple jobs to provide for her and her siblings. Victoria self-identified as a student under DACA protection, detailing the inaccurate stories that color her experiences: “People assume [Dreamers] are uneducated, stealing jobs, and that if we do somehow manage to find work, we are gardeners or maids and that we should have applied for citizenship on our own. This is such a completely false idea that we are allowed to pick our own fate when there is legislation in place that determines our future.” I offer Ana’s and Victoria’s comments here as representative examples of the larger class discussion. By the end of the class period, it was clear that the majority of the students in the room had first-hand experience with Muted Group Theory, even if they didn’t have the academic language to describe it until that day.

The next class, I introduced my students to South Grade Elementary School, a low-income, Title 1 school about an hour north of FIU. Since one of the aims of this course is to help students “analyze rhetorical principles, ideas, and terminology in local discourse practice,” collaborating with a community partner such as South Grade Elementary School nicely complemented our semester. I was familiar with this school because my sister, Alyssa, teaches there. During the 2018-2019 academic year, Alyssa taught a class of twenty-two third graders. Ninety percent of her students were immigrants or part of immigrant families and had been in the country for less than five years. Given our previous class discussion on immigration, the FIU students’ connection to these third-graders offered a productive segue into the Muted Group Video Project.

The goal of the project, I explained, was to speak back to the harmful narratives that inaccurately portray immigrants in this country. The previous day, we had used Muted Group Theory to recognize and unpack the oppressive potential of language; however, as Linda Lee Smith Barkman notes, “an integral and vital component of [Muted Group Theory] is that resistance and change are possible” (2018, 4). In other words, Muted Group Theory is a lens through which we can recognize *the power of language*, and this power can be used not only to oppress, but also to empower. This is an important recognition. It “is what keeps [Muted Group Theory] from being a pessimistic labeling of the marginalized and turns it into an optimistic tool for providing hope and voice to the marginalized” (Barkman 2018, 4).

I presented the Muted Group Video Project as one such tool, a platform upon which we could share more accurate and empowering perspectives with these young students than what they might otherwise hear and see in mainstream media. I explained to the students that they would work in small groups to film video messages for the third graders, and I offered the following guidelines:

- Not everyone in the group needs to be on camera. If you are not comfortable being filmed, then you can help with filming, brainstorming ideas, etc.
- If you are in the video, introduce yourself and give brief relevant info about who you are as a way for the third-grade students to relate to you.
- Incorporating multiple languages and personal stories is encouraged.
- Film the videos with a phone or a laptop. The videos do not need to be professional or formal; the focus here is the message that the video communicates.
- You may film the videos anywhere on campus; you will upload the video file to our course site at the end of the class period.

Prior to this class, I asked Alyssa for ideas of topics that would be relevant to the current needs and experiences of her students. I shared with my students her response:

The FIU students can address that it's okay to have more than one culture, that my students can learn English and have American friends, but while still celebrating their Hispanic culture. They can also give tips for welcoming immigrant students to the class since I often have students join our class mid-year. Finally, it would be really powerful if the FIU students shared how they have faced similar challenges with culture, language, and identity as my students, but they worked hard in school and are now doing well in college. Most of my students do not even think about college as an option for themselves. (Alyssa Maddox, email, May 2019)

Based on Alyssa's suggestions, the students and I identified four themes to guide our videos: the value of having multiple cultures,

strategies for welcoming immigrant students, the importance of school, and college as a goal for the future. The students then formed small groups based on their interests in one of the four themes. After some initial planning discussions, the groups dispersed throughout campus to film their videos. About thirty minutes later, the groups returned to the class and submitted their videos to our course site. Each video lasted approximately 2-4 minutes, and although we ultimately wanted one video, it was logistically easier for each group to film and submit individual videos. Alyssa and I then edited the individual videos together into one file.<sup>3</sup>

The next day, Alyssa shared the video with her students. After viewing the video, Alyssa worked with her class to write questions for my students. The questions included, “When you came to the US, was there anyone else who spoke your language?” and “How did you make friends in this country?” In an effort “to bring community voices into the classroom” (Cary 2016, 141), Alyssa and I planned a video conference for several days later so that the two classes could have a face-to-face discussion, and my students could answer the third-graders’ questions. During the discussion, the students conversed in Spanish, English, and Haitian Creole, bonding over their experiences growing up in an unfamiliar culture and what it means to be an immigrant student.

## **MOVING THEORY BEYOND THE CLASSROOM**

Following our video conference, my students wrote reflections on their experiences with the Muted Group Video Project. One theme that echoed throughout the reflections is the necessity of moving theory beyond the walls of the classroom. Gabe succinctly summarizes this in his reflection: “we are useless if all we do is strategize for other people to act.” If we do not act ourselves, this comment suggests, then our strategizing has limited value. Angela came to a similar realization, explaining, “just thinking of the ways we can stop stereotypes [and] holding space for accurate and diverse media representation is important, but it will only work if messages of inclusivity are given through education.” Put in the context of our Rhetorical Theory class, then, it would not have been enough to

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3 The completed video can be viewed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gidpym4y\\_aQ&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gidpym4y_aQ&feature=youtu.be)

learn about Muted Group Theory without also finding a way to put this theory into practice within our community. We needed, as Mari observed, “to share personal stories and publicly challenge these stereotypes [to] help humanize [immigrant students] and give a voice to those who have been muted.”

Comments such as these underscore the value of the Muted Group Video Project as a valuable pedagogical tool for connecting the ideas discussed *within* the classroom to the community living *beyond* the classroom. Specifically, by giving my students a platform upon which they could present new narratives about the Hispanic immigrant experience, this project provided a vehicle for our class to shift “from information (data) gathering to interactive process” (Anderson and Jack 1998, 169). Put simply, it allowed the students to *interact with* Muted Group Theory rather than only *gather information about it*, and this shift from passive recipients to active participants is central to a pedagogy that seeks to link student learning and community engagement.

Not only did this project allow students to move theory beyond the classroom, but it also invited them to view their cultural experiences and linguistic diversity as strengths rather than shortcomings. By presenting their experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge, the FIU students challenge the “deficit perspective” and instead “affirm Latinx knowledge(s)” as worth discussing and sharing (Villa and Figueroa 2017-2018, 71-73). It is important to note that this shift from deficit to affirmation happened as a result of two purposeful pedagogical decisions: 1) students spoke for themselves about their own experiences, and 2) students decided what to focus on in their videos.

## **PEDAGOGICAL FLEXIBILITY AND A RECEPTIVITY TO LEARN**

Despite the fact that these pedagogical decisions were purposeful, they were not automatic. When I first presented the video project to my students, I hoped that they would be willing to speak in the video about their own experiences. Thus, I had no hesitancy with pedagogical move #1. However, pedagogical move #2 caught me by surprise. I came to the students with a set idea of what they would discuss in the video. Mainly, I envisioned the students debunking

the harmful narratives swirling around about Hispanic immigrants. However, after listening to Alyssa describe the needs of her class and recognizing that not all of my students had personal experiences with immigration, I realized that the content of the video needed to change. Indirectly, our video project would still challenge false perceptions of Hispanic immigrants by sharing empowering messages with the third graders; however, this would not be the explicit focus. Instead, the Muted Group Video Project would discuss the value of having multiple cultures, strategies for welcoming immigrant students, the importance of school, and college as a goal for the future. These themes met the third graders where they were, attending to their specific needs and experiences, and they also allowed all of the college students to engage with the project, regardless of personal experiences with immigration.

This experience taught me the importance of pedagogical flexibility, what I have come to understand as the ability to adjust pre-set plans to reflect student needs and experiences. The significance of such flexibility can be more fully understood by considering Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack's discussion of oral history interviews (1998). In "Learning to listen: Interview techniques and analyses," Anderson and Jack share their experiences interviewing rural women about their lives in an attempt to give these women the opportunity to speak for themselves about their experiences. However, as they reflect on and reread their interview transcripts, Anderson observes the ways in which her interviews actually further silenced these women. She writes, "as I rummage through the interviews...I am painfully aware of lost opportunities for women to reflect on the activities and events they described and to explain their terms more fully in their own words" (159). She admits being too focused on the goals of the larger oral history project rather than on her interactions with the women as individuals. As a result, her interview questions were restrictive and guiding, focused on "prov[ing] preexisting ideas" rather than on allowing the interview direction to organically emerge based on the women's in-the-moment responses (158).

Although Anderson is discussing interview techniques specifically, her observations illuminate my work with students in the Muted Group Video Project. That is, after I listened more critically to the

students and loosened my grip on our pedagogical plans, I made room for the content of our video to shift. The result was a more responsive, inclusive video project. Specifically, as a result of the shift in video focus, more of my students could find points of connection, and the messages shared with the third graders were more applicable to their particular situations. Not only did I learn how to practice pedagogical flexibility, but I also learned the importance of adopting what Anderson and Jack call an “attitude...of receptivity to learn” (1998, 158). For me, this receptivity meant allowing space for the project to take shape according to the specific needs of the participants – both those within the classroom and those within the community.

## **MULTIPLE (LANGUAGE) MODES**

We can further recognize the pedagogical potential of the Muted Group Video Project by considering Cruz Medina’s 2018 discussion of digital testimonios. In “Digital Latinx Storytelling: testimonio as Multimodal Resistance,” Medina explains that “testimonio as a genre in Latin America has come to embody a critical practice, much like the familiar motto of ‘speaking truth to power’” (par. 5). Testimonio, Medina explains, has been embraced by many Latin Americans as a form of resistance, a way to challenge “dominant colonial narratives” and create new “sites of knowledge production” (par. 2). As a writing instructor, Medina’s main focus is on the benefit of including digital testimonios within the writing classroom:

Digital testimonio is a Latinx digital writing practice that makes use of the different semiotic affordances of multimodal communication in online environments, and it embodies a resistant ethos in an academic space to engage with issues of race, class, gender, and disability. The digital genre of testimonio affords further opportunities to communicate these messages of an individual “speaking truth to power” through modes that do not require authorization by the gatekeepers of traditional platforms of publication and media distribution. (Medina 2018, par. 2)

Medina’s discussion of digital testimonio as a multimodal practice focuses on the combination of modes such as visual (photos and screen shots), linguistic (written words), and aural (voice overs) into a single video recording. From this perspective, the Muted Group

Video Project is a digital, multimodal testimonio – it is a video project through which students use multiple modes to enact resistance in a digital space.

However, not only does the Muted Group Video Project combine modes such as visual, linguistic, and aural, but it also combines languages – and this observation suggests a fruitful expansion of Medina’s digital testimonio discussion. According to linguists, there are three language modes: the monolingual mode, the intermediate mode, and the bilingual mode (Grosjean 2001; Yu and Schweiter 2018). An individual who can speak multiple languages has the opportunity to move between these modes, deciding what language(s) to use and, thereby, which mode to activate. As we watch the video my students created, we see them navigating between various languages, including Spanish, French, Creole, and English. This linguistic choice is evidence of students enacting the “bilingual mode, [a mode] in which...two languages are utilized...in the form of code-switching or borrowings” (Yu and Schweiter 2018, par. 3).

A consideration of the students’ decisions to embrace the bilingual mode alongside Cruz’s discussion of digital testimonios expands our understanding of the Muted Group Video Project as a multimodal composition. That is, not only is the project multimodal because it includes modes such as visual, linguistic, and aural, but it is also multimodal in that it features multiple *language modes*.

The freedom for Latinx students to navigate between multiple languages is significant, especially when situated within the writing classroom. When writing classrooms “take as the norm a linguistically homogenous situation: one where writers, speakers, and readers are expected to use Standard English or Edited American English,” students who speak and/or write in other languages or language variations can become a muted group (Horner et al. 2011, 303). This harmful perspective impacts more than the voices we hear or don’t hear in the classroom. It also impacts students’ self-perceptions. Put simply, when students are taught that their language practices are “substandard’ or ‘deviant,’” they are simultaneously being taught that they “themselves [are] somehow substandard” (Horner et al. 2011, 304-305). However, projects such as the Muted Group Video

Project have the potential to challenge this notion, to create space for Hispanic immigrant students to publicly claim the validity and authority of their cultural and linguistic experiences.

Furthermore, by doing so for a community audience, as my class did with the third graders, they invite these younger students to do the same. When discussing her students, Alyssa explained that the majority of her students had limited perspectives regarding future goals or opportunities. “Most of my students,” she described, “do not even think about college as an option for themselves” because the majority of them do not have older siblings or parents who have attended college and can therefore provide an example of this possibility. However, the Muted Group Video Project introduced the third graders to the fact that college is a reality for many Hispanic immigrants. The interactions between the college students and the third graders echoes Cruz’s (2018) observation that digital testimonios “have the potential to promote literacy by broadening audiences’ perspectives...while providing a platform for making the personal into the collective” (par. 15). From this perspective, we can see the ways in which The Muted Group Video Project enacted a platform for my students’ personal experiences to offer a collective example for the third graders, one that aims to broaden what they recognize as options for their own futures.

## **APPLYING THE MUTED GROUP VIDEO PROJECT TO OTHER CONTEXTS**

Given my local context at an HSI, focusing on Hispanic immigrant students was a natural choice; however, future iterations of this project might consider engaging with other muted groups such as women, other racial minorities, and members of the LGBTQ community. Logan, one of my students, gestures to this potential in his reflection:

The biggest connection I can draw to [The Muted Group Video Project] is from my experience as a gay man. I am fortunate that I come from a mixed racial background. I’m half Latin and half Caucasian. But I look more Caucasian than Latin. That in itself allows me certain rights and to be heard much louder than my

Latino brethren. But, as a gay man, sometimes I'm not taken as seriously. When people find out I'm gay when I'm trying to have my voice heard about anything relating to politics or human rights, I am muted a bit.

As Logan suggests, the Muted Group Video Project has applicability for other subordinated populations. My hope is that educators reading this will consider ways in which the Muted Group Video Project might amplify muted voices in their classrooms and communities. The following summary of steps aims to facilitate application of the Muted Group Video Project into other classrooms.

1. Consider the demographics of your students and the potential way(s) their life experiences will connect to Muted Group Theory.
2. Approach a community partner such as an elementary school or an after-school children's program and explain the details and goals of the Muted Group Video Project.
3. Collaborate with the community partner to identify specific topics/themes for the video that will be relevant to the current needs and experiences of the community partner.
4. Introduce Muted Group Theory to your students; look for examples in the media and discuss application to students' lives and experiences.
5. Introduce the community partner and Muted Group Video Project to your students; emphasize the potential for resistance that is inherent within Muted Group Theory.
6. Identify specific topic(s)/theme(s) for the video(s).
7. Film video(s).
8. Share with community partner.
9. Conduct a digital or in-person conversation between students and community partner.
10. Invite to students to reflect on experience.

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# Walking in Jamaica:

## Exploring the Boundaries and Bridges of Rhetorical Agency

**Brent Lucia,**

*University of Connecticut*

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*Communities are in constant flux, shifting within a network of people, things and spaces; yet it is not uncommon to see a universal narrative emerge within the local commonplace of our towns and cities. These narratives are often too simplistic, avoiding the dynamic array of rhetorical flows that are circling through the social, material and historical realities within a communities' actual network. During my time working in Jamaica Queens, New York, I witnessed the strong dissonance between the common narrative told in Jamaica's local news outlets and the experience I had in its actual spaces. My manuscript explores this dichotomy by describing a recent walk I had through Jamaica's streets, traversing its unique landscape while reflecting on my own subjectivity in the process. In doing so, I argue that rhetorical agents have the ability to support or subvert these universal narratives. However, one must also consider how our spatial encounters reinscribe the fluid and often precarious positionalities we find ourselves in as we move through different spaces over time.*

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*As you walk through the streets of Jamaica, every house seems either a store or a tavern. There are two newspapers, one by Mr. Brenton,*

*otherwise “Dr. Franklin,” a good soul; and the Long Island Farmer. Jamaica has a large, old established Academy for Boys, “Union Hall,” and also an Academy for Girls. . . The infinitude of Jamaica stores and public houses allows an inference which is the truth, viz: that farmers, travelers, marketmen, and other passengers on the turnpike through the village give it all its trade and retail business. It has no manufactories, and has not been what is called a “growing place” for many years, and probably will not be.*

—Walt Whitman’s *New York, New Amsterdam* 1863

Whitman settled in Jamaica Queens in the 1830’s, working as a teacher and a writer for a local newspaper. The section of the turnpike Whitman is referring to is now known as Jamaica Avenue: a busy street that runs from East New York Brooklyn over to Bellerose Queens. The avenue is one of the oldest streets in Jamaica, dating back to the seventeenth century when native tribes used it as a trail that lead out to the Ohio River and the Great Lakes. For Whitman, however, the changes to this road in his time were not substantial enough for him to consider Jamaica a “growing place;” farmland stretched across this area, and its roads sent “passengers” to other, more populated parts of the city.

Today’s Jamaica tells a different story. Whitman’s account of Jamaica as a transportation hub for “farmers, travelers and marketmen” is still fairly accurate, yet its desire to become a “growing place” has certainly increased in recent years. While economic development was stymied through most of the early twentieth century, developers and businesses have recently grown interested in this area of New York, particularly as crime rates continue to dwindle. In 2014 I started working as an instructor at York College CUNY, a small community college on Jamaica Avenue, and began reading more about Jamaica’s transformation in city newspapers more more, local organization and real estate developers’ websites, social media outlets, and community blogs. I quickly noticed that a single, long-standing narrative had been forming about Jamaica since the early 2000’s, one that stressed “development” and “expansion” as a way to respond to Jamaica’s urban decay and crime. At York College I noticed that the pace of human activity right outside the campus seemed never ending—a rapid stream of passengers, straphangers, shoppers, workers and

students—suggesting a dynamic and fluid array of storylines, stories that seemed to be missing from local and national media outlets.

Walking through the streets of Jamaica Queens unfolds an experience not told by the local newspapers, websites, or community blogs, and the experience is certainly different than that of those who lived there before, like Walt Whitman. The patterns of this area of the city are being inscribed on a constant basis, supporting, subverting or questioning Jamaica's totalizing narratives. Subverting these universal narratives requires awareness to the networks one is a part of within his or her community. "Networks," Latour has argued, "does not designate a thing out there...it qualifies its objectivity, that is the ability of each actor to make other actors do unexpected things" (Latour 2005, 129). What defines a network then is the constant interaction of its actors, not a stable relationship of elements within a fixed structure that one is removed from. Considering our locations as networked is useful when thinking about our position within these locations, reminding us that we have the power to affect change within our towns or cities through developing new spatial interpretations. When working within these networked systems that create a place, it is important to understand the topoi, but it is also important to produce new threads of information that people do not necessarily find in the popular discourse (Latour 2005). Jamaica is certainly a region that continues to suffer from crime while also becoming a talking point for real estate developers, but these are not the only characteristics that define this area of the world. Other narratives about this community have the potential to emerge when one spends time engaging with Jamaica as a networked space, raising one's awareness to their material, social, and cultural realities as they move through space.

However, such a process is not innocent, and our subjectivities are also established and reworked within these networks. In an attempt to articulate these bodily interactions with space, we must not only understand its support or subversion to universal narratives but also consider how such encounters reinscribe our subjectivity. In doing so, we acknowledge the fluid and often precarious positionalities we find ourselves in as we move through different spaces over time. Indeed, new kinds of subjects are forming through this reciprocal process,

subjects who can potentially imagine themselves as different public beings. The promising stories of construction and revitalization through new development overshadow the emerging rhetorical flows that our own social, material, and historical realities help create. Improving our rhetorical awareness then means being sensitive to this fundamental dissonance between what we see and feel in our material worlds and what lives in our prevailing discourse.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY ON JAMAICA**

Once a small town in Long Island, Jamaica eventually dissolved its township and joined the jurisdiction of New York City in 1898, becoming a popular location for European immigrants. Eventually, developers recognized its ideal location for local business and transportation centers for the city. By the late 1920's, Jamaica was one of the busiest shopping centers in Queens, housing the first self-service supermarket in the country, King Kullen, which opened on Jamaica Avenue in 1930 (Cultural Collaborative, n.d). This development also included the famous Valencia Theatre (now the Tabernacle of Prayer), the impressive Kurtz furniture store and the Roxanne building, both now historical landmarks. It was during the early twentieth century when Jamaica grew as a transit-oriented hub, inspiring the region to become the center for commerce, entertainment and government for most of Queens and parts of Brooklyn (Cultural Collaborative, n.d).

By the 1960's, new neighboring shopping centers were constructed in Nassau County, helping to reduce the retail activity in Jamaica. This led to the closing of Jamaica's department stores and the relocation of two headquarter banks, suffocating its economic activity (Cultural Collaborative, n.d). The economic hardship continued through most of the 1980's due to the crack epidemic and Jamaica's inadequate infrastructure, which stiffened future development. By the time the great recession hit in the early 2000's, Jamaican residents were migrating to the south as part of the Second Great Migration (Bilefsky 2011).

Thanks to a recent decrease in the crime rate, Jamaica is slowly seeing a resurgence, and developers are beginning to pay attention, particularly to its unique location to transportation centers. The

mixed-use commercial center of One Jamaica Center as well as the creation of Jamaica Station—a transportation hub that connects the New York Subway, the Long Island Railroad and the AirTrain to JFK—were the highlights of many new development projects in the early 2000's. Jamaica also resides just north of the cities' largest airport, John F Kennedy International Airport, and is a central transfer point for the Long Island Railroad, which is the busiest commuter railroad in North America (Dickens 2014). One of its most bustling transportation hubs is Jamaica Center where two subway lines, the E and F trains, meet, as well as three major avenues: Jamaica Avenue, Archer Avenue and Sutphin Boulevard. It is here where various government agencies and businesses congregate. One building in particular, One Jamaica Center, houses a federal office building, a theatre complex and a shopping mall. The junction sits right outside the walls of York College CUNY. It is at this intersection where one is immediately swept into the surging energy of Jamaica's street-life, overflowing with citizens from all different regions of the world.



Hotel and condo developers are also becoming much more interested in Jamaica. One such project, entitled The Crossing at Jamaica Station, will become a 26-story tower built near JFK airport and will have 539 mixed-income apartments, incorporating retail and community spaces within the building's design (Walker 2017). This project will create what the development firm is calling a "super block," rising thirty stories high between the busy intersection of Archer Avenue and Stuphin Boulevard ("Construction of Mixed-Use" 2018).

As recently as July 2017, the Governor of New York City, Andrew Cuomo, earmarked ten million dollars to improve Jamaica's downtown, focusing on business, education, technology and job training. In a press release from Cuomo, he stated that "the critical investment in Jamaica's downtown will help it grow into a major economic hub that boosts small businesses, expands economic opportunity for residents, and draws new residents and visitors into the community" (Gannon 2017). New construction projects are on the horizon, looking to "enhance the neighborhood as a central business district" (Construction of Mixed-Use 2018) and jump-start a "development boom" (Walker 2017). Jamaica is now becoming the next space developers are pointing to for a word many locals in New York City hate: gentrification. A community blog entitled *Queens Crap* has this very issue in mind, declaring itself a website that's "focused on the overdevelopment and 'tweeding' of the borough of Queens in the City of New York" (n.d).

Jamaica's history depicts a constant shift between decline and revitalization, mirroring many of the headlines about Jamaica one sees today. Stories regarding real estate development run parallel to the depictions of decay and crime that continue to circulate within its popular discourse, even as the community is rapidly changing. Recent narratives in both local blogs and popular news sources range from complaints regarding Methadone clinics in the neighborhood, (Ker-Jedrychowska 2017) to a recent body of a man found in an abandoned food truck on Liberty Avenue in Jamaica (Boyer and Rayman 2019). The once popular WordPress website, *Cleanup Jamaica Queens*, was a testament to this sense of helplessness in the community. Its creator ended the blog's run in 2015, stating his time was wasted in a community "where way too many people don't give a shit...and some of the worst, corrupt and lazy elected officials ever are in office" (Moretti 2015). Of course, it isn't all bad. The hashtag #jamiacaqueens, for example, showcases a nice blend of entertainment, real estate development and community outreach tweets that present a thriving community. However, the overall narratives I found in this search seemed limiting, moving Jamaica towards a story that seemed negative and all too simplistic.

As I read through these local stories, I couldn't help but notice the stark contrast between Jamaica's written depiction in popular discourse and the experience of Jamaica as one embodies its spaces. The construction of space and our sense of embodiment are inevitably linked, as Lefebvre has argued "Each living body is space and has space: it produces itself in space and it also produces space" (Lefebvre 1991, 107). Moreover, it is the subtle, interconnected ways that "accidentally" develop through bodies and spaces that assist in the emergence of our everyday spaces (Dickinson 2002, 6). Naturally then, it is no wonder that walking around Jamaica can create a potential for various narratives that could depict this space—narratives that are deeply felt as one moves through its city streets. Other stories regarding Jamaica must speak to something outside of "growth," "expansion," and "crime, yet these stories seem flattened under a constant, totalizing narrative.

## **SUBVERTING THE TOTALIZING NARRATIVE**

Recent rhetorical scholars have advocated for a material turn within rhetorical theory, attempting to center the material elements of our rhetorical context as we seek to be more rhetorically sensitive in our everyday spaces. This rhetorical force, emerging through the interaction between bodies and their material spaces, has been defined within rhetorical studies in various ways. For example, Thomas Rickert has argued that rhetoric "must be grounded in the material relations from which it springs," stating that rhetoric is ambient, and it "impacts the senses, circulates in waves of affect, and communes to join and disjoin people" (Rickert 2013, x). Rickert focuses on how our bodies and our minds come into play when constructing the rhetorical situation and utilizing rhetoric as a tool for discovery. In Scott Barnett and Casey Boyle's recent book, *Rhetoric Through Everyday Things*, they introduce and define the term "rhetorical ontology" which is a framework used in rhetorical scholarship that focuses on both human and non-human elements in our material world in order to show how objects "interact suavisely and agentially in rhetorical situations and ecologies" (Barnett and Boyle 2016, 2). Working off Rickert's notion of the ambient conditions rhetorical situations exist in, Barnett and Boyle highlight the ways in which objects act as rhetorical forces within our spaces. Such claims have helped develop fresh insight into the material elements of our rhetorical contexts. For example, Rivers

and Weber revisit the rhetorical circulation of potentially mundane objects in their article, “Ecological Pedagogical and Public Rhetorics” (2011). Both authors show how unnoticed, non-human agents such as meeting minutes helped propel the Montgomery bus boycotts (Rivers and Weber 2011, 200). The authors advocate that such movements do not emerge solely from a single speech but through a larger, systemic interaction between humans and non-human elements.

Much of what is being conceptualized in these claims is an attempt to attune our rhetorical sensitivities to the material, raising awareness to the potentialities that can emerge outside of our bodies through the interactions within everyday spaces. Thus, recent scholarship is attempting to reverse the often common approach rhetorical scholars have to consistently emphasize the linguistic/textual over the spatial, devaluing the historical and material attributes of everyday life in the portrayal of a rhetorical situation (Barnett 2017, 17). Indeed, the rhetorical constructions of a given space can therefore be revisited and potentially critiqued through a more sensitive approach to the “material attributes of everyday life.”

In this vein, scholars such as Jeff Rice have highlighted the reductive qualities of our spatial representations that heavily rely on language representation, noticing the overbearing rhetorical narratives, or “totalizing narratives,” of a community which can flatten its local articulations. These totalizing narratives ignore the subtle interactions that help make up humans’ spatial production. In his text, *Digital Detroit*, Rice argues that his mapping project can be a model for replacing narrative constructions of a given region through its ability to arrange and invent on the rhetor’s terms. He sees his project as a way to subvert grand narratives, which are universal stories of a given place, a project that “evokes a totalizing space that does not allow for rhetorical turns, memory associations, spatial searches, or travel metaphors” (Rice 2012, 39). The grand narrative Rice notes in particular is Detroit’s depiction as a city of ruins—one that is constantly in the throngs of struggle and depravity. While some of these rhetorical claims may be true, repeating this universal narrative has done little to improve Detroit’s condition, and the typical response to this grand narrative has been to repeat the same *topos*, forgetting that a “given space holds multiple approaches towards one or more meanings” (Rice 2012, 66).

For Rice, our spaces should be seen as “networked,” which is not a generalized concept that one can point to, but is defined by its process of connecting. The network encompasses friends making connections, people dealing with music, food or academic life; a network is any given space put into relationship with other spaces (Rice 2012, 44). We are always in the process of building these networks as we move through locations, becoming active producers in the construction of these spaces. A place is not static, and our arrangements of space cannot be described in fixed orderings, but instead through interactions which help generate rhetorical invention (Rice 2012, 36). A network then is not simply built from our perception of a space, but through the memories, emotions, and feelings we encompass as we move through our locations—through the interactions we have with both human and non-human elements. These encounters seem to be an embodied practice that is inevitably tied to the social construction of our spaces. Bodies and places impact upon each other, and a body becomes marked with a residue of a place; however, places are also changed by the presence of our bodies (Reynolds 2004, 143). While totalizing narratives circulate through the discourse of a community, our embodied practices within these communities are important to consider when thinking about how one can become a rhetorical agent of change.

Change, however, is not only enacted by the rhetorical agent but also performed on him or her as one moves through space. One’s subjectivity is implicated in the process of connecting, where spaces help reconstitute our subjectivities as we experience, and circulate through, locations. As Dickinson suggests, it is in these minute, often subtle interactions within the everyday where we most thoroughly materialize ourselves and our bodies, and if we think of the subjective as more than just a mental operation, we need to pay attention to the frequent interactions one has with their material spaces (Dickinson 2002, 6).

The reciprocal relationship one has with space suggests that our subjectivity is unstable, operating somewhere between the body and its ecological landscape. Acknowledging this can potentially be empowering for a rhetorical agent as they create spatial representations, developing a deeper awareness to their own

subjectivity as it transforms within locations. From this position the static, totalizing narratives that circulate within our discourse and help position cities within American culture seem limiting, working as “circulated, yet fixed topoi” that create a monolithic version of our city spaces (Rice 2012, 21). The stories Rice came across regarding Detroit would “often fluctuate between demolition of some sort and rejuvenation as a response” (Rice 2012, 21). Such narratives remain constant and unchallenged, defining locations without considering the dynamic process between people and their spaces.

I was quickly bombarded with similar commonplaces about Jamaica, describing its potential for economic opportunity and the most recent acquisitions in the area by real estate developers, as well as the various assaults and murders that have happened in the neighborhood. These articles help paint the story that you read about not just in Jamaica but also in many “expanding” neighborhoods in New York City like Harlem or Brooklyn. Like Rice’s depiction of Detroit, the story of Jamaica was the same: once a community riddled by crime and drugs, it is now slowly building its way back thanks to the help of outsiders seeking real estate opportunity within the area. However, this was not the lived-in experience I had on the streets outside of York College; the encounters I felt seemed to pull me outside this rhetorical construction of Jamaica on occasion, traveling into new narrative potentials that helped shape and inform me.

I decided to walk through Jamaica after class one day with Rice’s *Digital Detroit* in mind, taking notes and pictures along the way to see what sort of narratives developed as I embodied its spaces. As I came in contact with objects that sparked my imagination, I’d quickly attempt a Google search on my phone in order to find more threads of information. I saw this practice not just as a way to examine Jamaica via the digital, but as a central component to my cognitive processes, something Andy Clark and David Chalmers call, “the extended mind.” The theory notes that thinking can happen outside the skull, noting that when we are linked with an external entity such as a cell phone, we are creating a cognitive system in its own right (Clark and Chalmers 1998, 8).

Walking with this process in mind, I tried to see what sort of questions would develop as I attuned my own rhetorical practices to the sensations, thoughts, memories and ideas that emerged through different locations. My goal was not simply to question the universal narratives regarding Jamaica Queens, but to try and raise my awareness to the subtle changes these spaces may have on my own subjectivity, attempting to reveal an honest depiction of how these locations affected my conscious experience. Indeed, while I believe such a process can help one potentially become a rhetorical agent of change inside their community, I also felt the need to describe the moments when one's sense of agency might seem limited, challenged or even lost through spatial interactions. Therefore, I remained open to the limitations of space as well as its freeing capacities, attempting to present myself as both empowered and humbled as I walked through Jamaica's spaces.

## **WALKING WITHIN THE NETWORK OF JAMAICA QUEENS**

I left York College and wandered down 168<sup>th</sup> street, walking towards the sounds of Jamaica Avenue. Various English and Spanish words colored the streets as I made my way north, quickly being reminded of Jamaica's eclectic community. Along with Jamaica's recent surge in development and its reputation as a transportation hub, the area has become one of New York Cities' most diverse neighborhoods. As recently as 2014, Queens County itself was noted as the third most diverse county in the country, housing a variation of African American, Latino, Caucasian, Native American and Asian American ethnicities (Narula 2014). You could say Jamaica is a large reason why. Various Hispanic and West Indian ethnic groups have flocked to this location since the 1990's, compiling a vibrant mixture of cultures within the region that is instantly felt when one moves through its streets.

I decided to walk past Jamaica Avenue and continue north towards Jamaica Hills on 168<sup>th</sup> street. As I neared Hillside Avenue, I noticed a few men and women wearing hijabs, moving briskly past the townhouses that squeeze against each other on the hillside. Jamaica has also seen a large growth in its Bangladeshi-American population, thanks in part to the Jamaica Muslim Center, an establishment that was coming up on my right down 168<sup>th</sup> street. The center houses

a Mosque, a school and a function area for religious gatherings. It is one of the largest Muslim institutions in Jamaica, dedicated to “promoting Islamic awareness and facilitating socio-economic welfare for the common people in Jamaica” (Jamaica Muslim Center, n.d). The center’s blue and white domes tower over the small houses in Jamaica Hills, presenting a compelling piece of both American and Islamic architecture. Looking up at this magnificent building, one can’t help but acknowledge the strange arrangement of both architectural styles unfolding on this quiet street in Queens.



I noticed that the Muslim Center is only a short distance from the Saint Stephen Episcopal Church on 168<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> avenue, and a five-minute walk from the famous Valencia Theatre House on Jamaica Avenue. Now a home for the Tabernacle of Prayer for All People, the Valencia Theatre’s stunning interior design serves as a backdrop

for Catholic services. Standing outside this theatre evoked a feeling of nostalgia, remembering a time when Catholicism once serviced the bulk of worshippers in the community. However, along with churches and mosques, the influx of Bangladeshi’s to Jamaica has helped increase the presence of Hindu temples in the neighborhood, creating a variety of religious communities. Multiple Hindu temples have been built on or off Jamaica Avenue, including two on the block of 173<sup>rd</sup> street alone. This rapidly growing East Indian community is a far cry from the European population that lived in Jamaica in the late nineteenth century and has therefore helped form this spiritual hybridity within the neighborhood, where various sects of Hindus’, Muslims and Christians co-exist. Walking past these holy spaces, I wondered how these religious communities have constructed or broken down barriers of faith and community within Jamaica? How have these separate faiths intersected in material ways, whether in commercial or public spaces in and around Jamaica?



Thinking through these questions reminded me that such inquiry begins the narrative process, or as De Certeau would call it, “the treatment of space.” Such treatments lead to stories about a location, and stories reveal not only the constraints of a place—its imposed order of things—but how one mingles its elements, revealing what one can do in it and make out of it (De Certeau 1980, 122). De Certeau reminds us that such inquiry may reframe the narrative, yet does so within the same boundaries that determine the totalizing narrative. While my questions are an attempt to think through the intersections of faith-based practices within Jamaica, I quickly found other stories within Jamaica’s popular discourse that were loosely related. For example, there was recently an announcement of a “Religious Garb Bill” in Northeast Queens in early 2019, which will prevent workplace discrimination against religious attire and appearances. The article, published on the [QNS.com](http://QNS.com) website that celebrates Northern regions of Queens, noted the importance of combating religious discrimination in this area of the city, but avoided highlighting the unique, religious pluralism that currently exists in Queens. Like my questions, the article points towards the faith-based practices in Jamaica, but only as it applies to political change. My inquiry seeks a different route for discussion, attempting to mingle the elements of space towards a narrative of spiritual and cultural hybridity. Yet both treatments of this space are never fully divorced

from each other, revealing similar operations that help people think through and organize such spatial structures.

I turned south on Hillside Avenue arbitrarily and immediately noticed the many Bangladeshi stores and restaurants along 167<sup>th</sup> and 168<sup>th</sup> street, not too far from a thriving Sri Lankan community. One immediately notices that the cultural complexities of Jamaica are witnessed not only through a variety of religious structures but also



in the storefronts that line Hillside and Jamaica Avenue. This unique mixture of Latino, African, and Bangladeshi populations is exemplified on the store's signs themselves, particularly at the intersection of 168<sup>th</sup> and 169<sup>th</sup> street. It was there I noticed Richie's Coffee Shop on 169<sup>th</sup> street, which was promoting its dishes in both Spanish and English, residing directly across from a pharmacy that displayed its title in English, while situated next to signs written in Bengali.

The most impressive showing of this cultural hybridity was further down 168<sup>th</sup> street where a small hair stylist crossed multiple cultures in a single awning. The name of the business, Caribbean Barber Shop, was etched in small English letters above the more prominent display of its name in Bengali. Below, and also in English, was the phrase: "service with a smile for all hair types and nationalities." This unique display of cultural diversity unraveled a series of questions I had for the shop owner: how did you come to a decision to enhance the lettering in Bengali and not in English? What practices allow you to still identify as a Caribbean Barber Shop while also welcoming all "hair types and nationalities?" The rhetorical choices these shop owners displayed on their store fronts presented both the unique

mixture of cultures within the neighborhood as well as the savvy business practices of the shop keepers who looked to survive within a location that crossed cultural borders.

