

Community Engagement in Writing Program Design and Administration

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ABSTRACT

The article theorizes ways in which writing program administrators can create and administer engaged writing programs, design innovative and sustainable writing curricula around community needs, train faculty in community-engaged pedagogies, and create substantive community partnerships. Employing engaged program design theory, the author offers the Writing Initiative for Service and Engagement at the University of Colorado Boulder as a model for how writing programs can support the work of local communities through sustainable, civically-engaged vertical writing curricula.

What does it mean to create, institutionalize, and administer a community-engaged writing program, and why is it a desirable model for WPAs? For several decades, service learning and other kinds of community-engaged pedagogies have offered an increasingly valued approach to teaching composition. The connection to critical pedagogy, experiential and active learning, and public rhetorics has provided theoretical underpinnings to this form of pedagogy that enhances students' academic learning through their educationally meaningful community-based experiences.

Scholarship on community-engaged curricular and program design hinges on four premises. The first premise is that these curricula and programs comprise an ethical vision for higher education, whose primary purpose, many scholars argue, is to teach students to be critical and active citizens. The second argues that writing is a situated form of social action. The third invokes enhanced learning outcomes associated with community-engaged pedagogies. The fourth argues that these pedagogies are fiscally smart investments for the university.

Guided by these arguments, and particularly by the evidence that community-engaged learning encourages deeper engagement with course material; better acquisition of rhetorical and writing strategies; a clearer conception of audience and exigency; and improved critical thinking skills, the Program for Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) at the University of Colorado Boulder decided to integrate community-engaged pedagogies throughout its lower- and upper-division writing curriculum. In 2008, the PWR launched the Writing Initiative for Service and Engagement (WISE) and became what Campus Compact calls an *engaged department* for our substantive programmatic commitment to community engagement. We have constructed a vertical community-engaged curriculum that touches several levels of writing classes (first-year composition, technical communication, science writing, business writing, and topics in writing courses such as travel writing, environmental writing, and grant writing) as well as several thematic areas of study (first-year experience, community literacies, digital and multimodal composition, ecopedagogy and sustainability, visual rhetorics, and public rhetorics). Currently, 30 percent of our writing faculty teach WISE courses each year to about 1,200 students, who spend over 15,000 hours on community-based writing and research projects. As I theorize what it means to undertake such widespread change for a writing program, I hope that WISE will prove a useful model to other WPAs considering such a curricular shift.

Like many universities around the country, the University of Colorado Boulder (CU) has added engaged learning to its mission. In 2008, CU's chancellor launched his Flagship 2030 Plan, which articulated his vision for what the university should strive for over the next twenty years. Civic engagement and experiential learning were at its heart. As Charlton and Charlton note, however, "the various mission statements we craft at every institutional level, regardless of how well they dovetail, are only representations, not enactments, of desire" (70). This has proven true with the chancellor's Flagship 2030 Plan. It is the responsibility of individual programs and departments to manifest community-engaged work, and many have been resistant for a variety of reasons, usually related to promotion and tenure requirements or misconceptions about its intellectual rigor. As several scholars studying institutional change have noted, the department is the "key unit for institutional transformation. The department [is] the unit that control[s] the curriculum and that set[s] the standards for defining the roles and rewards for its faculty" (Battistoni et al. 4). At the time Flagship 2030 was issued, five instructors in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric taught service-learning courses. A few more faculty had expressed interest, but there was no coherent programmatic discussion about what we were doing

and why. However, Flagship 2030 created an important *kairotic* moment for the PWR to make a powerful shift in our curriculum—to integrate community engagement throughout.

The Program for Writing and Rhetoric is a freestanding unit in the College of Arts and Sciences and is responsible for campus-wide instruction in academic and professional writing. We have upwards of eighty faculty and graduate students teaching our courses. Four are tenure-track faculty (whose tenure lines are housed in English or Communication and who function as our program director and associate directors); over forty are full-time instructors or senior instructors (who are on indefinitely renewable three-year contracts, some of whom are program coordinators or associate directors); and over thirty are adjuncts and graduate students. We offer roughly 450 sections of lower- and upper-division writing to more than 8,000 undergraduates each year. Because we currently teach almost every undergraduate student twice (as first years and again as juniors or seniors), we are in a unique position to impact undergraduate education on campus.

