

THESIS

SERVICE-LEARNING IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION:  
USING CRITICAL REFLECTION TO ENSURE STUDENT LEARNING AND BENEFIT TO  
THE COMMUNITY PARTNER

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

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Fall 2015

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## ABSTRACT

### SERVICE-LEARNING IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION: USING CRITICAL REFLECTION TO ENSURE STUDENT LEARNING AND BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY PARTNER

Over the past few decades, service-learning has taken hold in English departments at colleges and universities across the U.S, as service-learning offers real-world rhetorical situations for composition students. Further, some composition instructors have created first-year composition courses that include service-learning and it helps to connect incoming students with their communities, which has been found to be a means to improving retention from the first year of college to the second.

This thesis sets forth the claim that service-learning is a viable option for first-year composition courses, but must follow certain parameters if the course is to be of benefit to both students taking the course and the community partner. A focus on reciprocity is key, including involving the community partner early in the planning of the course so they have a say in the structure of the service-learning portion of the course. Secondly, while reflection has long been seen as a vital component of any service-learning course, composition courses should go a step further to require critical reflection so students can confront their own struggles early on, increasing the likelihood of a successful, positive outcome for both the student and the community partner. What follows is a brief history of service-learning in first-year composition courses as well as a review of literature the sub-topics included in the claim (needs of first year students, the importance of reciprocity, and critical reflection to name a few) as well as

suggestions on how to incorporate critical reflection into a first-year service-learning composition course that is of mutual benefit to both the student and the community partner.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Lisa Langstraat. Your patience, guidance, and support is the reason I was able to finish this thesis. It has been a long journey, but I have learned something new in each and every interaction we have had. I am so grateful for all that you have taught me. Your passion for your field and your willingness to share your knowledge has stuck with me as I have continued on in the field of education. You are a true inspiration to me. My committee as a whole was instrumental in keeping me on track and cheering me on to the finish. Dr. Sue Doe and Dr. David Greene, thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are so kind and generous with your time and expertise. I am forever grateful.

I would also like to thank my friends and family. You have all heard about this for years, and have never wavered in your support. This would not be possible without so many wonderful people in my corner. I especially want to thank my husband, mom, and dad for everything you have done to give me the space to write this thesis. You have watched kids, made meals, and let me talk out ideas more times than I can count. My cup runneth over with gratitude. I love you.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Lochlan and Elizabeth. You inspired me long before I knew you. Follow your dreams and see them through no matter what. You are both a dream come true for me.

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## CHAPTER 1: A HISTORY OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

### Introduction

Over the past few decades, service-learning has emerged as a strong pedagogical model that lessens what Linda Flower (2008) calls the “town/gown” divide between universities and the communities in which they are housed. Service-learning does just what the term implies- it allows students to work in the community and engage with community partners while practicing and reinforcing what they are learning in their college courses. While service-learning has become popular across several disciplines, it has taken particular hold in the field of composition, most notably in first-year composition courses. On her website page entitled “Service-Learning in First-Year Writing Courses”, Nora Bacon (2003) explains this strong connection by saying:

Our interest in how language gets things done in the world, together with our commitment to building a more just and social world, explains why composition has been among the first fields to embrace service-learning.

In her 2000 introduction to the first issue of *Reflections*, Bacon also said:

Given our profession’s historical commitments—to a vision of teaching and learning which addresses cognitive, affective, and social development, to a vision of writing which recognizes its power to effect personal, practical, and political change—it is not surprising that interest in service-learning has been particularly strong among writing instructors. (p.1).

Many experts assert that service-learning is a natural fit for composition courses because it presents students with real rhetorical situations, including a tangible audience and purpose for their writing (Cooper and Julier 1995; Heilker 1997; Wurr 2002; Deans and Bacon 2002; Duffy 2003; Faulkner-Springfield 2011).

Some service-learning scholars worry that service-learning may not do enough for the community and can actually do a disservice by perpetuating an “otherness” when privileged college students “serve” community members (Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski 2005). Concerns that service-learning can contribute to “otherness” in the community (rather than lessening such perceptions), are present throughout service-learning research (Herzberg 1994; Kahne & Westheimer 1996; Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski 2005). While these concerns are worth considering in any service-learning course, there is a common goal among these researchers: to overcome this divide by thoughtfully and carefully designing service-learning courses, incorporating critical reflection, and properly preparing students for their community-based experiences, rather than abolishing service-learning altogether.

Linda Flower (2008) calls attention to the real potential of service-learning projects (and really all community outreach done at the university) to take on an us/them, server/served relationship as it is specific to literacy programs rather than contributing to this “otherness” (literacy programs often being a project model for service-learning composition courses). According to Flower, when town and gown work together “the gowns possess the dominant discourse—and typically assume that their language, concepts, and forms of argument are the most effective for understanding these problems and should be learned and used by everyone else” (p. 95).

It is true that the potential to increase this town/gown divide and perpetuate such a dominant discourse is present in any service-learning course as well as any type of community outreach done by the university, and Flower provides practitioners with a wise caution when embarking on designing a service-learning course. However, there

are steps instructors can take to avoid such pitfalls, such as thoughtfully engaging the community partner in the planning phase of the course and maintaining a constant focus on critical reflection throughout the course to help students work through the us/them mentality they may have (or, in some cases, may even develop throughout the experience). Support for these strategies is forthcoming in the remainder of this and the subsequent Chapters.

Flower cites Bruce Herzberg (1994) as pointing out a second, more insidious problem in town/gown collaborations:

Well-meaning voluntarism can unwittingly replicate the social structures that are part of the problem, defining some people as the knowledgeable servers while casting others as the client, patients, or the educationally deficient—the served (p. 96)

Potential community partners are often imbued in social structures of service. Indeed, many community organizations exist with the goal of connecting those in need with various types of available *services* (housing, food, victim advocacy) wherein there is a real (and sometimes necessary) divide between the agency providing the service and the client who is served. For example, community literacy programs often refer to those who seek their services as “students” and community housing authorities refer to them as “clients”. The debate about such labels is outside of the parameters of this thesis, but Herzberg highlights this to service-learning instructors to illustrate that, if possible, the service-learning partnership should *not* be another of these server/served structures, but rather a true collaboration where the only title either party holds is “partner”.

The nuances in attitude and approach highlighted by Flower are important to note by any instructor considering creating a service-learning composition course, as are Flower’s suggestions to overcome such pitfalls and create a truly meaningful,

collaborative relationship with logic and open dialogue (these ideas are explored further in Chapters 3 and 4). Besides ways to overcome such thinking, it is important to note that there are positive ways to view the *service* within service-learning. David Greene (1998) expresses just such a positive view in his article "Reciprocity in Two Conditions of Service-Learning" from *Educational Gerontology*:

Service-learning involves serving another and affords opportunities to experience encounters that educate. The student and the individual served are not passive recipients of education and some charitable act, respectively, but they are co-participants in an enhanced, multifaceted experience. An observant student, especially if guided by service-linked educational objectives, stands ready to learn from the service recipient empowered by the service rendered. Both server and served provide and receive. In the process, the student more clearly sees the recipient as one who has something to give instead of one only in a position to receive. This realization itself is an important lesson in valuing others. (p. 411).