What is also noticed here is the adherence of the shopkeeper to follow policies established within certain systems of control (i.e the signage requirements indicated by New York City's Department of Buildings; the desired font, color and overall aesthetic for the sign to attract customers in a free-market system) while also graying the boundaries between various cultures in the neighborhood. The story that can be told is once again both a bending and constructing of various limitations. Indeed, stories have distributive power to authorize the establishment or displacement of limits, serving as both a frontier and a bridge of possibilities (De Certeau 1980, 123). Within the boundaries of legal and ethical constraints followed by the shopkeeper, they still seek to push the limits of how multiculturalism can present itself, crossing into various cultural articulations presented in their signage.

This “bridge of possibilities” seems to transcend my own defined boundaries of what it means to be a consumer in a culturally complex region of the world. I was originally born in the suburbs of Massachusetts, and the battle for customers between small businesses in my town never extended outside the English language. While not all of their marketing materials were targeting my demographic, their message reached me, and I was a possible—if not intended—member of their audience. Staring at the Caribbean Barber Shop sign was almost a complete subversion of the homogeneity found in my home town; a signal that was purposively not intended for a monolingual,

English speaker such as myself. As a consumer I felt out of place in its presence—as if the sign was purposively talking over or around me. Yet, as a New Yorker, I was somehow comforted by this feeling of distance between me and the sign's rhetorical message, reminding me that such a diverse city helps one learn to surrender



to the material and linguistic realities that purposively avoid you. I was humbled in its presence and the feelings that it gave me, even while my position as a consumer seemed to be completely ignored.

The variety of restaurants in Jamaica is a world tour of exceptional



cuisine. As I walked down Hillside Avenue, I noticed Guatemalan, Bengali, Chinese, Thai, and Latin restaurants all situated in the Jamaica Hills region of Queens. When I reached 160<sup>th</sup> street on Jamaica Avenue I found Muy Luck Kitchen, a Chinese restaurant, directly across the street from Rincon Savadoreno, which serves Latin specialties from Central America. Puerto Rican, Dominican, Sri Lankan, Jamaican and Italian restaurants also lined this stretch of Jamaica Avenue, providing an enormous range of food from around the world.

Jamaica then is not simply a story about transportation or economic expansion, but a story about cultural and theological complexities that all found a home within a small area of Queens. Coming to this conclusion as I walked further down Hillside Avenue, a few more questions came to my mind: how does this story come in contact with the narratives regarding gentrification? Is the cultural diversity of the neighborhood informing the various economic opportunities happening in Jamaica or is it being ignored? In pushing myself to think about these questions, I'm reminded that such "frontiers and bridges" formed through spatial imaginaries are also a push for survival, where intersections of social behavior and material space lie and where locations find flexibility. This flexibility can lead to promoting spaces of vibrant, cultural diversity or threatened,

diminished spaces. As Lefebvre argues, “social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others (Lefebvre 1995, 73).

The vehicle for how these metaphors are constructed then must not be forgotten, noticing that such a boundary-forming practice can implicate what’s included or excluded from the narrative. Indeed, these are the very processes that help develop and permit universal narratives to occur, yet it also reminds us of the malleable nature of such narratives. Our human desire sustains or breaks through the boundaries of a universal narrative, not some fixed system beyond our control. One must walk through, not read about, the spaces that construct Jamaica Queens to notice how the unique social, cultural and material realities help create its networked landscape, and how we can be agents of change within the network.

My walk through Jamaica was experienced by both old and new stories of the community thanks to the cultural artifacts that have withstood recent development. The rich history of Jamaica Queens is not completely buried under the waves of new construction and diversifying communities, and it can still be spotted in various landmarks around the region. Getting off Hillside Avenue and walking back east towards Jamaica Avenue, I eventually stumbled upon King Manor, a historical home that resides within Rufus King Park. A sign near the home described King Manor as a historically landmarked estate and once the home to Rufus King, an original signer of the U.S Constitution. A quick Google search revealed his name, and I learned a few more interesting elements of King’s history: while also being the U.S ambassador to Great Britain in the late eighteenth century, as well as a senate member and a presidential nominee in the early nineteenth century, Rufus King was an out spoken critic of slavery forty-three years before the Emancipation Proclamation. King even created provisions to the 1785 Northwest Ordinance that stopped the growth of slavery into the Northwest Territory (Purvis 1987, 21).

I walked up to the old colonial home from the park and stared at the tall, wooden door that faced out onto Jamaica Avenue. I was immediately reminded that Jamaica was once covered in farmland and dirt roads, where houses like King Manor stood alone and distant

from its neighbors. I tried to imagine what Jamaica Avenue must have looked like to Rufus as he stood outside that same door, watching the wagons and horses ride by his estate. What did he witness here and how did it develop his worldview? I've walked by his mansion a few times on the way to work and assumed King held the typical values of your standard American colonialist of the time, maybe because the mansion seemed like your typical colonial farmstead, with its boxed-shaped wooden façade and multiple chimneys, adorned with a symmetrical pattern of multipaned windows. Its symbols reminded me of the historical homes one finds in the reimaginings of America well before the Civil War, conjuring up a time when so many American's sense of moral responsibility somehow eluded the plight of African-Americans. Spaces resonate with symbolism that is not lost on the spectator, and can almost feel intentional. The oppressive steel structures in Manhattan's financial district, for example, are meant to showcase the power the market can have over the individual. Indeed, space has this heuristic power to change both the inhabitant's behavior, and potentially, also their view of themselves.

Acknowledging this power of material space reminds me that I should be cautious about the immediate conclusions I make about the spaces I traverse, particularly in light of totalizing narratives. In its presence, King Manor represented the typical moralities of eighteenth century America, one that I regularly encounter around the historical landmarks of my hometown in Massachusetts. However, his homestead equally fails at symbolically representing the progressive intentions of Rufus King himself. Staring at King's house reminded me that even the larger narratives I've bought into regarding colonial times in America are not as simplistic as I would tend to believe. It's interesting to think about his legacy as an early abolitionist in relation to the types of people who currently walk by King's door—many of which come from Africa or African descent. Jamaica's history may be unique in this way, and yet King's story seems lost in the shadows of more recent discussions regarding real estate expansion and development. What would Rufus think about the world outside his door now?

The visit to King's house was also a reminder of the impact rhetorical spaces can have on our own subjectivity. These spaces provide the

material and rhetorical resources in which we create our bodies and ourselves, implicating our subjectivities in the process (Dickinson 2002, 6). Investigating my encounter with King Manor more closely allowed me to revise my incomplete understanding of Colonial America and to reconsider not only the symbolic references to this time in history, but also the ability for one man to challenge the moral



paradigm of his or her generation. Such a story can be a kernel of inspiration for those who encounter King's home. For me, the house now symbolized the arduous process of building a moral crusade and forced me to think about the ongoing injustices of my own time. What are my responsibilities as a citizen in this period of American history, and how must I face them? I had entered King Manor with a sense of nostalgia for Jamaica's past, preparing myself to learn about yet another New York aristocrat, but I left with a new sense of urgency to be impactful in my community and to follow in King's footsteps.

There are more historical locations and objects scattered around Jamaica that share the same sidewalks as its citizens, serving as potential trajectories that could redirect the totalizing narratives within the community. Along with King Manor, there is the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce Building, Jamaica Savings Bank, and J Kurtz and Sons Store listed as three historically landmarked commercial buildings in Jamaica, further justifying the notion that Jamaica has been a center of commerce for decades. Walking by these buildings, I quickly noticed that these historical locations are clustered near the Sri Lankan shops, African-American hairdressers and Spanish-

American restaurants, seamlessly integrating the old with the new and making for a very vibrant and unique space.

It is not uncommon to see these old pieces of architecture being put to more recent use. As I walked by an old brick structure at 150-10 Hillside Avenue, I was curious about its origins since the building seemed outdated among the newer commercial buildings between which it was situated. The building had the words “Venture House” carved above its front door, which I would later learn was a housing project for people suffering from mental illness. The building was once the site for Walter B. Cooke’s Funeral home for over seventy years. One can trace obituaries to this site as far back as 1935. In the 1940’s the funeral home proclaimed itself the largest funeral director in New York City and continued servicing the area up until the 1970’s. The façade of 150-10 Hillside Avenue looked as if it had not changed since its early years as a funeral home, surviving decades of real estate development while continuing to service its local citizens.

The building’s legacy could reveal a new thread within Jamaica’s history, potentially reimaging its location. The ability to reimage space reinforces the ephemeral nature of spatial representations. The spaces we love are unwilling to remain permanently enclosed; they appear to move elsewhere without difficulty, into “other times, and on different planes of dream and memory” (Bachelard 1964, 53). Totalizing narratives may feel flattening in their privileged display within popular discourse; however, their existence relies on the fleeting projections of human “dream and memory.” What memories

of 150-10 Hillside do we want resurfacing and defining its location? A space’s history may help recast the current, universal narrative within a location, reminding its viewers that something other than “rejuvenation” or “urban decay” help define elements of Jamaica. As I stared up at the Venture House’s worn, brick façade, I thought about how a new spatial



representation may be buried in its rich past, waiting to be unlocked by its surveyors.

The cultures and histories you will come across in Jamaica change from block to block, where one can travel from the West Indies to Bangladesh in under a mile, or be transported to the eighteenth century among its historical parks and city landmarks. The transformation happens rapidly, yet who gets to decide what stays and what disappears? Walking away from the Venture House back to the subway, I stumbled on the famous Sidewalk Clock in Jamaica Center built in the late nineteenth century. Designated a New York City landmark in 1981, the double-faced copper clock towers over its cast iron base, surveying the busy intersection of Jamaica Avenue and Union Hall Street. The meaning of this clock must have changed within this ever-expanding community, a community that has left its previous demographic landscape behind, yet has kept this specific relic. The face of the clock seemed like a constant reminder that, at some point in Jamaica, keeping time was a luxury for only a few, and such objects were meant to be both aesthetically pleasing and useful to its onlookers.



The cultures and histories you will come across in Jamaica change from block to block, where one can travel from the West Indies to Bangladesh in under a mile, or be transported to the eighteenth century among its historical parks and city landmarks. The transformation happens rapidly, yet who gets to decide what stays and what disappears? Walking away from the Venture House back to the subway, I stumbled on the famous Sidewalk Clock in Jamaica Center built in the late nineteenth century. Designated a New York City landmark in 1981, the double-faced copper clock towers over its cast iron base, surveying the busy intersection of Jamaica Avenue and Union Hall Street. The meaning of this clock must have changed within this ever-expanding community, a community that has left its previous demographic landscape behind, yet has kept this specific relic. The face of the clock seemed like a constant reminder that, at some point in Jamaica, keeping time was a luxury for only a few, and such objects were meant to be both aesthetically pleasing and useful to its onlookers.

I could see an array of other signs in the immediate area of the historical clock referencing modern services such as Medicare or travel assistance. The intersection where it stood was busy with people rushing to cross the street. The clock's presence in this particular location quickly reinscribed for me the constant fluidity of an urban setting; the objects of the past stand still and witness our endless march towards modernity. This image reminded me of how my own subjectivity gets caught up in this constant push towards progress where one must always be ready to reinvent themselves in a fast-paced, capitalistic society or become a relic of the past. This

was the reality for me for ten years as an adjunct in New York City, where I had to navigate the precarious hierarchy of the higher education system in order to maintain a livable wage. I felt secure as an adjunct when I entered the classroom and twenty faces looked up at me awaiting direction, but I felt unstable leaving campus the last week of the spring semester, questioning how I'll pay rent during the summer months. The space captured this feeling of instability for me, suggesting that I could somehow symbolize both the stoic presence of the clock and the chaotic, Queen's intersection. I starred at the object one last time and allowed this unsettling emotion to wash over me, as the crowds of people quickly moved past my body.

## **CONCLUSION**

These locations are living and acting in Jamaica, affecting our embodied practices as our bodies affect the social construction of these spaces. In providing this walking journal, I hope to turn our eyes towards the non-discursive elements that create our rhetorical agencies, empowering us to shift the narratives of our towns and cities. These objects of cultural and historical relevance help define Jamaica and make this region vibrant and active as one walks between the city blocks. In the overpowering emergence of our universal narratives we can easily overlook the agentive elements in our spaces that contribute to the rhetorical flows of a region. That said, these rhetorical flows both empower and challenge our commonplace understandings of the spaces that we move through and the sense of agency that we feel. We have the ability to inherit these trajectories, "which allows for institution, or trees, or ourselves or your computer, to last" (Walsh 2017 403). While becoming sensitive to these rhetorical flows as I walked through Jamaica, I couldn't help but feel both empowered and limited by the spaces I wandered in, emphasizing the fluid nature of my own subjectivity. I believe this sense of rhetorical awareness can become an entry point to other, more localized narratives that exist in Jamaica, potentially subverting or redirecting its totalizing narrative, but one's own sense of self cannot be ignored in the process.

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# Public Art as Social Infrastructure:

## Methods and Materials for Social Action at Environmentally Contaminated Sites

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*This article analyzes the capacity for public art to build a “*métis*” infrastructure (Grabill 2007) capable of supporting local experiential and performative knowledge about the environment. The article describes the work of UPPArts, a small, nonprofit arts organization focused on promoting environmental awareness. Their long-term cultivation of partnerships with state agencies, NGOs, and community residents resulted in a robust collaborative arts program that engaged the public in making “nonexpert” (Simmons and Grabill 2008) knowledge based on the embodied experience of living within a contaminated urban watershed. Using field research conducted over the course of the author’s work with the organization, the article presents a thick description and rhetorical analysis of UPPArts’ annual culminating event, a parade known as the Urban Pond Procession. The article argues that the representation and performance of community knowledge in the form of community-made arts projects like the Urban Pond Procession helped mobilize a community into a public that could advocate for its right to environmental remediation and protection. The lesson of UPPArts is that the material dimensions of artistic method matter. The close attention that art-making forces us to pay to how we use materials to make things with each other can reconfigure social relations around the idea of a watershed as a rhetorical common-place (Druschke 2013).*

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*“Usually, the great advantage of visiting construction sites is that they offer an ideal vantage point to witness the connections between humans and non-humans. Once visitors have their feet deep in the mud, they are easily struck by the spectacle of all the participants working hard at the time of their most radical metamorphosis. ... The same is true of artistic practice” (89).*

—Bruno Latour, *Re-Assembling the Social*

Use this epigraph from Latour as a jumping off point for the way it centers the importance of artistic methods, or “artistic practice,” in the making and re-making of social relations. Latour’s sense that art can be a kind of construction site, where material space and social relations are mutually constituted, resonates with rhetorical theories of how publics take shape. As many scholars of public rhetoric have shown, publics form through the situated discursive work that people do in relation to each other on issues of shared concern (Warner 2002, 67; Long 2018, 15-16). Collective social action is possible when individuals recognize that, despite the pressures of institutional power that often exclude ordinary people from public participation, social conditions can be opened to collective intervention and change through public rhetoric (Ryder 2010, 37; Simmons and Grabill 2007, 423). To this understanding of public rhetoric, Latour adds an awareness of the value of artistic method for doing the discursive work of public making.

I draw attention to artistic method in order to frame a discussion of UPPArts, a community arts organization that formed in response to a contaminated urban watershed in Providence, Rhode Island. UPPArts’s centerpiece project, the Urban Pond Procession, was an annual parade from 2007-2017 that brought attention to a system of freshwater ponds in the Lower Pawtuxet River Watershed, an impaired urban water system in Providence county. The work began when the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Rhode Island State Council for the Arts collaborated to award a grant to a local artist to design a simple multilingual sign to warn the community of the danger of exposure to the contaminated pond waters (Ewald 2012). Rather than design her own graphics, the artist, Holly Ewald, used the funding to create a small arts curriculum at Charles Fortes Elementary School, and she used the students’ artwork to illustrate

the signs. Over the next ten years, the project would grow into a robust nonprofit organization called UPPArts, partnering not only with the Department of Health and the State Council for the Arts, but also with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Brown University's John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities, four neighborhood elementary schools and Dr. Jorge Alvarez High School, twenty-seven teaching artists, thirty teachers, and one thousand students. It produced twenty-four different community arts projects, including an oral history project documenting the Narragansett indigenous settlements in the region, all focused on urban freshwater ponds and the social activity that takes shape in relation to them.

In this article, I consider UPPArts's community art-making as a method for enabling public participation in environmental remediation and watershed management. UPPArts's collaborative artistic methods functioned to reorient community stakeholders to each other, to their government, to their local municipal infrastructure, and to the "land community" (Callister 2013) in a way that enabled productive public discourse and political action. To document these methods, in 2011, I began studying the history of the watershed's contamination and the community responses to it, and in 2012, I volunteered as a community organizer with UPPArts. Over the course of these two years, I participated in a pond cleanup; helped create a public art installation at a local diner; helped test a pilot curriculum to teach watershed ecology in K-12 arts classes; attended residents' planning meetings in the surrounding neighborhood; interviewed four key stakeholders working on the contamination problem; studied public documents about the history of the contamination; and helped plan the 2012 Procession. At the same time, I made weekly logs of my experiences and reflections, took photographs at UPPArts events, recorded and transcribed interviews, and made regular journal entries of my site visits to the ponds themselves.

Studies of community engagement through public art tend to focus on the representational power of art to raise awareness and bring visibility to important social issues. Moya and Nuñez's (2013) analysis of the *Nuestra Casa* traveling exhibit, for example, focuses on its ability to immerse participants in a moving representation of the dangers of

tuberculosis at the U.S.-Mexico border. Public engagement with the exhibit, however, is limited to visiting it as a spectator and then posting written thoughts and reflections in an area of the exhibit designed for audience response (135). The works produced by UPPArts are certainly important for raising awareness of urban water quality and for making visible the interconnectedness of the waterways that make up a local watershed. However, over the course of my work I came to a greater appreciation of the importance of artistic method itself for enacting what Elenore Long (2018) calls a responsive rhetorical art: “a purposeful, collaborative literate activity—one that is situated in local public life, carried out over time through the work of everyday people, committed to dialogic discovery across difference, and that informs humanizing responses to contemporary conditions that thwart people’s capacity to thrive” (13).

I argue that UPPArts provides a useful case study for understanding how the material dimensions of artistic method—the close attention that art-making forces us to pay to the use of materials to make things—can reconfigure social relations around the idea of a watershed as a rhetorical common-place (Druschke 2013). Simmons and Grabill (2007) claim that in order for ordinary people to participate in public deliberative discourses on environmental issues, “they must be able to use complex information technologies and know where to go to do their own science. And they must be able to produce the professional and technical performances expected in contemporary civic forums” (422). Their work with community-based organizations shows that this approach of democratizing access to science can lead to productive social change. The story of UPPArts suggests that artistic method also has an important role to play in creating the capacity for public participation on environmental issues, precisely because it draws a different attention to ways of knowledge-making and public formation than is available within technical discourses.

Similar to the way Simmons and Grabill describe “nonexperts” participating productively in public discourse on the environment by inventing ways of “doing science” with limited resources (434), UPPArts engages social actors in the very processes of making themselves into a public by collaboratively making art out of everyday objects. A brief example of three interconnected projects illustrates

this approach. In 2012, UPPArts partnered with the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island to create a K-12 teaching module about runoff, using plastic storage bins, sand, rocks, pieces from a children's playset, water, and blue dye to model how water carries environmental pollutants over impervious surfaces in a neighborhood, showing the effects of soil filtration and the vulnerability of groundwater to contamination. At the same time, they partnered with Big Nazo, an internationally-known performance art group located in Providence, to develop a "Creature Creations" workshop. The workshop taught K-12 students how to use foam and fabric to make life-sized wearable puppets inspired by the effects of contamination on aquatic life for use in street theater. Finally, these two modules helped shape the 2012 Urban Pond Procession, as the parade route followed the path of the watershed's underground aquifers and included the Big Nazo creature creations, as well as projects from multiple other schools and nonprofit arts organizations that UPPArts had partnered with over the course of the year. In this way, UPPArts uses artistic methods to collaboratively make knowledge about the watershed and then to embody and perform that knowledge in the making of a public. All combined, the projects raised public awareness about the existence and condition of the watershed while at the same time enabling the formation of a public around shared concerns for the watershed and their connection to it.

The lesson of UPPArts is that methods matter. Long (2018) explains that "the methods of rhetorical art matter; that is, even without promising guaranteed outcomes, they do carry consequence because they engage in the world in both material and symbolic ways" (25). Similarly, Janet Atwill (2006) describes the capacity for art to create ways of knowing in social situations where there is a recognized need for change but a lack of stability or certainty about the rules of social engagement (168). As the next section of this article makes clear, there are no set rules for addressing the many complexities of the Lower Pawtuxet River watershed and no guarantee that water quality will be restored to a swimmable and fishable status. By working towards that outcome, however, the methods of UPPArts build something else: a knowledge-making "infrastructure" (Grabill 2007, 16) that reorients people and organizations to each other and to the land in a way that sustains their civic engagement. Scholarship in environmental communication describes the need for such collaborative methods of

public participation (Druschke and McGreavy 2016; Brulle 2010). As Brulle notes, “broad based civic participation cannot be brought about by expert advocacy”; rather, it requires individuals themselves “to actively participate in the creation and maintenance of their civic institutions” (91). The case of UPPArts suggests that artistic methods can create a collaborative, knowledge-making infrastructure resilient enough to effectively respond to situations lacking certainty or stability.

The concept of infrastructure is especially relevant here. Like artistic methods, infrastructure turns our attention to the material dimensions of human social activity and rhetorical invention. Infrastructure is both material and social; it consists of the built urban environment, but it also consists of the distributed activity networks that sustain civic engagement. Grabill (2007) describes social infrastructures as the methods, tools, and institutions that enable ordinary people to collaborate on the mundane everyday rhetorical work of community action (14–16). He points to the need for a particular kind of infrastructure that supports the knowledge work of nonexperts, a “*métis*” infrastructure made from people’s local, situated knowledge and experiences (91). A focus on artistic methods and infrastructure shifts our attention away from scientific methods for studying the environment—the collection and measurement of data—and instead into performative, embodied, and emplaced rhetorical work. While the restoration of the Lower Pawtuxet River watershed may require civil engineering expertise, the larger questions of environmental awareness, activism, and protection, in this case, can only be addressed socially, through a “responsive rhetorical art.”

By using artistic methods to create a “*métis*” infrastructure of local, situated knowledges and experiences, UPPArts makes space not only for nonexperts but also for what early twentieth-century ecologist Aldo Leopold (1966) called the larger “land community” (240), which “enlarges the boundaries of community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals” (239). Leopold’s understanding of land community enables us to see both human and nonhuman members as equally responsive to and expressive of their knowledge and experiences. Callister (2013) argues that the concept of land community is necessary for broadening what counts as public

participation in environmental democracy, because it offers a way past anthropocentric Western theories of public rhetoric and deliberation (437). Like Grabill's "métis" infrastructure, Callister's model of land community participation makes it possible for experiential, embodied, and performative interactions between humans and the land, "beyond traditional institutionalized environmental decision-making contexts" (441), to count as a legitimate knowledge-making practice. In order to represent the experiential and embodied interactions of the land community as a legitimate, knowledge-making practice, I share two passages written from field notes I made while visiting Mashapaug Pond as a UPPArts volunteer. Composed as they are from scenes that evoke ecological balance and natural beauty, but punctuated by images of human disconnection and placelessness, I hope the passages convey what I felt working with UPPArts, a sense of the land community in tension with itself.

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*Late February in New England, visitors to the shores of Mashapaug Pond will more likely have their feet deep in snow than mud, although the possibility still holds of witnessing the spectacle of creatures hard at work at their most radical transformations. Dozens of black-tailed and Iceland gulls crouch in a colony across the ice, wintering here in the northeastern states while awaiting the thaw in the far north Atlantic. Seemingly without warning, they rouse themselves into a whorl of flight over the frozen pond and its surrounding neighborhood, agitated by an unseen predator or human presence. Three Canadian geese stand unprovoked. Not far from them, the remains of a snowshoe hare, bright white with gray markings, settles into the dry leaves and grasses of the pond's eastern cove, likely the victim of a hard winter, too little to eat since a recent major snowfall. Along the cove, struggling possumhaw, its bare branches and stark red winter berries out of the hare's reach, tangles with oak and Norway maple, trees that hem much of the pond's perimeter in a lush green during the summer, all but bereft of leaves now (author's notebook entry, 19 February 2011).*

## **OVERVIEW OF THE LOWER PAWTUXET RIVER WATERSHED**

Like many urban water systems, the Lower Pawtuxet River watershed suffers from environmental pollutants as a result of the built environment and the legacies of industrial manufacturing. From

the 1890s into the 1960s, the Gorham Manufacturing Company's sterling silver operations were located along a small cove on one of the watershed's ponds. For decades, Gorham was the world's largest producer of sterling silver, and its fine silverware are sought after as collectibles today. The soil at the former Gorham site is contaminated with heavy metals and a large, shifting perchloroethylene plume in the groundwater. In addition, the construction of RI State Highway 10 in the 1960s bisected the watershed's underground aquifers, impacting its natural filtering ability and contributing storm runoff to the waters. Around the same time, most of the land to the west and south in the watershed was developed into an industrial park and a retail shopping center. Due to these developments, much of the watershed is now covered with impervious surface, making it vulnerable to high concentrations of environmental pollutants like nutrients and bacteria contained in storm water runoff. The pond waters and the tissue of fish living in Mashapaug Pond contain high PCB and dioxin levels, and the pond suffers algae and cyanobacteria blooms in warm weather.

The legacies of industrial manufacture and mid-twentieth century development combine with complex sociological issues like the language diversity and high poverty rates of the area. According to the census, more than half of the city's 179,000 people live in the three neighborhoods that map onto the watershed, 43% of them under twenty-five years old. According to RI Kids Count (2019), a local children's policy and advocacy nonprofit, 36% of the city's public school students live below the poverty line, and 41% participate in school breakfast. A majority of the watershed's residents are Hispanic or Latin@, who make up a substantial portion of the 24% of the city's public-school students considered English language learners. In addition, close to 2,000 Hmong refugees were resettled in the neighborhoods of the watershed area from Cambodia following their service for the U.S. military during the Vietnam War, and many still reside there along with their descendants (Vang 2011).

In 1967, Gorham was sold to the multinational conglomerate Textron, which continued to operate Gorham's plant until 1986, at which point the factory was closed down and eventually demolished. The City of Providence acquired the property in the 1990s through

tax foreclosures, and soon after began plans to parcel the land for redevelopment. When local residents discovered the pollution the company had left behind, they formed two advocacy groups, the Concerned Citizens of Reservoir Triangle and the Adelaide Avenue Environmental Coalition. These groups met with frustration, trying to get the attention of the city and Textron to address environmental remediation. Tensions at the site came to a head in 2007 when the city began to prepare one of the parcels for construction of a public high school without having obtained the proper permits, leading the Environmental Protection Agency to file a lawsuit to halt construction. The school was eventually constructed after the city, state, and Textron agreed to remediate 18,000 tons of contaminated soil, install a turf cap to the property, to include an air filtration system in the school blueprints, and to commit to quarterly air monitoring tests.

The complexities of the site, as described above, foreclose any straightforward attempts at environmental remediation for the watershed as a whole. The combination of nonpoint source pollution from highway runoff; soil contamination; groundwater contamination that shifted underneath multiple parcels that were owned by different stakeholders; the confusing transaction history of city and corporate land ownership that obscured which entity in the end was financially liable; and the challenges of organizing a densely populated multilingual neighborhood into a public capable of recognizing its own rhetorical agency and resilient enough to navigate the complicated legal channels through which they could get the attention of their city representatives as well as state and federal environmental agencies—all of these challenges clearly go beyond the ability of technical science to simply identify the contaminants, execute a remediation plan to remove them or contain them, and communicate that plan to the public.

According to Elizabeth Scott, the Deputy Chief of Water Quality at Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the remediation of the site and the restoration of its water quality to a swimmable and fishable status would require widespread “social change . . . changing attitudes and behaviors” (Scott 2012). Scott describes the value of UPPArts’s work as getting people to “buy in”

to the idea that everyone has a role to play in maintaining the health of the environment through collaborative partnerships (Scott). As a representative of a state agency, she faces a challenge in getting residential property owners to think of their responsibility to the ecological dimensions of the land they own, and their ecological connections to other property owners within a shared ecosystem or watershed, without seeming like the state is trying to encroach on individual rights of ownership. She describes UPPArts as working to change the cultural paradigm of “everyone for themselves...it’s mine, I can do what I damn please” (Scott). In recognizing the need to change this paradigm, Scott is clearly framing the watershed as both a material and social infrastructure that connects residents. In fact, when they attempted to map the watershed in 2010, the environmental scientists working with Scott’s agency discovered that the connections among the ponds and the surrounding landscape—the watershed’s topography and aquifers and its ability to manage natural cycles of precipitation and water flow—had been so manipulated by a century of engineering and development that the watershed had been reduced in size by about a quarter, so that it no longer strictly follows the natural topography of the region but rather follows the storm-water drainage and sewage overflow systems built into it (Scott 2012). This shift in the material dimensions of the watershed marks a need for a corresponding shift in the way we conceive of our responsibility toward the environmental stewardship of it.

The work of UPPArts turns our attention toward how people shape, mediate, and transform their relations to each other through public rhetoric and their relation to the watershed through what Latour (2005) calls the “non-human objects” of technological production (160). The high school construction controversy led directly to the founding of the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island and to the formation of the first Urban Pond Procession as environmental advocacy groups. The Environmental Justice League helped residents advocate for themselves as stakeholders in the political process of remediation. Amelia Rose, the Executive Director at the time, described her work as defining the environmental problem and articulating a path forward in terms that all stakeholders would find reflects their interests (Rose 2012). Rose said that UPPArts, on the other hand, worked to invent a sense of community, in other words, to establish the watershed as a rhetorical common-place (Druschke

2013) that connects residents to each other. While the Environmental Justice League facilitates the community's ability to exercise political power, UPPArts facilitates the community's ability to form itself around the idea of a watershed and to perceive a collectivized need for environmental justice.

## **SIGNS FOR A COMMUNITY**

In this section, I explore how UPPArts initially attempted to negotiate the connections and disconnections between expert, non-expert, and land community by examining the organization's first collaborative public art project, a series of warning signs called "Mashapaug Pond Is Sick." I compare the rhetorical work of these signs to that of another sign designed by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM). This comparative analysis of public signs does two things. First, it illustrates the different epistemological assumptions between the DEM's technical rhetoric and UPPArts's vernacular rhetoric. Second, it highlights my argument that methods matter in forming a public around environmental issues. In short, although the two signs approached environmental communication from different epistemological assumptions about knowledge-making, they both shared the same material assumptions about sign-making. These shared material assumptions end up reproducing the same distances between social actors and disconnections from place that later UPPArts projects would eventually seek to undo.

Community members often view environmental scientists and engineers as incapable of seeing their own epistemological assumptions, devaluing the local, situated and experiential knowledge of actual residents in favor of the findings of empirical science (Peeples 2006; Simmons and Grabill 2007, 421; Peters 2017, 248; Edwards 2002, 109). Simmons and Grabill (2007) note that ordinary people are inhibited from participating in deliberative processes that impact them due to the "indirect exclusions" of science's discursive norms, exclusions which tacitly devalue or disallow their input (420), threatening to deny the public "epistemological status" in shaping public policy and constraining public voices to the expression of public opinion or public comment (Simmons and Grabill 2007, 421; Hauser 1999, 17).

The DEM's public sign, "Mashapaug Pond Do's and Don'ts" (see Figure 1), however, shows that it is, in fact, careful to qualify its own knowledge claims. The sign's design separates the do's from the don'ts with a carefully structured scientific argument describing "what we know about Mashapaug Pond," citing "a recent study" as the basis for that knowledge. The sign, then, shifts the authority for community action away from the community itself and towards technical science as the basis by which community action is authorized or prohibited.

Below the claim, three yellow circles include careful technical framing to support three sub-claims about the pond's bacteria, fish, and algae, by pointing to the underlying study's data. The first circle says that "Swimming in the Pond is NOT SAFE because *Fecal Coliform levels are high following rain storms*" (italics added). The second circle prohibits eating fish, explaining that "*Analysis of carp & bass samples indicate that fish from the Pond ARE NOT SAFE TO EAT*" (italics added). The third circle notes the dangers of algae blooms, explaining that "*Some types of Algae (Cyanobacteria) found in the Pond can produce toxins that can harm humans and animals*" (italics added).

From the perspective of the technical expert, these qualifications emphasize that what we know about the pond is based on a set of technical methods for studying it.

The language of the sign demonstrates the care that scientists take to limit their arguments to the available evidence: the precision of terms, the reliance on field data, the careful qualification of causality to explain why the pond is

**Mashapaug Pond Do's and Don'ts**

**Enjoy Mashapaug Pond Safely**

- Catch and release fish.
- Canoe and boat when pond conditions allow.
- Walk, bicycle or enjoy other recreational activities in the watershed.
- Picnic and bird watch.

**WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT MASHAPAUG POND FROM A RECENT STUDY**

**BACTERIA:**  
Swimming in the Pond is NOT SAFE because Fecal Coliform levels are high following rain storms.

**FISH:**  
Analysis of carp & bass samples indicate that fish from the Pond ARE NOT SAFE TO EAT

**ALGAE:**  
Some types of Algae (Cyanobacteria) found in the Pond can produce toxins that can harm humans and animals.

**To keep you and your family safe until we learn more, Please Do Not:**

- Drink pond water.
- Eat fish caught in Mashapaug Pond.
- Swim, wade, play or bathe in pond water.
- Boat whenever thick scum, algae mats, or foul odors occur on the pond.

**What Should You Do?**

Wash your hands with soap and water if you come in contact with pond water.	DO NOT eat fish caught in the pond.	Watch for increased algae in the pond, and avoid contact with pond water during algae blooms	Wipe your feet after leaving the pond to prevent tracking contaminated sediments into your car or home.
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State of Rhode Island  
Department of Environmental Management  
Office of Water Resources

For More Information Contact:  
RI Dept of Health  
Office of Food Protection  
Dave Burwell at (401) 222-2748 or  
email at [dfburwell@ehh.in.state.ri](mailto:dfburwell@ehh.in.state.ri)

**HEALTHRI**  
Rhode Island Department of Health  
Protecting People, Places, and the Planet

Figure 1. "Mashapaug Pond Do's and Don'ts" (2007).

unsafe. These rhetorical moves serve to establish the ethos of the scientist as a careful observer and analyst, driven by the data and reluctant to make any unsupported claim. I argue that this attention to its own epistemological assumptions is actually what distances it from the community, by highlighting methods of knowledge-making that are not easily available to the nonexpert. By highlighting scientific methods, the same rhetorical moves that establish scientific ethos also distance the expert from the community, laying claim to the epistemology, taxonomy, and discourses that produce knowledge, all of which carry with them the “indirect exclusions” that proscribe the public from participation.



Figure 2. “Mashapaug Pond Is Sick” (2007).

By comparison, UPPArts’s series of signs titled “Mashapaug Pond Is Sick” does not qualify the community’s knowledge claims nor does it point explicitly to its epistemological assumptions (see Figure 2). Visually, the UPPArts signs do not convey the structure of an argument; rather, they imply a collaborative, community-based epistemology in their design—a visual assemblage of individuals, languages, cultures, and agencies that have been put in contact with one another and that constitute community knowledge about the environment. On one of the signs, for example, the dominant visual element is a child’s drawing in blue, yellow, and white, showing a

poisoned fish floating on the surface of the pond. In the background, a large blue trash can on the shore of the pond reads, “Keep this pond clean / Throw stuff in the trash.” Where the main purpose of the DEM sign was obscured by its secondary purpose of laying claim to scientific ways of knowing, the purpose of the UPPArts sign is singular and clear: to alert residents to the dangers of the pond’s bacteria, fish, and algae.

The sign offers no explanation of how we know the pond is “sick.” Instead, it leaves its own epistemological assumptions implied in the presentation of a child’s drawing as the central visual element, surrounded by the same warnings in English, Spanish, and Khmer:

1. Help heal the pond and protect yourself
2. Do not eat fish from the pond
3. Do not swim, wade or play in the pond
4. Contact [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov) or call 800-942-7434 for information on the hazards of boating, algae mats, foul odors and dangers to pets

At the base of the sign are the seals of the three sponsoring agencies: the Rhode Island State Council for the Arts; the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management; and the Rhode Island Department of Health. To the right of the seals is the statement, “Artwork by Ms. Fennessey’s 6th grade class, 2007-08, Charles Fortes Elementary School, and artists Holly Ewald and Andrew Oesch.” All combined, these juxtapositions represent what Grabill (2007) might call the “*métis*” infrastructure that UPPArts was beginning to build, a distributed and networked system of information technologies capable of supporting the situated and experience-based rhetorical work of ordinary citizens (91). In this example, the information technologies represented consist of art that gives voice to children’s experiences and perspectives; multilingual translation technologies that can render different orthographic scripts; and the institutional structures capable of the “moral humility” needed to engage in a “responsive rhetorical art” in partnership with the community (Long 2014).

From a design perspective, then, “Mashapaug Pond Is Sick” visually represents the distributed and networked social infrastructure that

would become UPPArts's artistic method. However, my larger argument is that methods matter for drawing attention to the material dimensions of forming publics around environmental issues. To that end, the materiality of the signs—considering them as made things, as cultural artifacts in and of themselves—still disconnects public formation from knowledge formation, and disconnects both from the land community of the watershed. Both the UPPArts signs and the DEM sign reproduce the same material distinction between the technical and the vernacular, because the fabrication of both signs is the same. Both deploy the practices of materials science and mechanical engineering in their making, and both are the result of a series of technical choices, such as between sheet aluminum or photopolymer printing processes, and between laser cutting or stamping. In the next section, I'll show how UPPArts evolved to cultivate the development of a *métis* infrastructure through artistic methods using everyday materials, connecting social actors to each other through the very process of making, rather than representing already-formed connections in a fabricated medium like a sign. We might say that rather than making signs for a community, the projects produced by UPPArts became signs of a community.