This article details three essential elements for creating, institutionalizing, and administering a sustainable, engaged writing program with a comprehensive community-engaged writing curriculum. These elements include faculty development, programmatic support, and community partnership building. In this article, as the WISE founder and associate faculty director for service learning and outreach in the PWR, I describe the pedagogical, professional, and economic implications of our programmatic decision in order to provide a model for WPAs interested in creating a community-engaged writing program. In all of this work, I remain mindful of Paula Mathieu's concerns from *Tactics of Hope*, in which she challenges the value of the institutionalization of service learning, and particularly a top-down institutionalization, which, she fears, often stems from "public relations concerns" (95). While Mathieu acknowledges some of the benefits to strategic institutionalization, she also warns that we must look critically at the full range of implications of that institutionalization. She suggests that

rather than advocating institutionalization of service-learning per se, we should ask, what values are we institutionalizing? What needs are we prioritizing? What risks do we incur when we seek to create broad, measurable, sustainable programs that claim institutional resources and space? (98).

I address these questions while also emphasizing the important nature of and the imperative need for this work.

In Paul Feigenbaum's challenge to the dialectical nature of Mathieu's tactics-versus-strategies argument, he writes,

we should strive not for the utopian avoidance of institutional constraints but for the incorporation of relationship-centered practice into the academic paradigm itself. Instead of merely protecting the community from the institution, engaged scholars should work to make the institution more welcoming of the ethical visions that inspire their work. (49)

But Feigenbaum himself acknowledges that “ethical visions” in and of themselves are not adequate reason for transformation. The implementation of community-engaged work involves both tactics and strategies, and strategy is essential. When a program institutionalizes community-based learning, it must validate it, explain it, and provide a theoretical and research-based framework for it, all of which help to ensure the project’s durability and long-term viability.

RATIONALE FOR COMMUNITY-ENGAGED WRITING

How the PWR institutionalized community-engaged learning is important, and I will discuss this later in the article, but of equal importance is why. What did we hope to gain by doing this? What evidence did we have to suggest benefits—and benefits to whom? What are the underlying theoretical assumptions? These questions, asked by our dean and our program’s faculty advisory committee, were valid and needed to be answered. Several research studies, theories, and scholars helped me explain the rationale for the PWR’s commitment to community-engaged praxis.

In their introduction to *Going Public: What Writing Programs Learn From Engagement*, Rose and Weiser state, “as engagement work emerges as an expectation for faculty work and institutional commitments, writing program faculty need to understand and be prepared to locate their writing programs in relationship to these efforts” (4). They call it “a seismic shift of the grounding assumptions of the writing program’s purpose” (7).¹ Often, the decision to promote and support service-learning efforts is framed as an ethical one. The belief that writing instruction must connect to real world issues adds support to the most common argument for community-engaged learning opportunities: that through service learning, students become engaged citizens, active in the public discourses of a participatory democracy (Ash and Clayton; Berlin; George; Herzberg; Wells; Haussamen; Barber and Battistoni; Parks and Goldblatt; Grabill and Gaillet). In their article, “Writing Beyond the Curriculum,” Parks and Goldblatt envision an educational shift in line with Ernest Boyer’s vision for the New American College in its “capacity to connect thought to action, theory to practice” (qtd. on 342). Steve Parks pushes the idea even further in *Gravyland*,

imagining the effect of “writing programs premised on progressive social values and committed to expanding literacy rights within local communities” (35). Evoking Mathieu, he argues “for the importance of composition and rhetoric programs that develop strategic spaces (as opposed to tactical interventions) to support community-based partnerships and progressive literacy programs” in a visionary effort to create a “new city” (192, 98). Parks’s vision inspires me, and I imagine that any WPA considering such a curricular shift will have a similar proclivity. I have seen all too often, however, how the ethical argument can turn off those we need to convince the most. Is the focus on critical citizenship or community literacy or radically revised institutions of higher education sufficient to drive substantial and lasting curricular change and widespread support for those efforts? What other arguments are needed?