Aaron Schutz and Anne Ruggles Gere (1998) offer another way to turn the tables on the problematic idea of "serving". "To be successful, service-learning projects need to create spaces where college students are given opportunities to be 'cared for' by those they wish to serve" (p. 145). This is a great approach to forming the relationship with the community partner, both for the student and the instructor: to look not at what they can do for the community, but what the community can do for them. What can be learned from the community partner? How can they contribute to knowledge to be gained in the course? Taking time to answer these questions is a great start to shifting the paradigm of "helping the other" to allowing for the possibility that the student and professor can be "helped" instead, *caring* for the community partner rather than *servicing* them. Such questions can be asked through the process of critical reflection (see Chapter 2).

Present in each of the issues and ideas above is the idea of reciprocity. The community and the university need to be on equal footing in order for service-learning to be successful. In other words, each entity should receive a “service”. If elementary school students receive literacy tutoring as a service, for example, critical reflection should help the partnering college students identify times in the experience where they were “served”, perhaps learning something from their younger counterparts or confronting a long-harbored stereotype about “poor kids”. The importance of reciprocity in service-learning has become (fortunately) somewhat of a given as scholarship on service-learning has increased, but there are areas of nuance that remain to establish and maintain a truly reciprocal relationship that takes into account the needs of both the community partner and the student.

One such nuance is the inclusion of (and, to be sure, an emphasis on) critical reflection in service-learning courses. In fact, Eyler and Giles (1999) refer to reflection as the hyphen in service-learning. It is the true link between the service and learning, wherein an equal amount of each ensures a positive outcome for both student and community partner. As previously mentioned, a service-learning composition course provides a great opportunity to really delve in and focus on critical reflection, since writing is a key component of the course already. The fit is natural. Further, I would add, service-learning is particularly suited to first-year composition wherein students are not only honing their writing skills for their academic career, but also trying to find their place in a new school and a new community.

This thesis will demonstrate that service-learning is a viable option for first-year composition, as it engages and challenges first year students both academically and

civically. In order for a first-year service-learning composition course to be successful, true reciprocity must exist between student and community needs, which means that careful attention must be paid to the model of writing done throughout the class (in what Thomas Deans refers to as writing *for*, *with* or *about* the community). Further, critical reflection must be done throughout the course as a means to ensure student learning and writing skills improvement and that the experience is of real benefit to the community, but must be incorporated in a way that is accessible, not burdensome, to students.

In order to substantiate this claim, we first must unpack all of the issues laced together and review the research on each one. This Chapter will do just that by addressing the following questions:

- What definition of service-learning is guiding this work, and what needs to be understood about the history of service-learning to understand its viability in first-year composition?
- What does true reciprocity look like in a service-learning composition course?
- Why is first-year composition a good fit for service-learning?
- What types of community partnerships/projects are best for a first-year service-learning composition course?
- How can a focus on critical reflection be used to ensure this reciprocity between the learning of the first-year composition student and benefit to the community partner?

Once the benefits of incorporating service-learning into a first-year composition course are established, the remainder of the thesis will delve more deeply into how a

successful first-year service-learning composition course is designed, always centered on the ideas of reciprocity and critical reflection. Chapter two presents a literature review on reflection in service-learning and how critical reflection can ensure both accomplishment of course goals and true learning of self/community for students as well as a successful and beneficial experience for the community partner. Chapter three presents best practices and examples for planning a first-year service-learning composition course that incorporates critical reflection at every stage of writing (from the writing assignments themselves to reflection on each service-learning experience). Chapter three also further explores community partnerships that lend themselves to a final project written *with* the community. Chapter four takes this a step further by presenting specific assignments and final project suggestions that take all of the previously discussed research into account to tie together the academic components of the course and the final project written *with* the community.

### **Service-Learning: A Guiding Definition**

Before establishing a working definition of service-learning, it is important to point out there are several variations on the term itself. The most common terms for the practice are “service learning” (no hyphen), “community service learning”, and “service-learning”. For the purposes of this thesis I will use the term *service-learning*, as it most closely aligns with the definition and semantics I think is most appropriate for a successful service-learning course and the theory behind the term itself. As reiterated above by experts in the field, the term “service” is problematic to me as well, given the implication of a hegemonic structure wherein certain “haves” choose to “serve” the “have-nots”, an obvious placement on a social ladder that I disagree with

wholeheartedly. What makes me tolerant of this term, however, is the hyphen. Service connected so closely with learning implies a balance that is crucial to true service-learning, as you will see in the coming pages.

It is hard to deny that any community does need a certain amount of service from its members, be that physical labor, funding, or collaborative work towards solving a social issue. When learning is added to the term “service”, however, value is added to the experience both for the student and the community member, and therefore also for the instructor that is implementing the service-learning model. Barbara Jacoby (as per her personal communication with S. Migliore, April 1995) writes, “The hyphen in *service-learning* is critical in that it symbolizes the symbiotic relationship between service and learning” (Jacoby 1996: 5). The implied reciprocity between service and learning is key—ne one cannot exist without the other, and the wording itself implies no hierarchy. There is a distinction in meaning in using the hyphen, and I am much aligned with that implied in *service-learning*. Further, given the necessity of critical reflection in a service-learning composition course, this term is also fitting given the assertion by Eyler and Giles (1999) that reflection is the hyphen in service-learning.

As a final note on the wording itself, service-learning is often referred to community service-learning. In the same article, Jacoby goes on to say, “The term community in the definition of service-learning refers to local neighborhoods, the state, the nation, and the global community. The human and community needs that service-learning addresses are those needs that are *defined by the community*” (p. 5). Community service-learning as a term gives due credit to the role of the community in conjunction with the presence of the university and the student. This is a strong

statement, and the most accurate wording of the practice. For the purpose of this thesis I will shorten to service-learning, but do not wish to take away from value of the community. The *community* is implied by properly understanding the *service* in service-learning as mutual and reciprocal, not an “us/them” binary.

With the term itself established, determining a definition of service-learning can be just as fraught with nuances of meaning and shifts of focus from one party to the other. In her review of literature in the 1990 book *Combining Service and Learning*, Jane Kendall states that there were 147 definitions of service-learning at that time. Since, instructors and scholars have reworded some existing definitions and have also come up with their own to add significantly to this number (as shown in my review of service-learning syllabi in Campus Compact). However, most definitions used in composition courses seem to be based on a few accepted and well-respected definitions offered by experts in the field of service-learning and are not specific to composition. Definitions used by Thomas Deans and other writing instructors and scholars tend to be general definitions of service learning. For example, in his introduction to *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition*, Thomas Deans uses the service-learning definition from The Commission on National and Community Service.