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*A disused boat ramp ascends from the water's edge. From higher ground, the pond is clearly surrounded by the fact of the city. Its western shore abuts the back of a sprawling industrial park and a small, derelict playground consisting of a climbing structure and a little league baseball diamond. The empties from a six-pack of Bud Light are strewn around the parking lot. Two spoons, a trademarked "Coke" logo on their handles, lie in the dead grass, a sandy residue in their bowls. A broken Novolog Flexpen pre-filled insulin syringe pokes out from a scattered pile of Marlboro cigarette butts. Out on the ice, the gulls still carry on with their gossip, but their calls are at a far remove now. The traces of neglect and addiction here reveal the persistence of humans' toxic interface with the natural world, a feeling of placelessness that persists in the human-made objects left behind, the social activity and network of associations they enable, traces of the decomposition of the social, and the need to find resources capable of re-assembling it (author's notebook entry, 5 March 2011).*

## **SIGNS OF A COMMUNITY**

In this section, I offer a thick description (Geertz 1973) of one Urban Pond Procession in order to highlight the importance of the material dimensions of artistic methods in making a public. As we have seen, the “Mashapaug Pond Is Sick” public signage visually represented a nascent *métis* infrastructure through its juxtaposition of languages in translation, experiential learning, and the coordination of state and non-governmental agencies responsive to the community’s needs. Rather than representing this infrastructure, the annual Urban Pond Procession embodies and performs it.

The 2012 Urban Pond Procession begins orderly enough. The morning of the parade, everyone gathers at the Mashapaug Pond Boathouse, a typical, wood-framed, state-park-style structure. A dramatic, red-scaled dragon boat leans against its eastern exterior, left by the Ocean State Dragon Boat Club, which holds outdoor practices on the pond. All around the boathouse, preparations are underway as participants assemble their materials for the march that would wind through the neighborhood and end at the large public Roger Williams Park. Holly Ewald, the artist who originally set this carnival in motion years ago, announces to the gathering crowd, “we’re going to try to be a little bit organized this year.” Parade marshals are being assigned—they will carry colored flags and will have water and information for anyone needing assistance during the march. Volunteers are handing out drums hand-made from five-gallon buckets, crash cymbals made of painted, Oscar the Grouch-style garbage can lids, and painted cardboard signs that say “Don’t Swim with the Fishes.”

Off to one side, a student is climbing into a “fish costume” from one of the Big Nazo Creature Creation workshops. It resembles a large white hazmat suit with a helmet that is half diving bell and half teapot. This student is the only one from the workshop who could make it to the parade today, so there are extra costumes up for grabs for anyone who wants to wear one. A group of students from a local charter school assembles at the pond’s shore to kick off the procession by launching a floating sculpture out onto the pond. Their sculpture shows a model of the old Gorham factory on one side, and bouquets of flowers on the other. As the students speak to

the gathering crowd, some in the crowd notice that a light breeze is turning the sculpture on the water so that the flowers face us, and the factory is obscured.

Minutes before the parade is scheduled to begin, we all line up into formation: an “Urban Pond Procession” banner first, followed by a group of marchers wearing handmade hats shaped like water vessels, followed by a handmade drum troupe, followed by a painted banner saying “Don’t Swim with the Fishes,” followed finally by the trombones, sousaphones, snares, and police whistle of the Extraordinary Rendition Band. The Extraordinary Rendition Band, or ERB, describes itself as a democratic, guerrilla-style, “thump, boom, honk” marching band, much like the seemingly impromptu street bands one might find in the French Quarter of New Orleans. Their mission statement is “to interrupt your regularly scheduled life with spontaneous moments of raucous musical joy” and to “contribute to making the experience of saving the world a bit more fun and weird.” Finally, Holly encourages everyone to take advantage of the day. She says, “this is an opportunity where it’s okay for us to be silly and act like fools in the street a little bit, so I want everybody to be carrying a sign, wearing a vessel hat, wearing a costume, playing a drum, or holding a banner while we march.”

Our formation holds up until the procession comes to its first stop outside the Liberty Elm, a local diner. In the rear parking lot, surrounded by the neighborhood’s triple-decker apartment buildings, the ERB challenges a troupe of student five-gallon drummers to a drum-off, exchanging cracks on the snare with rat-a-tat-tats on the buckets, all punctuated by cymbal crashes from Megan, an ERB member who plays the “cymbals of the destruction of the patriarchy.” In the middle of the drum off, six life-sized Big Nazo puppets arrive resembling an array of pond cyanobacteria, dancing their way into the crowd, some of them nearly eight feet tall, teetering and twirling almost out of control. Roughly one hundred people are here, many in fish costumes or playing impromptu march tunes on an assortment of instruments, many of them meeting each other for the first time.

After this stop, the Procession slowly transforms into a carnival (See Fig. 3). Even the sense of order represented by the volunteer



*Figure 3. The 2012 Urban Pond Procession assembles itself into a “weird” public. Photo Credit: UPPArts.org*

parade marshals has broken down. A young boy dances around waving one of the marshals’ flags in his hand, having acquired it through a spontaneous barter system that has taken shape among the crowd. He hands the flag—just a brightly colored cloth tied to a stick—off to a woman in the crowd in exchange for her painted trash can cymbals that he now happily crashes. She waves the flag for a minute before passing it on to a man in exchange for a maraca. The “singularity” (Long 2018, xvi) of these objects as they transfer and transform across individual exchanges opens multiple possibilities for identification and meaning-making across participants. Long describes the singularity of moments like the ones described here as being crucial for the invention of new knowledge and new methods for negotiating contemporary life. The particular circumstances of the moment are always both familiar and new, presenting ambiguous meanings and multiple possibilities for action. The impromptu exchange economy of everyday objects during the processions is an improvisational negotiation across participants, playfully establishing the grounds for public discourse by performing the shared ambiguity of our material connections to each other and to place.

As Druschke (2013) points out, following Kenneth Burke, ambiguity is the site from which rhetorical identification can take place, where

the watershed is framed as both “a material and symbolic site for identification” (88), the “slippery” process by which a material watershed can become a symbolic community. The Urban Pond Procession enacts this rhetorical process by collapsing the watershed’s material and symbolic dimensions into a singular embodied performance of community knowledge, a simultaneously meaningful yet ambiguous inducement to work toward social change. At the same time that the procession makes social actors’ material connections to the watershed visible, it also makes visible UPPArts’s cultivation of a *métis* infrastructure of local, situated knowledge distributed and networked across individuals and institutions through its many partnerships and ongoing public arts projects. The infrastructure of UPPArts’s collaborative artistic method extends across the city like a rhizome, year after year, as the organization plans a pond cleanup one week; an arts workshop at a local non-profit arts education center another week; organizes an artist-in-residency program for Alvarez High School; and organizes a meeting with council members of the Narragansett Tribe to plan an oral history project about the pond.

These “small, meso-level changes” (Lamsal and Paudel 2012, 765) of community activism accumulate over time into meaningful social change. In June 2019, after more than a decade of community-building through public arts and partnering with more conventional environmental activist organizations like the Environmental Justice League of Rhode Island, a large parcel of the former Gorham manufacturing site was officially opened as a public park, just adjacent to the controversial Alvarez High School. Interviewed by a local environmental website following the park’s ribbon-cutting ceremony, Holly Ewald said, “the public interest in addressing the causes and cleaning up the area, and all the wonderful work done by so many, it was amazing to see.... It was gratifying that the arts can really work to create change” (Carini, 2019). UPPArts’s methods of connecting people to each other around local, situated knowledge of living in or near a contaminated watershed also connected them to real deliberative decision-making processes that otherwise might have left them excluded as “non-experts.” Years earlier, Holly credited the idea for the first procession to her experience at a public hearing on the contamination. She explained that she started this work “because I went to one of those public hearings and it was just awful. Nobody had any idea what anybody was talking about” (Ewald, 2012). Rather

than build public capacity in the complex information technologies needed to participate in the technical discourses valued in such forums (Simmons and Grabill 2007, 422), she deployed a responsive rhetoric based on collaborative and networked artistic methods, reassembling the social into what Warner (2002) calls a counterpublic (118), or what Holly calls people just “being weird” together. Speaking at Alvarez High School before the final procession in 2017, she pointed to the way her work enlists the idea of the watershed to change cultural attitudes of disconnection and distance from each other and from the environment:

We’ve helped to change the view of Mashapaug Pond for many people, yet it still is seen by many as a place to be avoided. But we know differently. It can be and is now seen as a place of learning.... Pay attention. What if we change our ways, pull up more asphalt, plant gardens, pick up pet waste, ride bikes more, drive cars less, cut back on fertilizers and pesticides? The pond would be healthier, our air fresher, our landscape more beautiful, our kids would have a place to play (Urban Pond Procession, 2017).

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# Writing for Advocacy: DREAMers, Agency, and Meaningful Community Engaged Writing

**Jeffrey Gross,**  
*Christian Brothers  
University*  
**& Alison A. Lukowski,**  
*University of Wisconsin-  
Stout*

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*This profile examines “Writing for Advocacy,” a pair of Spring 2018 courses designed around community engagement and project-based learning. Supported by a grant from Conexión Américas and the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition (TEEC), Christian Brothers University (CBU), a regional leader for educating undocumented students, provided a fertile space for a course that leveraged student voices to lobby the Tennessee General Assembly for in-state tuition for undocumented students at Tennessee public universities. Responding to the political moment of uncertainty surrounding DACA and immigration policy, we designed a course focused on meaningful projects designed for public dissemination and presentation, and our group-based learning approach allowed us to meet both institutional learning outcomes for effective writing and research, as well as softer outcomes for socializing and professionalizing first-generation and DACA students. This course offers a model for other community-engaged writing courses to support student efficacy and student persistence.*

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**T**hrough Conexión Américas and the Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition (TEEC), Christian

Brothers University (CBU) received a subgrant to teach a Spring 2017 course titled “Advocacy in Action.” CBU, emerging as a leader for educating undocumented students, proposed a course that leveraged student voices to lobby the Tennessee General Assembly for in-state tuition for undocumented students at Tennessee public universities. However, we were asked to delay until 2018 because our Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students faced an increasingly uncertain future and reluctance to share their status due to the election of Donald Trump. In that year, we redesigned the course into “Writing for Advocacy,” a pair of Spring 2018 courses designed around community engagement and project-based learning. Writing for Advocacy included a special section of first-year writing and an upper-division English elective, both of which met separately for some class sessions and together for many, especially as students collaborated on projects. Students worked in groups to define and respond to problems through public writing and presentations to advocate. This profile describes the community-engaged and project-based writing course we created with our grant. Responding to the political moment of uncertainty surrounding DACA and immigration policy, we designed a course focused on meaningful projects designed for public dissemination and presentation, and our group-based learning approach allowed us to meet both institutional learning outcomes for effective writing and research, as well as softer outcomes for socializing and professionalizing first-generation and DACA students.

## **SHIFTING FOUNDATIONS: ORGANIZING THE COURSE**

With the numerous uncertainties facing immigration in the US, we built a course that responded to this moment of political and humanitarian crisis. Inspired by T.R. Johnson, Joe Letter, and Judith Kemerait Livingston’s “Floating Foundations” model for rebuilding the writing program at Tulane University following Hurricane Katrina, wherein they sought “attunement to a fluctuating present” (2009, 34), Writing for Advocacy adapted to a shifting sociopolitical landscape, one where immigrants’ rights and safety were increasingly at risk. Nevertheless, with twenty-six students, many of them self-identified as DACA recipients, we began Writing for Advocacy in January 2018 to provide a transformative learning experience for underrepresented and first-generation learners. The course met both

hard, measurable learning outcomes—teaching research methods—and softer outcomes—professionalization and socialization.

We designed the course around the TEEC two-day summit in late February, an annual event for coalition members and national partners. In the first eight weeks, our course readings, writing assignments, research resources, and class activities prepared students for summit workshops and meetings. The second half of the semester focused on using the summit's momentum to continue advocating for change through writing. Students drew from ongoing interactions with various stakeholders and developed the self-efficacy to present to community leaders in one of the course's final assignments. The public audience and reception of student work made these networks part of the learning process. In *Writing for Advocacy*, we helped students align our advocacy goals for equal education with their ongoing lobbying efforts on behalf of scholarship programs and campus and regional political organizations. We positioned writing as community engagement, aligning with the definition of meaningful writing offered by Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller, and Neal Lerner: “meaningful writing projects offer students opportunities for agency: for engagement with instructors, peers, and materials; and for learning that connects to previous experiences and passions and to future aspirations and identities” (2016, 4).

## **SOLID GROUND: STUDENT SUCCESSES**

*Writing for Advocacy* emphasized *kairos* and the centrality of rhetoric as a means for students to understand and to affect their communities. Although our course's object of study was immigration policies and DREAMers, our subject of study, writing, positioned the emergence of meaningful student writing at the intersection of personal aspirations, histories, values, and community wellbeing. Applied to other local contexts, *Writing for Advocacy* could be replicated as a community-engaged and project-based learning model. Partnership with local partners and audiences can be implemented in multiple situations, particularly those where a significant portion of an institution's student body has a personal stake with the course's object of study. Immigration advocacy could be replaced with local initiatives tied into local or state issues. Students in Michigan could advocate for clean water for Flint, or students in Georgia could advocate for

voting rights. We believe Writing for Advocacy's emphasis on public-facing writing, *kairotic* response, and direct community engagement offers a model for meaningful writing.

Our group-based learning approach (students working in groups of five to six students around a particular immigration-related topic) benefitted from our conjoined course model, wherein experienced students served as fellow learners and peer mentors. We built on first-year writing programs across the country that provide peer mentors (Ward, Thomas, and Disch 2010; Yomtov et al. 2017; Holt and Fifer 2018). These programs especially help at-risk students who struggle with asking questions of authority figures because they want to appear competent or pass as citizens. We were motivated by research in the field, but also by Alberto Ledesma's *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* (2017), a required course text, in which he describes and illustrates his struggle and fear as an undocumented youth and the joy he receives in mentoring undocumented youth at University of California—Berkeley. In our conjoined classrooms, juniors and seniors steered group work to meet deadlines and created manageable outcomes. That is, their experience helped first-year students work through complex multi-faceted, semester-long projects. We credit this model, in part, for the first-year students' success in the course and their persistence to junior year.

We anticipated that research would play a large role in our students' advocacy work and created requisite assignments. Therefore, we dedicated over \$3000 of the grant money for CBU Plough Library purchases of approximately eighty-five books and films to support research. These materials also allowed our library to become a campus and community repository of materials pertaining to advocacy and immigration. Students used research for every written aspect of their course work: team-written blogs, infographics, congressional one-pagers, and researched essays. We found that a move away from the traditional essay helped students create informed research to shape policy and make change. Students witnessed this model of research and its necessity and application at the TEEC summit. Abigail Cohen of the Data Quality Campaign and Andy Smith of The Education Trust ("The 2018 Education Summit," 2018) demonstrated the use of data and research to argue for policy change. In creating the

rhetorical opportunity for meaningful and researched writing, we broke down the separation between academic writing and public writing. Students initially worked through an idea as a post on their group's blog and then returned to that idea in an individual project at the end of the semester, synthesizing deeper research: first-year composition students wrote white papers; students in the upper division course composed multimodal projects. Their research had stakes. We followed Jacqueline Preston, who challenges us to think of writing beyond narrow academic terms and view it as culture: "To regard writing as culture is to recognize language as symbolic action, the means by which we construct worlds and express realities" (2015, 39). Course writing assignments elicited research, argument, and rhetorical sophistication. Moreover, student writing lived beyond the classroom and the immediate crisis. Writing a letter, op-ed, blog post, or phone script provided students with agency, a way to speak back to those in power and to create meaningful change through their writing. They worked to create the sort of society in which they wanted to live.

One unexpected outcome of Writing for Advocacy was the opportunity to professionalize first-generation students. For most of our students, the TEEC summit was their first professional cocktail party, formal dinner, and networking opportunity. When we outlined the agenda for the event, one student shot his hand in the air and asked, "Do I need to wear a tie?" (Tyler, in discussion with the authors, February 2018). A young woman piped up, "Wait, how fancy is this? Like high heels fancy?" (Desiree, in discussion with the authors, February 2018). Faculty unaccustomed to working with first-generation students might find these questions off putting. We prepared to talk with the students about correct apparel. Our experience and the work of other scholars (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt & Moll, 2011; Rios-Aguilar and Deli-Amen, 2012) recognize the cultural challenges that first-generation students face as they move from a working-class identity and adapt to the taste and style of middle-class norms. For our first-year students, this transition was largely positive. We mitigated culture shock by leaning on the junior and senior mentors. While most of them were first-generation too, they had more opportunities and experience with internships, work, and networking.

Ultimately, we designed the course to challenge students' assumptions about advocacy while empowering them to become advocates. Our approach to the course could be defined as rhetorical advocacy: we wanted students to understand and participate in advocacy efforts from a rhetorical perspective, particularly in relation to the methods, techniques, and genres that make advocacy effective. Rhetorical advocacy differed from protest, another important form of advocacy work in which numerous of our students had previously participated. We discussed the "long game" of public advocacy, when a march alone won't change an unjust law. Helping students think long-term is difficult when their friends and family are detained and deported today. However, advocacy is about raising awareness, shaping local and state laws, and forming coalitions. Academic coursework, too, is about this "long game," so we often stressed that the course aimed to provide the theoretical and rhetorical foundations for a wide range of advocacy situations that sometimes required us to back off and take a broader view.

## **MUDDY WATERS: TEACHING ADVOCACY**

In co-teaching a community-engaged, project-based course, we learned some important lessons about what not to do. We spent too much time on logistics: maintaining the budget, arranging hotel accommodations, reviewing proposals for coach buses, and the like. Most simply, we needed an administrative assistant, as time spent on these efforts took away from the pedagogical aspects of course preparation. We relied heavily on our own networks, especially with alumni and established professional relationships. A university Community Engagement Office, something CBU added after our course, would make this work more efficient. As with any community-engaged course, ours needed months before the course establishing relationships and expectations with community partners. To the extent possible, travel arrangements, guest speakers, and outside events should be scheduled before the course begins by campus staff.

In addition to logistical struggles, we had to slow our instructional pace to accommodate students' workflow. Unlike traditional writing classes, *Writing for Advocacy* required students to develop

multimodal acumen—including photos, designing webpages, and editing for visual clarity. We never evaluated the writing out of its digital context. We rededicated weeks scheduled for in-depth analysis of class readings to providing feedback or helping students solve coding issues. Additionally, strong student writers in traditional essay formats struggled with a pared down online writing style, and our English Language Learners felt overwhelmed by juggling so many elements in addition to writing in English. To overcome some of these challenges, we provided a grant-funded writing tutor who had experience working with ELLs and digital composition. We reworked some assignments, even cutting a small project, to create time to work through the course's most important writing assignments. Those designing such a course should consider the pacing of assignments, recognizing students may need significantly more time for multimodal composition.

## **AFTER THE SURGE: REFLECTING ON THE COURSE**

Over a year later, we are still processing the course's effectiveness. Recently, Diana, a student from the first-year composition section of Writing for Advocacy, shared her experiences at the 2019 TEEC Summit. She stressed how our emphasis on rhetorical advocacy influenced her research interests as a sophomore psychology major:

I have carried with me the importance of research and advocacy throughout my sophomore semester as well. For my psychology research project, I was able to form my own correlational study where I looked at the mood and attitudes towards mental health treatment between documented and undocumented college students ... There are kids in Tennessee that have experienced the detention and deportation of their parents ... Those kids should not be forgotten. My passion has not dwindled once the class ended. It has only made me realize how I could take the importance of research in advocacy and combine it with the field of psychology. ("My Experiences," 2019 Tennessee Educational Equity Coalition Summit, February 11, 2019)

Perhaps a best-case scenario, Diana found an impetus for further research, so cultural writing created the self-efficacy to engage more deeply in academic work. She understood research to be a

fundamental part of advocacy. Passionate about her community and causes, she remains a protester.

Writing for Advocacy also created community awareness of CBU's initiatives, which opens new possibilities for internships and employment, for collaboration, and for student persistence in college. We transformed a general education required course into a group-based, project-based, and peer-mentored experience. The first-year composition section's success rate (sixteen students started the course and sixteen students passed the course) outperformed general sections of the course. Three semesters later, fifteen of sixteen students remained at CBU, which significantly outperforms our institutional freshman to junior retention rate. Moreover, two of the students in the upper-division section of the course are now enrolled in graduate programs in rhetoric and composition.

Our course introduced an approach to rhetorical advocacy. In a hostile political environment, particularly on state and federal levels, our students learned to contextualize their thoughts, to challenge their audience, and to make themselves mediators of change through rhetoric. Although the short-term political gains of this work might be slight or even nonexistent, the long-term psychological and educational value of speaking up articulates a sense of worth on individual, educational, and cultural levels, and that was precisely what the moment of Writing for Advocacy demanded. And, it is precisely the model we think can be built on in other contexts and places, bringing together meaningful writing and student agency.

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# Grantwriting Infrastructure for Grassroots Nonprofits: A Case Study and Resource for Attempting to ‘Return Stolen Things’

**Zosha Stuckey,**  
*Towson University*

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*In responding to conversations on engaged infrastructure, racial and reparative justice, and transformational WPA leadership, I call for more writing teachers and writing programs to take up grantwriting as a way to create much needed infrastructure for small, struggling grassroots nonprofits (NPOs). I detail G.I.V.E. (Grantwriting in Valued Environments), a community writing project at Towson University in the Baltimore metro area, where students are a primary, if not the main, source of research, grantwriting, and grants tracking for partner organizations via classwork, paid internships, and part-time employment. I problematize and locate this work within the nonprofit industrial complex and discuss the structure and functioning of grassroots organizations and how their particular milieu lends itself to projects like G.I.V.E. The project views equity as way to “return stolen resources” (Marcus and Munoz 2018), acknowledges the legacies of injustice in our communities, places students of color in leadership roles, and prioritizes work with under-resourced organizations that are led by folks from the community itself.*

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**G**.I.V.E. (Grantwriting in Valued Environments; [www.towson.edu/giveproject](http://www.towson.edu/giveproject)) is a university supported engagement project at Towson University in the Baltimore metro area that advances students' professional writing and grantwriting goals by connecting their coursework to the needs of small non-profit organizations (NPOs). We research, write, submit, and track grants for small, community NPOs (less than \$250,000 annual budget), which fulfills needs for both parties: students gain professional skills in grantwriting and increase their cultural competence while small organizations receive assistance with infrastructure and capacity building in ways usually only granted to larger, better funded NPOs. The project views equity as a way to "return stolen resources" (Marcus and Munoz 2018), acknowledges the legacies of injustice in our communities, places students of color in leadership roles, and prioritizes work with under-resourced organizations that are led by folks *from* the community itself.

In their comments on equitable partnerships in "Intentionally Digital, Intentionally Black," Marcus and Munoz (2018) articulate a notion of equity as "a return of stolen things" (20). This, for me, has functioned as an informal but rigorous way to implement and then assess G.I.V.E. Those of us doing community engagement in rhetoric and composition know that we have to prioritize relationships (Cella et al.) in order to work towards "progressive ideals." We know that what Carmen Kynard (2015) terms the "White Turn" desperately needs to be altered. But what do our projects look like when our community engagements attempt to "return the things that were stolen?" And, what does it look like when we intentionally direct our energy towards subverting the "white turn"? Do attempts towards reparative action work? Can we do this work effectively within the "Non Profit Industrial Complex," and how is our work there always implicated in systems of oppression?

By using G.I.V.E. as a case study, I hope to add to the conversations in our field about what constitutes ethical and anti-racist community engagement as well as inspire writing teachers and program administrators to adapt any aspect of the G.I.V.E. model to their own contexts. My work is part of conversations on racial justice (Kynard 2015; Browdy 2017-18; Grobman 2007; Inoue 2019), relationships

(Cella, Goldblatt, Johnson, Parks, Mathieu, and Restaino 2016), engaged infrastructure (House, Myers, and Carter 2016; Jacobi 2016; Grabill 2008) and transformational WPA leadership (Fedukovich and Doe 2018-2019). In what follows, I lay out the context, design, curriculum, impact, and ethical issues of G.I.V.E. and attempt to come to terms with the inherent complicity of anti-racist community engagement that is embedded in the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC).

## **G.I.V.E - CONTEXT**

I was born here in in the City of Baltimore many, many decades ago and somehow, as an academic, find myself back for keeps. As a white, Jewish, queer left-wing progressive, whose family benefitted from white privilege and participated in white flight to the suburbs, I have intentionally reverse-migrated back into the city. I view much of the world—and all of Baltimore—through a racial lens. Part of my racial consciousness grew out of the fact that Baltimore infamously was the place of the “trend-setting” Residential Segregation Ordinance of 1910, which prompted many similar ordinances across the country (Power 1983). Up until 1915, Towson University (T.U.) itself used to be located in the city in what was then a predominantly white neighborhood called Sandtown/Harlem Park (where three of our community partners now reside and where Freddie Gray died in police custody in 2015). Not long after residential segregation was codified into law, the college moved 1.4 miles over the city line to where it is today in the majority white town of Towson. T.U., which employs me and funds and houses G.I.V.E, has long been the Predominantly White Institution (PWI) of north and northeast Baltimore while Morgan State University (M.S.U.), 4.6 miles from T.U., has been the Historically Black University (HBCU) in the same region. The first black students weren’t admitted to T.U. until 1955, a year after *Brown vs. Board’s* mandate, and even today there exists an anti-segregation lawsuit against T.U. and the University of Maryland system brought by M.S.U. and other HBCUs regarding replication of programs.

G.I.V.E. acknowledges these legacies of injustice, actively opposes the present-day practices of segregation, and promotes investment in under-resourced neighborhoods in Baltimore. And even though T.U. continues year to year to increase its diversity, we still are remarkably

more white and more economically advantaged (as a University and as a town) than Baltimore City or the now, almost entirely black, Sandtown/Harlem Park neighborhood. To offer more context to G.I.V.E.'s work and to Baltimore, it can be said that Towson operates in one world while the city of Baltimore—and Sandtown/Harlem Park even more so—operates in another. A limited comparison of 2017 demographics shows racial identity and household income (under 1% not reported).

**Town of Towson:**

white 74.3%, Black 13%, Latinx 4.4%, 4.9% Asian

Median Household Income \$82,062

**Towson University:**

Students - white 58%, Black 19%, Latinx 7.7%, Asian 5.9%

Faculty - white 75.6%, Black 2.6%, Latinx 2.3%, Asian 5.2%

Median Household Income \$80,470

**Baltimore City:**

Black 62.8%, white 31.8%, Latinx 5.5%, Asian 2.8%

Median Household Income \$46,641

**Sandtown/Harlem Park:**

Black 96.1%, white 1.6%, Latinx 0.3%

Median Household Income \$25,208 (\*poverty for 4 is \$25,750)

(Census, collegefactual, bniajfi)

These figures only scratch the surface in terms of disparities.

G.I.V.E. takes the stance that privilege is meant to be shared; this act of sharing takes a lifetime of effort and includes commitment to volunteering, networking, sharing resources, and constant self-reflection. T.U.'s students, mostly middle and working class from diverse racial backgrounds, learn about the university's past and consciously take part in reconciliatory efforts. These efforts look very different for different students; white students, for example, still the majority at T.U., (and even more so in the English Department), are asked to come to terms with Baltimore's legacy. Asao Inoue, in his 2019 CCCC Keynote address, points to a key factor that is core to how G.I.V.E. approaches community engagement in the context of Baltimore:

White bodies perpetuate historical racial injustices...Our hearts are not the problem. In fact, I'm actually saying the opposite, that we cannot change our biases in judging so easily, and that your perspectives that you've cultivated over your lifetime is not the key to making a more just society, classroom, pedagogy, or grading practice. The key is changing the structures, cutting the steel bars, altering the ecology, in which your biases function in your classrooms and communities.

What do those changed structures look like? What do we do with white bodies whose presence "perpetuates racial injustice?"

## **G.I.V.E. - PROJECT DESIGN & CURRICULUM**

G.I.V.E.'s response is two-fold: 1) partner with grassroots organizations by building infrastructure *with* and *for* them that enhances their capacity while also reinforcing the capacity of writing programs and 2) accomplish that work (often "grunt" work) behind the scenes *making sure the partner is the main authority*. This, to me, is at least the beginning of equity and a return of stolen things. The disparities and systemic oppression that embody Baltimore are central to my pedagogy. I operate within a reparative framework influenced by my work with *Intergroup Dialogue* (<https://www.towson.edu/provost/initiatives/diversity/fellow.html>) at T.U. where the focus is on addressing privilege, fostering cross-cultural listening, and building our capacities to act on what we say and believe. I interweave perspectives of equity as a return of what was stolen into discussions with students, and they began to realize that grantwriting can play a part, however small or technical it might be. This work is part of what Carter and Mutnick (2012) term the "political turn" in community writing where we learn to support partners' "efforts to rebuild and retool for a more equitable, just, democratic, and sustainable society" (7).

G.I.V.E. emerged in 2012 when four graduate students in the Master's in Professional Writing program completed PRWR 619 Communication in the Non Profit Sector; they registered for concurrent independent studies which transformed into our first fundraising team. The students planned and ran a fundraising event for a community theatre project at Harlem Park Elementary,

and within a year, a more sustainable grantwriting model emerged. G.I.V.E. attempts to balance the practical aspects of workplace writing with theorizing and reflecting on the social and cultural climate of Baltimore, what NPOs do here, why they do it, and on writing in relation to communities, advocacy, and social justice. Our key partners include an urban after-school program, a “friends” of the state park organization, a restorative justice youth-focused organization, a program that advocates for the families of those murdered in Baltimore, and an urban farming-centered community center. After Trump came to office, the refugee organization we worked with folded, and thus, we are currently seeking a new partner. Three of these organizations have an annual budget under \$100,000, one has a budget of under \$250,000, and one has a budget of close to 1 million (our largest of yet).

The emphasis we place on small, community organizations is a strategic move to attempt to even out the philanthropic playing field where larger, well-funded NPOs hire grantwriters and maintain a steady fundraising stream while small NPOs struggle to find and keep volunteers to write and submit grants. These organizations are grassroots—founded and run by people from the communities they serve—and all but one that we work with is led by a person of color. The majority came to us *never* having written or submitted a grant before. Organizations that have annual revenues of less than \$250,000 are essentially small, out-resourced fish in a very big public sector pond. Time and time again I am astounded at how overworked, underpaid, and wholeheartedly committed this cross section of folks at small NPOs are. We partner with small, understaffed NPOs because we know that we can fulfill a very real need; there is a high level of demand from both the organizations and from students across the disciplines, and the project has a compelling need to expand and be replicated.

At T.U., G.I.V.E. is embedded in the English Department in one undergraduate and one graduate course, plus there are a handful of students that participate via paid internships, part-time employment, independent studies, and some even choose to volunteer. Opportunities for student leadership also abound in this work. Each semester, in addition to a course offered for fifteen to twenty-one students, the four

to six students that participate through internships and part-time student employment are funded by [BTU](#) (Baltimore-Towson United), a new community engagement initiative at T.U., and our Office of Civic Engagement and Leadership. I supervise the internships as service, but soon will be receiving a one-time course reappointment for this project. In order to receive funding, I submitted a proposal to BTU, received the investment funds, and am guaranteed at least three years of funding and support to scale and sustain a long-term project. While it is possible to create a variation of this project with no funding (as I did for four years), I would recommend a truncated version until funding is possible.

In both courses, the undergraduate ENGL 401 Grant and Advocacy Writing and the graduate PRWR 619 Communication in Non-profit Sector, students spend the majority of the semester working on grant projects with other assignments and heuristics interwoven. Guiding questions included on the syllabi offer a panorama:

- What is our place in the world of philanthropy? What motivates us?
- How can we become fuller human beings, more actively anti-racist, more engaged citizens, *and* better writers?
- How can we assist without imposing? What is at the essence of writing *for* vs. *with*? How do we write collaboratively and ethically without imposition?
- What is advocacy & social change (in Baltimore & beyond) & how does writing, fundraising, & social media intervene?
- What is a nonprofit? What is the nonprofit industrial complex? How do NPOs grow and succeed? What are limitations of NPOs and the NPIC?
- How does one step into the job of an organizational writer? What is the job market like?

In addition to grant and nonprofit writing projects, G.I.V.E. takes cultural competence seriously; one example is by continuing to hire and partner with 65%+ students and partners of diverse backgrounds. In Appendix 1, I've listed outcomes, assignments, and heuristics for the practical writing aspects as well as for professionalism, advocacy, and cultural competence. In Appendix 2, I've provided a list of

resources for grantwriting courses. Other curricular aspects that are core to this project are Google Drive (GDrive) and GrantHub. While GDrive is free, we have a paid subscription to GrantHub, an online grant management and tracking software. Students in courses gain access to view both GDrive and GrantHub, while student employees and interns can edit in those systems. Since GrantHub allows us to track applications at the *research, in progress, submitted* and *awarded* stages, students see how grants management works across the continuum.

When getting started in the classroom, students work in groups according to which NPO they have chosen to write with, so that micro-community in the classroom is helpful throughout the process. Community partners visit the classroom (as many times as they like in person and virtually too), direct us in terms of research, come in as speakers to share on relevant topics, and conference with students and myself throughout the semester. Nothing is done without the partners' authorization and feedback. Typically, undergraduates work on proposals in pairs, while graduate students often prefer to work alone. After both myself and their peers have reviewed and edited drafts (more often than not I review them multiple times), then begins a recursive writing process of conferences and written feedback from community partner to student to myself and back again. It can be a chaotic process but once students envision the purpose more clearly—to move the written expression of their knowledge forward for a real-life purpose—their buy-in and passion increase tenfold. G.I.V.E.'s process from identifying potential partner organizations to following up with the grant proposal after submission is visualized here (recursivity and feedback from the partner is involved in every stage).

Semester timelines make it impossible to completely acclimate to the yearly grantwriting cycle. Since the nonprofit world doesn't adhere to semester timelines, we often have had gaps during the summer months that sometimes can only be filled through internships. Luckily, summer months aren't typically when grant deadlines occur. Being able to continue the project through the summer also involves faculty workload issues that can be resolved only if there is a project budget available. Robert McEachern's (2001) essay, "Problems in Service Learning and Professional/Technical Writing:



Incorporating the Perspective of Nonprofit Management,” does a good job of listing potential structural and ideological areas inherent to NPOs that can cause problems for students. I have seen all of these problems: the NPO’s hyper-focus on the mission, staff wearing too many hats, the NPO’s atmosphere of scarcity, untrained staff, and over-reliance on volunteers (216–20). Volunteer turnover is high, and when there is money for staff, their turnover rates are high too. I’ve tried to bolster consistency by connecting with more than one staff member at organizations or by taking organizational and staff

stability into consideration when choosing which organizations to work with. On our end, I have also tried to seek out undergraduates who are Sophomores or graduate students who are in the beginning of their studies because it is time consuming to have to retrain and familiarize new student employees and interns every semester.

Another messy curricular component is trying to balance the focus on deliverables with student learning. I often find that anticipation of a “real world product” or “deliverable” can galvanize the recursive composing process. In “We Don’t Need Any More Brochures,” Leon and Sura (2013) argue that an “elevation of deliverables creates two counter-productive situations in service-learning curricula. First, it emphasizes product over equally valued curricular components like inquiry. Second, it severely limits the invention of possible ways students and teachers might engage productively with community partners” (62). While emphasis on the product can certainly derail the flow of inquiry, G.I.V.E does not function like a machine churning out proposals; the reality is that approximately 25% of our drafted proposals are actually submitted. The fact that not all student work becomes a “deliverable” is a required part of the work so that students have room to breathe and even flounder. As Rentz and Mattingly (2005) put it, students are consultants first, change agents second (115). And let’s be honest—consultants stumble behind the scenes all the time. To move beyond the rhetoric of deliverables means that we can celebrate submitted proposals, but that the sweat, thought, collaboration, and learning it took to create the text is also a victory.

This high level of messiness can be frustrating for everyone. Because there are real world constraints (the organization re-focuses its priorities mid-semester, a funder takes down its request for proposals before we submit, communication breaks down with the partner for one reason or another, etc.), students can experience frustrations and disappointments if their project isn’t submitted. A few years back, one of our partners stopped responding to our messages only for us to find out he had experienced a major health issue. Students were crushed out of fear for the partner’s health but also because they had to choose another project that didn’t have real world application. As students come to terms with the idea that their work is a gesture towards returning what was stolen, they invest even more in their

work. Students who have positioned themselves as privileged learn what it means to have access to more resources and social capital (than middle-schoolers in the city, than mothers whose sons have been murdered in Baltimore, etc.) and to share it.

After a visit to the neighborhoods and the organizational spaces where our NPOs reside (viewing themselves in these spaces as an “other”), students see abandoned blocks, decaying schools, industry that has withered, drug users nodding on the corners from heroin use. They also see vibrant communities, hope, love, and unity. In introducing concepts and strategies borrowed from the Intergroup Dialogue courses I teach, cross-cultural listening is key—white students specifically are taught how to have humility as an outsider when listening to people of color and/or when being present in communities and spaces less familiar to them. This translates in G.I.V.E. to all students developing an understanding of what it means to have insider/outsider status and how to navigate relationships, networking, and advocacy in new situations. It also translates to G.I.V.E. as an organization prioritizing listening and unobtrusiveness in situations that necessitate that. Students learn how to be unassuming in communities where they are the outsider; they learn how to listen deeply. And, they learn how to “give back.”

