

# Designing the Future: Assessing Long-Term Impact of Service-Learning on Graduate Instructors

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*We focus on the long-term impacts of service-learning pedagogy on an oft-overlooked assessment group: graduate instructors. We describe the civic engagement program we participated in as graduate student teachers, the Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program, and we illustrate how our early experiences with community-based pedagogies led to formative and long-term impacts on our approaches to research, teaching, and service and on our professional and personal work and identities. Based on our experiences, we offer a set of best practices that can serve as a foundation for the intentional design and assessment—both formative and summative—of forward-thinking graduate instructor objectives and outcomes.*

**Keywords:** *activism, civic engagement, community service, community-university partnership, higher education, graduate education, pedagogy, rhetoric, service-learning, writing*

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**W**e take the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program (CCLCP), a writing- and rhetoric-based civic engagement initiative at the University of

Illinois at Chicago, to explore the long-term impacts of the program on an assessment group that is absent in service-learning literature: its graduate instructors. As former graduate instructors in the program, we suggest the narrative synthesis of our experiences since CCLCP can aid in both envisioning and designing outcome-driven service-learning programs, as well as assessing the impact on graduate instructors as future faculty. In short, we look back to help others start with the end in mind.

Our participation in community-based pedagogies early in our training set the foundation for a career-long commitment and orientation to public engagement in our teaching, research, service, and student mentoring. In light of those impacts, we advocate an “understanding by design” or “backwards design” approach (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) to consider the question of how service-learning programs might be explicitly designed with an eye on the professional development of graduate students. To address this question, we examine our own experiences to highlight a range of long-term effects that service-learning theory, pedagogy, and practice has had on our careers and lives and then distil a set of best practices for service-learning curricula that support graduate student instructors as current students and future faculty. Our exploration of the impact of ten years of diverse, service-learning pedagogy informs context-appropriate, positive impacts on future graduate instructors.

We encourage other civic engagement and service-learning initiatives to assess impacts on graduate student teaching instructors, and we hope here to begin this conversation about program design and assessment. Based on a synthesis of our experiences, we suggest graduate instructor training in civic engagement initiatives ought to: 1) emphasize a *kairotic*, situated approach to community-based pedagogy across contexts; 2) cultivate mindfulness in both students and graduate instructors about seeking out and delivering on community goals and needs; 3) emphasize a balance between strategic and tactical approaches; and 4) make room for and encourage experimentation, risk, and reflection in community-based pedagogy and research.

We suggest that graduate instructor participation in service-learning and civic engagement initiatives is what Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres (2011) call an (un)common—which is to say common but undocumented—mode of engagement. Too often, graduate instructor objectives and outcomes are taken for granted or overshadowed by student and institutional outcomes. Without assessment, the impacts of these programs remain an implicit part of our pedagogy and life philosophies instead of a recognized part of our worth as professionals. We find this lack of attention problematic because these future faculty members are the most likely candidates to carry forward community-based pedagogies and public engagement ethics into the academy. This article and the experiences gathered in it draw attention to these (un)common modes and set forth an understanding that can be used to design further best practices for graduate instructors and the programs to which they contribute.

In the sections that follow, we highlight a gap in the service-learning literature related to graduate instructor outcomes; describe the Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program, its theoretical foundation, and its impact on student writing; and weave together four narratives that illuminate best practices for graduate training. We conclude with an argument for a backwards design approach that can launch a more extended conversation about graduate training and graduate instructor outcomes in civic engagement initiatives.

## **ASSESSING SERVICE-LEARNING STUDENTS, BUT NOT SERVICE-LEARNING TEACHERS**

The impact of civic engagement initiatives on graduate instructors has been largely overlooked in service-learning literature, though undergraduate student learning outcomes have been widely studied, including in our own program (Feldman et al., 2006) as we discuss below. For example, research has addressed the longitudinal outcomes of service-learning and civic engagement curricula on students' academic and personal lives. Eyler and Giles (1999) adopted a mixed methods approach to this question, combining survey data and student interviews to explore the connections between cognitive impacts (related to the development of content knowledge) and affective impacts (related to changes in attitudes) on

student learners. Their research demonstrated how service-learning can impact specific outcomes, including: personal and interpersonal development; understanding and applying knowledge; engagement, curiosity, and reflective practice; critical thinking; perspective transformation; and citizenship. Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) used a quantitative approach to explore this connection between academic/content outcomes and affective/attitude outcomes, analyzing data from 22,000 college students to compare course-based service-learning and co-curricular community service that occurs outside of particular classes. They found that participation in service-learning courses correlated with academic and affective outcomes; had a more positive impact on students than co-curricular community service alone; and was a strong predictor of students choosing a service-related career. Other studies have focused on the impact of particular courses on student participants (e.g. Strage, 2000; Simons & Cleary, 2006; Kelley, Hart, & King, 2007; Pine, 2008). Much of this research emphasizes the impact of curricular service-learning programs on students, both academically and attitudinally. Students, they suggest, are more knowledgeable, civically engaged, politically aware, and interpersonally savvy as a result of their participation in service-learning courses.