There are a few definitions of service-learning that encompass key areas of focus in this thesis, namely reciprocity and critical reflection. According to the *Ohio State University Faculty Guide to Creating Service-Learning Courses* (2002), service-learning is defined as, “A form of experiential education characterized by student participation in an organized service activity connected to specific learning outcomes, meets identified

community needs and provides structured time for student reflection and connection of the service experience to learning” (p. 5). Janet Eyler (2002) says that, “(service-learning) is ideally suited to achieving both personal and academic goals for students and broader goals of civic engagement and social justice for communities” (p. 517). The idea is to give students the opportunity to learn course material both inside and outside of the classroom, while gaining a social awareness of their community and empowering members of that community to succeed with tools from the same skill set.

Barbary Jacoby defines service-learning as “a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development” (1996: 5). This definition, as well as those above, includes the three necessary players in a successful service-learning course: the university (including the instructor), the student, and the community partner. All are essential, and reciprocity needs to exist between all three. According to Ellen Cushman (2002), this emphasis on reciprocity between all agents in service-learning distinguishes it from the community as laboratory approach, colloquially known as “hit it and quit it” (p. 43).

All of the above definitions show the key components and focus of service-learning. There is a further definition of service-learning that most closely aligns with my own view of such learning and the theory behind it, as stated in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning Course Design Workbook* (2001):

Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity change both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content. (p. 23).

Essentially what is presented is a three-prong definition, wherein each facet is equally important, and none are mutually exclusive, best demonstrating the importance for reciprocity mentioned by Jacoby, Cushman, and Eyster. This definition is fitting for a service-learning composition course in that it addresses the importance of critical reflection (a key component to any service-learning course, but an even more powerful tool in a composition course) and links values and skills to content knowledge.

### **A Brief History of Service-Learning Highlighting the Importance of Reciprocity**

The history of service-learning fills volumes of literature, and covers a range of topics inherent in this practice as it took shape in the American education system. According to E.L. Boyer (1994), such topics include its roots in volunteerism and the spirit of community engagement during WWII, the question of assessment in service-learning courses, and a shift from housing service-learning courses with separate departments to central student services offices to name a few (p. 48). While this broad history is important to understand and acknowledge, a complete review is beyond the parameters of this thesis. However, there are a few key events in the history of service-learning that led to a solid focus on reciprocity as well as movement towards the importance of incorporating critical reflection as a means to ensure reciprocity, especially as it relates to student learning, both academic and social.

Institutions of higher learning have a long tradition of service to the communities in which they are located. From research to volunteerism, universities have realized that they must give back to the communities that give so much to them. This spirit of service in higher education goes back to the Revolutionary War, when “the purpose of higher education slowly began to shift from the focus on individual students to the building of a

new nation" (Boyer, 1994, p. 49). The Land-Grant Act of 1862 furthered this idea, forever linking higher education to service, especially for agriculture and industry. University service to communities has grown over the years, from the early days of the formation of our nation to the spirit of volunteerism that took hold of the U.S. during the Second World War. It was in the 1960's that service-learning as we know it today began to take shape as a way to better serve the community as well as the students that participated in these experiences.

Barbary Jacoby offers a brief history of service-learning in Part One of *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices* (1996), mainly focusing on its development over the past fifty years. She says that the term service-learning first emerged in the work of Sigmon and William Ramsey at the Southern Regional Education Board in 1967. In 1969, the National Center for Service-Learning was established, further cementing the term service-learning into academic language. Though this center was short-lived, many colleges and universities continued to network through organizations that sprouted up outside of this national agency. In 1978 the National Society for Internships and Experiential Education (NSIEE; as of 1994, the National Society for Experiential Education, NSEE) was established to combine several of these separate groups into one. The establishment and disestablishment of such agencies shows the shift from volunteerism and internships to "experiential education". This shift, combined with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's and 1970's in the U.S., further established universities as centers of education on social matters and sites for demonstrations to move such agendas forward (such as Kent State and Mississippi State University). This led to a revitalized interest in experiential education, and service-

learning in particular, in the 1980s. During this time, the NSEE (National Society for Experiential Education) published the *Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning* (Jacoby, 1996, p. 29), which emphasized program development and sustainability, as well as service-learning's marginal status within educational institutions (p. 14-15).

The 1990s saw a focus on increasing faculty involvement in course-embedded service-learning, concern for academic integrity, and emphasis on the assessment of learning outcomes (Jacoby, p. 32). Timothy Stanton (2000) sums up this shift:

The end of the Twentieth Century has been kind to service-learning. What was once a very marginal largely unheard of 'alternative education' strategy has now become almost commonplace in the curricula of both secondary and post-secondary education institutions. (p. 119).

From there, research and implementation started to focus on reciprocity in service-learning courses as well as developing strong course objectives to enhance student learning and ensure that all partners would benefit. Jacoby says that this history has led to a view of service-learning that involves working in a creative tension marked by collaboration, reciprocity, and diversity (p. 34).

Not all agree with the reciprocal benefits highlighted by Jacoby. Some feel that service-learning has no place in composition courses, or the university in general, for that matter. Most notable among dissenters is Stanley Fish. Fish argues that the town/gown divide is as it should be, and defends the notion of universities being seen as ivory towers. While most of Fish's arguments are applicable to liberal arts education in general, he specifically rejects the idea of including community engagement in composition courses. He states, "All composition courses should teach grammar and rhetoric and nothing else" (p. 44).

While Fish brings up some points worth pondering, he is in the minority as universities, especially land-grant universities, have become more and more service orientated over the last hundred years in an effort to give back to their surrounding communities. While it is difficult to argue that academics needs to be the primary focus of a university education, when implemented correctly service-learning can be academically rigorous as well as beneficial to the social development of students (McNenny 2002; Wurr 2002; Eppler 2011) and community partners (Cruz & Giles 2000; Bringle & Hatcher 2002; d'Arlach, Sanchez & Feuer 2009).

The shift towards focus on reciprocity, as well as considering the full role of faculty involvement and academic integrity, is crucial to what service-learning is today. This is the basis of the three-prong approach which ensures that all parties benefit equally from a service-learning course: the university, the student, and (with the emphasis added in the 1990's), the community partner. Stanton (2000) asserts that "Research has demonstrated that students learn faster and more deeply through service-learning than in more traditional forms of education. Communities are serviced. Schools and institutions changed" (p. 119). In "Principles of Good Practice in Service-Learning", Suzzanne D. Mintz and Garry W. Hesser (1996) observe, "If there is a fundamental or comprehensive concept that has driven efforts to achieve high quality in the combining of service and learning, it is reciprocity. Reciprocity suggests that every individual, organization, and entity involved in service-learning functions as both a teacher and a learner. Participants are perceived as colleagues, not as servers and clients" (p. 36).

Through this history, the emergence of the importance of reciprocity can be seen. The importance of engaging the community partner early on and often, as well as ensuring a useful and use-able end-product are a given in most service-learning circles, particularly composition, as will be further substantiated throughout this thesis. While this focus on community is essential, it is also my aim to ensure that the student (especially first-year students and the inherent unique set of challenges they face) figures into the idea of reciprocity as equally as the community partner.

