Community Engagement in WRIT Courses:
A Resource for DU Writing Program Faculty

Prepared by

Liz Drogin & Melissa Tedrowe

Objective:

This document is designed to introduce Writing Program faculty to key concepts in community-engaged work and to serve as a practical resource for those wishing to incorporate community-engaged work into WRIT courses.

Table of Contents:

Part I. Overview of Community Engagement & Composition

What is Community Engagement?

Responding to the growth in community-engaged activities on college campuses over the past two decades, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has recently added a community-engagement classification. Carnegie defines community-engagement as "collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity." Many practitioners expand this definition to include socially-minded learning activities that benefit organizations/departments within the home institution.

While learning activities and partnerships vary widely across campuses and disciplines, virtually all agree that key tenets of successful community-engaged work include partnership, reciprocity, reflection, and sustainability. *Partnership* suggests that faculty, students, and community members feel shared ownership of the service activities. This includes collaborative design and goal-setting, as well as ongoing communication throughout the project. *Reciprocity* implies a mutually beneficial exchange. Typically, community partners gain resources, knowledge, volunteers, etc., while college students gain academic and practical skills, as well as deeper understanding of social problems. In community-engaged courses, *reflection* is often considered the key ingredient to student learning, the bridge between service and learning. Reflection exercises ask students to make connections between course material and community-engaged work, and to situate their community engagement within a broader social context. Research (Eyler & Giles, 1999) indicates that the reflection component of service-learning courses has the largest impact on student learning.

Without the reflection component, community-engaged course work might simply become volunteerism. Finally, *sustainability* has become an increasingly important component of community-engaged work. Practitioners prioritize long-term, ongoing partnerships because these tend to exhibit greater reciprocity. Community organizations, in particular, tend to lose out with one-time and/or short-lived collaborations, given start-up costs, such the time required to orient and train volunteers.

Composition and Community Engagement

Composition has developed its own set of pedagogy and practices around community-engaged work, with pro-engagement scholars contending that: (1) composition pedagogy shares key features with community-engaged approaches, (2) composition courses are enhanced by incorporating community-engagement and (3) composition instructors can effectively integrate community-engagement in multiple ways.

<u>Common Elements of Composition and Community Engagement:</u>

Composition and community-engagement prioritize student agency, critical thinking, multiple perspectives, community (and discourse community) awareness, and civic literacy. Both also conceive of writing as a social act. In "Writing across the Curriculum and Community Service-Learning," Thomas Deans (1997) highlights resemblances between WAC, in particular, and what he refers to as CSL (what we refer to as "community engagement"). Deans suggests that both approaches strive to be regarded as "instrumental" rather than "additive" (Thais, 1988), and can be characterized as "modes of learning" (Emig, 1977) rather than "add-on" elements of a course. He also notes that WAC and CSL include a vast array of teaching methods but that both emphasize active, collaborative, and student-centered learning. Most WAC and CSL course also tend to be generative, placing a high priority on student production rather than student consumption (i.e. banking model of learning). Finally, Deans points out that WAC and CSL are cross-disciplinary and, within particular fields, both approaches can precipitate new discipline-specific insights among faculty and students.

<u>Why Community Engagement in Composition?</u>

In contemporary higher education, conversations about the purpose of a liberal arts education have become commonplace, with many administrators and faculty encouraging a renewed focus on character development and democratic citizenship. Like Social Reconstructions before them, these educators assert that effective citizens need "opportunities to analyze and understand the interplay of social, economic, and political forces and to take part in projects through which they might develop skills and commitments for working collectively" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 239). Within composition, scholars who support community engagement emphasize the role of language, of critical reading and of writing, in performing civic duties and promoting democracy. These scholars argue that composition courses should train students to use rhetorical analysis to more deeply understand social issues/inequalities and to use written communication to advance social change, thereby creating a more truly democratic society. As Elizabeth Ervin (1997, p. 384) writes, "involvement doesn't just happen; it requires models of such behavior and structured opportunities for participating in it." Composition instructors can serve as these models by sharing their own critical interpretation of social issues and by providing students with meaningful ways to participate in public dialogue.

Apart from more global concerns about the social mission of higher education and composition's role in achieving that mission, faculty who incorporate community-engagement into composition classes contend that this approach to teaching writing can enhance student learning and, at times, can accomplish course objectives more effectively than traditional approaches. For instance, although composition courses typically teach students to consider purpose and audience when embarking on writing projects, Nora Bacon asserts that the classroom can easily be perceived as a "contrived and atypical rhetorical environment" in which students write for the professor with the sole purpose of earning a grade (Bacon, 1997, p.42). Bacon (1997) contends that by giving students a "real audience and purpose," community-engaged approaches heighten and complicate students' understandings of rhetorical situations. Students are, in fact, often writing for multiple audiences simultaneously. Moreover, with an external audience or audiences, students begin to think of themselves as "writers" rather than "students," and they often become "highly motivated and thoroughly engaged" (Bacon, 1997, p.41).