But what about the impact on service-learning's graduate instructors as future faculty? A decade ago, Pribbenow (2005) argued, "While there has been a steady increase in the understanding of how service-learning affects students, there remains a dearth of research on how using service-learning pedagogy impacts faculty" (p. 25). A few studies fill that gap, but focus primarily on institutional support for service-learning, rather than impacts on instructors themselves. Forbes et al. (2008), for instance, researched the impediments to service-learning adoption for Research I institution faculty. More recently, Lambright and Alden (2012) probed faculty for their impressions about institutional support for service-learning, but the impact on instructors remains underexplored. We know of no study to date that attends to the impacts of service-learning on the subset of instructors who so frequently employ service-learning pedagogies in their classrooms and who represent the future of institutional service-learning efforts in higher education: graduate instructors.

We take a first step here towards addressing that gap in the literature by focusing on the impact of CCLCP on a select group of graduate instructors—the authors—and on our subsequent work and lives.

## **THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF THE CHICAGO CIVIC LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATE PROGRAM**

To understand its impact on our work this past decade, it is important to first understand CCLCP itself. The program was created in 2004, by AnnMerle Feldman, Professor Emerita and former long-time Director of the First Year Writing Program at University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Feldman sought to design a program that would feature “ordinary writing in the engaged university” (Great Cities Institute). She later described her perspective on engagement:

Engagement...means that a university makes a commitment as part of its core intellectual agenda to a relationship with its context that depends on the mutual creation of knowledge. ... Engaged scholarship represents a reconception of traditional faculty members' work, one in which faculty members consider how their scholarship impacts public contexts. Faculty members find themselves establishing reciprocal and collaborative relationships with partners... and the research itself proceeds with new criteria and different goals. (2008, p. 2)

Feldman's vision, supported by a Learn and Serve America matching grant, emerged as the Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program (CCLCP), which welcomed its freshman class in fall 2004 to learn about the theory and practice of writing and rhetoric through a pairing of university-based lessons and community-based work. The vision for the program was Feldman's, who directed the program, helped shape the curriculum, taught the program's capstone course, and trained the four authors and many others in community-based pedagogy. Curriculum development and assessment were shared across the team, including its graduate instructors, who also worked together to co-teach courses in the CCLCP sequence.

CCLCP is a four-semester civic engagement program, in which cohorts of freshmen and sophomores complete a series of modified

writing, rhetoric, and general education courses, while completing 30 hours of work, per semester, in local non-profit organizations. Where many service-learning programs ask students to complete volunteer work and then return to the classroom to reflect on their experiences through writing, CCLCP practices a situated writing approach: challenging students to use both the classroom and the non-profit organization as spaces of learning to put their academic knowledge to work by creating consequential writing projects for partner organizations. Unlike many single-course service-learning models, CCLCP adopted a multi-semester immersion that features long-term relationships with community partners, which gives students time to become members of various communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Through shared practices and the increased identification that often results from those shared practices, students learn to situate their writing within organizations and their exigencies: engaging in shared work; imagining new ways of acting and working; and aligning their academic and partner work. For a book-length discussion of CCLCP, see Feldman (2008).

CCLCP was built on the ideas that the best writing is born of tangible exigencies that emerge from real-life rhetorical situations; students have much to learn from writers outside the university; and universities (and the students, faculty, and staff they house) need to act as more conscientious citizens of and contributors to their wider communities. CCLCP's thoughtful, rigorous, experimental curriculum was meant to accomplish those goals. CCLCP community partners include nonprofit, community, and governmental organizations that work on a range of public issues, including homelessness, poverty, housing, urban planning and design, the environment, and immigration. Under the guidance of their classroom instructors and community mentors, CCLCP students design documents like annual reports, fact sheets, resource guides, newsletters, and feature stories. For extended examples and discussion of student writing, see Feldman (2008); Rai, Marie, and Feldman (2012); Gottschalk-Druschke, Pittendrigh, and Chin (2007).

## **THE THEORY BEHIND THE PROGRAM**

The theoretical training we received through CCLCP was one of its significant lasting impacts. CCLCP's curriculum is based on a

conception of situated writing, which fuses social learning theory with rhetorical genre theory. CCLCP's approach to writing emphasizes the ways people learn to act and make meaning from that acting in social ways. We built from social learning theorist, Lave (1993), who argued, "participation in everyday life may be thought of as a process of changing understanding in practice, that is, as learning" (p. 6). In this view, participation begets learning. Extending Lave's work, Wenger (1999) explored the ways that everyday practices contribute to identifications with various "communities of practice" that are brought together through mutual engagement (shared practices that allow people to get things done), joint enterprise (a dynamic goal that creates mutual accountability), and a shared repertoire (the words, tools, practices, and routines). We adopted Wenger's social learning perspective and designed a curriculum that enabled students in CCLCP to mutually engage with members of community organizations, attempt joint enterprises like creating an annual report or a newsletter, and work to accomplish those goals through the shared repertoire of words, tools, and routines learned at their partner organizations.