## **G.I.V.E. - IMPACT & RECIPROCITY**

Our most quantifiable success to date is that we have raised over \$229,000 (out of over \$1 million submitted) all going directly to our NPOs. For an organization with annual revenue of under \$250,000, every grant makes a difference no matter how small. One of our first successes was being responsible for the majority of funds received to build an accessible playground in the nearby State Park. We’ve also received grants that fund: youth theater, youth attending a summer camp in West Baltimore, a digital projector for outdoor youth programming, neighborhood clean-ups, urban tree plantings, a dump trailer to haul trash and storm debris, a mobile interpretive van to serve Latinx community members, and general operating funds for an after-school program and a refugee organization.

As part of a “returning of stolen things,” G.I.V.E. also helps to develop infrastructure for organizations. We offer staffing where

staffing is absent, we listen and do what we're told, we meet midnight deadlines, and we become part of the organization's community to the extent that they want us to be included. Sometimes we remain fully behind the scenes as an intentional strategy for dealing with the repercussions of white bodies. G.I.V.E. takes its cues from our partners—in some situations like when we are the only people writing grants for an organization, the relationship is closer and we play a more active part in the culture of the organization. In cases like that, students and myself may attend meetings at the organization, take on longer term volunteer roles there (even as board members), and attend and organize fundraising events. In other cases, we can disappear behind the grant proposal, offer up a final deliverable, and ask what else needs to be done.

As an example of an impact that involved students getting deeper into the organizational community, in 2018 two G.I.V.E. undergraduates ran an eight week writing workshop for middle schoolers at an after school program (one of our partners) with much success. They developed curriculum with the organization's help and now will be starting a fourth semester leading the workshop. The curriculum, spearheaded by students, is now focused on spoken word because that is what the community's constituents wanted. We adapted by partnering with TU's Black Student Union's poetry team; the community partner adores that middle schoolers are mentored by college students who are also poets and black activists.

Sometimes our impact plays out when our community partners learn from us and take over the work we do because they now know how. To me, this is reciprocity at its best. What this looks like: 75% of the organizations G.I.V.E. works with came to us *never* having written or submitted a grant before. Some do not know what a request for proposal is. After having worked closely with us for two years (visiting classes, reading drafts, working one on one with students, combing through our resources, meeting with me), the community partner now feels they themselves can search for requests for proposals, download a grant application, copy and paste from the database of text, and edit, revise, and submit the proposal. In most cases, however, the community partner prefers for us to do it because it frees them up to work on other tasks. Another example can be seen in a partner who

is organizing a neighborhood clean-up and doesn't have a workable system for organizing volunteers. From us, they learn how to use Google Forms (after already learning about Google Drive from us) and Sign Up Genius, free tools that help manage volunteers.

G.I.V.E. specifically develops infrastructure for NPOs by building a platform of "live" resources for our partners. We construct, fill, and maintain a Google Drive (GDrive) for each partner. Student writing becomes part of G.I.V.E and all of G.I.V.E.'s work can become internal documents for the NPOs. Community partners help us create and have control over GDrive. In some cases, GDrive is the NPOs main document storehouse. In their folder, they find internal and external organizational documents. Some items in their Drive include: budgets and financials, proposals (not submitted, submitted, in progress), internal documents (IRS determination letter, letterhead, references, support letters, MOUs, etc.), curriculum and training docs, newsletters, and pics. GrantHub is a newer system for us and we are still trying to figure out how to entice partners to use it. The problem is that all five of our partners' grant information is kept on GrantHub—this means any one organization potentially has to wade through the other organizations' info. Although there is a way to dis-aggregate, our partners don't use GrantHub much, though the reason could be that they trust us and want us to manage grants alone.

We've developed even more infrastructure for organizations by creating (writing the description), advertising, and helping to fill internship positions (from universities in the region, but especially from T.U.) at our partner organizations. This funneling from G.I.V.E. to internships and, sometimes, to paid positions benefits our partners in that they now have access to interns, and they then have a hiring pool from which they directly pull. This mechanism has worked a few times so far; as an example, one G.I.V.E. student interned for the partner, was hired first part-time, then full-time, and finally became a devoted mentee of the Executive Director of the NPO. The relationships I have with the staff at our organizations are bolstered by the investment students make in the communities. G.I.V.E. is dotting the philanthropic landscape with motivated, culturally competent writers and advocates committed to a lifetime of giving

back. While hiccups appear at every turn, the impact is palpable, and we feel part of a return in community investment.

## REFLECTION & ETHICS

After many years adjusting and finetuning, there's still so much to learn and improve. It takes continual self-education on how to be anti-racist to figure out how to teach grantwriting through a lens of social and racial justice. It takes making mistakes. A host of scholars (Adler-Kassner 1999; Cushman 2002; Deans 2000; Rentz and Mattingly 2005; Herzberg 1994; Huckin 1997) have emphasized how important it is to consider and reconsider how community engaged projects are chock full of ethical risks that, if not attended to, can damage or exploit communities. Understanding how NPOs and the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) function within the context of university outreach can increase transparency and fairness and decrease likelihood of injury or breach of privilege. For G.I.V.E., this has to do with the possibility that equity or a "return of stolen things" might never be fully achieved when it is not only run by white folks like myself but also when it is within the structure of the NPIC. Working within the NPIC is inherently problematic even when the goals are equity and social justice.

In the introduction to *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non Profit Industrial Complex*, Andrea Smith (2008) explains that the NPIC "controls and manages dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, functioning as a shadow state constituted by a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the area of education and social services" (8-9; also see Rodriquez 2008). The point of a "complex" is that it is an amalgamation of entities—not just a one and done collaboration, but an organization of institutions that build infrastructure together for the long haul to reach common goals, often with some sort of sacrifice of original intent or design. This describes *us*. We aim to be fully collaborative, anti-racist across the board, and non-condescending as employees in the "Ivory Tower," but our intentions are often not enough.

The small NPO, once it is granted the 501(c)3 IRS designation, knowingly (but not desirably) gives up some sovereignty; in fact, many small, struggling NPOs are already acclimated to this grievous

reality of some semblance of compromise by the time they partner with a university. Because most of our partner organizations have three or fewer paid employees and rely mostly on volunteers, they rely on collaborations across the sectors to build infrastructure and to sustain themselves. But by becoming state-sanctioned, the small NPO can become a mechanism that mitigates rather than creates radical social change. And our participation adds to a managing of dissent. Even as both our partners and ourselves at universities visualize new structures, the day-to-day work we do then seems to maintain the status quo. As our partner organizations grow, other partnering and circumferential organizations—including universities (Johns Hopkins and T.U. included) and even corporations—support, house, fund, regulate, determine, and govern the NPO. One example of this is how there is often a buy-in price to sit on a board of directors of an NPO, which translates into many bankers or elite professionals sitting on boards that steer the organization.

I have seen example after example of small grassroots organizations accepting “help” and resources from universities or corporations more because they need it and less because they want it. Grassroots organizations often prefer to be independent of large institutional oversight, and view the relationship on a paternalistic continuum due to historical legacies. This is an even stickier reality when black-led organizations begin to work with universities that are predominantly white institutions. Regardless of intention, the predominantly white institution often manifests a “white savior complex” where collaboration is practiced more as an arrogant kind of “help.”

In the classroom, I am acutely aware of this same tendency where I myself manifest the “white savior complex” and where G.I.V.E. does as well. I attempt to make the tendency transparent by discussing with students the differences between charity and social justice: charity can maintain an ameliorative and slightly condescending rhetoric while social justice focuses on obtaining rights, equal participating, self-empowerment, and an equitable distribution of resource. Another issue arises when students are re-traumatized by pedagogy focused on urban injustice, systemic violence against people of color, women, and poor people, and on generational oppression. Because we are engulfed in a racist system, even anti-racist teaching falters and fails.

I often insert rest, rejuvenation, and play into my pedagogy when I notice that content has run too deep. I utilize hands-on learning (e.g. the “marshmallow challenge,” a popular online heuristic, to practice collaboration with peers), we’ve taken walks in the woodland area on campus, and I’ve incorporated self-care activities when needed.

Anti-racist teaching is complicated—apparent successes can often be shortcomings. It is a boon, for example, that G.I.V.E. students have been hired as grant and proposal writers, managers, and administrators by Johns Hopkins, The Maryland Food Bank (grants manager raises \$7.3 million a year), Parks and People Foundation, development departments at colleges, local businesses, and local Foundations. Another exciting outcome is how, as I write this, one of G.I.V.E.’s former students is potentially hiring another one of G.I.V.E.’s students who just graduated. In the Baltimore/Washington region, NPOs employ one out of every ten workers which equates to nearly 650,000 workers in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Northern Virginia. In the region, the nonprofit sector is the second largest industry employer, behind only the retail industry (“Key Findings”).

Job placement, however, also means that students are employed at many of the dominant institutions in the city which grassroots activists constantly criticize for their lack of ethical oversight and for their continued profiteering off of low-income, mostly African American neighborhoods. In this sense, reciprocity only goes so far. There is more to the critique of the NPIC (see *Incite!*), but as it is, our partners do tell us (via mid and end-of-semester evaluations) and the students report consistently and emphatically that we have made such positive impact on them. It does help to continually investigate how G.I.V.E. is a mechanism of the state and owning class apparatus—not to mention the racist system we are embedded in—where privilege, self-interest, surveillance, and self-promotion are embedded.

## **CONCLUSION: RETURNING STOLEN THINGS**

As much as I’d like to say G.I.V.E. succeeds in “returning stolen things,” I can only profess to handing over databases, narratives, information, research, time, and hopefully—in the spirit of grantwriting—money. Most important to the larger picture here is

the structure of support G.I.V.E. offers and how, I hope, it alters an approach to engagement. This project has taught me that we would benefit from more discussion in our field of how understaffed, under-resourced, and just generally strained small, community nonprofits are. While it is easy to critique how society, including the university, neglects to fully support community work, we rarely consider how our work is similarly limited in offering access to and dispensation of resources barring those we offer semester by semester through student involvement.

Rather, to return stolen things, our resources could be, at minimum, split in two between our program and the community programs we partner with. G.I.V.E. itself isn't there yet. And, while that might be a pipe dream of reparations, I believe we *can* do more; we can help strengthen, grow, and sustain our partner organizations themselves and begin to give back what has been stolen by offering infrastructure in ways similar to what G.I.V.E. offers. There still is no doubt that we must center student interests, voices, and right to fair labor. Without students, we cease to be. But another part of that reality is that thousands of small, community and grassroots nonprofit organizations have even fewer resources and less access to power than we do, and often even less than our students do.

I want to point to other scholar-teachers who have created grantwriting engagement projects like Courtney Stevens at Willamette, Charles Etheridge at Texas A&M Corpus Christi, and Kenna Barrett who was at University of Rhode Island. But it is Veronica House (2015), director of outreach at CU-Boulder's PWR program (mind you, Boulder has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to outreach, and not all of us are fortunate to be financially backed) that explains how their programming works to "bring in" as much as they "reach out." She explains that "community partners were interested in the idea of co-teaching and described the work as a form of educational outreach. Some of them expressed interest in helping the instructor determine readings, assignments, and days that they might visit the class to share their expertise through guest lectures or discussions" (66). It is the "bringing in" that I am interested in.

In essence, outreach projects can do more than conduct “business as usual”—to do more than “produce deliverables” (Leon and Sura 2013) for small, community nonprofits, but instead to take calculated, strategic risks that embed our intellectual work within under-resourced, over-extended grassroots organizations and, alternatively, open up space for nonprofits to exploit and inhabit writing programs and the university. That is, we can do more than “reach out.” We can aggregate and strategically institutionalize the work that is both ours and theirs. And this all takes trust—trust of our institutions and trust of us by the organizations we wish to help grow and sustain.

Robert Bringle and Julie Hatcher (1996) remind us that our engagement and outreach work has yet to truly “transform” the university (274). But it can, and I believe this is one way how that might happen. G.I.V.E. shows us that a community project’s (an NPOs) benefit can be just as important as student learning and that one priority does not have to preclude the other. With proven efficacy and some financial backing, it’s time for another “microevolution” similar to the one Linda Adler-Kassner (1997) identified over twenty years ago. House, Myers and Carter (2016) ask for an “evolution of the university” which will be incited by infrastructure changes (2). But this this evolution has to include institutionalization and infrastructure building not just of our internal programming but also of *the community organizations themselves*.

I honestly never thought I’d be here—in a position where University Marketing and Strategic Partnerships want to meet with me. I’ve found myself asking: is it even a good idea to wholesale this little corner of the universe? Turning my work over to the institution—*institutionalizing it*—wasn’t what I planned for, but I have found that this is the fate of some of us lucky or skilled enough to get tenure in an institution that has recognized the value of outreach and engagement. Even more dangerous is the idea of communities, especially communities of color, being controlled by universities and by white-led projects, so we have to stand down, be unobtrusive, listen, and practice allyhood. In *Tactics of Hope*, Mathieu (2005) uses the term “Strategic Institutionalization” to remind us that, as we institutionalize outreach programs, we must also stay committed to our values (see Campus Compact and CCCC Statement on

Community-Engaged Projects) and must calculate and recalculate the risks (95-98).

As a deft way to navigate the paradoxes and inequalities of attempting to “do public good” in the City of Baltimore—or in any place—G.I.V.E. is still and always will be complicit. This work is aligned with our field’s collective aspirations of contributing to the public good (CCCC Statement on Community Engaged Projects) and also to Asao Inoue’s (2019) reminder about language that has broad applications for community engagement: “White people can perpetuate White supremacy by being present....the presence of their [our] White bodies perpetuates historical racial injustices.” A reparative, anti-racist framework that asks us to build infrastructure *for* community nonprofits can work. White people especially have to be aware of the ways in which black-led organizations in Baltimore and elsewhere desire to be free of white influence. G.I.V.E is about taking cultural cues, sometimes disappearing out of the room, doing hard work behind the scenes and not getting or asking for credit. It’s about a lifetime of hard work. And, yes, equity is worth it.

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## NOTES

- 1 Please contact me at [zstuckey@towson.edu](mailto:zstuckey@towson.edu) for syllabi or if you are interested in hosting a workshop at your institution that will help you replicate this project.
  
- 2 This work can't be done without our partner organizations who share their life's work with us. Also, a special thanks to Towson University and BTU for supporting and funding us and to *Reflections* editors and reviewers for their rigor and kindness. And to students who are the foundation: Sharon A., Denelle J., Mindy W., and Greg L.

## APPENDIX 1: OUTCOMES, ASSIGNMENTS, AND HEURISTICS

*Outcomes related to grant & nonprofit writing:*

- Learn to research and find grant proposals for nonprofits.
- Learn to write grant proposals for nonprofits.
- Learn to track grants for nonprofits.
- Learn other genres of communication in nonprofits and for profits such as social media management, donor appeals, newsletters, bi-laws, annual reports etc.

*Assignments & heuristics related to grant & nonprofit writing:*

- Quick & Dirty Inventory of an NPO. Students become mini-experts in the organization they will be writing a grant with.
- Finding the Perfect Request for Proposal (RFP), RFP Compendium.
- Standard Format Grant Proposal (draft and final).
- Real World Grant Proposal draft and final). This is an adaptation of their second or third version of the long-form proposal they already composed.

*Outcomes related to professionalism, advocacy, and cultural competence:*

- Interact and build relationships with professionals from outside the university.
- Understand and practice cultural competence.
- Create content that impacts the world in a positive way for the “public good.”
- Practice becoming facilitators of language and advocates for constituents that aren’t able to always speak up or write for themselves.
- Consider careers in the philanthropic sector and how to develop a lifelong interest in advocacy.
- Obtain internships, enter graduate school and land dream jobs.

*Assignments & heuristics related to professionalism, advocacy, and cultural competence:*

- Visiting the city and the partner organizations with self-reflection.

- Cultural Autobiography. Reflection on family background, identity, life experience with difference, racial and cultural memory.
- Writing the “other.” Students learn narrative theory and problematize writing *with* and *for* and *as* someone. This is then transferred to writing “for” an organization, a role students struggle with.
- Cultural competence self-assessment, social identity wheel, white fragility & privilege readings and discussions, privilege checklists, listening exercises.

## APPENDIX 2: LIST OF RESOURCES FOR GRANTWRITING COURSES

### *Content Readings:*

1. Deep, Akash and Peter Frumkin. “The Foundation Payout Puzzle.” Working Paper – The Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard School of Government, June 2001.
2. Drucker, Peter. “What Businesses Can Learn from Non-Profits.” Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/1989/07/what-business-can-learn-from-nonprofits>
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6. “20 Ways Majority-white Nonprofits Can Build Authentic Partnerships with Organizations Led by Communities of Color” by @NonprofitAF - <https://nonprofitaf.com/2018/08/20-ways-majority-white-nonprofits-can-build-authentic-partnerships-with-organizations-led-by-communities-of-color/>
7. “How White Non Profits Benefit from Black Grief” by Shahem Mclaurin in *Huff Post*
8. On Lobbying <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/14/us/nra-finances-executives-board-members.html>

### *For RFP & NPO Research (find sites specific to your region):*

9. *Winning Grants Step by Step* by Mimi Carlson and Tori O'Neal-McElrath.
10. *Mobile for Good* by Heather Mansfield, 2014.
11. Governor’s Grants Office (Foundation, State, Federal) <https://grants.maryland.gov/Pages/home-page.aspx>
12. Philanthropy News Digest <http://www.philanthropynewsdigest.org/> - RFP list
13. Maryland Philanthropy (used to be ABAG or Assoc. of Balto Area Grantmakers) - RFP list <https://www.>

[marylandphilanthropy.org](http://marylandphilanthropy.org)

14. Non Profit 990's and more <http://www.guidestar.org/>
15. Search for funders by zip or state and for 990s: <http://foundationcenter.org/> (there is a free quick guide or we may have a password)
16. Maryland Non Profits – Searchable info on MD Non Profits in general and in particular <http://www.marylandnonprofits.org/>
17. General Operating Support Action Guide [http://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org/library/uploads/2016/01/GEO\\_General-Operating-Support-Action-Guide\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org/library/uploads/2016/01/GEO_General-Operating-Support-Action-Guide_Executive_Summary.pdf)
18. Smart Criteria for writing outcomes (a starting point) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART\\_criteria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMART_criteria)
19. Urban Institute Center on NPOs <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/center-nonprofits-and-philanthropy/what-we-do/data-and-current-research-initiatives>
20. Kellogs Logic Model Development Guide <https://www.bttop.org/sites/default/files/public/W.K.%20Kellogg%20LogicModel.pdf>
21. Training - Gov.'s grant conference <https://grants.maryland.gov/Pages/Training.aspx>
22. Everything you need to know about Non-Profits on Idealist.org <http://www.idealist.org/info/Nonprofits>
23. Network for Good. “7 Steps to Creating Your Best NonProfit Marketing Plan Ever” <http://www.fundraising123.org/files/training/7%20Steps%20to%20Creating%20Your%20Best%20Nonprofit%20Marketing%20Plan%20Ever.pdf>
24. Overview of NP sector composition <https://trust.guidestar.org/what-does-the-nonprofit-sector-really-look-like>
25. 2019 State of Grantseeking <https://resources.foundant.com/grantseeker-resources/2019-state-of-grantseeking-report>
26. Grantwriting profession <https://www.writermag.com/get-published/freelance-writing/break-grant-writing/>

**Zosha Stuckey** is an Associate Professor at Towson University in Baltimore, Maryland working in the areas of rhetorical theory and history, rhetoric & science, community engagement, professional and non profit writing, and social justice. Her book, *A Rhetoric of Remnants: Idiots, Half-Wits, and Other State-Sponsored Inventions* from SUNY Press can be found [here](#). She helped to create the [Diversity Faculty Fellows Program](#) at Towson and is an active member and facilitator of [Intergroup Dialogue](#). She can be contacted at [zstuckey@towson.edu](mailto:zstuckey@towson.edu) and you can read more of her work at <https://towson.academia.edu/ZoshaStuckey>.

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# Building an Infrastructure for a Jail Writing Community Partnership through Student Internships and Community Writing Projects

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**Lara Smith-Sitton,**  
*Kennesaw State  
University*  
**& Brody Smithwick,**  
*Lion Life Community*

*Co-authored by a nonprofit administrator and an English Department faculty member, this contribution discusses the creation of a community partnership for jail-based education and writing projects. By starting small through student internships directly with the nonprofit, manageable, programmatic development followed that included class-based community writing projects, capstones, and onsite workshops engaging graduate and undergraduate students. Seeking to provide insights for new program developers as well as experienced leaders, this article reflects on the value of taking what Paula Mathieu describes as a tactical approach to partnership growth that begins with small-scale projects to maximize reciprocity and impact in order to first construct of a strong, sustainable foundation.*

*Through descriptions of the evolution of this partnership, best practices for communication, addressing challenges, and expanding projects are outlined. Insights about this partnership reveal possible student-engaged activities and assignments, as well as the complexities of jail and prison writing. Reflections by students and community partners affirm a range of opportunities and the value and impact of internships, service learning, and community-writing when working directly with nonprofits, rather than with jails or prison administrators.*

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*I was able to build relationships rooted in trust. I believe trust is an essential ingredient in the transfer of knowledge, perhaps even more so with the incarcerated population.*

—Brody Smithwick

*I wanted to build a partnership that could grow slowly in order to create a foundation that was sound and able to expand deliberately in line with both community and the department's needs.*

—Lara Smith-Sitton

The State of Georgia places first in the nation for the number of persons “under supervision, be it in prison, jail, parole, or probation” (Jones 2018). Interestingly, while the Georgia Department of Corrections asserts that “ninety-five percent of offenders will one day return to society . . . [only] 30 percent of Georgia inmates have a high school diploma” (Hysen 2015). Recent studies draw direct lines between reduced recidivism and educational attainment. As Deborah Appleman (2013) explains, “if we choose to preserve the lives of human beings who commit serious crimes, we must have some interest in helping them preserve their humanity. And, if recent statistics can be believed, the more education they receive in prison, the less likely they are to reoffend” (29). This contribution explores how a growing nonprofit organization and the English Department of Kennesaw State University (KSU) used an internship program to build the foundation for a jail writing and GED-tutoring initiative at a county detention center.

The scholarship detailing the power and impact of prison and jail writing initiatives affirms the significance of their presence in literature, culture, music, and society. H. Bruce Franklin’s (1998) historical review of prison writing begins with the assertion that “one of the most extraordinary achievements of twentieth-century American culture is the literature that has come out of the nation’s prisons” (1). In the introduction to the 2018 edited collection, *Prison Pedagogies: Learning and Teaching with Imprisoned Writers*, editors Joe Lockard and Sherry Rankins-Robertson go beyond the

deliverables and the authors themselves to emphasize the exigency for more prison-based literacy work in the twenty-first century: “The importance of prison writing and teaching writing in prisons cannot be underestimated as a contribution to social justice as the United States faces a dark period in its history” (2). While this contention is likely understood and affirmed by those currently participating in this work, for individuals considering the possibility of creating new jail writing programs, the “how-to’s” (and “how-not-to’s”) can be difficult to uncover and quite daunting when discovered.

Our hope is that through the narrative of our partnership, we will reveal ways other practitioners—particularly those who may be new to this work—can start or expand current jail writing programs through internships and small-scale community writing or service learning projects. There is an emphasis herein on the commonsensical and basic steps we took to build a partnership and program framework. We will explore three key facets from the growth of our partnership and project: how the partnership between a local organization and KSU was created and is addressing some of the institutional challenges of creating a viable and sustainable program; how the collaborative decisions made during the development of the project provided essential infrastructure for future growth; and how the partnership has impacted the community partners, students, and incarcerated individuals.

The authors emphasize the value of what Paula Mathieu (2013) describes as a *tactical approach* in project development—one that embraces “personal relationships, mutual needs, and a shared sense of timing” (23), which, when inherent in community writing and public rhetoric projects, can result in strong, reciprocal community partnerships. Considerations of the unique ways the outside organization in this partnership bridged the needed relationship between a jail and KSU provide opportunities for others to explore new projects or expansion of existing programs. We, as leaders of this collaboration, pursued this partnership in hopes of developing a strong, sustainable community partnership that could provide much-needed support for a nonprofit organization implementing these programs. We wanted to specifically respond to a desire of those within the jail to engage in more academic, writing, and arts

programs, and we hoped to connect college students to this work so that they could better understand how educational initiatives—especially those that focus on writing—can transform the lives of incarcerated individuals. An essential facet of our initiative was establishing a plan for scaling in line with the realistic goals we collaboratively established for our program—goals that were in line with the resources we had available.

## **MAKING THE CONNECTION: BUILDING A NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR JAIL WRITING AND LITERACY WORK**

Our partnership started by first considering the needs of Lion Life Community (hereinafter “Lion Life”), a 501(c)(3) organization founded by Brody and his wife, Amy. The organization is committed to serving the educational needs of incarcerated individuals both during and after time spent in jail through a range of classes, writing, and arts programming. Due to a desire for more help to lead classes and develop materials especially for the GED classes, as well as involve others in the work of jail and prison education programming, Brody reached out to KSU to initiate an undergraduate internship program focused primarily on proctoring pretests and tutoring. In the first year, the internship program thrived: eleven student interns from sociology, psychology, and criminal justice helped forty-six individuals obtain GED certificates. Building on this success, Brody wanted to expand course offerings to include creative writing workshops that could provide meaningful and challenging writing opportunities beyond just what was needed for the GED exam. He returned to KSU again, but this time Brody specifically sought to craft internships for English studies students who could grow as writers and teachers through jail-based writing and literacy work.

This was why and where our partnership began. Brody reached out to Lara, a professor he’d met as a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) program at KSU. At the time, the English Department was expanding their internship program and seeking to establish more reciprocal partnerships that would benefit students, community partners, and society. The timing for this new initiative was kairotic because while Brody wanted to connect with college writers, Lara had a desire to start a jail writing initiative, but she was unsure where to start. Lara, while she was

generally familiar with programs established by other universities where faculty members and students participated in workshops, classes, and other writing collaborations, she found the literature overwhelming and just struggled to ascertain the needs and demands of this type of program. In addition, as the Director of Community Engagement for the English Department, she'd held cursory conversations with university administrators and other faculty who consistently reminded her of the complexities of moving students from campus to jails or prisons. Safety was a significant concern, but there were other issues as well, including adequate training to prepare students, transportation to and from sites, supervision of students while onsite, and the development of relationships with jail or prison administrative officers. There were also issues with university rules and regulations as well as legal issues surrounding this type of community-engaged work.

She wanted to build a partnership that could grow slowly in order to create a foundation that was sound and would have opportunities for expansion that was deliberately in line with both community and department needs. Also, Lara was committed to finding jail-based literacy projects that aligned with the interests of undergraduate and graduate students who loved writing and storytelling but that she could support in line with the time she had available to give to a new community writing project. A partnership offered a solution: the KSU students would intern with an experienced, nonprofit leader who had not only a strong relationship with a local detention center but also a commitment to carefully and thoughtfully building a program focused on reciprocity and establishing shared goals.

We understood at the initiation of our work together that universities can be uniquely positioned to support nonprofit organizations endeavoring to make inroads in reform arenas. Universities can provide financial resources, grant assistance, interns, volunteers, expertise, knowledge, and research support. What we learned was that nonprofit organizations are uniquely positioned to support universities developing partnerships with detention centers.

While we believed there would be advantages through collaboration, we were also aware of the unstable nature of jail writing initiatives.

Tobi Jacobi (2016) explains: “while education provides a path to better lives for incarcerated individuals, these programs can be canceled or not supported as they are sometimes viewed as extracurricular, privileged, and less rigorous/necessary/pragmatic/useful than maintaining physical and psychological control” (66). We did not want to start something and fall short of our shared vision for a long-term partnership that could provide powerful educational and writing opportunities for incarcerated individuals and college students. We were willing to be patient and deliberate in the growth of the partnership and program.

One of the biggest hurdles for starting a jail writing program is development of a community partnership with a detention center. While a desire for more educational programming may exist, jail administrators must reconcile the risks and rewards of opening doors to outside groups alongside of institutional priorities. Correctional facility employees have many responsibilities, and managing volunteers—including their prescreening, training, and supervision—can take away from the priorities of their jobs. Plus, questions about long-term sustainability can also dissuade jails from investing time in new partnerships. Also, because faculty members often do not have the opportunity to spend much time onsite interacting with jail personnel before starting a program, they may not have a firm grasp of how their vision for an impactful program could actually become a burden for the staff and administrators.

Another critical concern at the start of a relationship may relate to concerns about the intentions and approaches of the individuals interested in bringing community-based projects to jails and prisons. Sadie Reynolds (2014) recognizes these complexities: “well-intentioned, privileged individuals who help less fortunate people often do so without critically examining their motives. The blinders of privilege show up as an unacknowledged sense of superiority and condescending ways of communicating and relating with the people they are trying to help” (101). These issues can thwart the establishment of the needed relationships for viable university-jail literacy work. In the case of partnerships with universities, the students and faculty working with the incarcerated individuals may not have fully examined their own motives before approaching

projects where they interact with incarcerated individuals. This can also make jail personnel hesitant to respond to outreach efforts by universities' representatives.

Brody, an experienced jail-based educator understands these complex and complicated issues, and he explained to Lara that he had seen outreach efforts fail for precisely these reasons. Brody's nonprofit organization has a respected history of implementing successful educational programming. Brody knows the jail—its structure, leadership, employees, and regulations—and, most importantly, he is trusted by the jail administrators and the inmates. Thus, the partnership was created between KSU and Lion Life—a partnership that helped KSU to establish programs that better serve a range of stakeholders and participants and Lion Life to achieve its goals as well. Lion Life serves as the bridge between the university and the detention center. When Brody reached to the KSU English Department, he came with the knowledge needed to create a strong infrastructure for a jail-university literacy program that could support GED program needs and allow for an expansion of educational programming and jail-based class offerings.

Brody recognized that the success of the GED program was directly linked to the amount of time he was able to make himself available to the students. By showing up consistently each week, he was able to build relationships rooted in trust. He believes trust is an essential ingredient in the transfer of knowledge, perhaps even more so with the incarcerated population. While the number of graduates had increased, Brody also knew there could be even greater success if we were able to overcome the challenges of the physical layout of the jail. There are eight individual dormitories inside the jail that function as their own separate microcosms. With a restricted amount of access to each dormitory, he could only deliver consistent instruction and build trust-centered relationships with a limited number of students each week. The demand for new classes and more instruction was greater than the supply of instructors.

Brody's experience and knowledge allowed the English Department and Lara to ease into jail-based literacy projects. She could give students the opportunity to experience this important, impactful

work through internships prior to creating full-scale, onsite projects where she was navigating unfamiliar waters. Understanding the needs of the jail administrators, Lion Life takes the lead in prescreening, training, and course content creation. Students complete a prescreening facilitated by Lion Life, then the organization provides both formal training and discussion about jail-based literacy and writing programs that help students understand the purpose and significance of their commitment to this work. For the partnership to be a success, we wanted to “create mutually affirming relationships with incarcerated workshop participants” (Reynolds 2014, 102) and to help the KSU interns and volunteers maximize their experiences while providing much needed literacy and educational support for the jail.

## **GETTING ORGANIZED: COLLABORATIVELY IDENTIFYING GOALS AND NEEDS**

At the start of the partnership, Lion Life identified three main goals, and we collaboratively addressed how the English Department could support these critical needs:

- *raising public awareness*—the need for financial and staffing resources to produce and disseminate information that supports outreach efforts and support for Lion Life’s programming and mission;
- *developing written and published products*—the creation of class and workshop materials and editorial support for publication of creative works;
- *recruiting interns and volunteers*—access to professors and college students who can consistently support the work of the organization onsite at the jail.

Through the creation of these three goals we were constructing a framework for a student internship program that connected KSU students to Lion Life. From the beginning, we were open to seeing what could evolve. We embraced what Laurie Cella and Jessica Restaino (2012) explain in *Unsustainable*: “a good plan for community action is one that can be revised” (14). With this in mind,

we emphasized flexibility, improvement through communication, and frequent evaluation of goals and student contributions.

Students supported these goals first through internships and then later by engaging with a community writing project in a class. The English Department internship courses are available for undergraduate and graduate students where they can earn academic credit and receive faculty support during a semester-long internship. A range of internship opportunities can qualify for the courses, and an internship working with a nonprofit such as Lion Life would work well as it provides students an opportunity to put their writing and research skills in action. Students learn of the internship through Lara, who regularly shares information about available opportunities that she is aware of with inquiring students. The students must obtain the internship directly with an organization and then the organization directs the intern and the projects they complete. Lara then provides a pedagogical structure for the course using the internship as a subject for reflection, writing, and discussion.

To achieve the first goal we created, interns used their writing and research skills to support the advocacy work of Lion Life through the creation of outreach materials for community members, grant writing, and content creation under the direction of Brody. A desire to help college students understand the work of nonprofits pursuing social justice, advocacy-related projects as well as jail-based literacy, social justice, and educational programs underpinned this goal. Our second goal provided an opportunity for student interns to use skills and abilities acquired in their English degrees to assist in the production of materials used for GED and/or creative writing courses. Creating worksheets, reference guides, and other written documents are valuable contributions because the students bring unique perspectives as to how they might learn or teach others, and the individuals using the materials benefit from materials created by college students who consider their own educational experiences in crafting the teaching tools. While we anticipated challenges with the creation of consistent, effective, and pedagogically sound documents, through meetings with students throughout the semester, Lara could help students before final drafts went to Lion Life for shaping, revision, and finalizing. The course provided the space and time for

discussions that enriched what the students were learning directly from their experiences with Lion Life. This two-level approach allowed the two of us to collaborate about concerns and proactively facilitate improvement for projects that needed redirection. This type of work was truly a cooperative, team effort.

Finally, and most significantly, we wanted students to have the opportunity to engage onsite at the jail. Here, students would have an opportunity to receive a third layer of feedback through interacting with the individuals at the jail who were using the materials. We needed to recruit students who wanted to be a part of the project and get the word out about the new initiative, but we also wanted the inmates to feel comfortable and enjoy working with students from KSU. It was important that the students from KSU recognized that they were collaborating with the inmates to reach shared goals around the topics of writing and literacy. Lion Life wanted to provide support for more GED preparation as well as expand the number of other writing and arts courses and initiatives—the students helped make this possible. Lara would be able to connect student interns to Lion Life and design community writing projects that could be incorporated into courses. Because students would work with Lion Life rather than the detention center, Brody would be able to give them a substantial amount of training prior to being onsite. He was also able to discern what classes and opportunities would work best for the individual students and connect them to those opportunities. If students seemed hesitant about the project or being onsite, we could collaboratively provide extra guidance and preparation. This occurred due to the trusted partnership we had established and the commitment we had to talking with students and preparing them for their work. In addition, with both of us interacting with students, we could gauge how they were feeling about the project and their comfort and preparedness for onsite engagement. Frequent interactions about the student interns' work and close communication is essential to the program's success. While not necessarily unique within jail-university partnerships, we felt that what made this partnership strong was Brody's strong understanding of the jail and the needs of the inmates and Lara's clear vision about internship structures than can maximize student learning and community engagement.

While we envisioned how the partnership between Lion Life and KSU had the potential for impactful jail-based projects, as we moved forward, we also became cognizant of obstacles that could interfere with or derail our goals. In order to prepare for the challenges of a new program, we identified the three main obstacles we anticipated once the work began: (1) sufficient time to implement and grow a new partnership and project components, (2) an understanding of and delivery of adequate student preparation, and (3) sufficiently monitoring concerns of students, including their safety. We considered these concerns together, cooperatively seeking solutions because the partnership would be between the KSU English Department and Lion Life rather than between the university and the jail. In addition, we were both mindful of the challenges the students and inmates might face in developing relationships with each other for purposes of the onsite classes. We relied significantly upon Brody's experience with the individuals at the jail and deep knowledge about how to develop points of commonality and trust. His expertise was essential to lay the foundation for effective interactions and respect between all participating in the project—his knowledge and skill as a trainer and leader was essential to the project.

Another consideration of our program and the involvement of college students related to the differences between working within a jail, rather than a prison community. For example, the jail is operated by law enforcement under direction of a sheriff who values the programming that Lion Life brings, but should there be a change in county leadership the detention center's priorities could be adjusted, which might affect the classes offered by Lion Life, and the involvement of KSU students. In contrast, given that a prison setting is run by either the state or federal government, local or community political changes may not be as much of a concern. Another consideration is that the jail is located in a county close to the university with primarily short-term residents. This raises the possibility of our students crossing paths with individuals after they are released. So, while some individuals may remain incarcerated for several months awaiting trials or due short sentences, others may abruptly no longer be part of a GED or writing course because they have been released or moved to prison following sentencing. While Lion Life works to create courses that meet the needs of jail residents regardless of their tenure there, many of the individuals

that our students will interact with are likely quite uncertain about their immediate futures or know that they will likely be leaving soon. This can result in a jail environment that feels tentative, and some inmates may hesitate to engage deeply with the courses, but Lion Life's knowledge and proactive acknowledgement of these kinds of complexities has been important for the programmatic development of our partnership and projects. Understanding of the differences between the temporal nature of jails and the more perennial facets of prison has been paramount to preparing for possible interruptions and detours.