Discussion about the connection between community engagement and writing program administration often hinges on a comprehensive view of writing that emphasizes its context-bound, social nature. Not surprisingly, then, community-engaged writing has proven to lead to enhanced learning. Tom Deans explains the multiple benefits: it challenges students “to *write* themselves into the world through producing rhetorical documents that intervene materially in contexts beyond the academy,” “to *read* the complex social forces that constitute one’s cultural context,” and “to *write* purpose-driven documents for audiences beyond the classroom” (“English Studies,” 102, 103; emphasis original). Indeed, fifteen years of assessment studies in higher education and composition studies document that well-executed service learning encourages, at a higher level than traditional courses, comprehension and application of knowledge (Eyler and Giles); development of critical thinking (Ash and Clayton); awareness of the complexity of rhetorical principles (Bacon; Feldman; Wurr); analysis of rhetorical appeals, of reasoning, of coherence, and of mechanics (Wurr); understanding of counterarguments, contextualization of arguments, effective use of sources, engagement with intellectual strategies, appropriate use of language (Feldman); and transferability of concepts (Bacon; Feldman). It encourages students to “analyze the social action that genres perform: how they are tools-in-use rather than fixed formats” (Deans, “Shifting Locations” 456). The contextualization of rhetorical principles and the higher scores of students participating in service learning offer a compelling argument for inclusion of high impact community-engaged learning experiences in a rhetoric and writing curriculum. When a dean at CU asked me whether there are assessment studies to document the PWR’s claim of enhanced learning, I cited the findings named above.

Upper-level administrators are also interested in the economic implications of an engaged curriculum. Bringle et al. published a large-scale study indicating that service-learning courses aid in retention of students, recruitment of students, higher alumni donations, higher graduation rates, and higher numbers of alumni remaining and working in the community once they graduate (“The Role” 47). These arguments are helpful when discussing funding to engaged writing programs with administrators or with offices such as Student Affairs.

Competing ideologies about the purposes for higher education necessarily influence these disciplinary and institutional conversations. Not all high-level administrators will prioritize that their faculty teach students about social justice issues or to be critical and engaged citizens, but they will always care about numbers. Even though some faculty members bristle at reducing community-engaged work to a conversation about numbers, recruitment and retention numbers matter. Eli Goldblatt argues in *Because We Live Here* that retention often connects to social justice issues—to underprepared students, to racism on campuses, to the great disparities in the kinds of educational instruction our students experience before coming to our institutions. WPAs can justify the curricular choice in budgetary conversations, not only as valuable to student learning outcomes but also to the financial health of the program, the institution, and the community.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Once a WPA determines the benefits of encouraging community-engaged pedagogies, she must focus on faculty development, partnership building, and the programmatic shifts necessary to make the work sustainable for all involved. Making community engagement part of the curricular mission involves the intentional, collaborative, and systematic design of community-engaged pedagogy at and across individual courses and programmatic levels. Faculty professional development workshops and other training and support efforts help to ensure rigor and excellence in course offerings.

The first step in the deliberate institutionalization of community-engaged pedagogies in the PWR was to encourage faculty buy-in and enthusiasm for the work by creating an inclusive and collaborative faculty cohort. To launch the conversation, the Colorado Campus Compact director and I held a full-day engaged department retreat at a mountain lodge down the street from campus for twenty-one faculty who expressed interest. Colorado Campus Compact ran the event free of charge as part of their service to us as a member institution. An essential feature for engaged program building is to draw on faculty strengths, interests, and expertise

in ways that benefit the programmatic mission. To that end, each faculty member and I met individually before the retreat to discuss how they hoped to participate and what they wanted to contribute. This helped develop the anticipation that their individual work would enhance the collective programmatic initiative.

At the retreat, we first brainstormed as a group to create working definitions for what service learning and community engagement mean in our program and what service-learning courses should contain. We discussed how service learning differs from volunteerism and charity work and then drew on several definitions from national organizations and scholars to create our own: “service-learning is a pedagogy that integrates academic instruction and structured critical reflection with educationally meaningful community work that is appropriate to course learning goals in order to enhance the learning experience and meet community-defined needs” (WISE). We began to develop service-learning course criteria, which we wrote on whiteboards and refined as discussion continued:

- service learning should be integral to the course, not extra credit or an add-on;
- academic coursework should be fully integrated with the community work as evidenced in the syllabus, assignments, and critical-reflection prompts;
- service-learning activities and assignments should be designed in collaboration with community partners, and communication should occur throughout the semester; and
- students should understand within the first few days of class how their community-based work relates to the course’s objectives and assignments, how it will enhance their understanding of course material, how it will be evaluated, and how it relates to the course grade.