But while social learning frameworks help theorize learning that results from student engagement with community partners, as writing teachers attentive to discourse, we paired social learning theory with genre and rhetorical theory, finding useful complements to Lave (1993) and Wenger (1999) in the rhetorical, genre-based work of Miller (1984, 1994) and Bawarshi (2003). For Miller (1994), genres are a pragmatic tool for initiating social action and serve a notion of writing as a "practical art" (p. 67). Bawarshi (2003) framed genres as situated *topoi*, or the sites where invention takes place. In other words, genres help us locate publicly held expectations for various types of writing and discover ways of responding within rhetorical situations, as well as providing a means through which we may invent new ways of acting in the world.

The heavy influence of rhetorical genre theory prompted us to teach community-based writing projects as sites of invention and intervention. Students learned the standard conventions of writing they were asked to do and used those conventions as levers for creative divergence. Students learned the various genres and the exigencies

that gave rise to them within the situated contexts of their community partners and the publics they served—each of which held particular expectations, rules, and norms that could be thoughtfully adhered to, bent, or improved. Like Wenger (1999), Miller (1984, 1994), and Bawarshi (2003), we emphasized the identification of exigencies as opportunities for responding to social needs. We taught—and still teach—our students that every act of writing or speech emerges at a nexus of social action, carrying along with it “social, institutional, and material systems” (Bazerman & Prior, 2005, p. 137) that help us invent acts of speech or writing in response to the exigencies that face us in our daily lives. Our CCLCP students learned how to engage in the practice of community work and community-based writing, to imagine consequential interventions into pressing community exigencies, and to align these new ideas with existing forms and ways of doing things in situ. And so did we.

## **WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT OUR STUDENTS**

CCLCP is grounded in the idea that, as Russell (1995) argued, there is no such thing as generalized knowledge; rather, all knowledge exists within goal-directed, historically situated, cooperative activity systems composed of a subject, an object(ive), and tools. When we joined CCLCP, the four of us were already teaching in UIC’s First Year Writing Program, which holds a situational, activity-centered, rhetorical genre approach to writing instruction. CCLCP upped the stakes of this situated writing approach by placing students in goal-directed, historically situated, activity systems in communities beyond the classroom walls, while incorporating purposeful coursework that would enable students to learn about and engage with those communities. Despite differences in our particular philosophical and ethical orientations, we shared a general outlook that universities ought to engage with the communities around them and contribute to community-defined goals for community literacy and social justice. In other words, we found value in encouraging our students to become more engaged (or sustain their engagements) in their local communities and to model that engagement ourselves.

Moreover, as graduate instructors in CCLCP, we were uniquely poised to model our leadership-as-rhetorical-efficacy beliefs through publications, conference presentations, seminar papers,



comprehensive exams, dissertation work, and personal activism. We felt a keen connection to our students in that we, too, were attempting to position ourselves rhetorically as professionals and community partners at the same time our students were defining their own orientations to the academy and world. Partly because we saw the program's positive impact on our own academic work, we hypothesized that students would actually learn to write better from the experience of being deeply immersed in the work and practice of community partners. And, in fact, they did.

CCLCP worked to undertake a program-wide assessment of students' academic writing, the results of which are detailed in Feldman et al. (2006). For the assessment, a team of readers compared unmarked CCLCP student research papers to those from a control group matched for ACT scores, gender, and ethnicity. On average, CCLCP students scored higher than non-CCLCP students on the learning outcome rubric applied to all First Year Writing Program research papers. Feldman et al. (2006) argued that these results reflected "the deeply situated learning that took place in the context of reciprocal, community-based relationships" (p. 16). That study worked to quantify the impact of CCLCP on its student writers, while another took a qualitative approach to assessing students' learning records online (Feldman, 2008), but, as a program, we have given less thought to the impact of CCLCP on its graduate instructors. This lack of data is not surprising, given the wider national trend discussed above related to student-focused but not instructor-focused assessments of service-learning outcomes.