### **Service-Learning in the Composition Classroom: A Community of Scholarship**

In addition to grounding ourselves in a brief history of service-learning in general, it is also important to understand its roots and evolution in the composition classroom. In 1997, Linda Adler-Kassner, Robert Crooks, and Ann Watters served as editors for a volume of writings specifically about service-learning in composition called *Writing the Community: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Composition* as part of a series of books on service-learning in the disciplines published by the American Association for Higher Education. This book combined best practices and lessons learned up to that point by many experts in the field including Thomas Deans, Nora Bacon, Bruce Herzberg, and Linda Flower. Topics range from writing across the curriculum (WAC), reflection, community service writing, and teaching critical thinking and how service-learning plays into each. In the introduction, Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters observe that the early 1990's saw "a microrevolution in college composition." "Revolution" because of the growing number of schools implementing service-learning at that time, and the radical transformations that were being reported regarding "the understanding of education and its relation to communities outside the

campus” (p. 1). They added “micro” to the revolution, however, “Because despite the growth and success of service-learning in the Composition discipline, a great many composition instructors know little if anything about it.”

With advocates, practitioners, and researchers clearly poised to make service-learning a large presence in composition classrooms, the following ten years did see an increase in scholarship and incorporation of service-learning into composition classrooms. In 2000, *Reflections*, a journal devoted specifically to such endeavors was launched. In the fall of 2006, the first volume of the *Community Literacy Journal* was published. According to their website, the focus and scope of this publication is to publish “both scholarly work that contributes to the field’s emerging methodologies and research agendas and work by literacy workers, practitioners, and community literacy program staff. We are especially committed to presenting work done in collaboration between academics and community members” (“Editorial Policies”). This collaboration between academics and community members often takes the form of service-learning.

Such publications served to further advance the “scholarly side” of service-learning (for example, the results of studies on student perceptions, academic gains, and benefits to the community) as well as becoming a valuable archive of what instructors were trying as they incorporated service-learning into composition classrooms, including what worked and what didn’t. Most instructors sharing their experiences in these publications frame the final writing projects in these courses with one of Deans’ models: writing *for*, *with* or *about* the community.

It is important to note that, for disciplines other than English, there has been a shift to house service-learning in student services or dedicated service-learning offices.

Dan Butin (2010) gives several reasons for this shift. Chief among them are a reduction in tenure-track faculty (p. 145) leading to more and more adjunct faculty and even Teaching Assistants who may not have the time or expertise for incorporation of service-learning; the “massification” and industrialization of higher education (p. 149); and economic concerns that force faculty to work on more “marketable” and profitable endeavors (p. 147) that lead to further funding for the university.

English departments by and large have continued to house their own service-learning composition courses. This is demonstrated by the continued scholarship and focus on service-learning in composition courses and English departments. It is promising that such service-learning endeavors are often still housed in English departments, unlike the shift in other disciplines to specialized service-learning offices. There is still work to do to refine the practice of incorporating service-learning into composition courses, and that there is still room to find the best balance between improving the writing skills of students and meeting real need in the community. However, this continued housing of service-learning courses within English departments speaks to the strength of and need for the connection to the community as a way to improve student writing.

### **First-Year Composition Students and Service-Learning**

Fosen (2006) found that students seem to see first-year writing courses as having little cultural meaning or worth; these courses “construe writing as a remedial skill that must precede even the foundational work of students’ other general education courses” (p. 20). Often such complaints are grounded in the fact that students see no real-world connection for their writing. Service-learning counters this by offering

students a real-life rhetorical situation as well as a tangible audience for their work. (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, & Watters 1997; Heilker 2002). Paul Heilker (1997) argues that “Composition students have suffered for too long in courses and classrooms that are palpably *unreal* rhetorical situations” (p. 71).

Thomas Deans (2002) points out that first-year composition is an excellent course in which to incorporate service-learning, as it is a gateway course taken by nearly all incoming students, and can therefore help set the tone for their entire academic experience. “If students just entering higher education encounter an academically rigorous, rhetorically oriented, and ethically provocative first-year writing course, they will likely be predisposed to other service-learning and outreach opportunities” (“Writing as Students”, p. 135). Other scholars echo the idea that service-learning is a natural fit for first-year composition (Gardner 2002; Chaden, Graves, Jolliffe, & Vandenberg 2002; Deans & Bacon 2002; Rousculp 2005; Gring-Pemble & Garner 2010).

While the goals of first-year composition can vary by institution, there are some that are fairly common across the board. First and foremost is to prepare students for the academic writing that will be required throughout their college career. Much of this writing will be in the student’s specific area of study, often based on a real rhetorical situation. For example, a student majoring in Environmental Engineering will likely have to write a paper wherein he or she confronts an environmental issue that they see at play and propose a solution. Why not engage students with such “real world” writing experiences in first-year composition?

Research also suggests that incorporating service-learning into first-year composition has a greater impact on improving the writing skills of students than traditional first-year composition courses (Vogelgesang 2002; Wurr 2002). Vogelgesang et al. cite a 2002 HERI study that found benefits associated with course-based service are strongest for academic outcomes, especially writing skills (p. 16). Adrian Wurr uses test-based measures to compare writing samples from first-year students in a service-learning composition course to those in the traditional course. Students were randomly assigned to one of four sections of first-year composition (two each for service-learning and traditional models). The study results indicated that the writing produced by service-learning students was better in a variety of ways, better on average by a half a letter grade. The essays written by students in the service-learning sections were superior in use of theoretical appeals, logic, coherence, and mechanics. This is no doubt in part due to the real rhetorical situations presented to students.

Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters (1997) offer several summative thoughts on service-learning composition courses in their introduction to *Writing the Community*. They say that, “The kind of written record produced in service-learning courses... can help to move the school and the surrounding community towards greater consciousness of their connected places in larger social systems” (p. 5). While more work is needed to prove such a large claim, past results indicate that incorporating service-learning into composition can “increase students’ conception of the social far more effectively than either textbooks or experience alone” (p. 5). “Both service-learning and composition have been crucial contact points for academic and nonacademic communities—service-learning obviously, but composition also because communication and writing skills have

been an area of such great concern and an easy point to observe the ‘results’ of education” (p. 14).

But what about first-year students in general? How does service-learning affect them, even before they set foot in their first-year composition course? It is true that the body of research supporting service-learning is vast, including the positive effect on students (McNenny 2002; Wurr 2002; Eppler 2011) and community partners (Cruz & Giles 2000; Bringle & Hatcher 2002; d’Arlach, Sanchez & Feuer 2009). What is even more promising is that research on the needs of today’s first-year student show that there are several areas of intersection between the needs of first-year students and those addressed in service-learning courses (Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah 2002; Vogelgesang et al. 2002; McNenny 2002; Crissman Ishler 2005; Kuh 2005; Bringle, Hatcher, & Muthiah 2010). Key areas of intersection include the following specific needs of first-year students:

- Students want to be engaged in their own education (Kuh 2005).
- Students need to engage with faculty outside of the classroom (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991; Kuh 2005; Siegel 2005)
- Instructors should allow for collaboration both inside and outside of the classroom (Evenbeck & Jackson 2005)

Edward Zlotkowski agrees that service-learning is well suited to first-year students. In Zlotkowski’s view, the emergence of research on the first-year experience movement (started by Upcraft and Gardner’s 1989 groundbreaking book *The Freshman Year Experience*) was happening at the same time researchers were making a strong case for community-based learning, led in part by Kendall’s *Combining Service and*

*Learning* in 1990. Many of the goals of each of these movements are congruent (a recognition of multiculturalism, a student's role in the community-at-large, and student retention to name just a few), making service-learning not only a good fit for a first-year course, but possibly essential to improving the first-year experience for students.