Finally, as mentioned above, community-engaged pedagogies prioritize reflection as a central part of the learning process. As a result, practitioners have developed structured reflection models that, when incorporated into composition courses, have the capacity to not only deepen students' understanding of social issues, but also to enhance retention and transfer for critical reading and writing skills.

Incorporating Community Engagement in Composition Courses

The University of Minnesota Community Service-Learning Center divides community engagement activities into four general approaches -- direct service, indirect service, research and advocacy. *Direct service* typically involves person-to-person contact and asks students to interact with and serve community partners in a variety of ways. *Indirect service* targets a community need but does not require face-to-face contact between students and community partners. This kind of service includes analyzing and producing materials, organizing events, fundraising, etc. *Research* engagement asks students to collaborate with the community and/or a community partner to collect and analyze information that serves the public good. Finally, *advocacy* work asks students to advance the public interest by giving voice to a particular community, set of concerns, etc. Advocacy often involves heightening awareness of social concerns through information campaigns, petitions, and lobbying efforts.

Composition courses can successfully incorporate any of these four approaches to engagement. Instructors typically select an approach or set of approaches based on course goals, as well as the needs and interests of the community partner. Tom Deans (2000) provides a typology of community-engaged writing that links these various approaches (*direct, indirect, research,* and *advocacy*) with particular kinds of writing activities. In particular, Deans describes three types of community writing projects – projects that write *about* the community, *for* the community and *with* the community. In the first of these, writing *about* the community, students use service experiences (*direct* or *indirect*) to inform their classroom writing. Writing projects typically center on traditional academic literacies, as students reflect on their experiences in critical essays and research papers. The professor is typically the central audience when students write *about* the community. Alternatively, when students write *for* the community, they focus on developing "workplace literacies" and they typically direct their writing towards their community partner. In such courses, students typically conduct *research* and/or provide *indirect service* for their partner by producing brochures, grant proposals, internal memos, or other documents that meet their community

partner's needs. Finally, when students write *with* the community, writing projects assume a more collaborative and grassroots orientation. With a focus on *advocacy* work, courses of this type might pair student with local leaders or activists to draft policy proposals, editorials, or campaign materials.

Part II: Getting Engaged

Partnerships

The literature on service learning talks often and loudly about partnerships because without them, well, service learning wouldn't happen! As you move ever more deeply into this work, you'll hear a lot about the importance of both choosing and being a good partner, as well as about these four "best practices" in community engagement:

RECIPROCITY – In outdated models of service learning, the university was construed as an older and wiser sibling who could bestow great benefit on the community. Current thinking emphasizes the *partnership* between university and community; both bring valuable skills and knowledge to the table; both have something to contribute and to gain. This means that university partners need to ask thoughtful, genuine questions and listen as much as if not more than they talk. What does your partner need from you? What don't they need? How can you and your students help rather than interfere?

RESPECT – When it comes to service learning, respect has to do with learning as much as you can about your community partner, their mission, the people or causes they serve – and then sharing that information with your students. Such sharing might take the form of meetings with the community partner, studying their literature, cultural sensitivity training, class readings, and more. At the same time, you want to be as open as you can with your community partner about who YOU are -- your class goals, pedagogical approach, students, and overall culture of your institution. Which brings us to our third best practice . . .

COMMUNICATION – From learning about each other's norms and expectations to scheduling logistics, nothing is more important to a successful community partnership than clear and regular communication. Opening up a conversation about how you and your partner will stay connected (i.e., how often, through what channels, estimated response time) at the start can pave the way to a more successful working relationship.

SUSTAINABILITY – Frequently (and understandably) faculty members are concerned about making it through the quarter. But chances are high that your community partner doesn't fold up shop once your WRIT grades are submitted. Best practices in service learning include not abandoning your partner just because you've gotten what you need from them – a rich service learning experience for your students. Talk openly with your community partner about what will happen once your class is complete. Perhaps you want to design a time-limited service project, or construct plans to insure that the needs your class has come to fill will continue to be met.

As in any relationship, there's always more to learn about how to do it well; we encourage you to keep reading and exploring and talking to other community-engaged practitioners about how to be a good partner. Here again, we want to underscore the value of attending CCESL's introduction to service-learning: over the two days, you'll hear several faculty-community partner teams talk about their relationship, what worked, what didn't, and why.