## **WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT OURSELVES: LESSONS FOR THE FIELD**

In response to the gap in research about long-term impact of community-based pedagogies on graduate instructors, we synthesize our experiences carrying the lessons of CCLCP forward in our teaching, research, and activism in various institutional structures and geographic locations. Of the four authors, one of us remains at University of Illinois at Chicago, completing her dissertation, while the remaining three serve as tenure track faculty: one at a research-intensive state university in the Pacific Northwest; one at a smaller, high research activity, public university in New England; and one at a Midwestern community college, after teaching at both

an urban two year college and a private religious four year college. Our research has taken us to equally diverse settings, including field-based studies of prison activism, evangelicalism, community policing, and environmental outreach, among other subjects, spanning the country from Washington State to Rhode Island. We have taught undergraduates, graduates, middle school children, and community members in formal and informal settings—through university courses, environmental education initiatives, public lectures, and community meetings—and we continue to reap the dividends of taking a community-based approach to research and pedagogy across an array of rhetorical situations.

By synthesizing our work over the past decade, we have identified a number of best practices that civic engagement programs can pursue in their support of graduate students instructors, including: 1) emphasizing a *kairotic*, situated approach to community-based pedagogy across contexts; 2) cultivating mindfulness about seeking out and delivering on community goals and needs; 3) emphasizing a balance between strategic and tactical approaches; and 4) making room for and encouraging experimentation, risk, and reflection in community-based pedagogy and research. These best practices can serve as starting points for developing concrete learning outcomes that programs should assess for graduate instructors, as well as conversation starters for future, rigorous explorations of service-learning impact on graduate instructors and graduate instructors' impact on service-learning.

## **TAKING A *KAIROTIC*, SITUATED APPROACH TO COMMUNITY-BASED PEDAGOGY ACROSS CONTEXTS**

*Megan Marie Bolinder*

That I have been able to theorize, teach, and practice service-learning in three contradistinctive institutions since our time in CCLCP, illustrates the fascinating fluidity of civic engagement across a variety of settings, a key feature of our experience in the variety of courses and community partnerships in CCLCP. While teaching

for Malcolm X College (City Colleges of Chicago); Calvin College (Christian liberal arts college in Grand Rapids, MI); and Northwest Arkansas Community College (two year school in Bentonville, AR), I have experienced firsthand the *kairotic* effect of engaged learning and writing for students in various contexts. Ten years out, my experiences have instilled in me a definition of leadership as rhetorical efficacy, which can happen anywhere: an urban R1 university, an urban community college, a beautifully cloistered Dutch Reformed four-year college, or a rural community college set down the street from Walmart's international headquarters. Anywhere. Helping students see the relationships between language and the material contexts of culture, politics, and economics—or the “rhetoric of everyday life” (Nystrand & Duffy, 2003, p. 1)—is as important a critical thinking tool on the streets of Chicago as it is in hollows close to the Boston Mountains. In other words, while no prescriptive model of service-learning or engaged learning can be ill fittingly forced on top of a classroom, student body, or program, the fact has remained for me—and all of us—that engaged learning can be infused into any classroom and/or programmatic context. And should.

At Malcolm X College, student engagement looked like non-traditional Developmental English students—who were sharpening their own grammatical and rhetorical skills—working with Erie Neighborhood House constituents to practice English fluency for their immigration and naturalization exam. Malcolm X students, many of whom had never gone further than the city limits, found themselves engaged with international peers who desired a similar kind of life change, a life change where rhetorical efficacy would confer a degree, a job, and/or citizenship. As students and constituents found themselves mired in diverse and complicated issues, ethical concerns, and social problems, for both Malcolm X students and Erie House partners, the quest to be “literate” took on new power and meaning.

At Calvin College, student engagement in my Written Rhetoric classes looked like healthy, well-fed, academically prepared, often privately educated, and mostly traditional eighteen-year-old students entering—in some instances, for the first time ever—an urban area via public transportation and weekly visiting a public elementary school where most of the students were on free or reduced lunch.

Early in the semester, each of these young adults would choose whether they would go to Homework House at Cesar Chavez, Dickinson Elementary, or Neland Avenue Church in order to mentor children whose lives were, 99% of the time, completely different from theirs. The Calvin students, who were organized through a campus-wide service-learning program but who applied their experiences through research and various written genres, committed to working weekly with one individual student on reading and writing goals. By the end of the semester, however, larger lessons of economic hardship, racial inequality, school zoning, and indefatigable hope always dominated what the Calvin students reported to have learned. While many service-learning conversations have warned against the tendency of such “mentoring” or “tutoring” to become a patronizing charitableness (Bennett, 2000; Deans, 2000), I maintain that Calvin students were engaged in a manner that introduced them to new ways to address the complex and persistent social problems of the 21st century, much in keeping with the mission of Calvin College and implicit in many of their own faiths.