There is one more crucial benefit of service-learning to point out as it relates to first-year students at American universities: research on first year student persistence identifies service-learning as an excellent means to retention (Vogelgesang, Ikeda, Gilmartine, & Keup 2002<sup>1</sup>; Crissman Ishler & Upcraft 2005<sup>2</sup>; Siegel 2005<sup>3</sup>; Zlotkowski 2005<sup>4</sup>; Bringle, Hatcher, & Muthiah 2010<sup>5</sup>; Ling Yeh 2010<sup>6</sup>). The detailed research behind these findings (and thus the implications and recommendations for universities) is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is worth taking a moment to stress this connection as it directly supports the idea that incorporating service-learning into first year courses is viable and beneficial for the student and the university (and, as has been shown, the community).

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<sup>1</sup> Vogelgesang (2002) cites a 2002 HERI study that found service-learning to be effective as it "facilitates four types of outcomes: an increased sense of personal efficacy, and increased awareness of the world, an increased awareness of one's personal values, and increased engagement in the classroom experience" (17), all factors that have a positive effect on student retention.

<sup>2</sup> Crissman, Ishler, & Upcraft (2005) found that there is substantial evidence supporting that students are more likely to persist when they participate in service programs that are designed to enhance their successes (they cite Kulik, Kulik, & Schwab, 1983)

<sup>3</sup> Siegel (2005) discusses the role service-learning plays in developing civic responsibility in students, which has been shown to increase retention.

<sup>4</sup> Zlotkowski (2005) asserts that service-learning pedagogy better suits the learning styles of incoming first-year students than the delivery methods of other courses.

<sup>5</sup> Hatcher et. al. (2010) highlight three key areas known to increase student retention that are present in service learning courses: academic achievement; development of peer relationships and extra-curricular involvement, and meaningful interactions with faculty.

<sup>6</sup> Theresa Ling Yeh (2010) found a strong correlation between service-learning and persistence among low-income, first-generation college students.

Though there are several factors to consider when analyzing retention rates from the first to second year of college (such as public or private institution, admissions selectivity, and level of degrees offered), ACT reports that the retention rate from the first to the second year at a traditional college in 2014 (traditional meaning average selection criteria at a university offering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral Degrees) was 73.4% (2014). That means that, at the vast majority of American college, over 25% of first-year students do not return for a second year. As the price of college rises, the American Institutes for Research put this figure into financial terms: "Between 2003 and 2008... states appropriated almost \$6.1 billion to colleges and universities to help pay for the education of students who did not return for a second year" (p. 1).

There are several interventions taking place at American universities to tackle the high rate of student attrition from the first to the second year of college, including targeted orientation programs, "first-year survival courses", and mentorship programs. Vincent Tinto, an often-cited expert on student retention, is critical of many of the singular ways that universities address this issue, accusing them of not actually taking the issue of student retention seriously. According to Tinto (2000), there are five conditions that must be met in order for an institution to be supportive of retention (p. 2-4):

- Students are more likely to persist and graduate in settings that hold high and clear expectations for student achievement
- Students need academic and social support
- Students are more likely to succeed in settings that provide faculty, staff, and students frequent feedback about their performance

- Students need to be involved, socially and academically, in their education
- Learning must occur, and students need to find value in that learning

Service-learning courses, when well-designed, can meet all of these needs.

### **K-12 Partnerships: A Strong Choice to Ensure Reciprocity**

As mentioned previously, Thomas Deans asserts that there are three possible models of writing in a service-learning course: writing *with*, *for*, or *about* the community (definitions below). Part of the claim of this thesis is that *writing with* projects are best to ensure reciprocity between student and community needs. While the community partnerships that lend themselves to *writing with* projects can take many forms, there are several successful examples of partnerships with K-12 students that are built around *writing with* the community. For ease of example and to narrow the focus of possible community partnerships, this thesis will focus on these K-12 partnerships as they are emerging in service-learning research as beneficial to both the college students and their younger counterparts, though it is not to say these are the only viable options for a *writing with* course. As such, it is necessary to take a step back to briefly examine these three models put forth by Thomas Deans to illustrate why I see *writing with* as the best model to further my claim.

According to Deans (2000), writing *for the community* “are those (projects) through which college students collaborate with understaffed non-profit agencies to provide workplace documents (grant research, newsletter articles, news releases, manuals, brochures) for the given agency” (p. 17-18). In this model, workplace literacies are valued as well as traditional essays. Students essentially enter into a client relationship with the community partner as they are producing purpose-driven

documents (p. 53). Deans cites others (Paul Heilker, Laurie Gullion) who agree that writing *for* the community offers the most “real-world” rhetorical situations including “real tasks, real audiences, real purposes for writing” (p. 54). Typical projects in which students write for the community are brochures, newsletters, or recording oral histories.

In *writing about the community* courses, students participate in a more traditional form of community service (offering a service that may be unrelated to writing goals or course objectives, such as working in a homeless shelter or a community garden) and then draw on that experience as they write essays. According to Deans, the emphasis here is generally on personal reflection, social analysis, and/or cultural critique.

Students may be confronted with complex social issues that can become topics of traditional research papers, using their own experiences as a first-hand source. Here, student writing is evaluated according to traditional methods, typically without input from the community partner. As a case study for this model, Deans writes about Bruce Herzberg’s Expository Writing I: Summary and Synthesis course at Bentley College. He observes that a primary goal of the course is for students to exercise critical thinking.

The main difference between writing *about* the community and writing *for* the community is that, in a writing *about* model, students write about pressing social issues in “a rhetoric of academic critique and argument” intended for an academic audience (primarily the teacher), not written as a public document (p. 97). A *writing about* assignment is typically a student response to an issue they observe at play in the community partnership that they wish to explore further, such as a shortage of housing or red-tape community members have to get through for needed services. In such cases they often use the community partner as a primary source in the paper itself.

Finally, writing *with* the community often adopts a “grassroots sensibility”. These programs often have university faculty and students working directly with community members rather than established nonprofits or governmental agencies. Deans notes that writing *with* initiatives “take many forms, including activist research, literacy work, proposal writing, and collaborative problem solving” (p. 110). To illustrate this model, Deans describes the Community Literacy Center (CLC), a partnership between Carnegie Mellon University and Community House in Pittsburgh. Over the years there have been many projects wherein students partner with community members on a final product, including video productions, ongoing research projects and publications including *How to Be Heard: A Handbook for Community Literacy*. Above all, the goal of this model is collaboration, giving both students and community members an equal voice.