We both saw cooperative discussion of goals and anticipation of potential issues as an essential part of getting organized. We believed the project would prompt students to think more deeply about the powerful potential of prison reform. David Coogan's work (2014) aptly captured our hopes: "we assemble here to persuade and to be persuaded, to identify and to question identifications, to open ourselves to the possibility of change in jail and in society" (18). In addition, the goals aligned with Lion Life's mission and values, which focuses on how education, creation, and art can enrich the lives of individuals who are incarcerated and build strong communities. We both agreed, however, that the success of this partnership needed to also be committed to an understanding of reciprocity. Ellen Cushman (1996) describes this as "an open and conscious negotiation of the power of structures reproduced during the give-and-take interactions of the people involved in both sides of the relationship. A theory of reciprocity, then, frames this activist agenda with a self-critical conscious navigation of this intervention" (16). The respect for each of our roles, needs, and desires, while privileging our ultimate goal to support the writing and literacy needs of those within the jail, resulted in a project steeped in a commitment to mutual benefit.

## **STARTING SMALL: CONSIDERING THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF TWO INTERNSHIPS**

Paula Mathieu (2012) argues that there are "useful ways to *begin* a project: that individual people, whether a faculty member, graduate student, or undergraduate could develop a relationship with a community group and really understand their needs, a project *could* develop that way" (28). The first project responded to the desire

to have an intern to learn about and develop educational materials focused on the writing portion of the GED and possibly implement them onsite at the jail. Katherine, a senior English major and pre-law student, expressed an interest in an internship that could fulfill a practicum for her honors college thesis (a required capstone project). She hoped her experience interning with Lion Life would be a valuable part of her law school application statement and help her prepare for her legal career given that she was interested in juvenile justice and child advocacy work. She also believed that what she learned when she was developing her own skills in her English and writing classes could help her develop materials that were accessible and useful.

In her capstone proposal Katherine (Adamson 2017) articulated a problem faced by incarcerated individuals: “Education is important for both an individual and a society to thrive, but what happens to those that are unable to receive education due to incarceration?” Her initial plans for the project were described as follows: “I will use my writing and communication skills to create clear documents that will be used to help inmates prepare for and pass the GED. . . . This will enable me to understand the literacy and educational issues faced by inmates in North Georgia jails. . . . Not only will I be able to learn about those I want to represent, but I will gain a unique first-hand experience with them.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout the internship, Katherine created resource materials and led educational workshops that focused on GED preparation, most notably writing skills.

A reflective journal kept throughout the internship allowed Katherine to craft an autoethnography at the end of the internship as a part of the thesis itself. The value of the experience was articulated in her thesis:

What started as an opportunity to help inmates learn so they could pass the General Education Development (GED) test turned into a project more impactful than I could have ever imagined. I have seen women regain hope for their futures and witnessed the priceless look on a student’s face when she learned the news that she earned her GED. My life’s work, whether it be working as an attorney or helping people get their lives back on track, has been confirmed through this experience. (Adamson 2018)

Following completion of her thesis and then graduation, Katherine has continued to volunteer at the jail by tutoring students, supporting their writing, and leading workshops. Interestingly, while she was accepted to law school, Katherine decided not to attend; instead, she applied to a Master of Public Administration program that specializes in nonprofit administration. Approximately a year after her graduation, the experience of working in the jail revealed new professional goals to her: “I have observed what happens when someone’s free will is completely taken. Some days I leave so touched and humbled by the lives of the women I interact with; other days I leave mad, thinking how ridiculous it is that we have not made prison reform a stronger priority” (Katherine, personal communication, 7 April 2019). Though she originally planned to be a lawyer in order to help those in need of legal support, she now believes she can have a greater impact as a nonprofit administrator working to expand educational opportunities and advocate for prison reform. Through her experience working with Lion Life to develop and implement educational materials, she gained insights as to how she can continue this work in the future. The tutoring she did in reliance upon educational resources she developed with Brody was foundational in helping her see that she could come alongside of those in the jail and support their goals to obtain their GEDs.

The next student to intern with Lion Life was Diana, a graduate student in the MAPW program concentrating in the areas of creative writing and rhetoric & composition. She had no experience with jail-based literacy projects, but as the child of Ukrainian immigrants, she was interested in how language skills impacted the ability of incarcerated individuals to manage what she describes as a “dual cultural identity.” She explained, “I found jail culture very different than an average citizen’s life. I was shocked, taken aback by the noise—it was loud; the concrete caused echos; the culture was so different.” Able to speak Spanish, she worked with students on their English language skills while honoring their unique cultural backgrounds. Diana shared the significant value she placed on the experience, yet her interactions allowed her to forge deep and profound connections with the individuals she worked closely.

Diana, in an interview the spring after her summer internship, explained that she forged a unique connection with the individuals she worked with because many of her students at the jail also had connections to immigrants and family members in other countries. Diana described the impact of the internship on her graduate teaching career:

I learned how to communicate feedback more effectively in the composition classes I taught. I was able to help students focus on their learning needs because I could now better understand how to support students with a variety of skill levels in the same class. Before this, I could not do this as effectively. When you are in a jail setting, the individuals you work with have such a variety of backgrounds and educational levels. (Diana. personal communication, 7 April 2019)

The experience also influenced a facet of her master's thesis project. She became interested in crafting an autoethnography that included reflective and creative non-fiction elements along with research about a "dual cultural identity" as American and Ukrainian. The desire was to create a project that captured her graduate work in both the creative writing and rhetoric & composition concentrations. In her proposal (2018), she writes, "this capstone project will explore my literacy development as a Slavic-American emerging scholar by taking an in-depth look at the literacy experiences that shape my identity" (1). Diana made connections with how discourse communities, particularly those connected to literacy, shape identity.

When Katherine and Diana pursued their internships, the classes and work they were primarily focused on were helping implement a form of curriculum that fit the open enrollment component of Lion Life's classes. Through these two students, we were successful in addressing two of the primary goals: creating class and workshop materials and connecting students to the work of Lion Life onsite at the jail.

In considering the creation of the needed materials, the highly transient populations of county jails call for a unique approach to curriculum for the onsite classes. Katherine helped develop a rubric

for the essay portion of the GED that could be understood and followed by a volunteer with no experience in composition studies. These types of grading aids are important since volunteers and interns are transient as well. Katherine, as an English major, was comfortable with her writing skills and was able to reflect during the internship on what she found helpful when learning to write essays. Having systems in place that allow instructors to “plug in” with minimal training is essential to the success of Lion Life’s programs. Along the same lines, new volunteers and interns do not have the luxury of systematically working through a curriculum from point A to point B with students who possess similar levels of aptitude. To remedy this problem, we had Diana help develop worksheets that aid ESL instructors in teaching to three different skill levels simultaneously. While the impact on Katherine and Diana clearly had profound influences on their academic, professional, and civic lives, Brody’s interactions with some of the inmates also confirmed our efforts were impactful within the jail as well. Brody, as an experienced educator, had access to a range of educational materials; however, through the internships, new materials were created that were helping others get GEDs and explore writing in new ways.

## **EXPANDING THE PARTNERSHIP: COMMUNITY WRITING PROJECTS AND CREATIVE WRITING CLASSES**

Building upon the success of the first two internships, we expanded our collaboration to include community engagement projects in Lara’s professional writing course. Students in the course were given an opportunity to pursue an independent or collaborative community writing project in one unit of the course. The goal was for students to put their writing and research skills in action in order to see how their abilities could make an impact in the community. Working with Lion Life to create community outreach materials that could share the benefits of GED, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), creative writing, and entrepreneurship courses offered in jail settings was one of the projects selected by one of the students. While this was not jail-based writing, the student conducted research that provided general knowledge about educational resources and supported Lion Life’s need for raising awareness about the value and impact of educational initiatives. Prior to this project, the student was not familiar with educational programming in jails and prisons

or that there was a need or demand for these initiatives. This project created the framework for Lion Life to further develop materials that helped raise awareness of Lion Life's course offerings both inside and outside of the jail. Most of the Lion Life team is devoted to teaching the courses, leaving very little time to think about promoting the programs or drafting promotional material. Collaborations like this yield a precious commodity—time. The opportunity for a student to pursue a project of this sort is indeed a valuable service learning/community writing project. While the student was not onsite at the jail, she was learning about jail education programs and supporting the crucial work of Lion Life in the community. In addition, the scale of the project was small, which allowed us to consider how other class-based projects could be developed in future courses.

The following semester, another project introduced in a professional writing course considered the challenges faced by individuals who are released from jail and need to find employment. A group of four students were charged with developing ideas that could respond to this need. The students proposed making resume templates and leading two workshops—one focused on resume writing and another for interview preparation—at the jail. While the materials and workshops the students envisioned was something that Lion Life saw as valuable, the lack of expertise of the students and the challenges with the scope of the project did not allow for implementation of the workshops. The students found it challenging to complete the research, to understand the kinds of resources that were needed, and to create a focused proposal—their aims, while rich with excellent ideas, were too big for completion in the course. We recognized the value of the project but knew this project needed to be planned and executed over a longer period of time than in the one semester offered in this undergraduate course. We believe that having a workshop with resource materials that will help incarcerated individuals prepare to return to productive lives will be of significant benefit to those who participate because obtaining gainful employment with expediency is a must if they hope to escape the vicious cycle of recidivism. A program of this sort could help with preparations for obtaining a job before even setting foot outside of the jail, and the KSU students' engagement with the project would be welcomed.

However, though the project itself was not completed as we had hoped, it was still a very valuable project for the students—they learned about the complexity of planning and implementing realistic projects and used their research and writing skills to develop materials that provided a foundation for a future community-based project. What was also notable about this situation was that we, as program leaders and partners, communicated about the strengths and weaknesses of the workshops proposed. We explored how we could have approached the project differently in the class. Had we not had a strong relationship—one committed to effective communication practices—it may have been difficult to discuss the obstacles with implementing the workshop, and the failed project may have seriously undermined the partnership. Instead, given the collaborative nature with Lion Life, we could assess the challenges throughout the project and focus more on how to make it valuable for the students and build upon their insights to continue working on this project in the future. As Steve Parks (2012) asserts, when projects go awry, we need to consider “a revised conception of value” (55).

As we continued to develop community writing projects and internships for KSU students, Lion Life had a creative writing program that was gaining popularity within the jail and creating more opportunities for collaboration. Brody took the lead with the instruction and design of these courses. The creative writing classes are run in a workshop fashion one might expect in a fiction writing or poetry course; however, they are anything but typical. There is almost always a “first-timer” due to the open enrollment component. So, a brief overview of the importance of writing is given at the beginning of nearly every class. The students move through three modules: poetry, playwriting, and short stories. Each unit lasts from four to six weeks depending on how the group progresses as a whole. A short lecture on a specific element of the craft is given at the beginning of the class, followed by a correlating writing exercise. Then, students participating in the jail-based class read their work aloud either from the assignment or from the previous week’s out-of-class writing assignment. Each time someone shares, the entire room gives brief verbal feedback. Then students are given a prompt to work on throughout the week.

With fifty to sixty individuals participating in these jail-based classes each week, an enormous amount of content was generated. Brody needed additional support to help with these courses and to support the writing goals of the program. Interns and volunteers could help transcribe handwritten content into a digital format; those with some degree of creative writing background could give feedback to the incarcerated writing students. Having interns, particularly aspiring and working writers, engage with the written work of others could provide opportunities to explore a vast amount of creative output in genres and about topics KSU writing students may not be familiar with. In addition, these internships could help Lion Life explore how to support the incarcerated writers' craft and opportunities for dissemination.

In the first year of the creative writing program, 364 individuals participated in classes—it quickly became a dynamic and successful program in the jail. Full-length novels, countless poems, and numerous short stories have been written. One individual collaborated with his classmates on a one-act play assignment, ultimately creating a full four-act production. The students held auditions, cast the roles, and rehearsed for months before performing the play for members of the jail's upper administration. This presented opportunities for students in the MAPW program to become engaged with community writing and service learning projects, including helping to transcribe and format the handwritten pages of the script in printed and digital formats so that the play became more than an idea but a more developed creative project. As Lara was learning more about the needs of Lion Life, Brody was learning more about KSU students and opportunities for more collaboration and engagement. In addition, as our partnership grew and we continued to respond to the needs and desires of the nonprofit and the incarcerated individuals, undergraduate and graduate students were understanding more about the impact of writing and literacy on the lives of incarcerated individuals.

As we moved forward with the partnership, we felt student interns and those in the courses were learning while producing some useful materials. Lion Life's educational programming continues to expand. Currently, the course offerings at the jail include GED,

ESL, Creative Writing, Continuing Education Preparation, Freedom from Addiction, Entrepreneurship, and Music. The organization also operates an in-jail library. More drama-specific and visual arts courses are on the horizon. The organization is ambitious and hopeful in its efforts. Inspiring individuals to improve their lives through artistic mediums, Lion Life embraces the reflective, metacognitive qualities of creation—in whatever forms—to help individuals overcome challenges, gain new perspectives, self-regulate, and persevere in the world. We see engagement with these projects—and giving students an opportunity to support the work of Lion Life—will change people by “help[ing] them to see the interconnectedness of their lives and communities with people inside, giving them an insider glimpse of the prison industrial complex” (Reynolds 2014, 103).

In addition, the value of the initiatives has also been felt by individuals who have been released and have remained involved with writing opportunities led by Lion Life. One student, Keith, described how he perceived the impact of the GED class, stating, “it really opens up so many doors. The GED allowed me to land a job . . . I was homeless before I got that job. . . . [it has] instilled a greater work ethic in me, taught me how to set goals, and just made me a better person overall.” Also a participant in the creative writing workshops, Keith saw them as building the self-worth and hope of those who participated: “People would come into the class and you could tell that they thought they had zero talent . . . as they learned to craft stories, you could tell they began to believe they had some degree of talent . . . [they] began to gain hope again as they created art” (Keith, personal communication, 5 April 2019).

Another participant of the creative writing classes, Trey, shared how the classes impacted him:

The courses opened up an entire new world for me. They gave me something constructive to do while I was locked up. It became a way to escape a stressful situation. I had never thought of myself as a writer before and would not have discovered this talent if it were not for the classes. Now, I write through my problems. I wrote an entire novel while I was incarcerated and have written two more since I’ve been released. It has become a major source

of healthy entertainment for me. Creating fiction helped me put my mind on paper. I could then evaluate myself and the world in new ways. This exercise has impacted me in incredible ways. (Trey, personal communication, 6 April 2019)

## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: BUILDING PROJECTS FROM A STRONG FOUNDATION**

Our goal is not simply to move college students to jail settings to engage in writing and literacy activities but to also raise awareness about the powerful need for and impact of education while revealing the depth of writing talent and rich stories incarcerated individuals can share. We want those involved to see the commonalities of being human regardless of where we sleep at night. We aspire to what Wendy Hinshaw and Kathie Klarreich (2014) observed through their program: “Outside students became advocates for inside partners” and for the nonprofits doing this important work (150). By moving slowly into project identification and development with the English department, Lion Life was able to continue growing their programs and thoughtfully consider how KSU might best engage while developing a sustainable, manageable, impactful program.

When those who are struggling the most in our communities are lifted up, empowered, and given a voice, everyone benefits. Perhaps the most essential need for a program like Lion Life’s is for the community at large to catch the vision. If inmates are released only to be forever stigmatized as “the other,” then Lion Life’s impact stays confined to the jail. Collaboration with a university allows for further reach into the community and can give those outside students-turned-advocates a platform to proclaim their message to the world. And developing the relationships thoughtfully and slowly with reciprocity and flexibility can allow for a strong and effective infrastructure.

The flexibility and insightful experience brought by a nonprofit to a faculty member responsible for developing community-engaged programs and internships resulted in building a framework for a jail writing program. Starting small offers the time and space for universities and community partners, particularly a nonprofit, to get to know each other, better understand goals and needs, and scale

programs that have valuable, impactful, and sustainable structures. It also gave us the chance to manage our project carefully and deliberately, revising projects, re-envisioning needs, and making needed modifications. This was essential. We had never worked together before, and while we both had a vision for our collaboration, Brody's expertise shaped the project and helped Lara to better understand the many facets of jail and prison writing initiatives.

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# #BostonStrong/ BostonStrong?: A Personal Essay on Digital Community Engagement

**Kristi Girdharry,**  
*Babson College*

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April 15, 2013 started out as a beautiful spring day in Boston. It was Patriots Day, a local holiday and a day reserved for the world's oldest marathon. I was at my mom's house, an hour away from the finish line, when a friend messaged me about explosions. The message came with a link to a local news station. I turned on the tv and sent the link to another friend in California. "One of the reports says two explosions," my friend would respond. "If that's correct, it's definitely an attack."

It was an attack. On April 15, 2013, two homemade pressure-cooker bombs were detonated at the finish line of the Boston Marathon with intent to harm many people. The city shut down. On local broadcasts, images of maps concerning the threat of multiple bombings were interjected with real-time updates on the suspected identities of the bombers. Quicker updates came through Twitter. Links to police scanners

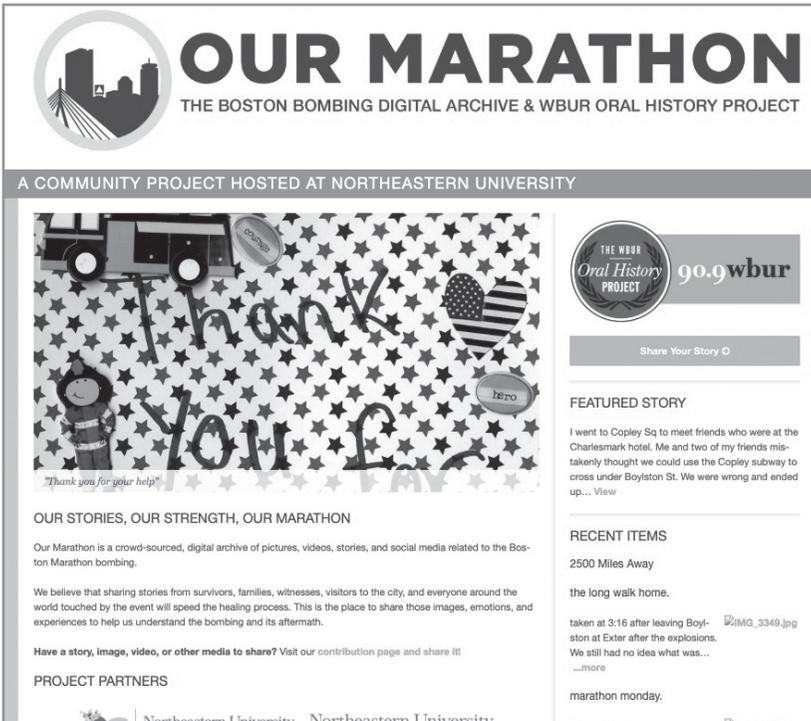
were shared. Eerie images of people-less streets among Boston landmarks popped up on BuzzFeed.

2013 reminded me that it could “happen here”—it could happen anywhere, and it happened here. Almost exactly four months earlier, a massacre took place in Newtown, Connecticut; victims’ family members were cheering in the grandstands at the end of the race that day. Another child was killed near them. I felt deflated. When the bombers were caught—each with their own cinematic renderings spilling out the tv—I felt no relief. Multiple people were dead, even more were recovering from injuries, and the terror psychologically impacted us all. This is what some people live with daily, but not us here in Boston, Massachusetts: a place where we lift each other up, a place with gun laws, a place you send your wicked smart kids to walk the Freedom Trail. What’s our narrative again?

Within two weeks of the bombing, a group of Humanities professors and graduate students at Northeastern University, including myself, obtained seed money to build an archive of all the stories, pictures, videos, and ephemera from the events. As an institution invested in the Digital Humanities, we had already been having conversations about various digital tools, methods, and archives; moreover, as an institution approximately one mile away from the finish line, we felt compelled to capture the stories swirling around us in real time.

This meant speed. Our first staff meeting took place on May 9<sup>th</sup>, the first version of our website went live on May 16<sup>th</sup>, and the first crowdsourced artifact—a beautiful story someone had written about her experience in a laundromat following the violence—was submitted on May 22<sup>nd</sup>. We moved quickly with our motto—“No story too small”—and we figured we’d just try to capture as many stories and other artifacts as possible, which also included an oral history component that I would manage.

The speediness was a strange thing for me. We were so “in it” and focused on gathering as many voices as possible in the archive that I barely processed my own story. There was the physical distance from the bombing that morning, but there were levels of intimacy with the events and their ripples that I didn’t quite reflect on at the time



The above screenshot shows the Our Marathon website when it was “live” and soliciting crowdsourced material.



This is what the permanent website looks like now, located at <https://marathon.library.northeastern.edu/>.



*Sample artifact: "B Strong poster from the Copley Square Memorial" from the Boston Marathon Temporary Memorial Collection (Boston City Archives 2014).*

because I was steeped in others' stories. For example, immediately following the bombing, my mom didn't want me to go back to the city. She worried about me, which resulted in texts telling me to be careful because they were showing images of "two very Indian-looking guys" on the news, implying that my own Indian-colored skin may be in danger ("I don't know, Mom," I would respond. "They looked pretty light on my phone."). She worried in a way an immigrant does, in a way someone born in central Massachusetts doesn't. She worried in a very real, post 9/11 way. Maybe there was touch of tender rebellion in her daughter's mask of nonchalance, though I can't remember if that was a part of my 9/11 experience as a teenager.

That summer I was teaching an online class, trudging through the woods with five-year-olds at a nature camp, and collecting stories of people who actually felt a lot of pride. The phrase "Boston Strong" popped up everywhere: painted on the side of an overpass, screen printed across t-shirts, used to promote various community events supporting survivors and victims' families. In the artifacts we were collecting for the archive, we saw the phrase in images of notes left at makeshift memorials, displayed across the front of a public bus, and even tattooed on skin. And, of course, it was hashtagged on Twitter.

Interestingly enough, those hashtags found their way into the written stories some people shared with the archive. Whether a

direct reflection on the hashtag or a detail in a story, this grammar of the internet was so entrenched in some community members' minds that, upon sitting down in their homes or at a Share Your Story event we hosted at a local library, it became part of their stories. It was a part of *our* story.

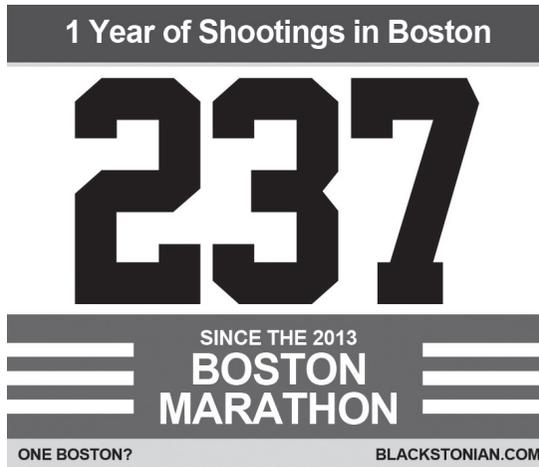
Though it must have been lingering in the background like a mental note to drink more water, I didn't outwardly recognize my discomfort with the phrase until I received an email from one of my research participants much later in my dissertation process. I was interested in understanding why people wrote their stories down and shared them with the archive, and so I followed up and asked questions about their decisions and experiences. One afternoon I received an email reply that ended with the words "Boston Strong" the way someone might use "Best" or "Sincerely." I read it as a note of solidarity—this was someone volunteering their time for me because they believed in the work I was doing—but it brought me into a realm of which I didn't feel a part.

Although I sat with elderly people as they carefully typed their stories on public computers, although I was invited to people's homes to listen about events that permanently altered their lives, although I saw how the phrase seemed to connect others, "Boston Strong" was not a way for me to hold hands with the community. It was more than just the distance I felt as an amateur academic engaging in the last examination before obtaining the degree. It was more than some personal resistance to the commodification of trauma. The Boston Marathon bombing became a "raced" tragedy. "Boston Strong" took up a privileged space. And I wasn't the only one who felt this way. In fact, people much more aware than me at the time were questioning this phrase and others like it in our community. As a historical repository, Our Marathon meant to offer a snapshot of what Boston was like during this time period. With 10,000 artifacts, the archive certainly does offer a snapshot; however, while the archive promoted that everyone's story mattered, participation was not as diverse as we had hoped it would be. As an academic archive concerned with the democratic potential of digital crowdsourcing, could we have missed whole swaths of stories important to Boston's overall history? Did we create something that invited certain people and silenced others?

Archival silencing is often thought of in relation to power and oppression in the creation of the archive (Carter 2006; Cushman 2013), and in his influential book *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Haitian historian and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015) reminds us that silencing happens in all stages of the archive: who creates the archive and the choices they make, what the sources are/where they come from, and the stories/details people choose to share or are requested to share. In the end, not every story is deemed as important to the collection at the time. This archive in particular offers an interesting case study of silences because it was both a historical and memorial effort. We absolutely chose to silence inappropriate artifacts.

To be an academic archive, we were interested in collecting a lot of material; however, as a community project, we were very cautious about the material we could ethically put into the archive. For example, there were people who made memes that were making fun of victims or that were praising the actions of the bombers. Historically, those things are part of what happened. If you want to think about the events, you cannot only think about the narrative of memorial, remembrance, mourning, and celebration. But what would happen if a family member of one of the victims pulled up our site, and the first thing that appeared was a meme making fun of the victims? That would be a horrifying scenario. It would just increase the trauma.

While that ethical consideration led to an intentional silencing, there was unintentional silencing as well. For example, after the Boston Marathon bombings, there was criticism of the attention the victims received in relation to the violence that regularly takes place in lower-income areas of the city (Bidgood 2013; Crawford 2014; Jonas 2013). *Blackstonian*, a newspaper dedicated to issues related to Black, Latino, Cape Verdean, and other Peoples of Color in Boston, kept a tally of how many shootings occurred in the city in critique of the “One Boston” mentality that permeated and prompted the One Fund—an organization that raised millions of dollars for those most impacted by the bombings (Leidolf 2014).

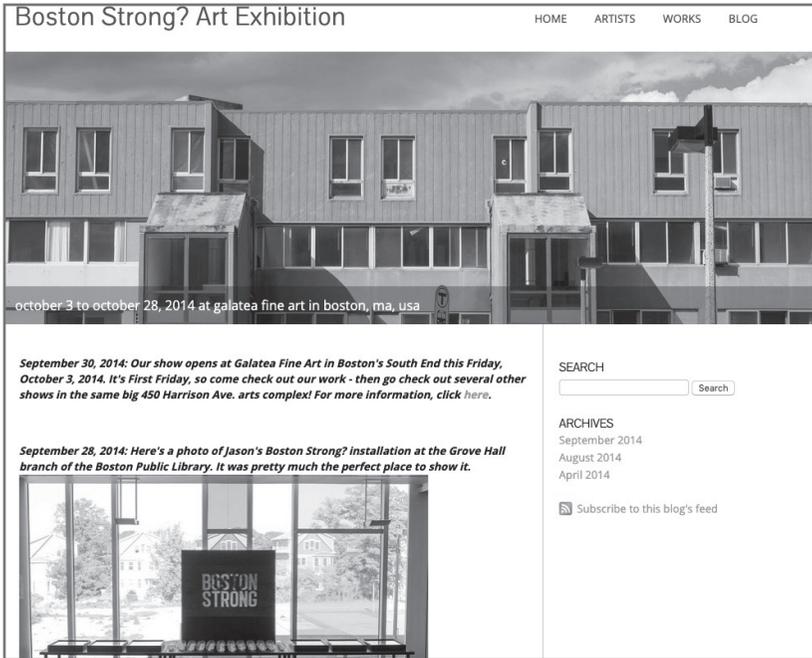


*There were 237 shootings in Boston in the year following the 2013 marathon. The above image gives this information along with the question "One Boston?" (Leidolf 2014).*

While understanding of the tragedy, many community members were angry that so much could be done so quickly for this tragedy while children in their communities were dying from violence not too far away.

Like One Boston, Boston Strong was not without critique, as publicly evidenced by the Boston Strong? Art Exhibition that took place one year after the bombings (Pramas 2014). Boston Strong? exhibited collage, drawing, and conceptual practices from artists Darrell Ann Gane-McCalla, Shea Justice, and Jason Pramas to weigh the community's response to the marathon bombings as opposed to overall violence in the city in the year that followed and asked provocative, discomfoting questions about media, corporations, race, and poverty (Bergeron 2014).

Tina Chéry, a mother who lost her son (an innocent bystander) to gun violence, attended a Boston Strong? Show, and she commented that she has felt what many of "those" people felt in regards to the worthiness of life and remained hopeful that work can be done to erase the question mark of the show and move forward in a truly united way for all community members (Eisenstadter 2014).



*A screenshot of the "Question Boston Strong" website (Pramas 2014).*

In looking at the historical context of Boston in 2013–2014, these stories are hugely important, but you will not find them in the archive. Just building a digital, crowdsourced archive does not mean that people will want to contribute or feel invited to contribute, particularly when the common dialogue around an event does not match their experiences. Crowdsourcing artifacts theoretically allows for a distribution of power, as participants can contribute their own artifacts on their own terms, contextualized with their own words. That being said, when the trauma is fresh (i.e. the closer you are to the event one is archiving), the more the archive is positioned as memorial. To be a memorial indicates a collective experience, and one thing human beings do in places of loss is try to fill voids with *stuff*, right? Likewise, the archive itself was preemptively filling a void by permanently housing all of the *stuff* that was out there. Attempting to quickly fill that void, however, led to issues. What happens to our communal history when certain voices and types of stories become privileged, intentionally or not?

In Our Marathon's aim to represent communities affected by the marathon bombings, the archive also created a community of its own—one that we now see may have unintentionally silenced people. This is an important truth of the "historial" archive—a portmanteau I use to signify historical/memorial archives (Girdharry 2019)—but it is not a hopeless one; rather, as time moves us further away from such traumatic events, the historial archive not only offers a peek into one representation of an historical moment, but it offers rich opportunities to contextualize what stories remain silenced and discover what stories can perhaps become un-silenced with more work.

What does un-silencing actually look like? Writing this in 2019, I would simply say look to the advocates literally and figuratively making noise: Black Lives Matter and the Women's March, to name a couple. But we don't always need grand gestures and huge organizational capacities to notice inequality and decide to do something about it. I wish I could say there was some grand moment that inspired this reflection and caused me to act. But there was no big moment. There was a small moment.

On April 23, 2018—just a little over five years after the bombings—I spoke on a panel with a few of my fellow Our Marathon colleagues. I don't really remember what I spoke about, but I do remember seeing Joanna Shea-O'Brien in the audience. Joanna was one of the professional oral historians I worked closely with on the project. She was one of the people I stressed with and cried with as we post-processed other people's stressing and crying. When she asked if I wanted to work on another project together, I immediately said yes. While our first conversations swirled around the words "mothers," "loss," and "gun violence," there was no pressure of time to commit to a project idea right away. We thought about our networks, we talked to smart people with expertise in areas like Public Health, Criminal Justice, and Oral History, and we discussed many *why* questions: why mothers? why loss? why guns? why oral history? why try to preserve these stories? why us?

In the meantime, we started attending community events. Chaplain Tina Chéry, whose insights I cited earlier in regards to the Boston Strong? exhibit, was clearly a social justice leader in the community.

She founded the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute in memory of her son in 1994. The organization continues to give incredible support to those impacted by homicide, which includes their annual Mother's Day Walk for Peace—a seven-mile walk from the Town Field neighborhood of Dorchester to Boston's City Hall Plaza. We volunteered at the Walk, we showed up for community listening sessions, and we met with LDB Peace Institute staff members to talk about collaborating on a potential project.

In short, it took months of trust building and conversation. Our slowness—a tenet of the oral history methodology itself—was a result of our mindfulness, and today (a year-and-a-half later) we have completed one oral history interview for our project: Community Resilience and Homicide in Boston. We are using this pilot experience to further develop our guidelines and parameters before we approach grants and institutions. The speed doesn't automatically alleviate all of the concerns of preserving stories, but we are trying to build a structure that uplifts voices that may be overshadowed in the media and lets community members preserve their own histories on their own terms.

When I was working on a dissertation that ended up examining Our Marathon, I had always thought that I would submit something to *Reflections*. Watching people write their stories down in public was inspiring and thought provoking. I was compelled to think about literacy sponsorship and the challenges and successes of university-community partnerships. But there are risks of taking on community projects on academic timelines. In contexts of shared trauma, stories matter for healing and creating a communal space, but the public nature of the archive may cause certain artifacts to be intentionally silenced. However, the further away from the trauma temporally, the more the archive becomes positioned as history, so, as I continue thinking through these issues, I caution researchers to be mindful of what is present for historical purposes but might be missing for memorial purposes. If you're interested in this kind of work, how might you contend with silencing?

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# Activist Archival Research, Environmental Intervention, and the Flint Water Crisis

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*As activists from historically marginalized communities advocate for themselves when confronted with increasing environmental and social injustices, students and scholars are uniquely poised to collect examples of, learn from, and amplify activists' rhetorical efforts at intervention. This article argues for activist archival work in which researchers collect examples of activist interventions as a critical form of community engagement. The case study presented here, which focuses on local activist writing (broadly conceived) in response to the Flint water crisis, illustrates one possibility for how activist archival research might be undertaken. Specifically, it highlights the tactics of black and working-class community members who joined together to make apparent how water contamination was affecting their own bodies, families, and communities through complex, multimodal interventions online and in the Flint community. Furthermore, this article emphasizes why such research is necessary and important, particularly when the embodied, scientific, and cultural knowledges of marginalized community members are represented little, if at all, in mainstream media coverage and normative rhetorics of risk.*

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**G**ina Luster was not an activist. She was a single mother who worked as a district manager for a retail chain in Flint, Michigan. But that all changed not long after officials in Flint prioritized saving money over ensuring residents received quality water by switching the city's water supply from the Detroit water system to the polluted Flint River. Almost immediately, Luster and her fellow Flint residents noticed the smell, taste, and color of the water changed dramatically. The water might be blue one day, green the next, and was often shades of brown or yellow. Sometimes it smelled a little like gasoline, at other times like a fish market (Sanburn 2016). The effects of the contaminated water were hard to ignore, so Luster called the state and water systems to complain and inquire into the safety of her water. She was repeatedly told there was nothing wrong with it, while at the same time, her daughter began experiencing hair loss and severe rashes, and Luster's own health concerns grew increasingly severe. "I started losing weight—I lost close to 60 pounds. My skin color changed. My hair was coming out. My bones ached. I felt like I was 95 years old. In July 2015, I collapsed at work," Luster wrote (Becktold 2018). Eventually, Luster lost her job because of the health issues she was experiencing. It was then she became an activist, one of the self-proclaimed "water warriors" for Flint.

Increasingly, concerned residents like Luster began gathering for protests outside of city buildings and attending meetings to voice their concerns. They even took plastic bottles of their water to a hearing with then-Flint emergency manager Jerry Ambrose, who said there was no way the water residents showed him came from Flint (Rodrick 2016). City officials continued to tell residents their water was safe and that city tests did not indicate problems—later, residents would learn those city tests were not conducted at the homes at highest risk for lead, and some of the numbers reported for those tests had been modified (see, for instance, Fonger 2015). So, community members, angry at city officials' response, decided they would prove what the evidence from their own tap water and their families' bodies already told them: that Flint water wasn't safe.

In Flint, a city that is 57 percent black and 36 percent white, with 42 percent of residents below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau

2015), levels of exposure to the water contamination were not equally distributed. Many of the more affluent, predominantly white neighborhoods in the city never had their water switched to the Flint River. Some community members whose water was switched learned about the contamination and so stopped using the water much sooner than others (consider, for instance, how many non-English-speaking residents did not know about the contamination for *months*). Furthermore, community members with higher income could purchase their own bottled water and water filters before free supplies were provided or when those free supplies ran out. Some had transportation available to pick up bottled water or to take their children to get lead testing before widespread lead testing efforts were initiated, some could afford necessary medical treatment to offset the effects of lead poisoning, and so on.

Yet despite all of these barriers, large numbers of community members of color and lower socioeconomic status joined together, building coalitions to advocate for themselves, including pastors like Bobby Jackson, retired auto workers like Claire McClinton, longtime community activists like Nayyirah Shariff, and concerned parents like Luster. The efforts of these activists in particular were there; they were important, they deserve to be recognized, and they are routinely omitted from press and other public accounts. Their work should be archived and preserved for the historical record. Specifically, black and working-class community activists joined together to test their own contaminated water, to protest, to distribute bottled water, and to fight for clean water for all Flint residents at a time when they were also experiencing the effects of the water contamination on their own bodies. Community activists drew on and integrated their own complex identities, often shaped by multiple forms of oppression related to race, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and citizenship status to form political coalitions and advocate for themselves in the face of unequal power relations. The result of this coalition-building is what Anna Carastathis (2013) calls “creative acts” that enable the formation of political alliances and the pursuit of “liberatory politics of interconnection” (944). These creative acts were vital to bringing attention to the Flint water crisis. Yet in national mainstream media coverage of the crisis, it was mostly a group of white Americans—mothers like LeeAnne Walters and

Melissa Mays, researchers like Marc Edwards of Virginia Tech—who were identified as the “heroes” of the water crisis.

This pattern of racial bias is why I view activist archival work as a critical form of community engagement. Activist archival research is so named because it involves archiving activist interventions and positions the archival researcher in an activist role. In a special issue of *Archival Science* focused on “archiving activism and activist archiving,” editors Andrew Flinn and Ben Alexander (2015) highlight projects where “archivists seek to creatively document political and social movement activism” as well as those where the archival process supports such activism (329). I believe my work on the Flint water crisis fits this characterization and that such archival research provides new avenues for community-engaged scholars, particularly as instances of environmental and broader social injustice like what occurred in Flint are happening with increasing frequency all over the United States (consider, for instance, the recent lead crisis in Newark, New Jersey). It is imperative that we make apparent the writing (broadly conceived) undertaken by often silenced and ignored communities, and that we learn from and value that work. Community activists intervening locally undertake complex, multimodal efforts at intervention that draw directly from their own embodied, cultural, and scientific knowledges. By collecting artifacts and examples of such instances of environmental intervention, we are able to expand our conception of what “counts” as valuable knowledge and writing at the same time we recognize and amplify the important work activists are undertaking in their communities. In this way, we can take up Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch’s (2010) call to identify “new places to look, new questions to ask, and new issues to consider” (12–13). By doing so, we can “enrich our rhetorical histories with artifacts that might be deemed unarchivable by a more traditional archive, or worse, considered unworthy of the historical record,” as K.J. Rawson advocates for in the video essay “Rhetorical History 2.0: Toward a Digital Transgender Archive” (2013).