At Northwest Arkansas Community College where I currently teach—a commuter college that has grown quickly to serve both rural and local students—student engagement has manifested itself as a sharp critical thinking tool in my composition and film classes. The advent of cell-phone videography, and simple, free editing software, has opened up new possibilities for digitally produced research projects such as documentary films with ethnographic research.<sup>1</sup> One student has created a documentary about the need for better funding and volunteerism in her co-op and affordable housing development. After filming community events and interviews for a semester, this student learned the rhetorical importance of representing her neighbors and friends as fairly and professionally as she could. Another student began a project with the intent to expose ill-treatment and shackling of pregnant Benton County Jail inmates and wound up, over the course of research and interviewing, realizing that her initial judgments were sparsely informed and that, instead, the social complexities of incarceration and motherhood do

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1 These projects were not governed by Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, in part because of the absence of an IRB mechanism at my institution. Still, I pre-approve all student interview questions and train students in responsible research, including asking subjects to complete unofficial waivers and referring to subjects anonymously in research products.

not provide easy judgments nor easy solutions. The burden to then craft a documentary narrative about incarcerated women and jails became a significant exercise in critical thinking and realizing the rhetorical implications of her work, particularly as she plans to use this project as a springboard for a Bachelors of Arts in journalism.

These anecdotes are just a few of the many where the direction of student engagement has been shaped by the needs of the community and the goals of the students. At their core, these different rhetorical situations prove themselves to be diverse and varied sites of invention.

## **SEEKING OUT AND DELIVERING ON COMMUNITY GOALS AND NEEDS**

*Candice Rai*

Since CCLCP, the four of us have used the classes we have taught to encourage students to fill some of the identified community needs detailed above, like helping community members practice English fluency for the immigration exam and elementary students with homework, or advocating for affordable housing, for example, as well as designing place-based lesson plans for local elementary school students, drafting communication materials for a state agency, and planning an outdoor, overnight, cold weather campout as a fundraiser for a local homeless shelter, among other things.

My participation in CCLCP profoundly shaped my thinking about how the academy's work might be extended to focus on addressing real world issues with and on behalf of public partners, to facilitate students' deep engagement with the situated nature and power of writing, and to build general capacities for working with others to get things done in complex situations that require action. In my own research and teaching, I have worked to take inspiration from Feldman's (2008) earlier definition of engagement—focused on the mutual creation of knowledge, the pairing of scholarly agenda with public context, and the importance of reciprocal and collaborative partnerships—and to build from Furco, Holland, and Howard's (2007) definition of “scholarships of engagement” to consider how

to pair our students' scholarship—and my own—with community needs.

In doing so, I have come to define engaged pedagogies as methods and curriculum that:

- Build on the mutual, overlapping, and/or complementary needs, goals, and expectations of university and community partners;
- Draw on the expertise, knowledge, resources, skills, and capacities of both the university (its institutions, disciplines, faculty, students, etc.) and community partners;
- Collaboratively produce research questions, projects, knowledge and/or curricula that emerge from, contribute to, and circulate within both university and public contexts;
- Maintain traditional disciplinary inquiries, knowledge, or skills, but might extend, enact, and adapt disciplinary work to be more responsive to and responsible for public partners, situations, and issues; and
- Increase all stakeholders' capacities to conceive of and perform meaningful collaborative work with diverse people within ambiguous, multifaceted situations.

I work to ground these principles of engagement within community-based courses I teach at the University of Washington (UW). One course is a qualitative research seminar designed to introduce students to research theories and methods, cover various aspects of research, including research design, fieldwork, ethics, and data analysis, facilitate conversations about the strengths and limitations of qualitative research, and provide concrete field experiences.

In a recent version of the course, students were required to work outside the classroom with partner agencies on projects employing

qualitative methods (interview, observation, focus groups, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Classroom-based projects included field notes, a project design and partner profile, an interview paper, a coding experiment, and a final project designed in collaboration with community partners (such as research reports, needs assessments, and white papers). Partners created projects that provided students with opportunities to refine research skills within actual field sites, while students gathered new knowledge driven by partners' research needs.

I partnered with UW's Carlson Center, which facilitates university-community partnerships, to identify organizations. The call for partners stated class needs: 1) Projects must be doable within ten weeks, should speak to a direct organizational need for qualitative research, and should be driven by a clear research question that the partner is seeking to answer. 2) Projects should allow students to gather, analyze, and write up qualitative data. Seven organizations participated, each had a need for qualitative research, and each had great project ideas. Here are two examples:

- A Seattle non-profit that offers services to the homeless wanted to know more about how and why people use and benefit from their services and how these services might be improved. The partner administered surveys to gather such data, but sought a more detailed picture. Students worked with the staff to recruit participants for focus groups and interviews. Students conducted the interviews and distilled the data into a report that summarized the findings.
- A Seattle non-profit that focused on anti-racism and poverty advocacy desired analysis of their public materials to assess whether these materials aligned with their mission, values, and identity. The partner also wanted students to interview willing clients, staff, and others about their thoughts on this alignment. The project emerged in response to concerns that the public materials presented inconsistent or misaligned goals. The research culminated in a report of findings.

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<sup>2</sup> No IRB approval was required as no publication or long-term research occurred.