I offered additional learning objectives that we could add to our syllabi. These include that students will:

- recognize and analyze correlations between theoretical concepts and lived, local experience;
- produce writing that effectively addresses a community need;
- distinguish individual manifestations of a problem from the systemic, root causes;
- assess rhetorical circumstances in the public sphere and intervene appropriately through writing and civic action; and
- create purpose-driven documents for audiences beyond the classroom.

Drawing from Campus Compact's engaged department scholarship, we discussed personal, pedagogical, programmatic, and community barriers to becoming an engaged faculty member and an engaged program. During a brainstorming session, faculty raised various concerns: "Do I have the time to do this?" "Where in my course will I make room for this?" "Will I lose time to teach actual writing issues?" "How does this fit into a writing curriculum?" "What is a service-learning writing course supposed to do?" "How do I assess service-learning projects?" "What civic skills should we teach?" "I'm concerned about burdening community partners." "I don't know how to approach community partners." "Are we meeting real community needs, and how will we assess that?" "How do we market this project and educate others about what we do?" After faculty called out these questions, we discussed current scholarship and did some creative brainstorming around the issues that surfaced to determine how we could address them. Battistoni et al. suggest that

change is more likely to occur when barriers are removed or weakened than when supports are strengthened. This is because increasing support for organizational change will often just invite more resistance. Attacking the barriers, on the other hand, will make the positive forces stronger. (27)

We realized that we needed to think carefully and creatively about how to frame the work as integral to writing instruction. We agreed that significant training needed to occur.

A grant from CU's Institute for Ethical and Civic Engagement funded two course releases so that I could further develop WISE. That semester and every semester for the next two years, we offered two to three faculty development workshops that ranged from basic service-learning course development to advanced workshops on critical reflection, partnership-building, and digital narratives. As faculty became more invested, some led workshops on their area of expertise and its relation to community-based instruction. Our service-learning office funded six colleagues to create and teach a service-learning first-year writing course. Focus groups with these instructors and other newly engaged faculty helped me understand what was and was not working and where they needed more support. We established a community-engagement library of books and DVDs for faculty use, and our program subscribed to *Reflections: A Journal of Public Rhetoric, Civic Writing, and Service Learning*. Once a year for four years, we brought in nationally-renowned speakers such as Patti Clayton, Robert Bringle, Tom Deans, and Steve Parks, all of whom held multi-day faculty development workshops for interested faculty.

I created the WISE website as a public instructional resource for service-learning practitioners and WPAs across the country who are interested in curricular change (House). The site includes pedagogical materials on critical reflection, course design, and partnerships. An unexpected benefit to creating a database is that I no longer need to hold workshops to cover basic material. I continue to meet individually with faculty or graduate students who want to engage with service learning for the first time or with seasoned faculty who want to update their courses, but in general, the initiative sustains itself. Our service-learning numbers have increased substantially from the original five instructors to thirty-two instructors teaching across our vertical WISE curriculum. The PWR has more instructors teaching with service learning and teaches more service-learning courses than any other academic unit in the University of Colorado system. In conversations with administrators, community partners, or potential donors, these numbers make a compelling argument about the program's commitment to the community and about our need for support and resources.

While these numbers indicate an impressive and real programmatic commitment to external audiences, perhaps more exciting to us within the program are the effects of the pedagogical shift on the faculty. I think of Mary Hocks' suggestion that WPAs should encourage "practices that *actually transform our experiences as teachers*" (38; emphasis added). The faculty who consistently do this work have become highly professionalized and committed to their individual partners, with whom they have sometimes developed long-standing relationships. The work occasionally goes beyond teaching to scholarship, which is not required of instructors per their contract of 75 percent teaching/25 percent service. Our faculty present their work at campus and regional workshops and at national conferences such as CCCC. Colleagues share relevant articles, CFPs, and assignments with one another. In other words, WISE is not a recruitment device or a mandate. Rather, it functions along the lines of Grabill's theory of infrastructures: "infrastructures enact standards, they are activity systems, and they are also people themselves" (*Writing* 40). WISE is a network of actors—workshops, the website, readings, faculty, community partners, projects, and activities, which manifest in a vertical engaged curriculum. We have been recognized as a model program by University of Colorado's Institute for Ethical and Civic Engagement, and our faculty have won numerous university, community, and national awards, particularly for our work with sustainability, diversity, and engaged scholarship.