When I first heard about the Flint water crisis, I could not engage directly with the Flint community because of my own geographic location (I reside in central Illinois, which is a six-hour drive from Flint) as well as family, bodily, and employment constraints. Even if

I could have more easily engaged directly with the Flint community as the crisis first unfolded, I also was (and remain) leery of instances where outsiders (like academics, such as myself in this situation, who do not belong to the community facing the environmental risk) attempt to “help” but may actually impede the efforts of local activists. I recognize my own positionality as a white, middle-class, straight, cisgender, relatively able-bodied woman with a tenure-track assistant professor position, particularly at a time when so many people in our country, our communities, and even our own fields do not have this same power and positionality. Systemic injustice and exploitation dehumanizes all of us, and I believe it is morally imperative to amplify the perspectives of people whose lived experiences are different from mine, whose daily realities differ from mine, who are most vulnerable and oppressed by the system, and who are marginalized by the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability, and citizenship status at which they reside. I care deeply about what was and still is happening in Flint and the broader environmental justice exigencies it represents, which are occurring right now throughout the United States. In the early months of the water crisis, I felt strongly that I needed to do something, so I honed in on the tactics of community activists like Gina Luster and began collecting examples of community activist interventions to learn from, to celebrate, to share with my students, to perhaps one day make available even more widely to other scholars, students, and activists.

I did this work because I believe activist archival research, in which we collect artifacts resulting from community activist efforts, archive them, analyze them, and share them, is one way to draw attention to what community activists are doing and to disseminate that knowledge so others (people in other communities facing similar challenges, students in our classrooms, our colleagues) can learn from them. Scholars and teachers can join forces with emerging social movements, “supporting their efforts to rebuild and retool for a more equitable, just, democratic, environmentally sustainable society,” as Shannon Carter and Deborah Mutnick (2012, 7) put it. Here, I make the case for why an activist archival approach has broad benefits to our disciplines, our students, and the communities whose work we archive, and I present one possible method for archiving and

analyzing activist rhetorics as they are occurring, using a case study of the Flint water crisis.

## ADVOCATING FOR ACTIVIST ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Archival research is a valuable component of our disciplines that enables us to recover previously unrecognized stories and histories and to analyze and learn from the work of rhetors who have come before us. The archival “turn” and arguments for conducting archival research have been well-documented in rhetoric and composition studies. In particular, Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan’s edited collection *Beyond the Archives* (2008) advocates for a broader conception of what “counts” as archival research and illustrates that archival research can tap into personal interests and exigencies, resulting in a complex, serendipitous process of knowledge-making.

Archival research need not only focus on the past; it also can be a useful method for recognizing, valuing, and preserving important activist work in the moment or soon after it occurs. Contemporary activist interventions often transpire at least in part online, which is why activist archival research involves engaging with what scholars call “Archives 2.0.” *Archives 2.0*, Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne (2012) emphasizes, aren’t just a digital archival collection—rather, such archives “invite participation in the formation and expansion of the sites” and highlight “various levels of connectivity” (6), such that we (and our students, as I will discuss later) can become both consumers *and* producers. Perhaps even more importantly, *Archives 2.0* enable a broader conception of who is “qualified” or an “expert,” which is vital if we focus our efforts on archiving the work of community activists whose own expertise might differ from “official,” sanctioned sources, and if we encourage undergraduate students to engage with such archival efforts when they are, for the most part, not perceived as “qualified” archivists.

By its very nature, archival work involves making choices about where to look, what to include or exclude, when to keep searching, and when is enough (for now). In this way, all archival work is necessarily ongoing, necessarily incomplete. The goal of the archival work I have undertaken related to the Flint water crisis—and that I argue we need much more of—is not to tell a singular, linear story of

environmental intervention. Such a story is not possible. Rather, as Tarez Samra Graban, Alexis Ramsey-Tobienne, and Whitney Myers (2005) suggest, we must “look to archival aids for unstable narratives, not stable ones” (234). Furthermore, Achille Mbembe states, “the archive, therefore, is fundamentally a matter of discrimination and of selection, which, in the end, results in the granting of a privileged status to certain written documents, and the refusal of that same status to others, thereby judged ‘unarchivable’. The archive is, therefore, not a piece of data, but a status” (quoted in Rawson 2013). I argue for granting status to those documents—and those activist efforts—that may otherwise be overlooked. The methodology I present in the next section is one way we can hone in on these underrepresented activist efforts so we can archive and learn from the savvy rhetorical tactics undertaken to intervene locally.

## **A METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING ACTIVIST INTERVENTIONS**

A methodology that brings together Angela Haas and Erin Frost’s (2017) apparent decolonial feminist rhetoric of risk and Jeffrey Grabill’s (2014) rhetoric in the common places enables us to hone in on specific instances of environmental intervention occurring in marginalized communities. Haas and Frost’s (2017) apparent decolonial feminist methodology brings feminist, indigenous, and decolonial theories into conversation with Jeffrey Grabill and Michele Simmons’ (1998) critical rhetoric for participatory risk communication. Risk communication generally occurs when scientists, policymakers, and other recognized “experts” convey information about environmental health risks to a seemingly unknowing public. However, Grabill & Simmons advocate for recognizing the knowledge and expertise of citizens and including them in meaningful ways in the “construction of risk itself” (420). An apparent decolonial feminist methodology studies connections between risk communication and power, global and local systems of oppression, and institutions in order to both intervene in existing and propose revised rhetorics of risk (171). In an apparent decolonial feminist methodology, rhetoricians strive to make their own “subject position explicit, to hail allies in redressing sexism, and to critique ethics of efficiency” (what they call *apparent feminism*) while also “interrogat[ing] and seek[ing] to redress the colonial effects of risk and its scientific and technical rhetorics on the land, communities, knowledges, and lifeways” (what they call a

*decolonial rhetorical methodology*) (Haas and Frost 2017, 170). Haas and Frost underscore the value of their methodology in making apparent those stakeholders who have been left out of or disempowered by uncritical or normative rhetorics. Additionally, they argue for their methodology's wide use value "in a variety of risky rhetorical situations" (178), particularly those in which environmental equity is threatened.

Using an apparent decolonial feminist methodology enables activist archival researchers to identify specific cases of environmental or health risk to study. Furthermore, its emphasis on valuing underrepresented knowledges and embodied experiences to redress social injustices ensures researchers hone in on the often-overlooked rhetorical work of community activists "for whom environmental equity is not an embodied reality" (Haas and Frost 2017, 181). In other words, employing an apparent decolonial feminist methodology necessitates listening to and learning from individuals' knowledge of their own bodies and the stories they tell about their experiences with environmental contamination, which often are not widely represented in mainstream media coverage or acknowledged by people in positions of power.

Whereas Haas and Frost's (2017) apparent decolonial feminist methodology helps activist archival researchers identify which cases of environmental risk to study, Grabill's (2014) rhetoric in the common places enables us to determine what point(s) in community activists' risk assessment and communication processes on which to focus. Grabill's methodology recognizes the "mundane labor" of knowledge work as being central to the practice of a rhetoric in the common places (252). Grabill proposes a series of devices, or ways of thinking about methods and practices, that enable the work of public rhetoric (257). These devices are detection, rendering, assembly, calculation, and communication. With *detection*, community members work to identify shared concerns, to research and inquire into an issue so that they might begin to collectively "identify the indicators of publicness and the concerns that motivate rhetoric" (Grabill 2014, 258). Once an issue has been detected, the work of *rendering* involves what Grabill calls "following indicators or pulling on threads"—or tracing specific activities and the people and things associated with

those activities (258). It is necessary to render accounts in order to begin the work of *assembly*, in which a public is built and maintained around a matter of concern. Next, *calculation* involves measuring and assessing the impact of this work—in other words, what the velocity, value, or “oomph” (as Grabill calls it) of this work is. Finally, *communication* involves thinking carefully about the messages that are made and delivered and the devices of messaging (257–258).

The first three devices Grabill identifies in his methodology—detection, rendering, and assembly—are central to activist archival research because they focus attention on the ways citizens in affected communities begin to “make a thing” (Grabill 2014, 263) or start the important work of hailing others to join them in intervening in their communities. In taking up Grabill’s (2014) point that a methodology must be a theory “of and for action” (259) that supports others’ work, I argue that there is much we can learn by examining how community members initially identify a local environmental problem, inquire into the nature of that problem, and then hail others in their community to intervene with them. This work leading to assembly isn’t just important to rhetoric, Grabill argues; it *is* the work of rhetoric. Yet often in studies of community activist work, the emphasis is on the actions of the already-assembled group fighting for environmental justice or on what happened long after a specific advocacy effort has concluded, rather than on the important work that was performed before a coalition of community members began their collective efforts at intervention. If this mundane work leading to assembly were more explicitly studied and discussed, people in other communities attempting to engage in similar work might have a better sense of how they can hail their fellow community members. Thus, combining the first three devices of Grabill’s rhetoric in the common places with Haas and Frost’s apparent decolonial feminist rhetoric of risk methodology enables researchers to recognize and value the important efforts of at-risk community members who rely on their lived, embodied experiences as they first begin to intervene locally.

## **ACTIVIST ARCHIVAL RESEARCH METHODS**

Compiling a digital archive as an environmental crisis is unfolding is challenging, to say the least, and illustrates Elizabeth Yake’s (2010) contention that “searching is both an art and a science” that requires

“planning, patience, and persistence” (113). Such activist archival research requires creativity and critical thinking even to figure out where to find things, particularly as activist interventions include both online and on-the-ground efforts. The methods I employed to gather examples of community activist interventions that I discuss briefly here are not perfect, and what I gathered through my own research is but a tiny sliver of the materials related to the crisis. Yet I hope that by detailing how I curated artifacts from the Flint water crisis, other researchers will begin to envision how they might undertake their own activist archival work.

In my initial archival research on the Flint water crisis, I focused on examples of activist interventions that began with the switch to Flint River water in April 2014 and continued through May 2016. Although Flint activists continue to fight for access to clean, safe water even today, I initially constrained my search to those dates because of my focus on activist efforts at detection, rendering, and assembly, which mostly occurred during this timeframe. During my research, I collected news and magazine articles (from local and state media, particularly *MLive* and *The Detroit Free Press*, national media, and numerous alternative publications such as *Grist* and *Mother Jones*), technical documents I found online (including water quality reports and flyers about water safety distributed in the Flint community, among many other items), photographs, and social media posts (particularly from Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, where I followed relevant social media tags including #FlintWaterCrisis and #HelpFlint). Because of my focus on an apparent decolonial feminist methodology, I was interested in finding what community activists were saying, writing, and posting themselves, particularly about their own embodied experiences with the water contamination, so in my initial research, whenever specific community activists or activist groups were mentioned, I would search for those activists online to find what other articles and videos they appeared in and to see if they had their own blogs, websites, or social media accounts. Additionally, I conducted Google image searches to find photos related to the crisis. I focused on collecting images that depicted community members struggling to live at home without access to clean water, showing evidence of how the contaminated water was affecting their bodies, handing out or obtaining bottled water, or attending rallies or other advocacy-focused events.

To analyze the data collected from these research methods, I used grounded theory and theoretical data sampling informed by decolonial feminist theory. This type of analysis, as Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (2008) explain, is “fluid and generative” and requires opening up “the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them” (159). It allowed me to identify concepts from an initial set of data I gathered and follow the lead of those concepts to see where they might take me, what additional data collection might result, and then what new concepts might emerge (and so on). This immersion, I believe, was important for identifying and learning from the ways Flint activists sought to intervene locally because I was guided by what the community activists did rather than by what I expected to find from studying their efforts.

I coded all artifacts I gathered based on form and genre (for instance, flyer, Tweet, photo of water, etc.), types of knowledges represented (cultural, embodied, scientific), and devices (detection, rendering, and assembly). After I completed coding, I identified themes and ideas that emerged from the artifacts I was studying, analyzed the data again grouped by code to see if anything else emerged, and continued with this process until it seemed as if I had identified the key themes or ideas related to Flint community activist efforts. In the course of this analysis, I identified a number of specific community members whose stories were important to the trajectory of activist work in Flint and whose contributions were represented in the artifacts I collected, and I spent additional time studying the artifacts about or produced by them.

From my research I recognized that Flint community activists were adept in their ongoing efforts to act and to engage their fellow community members in that action. A large number of community members attended protests and meetings, assisted with water testing, and spread the word about the water crisis via social media. Additionally, a number of organizations and coalitions formed in response. Yet, as Grabill (2010) points out, because rhetorical activity is coordinated and distributed and, thus, difficult to detect, communities or publics must be “assembled and continuously reassembled” (195). I envision that the creation of a larger Flint water crisis archive will require collecting more materials from the early years of the crisis as well as interviewing those activists who were involved to bring

their own perspectives and voices more fully to the project. Still, from the artifacts I did gather, I learned just how many different tactics activists undertook in the community and online—many of which were represented little, if at all, in mainstream media coverage of the crisis. In the next section, I offer a brief discussion of some of these artifacts I collected online to underscore my contention that activist archival research is necessary and important.

## **DETECTION, RENDERING, AND ASSEMBLY IN FLINT: A CASE STUDY**

As I began following and collecting artifacts online related to the Flint water crisis, I realized the activist efforts of Gina Luster and her fellow Flint community members followed a common storyline of environmental intervention in which community members take up activist work after detecting health problems or other concerns affecting their own bodies or the bodies of family members (for further discussion of this common approach, see Schwarze 2007). Particularly in marginalized communities, environmental issues often are dismissed by people in positions of power in elected office, businesses, media, and/or organizations until the effects are extreme and impossible to ignore. Many of these problems stem from lax regulation and deregulation; from decisions made by people who do not consider the real, material effects of their decisions on specific bodies and communities; by corporations with too much control and too little oversight for whom the bottom line trumps everything; and/or by narrow constructions of what is deemed evidence and who is authorized to collect such evidence. And so, in response, community members become activists, despite being burdened by the many challenges present at the intersections of race, socioeconomic status, gender, citizenship status, disability, and so on. They spend considerable time and effort fighting to communicate their concerns and make their voices heard in the hopes of stopping the destruction of their bodies and communities.

Many Flint residents were surprised when they heard that officials were considering a switch to the “notoriously polluted” Flint River (Pulido 2016, 4). Over the many decades in the mid-1900s when General Motors (GM) transformed Flint into an automotive manufacturing mecca, the river became a disposal site for all manner of toxic wastes from nearby factories responsible for supplying

the materials necessary for making cars (Rosner and Markowitz 2016). Polluters like GM were never held accountable for the river contamination, and city officials passed off the consequences to local residents rather than pressing for corporate responsibility. As was discussed earlier, residents' concerns about the switch seemed warranted when the quality and appearance of the water changed, and the effects of the water on their bodies was just as startling. Community members did not keep their concerns to themselves—many, like Luster, “complained vociferously about the quality of the water” to city officials (Pulido 2016, 6). Yet city and state officials dismissed their complaints and kept insisting the water was safe to drink. Then-mayor Dayne Walling even went so far as to drink a glass of the water on local television to demonstrate his comfort with it (“Flint’s Mayor” 2015). Such a move illustrates how city officials privileged their own knowledges (which, it was revealed later, were based on ignored and erroneous water testing data) over the embodied knowledges of Flint community members.

After community members initially detected the problems with their water and the effects the water was having on their bodies, they began the work of rendering by gathering evidence of the water contamination to build their case that the issue needed to be addressed immediately. Community activists were forced to do this work on their own after officials from the City of Flint, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, and Governor Rick Snyder’s office repeatedly ignored Flint residents’ concerns about the effects of the water switch on their bodies and continued to dismiss them by insisting the water was safe to drink.

Community member LeeAnne Walters sparked early efforts at rendering by requesting that someone from the city test her water after her children developed a number of severe health concerns she thought were linked to the water switch. Shortly after a city employee completed the test, Walters received a panicked voicemail from the employee, who told her not to let her kids drink the water in any form. No level of lead exposure is safe, but anything over 15 parts per billion is a serious problem. The water at the Walters home was nearly seven times that: 104 parts per billion (Smith 2015). A week

later, a follow-up test recorded lead levels at 397 parts per billion. Shortly thereafter, all four of the Walters children were diagnosed with lead poisoning. “I was hysterical,” Walters told *Mother Jones*. “At first, it was self-blame. And then there’s that anger: How are they letting them do this?” (Lurie 2016). The city claimed the problem was specific to lead pipes in the Walters house, though the Walters had the plumbing updated when they moved in, so there were no lead pipes. The city’s solution involved shutting off the Walters’ water and hooking their house up to a neighbor’s garden hose.

Walters was certain the problem was not just with her water, so she began researching city water data herself and tried contacting anyone she could think of—from community activists to random people at the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regional office. Eventually, she reached Miguel Del Toral, an EPA water specialist who listened to the evidence she had gathered. Del Toral further investigated and learned just how corrosive the contaminated Flint River water was to the aging lead pipes in the city. Yet the memo Del Toral sent to his bosses was widely ignored and discredited. Eventually Del Toral put Walters in touch with Marc Edwards, a water treatment expert at Virginia Tech University, and Del Toral helped Walters collect thirty water samples from her house to send to the Virginia Tech lab for analysis (Hohn 2016). The Virginia Tech team, led by Edwards, found lead levels even higher than the previous tests (which had been done after first flushing the pipes) had detected. On average, the levels were 2,300 parts per billion, and one sample was more than 13,000 parts per billion, which is above the EPA standard for toxic waste (Rodrick 2016). Still, city officials continued to insist the lead levels at the Walters home were an anomaly.

Walters and Edwards became widely profiled, prominent figures connected to the Flint water crisis because of their initial efforts to prove just how toxic the Flint water was. Walters, a white woman, was a stay-at-home mom who spent countless hours researching the contaminants in the city water and their health effects and was relentless in contacting anyone she could think of to assist her. She did so at a time when many other residents were experiencing similar health effects but may have been limited in their ability to get

answers because they did not have the time or resources to engage in the rendering that Walters did. Edwards, a white researcher with the technical expertise to support the embodied knowledges of the Walters family, was similarly hailed early on in media coverage as a “hero” or “savior” of the water crisis. Yet as media coverage of the water crisis intensified, often focusing on the efforts of Walters and Edwards, a diverse coalition of community activists including local pastors, ex-felons, small business owners, and concerned parents—many of whom were black, low-income, or both—worked tirelessly behind the scenes to collect evidence of the water contamination and spread word about it online and in their community.

Even though I was not able to knock on doors in Flint to raise awareness of the water crisis or collect samples from homes in the community, I could engage in activist archival research to reveal the hidden stories and efforts of this diverse community coalition, which were documented much less frequently, particularly in the early months of the crisis, and often told only in local media, if at all. I could collect the coverage of these local activists’ efforts that appeared in small online and indie publications, photos of their actions, and their own social media posts. These artifacts, when studied alongside or even in place of the common storylines of the contamination that appeared in the national press, portray a more complex picture of the local activist efforts of intervention. They help illustrate the ways Flint activists communicated to other affected community members through a variety of rhetorical forms (speech, writing, bodies, images), highlighting community members’ complex identities and their cultural, embodied, and scientific knowledges. And they make visible and audible the people on the front lines who are often behind the scenes, without whose participation in such struggles real social change would not occur. It is far too easy to rely on common or obvious narratives of environmental intervention present in the media. I initially did it myself in spending too much time retelling the stories of Walters and Edwards at length in early drafts of this article rather than focusing on the activists who were not widely represented elsewhere. But clearly, the stories we most need to learn from and amplify are more than likely not the easiest ones to uncover or the most frequently told.

A diverse group of activists representing the organizations Coalition for Clean Water, Flint Democracy Defense League, and Flint Rising came together in an important moment of rendering and assembly after the water tests of the Walters' home when Virginia Tech researchers sent 300 water testing kits to Flint to gather additional data about lead levels across the city. Nayyirah Shariff, community organizer and director of Flint Rising, was among the community activists of color who were actively involved in water testing. In a local newspaper article that ran during the testing, Shariff said, "we're going to get these test kits out to the community, and we're going to find out the truth about what's in our water" (Guyette 2016). Within a month, the Flint community activists helped gather and analyze 861 water samples, more than twelve times the number of water samples city officials collected in six months (Rhoads, Martin, and Roy 2016). Based on the results of the completed water tests, the Virginia Tech researchers found that forty percent of Flint homes had lead levels exceeding the acceptable limit (Rodrick 2016). The MDEQ argued the test results were not accurate, which prompted community members to develop quality control procedures. For instance, they taped kits closed and signed their names across the tape when they collected samples as protection against tampering (Rhoads, Martin, and Roy 2016).

Flint community members chose to collect their own data because they refused to accept information provided by the city and state. The approach community activists took as they worked with Virginia Tech researchers is an example of popular epidemiology, in which "laypersons gather scientific data and marshal the knowledge and resources of experts" (Brown 1993, 18) to identify environmental hazards and diseases. Popular epidemiology is commonly undertaken by community activists advocating for environmental justice because it integrates the "physiological, psychological, and social effects of environmental hazards" (Novotny 1998, 140) and recognizes the extent to which certain groups (particularly because of socioeconomic status, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and disability) are more affected than others by health threats. Di Chiro (1998) argues that such work is akin to the construction of a new scientific method that takes into account different perspectives, standpoints, and social justice arguments.

The research community activists conducted also served to create a local counterpublic that stood in stark contrast to the dominant “public” narratives of city officials. Counterpublics are groups “formed by their conflict with the norms and contexts of their cultural environment” and a “context of domination,” according to Warner (2002, 63). Similar to the local publics discussed by Higgins, Long, and Flower (2006), which communicate via hybrid, alternative discourses that circulate both within and beyond the group and provide culturally appropriate ways to address key issues and acknowledge rival perspectives, the local counterpublic that formed in Flint was comprised of marginalized members of the community affected by the water contamination who recognized their subordinated status and assembled to respond and intervene. Activists came together to put a face on this local counterpublic and to circulate information about what they found in September 2015 when they joined Edwards at a press conference on the lawn outside Flint City Hall. During the press conference, Edwards announced the test results and asked Flint residents not to drink their water. MDEQ officials again questioned the research, even calling Edwards and his team “magicians” who “pull that rabbit out of that hat everywhere they go” (Roy 2015). In response to the press conference, the city and state conducted their own testing of seventy-one samples, but they eliminated the two highest lead scores (one of which was from Walters’ house) on technicalities, which dramatically brought down the results of lead levels in the city (Rodrick 2016). In refusing to acknowledge or take seriously the results of the water testing conducted by community members and Virginia Tech researchers, city and state officials perpetuated the long-time approach to risk communication in which people in positions of power (typically deemed “experts” or “officials”) accuse the public of being “irrational,” “ignorant,” and incapable of understanding technical data (Fischer 2000, 122–123) and question community activists’ own research findings, no matter how carefully their studies are designed and carried out.

At the same time many community members were testing their water, another community member and medical professional was conducting research of her own. After Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, the director of the pediatric residency program at Hurley Medical Center in Flint, heard local parents’ complaints about their children’s health problems and learned that the city did not have corrosion controls in

place, she began testing blood lead levels in Flint children. Through her research, Hanna-Attisha discovered that the incidence of lead contamination in children under five had doubled since 2013—and in Flint’s worst-affected neighborhoods, children’s lead levels tripled (Hurley Medical Center 2015). Hanna-Attisha checked the numbers repeatedly before presenting them publicly, within weeks of the press conference held by the group of community activists with Edwards. At first, officials denied the accuracy of Hanna-Attisha’s tests, too. As with the residents’ water testing results, MDEQ said her data did not match state testing results and accused community members of sparking hysteria. Officials once again ignored their constituents (primarily people of color) as well as another person of color (Hanna-Attisha is an Iraqi-American woman), despite her credentials.

Yet community activists continued to spread the word about the results of the water tests and Hanna-Attisha’s study via websites they created, through social media, and by speaking with any news reporters who would listen to them. A few days later, the state finally acknowledged the issues raised by community member-driven testing, and Genesee County issued a public-health emergency and formally asked residents not to drink the water. In October 2015, the city switched back to the Detroit water system. However, the community’s problems were not solved by the second switch because the lead pipes carrying water through the city were so corroded at that point that even the Detroit water became contaminated.

The examples presented here underscore the difficulty community members face in undertaking the work of rendering and assembling a local counterpublic when officials do not listen to or acknowledge the embodied and scientific knowledges community members possess. It also makes visible the inequality and injustice underlying the Flint water crisis. Even when community activists called on “authorized” researchers to assist them, the evidence they collected was not immediately taken seriously. As Hanna-Attisha told a reporter, “They [Flint residents] were being neglected. Moms were complaining. People were going to town-hall meetings and getting arrested. But nobody listened to them” (Sanburn 2016).

Yet community activists did not give up. As the evidence of lead contamination grew, activists including Luster and Shariff engaged more directly in tactics aimed at assembly, including going door-to-door to homes to warn residents their water was not safe (Le Melle 2016). Luster was motivated to speak directly with community members after she was told her apartment complex on the border of the city was not receiving Flint River water even though it was. “That was the fire under me to be an advocate for the forgotten folk, not only in the building where I live but for the undocumented immigrants. Nothing was in Spanish, so we started knocking on doors” Luster said (Becktold 2018). Activists also distributed 4,000 door hangers, which were printed by another white local activist, Melissa Mays, and her husband with their tax return money. The door hangers included a list of the signs of contaminated water along with the message “Your water is not safe” and phone numbers for local, state, and national officials (McDonough 2016).

From the early months of the crisis, groups of community members regularly assembled outside Flint City Hall and in other locations, staging protests. Protest participants often held up bottles of the colored water that came from their home faucets, along with large hand-written signs with messages including “Justice for Flint,” “Flint Lives Matter,” and “Water Is a Human Right.” At many protests, children stood alongside their parents, often holding their own signs with messages such as “When will I have clean bath water?” and “Stop poisoning us.”

One protest called a “die-in” was staged by a group of women activists who wanted to convey a different message about the health consequences of the water contamination. In May 2016, ten women wore white jumpsuits decorated with red-painted hearts that said “Flint.” The paint from the hearts bled down their legs in a visual representation of the damage women across Flint were experiencing as a result of the water contamination. The women laid silently on the steps to the entrance of the water treatment plant. One of the black activists, Nakiya Wakes, stood and told the story of how she miscarried twins then came home from the hospital to a state notice saying not to drink the water. The video of her speaking was shared on social media (Figure 1). In it, she stated, “This area is a crime



*Figure 1. Screen shots from two Tweets posted by Flint Rising. The Tweet on the left includes a video showing a coalition of women of various ages, races, and income levels laying on the steps of the Flint water treatment plant as activist Nakiya Wakes shares her story of miscarriage. The Tweet on the right shows participants in the die-in. Included in the photos are Melissa Mays (third from the left in the back row), Mona Hanna-Attisha (second from the right in the back row), Gina Luster (second from the left in the front row), Desiree Duell (center front), and Nakiya Wakes (second from the right in the front row), whose activist efforts are all discussed in this article.*

scene. We have lost children. Our lives, our reproductive systems have been damaged,” even as a plant supervisor tried to stop her, telling her repeatedly that she was trespassing.

The die-in received limited local news coverage, but images and videos of the protest were shared on social media, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This protest offers an example of the ways participation in an activist event is simultaneously a tactic for building assembly and evidence of assembly that has already occurred. In other words, the women who protested at the Flint water treatment plant had already come together around a shared matter of concern. In doing so, their actions also brought attention (via social media posts and local media coverage) to a consequence of the water contamination about which other community members may not have been aware. Thus, the women who participated in the protest

helped publicize the assembly that had already occurred while also potentially assisting in further efforts to sustain and build assembly by making apparent to a wider audience what was happening to local women's reproductive systems.

Community activists also engaged in performances and art installations to raise awareness and make arguments about the severity of the water contamination and its effect on community members' bodies. For instance, in 2015 white Flint artist and community activist Desiree Duell created a protest art installation called "A Body of Water." The project began when her son asked her if they could make art with all of the empty water bottles they had in their home since they, like so many Flint residents, no longer drank tap water. After Duell helped her son outline his silhouette in used water bottles, she decided to expand the project into the community (Atkinson 2015). For the installation, participants at community centers, churches, and festivals—many of whom were children—posed on the ground so their bodies could be outlined in chalk (as shown in Figure 2). Then the outlines were filled in with recycled water bottles with waterproof LED lights (Tyson 2016). The combination of the chalk outlines (reminiscent of the outline around a body at a crime scene) and the use of the recycled water bottles (so prevalent in day-to-day life, at least for those community members who had access to them) drew attention to the tangible effects of the water contamination on Flint residents' bodies. The art installation also served as a means of assembly as community members came together to participate in and view the project alongside other residents with similar embodied experiences.

Tweets like the one shown above about the die-in (Figure 1) and Instagram posts of the different "A Body of Water" installations are just some of the examples of ways Flint community activists used social media to share information and raise awareness. Another example is Shariff's Twitter feed. Shariff (@nayyirahshariff) Tweeted regularly—often multiple times per day—about the Flint water crisis beginning in January 2015. She frequently mentioned Governor Rick Snyder (@onetoughnerd) in her Tweets, often with the hashtag #arrestsnyder. Yet she also used her social media presence to help people in the community access safe water—for instance, in fall 2015



Figure 2. Community activist and artist Desiree Duell draws around the outline of Netiva Wilder in a 2015 performance of “A Body of Water.” The outlines of residents’ bodies were filled in with reused plastic water bottles lit with waterproof LED lights (photo courtesy of Desiree Duell).



Figure 3. A screen shot of a series of three Tweets posted by Nayyirah Shariff (@nayyirahshariff) in January 2016. Shariff and other Flint activists took to Twitter to raise awareness of and show outrage at requirements that Flint residents had to provide official identification to receive bottled water. Their efforts led to a rapid change in policy.

she Tweeted about water filter giveaways, and in early 2016 she posted messages letting people know where they could find bottled water in the community and soliciting help with unloading and distributing water. Shariff also was active in Tweeting information to community members interested in participating in the canvassing efforts to spread word about the lead contamination. Shariff further advocated for members of the community who were undocumented immigrants, homeless, or otherwise did not have official forms of identification when people attempting to get free water at fire stations were told they had to provide government-issued IDs (as shown in Figure 3).

Shariff's use of Twitter aligns with the findings of Rodrigo Sandoval-Almazan and J. Ramon Gil-Garcia (2014) on the use of social media tools for political activism, in that Twitter served as a venue for Shariff to manage and distribute information enabling community activists to organize in Flint. It also illustrates the ways people can mobilize their networks through the integration of online and in-the-community actions (a topic further discussed by Ryder 2010), as Shariff and other community activists used their social media posts to showcase what was happening to their bodies (by posting images of chemical burns, for instance) or activist efforts at intervention (by showing images of protest participants in action). In other words, both the online and in-the-community actions undertaken by Flint community activists work together as part of what Verzosa Hurley and Kimme Hea (2014) call a "larger complex of communication practices" (66) undertaken by community activists in response to local environmental risk.

## **LEARNING FROM ARCHIVING ACTIVIST INTERVENTIONS**

The examples of community activist efforts at detection, rendering, and assembly discussed here are but a few of many I collected in the first few years of the Flint water crisis. These examples underscore how pivotal community activist efforts were in raising awareness of the water contamination and its effects on residents' bodies. Without community activists' persistence in sharing their stories, conducting their own research, and making their complaints heard, the already devastating effects of the water contamination likely would have been considerably worse. There is much we can learn from the ways that

community activists in Flint and other marginalized communities faced by environmental contamination detect, render, and assemble in order to intervene locally. But in order to learn *from* them, we first must learn *about* such efforts.

When community activists act to intervene in their communities, their success may be limited if their work is not authorized or recognized by people in positions of power or conveyed via mainstream media coverage. As Di Chiro (1997) found in researching the grassroots efforts of women environmentalists, the common assertion that “legitimate scientific knowledge about the environment is exclusively located within certain communities of credentialed experts” (210) prevails and often serves as a barrier to community activist efforts. In Flint, community activist interventions still involved credentialed experts such as Edwards and Hanna-Attisha, who were recognized as “authorized” to speak because of their technical expertise, despite the considerable local and embodied knowledges of Flint community activists. Yet Flint community activists are the “new species of ‘expert’” for whom Di Chiro (1997, 210) advocates, specifically women activists who use their own common sense and experiential knowledges in undertaking community-based research. As the artifacts from the Flint water crisis illustrate, these experts are doing important work—even though their efforts are not always widely recognized.

This is precisely why activist archival research matters. We can go backwards and archive social justice interventions that have already occurred. But we can also archive activism-in-the-moment, whether during an unfolding environmental crisis like the one that occurred in Flint or during an extreme weather event such as Hurricane Harvey, when community members took to Twitter to share and obtain information, seek and provide help, and more. We cannot, nor should we, always get directly involved in environmental interventions for, as Carter and Mutnick (2012) point out, “frequently we in the academy have more to learn from than to teach community members and social justice organizers” (6). But we can begin archiving artifacts related to such interventions to learn from and share with others, so activist work is valued and recognized beyond the moment of exigence when it occurs. Then we must work to make that archival work broadly

available—and not just to academic audiences. For me that means my next step is building an archive of Flint artifacts that is accessible online, sharing those artifacts with the Flint activists who initially created them, and engaging with them to collect additional artifacts. I also hope they will share their own stories in their own words about the water crisis and the activist organizing they did in response so that a broader audience might celebrate and learn from their efforts. In this way, activist archival research is the sort of “generative community literacy practice” and site of “collaborative rhetorical invention” that Whitney Douglas (2017, 31) calls for.

Activist archival research also has a place in our classrooms. As Pamela VanHaitsma (2015), Jim Purdy (2011), and others argue, students are already accustomed to and work with digital archives in their daily lives, and more formalized archival efforts in their classes provide another opportunity for students to participate directly with scholarly inquiry. Through digital archival projects, students can contribute to and create new archives, bring archives to more public audiences, and collaborate with communities directly. Such archival work in classrooms presents an opportunity for teaching research methods that expand beyond traditional library instruction and make apparent for students that, although scholarly research and “official” sources of information are valuable, they are only one type of available, legitimate knowledge. Students can begin to consider the ways conducting their own interviews or ethnographic work as well as archiving social media posts, videos, and other documents online are relevant, authoritative, useful research methods that can contribute to their own and others’ knowledge about social justice issues and help them see more nuanced, layered perspectives on the topics they are writing about than what may be portrayed solely in mainstream media coverage.

We might begin by having students study existing archival work. As I mentioned earlier, I share artifacts from my own archival efforts in my classes. (Other scholar-teachers do the same. See, for instance, Nancy Welch’s *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World*.) There are also other existing archives available for students to learn from, such as the #NoDAPL archive (<https://www.nodaplarchive.com/>) or one of the many #BlackLivesMatter

archives (see, for instance, <https://archive-it.org/collections/4783>). Students can study, discuss, and write about these materials. Then they can engage in actual archiving of artifacts, particularly those found online. Why not have students identify a current social justice exigency and begin the work of compiling a digital archive? The entire class might work together to document an unfolding social justice issue, hashtag movement, or local concern. Or each student might individually identify a stakeholder involved in an issue whose work they wish to archive, and then the entire class can bring together their individual archival work and analyses to build a complex picture of a specific issue or crisis.

We can and should be curators for instances of intervention when they are occurring. This archival work is a vital way (though, of course, not the only way) of engaging with and learning from communities, whether in our own towns or halfway across the world. If done carefully, thoughtfully, and ethically, we can contribute by collecting the artifacts resulting from those efforts and by archiving, amplifying, and sharing them. This kind of research can reveal layers of activism, particularly among those marginalized community members, such as people of color, who are too often omitted from mainstream media coverage and the public record.

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# The Work of the Conference on Community Writing: Reflections on the 2019 Philadelphia Conference

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*This essay presents a polyvocal review of the 2019 Conference on Community Writing. It is composed of a series of vignettes and reflections written by the authors, community partners, conference organizers, educators, and others who attended the conference. Together, these reflections examine a central theme of the conference, “the work” of community writing, by attending to four questions: 1) What is the work of the Conference on Community Writing, and what does it tell us about the state of the subfield of community-engaged writing?; 2) What spaces does the conference encompass, and who is included in these spaces?; 3) What are the material realities that enable and constrain our work, in and beyond the conference?; and 4) What work is unfinished, and what will sustain us as we tackle it? The polyvocal essay presented here examines these questions through multiple positionalities within community writing studies, ultimately arguing that attending to the diversity of voices, stories, and perspectives in community writing must guide our efforts to understand community writing as a field and imagine its future work.*

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*“What do you do/say/chant/read/write to remind yourself that your job is NOT YOUR WORK?”*

—Carmen Kynard

*“I’m sick of academic arguments. I want stories.”*

—Paula Mathieu

*“How can we support others to have the courage to share their stories, especially in spaces where they are not represented?”*

—Michelle Angela Ortiz

Carmen Kynard, during her keynote address at the 2019 Conference on Community Writing (CCW), called on us in the audience to examine ourselves and the work we do, or fail to do, to address systemic racism and injustice. This social change *work* is not the “job,” the basic duties of our appointment. Nor is our work the “hustle,” the professional moves—shaped by white, neoliberal norms—that help us publish and network. Kynard challenged conference participants to distinguish the work, the job, and the hustle in order to remain oriented. “How do you self-check on your own consciousness when you get so deep into the hustle that you forget who you are and what you came here for?” Kynard asked. Her keynote (re)centered the work, and *how to do the work* was one of the fundamental questions that defined and shaped the third biennial Conference on Community Writing, hosted in Philadelphia by Drexel University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Temple University.