I wanted students to leave with a more sophisticated sense of qualitative research gleaned from both classroom discussion and the in-trenches-experiences of real fieldwork. I hoped that partners would be left with useful data, research protocols, and reports and, perhaps, a greater capacity for working with students in future partnerships.

As we all know from our own experiences (and from research on service-learning impacts on students), engaged opportunities provide for the effective teaching of disciplinary skills. But they also have the potential to shape graduate students' future dispositions towards thinking about how to become more responsive to public exigencies. In all of our cases, not all our academic work is driven by a commitment to engagement, but our collective inclination towards engagement has become one of the general orientations that influence our work as administrators, teachers, and scholars. Given this, our experience with CCLCP also inspired a career-long goal of facilitating a similar orientation in our graduate students to carry into their faculty careers, as well as instilling an orientation toward engagement and collaborative action in our undergraduate students.

## **BALANCING STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL PERSPECTIVES**

*Caroline Gottschalk Druschke*

In our discussions in CCLCP and our work since, we have grappled with the balance between strategic and tactical approaches to community-based work. de Certeau (1984) delineated between strategies and tactics, where strategies label proper ways of being and acting, defined by those who have power over space and time. Tactics, meanwhile, belong to “the other” and refer to their everyday practices. Strategies are structured, territorialized, and persist over time, while tactics are fleeting, *kairotic*, and impermanent. Tactics make change through tiny ruptures in more ordered ways of being and knowing.

Mathieu (2005) adopted de Certeau's delineation of strategies and tactics to great effect, critiquing strategic (highly structured,



institutionalized, spatialized) vs. tactical (malleable, deterritorialized) public writing programs. Heavily influenced by Mathieu's (2005) critique, I tended to be a constant gadfly in our shared CCLCP curriculum meetings, questioning the highly structured organization of the program. Students were closely monitored and guided through the curriculum, including in the selection of community partnerships; relationships between the university and its community partners were highly formalized; partners were paid for their time; crises were almost always averted or quelled, oftentimes without any visible trace, by the incredible work of CCLCP Associate Director Diane Chin. But I often vocalized concerns about what was lost in this exchange, constantly asking if the program could find ways to be more flexible, timely, and responsive and to position students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Those concerns about flexibility—the ability to seize *kairotic* opportunities—and self-determination nagged us all to varying degrees, and we have carried them with us into our various futures. This is certainly true for me as an Assistant Professor of Community-Based and Interdisciplinary Writing at the University of Rhode Island (URI), where I was hired to teach the course Writing for Community Service and strengthen the department's and university's commitment to community-based pedagogy.

Thanks to my CCLCP training, I reshaped the URI class based on our CCLCP introductory course and my UIC introductory rhetoric course, which asked students to design and enact rhetorically justified public campaigns that would persuade specific audiences to take action on issues they felt passionately about. Like CCLCP's introductory class, the URI course combines classroom-based lessons in rhetoric and writing with preparatory writing projects and 30 hours of community-based work with a non-profit organization. It culminates in a writing project that fills an identified need for each student's community partner. Students learn about rhetoric and social issues, while producing useful public writing for their community partners and supporting the mission of the university. Student projects have included, among other things, press releases for a popular farmers' market, a resident handbook for a community women's shelter,

recruitment fliers for a tutoring program, and a web site for an urban soup kitchen.

In my curricular decisions, I have tried to build flexibility into the course to make room for both strategic and tactical approaches. On the level of strategies, for instance, it is helpful that the course exists as a constant university catalog option and is taught on a consistent, rotating schedule (though that schedule does not always match the ebb and flow of external community needs). I have also benefited greatly from the strategic institutionalization of experiential learning at URI, including the launch of a new school-wide community-based learning initiative and the hiring of a first-ever Experiential Learning Coordinator who helps to identify and cultivate community partnerships. Meanwhile, the deepening of URI's relationship with Campus Compact, including my participation in the 2012/2013 Campus Compact Engaged Scholarship Statewide Presidential Faculty Fellowship Program, has provided a much-needed influx of energy and collegial support.

On the level of tactics, a relative lack of departmental infrastructure has gifted me with the freedom to change course readings and written projects semester to semester, including making changes to the syllabus within any given semester based on the needs of particular students. Crucially, my students seek out and broker relationships with community partners of their own choosing. Whereas, in CCLCP, students were matched by program staff with a small set of predetermined community partners, URI students begin the course by writing either a manifesto or an engagement narrative to focus in on their own experiences and interests and then search broadly to find partnerships that meet their interests and skills (and, in some cases, deepen their existing community-based commitments). That level of self-determination seems to pay off in terms of students' commitment to their work and growth as professionals and citizens. But that flexibility seems to work best when balanced with strategic infrastructure that supports both my and my students' efforts.