PROGRAMMATIC EVOLUTION

Pedagogical support is critical, but the biggest challenge that we face connects to creating incentives and rewards for faculty. As anyone who has taught a well-designed community-engaged course knows, it requires a tremendous amount of work and time beyond the traditional work of creating and teaching a classroom-centered writing course. In fact, studies of the impact of service-learning pedagogy on faculty find that time and logistical challenges are the primary reason for faculty's dissatisfaction with the pedagogy, even while the faculty emphasize numerous benefits, which include purpose and professional satisfaction associated with service learning (Pribbenow 34). This has been the case for our faculty as well. Drawing on Mathieu's discussion of the ethics of tactical projects for community partners, I would like to suggest a related/flipped concept: the ethics of strategic institutionalization for faculty. Because community-based learning has become part of our curricular mission, providing a faculty support and reward structure is essential. Indeed, as higher education institutions promote community-based research and teaching, faculty must know that their engaged work will be recognized and supported as a legitimate form of scholarship and as a high-impact form of teaching.

The PWR's personnel committee has restructured our program's reappointment, promotion, and merit evaluation systems so that faculty receive merit points for community-engaged teaching, and it is a significant factor in reappointment and promotion discussions. This offers a way to indicate the value of the work to the program and college and helps ward against burnout. I continue to work towards improving the rewards system and would also like our program to offer faculty who consistently teach service-learning courses a course release after a certain number of semesters so that they can revisit their partnerships and service-learning scholarship. Future improvements would include the program capping community-based courses at fifteen students instead of nineteen. Budgetary restrictions currently do not allow for these changes, although I continue to advocate for them.

As the writing program's work in community-based pedagogy evolves, we continue to consider the ways in which to promote our work to campus and community audiences. We tag our service-learning courses as (sl) so that students can choose the pedagogical method they prefer. We hold an annual Student Service-Learning Showcase where students present their community-based projects to the University of Colorado and Boulder communities. In October 2015, we hosted the inaugural Conference on Com-

munity Writing, a highly successful international conference attracting academics and community partners.

To create a sustainable culture of community-engaged pedagogy, it has been critical to have a faculty member who acts as a point person for faculty development and other programmatic efforts. My current position as associate director for service learning and outreach did not exist before 2010. After two years of my work on WISE with a one-course buyout each semester, our then-director successfully argued for the value of creating the associate director position to protect my time (the course release is written into my contract) and to formally establish my administrative work as an essential and valued part of the PWR's mission. Sustainability is a popular concept these days in rhetoric and composition scholarship about community engagement, particularly due to Restaino and Cella's important edited collection *Unsustainable* (2013). My work is to help create an engaged infrastructure, a support system, resources, networks of people and projects, and a vision for future programmatic development that can be sustained *despite* the predictable and unpredictable shifting tides.

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

At the International Association for Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement conference in 2008, I attended a workshop with Robert Bringle and Patti Clayton. Bringle opened the workshop with a punch line: "University faculty are from Mars. Community partners are from Venus." The audience laughed. He applied relationship psychology, or exchange theory, to community-campus partnership theory, emphasizing that issues of trust, communication, commitment, and respect come into play, as they do in other kinds of relationships. As in friendship and love, frequency of interaction, diversity of interaction, and interdependency (influence on other's behavior) are measurable factors of the impact of the partnership ("Beyond Reciprocity"). Everyone at the workshop knew what he was getting at. We didn't want to be *that guy*—the one you think you've had a great date with, but then he never calls you again. We wanted to be dependable and communicative and totally invested. Well, hold on a minute, Patti Clayton said. You don't want to smother them.