Deans himself best connects these models and the importance of service-learning in composition courses:

Despite the differences I have discerned among community writing paradigms, all three share characteristics that distinguish them as a whole from current practice in college writing instruction: an emphasis on experiential learning, an insistence on living out a dialectical relationship between action and reflection, a synergistic pairing of community work with academic study, a folding of community outreach experiences into research and writing, and a commitment to addressing community problems and social justice through writing and rhetoric. (p. 143).

When *Writing Partnerships* was published in 2000, Deans seemed to envision quite involved and complex projects under the umbrella of *writing with the community*. The CLC at Carnegie Mellon is, in Deans’ own words, “the result of a constellation of forces which, unfortunately, are not often readily available in most university-community pairings...” (p. 140). This particular project is the result of years of relationship building,

very strong and sustained institutional support, and support by several faculty and staff members. In 2003, Deans published *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric with Readings*. Here he presents options for a writing *with* model that is attainable by more programs and universities. He suggests two possible *writing with* projects: writing a proposal to key community members to collaborate on solving an existing problem (with the means to doing so, both fully defining the problem and proposing a solution, left open to input from community members) and composing an oral history. These project ideas are in line with *writing with* models that have been successful over the last decade. The notable evolution in project ideas offered by Deans for *writing with* is scale: suggestions have gone from highly engaged, long-term projects to less intensive projects that can successfully be completed in one semester.

Several articles have been published since the release of *Writing Partnerships* and *Writing in Community Action* that showcase service-learning composition courses that successfully utilized a *writing with the community* model, many of them in *Reflections*. In 2003, Cheryl Hofstetter Duffy made a deliberate shift from writing for and about their community partners (in this case, her class worked with international students) to writing with them, working collaboratively on newsletters. Duffy notes that, “Unlike the papers students handed in the first time I attempted service-learning...the writing done collaboratively in the revised course has a richer and more authentic rhetorical situation, with clearly defined audiences and purposes” (p. 9). She goes on to say that “we owe it to ourselves and our students to tap into these (rhetorical) principles as we design our courses.” In Duffy’s course, students worked side-by-side with their

community partner on everything from topic selection to the actual articles contained in the newsletters. Both voices were present in the final product.

In the fall 2005 issue of *Reflections*, Tiffany Rousculp writes about a course transformation similar to Duffy's. Originally her students published a newsletter called *Bridges* in which they wrote *for* or *about* the community by interviewing residents and sharing their stories in the students' own voice. Rousculp shifted the focus to writing with the community members, allowing the words and writing to be those of people living in the community, "rather than enlisting students to interview residents and interpret and present their stories" (p. 71). Rousculp, like Duffy, stresses the importance of giving community members input on themes as well as individual pieces. She also stresses small but important ways to truly value the community member's contribution and to be sure they have a voice. One is to use their own words whenever possible. In the 'zine (the final product of the partnership), each writer pens his/her own introduction. The other key, according to Rousculp, is to have a celebration at the end of the semester with readings, if possible.

As a final specific example on successful writing-with models, Shirley Faulkner-Springfield (2011) recounts her experience incorporating service-learning into a first-year composition course at North Carolina Central University wherein her students invited high school students to write them letters about "the moral, intellectual, social, and psychological factors that affect their transition from high school to college" (p. 66). The college students and high school students write back and forth several times throughout the semester, with the college students eventually serving as mentors and role models for their high school counterparts. "The theoretical framework for this study

draws on Thomas Deans' concept of writing with the community and on Linda Flower's approach to community partnerships that manifest at the Community Literacy Center" (p. 73). Faulkner-Springfield finds that this project is a great fit for first year composition since it exposes students to concepts and theories of writing as well as the essential of English composition and rhetoric (p. 66). She feels that, ultimately, letter writing allows students to see that writing can, and must, effectively serve its purpose.

As mentioned earlier, the key to a successful writing *with* course seems to be in the scale. Further, as you can see from the examples above, there are particular community groups for which writing with works very well, specifically when working with young people. This makes sense, given what we know about first-year college students, not all that far apart in age from middle and high school students in their community: they want to have a voice and know they are being heard, and they want to feel like a part of academic pursuits. The writing with model nurtures this reciprocal focus.

The three examples above pair college students with community members that are high school age or above. Service-learning practitioners have also found that writing with elementary age children is also a viable partnership option for service-learning composition courses. Both Michael John Martin (2000) and Cathy Sayer (2000) have taught service-learning courses wherein composition students are paired with elementary aged children on collaborative writing projects. In Martin's class, his students go into their community partnerships with little to no structure in mind for the final product, so the elementary students can put forth their own ideas. Final products could range from a book of poems to a short story in which everyone writes a scene or

section. Again, Martin stresses the importance of having students share their work at a reading at the end of the semester.

All of the examples above show that *writing with* is a viable model for first-year service-learning composition courses, and what emerges are appropriate community partners for such a model. I suggest that a service-learning course that pairs first-year composition students and younger students (K-12) meets the needs of first-year students cited elsewhere in this Chapter, as well as the needs of elementary and secondary students (Gomez 1999; Everett 1998; Othmer & Sealfon 2010). At the heart of these collaborations is true reciprocity. Both groups of students have a say in the format of the final product, each person's voice is represented, and learning by doing (and teaching) reinforces rhetorical and writing concepts for both the college students and their younger counterparts.

Marion A. Eppler et al. (2011) conducted two studies to support the claim that service-learning partnerships between college and elementary students are beneficial to both parties. The basis for the studies was a service-learning course in which first year honor's students tutored at-risk elementary school children in reading. The first study examined changes in social attitudes and motivations for volunteering for the college students, and the second study assessed benefits for the children by examining changes in achievement motivation and progress in reading.

In Study 1, Eppler et al. saw a significant increase in the frequency that the students in the service-learning course volunteered, even after the class ended. On average, these students volunteered once a week compared with only a few times a year by the control group. One surprising finding was that "service-learning increased

students' motives for volunteering in order to protect their self-esteem and help them deal with personal problems" (p. 107). The service-learning students also became more likely to value service as a way to gain new perspectives, increase self-esteem, and to cope with personal problems. They were also more likely to engage in service as a means to clarify career goals (p. 108). The authors also note that service-learning students "...came to see service-learning as a way to foster their personal growth and development, an effect not expected by the instructor or the researchers" (p. 108).

In study two, researchers were interested in whether tutoring by untrained college students improved the children's reading scores as well as whether the college students affected students' achievement motivation, specifically their response to challenges. The study found that reading scores were improved, and it did not seem to matter that the college students had no special training or curriculum to follow (as opposed to past studies showing positive effects for children tutored by college students trained to use a structured reading curriculum by Allor & McCathren, 2004 and Fitzgerald 2001). This implies that service-learning instructors do not need to devote a lot of class time to "tutor training" if embarking on a writing-with partnership with school children. The authors conclude the article by stating that "our findings show benefit of service-learning experience for both students and the community" (p. 112).