The successes I have experienced at URI have often resulted from a fusion of tactical approaches to particular courses, supported by strategic institutional infrastructure. For instance, while Writing for

Community Service benefits from ongoing ties with past community partners, it builds from *kairotic* opportunities like the time when students created lesson plans for a watershed council I conducted research with one semester and when we devoted another entire semester to creating timely projects for the state Department of Environmental Management based on a serendipitous meeting with the Department's Director. From CCLCP, we all learned how to balance strategic and tactical objectives, and we have employed that balanced perspective to facilitate student learning and address community needs across a variety of settings.

## **EMBRACING EXPERIMENTATION, RISK, AND REFLECTION IN COMMUNITY-BASED PEDAGOGY AND RESEARCH**

*Nadya Pittendrigh*

Thanks in part to our CCLCP experience, much of our work inside and outside the classroom has pushed the boundaries of experimenting with the rhetorical impact of community writing and rhetoric. Our work in CCLCP and beyond has focused on the special, recursive, social, and embodied modes of learning that characterize CCLCP. CCLCP not only puts undergraduates into powerful touch with those special modes of learning but exerts ongoing pressure in students' and instructors' research and writing to fracture binaries, embrace complexity, and avoid cheap shots. For a sustained discussion of this point as it relates to a CCLCP in-class writing project, see Gottschalk-Druschke, Pittendrigh, and Chin (2007).

In *Making Writing Matter*, Feldman (2008) suggests that CCLCP's binary-breaking boundary crossing power, offers new types of relationships to be forged between universities, instructors, students, and communities through writing—and in many ways, our own engaged research as graduate students and beyond has embodied that risk-embracing vision. CCLCP inclined us towards engagement, and, for all of us, it shaped the direction of our community-based, ethnographic dissertations, including Megan Bolinder's study of evangelical rhetoric in a Midwestern megachurch (Marie, 2010),

Candice Rai's study of democratic rhetorics in urban redevelopment (Rai, 2008), Caroline Druschke's study of watershed-based agricultural conservation outreach (Druschke, 2011), and my own study of prison activism.<sup>3</sup> My work as a CCLCP graduate instructor prompted the risky step of changing Ph.D. tracks, from a poetry-writing dissertation to a rhetoric dissertation, rooted in my involvement with a community activist group seeking to reform or shut down the Illinois Supermax prison, devoted entirely to solitary confinement. (We succeeded when Tamms closed its doors in January 2013.) I have come to see my own dissertation, which takes stock of the discourse deployed by that activist group, as an extended service-learning research project, employing precisely the embodied approach to conducting research and the collaborative approach to writing and knowledge making taught in CCLCP. Having inhabited these collaborative, community-based research methods, which Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres (2011) describe as "participatory epistemology" (p. 393), in my own dissertation, I have re-imported that first-hand rhetorical expertise right back into the composition and rhetoric courses that I have taught subsequent to CCLCP.

My dissertation research began as a letter-writing campaign to Supermax prisoners, an attempt to offer them some contact with the outside world. But that simple act of producing text for the prisoners turned into a multi-year political activism campaign that eventually helped to bring about the closure of the prison. The letter-writing group around which this campaign was launched began as a small-scale poetry exchange between a dozen prisoners and a few artists and educators outside the prison. But that experiment, which engaged socially isolated prisoners and a wider public with one another in a shared sense of community, inevitably placed me in a variety of risky and *kairotic* situations. There was risk in switching dissertation tracks in order to study the activism to reform or close the prison, without knowing whether that work would be valued, recognized, or compatible with my academic work. Additionally, along with the advocates, including lawyers, artists, educators, former prisoners, and their families, I engaged in stressful, time-consuming, high-stakes collaboration.

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3 Our community-based dissertations received IRB approval at University of Illinois at Chicago.

In some ways, these risks are the same risks that any person in a position to learn something new faces, yet in other ways, my experience captures the special nature of the *kairotic* risk of engaged research. Like any learner, I had to educate myself in subjects in which I had no prior expertise, and I faced uncomfortable choices about where to allocate my limited time and energy, whether on the officially sanctioned academic work required to finish my degree expediently or the activism in which I had become enmeshed. Yet because there were real people involved, I never escaped the risk inherent to prioritizing my academic work over the demands of the activism, or vice versa. If all engaged researchers face similar difficult choices regarding their limited time, perhaps my experience also speaks to an even more important risk inherent in engaged research: because community-based learning requires ethical-rhetorical negotiations with real people, real stakes, performed in real-time, the *kairotic* risks of failure are not “merely academic.” Thus, in some senses, service-learning and community engagement function as powerful pedagogy precisely because they are so all-consuming. Those of us who would support future students and colleagues pursuing such participatory methods should not lose sight of its social and professional risks.