Clayton presented a useful model for conceiving of the kind of partnership most suitable for a course. On the partnership scale, which ranges from *exploitative* to *transactional* to *transformational*, she delineated the characteristics associated with each kind of relationship as they range from placement to partnership. As she has elaborated in her written scholarship, *transactional*, she explained, implies work designed to complete a task, and

while each party has something the other finds useful, there is no enduring purpose to the projects or the relationship. *Transformational*, on the other hand, implies a deeper, more sustained commitment, and individuals question and reflect together with an expectation for future growth around the issues the individual projects address (Clayton et al. “Differentiating”). During planning stages of a course, an understanding of the components of various levels of interaction and commitment can help both the faculty member and the community partner to develop a stronger and more equitable connection. While there is nothing wrong with choosing placement over partnership if it is intentional and negotiated, the delineation of the partnership scale often helps faculty move towards transformational work if all partners want that development. The moral of the workshop: relationships are complicated.

Throughout our program-building work, we as a faculty considered how our discipline and the teaching of community-engaged courses contribute to the public good and how we meet community-identified needs. Already-existing relationships can beget projects. (Eli Goldblatt tells us not to underestimate the generative potential of lunch [145–92].) But when the relationships do not yet exist, how does a writing program reach out to the community that houses it?

In WISE’s second semester, the PWR held a Community Partner Symposium, welcoming thirty-five non-profit representatives to a luncheon with our faculty. In our invitation, we briefly described WISE and what service learning is, offered examples of potential projects, and presented our commitment to finding the level of partnership and collaboration that worked best for them. The purpose of this event was to honor the participation of organizations that had worked with our service-learning students previously and to learn more about the needs of other organizations with whom we might develop service-learning projects.

The topics of discussion at the luncheon mirrored those at the preliminary consultations I now do each time a potential partner contacts me. I spoke about service learning’s distinction from volunteerism and our learning goals at each course level. We discussed the opportunity for shared teaching and mentoring and how their expertise and knowledge would be valued and utilized. We discussed the concepts of reciprocity and a shared mission. Some partners wanted to be more actively engaged with the classes, others less so. We considered how the kinds of work we could do with them can vary accordingly, what good and bad partnerships look like, and what the characteristics of each might be. Two of the community partners who had previously been students in our program’s grant writing course gave their perspectives from both sides of the relationship.

Other partners who had worked with University of Colorado students in the past shared their experiences, suggested measurable outcomes for successful partnerships, and offered advice to others. Some examples included the need for clear and open communication, room for feedback among all the stakeholders, and clear definitions of responsibilities from the outset.

We came up with several factors that faculty and community partners agreed would help a course run smoothly. The most important factor was to determine whether the site is doing work that lends itself to a connection with the course content and whether students' work for the organization lends itself to reflection on the connection with course work. The non-profit's volunteer coordinator or another staff member should agree to direct, frequent contact with students. Partners stressed how limited their time and resources often are but were adamant that if they could plan for that time in advance, they would want to make it work. We discussed the chronic conundrum in service learning—that community organizations do not run on an academic calendar. I have encouraged two options to help mitigate this problem. The first, that a faculty member create an ongoing project that classes will work on semester after semester; the second option, that I find a faculty member to take over a project from another instructor.

Community partners were interested in the idea of co-teaching and described the work as a form of educational outreach. Some of them expressed interest in helping the instructor determine readings, assignments, and days that they might visit the class to share their expertise through guest lectures or discussions. It is critical during course design to take into account the wealth of knowledge housed in the community and to offer ways for the partner to share expertise.

From WISE's inception, our goal has been to determine what the community needs are and how we can adapt our curriculum to meet those needs. Sometimes faculty seek out organizations whose mission they think might align well with course objectives. On many occasions, especially as WISE has become better known in the community, organizations will initiate discussion of potential writing or research projects. When I meet with an organizational representative either on site or over coffee to determine whether our needs align, I discuss types of projects with the partner, referencing Tom Deans' distinction between writing about, writing with, and writing for the community (as well as Terese Guinsatao Monberg's addition of "writing as the community"). These frameworks have been tremendously useful for potential partners—and for faculty as they design their courses and consider possible partners—as *writing about* and *writing as* projects may have quite different criteria, goals, and responsibilities for the

non-profit than *writing for* or *writing with* projects (*Writing Partnerships; "Writing Home"*).