Last but not least, we want to address the question of **finding a community partner**, because this is often a concern for faculty new to service learning. Again, CCESL is a terrific resource for this: take a look at The Science Shop on their website for suggestions, and/or set up an appointment to chat with one of their staff members. They know the Denver area and its service needs well and can help you make a good match. Remember, too, to consider partnering with organizations you already know about and care about – your child's school, a church you attend, a local theater you frequent, a nonprofit you support. Or let your passions be your guide: what issues energize you? What corner of the world would you like to help improve or get to know better?

Finding a partner might seem daunting at first, but keep in mind that plenty of people and organizations around DU are eager to collaborate with you and your students. So be proactive in your search, and don't forget to be a good partner, remember the practices above.

Challenges

It's easy to fall in love with the idea of service learning. We picture ourselves engaging students in wonderfully authentic learning situations, building meaningful relationships with people beyond our insular writing classrooms, and becoming better teachers through rich, reciprocal community relationships. Who wouldn't want to try this approach?

Yet at the same time, service learning can be intimidating. We've been there. So much more to juggle – more people, more planning, more logistics, more at stake. Teaching is unpredictable to begin with; incorporate a service learning approach and even less is in your control. So yes, the challenges associated with service learning are real – we list some of the most common ones below -- but what we want you to know is that every single one of these challenges is surmountable. You can do this, and we think you should try!   If the "risks" associated with service learning are real, the payoffs are too.

FEAR – Can I really do this? What if things go wrong? I've got my hands full teaching a "normal" class. Why bring in additional variables? What if my students and I "fail" in front of our community partner?

CONTROl – Plenty of us believe in the decentered classroom, but service learning decenters beyond what we're used to. To varying extents, community partners and students can become like team-teachers in your class. What do you think about collaborative teaching? Are you willing to give up total control over your class (or at least the illusion of it)?

LOGISTICS – Someone misses their ride to the soccer field.   One of your students tells you the fourth grader he's supposed to tutor never shows. You're got 15 students and six have scheduling conflicts. One doesn't want to participate. What do you do with such wrinkles in the plan?

COMMUNICATION – Probably the most important communicative channel is the one between you and your community partner. How do you keep it clear? What if your community partner doesn't respond to time-sensitive emails? Or only reads part of your messages? Or leaves her position?

ASSESSMENT – You know how to grade persuasive essays, research reports, etc., but how will you assess your students' participation in the service learning aspects of your class? Who else will be involved in the assessment – your community partner? Other students?

ALIGNMENT - How will you be sure that there's a strong connection between service learning activities and your course learning goals?

SUSTAINABILITY - Your service learning course went well but you're not teaching it for another year . . . or ever again . . . and your community partner has come to depend on you. How do you keep a partnership going even when you're not around?

Again, we list these challenges here not to scare you off from trying service learning, but to say "we've been there," and you can do it! At DU and beyond you'll find a wealth of resources to help you succeed with your service learning course. We highlight some of our favorites in the section that follows.

Our Top Ten Favorite Resources

. . . for Writing Program faculty interested in service learning. We welcome your own suggestions and finds!

(1) DU's very own **Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning**. CCESL is generous, encouraging, knowledgeable, and the website (http://www.du.edu/ccesl/) is a gold mine. Visit it often and attend CCESL events whenever you can. You'll meet some of the best people on campus.

(2) **Writing Program faculty** experienced with service learning. They know our courses, they know this campus, and they're (almost always) willing to chat over a cuppa joe at Kaladi or a beer at Spanky's.

(3) **Annotated bibliography compiled by the Program of Writing and Rhetoric at CU Boulder**, our friends to the north (http://servicelearning.pwrfaculty.org/node/6). Includes some of the classics as well as more recent literature. A good place to start if you want to familiarize yourself with the SL literature.

(4)   **Rebecca Moore Howard's source list** (http://www.rebeccamoorehoward.com/bibliographies/civic-engagement-community-engagement-democratic-education-service-learning) If you've read through CU-Boulder's annotated bib and want more, check out this bibliography. It's not annotated but it's incredibly comprehensive. We recommend skimming the titles for a cursory overview of the SL literature, then return to the list when you're ready to write your first SL article. This is a great place to get a jump start on the relevant literature.

(5) **Community Literacy Journal** (http://www.communityliteracy.org/index.php/clj). One of the top two publications for those of us interested in writing and literacy (see #6 for the other publication). We like that they showcase not just scholarly research, but work by community literacy program staff and community members. Again, a great place to familiarize yourself with the cutting-edge work in comp and SL, and a possible publishing venue.