My research uses participatory methods to look at rhetorics of the body, as well as the bodily rhetoric of former Supermax prisoner-activists who attempted to communicate to public audiences the invisible, psychological damage caused by prolonged social isolation. It helps shed light on the concepts of engagement tapped into by CCLCP and explored here, illuminating what was absent in the Supermax: engagement itself. The Tamms prisoners were unable to reach a hand around the bars to touch the hand of another prisoner, or use a mirror to see another prisoner’s face, or, as one inmate put it, “conversate all night” (Westefer v. Snyder, 2010, p. 42). Though Supermax prisoners were able to communicate with each other to some degree by shouting, prisoners testified that such communication was difficult to sustain, because one’s interlocutor had to be standing at the front of his cell to hear a shoutout, and one had to shout for the whole conversation. Despite such limited communications in the Supermax, the judge ruled that Supermax prisoners endure sensory deprivation, and therefore should be entitled to due process before being sent specifically to Tamms. What were Supermax prisoners deprived of that was distinct from other prisons? One answer to that

question is the social thread that connects one day meaningfully to the next: sustained social relations with others.

What I—and all of us—learned through my experiences with CCLCP and my own research, is that engaged learning harnesses the power of embodied experience made to matter through real-world social relations. Engaged learning is a form of qualitative research, and CCLCP certainly treated student engagement with partners as rhetorical research into the communities and practices with which they were asked to participate. The value of such participatory research is that such modes allow access to common, but under-recognized avenues for learning and rhetorical world-making, which Middleton, Senda-Cook, & Endres (2011) call “(un)common,” explaining such engagements are “common in that they happen every day,” but “uncommon in that they are typically undocumented” (p. 389). All of us are engaged in forms of qualitative research, which not only deploy such participatory or embodied modes of research but also attempt to document their subterranean experiential power. And this work flourished from the encouragement and guidance we received as CCLCP graduate instructors to experiment, take risks, and reflect on the results of our actions.

## **A LOOK BACK, IN ORDER TO BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND**

We offer our experiences with engagement—as teachers, scholars, and activists—because they point to a number of concrete lessons for graduate instructors interested in community-based pedagogy, faculty members engaged in service-learning efforts, and administrators thinking about the impacts of engagement on students, faculty, and communities. Likewise, we offer the symbiotic, continuous effects of our last decade as rich experiences-turned-outcomes for any program/institution looking to design a compounding, lasting impact in the lives of its students, instructors, community, and alumni. Finally, we wish to begin a conversation about the too often (un)common and unspoken imperatives of graduate training in civic engagement programs.

While community-based work is demanding, we pursue it for a number of reasons:

- We realize the profound impact civic engagement and service-learning initiatives can have on graduate instructors at a formative time. CCLCP imprinted itself on us, and that imprint is unlikely to fade any time soon.
- We understand the importance of sustained commitment and mutual responsibility: of intimacy over time. A decade later, we see the rich results of our long-term relationships for ourselves, our partners, our students, and our institutions.
- We argue that community-based work is academic, contributing to positive academic outcomes for students and instructors. Meanwhile, done well, it can support vibrant communities and move precious funding and human resources where they are sorely needed.
- We contend that the invention, implementation, assessment, and reflection required to close the loop for engagement initiatives demand substantial time and energy, represent academic and humanitarian best practices, and accomplish key objectives of institutional missions. As such, these efforts should be given more weight than they currently are in considerations of tenure, service, teaching load, and/or compensation. In these negotiations, faculty can point to a CCCC (2009) position statement on “the professional legitimacy of publically engaged literacy work,” and to the guidance provided there for universities to evaluate community-based products and activities based on each project’s degree of reciprocity, reliance on specialized knowledge, long-term sustainability, and contribution to new knowledge.

We recognize that we were likely drawn to CCLCP because of latent interests in community engagement and embodied, everyday rhetorics, but our CCLCP experiences ignited that interest. We are grateful for the opportunities provided us by AnnMerle Feldman and the CCLCP team. We have become more informed, committed, and innovative. The experience gave us a taste of institutional support

and academic success, and we have since worked to recreate and even extend that success in a variety of ways.

We were especially lucky to have been trained in a program that emphasizes the best practices we identify here. But who knows what might have resulted had we begun with the end in mind: a fully articulated and rigorous agenda of study and instruction in enacting a *kairotic*, situated approach; exploring community goals and needs; balancing strategies and tactics; and practicing experimentation, risk, and reflection. Likely, we would have ended up with a beautiful amalgamation of experiences similar to what we have experienced and enacted over the last decade. Nevertheless, we might also have had a more concrete language with which to ground our initial program objectives and launch long-term impact assessment. In an era of performance funding and retention campaigns in higher education, we know that data-driven decisions have become the new normal. We encourage our readers to broaden their scope of civic engagement language and assessment, share the results of their efforts, and not lose sight of instructors (graduate or otherwise) and their labor in discussions of impact.



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