Some of our first-year course instructors allow students to choose their own organization with which to work. They might do a *writing about* assignment, such as a research paper investigating causes or effects of the social issue their organization addresses. Maybe they will determine an organizational need as part of a low-stakes *writing for* assignment and craft a proposal letter to a local business or campus office asking for a donation of a particular item or service that their non-profit needs. For example, one student completing his service-learning work at a day shelter for homeless individuals noticed the clients' need for dental care. He wrote to twenty-four local dentists and, using the rhetorical strategies he had studied, requested that they provide one free day of dental care a year to the shelter's clients. Thirteen agreed to the request. Another group of students partnered with the shelter's art group to create a mural with the homeless clients. Over several weeks, they collaboratively produced a giant tree with the symptoms of homelessness written out in the leaves and the systemic, root causes written in the roots. The mural hangs in the shelter's main room, visited by several hundred homeless people every day.

Depending upon the topic of the course, upper-level students may, for example, write a grant, create an interactive website, develop a business plan, or do a digital storytelling project for an organization. One class did a comprehensive community discourse analysis for an environmental organization that wanted to understand how people use and understand the word *sustainability*. The students wrote a report and presented their findings to the organization's board of directors. Another class, which focused on poverty and hunger, created newsletters on nutrition and food access for semi-literate parents of children in an after-school program. These are a small sampling of the writing projects students complete.

When I meet with a potential community partner, I share relevant project examples as I hear from them the scope of the work they are proposing. During this meeting and based on my knowledge of faculty interests and expertise, I determine which faculty member might design a course around the project need or work with the partner as one of the options from which their students can choose. If a faculty member expresses interest, I connect the two, and they are then free to create their plan. During planning meetings, the instructor shares the semester timeline, course goals, and the students' ability level, as she and the partner craft an appropriate, educationally meaningful student project. An understanding of mutual accountability is established at this time. Partnerships are in flux and sometimes unstable, based on changes in personnel, clients, and resources at the orga-

nization and different project needs and expectations. As with any relationship, creating a strong partnership is an ongoing process. Sandmann et al. argue that program planning theories are critical in the development of strong service learning work, as they involve not only “course-based cognitive outcomes but . . . social, political, and ethical considerations that inform the development of service-learning partnerships” (17). Responsible administration of an engaged writing program involves continual negotiation among faculty, students, institution, and community partners.

INSTITUTIONAL (RE)VISION

The WPA who provides faculty and community partners with guidance on how to negotiate different needs, goals, interests, and schedules in order to foster reciprocally beneficial outcomes moves their writing program toward Campus Compact’s definition of an engaged department. While Paula Mathieu voices concern that in strategic programs (versus tactical projects) the emphasis is on “securing stable continuity over time, and in many ways resists local rhetorical responsiveness,” a savvy administrator of an engaged program searches out community needs (which are time-sensitive) and supports the faculty’s development of courses around those needs (99). Therefore, while courses shift as community needs change and as the faculty’s experiences with community writing evolve, the programmatic structure is secure enough that faculty are trained and rewarded as they develop themselves as engaged faculty, and community partners can be relatively secure in the continuity of projects over time.

Writing program administrators often manage a large group of writing instructors and have responsibility for establishing learning outcomes and curricula for writing courses that, at many institutions, reach the entire student body. The discussions WPAs have across campus can help to shape larger conversations about our institution’s mission and about what constitutes a professional teaching faculty. Ernest Boyer posits that “for American higher education to remain vital we urgently need a more creative view of the work of the professoriate” (xii). A writing program can function as a vibrant part of a university that helps to define what a vital institution’s purposes are and can be. We can champion our faculty, students, and community partners as we ensure that the relationships and projects are both ethical and intellectually rigorous.

We can help lead the revision of our individual institutions, and of higher education in general, by getting engaged; by challenging an entrenched and powerful mindset that, despite mission statements, continues to narrowly define research, teaching, and service; by supporting

graduate students and junior faculty in these endeavors as they shape their professional identities and seek employment, reappointment, or tenure; and by adapting our curricula to the needs of our communities so that the writing program is an evolving, dynamic part of a specific locale, of its unique community ecosystem.

NOTES

1. This article, which offers a model program that has made that shift, complements the rich scholarship coming out of departments and programs that have created an infrastructure for doing engaged work: I'm referring to work by Eli Goldblatt at Temple University, Linda Flower at Carnegie Mellon, Steve Parks at Syracuse, and Jeff Grabill at Michigan State, among many others.

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