(6) **Reflections: A Journal of Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning**
http://reflectionsjournal.net/ Published twice a year, this is a peer-reviewed journal interested in "how writing projects which bring community, faculty, and students into dialogue alter the traditional pedagogy and research practices of Composition/Rhetoric." They publish both the academic research that emerges from community or service-learning projects and non-academic research produced by project participants—the poetry, essays, photographs, and memoirs which often emerge from such work.

(7) **The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning** (http://ginsberg.umich.edu/mjcsl/) More interdisciplinary than CLJ or Reflections, this is a national, peer-reviewed journal out of the University of Michigan. We've gotten terrific ideas for courses and partnerships through reading MJCSL, and we find its interdisciplinary emphasis useful in thinking about WRIT 1133 in particular.

(8) **Campus Compact** (http://www.compact.org). Something to check out if you want to learn about service learning at the national level. This is a coalition of more than 1,100 college and university presidents—representing some 6 million students—who are committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education. CC claims to be the only national higher education association dedicated solely to campus-based civic engagement. Their work involves encouraging public and community service that develops students' citizenship skills, helping campuses forge effective community partnerships, and providing resources and training for faculty seeking to integrate civic and community-based learning into their curriculum.

(9) **Niches within professional organizations.** Within CCC, NCTE, WPA, IWCA, RSA, and other organizations affiliated with composition studies you can find subsets of people interested in service learning. From panels at the large national conferences to working groups and special journal issues, you're likely find an active culture of service learning in your favorite professional organizations.

(9) **Gold nuggets gleaned from SL-comp syllabi scattered all over the web.** An obvious suggestion, perhaps, but we're surprised at how often this resource is overlooked. Many of us have found terrific syllabi to steal (er, emulate!) all the time, and have even struck up productive exchanges with other comp faculty across the miles, based on our mutual interest in SL.

(10) **Your own experiences.** We can't say enough about the value of drawing on your own experiences, expertise, and passions when it comes to designing a service learning class. Enthusiasm is contagious everywhere in teaching, but no place more so than the service learning environment. What do you love? What corner of the world to you want to share and explore with your students? What social issues do you already engage with? What community contacts do you already have? Think on these when setting out.

Top 5 Recommended Reads

In addition to the two bibliographies listed above, we've compiled a handful of our favorite sources here. If we've missed something essential, let us know.

(1) <u>Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition</u> by Thomas Deans. Urbana, IL : National Council of Teachers of English, 2000.

A comprehensive overview of service-learning in composition studies. Useful for high school and college educators seeking to combine writing instruction with community action. Offers college-level case studies to illustrate how service-learning relates not only to first-year, upper-division, and technical writing courses, but also to critical pedagogy, writing across the curriculum, ethics, and literacy. Appendices include a sample syllabus, student writings, and a list of resources for service-learning teachers and administrators, along with short descriptions of over 60 writing-centered service-learning courses and programs.

(2) <u>Writing the Community: Concepts and Models for Service Learning in Composition</u> edited by Linda Adler-Kassner, Robert Crooks, and Ann Watters. Washington, DC: NCTE's Service Learning in the Disciplines Series. 1997.

An edited collection that presents service-learning and composition /communication as a natural pairing. For the newcomer, this anthology provides a brief history of the relationship between service learning and communication; describes the micro-revolution in college composition through service learning; and points to future directions for community engagement in composition.

(3) <u>Writing Toward Democracy: Service-Learning and Composition</u> by Glenn Curtis Hutchinson, Jr. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro: UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2002.

Ideally, service learning helps students learn to write through active inquiry, collaboration with different discourse communities, and consideration of their roles as citizens. The author calls for a "discourse of democracy" in which students write about and act upon problems that matter to them.

(4) "Composition Studies and Service Learning: Appealing to Communities?" by Kevin Ball and Amy Goodburn. <u>Composition Studies</u> 28: 1, Spring 2000. 9-94.

The authors observe that while composition's literature on service learning talks a lot about reciprocity with the community and community empowerment, those ideals often are unmet. Discussions of student learning and faculty benefit tend to overshadow considerations of community partners – what do they think of the "partnership"? Is it a true partnership and are community partners really benefiting? The authors call for problem-solving dialogues and other strategies that include community partners more fully.

(5) "Sustainable Service Learning Programs" by Ellen Cushman. <u>CCC</u>. 54.1 (2002): 40-65.

Through an analysis of recent publications on service learning and data gathered during an outreach initiative at University of California, Berkeley, the author identifies obstacles that hinder the sustainability of community literacy programs. In particular, she finds that faculty in service learning courses would do well to view the community as a site where their research, teaching, and service contribute to a community's self-defined needs and students' learning.