All three of Thomas Deans' models for service-learning in a composition course are viable, and instructors need to determine what is best for the particular course goals and the needs of their local community. However, the successful programs above support the use of a *writing with* model as a good fit for partnerships between first-year college students and K-12 students. Not only does this model allow the first-year college

students to review and teach the writing skills they are studying and practicing in class (including basic writing concepts), but it allows them to feel needed and part of their own education. These affective needs, as seen in this Chapter, are just as important to retaining and fostering first-year students as are the academic benefits of the course. In the true spirit of reciprocity, the elementary and secondary students benefit academically as well, but also report affective and personal gains as well.

## **Reflection**

Student reflection has become somewhat of a given within service-learning courses. Veronica House (2013) points out that “virtually all academic definitions of service-learning include reflection”. Given this, House asserts that “practitioners must understand ways to effectively incorporate it into courses” (p. 28). The call to do so is not new. In 1997, Chris Anson drew attention to the need for composition instructors to understand reflection and to engage with new and forthcoming research on better ways to incorporate and structure reflection in service-learning classes, especially in composition. Sixteen years later, House extends the same call.

Much has been done since Anson’s 1997 article to further research and best practices in regards to reflection in service-learning courses. One major shift has been in the terminology. The work of Sarah Ash and Patti Clayton (2009) have made “critical reflection” the gold standard in service-learning classes over general reflection. Veronica House summarizes the difference by stating that “the word ‘reflection’ brings to mind emotional, subjective, non-academic writing, which can be difficult to evaluate: whereas ‘critical reflection’ suggests analytical, evidence-based intellectually rigorous writing that is appropriate to evaluate” (p. 30). In other words, the move has been from

general, write-to-learn based journals to more structured reflection that is designed to move students through difficult questions by engaging them in critical thinking to confront and analyze their assumptions and misgivings.

In a first-year service-learning composition course that is purposely structured to ensure reciprocity between student and instructor, critical reflection is key. Such rigorous inquiry through reflection both allows the student to connect the service-learning experience to their own learning and serves as a window into how the partnership is going, and what the community partner is gaining from the experience. Critical reflection is not without its opponents and varied (sometimes conflicting) views of how to best incorporate it into a service-learning class. Chapter two provides a literature review of such issues specifically, and presents the best practices that emerge from the literature on structuring critical reflection for a first-year service-learning composition course.

## CHAPTER 2: THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF CRITICAL REFLECTION

Pattie H. Clayton and Sarah L. Ash (2004) articulate three predictable patterns of service-learning courses (p. 60-61):

**Phase 1:** Intrigued by the promise of the pedagogy and uniqueness of the experience, students and instructor launch into the semester together, hopeful and confident.

**Phase 2:** As the semester proceeds, students may begin experiencing difficulties adjusting to such a multi-faceted process that requires independence, initiative, and persistence in the face of unanticipated obstacles. Students may also struggle when they are forced to adopt a self-critical analytical perspective oriented toward continuous improvement. And, aware of it or not, instructors may similarly be experiencing difficulties transitioning to this new pedagogy, which requires more flexibility and less hierarchy in relationships than that to which most are accustomed.

**Phase 3:** Gradually, these collective difficulties may begin to diminish the effectiveness of the experience, not to mention collective enthusiasm for it.

They say that, "...service-learning instructors invite students into a teaching and learning process that is messier, more self-critical, and more open-ended than most student(s)—or most instructors—have been socialized into" (p. 61). This, they say, creates "an experience of dissonance that is all the more filled with learning potential because of these very differences" (p. 61). Diligently guiding students through this period can lead to the next phase:

**Phase 4:** A period of increased effectiveness and creativity, greater openness to challenge and risk, deeper self-awareness, and a stronger sense of personal responsibility and community. (p. 61).

Phase 4 is really critical reflection, wherein students are challenged to deeply engage in their own experiences and their thoughts and feelings about their experiences. Citing Eyler & Giles (1999), Clayton & Ash state, "The primary reason

reflection is so central to effective service-learning is because of the depth of critical analysis it can facilitate into open-ended and ambiguous questions” (p. 61).

Reflection has long been seen as a crucial element in service-learning courses to connect the service-learning experience to course material and goals and to ensure student learning from the experience (Anson 1997; Eyler & Giles 1999; Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah 2004; Molee, Henry, Sessa, & McKinney-Prupis 2010; House 2013). In fact, several practitioners include reflection in their guiding definition of service-learning to show how essential it is to effective service-learning. John Saltmarsh (1997) says that, “Community service learning is a pedagogy of *reflective inquiry* linking students’ affective and cognitive development and connecting institutions of higher education to communities of which they are a part” (p. 84, emphasis added). Kendall (1990) asserts that:

Service-learning programs emphasize the accomplishment of tasks that meet human needs in combination with conscious educational growth... They combine needed tasks in the community with intentional learning goals and with *conscious reflection and critical analysis*.” (p. 20, emphasis added).

There is little argument that reflection is essential to any service-learning course, regardless of discipline. However, it can and should be even more deeply engrained in composition service-learning courses given the focus on writing skills and what has come to be known as write-to-learn. Active and thoughtful reflection not only allows students to connect their service-learning experience with course goals and objectives, but offers a first-person medium in which to practice and develop writing skills. There are several theories on how to incorporate reflection into a service-learning class as well as models for doing so. This Chapter presents a literature review of the research on critical reflection, both as an emergent critical element of all service-learning courses

and as it relates to composition service-learning courses striving to focus on the reciprocal relationship balance between student and community needs, including those in a first-year composition course.

### **The History of Reflection: A Shift towards Critical Reflection**

Most scholars of reflection in service-learning courses harken back to the work of John Dewey as the pioneer of reflection in higher education. In fact, Chris Anson (1997) says that Dewey is “the genesis of the concept of reflection” (p. 170). John Saltmarsh (1996) sums up Dewey’s contributions to service-learning in this way: “Dewey’s writings inform service-learning through a philosophy of education, a theory of inquiry, a conception of community and democratic life, and a means for individual engagement in society toward the end of social transformation” (p. 13). Specifically, Dewey’s writings analyzed five aspects of education that can be seen as specific to service-learning:

1. Linking education to experience
2. Democratic community
3. Social service
4. Reflective inquiry
5. Education for social transformation

These areas of contribution inform not only the field of service-learning in general, but highlight two key pieces of the claim of this thesis. Namely, that reflection is key to not only student learning in a service-learning course, but is crucial to ensuring reciprocity with the community partner, as in the social service Dewey mentions within a democratic community. Dewey goes into great depth about the necessity of reflection (in education as a whole, not just in service-learning), and his ideas are often tied to reciprocity with the community partner. “When we reflect upon an experience instead of just having it, we inevitably distinguish between our own attitude and the objects toward

which we sustain the attitude” (1916, p. 173). In the case of service-learning, these “objects” are the community partner and, specifically, their circumstances and needs.

Dewey also says that, in the reflective process, the “value of knowledge is subordinate to its use in thinking” when trying to solve a problem encountered in the service (1916, p. 158). In *How We Think* (1910), Dewey describes reflective thinking as “the kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious and consecutive consideration...It enables us to know what we are about when we act. It converts action which is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action” (p. 113, 125). Essentially, reflection is necessary to ensure student learning. In service-learning scholarship, reflection is key in this regard.