Another central question at the conference was how to talk about the work we do. During her keynote on the last day of the conference, Paula Mathieu asked participants to put aside academic argument in favor of stories. Mathieu underscored the importance of telling our narratives, of understanding our motivations, and of unpacking our positionalities relative to our work. Mathieu builds on the scholarship of Amy Robillard (2019), who asks that we all investigate our relationship to *story* “for your own understanding of why you do what you do” (xii). Muralist Michelle Angela Ortiz, whose keynote

addressed a standing-room-only crowd at the Free Public Library, told stories, and asked the audience to think more deeply about the relationship between story and power. Ortiz's collaborative public art features stories of migration, deportation, and detention, and it involves community members in creative action against harmful immigration policies. Ortiz's keynote focused on ways her work represents, in public spaces and visual forms, the stories of those whose voices are silenced—and she challenged CCW participants to attend to the politics of whose stories are heard.

In this reflective review of the 2019 Conference on Community Writing, we take these calls for stories seriously, unpacking a variety of interrelated yet disparate stories, woven together to try to help us understand *the work* of community writing. The four co-authors—Adam Hubrig, Heather Lindenman, Justin Lohr, and Rachael Shah—tell our stories from a range of positionalities, including, for example, rural and urban communities; tenure-line, lecturer, and graduate student appointments; different relationships to dis/ability and neurodiversity; and a variety of socioeconomic statuses. In other ways, our perspectives are limited; for example, we all experienced the conference as academics rather than community partners, we are all in the early stages of our careers, we all were born in the United States, and we are all white. In an effort to gather more perspectives, this review includes not only narrative-based vignettes from the four of us, but also vignettes and quotes from additional stakeholders who range from conference organizers to community member attendees.

We bring these perspectives together as a sort of kaleidoscopic lens through which to explore the following questions: What is the work of the Conference on Community Writing and what does it tell us about the state of the subfield of community-engaged writing? What spaces does the Conference on Community Writing encompass, and who is included in these spaces? What are the material realities that enable and constrain those who do the work of community writing? What work is unfinished, and what will sustain those of us who practice community writing as we tackle it? We respond to Mathieu's, Kynard's, and Ortiz's appeals to the writers, teachers, activists, and scholars who attended the third biennial Conference of Community Writing by sharing reflections on the work and ongoing challenges

of community writing. We argue that the polyvocality we present in this essay is at the heart of the Conference on Community Writing, and that carefully attending to differences in positionalities must guide our approach to understanding CCW and imagining the future work of the field. In these many voices, we as coauthors, as well as our many collaborators consider the work of community writing through our varying perspectives.

## **WHAT IS THE WORK OF THE CONFERENCE ON COMMUNITY WRITING AND WHAT DOES IT TELL US ABOUT THE STATE OF THE SUBFIELD OF COMMUNITY-ENGAGED WRITING?**

Conferences are usually seen as places to present on work that has been done. Community-engaged work, filled with false starts and messy relationships, happens in our home communities. Conferences tend to be for stepping outside the work for a moment, flying across the country, and projecting slides that look back on a project and render it consumable—while the real work waits back home. Conferences are for the hustle.

But the 2019 Conference on Community Writing explicitly tried to do work of its own—both in the field of Rhetoric and Composition and in the host city of Philadelphia. CCW attempted to build coalitions, create space for critical reflection, and disrupt common practices in the field. Beyond academia, the conference also facilitated a public art project with muralist and keynote speaker Michelle Angela Ortiz, and offered DeepThink Tanks, which are action-oriented working sessions co-facilitated by academics and local activists, on topics such as immigration, gentrification, and anti-racist practices. Below, the interplay of reflections of conference organizers and attendees hints at both the promise embedded in CCW's efforts to push against academic norms and the messy reality that comes with doing, and not just presenting, work.

*Veronica House, Conference Founding Director*

When we put out a call for the first [2015] Conference on Community Writing in Boulder, we crossed our fingers that people would come. My chair thought we might get forty people. We ended up having to cap registration at 350 people because we ran out of space. There were more people doing community-engaged writing than I ever imagined. We didn't know about each other and our work. Part of the goal of the conference is to serve as that connecting space. The first and second CCWs in Boulder highlighted a real desire for connection, for resources, for mentorship across universities. Some people felt isolated at their own institutions. I took Campus Compact's "engaged department" model and suggested, through the first conference's theme of "Building Engaged Infrastructure," that we conceive of writing and rhetoric as an engaged discipline. What would that mean in terms of our journals, our tenure and promotion expectations, our citation practices, and our mentorship and support for junior faculty and graduate students who do engaged work?

I kept hearing faculty say that they are doing engaged work *in spite of* a lack of support at their home institution or *in addition to* all of the other responsibilities they have. What if we could move around all of these potential barriers that can cause fatigue and burn out, and we could create a structure—that engaged infrastructure I was getting at with the inaugural conference theme—to make the work more sustaining and sustainable? Really, this would call for a shift in the field in terms of hiring and T&P practices, a shift in our journals in terms of what and who gets published and what counts as knowledge, in our book series, etc. That's what The Coalition for Community Writing now aims to do.

Our 2019 keynote speaker, Carmen Kynard, tells us not to mistake the job for *The Work*. CCW tries to help people in (and out of) the job in order to make the important work toward social change more doable, more recognized as valuable . . . and even if it isn't recognized at the home institution, to provide a space for people to share their work, be celebrated, appreciated, supported. To me, that's the joy of CCW.

*Paul Feigenbaum, editor of Community Literacy Journal and associate professor at Florida International University*

Being at this conference makes me feel like I am witnessing the work. However, as we endeavor to keep this work sustainable, which has included institutionalizing the CCW, I am also left wondering how we prevent the work from gradually morphing into another aspect of our jobs. Can this be prevented? Or can it just be delayed? If you institutionalize the work, does it inevitably become something else?

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*Rachael Shah*

Community Writing is hovering at the edge of disciplinarity, working to establish itself as a sub-discipline. I feel the tension as we take up the traditional markers of a subfield but seek to push back, even in subtle ways, against the norms.

Awards, for example, are often grounded in neoliberal, individualistic notions of competition. But the CCW Outstanding Book Award committee, when faced with three particularly strong monographs in the finalist round, gave the award to all three: Steve Alvarez's *Brokering Tareas: Mexican Immigrant Families Translanguaging Homework Literacies*, Patrick Berry's *Doing Time, Writing Lives: Refiguring Literacy and Higher Education in Prison*, and Candace Epps-Robertson's *Resisting Brown: Race, Literacy, and Citizenship in the Heart of Virginia*. Paula Mathieu, chair of the committee, highlighted how immigration, incarceration, and white supremacy are interlocking issues, and the three books are "awarded together as important books on resistance, response, critical awareness, and hope."

We work within the larger academic schema, and yet we try to change the rules in small ways. Perhaps the changes to the rules are too small. But perhaps they are a starting point.

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*Sherita Roundtree, Assistant Professor, Towson University*

As I listened to women of color around me breathe and release to the tenor of Professor Carmen Kynard's meditations, I understood that we must reckon with what it means to work in support of our communities and hold ourselves accountable. Community-engaged work is not only about collaboration, but it is also about taking self-inventory—as I have learned from Vani Kannan and Yanira Rodríguez. Beyond the thoughtful scholarship and presentations, CCW embodies these coalitional frameworks by challenging us to (re)evaluate our principles, identify our networks of support, and grapple with the varying levels of risk among us.

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*Carol Richardson McCullough, Community Writer from Writer's Room (community literacy arts program in partnership with Drexel University)*

Right before I began this reflection, I checked Instagram on my ever-present phone just like the young ones do today. There I saw pictured a gorgeous Michelle Ortiz installation newly opened today at Haverford College, in the Philadelphia suburbs. This collaborative artwork connects to her "Familias Separadas" public art project, amplifying the stories of families affected by detention and deportation in Pennsylvania. It encourages community members to examine their own thoughts and construct creative messages in response to families detained in the wake of US immigration policies. At the heart of the installation lies these words: "Nunca dejamos de luchar por lo que nuestro corazón anhela [Never stop fighting for what our heart yearns]."

Just last week Michelle traveled to Boston to introduce her work included in an exhibit at the Institute of Contemporary Art of twenty artists from around the world, illuminating stories of migration and home. After that, she hopped on a train to MIT to view another art exhibition in the realm of Poetic Justice. The week prior to that she joined us at home in Philly to share with the Conference on Community Writing a powerful keynote address highlighting her public art work affirming individuals and communities on a national and international scale. There she activated two vibrant murals at the Free Library

of Philadelphia, created for the occasion and augmented by panels designed by community members responding to the topic, *home*.

I was both humbled and amazed at the image of the little Black girl standing in her side yard by her house on the corner at the top of a hill long ago because that girl painted in shades of brown, gold, and earthen tones on the spectrum between those two colors, was me when I was about seven years old. The hands, showing the wrinkles of time's passage, are mine now, painted holding the snapshot while reflecting on my *Home*. Michelle Ortiz thinks big while never losing sight of the little people and the smaller details. She recognizes the importance of it all in the Big Picture.

Who knows where Michelle will be, or what she will be doing next week? But I do not doubt that on some level, it will be a continuation of *The Work* she has committed her energies and talents to doing, addressing profound issues while opening minds and sensitizing hearts through beautifully powerful images and the dialogue around them. She is bold, brave, and intentional. Her work is both prolific and profound. Her work, *The Work*, goes on. She never stops.

Once thought-filled people become inspired and encouraged, words can be put into action. Action can change the world if its actors are bold enough, brave enough, and intentional enough to never stop working towards the goal. Even though we had participants on the move through our City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection, from universities to museums to a center for neighborhood partnerships to a library through a parkway into a community and round-and-about again (sometimes running like Rocky through these streets), I hope we all gained inspiration through something we saw, felt, or experienced to emerge from the 2019 CCW in Philly, energized and recommitted to *never stop Doing the Work*.

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*Heather Lindenman*

There were times that writing seemed incidental to the conference and the goals that conference participants are trying to accomplish.



*HOME Mural: Michelle Angela Ortiz's mural of Carol Richardson McCullough, Heim Center, Free Library of Philadelphia, photographed October 17, 2019. The mural reads, in large print, "Home nurtures and strengthens us."*

Writing may be what brought us together, but it also was not the point. The point was the work. The writing is more or less central to that work, depending on the undertaking. In the Herstory Writing Project, and in Liliana Velasquez's memoir about crossing the border, writing is central because it is a means of conveying something important and turning it into a shared experience, to the extent that that's possible. Some of the other work people talked about could have been unrelated to a conference on writing: making sure Latinx and black residents are members of the boards of organizations. Advocating for the rights of undocumented children. Calling attention to the racism and injustice of Atatiana Jefferson's murder.

The study of writing—in all its many verbal, visual, and polyphonic forms—seemed less important at this conference than the praxis of leveraging writing toward a more tangible end.

## WHAT SPACES DID THE CONFERENCE ON COMMUNITY WRITING ENCOMPASS, AND WHO WAS INCLUDED IN THESE SPACES?

What happens when a conference goes out into the world? When it is no longer hermetically sealed within the bounds of a hotel or conference center and all the services catering to the conference clientele? Previous iterations of CCW were housed in the University Memorial Center at CU-Boulder, but this year's conference decentralized and embedded the work within the community. It was a powerful gesture, and, like any choice, it had multiple kinds of repercussions. Where we go and how we navigate a place marks us and reveals vital stories about who's inside, who's outside, who we have managed to consider, and who we have yet to welcome more fully.

This year's CCW was defined not only by extending the conference into the community, but also by bringing the community more fully into the conference. Community partners had a significant presence at this year's conference, leading workshops and DeepThink Tanks (participatory, action-oriented working sessions), and presenting keynotes. As successful as this initiative was, it was not without challenges, reminding us that the work of being more inclusive is ever-continuing.

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*Rachael Shah*

At the conference, I sat in the living room of the Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships, on a couch next to a fireplace, and asked Veronica House, "What does it mean that we are holding part of the conference *here*?" The Dornsife Center, located in a historically African-American neighborhood, hosts programming that ranges from community dinners, to side-by-side courses that involve residents and Drexel students, to community lawyering clinics.

My first national community engagement conference occurred in a different kind of place. I have a memory of sitting in a hotel ballroom, chandeliers overhead, while a young man of color spooned dressing over my salad. In the front of the room, a white academic

was being honored for her work with engagement. I remember a thick sense of unease settling over my chest. I had maxed out my graduate student budget to pay for registration and flew across the country to a conference where I didn't know anyone personally—even as the nametags matched my comprehensive exam reading lists. CCW did not yet exist to bring together people at the intersection of community engagement and writing studies, and I was trying to find a disciplinary home. So, I wandered hotel hallways, tucked drink tickets into my business cards for safekeeping, and reflected on the spatial rhetoric of the rooms where we met. And honestly, I have to think hard to remember which city I was in.

CCW attempted to create a different environment and engage more intentionally with Philadelphia. On Friday, we walked from the conference hotel to the Dornsife Center, noticing the sidewalks become more uneven as we moved into the vibrant neighborhood of Mantua. The quietly swanky hotel we left behind, *The Study*, took its theme seriously: a sculpture of a pair of glasses sat out front, and each room featured a cup of sharpened pencils.

The conference's move from "The Study" to a neighborhood center was an explicit metaphor for what Community Writing hopes to accomplish, how we seek to shift the locations of knowledge production. Scholars like Linda Flower have argued for methods to center on community expertise and find the "story behind the story" on civic issues. Ellen Cushman, Juan Guerra, and Steve Parks have called on our field to decenter whiteness and recognize more diverse forms of knowledge production; scholars in community publishing emphasize the importance of telling and making history in collaboration with marginalized communities (Keubrich 2012); and John Saltmarsh, Patti Clayton, and Matthew Hartley have argued against academia's delegitimization of community knowledges. The conference is attempting to encourage this shift. The call for workshops asked that community partners be co-presenters and conference registration for community partners was free. The featured speakers included muralist Michelle Angela Ortiz and the young Guatemalan author Liliana Velasquez, in addition to scholars like Carmen Kynard and Paula Mathieu. And Kynard and Mathieu both honored knowledges traditionally excluded from academia,

from knowledge of black pop culture to contemplative practices. The DeepThink Tanks encouraged participants to consider activist work as knowledge work, such as the DeepThink Tank that local black activists hosted at The Dornslife Center to examine gentrification.

But the shift in the locations of knowledge production is far from complete. This shift has implications for who we cite, who we publish, who we honor in our theoretical lineage, and who has a say in our program designs. The move from The Study to the Dornslife Center is not a natural one, given the norms of academia, nor an easy one. And even in attempts to make the shift, there are those who will get lost or be excluded.

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*Justin Lohr*

In 2017, community partners felt like a novelty. But at this year's conference, made more accessible by its location in a major metropolitan area, community partners were ordinary—in the best possible way. Voices in our field have long warned us about the “dangerous territory” (Stoecker and Tryon 2009) we tread upon when we do not fully include community voices in our work. But maybe the composition of the conference this year can give us hope—evidence of a shifting tide at the conference itself, and an image for our field at large to work toward in terms of who we include at our own ever-growing table. CCW is actively seeking out community voices by offering free registration to community partners. Our work is reciprocal and polyphonic, and more than any other year, the CCW in 2019 seemed to capture these qualities and call for the field to reflect them as well.

This centrality of community partners crystallized for me during the DeepThink Tank at the UPenn Kelly Writer's House. Andres Celin of Youth United for Change detailed high school students using their training in speech writing to make themselves heard before the council of the sixth-largest city in the country in order to bring free clean water to Philadelphia high schools. Sarah Zeller-Berkman presented her work with the ChangeFocusNYC project, which gathered stories about how young people navigate New York's government agencies.

And Christin Rosario Tucker of Mighty Writers spoke of the challenges and successes of providing mentorship for young women at a pivotal stage in their lives.

In this DeepThink Tank on UPenn's campus, in a physical space that seemed distinctly scholarly and elite, I saw three community partners take center stage. The "scholars" in the room, never as far from Ivory Tower elitism as we would like, were the ones listening, shut up by the work of those doing the work. It was moving to see this space transformed into a stage for collaborations across difference, for bodies and issues that previously would not have been given much attention in such places.

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*Tia Van Hester, Afrofuturist Feminist and Director of Global Engagement at Monmouth College, at the CCW Writers in Residence Presentation*

By writing stories with our bodies in space, we change the game.

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*Adam Hubrig*

Diversifying the field of community writing, Iris Ruiz reminded us at the Editor's Roundtable, requires not only a diversity of bodies, but also a diversity of knowledge, methodologies, and epistemologies. Sherri Craig, who organized the roundtable with Don Unger, pointed to the emerging conversations in the field about the politics of citation, conversations which were *not* happening in the field even a few years ago and are, as Donnie Johnson Sackey noted, the result of on-the-ground efforts of teachers, researchers, and community partners to open up spaces for dialogue.

Steve Parks added to these ideas, critiquing the silo-ing of *non*-whitestream approaches: book series cannot simply print a single book by a person of color and assume their "diversity" work is completed—instead these conversations should be represented and

present throughout multiple projects. And, Parks added, white people must educate themselves as to what they don't know, not to expect people of color to do more labor.

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*Heather Lindenman*

There were moments when we felt like a community. The shared clap to activate the mural in the public library joined those present in something greater than ourselves. I felt the collectivity of urgency most keenly at Carmen Kynard's keynote, at Liliana Velasquez's reading, upon hearing Eli Goldblatt's words about how outrage, surprise, and joy drive our work while surrounded by skeletal dinosaurs, a strange oasis from a windy night in Philly.

But then there were the moments where we were not yet the people we purport to be. I showed up a few minutes late to a session featuring five community partners, invited to share their expertise with us academics. The speakers included Latinx community advocates; two documentarians; a first-generation, Latinx college student; and a recent graduate. One of the presenters, also the head coach of a soccer team, had to find a substitute to coach his team in a tournament that day so that he could attend our conference. When I and one other conference attendee arrived, the presenters were packing up to leave because no one else had come to their session.

They stayed, and here's what they shared: stories of what it's like to be a first-generation college student and a person of color entering a PWI; stories of racism, where a local Latinx leader was appointed to the board of a local nonprofit, but then told not to talk; stories of ageism, where a nontraditional college student applied to a job and was told "we're looking for college students." They shared ideas for responding, ideas grounded in deep knowledge of a community: run for school board. Advocate for more equal access to high-quality education. Get to know people from different political backgrounds by finding shared passions—by actually talking before and after the kids' soccer game. Chronicle inspirational stories on YouTube in a way that gives hope to people who don't have much hope. Their stories demonstrated ways that "irresponsible writing," to use one

speaker's words, can inadvertently harm community development; their experiences with activism demonstrated the complexities of engaging heterogeneous immigrant groups in community building.

In our discussion of community organization, one community leader explained: "welcome" is not as simple as claiming to welcome all, as in a church. One can write "All are welcome" on the sign, but what happens once everyone is inside? Do people greet them?

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## **WHAT ARE THE MATERIAL REALITIES THAT ENABLE AND CONSTRAIN OUR WORK, IN AND BEYOND THE CONFERENCE?**

None of this happens in a vacuum—not the work, not the conference. Yet, what we present and write about frequently omits the material realities that shape the work and mediate our relationship to it. Our bodies, our commitments, our efforts just to pay for any of this to happen—these are defining features of our lives and our work, but function in our scholarship as an absent parallel narrative. What might happen, though, if we gave full voice to this narrative? How might it help the work? Help us as the ones who do it?

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*Adam Hubrig*

On Thursday, at the Kelly Writers House, the DeepThink Tank facilitators gave participants instructions to position themselves in the room based on the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement "All education should center on civic engagement." Those who were in full agreement stood at the front of the room, those who disagreed at the back, and those somewhere in between found spots in between to mark their positions accordingly.

Unable to navigate the busy space and quick movement with my cane, I remained at my seat, reflected on the question, and observed participants: Attendees shuffled from their seats, their feet doing the

calculus of where they stood—in the room and on the issue. The group ended up being fairly scattered.

Once our bodies had settled, we engaged in conversation about why we each stood where we did. One participant in the think tank pointed out that while her goals might be political literacies and civic engagement, her students' goals were often focused on other concerns, like earning their GED. Another participant shared the stark realities of material conditions that might make students feel distant from political action or too busy to engage.

How do we recognize and push back against the material barriers to the work? How can we address the failures of entire systems that push people of color, queer folk, disabled and otherwise marginalized body-minds away and disempower them? I need to better interrogate how my own positionality, especially my whiteness, shapes how I see these issues, and I hope others will do the same to collectively provide better access.

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*Justin Lohr*

We need a *techne* for making the work seen. The work before the work begins, that is. The iceberg labor. How do we articulate the mass beneath the surface? In a language that speaks to colleagues, chairs, college and university administrators? Where is the *techne* that helps us say that this work is as valuable as that work?

Work that occurs out of bounds too often goes invisible. For Jessica Pauszek, this means the labor of grant application after grant application—the \$200 plus the \$300 plus the \$300 plus the \$350 that makes the work possible. In a recent article, she wanted to itemize every grant as a way of saying, “this project is a project of precarity.” We need the stories of precarity, she tells me, because they open doors to inquiry and finding more ways to do the work strategically. She explains that our methods sections need to make visible the invisible, the sometimes-threadbare patchwork of grants and emails and permissions on which the work relies, a patchwork that is rarely

as far from unraveling as we would like. We need to talk about the failures.

“I’m thinking of all the stories,” she says, “we aren’t telling when we only tell stories of success.”

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*Allen Brizee, Faculty Director for Community-Engaged Learning and Scholarship and Associate Professor of Writing, Loyola University Maryland*

We must continue to be honest about our failures, because we can learn so much from them. In reflecting on and studying our failures, we should use multiple measures—narrative, holistic, qualitative, quantitative—in assessing our outcomes and impacts. Using these approaches is important for tracking our work because in civic engagement, it’s not a matter of *if* we will fail, it’s a matter of *when* we will fail. And we need to learn how to fail with grace and resilience so that we can, if appropriate, continue to work with our students, our colleagues, and our community partners.

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*Rachael Shah*

People I know at the conference ask about the Husker Writers program I’ve been involved with, and I have to tell them: it’s looking like the funds won’t be coming through this year. I submitted one last Hail Mary major grant application the week before my first child was due, and while we made it to the final round, we didn’t get the award. The three canceled meetings and unanswered emails from the person who controls our backup funds seem to constitute what I’ve learned to identify as a “Nebraska No.” I’ve faced these kinds of walls before, and I’ve always found ways to build a jerry-rigged solution—but never while holding an infant on one arm.

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*Justin Lohr*

I arrive at the conference carrying a half-dozen rhetorical analyses and research review articles in my backpack; dozens more are a few blocks away in the trunk of my car. They are all due back soon. Unlike the two previous iterations of this conference, which offered actual *trips* to Boulder, this is something much closer to commuting, which makes it that much harder to bound this off from everything at home. From a pregnant spouse who I won't sleep beside for the first time in over two years. From anxieties about whether I'll get parental leave. From an impending appointment with the rheumatologist, where I'll find out what stories my bloodwork is telling.

I imagine that most everyone at this conference carries even more than I do. Untamed lives to match our untamed work—work that continues to struggle against the confines of academic norms, that defies the 9-to-5 and 40 hours per week. That regularly spills into and complicates our “other” lives, our “other” relationships. But these lives beyond the work rarely, if ever, occupy center stage—in our presentations or in our publications. There are certain things we only talk about in the margins of a conference, at the happy hour or over the informal coffee. As entwined as they are with the work, our lives beyond the work remain at best the parenthetical, the footnote, the bit of humor that precedes the “real stuff” of a talk. Even though the two vitally inform and often constrain and complicate each other, we almost never discuss both narratives together. There are some exceptions to this, and the CCW at times seems to be one, but we need more.

Life is a mess. The work is, too—often in the best possible way. We need stories that capture the mess.

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*Heather Lindenman*

Liliana Velasquez, who read an excerpt from her memoir for a packed room of conference participants, fled Guatemala for the United States when she was fourteen years old. Her story of escaping violence, attempted rapes, and robberies is horrifying. Yet tens of thousands

of children annually who flee their home countries for the US all have their own stories to tell, many like Liliana's.

What does it mean for undocumented people to tell their stories? Velasquez, author of *Dreams and Nightmares/Sueños y Pesadillas*, and Mark Lyons, her translator and editor, met forty-five times. Mark was concerned these meetings were taking too much time away from Liliana's schoolwork. "Telling this story is saving my life," Velasquez said.

And yet. "This may not be a good time to write undocumented stories," assistant professor and DeepThink Tank co-facilitator Sara Alvarez said. "Students should not *have to* write their stories to relive their trauma."

"For an undocumented person, coming out is a big deal," said undocumented activist and co-facilitator Angie Kim. "That should be done in their own time. Not everyone wants to advocate. That's a very big thing. It's exhausting."

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## **WHAT WORK IS UNFINISHED, AND WHAT WILL SUSTAIN US AS WE TACKLE IT?**

In his CCW retirement celebration, Eli Goldblatt identified the three driving factors in his years of engagement with community writing: outrage, surprise, and joy. Many of us are driven to do this work because of our outrage with injustices both within and beyond the academy, injustices that seem so pervasive it's difficult not to feel powerless in their shadows. Sometimes, in our outrage, we collectively find the courage to face those injustices.

What work is still to be done, in collaborating with communities and altering academic structures? How might community writing attend to and accommodate the individual people, and their various positionalities, who are doing this work? How might we understand

the range of positionalities in doing this work but also the full range of limitations to it and inspirations for it?

Amidst the injustices and gaps, we find flashes of hope, often in surprising moments when relationships matter more than what we “ought” to be doing. At times, in those spaces where we honor the difficult, always-unfinished work, there are moments of joy.

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*Justin Lohr*

“In twenty-five years of community writing,” Jeff Grabill explained, “we still can’t escape our own disciplinarity.” Grabill, along with Dawn Opel, Sean McCarthy, and Erik Skogsberg, spent Thursday morning questioning, it seemed, all the boundaries: the boundaries of “medieval” academic departments, the humanistic obsession with texts rather than actual humans, and the need for work that spills beyond the boundaries.

The conversation centered around the concept of innovation, and I must admit that part of me balked at the word. It is so often associated with developing widgets or streamlining their delivery. And yet, the panel asked, does it have to be such a noxious word? After all, as Sean McCarthy reminded us, “innovation is fundamentally a liberal art. It goes back to inquiry, and universities might be the only spaces left for inquiry.”

We need spaces between and beyond departments. We need unbounded sprawl to make places for social innovation. But, to reclaim innovation, the presenters argued, we will also need to innovate our departments and push against the humanistic obsession with texts and lonely authors. Can we buck the emphasis on the creative individual in an age when so much cultural creation and social action is collective and collaborative? Can we, at the same time, also defy the hermetic sealing of knowledge in order to build courses and projects that fuse humanities with social sciences with digital design with whatever else to truly do the work that needs to be done?

Our home departments, faced with declining enrollments and diminishing cultural belief in the value of humanistic education, desperately need innovation. Figuring out how to become a more collective, encompassing, inclusive humanities might just be the innovation that we need. After all, as Jeff Grabill put it, “the humanities would probably be much more interesting if it spent more time with humans.”

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*Dominic DelliCarpini, Professor of Writing Studies and Dean of the Center for Community Engagement, York College of Pennsylvania, in Grant Writing Workshop:*

It's human work.

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*Sherri Craig*

If you've met me, then you know. In the brief time since I threw off the shackles of graduate school and realized that the shackles only changed shape, size, position, and visibility, I have become more of a burn the whole ship kind of person. Being just three semesters into my first tenure stream position should make me concerned about image, behavior, saying the right cis-het white oppressive comments that will allow me entry into the cis-het white protected ivory tower of tenure and complacency. However, in the face of this reality, I have become a “burn the whole ship” junior scholar, and my first time attendance at the 2019 Coalition on Community Writing Conference confirmed my emerging identity.

In the middle of my roundtable discussion, “How Editors Can Build Solidarity and Help Change Scholarly Publishing in Writing, Rhetoric & Literacy Studies,” during a discussion of publication practices in rhetoric and composition, inspired by my colleagues in arms at CCW 2019, I declared, “we need to burn the whole damn ship.” I believed it. I believe it. My “burn the whole ship” somewhat alludes to *Clotilda*, the last known ship carrying enslaved people, that was burned in the Mobile Bay in 1860 by slavers who set fire to the

vessel to hide evidence of their horrors and misdeeds, as it was illegal to participate in the slave trade at that time. Despite the power of this image, my identity description actually takes up the historical resistance aboard *Adventure* and *La Amistad* where collections of enslaved persons recognized the power of the collective, rose up, and overcame their oppressors, sometimes with fire. The enslaved persons determined enough was enough, despite exhaustion, starvation, inhuman conditions, and fear of retribution. Our ship has gone to rot and we need to burn it down because this young Black scholar has had enough. In only three semesters at a university just twenty miles from the CCW host institutions, I had enough of the job. I need to remember the work.

Dr. Carmen Kynard reminds us in her 2019 keynote that we must separate the job from the work from the hustle. Such gleaning could help remember the work. The work of engaging with communities that are like mine. The work of laughing with students in my office late into the evening. The work of challenging hiring practices that demonstrate a preference for “fit, nice, and collegial” and other coded language that just means compliant and quiet. The work of supporting the vision of *Spark*, a new open-access writing studies journal. The work of publishing in spaces that value resistance. The work of saying, “This. Is. Enough.”

The Conference on Community Writing provoked us to consider the need for the work. The conference was engaging and there were many important and worthwhile conversations. I left inspired, surrounded and supported by a sea of women of color. I hold onto the energy like a lit match.

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*Aja Martinez, Assistant Professor, Syracuse University*

I am continually bolstered by the words and work of Carmen Kynard. Carmen makes me brave in my own pursuits of justice and elevating of the voices of those who this job tries to bury. Carmen’s keynote reminded me there is coalition and solidarity amongst a small, yet fierce few in this field, and I was happy to be counted amongst those who were lucky enough to be inspired by her words.

*Rachael Shah*

At Carmen Kynard's keynote, a memory returns to me. I am walking back from new faculty orientation, where the dean has just given a presentation about his vision to "tighten the screws of tenure." Scholars across the country should know our names, he insisted. Feeling sick, I call my mentor, Adela Licon, looking, I think, for reassurance—or maybe an exit plan.

But the first thing she says, her voice coming strong over my phone speaker, is "f\*\* that neoliberal bullsh\*\*t!" She goes on to remind me why I had taken this position: the graduate students who started their own community literacy organization, the opportunities to help white teachers grapple with critical race theory, the thriving youth poetry slam network. In my work, it's more important that the high school teachers down the street know my name.

Kynard's talk gives me a vocabulary for the lesson Adela was teaching me: she was teaching me to separate the hustle from the work, and to see the hustle for what it is. It is easy to get lost in the job and the hustle. Helping others stay oriented, supporting others to do the work, is important work itself.

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*Adam Hubrig*

As the air cooled and the sun began to set, I wandered Philadelphia's sidewalks, lost. Unsteady on my feet, I searched for a curb cut so as not to fall in the street. Finding none, a stranger kindly offered an arm. I shifted my weight onto my cane and then onto the street. Through the course of the long day, my phone's battery had dwindled and I was trying to find my way to the library on streets I'd never heard of under an unfamiliar city skyline.

The stranger helping me down the curb noticed before I did: I was bleeding through my shirt. The extra walking had upset a long-standing abdominal wound, which had begun to bleed through the

bandages. It was more embarrassing than painful, and I decided to skip the event and look for my hotel. As I reflect on the situation, I *know* any number of my colleagues would have been happy to help. But sometimes the difficulty of disability is how difficult it is to ask for help, to even accept the kind arm of the stranger helping me down the curb.

Later in the week, after the very last event of the conference, I missed the shuttle back to the hotel. I was going to begin walking back. Eli Goldblatt noticed I was about to head back, and asked Steve Parks if he would mind dropping me off back at the hotel. As I approached the car, Eli lent me an arm to get down off the curb. I appreciate this act of kindness—both from the stranger on the first night and Eli on the last—and wonder if maybe this is part of doing the work, too: of being open to how we might enable access without people having to go through the awkwardness of *asking* for access.

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*Eli Goldblatt, Professor of English at Temple University, in his retirement tribute at CCW:*

So much of this work is about listening.

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*Rachael Shah*

Elenore Long and I are walking across the uneven sidewalks from the Dornsife Center when she asks me about a trio of graduate students from my program whom she met years ago. I don't know what to say, exactly, so I just sigh and tell her, "one of them committed suicide last month."

We stop walking a moment.

It's difficult, but as we slowly begin to walk again, I tell the story. I tell Ellie about this young woman, Katie, who was full of light and deeply committed to the adjudicated youth she worked with for years. Her genuine investment in the graduate-run community literacy

organization she founded played a key role in recruiting me to Nebraska. She was brilliant and capable. In her first year at a tenure-track job, she started several initiatives. A book project on collaborations with dual enrollment teachers at local schools is now left incomplete.

Telling this story to Ellie is a strangely raw moment for an academic conference. And I wonder how often the hustle allowed Katie to be raw. She was required to embody a professional persona of composure, confidence, *answers*—even while bearing the pressures of life as a new, untenured WPA, uprooted from her support system. Our job market requires this movement, this isolation, and treats it as normal—even though it is so far from normal. I can never pretend to know what caused Katie’s death, but I do know that the expectation that we prioritize our jobs that above all things is dangerous.

Ellie is silent for a moment, and then says with quiet conviction that this suicide holds our field accountable.

In her absence, Katie leaves behind unfinished work.

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*Adam Hubrig*

The hustle is so damn exhausting. As a graduate student, I feel a pressure to market myself in every room I enter. As someone who is mobility-impaired, that entering is so much extra work. Being autistic, I’d sometimes rather not enter *at all*. I’m tired.

Even with all the hustling, there are no guarantees. I think about my friend, Katie, who committed suicide earlier this fall. The last time we spoke, she was giving me advice on the hustle: my cover letter, phone interviews. But even having the job didn’t make it easier for her.

I remember seeing Katie at her happiest when working with high school students who had been in and out of juvenile justice programs, when welcoming graduate students like me into partnerships she had built. Katie *shined* when she did the work.

I've met others at CCW who shine—like Katie—when they do this work. I talk with a couple of undergraduate students who do engaged work, telling them about the graduate program I'm in and suggesting they apply, offering to help with application materials.

Back in my hotel room, a few hours later, I slumped in a chair, horrified that I may have set them on a similar path of exhaustion. I think about what graduate school has *cost*, not just in terms of money, but time away from family, implications for physical and mental health.

But then I think about the shining; I think about Katie at her happiest. I think about revising scholarship applications with refugees from Myanmar late into the night and a hundred other moments of work I've been involved in *because* of Katie.

If they decide it's the right fit for them, I want them to have those opportunities to shine, too.

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*“Seguimos Caminando” (“We Keep Walking”) is a series of animated images created by keynote presenter and muralist Michelle Angela Ortiz and projected on the gates of the Philadelphia City Hall. Based on stories from detained mothers, it began with questions:*

1. What gives you strength in moments of darkness?
2. What makes you feel most free?
3. What do you hope for you?
4. What do you hope for your child?

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*Justin Lohr*

It's a red brick building. My alma mater owns it now, but in 2007, it was still used by Breakthrough of Greater Philadelphia. My conference ends on a bench outside this building. It is the place I began this sort of work, teaching afternoon enrichment classes.

I listen to the bricks for a bit. Some of what I hear makes me wince—there are always painful missteps in working across difference. It's now obvious to me why the Edgar Allan Poe curriculum in those enrichment classes resonated less than Self-Discovery through Creative Writing, the latter about articulating oneself into being. I can't remember many specifics now. There may have been a lesson plan that involved listening to the Fugees. But much of what I hear inspires gratitude in me.

As I sit here, it becomes clear to me why I entered into this kind of work. It was because of my experiences in this building, my first steps into a world something like community writing as a college student who, each week, learned as much from the students he worked with as they did from him—and often more.

That I can do this work fills me with more gratitude than I have words for. The work demands a great deal, but there's a reason we keep at it. It sustains us in a way other work does not.

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There is much work to be done—in the field, on our campuses, in our home communities, and within and through the Coalition for Community Writing. As we look forward to 2021, when the fourth biennial CCW will be held in Washington DC, we are reminded of the need to talk with each other, tell each other stories not only about our job and our hustle, but also about our work: the prison writing workshop that inspires, the healthcare collaborative that hasn't gotten off the ground, the dynamic substance abuse writing group, the grant that we can't seem to get funded. The stories and reflections in this article are one gesture toward that goal. Stories, when told well, lead us back to the work.

We end on one final insight from undocumented activist Angie Kim, co-facilitator at the “Our Struggle, Our Joy: Immigrant Activism, Storysharing, and Community Building” workshop: “For me, when a person shares a story, whether we read them in a book or meet them in person, stories are supposed to inspire. But inspire what? To do something.”

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## Review:

### *Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Publics*

Eds. Jonathan Alexander, Susan C. Jarratt, & Nancy Welch.