Part III: Faculty Insights

Liz Drogin

Liz included direct service and community-based research into her WRIT 1133 courses. Liz partners with America SCORES Denver, an organization that provides afterschool programming (literacy, soccer and community action) to low-income youth. Liz's students volunteer weekly as assistant tutors and coaches and also conduct research on behalf of the SCORES organization.

(1) What are the advantages of incorporating service-learning into your writing courses? How, if at all, have SL approaches enhanced your ability to meet course objectives?

I have incorporated both direct-service (weekly volunteering at a community site) and community-based research (research conducted on behalf of a community partner) into my WRIT 1133 courses and I've had almost wholly positive experiences. I think one of the most compelling aspects of using SL approaches in 1133 is that it allows one to provide students with "real" research experiences. Students conduct investigations, whether through interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc. that have actual implications for community partners. The way I've structured my classes, students collaborate with our community partner to develop research strategies, then they independently collect and analyze the data, and report results. Students experience every component of the research process and, because they are assisting an organization that they have typically come to respect, they become heavily invested in their work. Moreover, students feel there is something at stake in the research process. In some iterations of the course, students have presented their research to the Executive Director of our community profit. In all iterations, students know that the most compelling projects will be passed along to our partner; there is an authentic audience for their research outside of the classroom.

In addition, I find that students' heightened investment in their research projects often extends to other areas of the course. Many students seem more engaged in class discussions because they can connect course ideas to their own experiences, to concerns that matter to them. Students also often seem more at ease in the classroom as a result of their experiential learning. Students have the opportunity to observe and interact with me and with peers outside of the classroom setting and I believe this tends to strengthen our class rapport, often resulting in a more dynamic learning environment in the classroom.

(2) What kinds of activities and assignments have you found to be most successful?

I prefer using a combination of direct-service and community-based research. The direct service gives students exposure to a community partner and enables them to develop, first-hand, an understanding of an organization's mission, programs, challenges, etc. The community-based research allows them to make use of and apply the knowledge and skills they are developing in WRIT 1133.

I have asked students to conduct both interviews and surveys with various populations, including afterschool program participants, parents, and coaches/teachers. The logistics of collaborative data collection with 45 students have often proved to be challenging, but it has been exciting to end up with sufficient information for both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The bumps along the way (mostly missing data from less diligent students) have also provided a learning opportunity for students, as we've then discussed the importance of consistent methods in generating reliable results, etc. I have also asked students to produce materials (newsletter articles, blog posts) for our community partner, but I have found these sorts of assignments to be less successful because they have required more guidance/time commitment from our partner and because our partner has not needed the sheer quantity of materials that forty-five students can produce.

(3) What advice would you give to faculty who are just getting started with SL approaches?

It is crucial to find a community partner that will collaborate and communicate throughout the process of course design and implementation so that you can be sure the relationship is mutually beneficial. If possible, I suggest forming a relationship with an organization, perhaps through volunteering, in advance of developing a community-engaged course with that organization. It is helpful to have a mutual understanding of each other's goals and interests from the outset (and, insider-knowledge of an organization can be very useful!). Knowing this is not always feasible, I think key qualities to look for in a community partner include flexibility, responsiveness, and open communication.

I would also recommend taking advantage of CCESL's many resources, including the Service-Learning Scholars workshop and ongoing professional development and networking opportunities. CCESL's knowledgeable and friendly staff is happy to offer guidance and support at any stage of the process. CCESL's website also contains links to useful resources (old syllabi, assignments, etc.). And, don't forget CCESL's many sources of funding for community-engaged projects (faculty pods, mini-grants, etc.)

(4) What are primary challenges you have experienced and how would you advise faculty to address these challenges?

The challenges that I have experienced have typically been idiosyncratic rather than structural. In a few instances I've had students fail to meet their commitments to the community partner. In one instance, the community partner and I have deemed a student to be unsuited for the volunteer work. In other instances, I've had students feel under-utilized and/or ignored by the head teacher/coach. My response to each situation has varied depending on the individual circumstances so I'm not sure I can offer any general advice about how to prepare for these sorts of challenges. I can say with certainty that these sorts of challenges almost always arise; when incorporating service-learning approaches there are simply going to be unanticipated obstacles and factors (often personalities) that are out of your control. It is important to communicate expectations clearly at the outset and to maintain ongoing communication (regular check-ins) with all parties involved.

Eric Leake

Eric taught a 1733 course in partnership with the African Community Center. His students volunteered regularly at the ACC in various capacities and also produced materials for the ACC, including a handbook for employers of refugees and an instructional video about the interview process designed for refugees seeking employment.

(1) What were the advantages of incorporating service-learning into your writing courses? How, if at all, did SL approaches enhance your ability to meet course objectives?

Service-learning gave the course additional purpose. The writing and reading that we were doing, the conversations we were having in class, and the projects that we were managing had a fairly clear purpose beyond the classroom. That was nice. Even the challenges that resulted in seemed like real challenges with applicable strategies for addressing them.

The service-learning course also altered my position in the classroom, in mostly good ways. I had to be more inventive in helping to design and teach projects that fulfilled a need with the partner organization while also meeting course objectives. I think this resulted in better assignments. I took on roles more of a coach and liaison in helping students work through their projects and with our service-learning partner and the community. I liked this positioning. I had to give up some authority because I was not in as much control, but I think that all worked well. This was more difficult at times, however, because it required me to be more responsive and adaptable. Grading and assessment were a bit harder, too, as everything became more negotiated and the result of class and team efforts.

(2) What kinds of activities and assignments did you find to be most successful?

I thought that working in teams was useful in not overloading the partner organization and in providing better quality work. We spent a decent amount of class time talking about service-learning experiences, reflecting on those, and sharing resources and ideas. This was time well spent.

(3) What advice would you give to faculty who are just getting started with SL approaches?

Finding a good partner organization is important. I think it will work much better if that partner organization also aligns with your interests. Planning ahead is critical, but at some point I think you have to just jump in with it.

(4) What are the primary challenges you experienced and how would you advise faculty to address these challenges*?*

As I mentioned above, I think that grading was a challenge for me. The class became such a group effort, it was hard to put a score with who contributed more or better in some cases. Evaluation seems much more disconnected from the service part. If I were to do it over again, I would more clearly define evaluation mechanisms, maybe through more robust reflection assignments and portfolios and to describe how these fulfill important functions, too.

Megan Kelly

Megan has incorporated SL approaches in her FSEM, WRIT 1122 and WRIT 1133 courses. She has partnered with DU's Center for Sustainability and Students for Sustainable Food.

(1) What are the advantages of incorporating service-learning into your writing courses? How, if at all, have SL approaches enhanced your ability to meet course objectives?

Incorporating service learning can lead to a greater understanding of audience, while also raising the stakes of assignments. I have used similar assignments in SL and non-SL courses and have found that students often perform better when writing for a real audience rather than a hypothetical public audience. With a real audience, students feel accountable to someone else and that their writing has the potential to make a difference.

Last year I worked closely with DU's Center for Sustainability to develop a writing assignment that would provide useful information for the Center as it grows its resources. The Coordinator of the Center asked for a sustainability handbook and this led to valuable lessons about genre in the WRIT classroom. In class we asked the following types of questions: Why would The Center want a handbook? What do handbooks from other universities look like? What types of information gets included? We also talked about the use of sources and what the community partner would find reliable and persuasive data.

(2) What kinds of activities and assignments have you found to be most successful?

I've had the most success with assignments that progress sequentially. In my FSEM I use a series of assignments including a waste audit, a visual display of the data collected in the audit, and a proposal for change that extends the argument from the data visualization. This proposal is then presented to the community partner. The success of these assignments seems, in part, due to their integrated nature. Students are able to get a full picture of the research process.

Alternatively, in my WRIT 1122 course when students created a handbook for the Center for Sustainability, I found this assignment less successful because it didn't align with class conversations about genres of activism, specifically. It was difficult to make the handbook into a text that would promote change on campus. Also, each group working on the handbooks took an individualized approach, and so all of the final products looked wildly different. While I was satisfied with all of the work, this unfortunately did limit the usefulness of the handbooks for the community partner; a uniform look would have been preferred to conform with the image and brand of the Center.

(3) What advice would you give to faculty who are just getting started with SL approaches?

Don't be afraid of working with a community partner. To start, try to find a community partner that aligns with your own teaching interests. And, even if the final products aren't what you anticipated, there is a lot to be gained, for you and your students, from the process of collaboration. Service learning allows for building community and making connections on campus and beyond. For example, several of my students have continued working with our partner organization.

Also, based on my experience, I would strongly encourage people to consider looking for a partner on campus. These partnerships can work very well because there are often fewer logistical and communication challenges, and these partners will also understand the constraints of the ten-week quarter.

(4) What are primary challenges you have experienced and how would you advise faculty to address these challenges?