Jacob Richter,  
*Clemson University*

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What do rhetorics, both those of the past and those circulating in the present, have to teach us about overcoming impediments to democratic participation? Questions like these are explored prominently by Jonathan Alexander, Susan C. Jarratt, and Nancy Welch (2018), who extend the disruptive capacities of *unruliness as rhetorical tactic* in their edited collection *Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Publics*. It's no new observation that activists wishing to disrupt or resist accepted, status-quo systems must frequently turn to practices that are deemed unauthorized, unsanctioned, and *unruly* by the institutions empowered to publicly define what is deemed permissible in a specific forum or society. In recent years, some rhetoricians have been greatly invested in exploring how dissenting voices upend the status-quo, how some rhetors articulate beliefs that circumvent dominant hierarchies and ideologies, and how these rhetorics are sometimes able to disrupt structures which

tacitly (and explicitly) benefit ruling normativities maintained through the suppression of dissenting voices (Baca and Villanueva 2010; Buchanan and Ryan 2010; Ruiz and Sánchez 2016). Activism, public assembly, and political activity have always been connected to the action of rhetoric, action that is directly felt in our classrooms, in our communities, and in our public forums (Hess 2010; Morris and Browne 2013). In probing these values, *Unruly Rhetorics* proves an insightful collection containing essays well-equipped to enrich and update conversations surrounding the connections between rhetoric, literacy, and civic action.

*Unruly Rhetorics* extends recent scholarly interest in exploring the refusal of particular rhetors to accept structural injustices, in probing the public disavowal of social and political inequalities, and in exploring the public refusal to silence galvanized voices of resistance, advocacy, and dissent (Ackerman and Coogan 2010; Kahn and Lee 2011). To more fully probe ways in which rhetorics might be designed to pursue social and democratic ends, a degree of strategic *unruliness* oftentimes proves a productive strategy toward critiquing enmeshed power structures. Authors contributing to *Unruly Rhetorics* have previously explored rhetorics of sexuality and queer publics (Alexander and Rhodes 2016), advocated for increasing attention to public rhetorics surrounding homelessness and structural impoverishment (George and Mathieu 2009), and probed the envelopment of higher education by neoliberalism and precarious labor practices (Welch and Scott 2016). Ultimately, the essays comprising *Unruly Rhetorics* propose an array of disruptive rhetorical strategies as a means of empowering marginalized communities to disrupt, resist, and respond effectively to situations in which they might otherwise be silenced.

Rhetoric's capacity to instigate change, which often necessitates some level of urgency or disruption, is productive for citizen-activists well beyond Aristotle's traditional definition of the *available means of persuasion*. Instead, drawing upon the work of the philosopher Jacques Rancière (1999), the editors and the essays in the collection postulate rhetoric's capacities as the "available means of *disruption*" (7; my emphasis). They draw upon Rancière's assertion that political activity is "whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it,"

anything which “makes visible what had no business being seen” or “makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise” (30). Indeed, in just the past few years, rhetorics willing to disrupt existing socio-political structures utilizing a degree of *unruliness* have proven capable of drawing attention to environmental responsibility and land rights of indigenous peoples (the Standing Rock Dakota Access Pipeline protests of 2016), of interrupting and rerouting media narratives (such as football star Colin Kaepernick’s kneeling on one knee during the American national anthem to protest police violences against unarmed African-American citizens), and of seizing the global conversation surrounding mass gun violence (such as the *March For Our Lives* demonstration responding to the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting). *Unruliness*, as tactic for resistance and advocacy, demands attention. *Unruliness* insists upon serious deliberation, forgoing politeness and decorum, and instead communicating vividly and vociferously with the urgency and obtrusiveness required when status-quo discourses pose lived, embodied dangers to marginalized communities.

The fifteen individual chapters in *Unruly Rhetorics* utilize the connecting thread of *unruliness* as a heuristic to animate specific instances of people and rhetorics straying outside dominant social codes, conventional legal modes, and typical “academic” values to assert a dynamic collective argument; *unruliness* is a rhetorical strategy that can be employed in various ways to inspire and achieve social change in situations in which civility, decorum, and politeness serve to maintain hegemonic ideologies. The collection showcases how these dominant practices and conceptions can infringe on a woman’s legal right to control her own body (Dana L. Cloud), shut down academic freedom through fear and intimidation (Matthew Abraham), make invisible indigenous bodies and voices (Joyce Rain Anderson), shame and make spectacle of feminine sexuality (Jacqueline Rhodes), and maintain unfair and exploitative labor conditions (Nancy Welch). Additionally, *Unruly Rhetorics* testifies to the ways in which existing structures function to censor dissident press (Diana George and Paula Mathieu), to attack collective bargaining rights (Kevin Mahoney), and to uphold racist, superficial pacification strategies utilized at a number of major research universities (Yanira Rodríguez and Ben Kuebrich). Lastly, the collection showcases attempts to dissolve progressive political coalitions (John Ackerman and Meghan Dunn),

as well as demonstrating how human rights reform efforts in places like Syria and Iraq are undermined by rhetorics associated with academic discourse and global neoliberalism (Steve Parks et al.). From beginning to end, *unruliness* demonstrates itself to be a viable rhetorical tactic when the grounds we stand on need to be shaken if they are to be made more equitable, more just, and more humane.

Prominent among the stand-out essays assembled in *Unruly Rhetorics* is Yanira Rodríguez and Ben Kuebrich's "The Tone It Takes: An Eighteen-Day Sit-In at Syracuse University." Rodríguez and Kuebrich chronicle a civil disobedience effort they helped enact at their university, which grounds an examination of public relations campaigns common at universities across the world. Rodríguez and Kuebrich identify civility rhetorics pedaled by universities which reduce legitimate, historically-maintained social injustices into sanitized, watered-down narratives that fail to encapsulate the full, lived injustices these narratives attempt to mask. Far from enacting goals of social justice, these public relations campaigns represent what the authors term an "inclusion delusion," the *appealing-but-not-satisfactory* discourses of empowerment related specifically to campus racial diversity, accessibility, gender, and sexuality that do little or nothing to address lived, embodied problems on modern campuses (169). They remind us that parameters of acceptable public exchange ("civility") are never determined through equal determination, but rather are always structured to favor dominant and entrenched power relationships. *Civility* in Rodríguez and Kuebrich's case becomes a *rhetoric of superficiality*, a rhetoric which attempts to pacify and quiet a responsive, subjugated counterpublic with pleasant niceties, but which masks serious inaction in social circumstances that pose lived dangers, especially to marginalized peoples and bodies. *Unruliness*, Rodríguez and Kuebrich outline, is one way in which to address these "superficial rhetorics of diversity and dialogue" that refrain from taking more tangible action toward addressing injustices, and to "reveal the existing divides of structural oppression" maintained by many modern institutions of higher education (170).

Also demonstrating clear *praxis* of *unruliness* is Dana L. Cloud's "Feminist Body Rhetoric in the #UnRulyMob, Texas, 2013." Cloud calls upon theorists such as Hélène Cixous (1976) and Kenneth

Burke (1954) to elucidate the “people’s filibuster,” an uprising of “thousands of Texans against a draconian omnibus anti-abortion bill in the Texas legislature” (28). Cloud calls attention to the paradox at the heart of much of the legislation and discourse surrounding women’s bodies in the United States, which posits those bodies not only as sites of public political and ideological conflict but also as private sites of everything “dangerous, disgusting, and out of bounds in politics *proper*” (28; my emphasis). Here, what is proper serves to deflect and divert attention from the embodied violences *proper* discourses wage on the bodies of women. Tellingly, after the protesters deployed tampons, sanitary pads, and other menstruation-related items as an *unruly* rhetorical tactic in the courtroom, the items were promptly banned from the space in an effort to maintain the “rules of decorum” that, for Cloud, demonstrate how women’s body parts and the “formalities of neoliberal rule” are increasingly at odds (37). This ban in the male-dominated legislature, ultimately, functions to draw attention to just how little the normative practices of democracy are willing to tolerate the bodies of women. In this vein, Cloud outlines various ways “conventions of politeness and decorum” can veil and obscure power relationships. Positing *unruliness* as a method with which to insist upon and publicly affirm the agency of the protesters’ bodies, voices, and rhetorics in a democratic forum which traditionally excluded them, Cloud is able to realize the editors’ vision of employing the *unruly* to “rethink the time and space of the political itself, of assembly, and of rhetorical action” (22).

Further works in the collection continue to probe potentials for public resistance, including Deborah Mutnick’s inquiry into connections between literature and contemporary political demonstrations in her essay “Answering the World’s Anticipation: The Relevance of *Native Son* to Twenty-First Century Protest Movements” and John Trimbur’s articulation of the institutional responsibilities incumbent upon professional organizations in “The Steven Salaita Case: Public Rhetoric and the Political Imagination in U.S. College Composition and its Professional Associations.” Contributions from Londie T. Martin and Adela C. Licona concerning queer remixing practices and from Jason Peters on public institutions and unruly languaging practices close out the essays assembled in the collection.

*Unruliness*, so commonly condemned by civility organizations, by universities, and more broadly by populations benefitting from existing, status-quo systems, rises to be far more than just a slogan or buzzword in this collection. Through each iteration, *unruliness* is demonstrated as a powerful, versatile rhetorical strategy to help disrupt or resist embedded cultural standards, conventional social expectations, and privileges divided unequally on the basis of race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation. *Unruly Rhetorics* amasses a collection of voices demonstrating rhetoric's role as agent of *disruption*, as facilitator of activist literacies, and finally as a call to action for further scholarship that unabashedly pursues social justice with the rhetorics of *unruliness* at their disposal. I am confident that *Unruly Rhetorics* represents a valuable and timely addition to conversations surrounding rhetoric and social justice, and will be likely to offer generative scholarship to anyone with interests in civic rhetorics, in advocacy, or in the rhetorics of social protests.

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## Review:

### *The Adjunct Underclass: How America's Colleges Betrayed Their Faculty, Their Students, and Their Mission*

by Herb Childress

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To those outside of academia, college professors lead charmed lives. What's not to love with the Hollywood version of twelve-hour work weeks, six figure salaries, meaningful discussions of the mind, summers off, and even paid sabbaticals for pet projects? For those who toil in the trenches, teaching mandatory freshman composition and literature classes, the grim reality is quite different. According to recent data put out by New Faculty Majority, 75.5% of college faculty are contingent, meaning off the tenure track. That is 1.3 out of 1.8 million faculty members at large. And of that percentage, 50% are adjunct, which entails low pay, no medical benefits, and zero retirement contributions from the employer (New Faculty Majority 2019). It is not only unfair to the adjuncts, but also to the students and/or parents who are investing in someone spread woefully thin.

This growing trend, once heralded as higher education's dirty little secret, is skillfully and humanely examined by Herb Childress in his new book, *The Adjunct Underclass: How America's Colleges Betrayed Their Faculty, Their Students, and Their Mission*. As someone who has been there, working both sides of the fence (adjunct teaching and administrative duties), he discusses exploitative and unpredictable nature of part-time work. He states, "a life of contingency, like any life with an abusive partner, requires us to manufacture elaborate emotional defenses. We imagine that if we only do better, love will follow. We fear retribution, and so walk quietly" (162). Case in point? A few years back, adjuncts at East-West University, located in Chicago, were fired because they tried to unionize. The university claimed their contracts were simply not renewed, but the American Association of University Professors saw it quite differently, citing retaliation (Peter Schmidt 2010).

Therefore, it's an imperative read for graduate students entering the field of English, those trying to balance traditional pedagogies while teaching overloads, and others focusing on activism through unionization and/or striking. It would be of particular interest to tenure track professors, too, as once-secure lines are disappearing only to be replaced by adjuncts or instructors with less bargaining power to negotiate for a decent salary (Trevor Griffey 2017).

The book is broken down into eight chapters, ranging from the what the brochures don't tell you, to the stark reality foretold by Thomas Benton that we will not all land tenure tracks, to what to do if it doesn't pan out. In chapter one, he begins with the fairy tale of what most envision and then quickly delves into the everyday actualities: poverty-like wages, professors that sleep in their cars, freeway flyers (those who travel between multiple schools in hopes of improving job prospects and/or salaries), and the ever-popular psychic wage—the notion that we're called to the classroom for a higher purpose, so just keep giving until bled bone dry. This is where the cracks begin to form for many professors. Nicole, an adjunct hoping for a permanent faculty job and highlighted in his research states:

Getting part-time jobs are easy, but real jobs all go to people with political links within the departments. There's a real catch-22 for

publishing when you're an adjunct. You have to travel to do your research, to go to archives; you have to travel for conferences; but instead you take summer jobs. There's no time and no money to publish. I'm already middle-aged; I need to start functioning in a different world . . . My generation is being sacrificed, being crucified for decisions made by others. (8-9)

Some colleges pay as little as \$1,500-\$1,900 per course, and many institutions cap adjuncts at a certain number, so they don't have to allocate benefits. Academic conferences, on average, run about \$1,000 when all is said and done (conference fee, air travel, transportation, hotel, food, and so on). Therefore, it's nearly impossible to build a strong curriculum vitae and teach as an adjunct simultaneously. This is just one of the many dilemmas part-timers endure on a continual basis because the structure is deeply rooted in mistreatment. Many critics have claimed that academia, especially in the humanities, eats its young because one can do everything right and still come up short in the end.

As the book progresses, Childress states in chapters four through seven that the hiring landscape seemingly changed overnight, or at least in one working generation. In the 1970s, it was 75% tenure track and 25% adjunct, using them more for emergencies or a stopgap measure. Now, that ratio has completely inverted, and the academy has shifted to a corporate, WalMart-like model of discarding the workforce and reducing labor costs in slimy-yet-creative ways. They include:

1. Fewer people, longer hours.
2. Workers redefined as independent contractors.
3. De-bundled professional activities and the creation of paraprofessionals.
4. Outsourced non-core functions.
5. Replacement of humans and space with technology. (119-121)

Individually and collectively, these proposals are good for business but not for the average John Doe worker. The question that could be asked by many is—why? Why even do this type of work knowing

you (the adjunct) are going to get screwed over repeatedly and mistreated by administrations? Why not fight back like the people of Puerto Rico (who recently flooded the streets and protested on highways against decades of corruption, recession, and a debt crisis) in opposition of their Governor Ricardo Rosselló (Wynn Davis 2019)? Surely adjuncts can do the same on a smaller scale and storm the president's office, right? It should be noted that this is asked a lot by those unfamiliar with ivory tower politics, and Childress hits the nail on the head.

In a nutshell, adjuncts never come in a one-size-fits-all box, which works in higher education's favor more often than not. Childress states, "the higher-education community at large points to a different quadrant, the 'causal learners'" (126). Who are these people? They include the retired professor that likes to teach his favorite course for kicks and giggles, the attorney who lectures about property law one night a week, the creative writer dabbling in poetry that is financially supported by her partner, the new mom who just wants to get out of the house on Saturday, and so on (126). Why? "Because it's just so darn much fun!" (126). While there is nothing wrong with these educators, that mindset fails to consider the emergent category of those who are often floundering, specifically young graduate students, instructors at non-unionized/private institutions, women, and minorities, which makes organizing and striking more difficult. Rocking the boat or questioning the current status quo could lead to termination.

Thomas Benton also famously warned students about this predicament in his infamous essay "So You Want to Go to Graduate School?" in 2003. He later stated:

It's hard to tell young people that universities recognize that their idealism and energy—and lack of information—are an exploitable resource. For universities, the impact of graduate programs on the lives of those students is an acceptable externality, like dumping toxins into a river. If you cannot find a tenure-track position, your university will no longer court you; it will pretend you do not exist and will act as if your unemployability is entirely your fault. It will make you feel ashamed, and you will probably

just disappear, convinced it's right rather than that the game was rigged from the beginning. (Thomas Benton 2009)

Childress himself left the educational arena altogether in 2013 to partner with an ethnography-based consulting firm, but he still mentions the internal conflict, stating, "part of me still wants it. That kind of faith is in my bones, and reason can only bleach it away somewhat. The imprint is still there, faint, hauntingly imprecise, all the more venerable for its openness to dreams" (163). It's a theme woven throughout the book because everyone wants the brass ring (tenure track line), but only a minority will obtain it.

In his final chapter, Childress advises contemplation, having gone through the head vs. heart struggle mentioned above from personal experiences and those he interviewed. The good ol' days of working at a university with a livable wage and benefits are long gone for a vast majority of professors, especially in the humanities. He gives realistic recommendations for undergraduate students and their families, prospective graduate students, and colleges and their management. He reminds all of us that "relationships are everything," and "the faculty is the college" (148-150).

Because Herb Childress knows the intricacies of academia and not the glossy Hollywood version that is so often portrayed, he writes with authority and clarity. Additionally, he perfectly captures all the mixed messages of being an adjunct professor (hope vs. despair, joy vs. regret, and enthusiasm vs. burnout) while backing up the narratives with current quantitative research. It's a shame that we lose professors like this over and over again. However, his experience will help and perhaps more importantly, warn, others pursuing this broken-down system of exploitation.

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# Review:

## *Community Literacies en Confianza*

By Steven Alvarez

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Steven Alvarez's *Community Literacies en Confianza* provides a perfect example of how conversations about language, literacy, and community can benefit from cross-disciplinary engagement. In this accessible, grounded illustration of how youth navigate literacy learning at two after-school programs, Alvarez ties together interdisciplinary conversations related to language and literacy while also providing clear recommendations for teachers at several levels who want to continue engaging in community-driven work. As an interdisciplinary scholar, I particularly appreciate the way that Alvarez threads together disciplinary conversations while simultaneously maintaining focus on the lived experiences and stories of his participants and collaborators.

Following the goals and structure of the "Principles in Practice" imprint of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) book series, *Community Literacies en*

*Confianza* links research on a particular topic (in this case “Teaching English Language Learners”) to a specific NCTE brief or policy statement. The book thus opens with the “NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLS),” which sets the tone for the purpose of the book and the discussion and problematizing of the statement that Alvarez engages in throughout the manuscript. While, as Alvarez explains, this position paper has paved the way for honoring and building on the strengths of linguistically diverse youth in classrooms, further attention to the language and literacy practice of contemporary youth and their communities is critical to the ongoing sustainability of our classrooms.

Although there are multiple elements of value in this manuscript, one of the things I most appreciate about Alvarez’s discussion is the way in which he provides concrete, adaptable definitions of terminology that is often contested in academic circles related to theories and practices of language and literacy. For example, the book includes a “Statement of Terminology and Glossary” written by Steven Alvarez, Betsy Gilliland, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, Melinda J. McBee Orzulak, and Shannon Pella. This glossary is an invaluable resource for teachers and researchers interested in language and literacy scholarship, as the authors provide a cross-disciplinary historical overview of terms such as “English Language Learner,” “bilingual, multilingual, or plurilingual,” “emergent bilingual” (García 2009), “English as a foreign language,” and many more. As a researcher who has frequently made the common mistake of conflating and interchanging this terminology without understanding its histories, I truly appreciate having this glossary as a reference tool that can help me to better articulate the ways in which I’m describing specific language practices. In addition, this glossary (and Alvarez’s clear undertaking of specific terminology throughout the manuscript) further illustrates the importance of conducting historical traces of language scholars across disciplinary boundaries in order to ensure that we, as researchers, are not ignoring entire lines of scholarship as we develop “new” concepts for describing linguistic movements in our work.

In addition to its clear, historical overview of terminology related to language and literacy, *Community Literacies en Confianza* provides in-depth, contextualized accounts of how language and literacy learning extend beyond classrooms and institutionalized contexts. As Alvarez explains, “cultivating a caring atmosphere in multiple languages...requires additional effort, guidance, and trust-building between teachers and communities” (p. 3). The responsibility of caring for our youth, then, rests not only on the shoulders of teachers and administrators, but is also in the hands of our entire community, as “it takes a community to raise a bilingual child” (p. 3). Because this community support is frequently already present in the lives of emergent bilingual children (García 2009), teachers’ roles in continuing to extend this supportive environment rely on their willingness to “learn about students’ families and communities while establishing connections of trust” (p. 3). This is where Alvarez’s guiding concept of *confianza* emerges as a “reciprocal relationship”...” built through an ongoing, intentional process that is centered in local communities and involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation (Delgado Gaitan; Zentella)” (p. 4). Thus, through my interpretation, *confianza* is a mutual trust established among teachers, students, and families, primarily through a practice of listening and valuing home-based knowledges and literacies.

As Alvarez continues to illustrate *confianza* as it is enacted with his participants across two research sites, the stories and experiences of emergent bilingual youth are brought to the forefront, providing readers with opportunities to listen to and engage with youth voices and perspectives directly. For example, Alvarez presents excerpts from writing that youth composed to share their experiences learning and practicing languages. Through these excerpts, readers get to hear from participants like Ana, who writes about her “disappointment in not feeling ‘authentic’ like a monolingual Mexican Spanish or American English speaker” (p. 2), and Celia, a high school student who interviewed her mother about the role that community-driven after-school programs play in her daughter’s confidence and growth (p. 17). As the chapters continue, Alvarez blends conventional written narratives from youth with multimodal digital and visual stories that depict youth’s translanguaging practices through alphabetic and non-alphabetic modalities. These illustrations of youth’s composing practices can make valuable contributions to ongoing research in

both English Education and Rhetoric and Writing studies regarding the connections between language diversity and digital technologies in contemporary contexts (e.g., Banks 2006; Jocson 2018; Fraiberg 2010).

Through his depiction of how youth take ownership of their stories while leveraging multiple modalities, Alvarez also showcases both the power of his participants' stories and the various roles that youth can play in not only developing but also researching their own language and literacy practices. As Alvarez clarifies, "when students begin to view their own lives from the perspective of a researcher, their everyday realities seem strange and new. This reorientation causes them to narrate their own and others' stories in a new way, as students learn to use their voice and maturity, and gain confidence in representing their communities and expertise from their lives" (p. 46). As Alvarez (re)positions literacy and language expertise in the histories, practices, and lived experiences of youth and families, he also centers these participants as research collaborators with methodological expertise, and he welcomes other researchers and teachers to do the same.

Overall, *Community Literacies en Confianza* makes important contributions to conversations about the value of community knowledges in classroom practices, about the connections between languages and modalities in language and literacy, and about the value of Latinx communities coming together to build infrastructures for support, growth, and survivance outside of institutionalized contexts. Though Alvarez's writing, readers gain much more than important tips and lessons for supporting linguistically and ethnically diverse youth in and outside of classrooms—we also get to see the story of a committed teacher who purposely not only shares but also builds his own talents and expertise through the collective voices of his participants. Through embedded translingual poetry like his poem, "Fieldnote" (p. 85-88), Alvarez demonstrates what it means to not just learn from but *with* youth, always en confianza.

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## Review:

### *Field Rhetoric: Ethnography, Ecology, and Engagement in the Places of Persuasion*

By Candice Rai & Caroline Gottschalk Druschke

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Candice Rai and Caroline Druschke have compiled an edited collection of ten articles about field rhetoric written by scholars from disciplines as diverse as English and communication, ecology, and political science. They view rhetoric as ecological, “a complex constellation of persuasive forces in the world” that is best studied in context—through fieldwork, actively engaging with the community. The articles are organized into three subsections, moving from field methodologies and Samantha Senda-Cook et al.’s “Rhetorical Cartographies” that investigates remapping a community of “polarized topographies” (104); to field ontologies and Bridie McGreavy et al.’s “Belonging to the World” that takes a “mundane aesthetic orientation to rhetorical ethnography” (151); and finally field inventions, exemplified by Jeffrey T. Grabill et al.’s “Fieldwork and the Identification and Assembling of Agencies” that builds a new “methodology that attempts to

assign language to fieldwork materials and practices" (194). While ethnography has long been an important part of rhetorical study, this volume lays out the methodologies, ontologies, and inventions to serve as a roadmap for new scholarship. The editors have assigned a primary importance to study of the material, physical manifestations of rhetorical practice through ethnographic field work, which finds middle ground between deterministic, autonomous theories of the importance of literacy to human development in a Darwinistic survival of the fittest and purely ideological views of literacy that do not usually acknowledge the role of the environment and nonhuman actors in rhetorical action.

The last great leap in the oral/literacy debate occurred during the 1980s when researchers found that the benefits of literacy do not necessarily follow from the ability to read, but rather stem from the use of appropriate literate practices in context. When Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole conducted their study of the Vai people in western Africa, literature studies passed into the realm of ethnography taking place *in situ*, in a different culture and country than the scholar's home. Their resulting book, *The Psychology of Literacy* (1981), was a major influence on the oral/literate debate, leading to a shift to the ideological model of literacy. Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words* followed in 1983, focusing on the literate practices of families in the southeastern United States. Brian Street's *Literacy in Theory and Practice* followed in 1984, outlining a similar ethnographic study conducted in Iran. What all of these studies from the 1980s point to is the importance of studying the uses of language and rhetoric in context, but while these studies focused on the sociohistorical factors that affected language development, they did not attend to the physical exigencies and material realities that drove people to communicate in certain ways. This attention to the role of nonhuman actors in human literacy is what the editors of *Field Rhetoric* forward in their collection.

Rai and Druschke take this practice to heart in *Field Rhetoric*, and add reflexive, methodological inquiry to its core. It is one thing to choose ethnographic research as a methodology and to determine a site of research and group of participants. It is quite another to understand how those choices and their physical reality affect the

attendant meaning and outcomes of a qualitative social science study, and how this research might effect real change in the world. Including and even prioritizing nonhuman actors in ethnographic research does call for a new methodology of inquiry: the application of methods previously reserved for human actors, such as observation of and listening to nonhumans. For example, Ackerman shifts the “backgrounds of habitation ... to the ontological foreground” in Chapter 7 “Rhetorical Life Among the Ruins” to describe the rhetorical effects of environmental (both human-built and natural) degradation (177). This type of research also lends itself well to pragmatic action based on its findings, such as the work done by Grabill in a Michigan harbor community faced with a dredging project in Chapter 8 and the recommendations made by McGreavy et al. in the clam-digging industry of a community in Maine in Chapter 6. It appears that taking an ideological stance that attends to physical realities in ethnographic research makes researchers more in tune with their participants’ concerns and needs and more likely to take up social activism in their sites of research.

In the articles primarily concerned with agriculture and fishing, there is the sense that the researchers are looking for practical applications of their findings to these resource-extractive industries. Druschke’s research on farmers in rural Iowa reflects how the rhetorical construction of ideas about food and water trouble the relationship between farmers and their land. She also describes how this felt difficulty or tension between “feeding the world” and conserving the environment similarly affected her position as researcher (22). According to Druschke, “These competing demands are at the heart of the tensions identified here in the polysemous nature of stewardship” (38). Herndl et al. also investigate agriculture through the difference between language used by scientists and farmers in a study on the potential industry structure for manufacturing cellulosic biofuel. In a departure from the qualitative analyses that characterizes Druschke’s article, they use Semantic Network Analysis and the program Texttexture to identify the collocation of terms used by the two groups. They argue that quantitative analysis can be a useful tool, mostly because it “carries considerable cultural capital” that can lead to “membership in large, externally funded interdisciplinary projects” (89). Greavy et al. study sustainability efforts of the clam industry in Frenchman Bay, Maine through twenty-two interviews and observations, paying particular

attention to the materials used in their fieldwork, the “vibrant matter” that affects their participants’ decision-making processes, and the objects used to take action (157). Their work allowed creation of the 610 Project, “which sought to make progress on opening 610 acres of closed clam flats in the bay” (157).

Articles that focus on the importance of place include chapters by Sendra-Cook et al., Cintron, Ackerman, and McClellan. Sendra-Cook, et al. investigate the rhetorical cartographies of Midtown, Omaha, Nebraska. They reify the importance of space and place in determining the socio-rhetorical possibilities available for inhabitants of the city. But they also show how one group of men set out to remap the community to much success by changing the uses of properties in an urban development project. In a similar observational vein, Cintron describes fieldwork conducted in the Balkans in what is laid out as more of a personal essay format than the outline of a formal study. Cintron alternates between descriptions of young men and women on a bus, speculating as to their economic and social situations while discussing the overall economics and politics of the Balkans. The tension between meritocracy versus corruption is palpable. He takes local examples from his situated fieldwork and then extrapolates to the national and global scale. Ackerman likewise investigates the history of place and includes “ruination” as a comparative tool to study the living—the ghosts of history still affecting the ideological lives of the present (171). He cites Kent State since the May 4 shootings as an example where a massive downtown redevelopment project served to reinforce the university/city divide despite efforts to bring the two together. Such an investigation could productively be applied to research regarding sites of environmental degradation and inequalities/injustice, where “the biological foundation to ruination as a process of recovery resurfaces as a place of persuasion” (188). McClellan’s chapter studies the Portland, Oregon, Pioneer Courthouse Square as “Portland’s living room,” highlighting the different views of habitual visitors to the public square and the way her personal identity affected her interpretations of the site (216).

The remaining chapters aim to give advice and new terminology to ethnographic fieldwork researchers. Adams’ chapter studies the memories of unwed mothers who were sent away to give birth

because of the stigma of their social status. She focuses on the value of memories to field research, and she realizes that interacting with her participants one-on-one when conducting interviews reinforces her subjects' original isolation, so she switches to holding focus groups. She also finds considerable value in accepting and fully experiencing the emotional aspects of subjects' retellings, which she calls "signals of intensity" (55). In a similar turn toward the modes of research, Hess warns that the use of technologies such as smart phones by field researchers should be tempered by "technological reflexivity" because such devices and their programs are not neutral (236). The occurrence of a "filter bubble" and the ubiquitous nature of algorithms makes the researcher subject to unintended biases (237). There is also the sensationalism of "media logic" and framing, where a researcher might choose the most fantastic, but not necessarily analytically important, video footage to report results of a study (245). Grabill, Leon, and Pigg also provide a mode or model for research: new terms for fieldwork materials and practices. They introduce the concepts of *mediators* (ideological/identity assemblages), *resonances* (rhetorical genres that reflect assemblages), and *termini* (finished rhetorical product) and apply them to three fieldwork studies. They quote Latour from *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013) as asking "what sort of collection and what sort of composition is needed" to conduct rhetorical research (208)? These chapters put forward new frameworks or boundaries to conducting and reporting fieldwork that can guide the researcher toward more ethical, accurate research techniques.

Overall, *Field Rhetoric* is an impressive collection of research articles that are at the forefront of social science research that takes an ethnographic path toward greater understanding of rhetoric's uses and implications. It is clear that the consequences of being literate or not are no longer the focus of this type of research, rather it is the ever-expanding investigation of how rhetoric, whether oral or written, is mediated by nonhuman actors, and how rhetoric also plays an important role in how we live in the material world.

# Review:

## *Social Writing/Social Media: Publics, Presentations, and Pedagogies*

Eds. Douglas M. Walls & Stephanie Vie

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I ncreasingly, academics across the disciplines rely on Twitter to share their research. Scholars in fields ranging from climate science (Katharine Hayhoe) to history (Kevin Kruse) use the platform to make their work available beyond “classrooms, journals, and the occasional book” (Pettit 2018). Yet the uptick in academic tweeting has received pushback from other scholars. Gordon Fraser (2019) writes that academic discourse requires sustained attention to the research and writing norms mastered in graduate school and is diluted when made widely available via Twitter. Justin E.H. Smith (2019) concurs that “crackling, clickbaity Twitter thread[s]” may “circumvent the channels that have long ensured” the quality of academic discourse. Other scholars disagree: Jason S. Farr and Travis Chi Wing Lau (2019) respond to Fraser that the “informal conversations” sparked on Twitter enable “more people to participate in scholarly conversations,” widening the scope of who can read, write, or engage with

academic discourse. The debate is ongoing, but at its heart is a need to (re)consider how the availability that characterizes social media discourse changes our work as researchers and teachers inhabiting a networked world.

Questions of availability foreground the recent edited collection, *Social Writing/Social Media: Publics, Presentations, Pedagogies* (Walls and Vie 2017). Focused on social media rhetoric in both public and academic spheres, the collection situates itself in the context of social media's power to make rhetoric "available . . . across vast distances, (almost) instantaneously" (Hart-Davidson, x). This availability, especially given social media's visible impact on civic, personal, and academic discourses, makes the volume "timely and compelling" (Walls and Vie 2017, 5). Citing substantial research on digital and multimodal composing, such as Ball & Kalmbach (2010), Delagrange (2011), Journet, Ball, & Trauman (2012), and Palmeri (2012) as the basis for its work, *Social Writing/Social Media* provides a critical, wide-angle look at the previously "undertheorized" (Walls and Vie 2017, 5) subject of social media writing. The collection names, explores, and evaluates a range of rhetorical and writing practices within social media. Leaving "social media writing" (Hart-Davidson xiii) loosely defined as "the acts of composing that occur specifically in social media spaces" (Walls and Vie 5), the collection expands to include work on niche sites such as Etsy stores themed around the cult TV show *Firefly* (Potts) alongside fresh looks at behemoths like Instagram (Alexander and Hahner) and Facebook (Arola). Organized into three sections, the collection delves more particularly into the purpose and potential value(s) of social media writing in 1) public, activist discourses (Dadas, Beck, Adkins, Bullinger and Vie, Colombini and Hall, Potts), 2) self-presentation and cultural expressions (Williams, Walls, Buck, Hutchinson, Arola, Alexander and Hahner), and 3) writing pedagogies (Portanova, Mina, Faris, Anson). Overall, this collection's broad look at diverse social media rhetorics is key in "help[ing] rhetorical scholars engage in an informed dialogue about the material conditions of network writing where they are most readily observable: in social networks" (x, Hart-Davidson). For scholars and teachers interested in how the availability of social media shapes writing and rhetoric, *Social Writing/Social Media* moves the conversation forward by correcting assumptions about social

media writing, naming emerging research on social media rhetorics, and critiquing the implicit biases of social media interfaces.

Learning theory suggests that the first step towards mastering new concepts is naming incomplete, flawed mental models of the concept (Bain 2011), so the attention *Social Writing/Social Media* gives to challenging prevailing assumptions about social media writing is noteworthy: it invites readers to shift their mental models of what it means to compose on social media and how social media interacts with public discourse and writing education. In “Hashtag Activism: The Promise and Risk of ‘Attention,’” Caroline Dadas complicates the stereotype of digital activism as “slacktivism” (29). Defining “hashtag activism” as the “use [of] hashtags for directing attention to social and political causes” (17), Dadas traces the “considerable consequences” (30) of hashtags in public discourse, from glossing over cultural complexities in troubling, “imperialis[t]” (24) ways to amplifying marginalized voices. Likewise, Chris Anson pushes back on the too-common assumption among writing professors that students’ “use of social media . . . ‘degrades’ writing ability (Hansen, 2013)” (310). Through analysis of YouTube comments, Anson shows how social media platforms make “serious intellectual work” possible, from “the negotiation of alternate views” to “the sharing of further material through eyewitness accounts or links to deeper and more extensive background reading” (324). Effectively rewriting assumptions about social media composition, these chapters and others provide an accurate, holistic framework that sheds light on ongoing research on digital rhetorics and communication and suggests creative pedagogical strategies that make full use of social media writing resources.

*Social Writing/Social Media* also highlights new lines of research emerging from social media rhetorical practices. One of the most interesting chapters along this theme is Kara Poe Alexander’s and Leslie A. Hahner’s, “The Intimate Screen: Revisualizing Understandings of Down Syndrome through Digital Activism on Instagram.” A twist on the public screens of mass media (DeLuca and Peoples 2002, as cited in Alexander and Hahner), the “intimate screen,” Alexander and Hahner theorize, takes advantage of the “individualized screens” (227) of social media and mobile composing

to “cultivate an intimate”—and likely receptive—“public” (227). Alexander and Hahner point to an Instagram account advocating for children with Down Syndrome as an example of the intimate screen. The account’s owner, Christy, shares photos of her two daughters (one adoptive), both of whom have Downs, to destigmatize and nuance Downs and promote special-needs adoptions. Social media writing, Alexander and Hahner conclude, does not simply reproduce familiar discourses (Henning 2013) but forges new ones adapted to a networked environment. Their work and others’ emphasize the innovative, locally-situated rhetorical work generated out of social media spaces, opening fresh areas for study and invigorating research into and production of digital rhetorics.

Yet *Social Media/Social Writing* is not uniformly positive. The final theme is one of critique: the failure of social media (composing) to account for the rhetorics of diverse cultures and communities. Kristin Arola’s “Indigenous Interfaces” contributes to this theme. Drawing on interviews and (auto)ethnographic research among Native American communities, Arola contrasts Facebook’s familiar “blue-and-white interface” (212) with an imagined Native American version of Facebook, “something that” gives voice to “indigenous ways of being and doing” (221). While Arola concludes that agentive indigenous social media writing is possible on Facebook, her work raises important questions about the bias(es) implicit in social media interfaces and the importance of reimagining social media composing as inclusive of diverse rhetorics and cultures. Unfortunately, as Arola’s chapter is one of only two in the collection (Hutchinson’s is the other) which gives sustained attention to questions of ethnic or gender identity in social media writing, the collection’s social critique is limited; it is unable to fully address the ways that civic discourse on social media is jeopardized by instances of bias, from gender-motivated trolling to the uneven enforcement of hate speech policies. Further work is clearly needed on questions of how diversity and sociocultural difference(s) are navigated within social media writing to better account for the interactions of social media rhetoric with questions of justice and human flourishing.

In the forward, William Hart-Davidson notes that social media writing is too rarely recognized as a serious form of public discourse.

## Reviews

*Social Writing/Social Media* is an attempt to change that. In turning a scholarly lens to social media writing, the collection legitimizes it. *Social Writing/Social Media* is an exciting expansion of the digital rhetoric landscape, opening new horizons for research into social media composing. Ultimately, the wide-ranging analysis of *Social Writing/Social Media* may help us to better understand the writing practices and ideologies at work in social media and to navigate the role of social media composing in public discourses, our own ongoing research, and our classrooms.

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