A main challenge can be a disconnect and/or lack of regular communication between the community partner and students. Often, community partners become involved at the outset of the course (such as in the design of projects) and at the conclusion of a course (during the assessment phase). In my opinion, it would be ideal to have the community partner present throughout the quarter. If I had planned more in-class meetings with the Coordinator of the Center for Sustainability, it might have helped illuminate challenges earlier and would have enabled us to deliver a more useful (in this case, a more uniform) final project. This type of collaboration can be difficult, though, because there are major scheduling challenges, even with an on-campus partner. In the future, I plan to address the importance of connection time with students and set clear goals around participation during the preliminary meetings with my partner.

Heather Martin

Heather incorporated a service learning approach in her section of WRIT 1633, which focused on engaged pedagogies and progressive education. Her students served as writing mentors to 5th graders at a local elementary school – the one her daughters attend!

(1) What are the advantages of incorporating service-learning into your writing courses? How, if at all, have SL approaches enhanced your ability to meet course objectives?

One of the main advantages is that service learning helps students understand first-hand, in an authentic way, what "rhetorical situation" means. My 1633 students had a real audience (beyond me, their teacher) that mattered to them; they recognized that their writing could and did have implications beyond the classroom, beyond school. I think in WRIT courses, we can talk about audience and provide hypothetical examples, but students don't really understand it deeply until they experience it – that is, until they write for someone other than the teacher. I guess what I'm trying to say is that being in a service learning situation makes audience and writing in general *live* for students in a way that it doesn't otherwise.

Another advantage of service learning has to do with research. Depending on who you're partnering with, the service learning site itself can become a site for real, primary research. It's a little like what I said about audience: we can assign students to conduct interviews, say, somewhere on campus, but when they're "in the field" the method takes on a different meaning for them.

(2) What are primary challenges you have experienced and how would you advise faculty to address these?

Related to writing courses in particular, I think it's sometimes hard to link coursework to service work. I had this experience: my students' service was over here, their writing was over there – it felt like they were floating separately. To address that, I'd recommend drawing on the community partner to find out what kinds of writing and research they need, and then really have the assignments be community based. That's what I plan to do next time.

A small, logistical challenge that I faced was this: because I scheduled our work at the elementary school during class one day each week, you could say that we "lost" one day of a certain kind of class time. Now, it's not necessary to schedule work with the community partner during class, but logistically it really simplifies things! But to faculty new to service learning, I'd warn that there's also a cost: I had less time with the students, just us. One way of addressing this, of course, would be to communicate with students more over Blackboard and other digital channels.

(3) What kinds of activities and assignments have you found to be most successful?

Reflection is the easiest example. Informal reflective assignments help me understand what students are getting out of their service and the relationship they see between the coursework and the service.

I'd also recommend designing assignments that link service work directly to the reading, writing, and research in the class. In my 1633 service class, I added service to an existing set of course materials and assignments. For this reason, students sometimes felt that the assignments were separate from the service, and they could make the connections between them that I had hoped they would. Next time, I will link the assignments more carefully to the service work. I will employ indirect service (doing writing *for* the elementary school, for example) as well as direct service with the students.

(4) What advice would you give to faculty who are just getting started with SL approaches?

If at all possible, faculty should work alongside their students – they should do the service too. At the very least, they should be on site whenever possible. Also, use the opportunity working with a community partner to collect data. Can you do interviews? Collect surveys? Gather observational data? Etc. Also, be sure that the community partner understands what research you're doing and that it's valuable to them as well.

Last, I'd say choose a partner you connect with. My choice of partner came from a selfish place: I worked with my daughters' elementary school, and so a lot was at stake! Fortunately, the partnership turned out to be a beneficial all the way around. My students learned and grew, the students they tutored learned and grew, and my relationship with the school was strengthened. So again, I'd say follow your own interests -- go for something you're passionate about. It makes all the difference.

.

Melissa Tedrowe

Melissa's three sections of WRIT 1133 partnered with the DU Center for Sustainability to help create a "campus snapshot," the goal of which was to assess how "green" our campus really is. Students sorted and weighed trash, interviewed their peers about their water usage habits, and tracked food pathways to DU dining halls.

(1) What are the advantages of incorporating service-learning into your writing courses? How, if at all, have SL approaches enhanced your ability to meet course objectives*?*

The main advantage is that service learning opens up the closed feedback loop that traditional schooling deeply ingrains in us. We all know the usual circulatory path of a piece of writing: students > instructor, instructor > students, and maybe somewhere in there students > students. With service learning, students experience what it means to be accountable to other audiences; they know that their writing matters beyond school, and it think they take it more seriously.

Advantages for the faculty member: at its best, service learning is a kind of team teaching. Breath of fresh air, expands my ideas about what I'm doing in the classroom, also gives my work a heightened sense of relevance. Definitely enhances my ability to meet course objectives by giving my students real-world rhetorical situations to respond to.

(2) What are primary challenges you have experienced and how would you advise faculty to address these?

Loss of control. More relationships to manage. More logistics. My advice here would be: don't expect it to be otherwise and don't assume that chaos it's a bad thing. Some of the best, most memorable lessons come out of the chaos that is SL. And besides, you never had control in the first place.

(3) What kinds of activities and assignments have you found to be most successful?

My first time out I did not have my students engage in much reflection, and that was a mistake – a missed opportunity. They (and I) were preoccupied with meeting our deadlines for the partner, and I didn't make time for them to metabolize the experience. More of that. I'd say, too, that collaborative writing was something I did and that it had the same pros and cons you'd expect from any collaborative work situation. Some people pulled their weight more than others, some people have skills in one area and leaned into those but maybe didn't develop others. I'm not sure this is a service learning issue so much as a collaborative writing issue, but the way my course was designed these two went hand in hand.

(4) What advice would you give to faculty who are just getting started with SL approaches?

Take advantage of the amazing DU resource that is the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning. They are your friends! Also, don't be afraid to start local – with a campus partner rather than someone beyond DU, or with just one SL assignment rather than an entire SL focused course. Dipping your toe in the water at first may give you courage to take that full swim in future quarters.

John Tiedemann

John has taught various *22 and *33 sections in which students have worked with organizations such as The Saint Francis Center, El Centro Humanitario, RedLine, Denver Urban Ministries, and PlatteForum. His students have produced newsletters, profiles, web copy, and instructional materials for these groups and created video documentaries about them.

(1) What are the advantages of incorporating service-learning into your writing courses? How, if at all, have SL approaches enhanced your ability to meet course objectives?

My SL assignments always involve writing for community partners -- newsletter stories, Wikipedia entries, informational materials for partners' clients, etc. So there's a real exigence there, and a real audience. Students write in an authentically public environment.

(2) What are primary challenges you have experienced and how would you advise faculty to address these?

Make sure that your partner isn't left in the lurch if your students don't do a top notch job (or, worse, simply fail to turn in their work). It's best to create projects that supplement the partner's work, rather that projects they're actually depending on. Also, build some redundancy into the system. E.g., if the partner would like some flyers created, put different individuals/groups on the task. That way, the partner has some choice about which to use, even if one student or group drops the ball.

(3) What kinds of activities and assignments have you found to be most successful?

Regardless of the service the students perform, ask them also to reflect on it in writing. And give them a conceptual framework within which to reflect, one that connects deed and word, their service work and their understanding of writing.

(4) What advice would you give to faculty who are just getting started with SL approaches?

Partner with a group with whom you, personally, already have a relationship, one that's independent of the class. The deeper your personal relationship with the partner, the better you'll be able to work through the inevitable bumps in the road. Also, recognize that, because your partner is doing you and your students a big favor by inviting you to take part in their work, be sure that your work actually benefits them. True, community orgs need volunteer labor. But it's a lot of work or them to bring students into the mix, so make sure it's worth their time. And make sure your students understand that the partner is doing them a favor, not the other way around. Finally, invite someone from your partner org to visit your class, before you go on site. It makes the experience more real for your students, and puts a face to the org, one to whom students can feel responsible.

References:

Ash, S.L, Clayton, P.H. & Moses, M.G. (2008). *Learning through critical reflection: A student tutorial.* Center for Excellence in Curricular Engagement: NC State University.

Bacon, N. (1997). Community service writing: Problems, challenges, questions. In L.Adler-Kassner, R.Crooks, & A. Watters (Eds.), *Writing the community: Concepts and models for service-learning in composition* (pp. 39-55). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (n.d.). *Classification description: Community engagement elective classification.* Retrieved from http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/community_engagement.php

Community Service-Learning Center, University of Minnesota. (n.d.). *Community engagement scholars program: Direct, indirect, research, and advocacy engagement.* Retrieved from http://www.servicelearning.umn.edu/cesp/programdetails/engagement_types.html

Deans, T. (2000). *Writing partnerships: Service-learning in composition.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers.

Deans, T. (1997). Writing across the curriculum and community service learning: Correspondences, cautions, and futures. In L.Adler-Kassner, R.Crooks, & A. Watters (Eds.), *Writing the community: Concepts and models for service-learning in composition* (pp. 29-37). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

Ervin, E. (1997). Encouraging civic participation among first-year writing students: or, why composition class should be more like a bowling team." *Rhetoric Review*, *15*(2), 382-399.

Eyler, J & Giles, D. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal, 41*(2), 237-269