If we fast-forward to the emergence of deep scholarship in service-learning over the last 25 years, we see reference to the influence of other educational scholars. Janet Eyler (2002) states that “good reflection is linear and ever-progressive” (p. 519) and cites Schön (1983, 1995) as stressing the importance of reflective practice where individuals reflect not just “on practice” but “in practice”. This, she says, draws on Kolb’s continuous learning cycle. Chris Anson (1997) illustrates this by reminding us of the components of Kolb’s learning cycle: First, the learner participates in a concrete experience. Second, he or she participates in “reflective observation” by looking at the experience from many perspectives. Third is “abstract conceptualization”, wherein the learner “creates concepts and integrates observations into logically sound theories” (p. 171). The fourth and final cycle is “active experimentation”, in which the theories are used to make decisions and solve problems (p. 171). Each of the four parts of the cycle can be seen in the types of reflection being done in service-learning courses today.

While the importance of reflection in service-learning has long been established, the approach to incorporating it, as well as to what end, has varied among practitioners. In 1997, Chris Anson wrote an often cited article titled “On Reflection: The Role of Logs and Journals in Service-Learning Courses” in which he explores the role of journal writing in service-learning courses. His main concern is that journal writing, as a general practice, can be fairly uninvolved and simply recount events. Anson recounts the journal entries of one particular student in one of the first service-learning courses he taught. The student was writing about her service-learning experience as a tutor. While she did express frustration with the language barrier between her and the student she was tutoring, she did not explore this frustration in terms of any causes or solutions, nor did she ever connect it to the course (or any other academic) content. Nine weeks later, entries from the same student were still much the same. Anson observes, “Journal writing in many service courses may serve the purpose of creating a log or record of experience, but falls short of encouraging the critical examination of ideas” (p. 167-168), as his own student demonstrated.

According to Anson, “Reflection is supposed to encourage a movement between observation and intellectual analysis or consciousness-raising, and conversely to apply abstract concepts (such as citizenship, public ethics, or social justice) to contexts beyond the classroom” (p. 167). In the case of the student above, none of this was present. This led Anson to add structure to the journals in order to “create a genre of the academic journal for service-learning courses that deliberately, creatively, and effectively brings the concept of reflection into sharp focus” (p. 170) instead of adopting common practices for journal writing. As one form of such structure, Anson encourages

offering students “frames” for reflection (p. 173), wherein students examine a single concept or issue from a variety of alternating perspectives.

For example, when reflecting on citizenship, Anson gives students three frames in which the term *citizens* is understood based on the work of Boyte and Farr (1996):

1. *Rights-bearing members of a political system who chose their leaders...through elections;*
  2. *Caring members of a moral community who share certain values and feel common responsibilities toward each other; and as*
  3. *Practice agents of a civic world who work together in public ways and spaces to engage the tasks and try to solve the problems that they collectively face.*
- (3-4).

Anson then asks students to consider each, and explore what solutions may be present in these various perceived issues of “citizenship” at play in their service-learning partner site. This gives students ways to think about their own roles and responsibilities relative to the mission they are serving. Anson seems to value journal entries wherein observations “weave like threads in and out of a kind of reflective fabric in which things *mean* or have significance for belief, and ultimately action” (p. 175).

“Framing” in writing responses is nothing new. Essentially, it is adding context. Specific to Anson’s example, the context serves two distinct purposes. First, these frames can help students who are struggling to grasp the concept of the topic of the reflection. In the example above, “citizenship” may be a term some students struggle to define and/or relate to. By giving examples of how this term can be understood, Anson gives context to the term and guides students towards relating to it. This in and of itself

pulls students deeper into the reflection, as they aren't stuck from the get-go trying to understand what they are supposed to be reflecting on. Secondly, these frames can help student more closely connect their service-learning experience to broader social issues by guiding them to connect what they are seeing, hearing, and feeling in isolation to much larger (and more complicated) social issues.

While these "frames" did give students a new way to think about what they were encountering, they were also rigid in that they assumed what issues students would encounter and tried to anticipate issues they would be confronted with within their community partnerships. Even in his example of exploring what a "citizen" is, there is an assumption that this would be a term students would (or should) grapple with. Service-learning instructors started to see that, while they needed something structured to guide students to connect service with learning and more deeply engage with issues they were encountering, they also needed to keep the prompts and structure somewhat more open to individual student experiences.

As such, journals remained the primary format for student reflection, but the "frames" were modified over time. The journal is a viable medium for reflection, as this is a format of writing most students are familiar with, and it gives freedom to write from the first person, unlike many other forms of academic writing. The downfall of this, of course, is that the reflection can become too egocentric, wherein the student focuses only on his/her experience, frustrations, joys, etc. and does not analyze these experiences from the perspective of the community partner or explore how they pertain to course material. Further, such a practice could compromise the reciprocal relationship, as the student focuses too much on "What am I experiencing and getting

out of this?” rather than, “Why am I feeling this way? What might my community partner be feeling? Have I learned anything about why this might be happening? Can I offer any solutions?”

In an effort to move students towards this more critical and challenging reflection, Eyler & Giles (1999) presented five characteristics of good reflection activities, which they refer to as “The 5 Cs”: a) connection between experience and knowledge, b) continuity of reflection before, during, and after the service experience, c) context of applying subject matter to real life situations, d) challenging students’ perspectives, and e) coaching and providing emotional support to students. What is missing in this model, when compared to the goals set out by Anson, is a connection to course content and materials. Interestingly, in a study analyzing student perspectives of service-learning classes that included The 5 C’s, Eyler, Giles & Muthiah (2004) found that the single most significant characteristic for student perspective of success of a service-learning course is integration of academic content with the service experience (p. 42). Though The 5 Cs don’t specifically address this connection, students indicated that reflection helped reinforce this connection. The authors state that, “...reflection that is structured, regular, and clarifies values independently contributed to the quality of the educational experience for students” (p. 42).

By the early 2000s, service-learning scholars started to see a need to not only study the types of reflection that were most effective, but the need to measure if (and how much) students were learning in their service-learning courses through their reflection. In 2002, Janet Eyler draws our attention to what she calls “extensive reflection” as she reviews the relatively few studies done up to that time that “distinguish

among the types of service-learning experience or measure the impact of amount and forms of reflective practice” (p. 518). Eyler found that there is evidence to suggest that amount and type of reflection matter as related to quality of a service-learning experience as well as that service-learning that “connects experience with academic study through extensive reflection may contribute to a deeper understanding of social problems and to the cognitive development that makes it possible for students to identify, frame, and resolve the ill structured social problems that we must deal with as engaged citizens in communities” (p. 519).

Eyler & Giles did call for more research in this area in 1999 when they “compared highly reflective service-learning with service added to courses with little reflective integration and found that reflective service-learning increased critical thinking performance using measures based on reflective judgment theory” (p. 522). “While reflection appears to be critical for attaining important cognitive outcomes of service-learning or other field based programs, we have reason to believe that students are unlikely to be engaged in reflection in their community placements unless intentional efforts are undertaken to make it so” (p. 522). Thus, extensive (and, I would add, structured) reflection is essential to link the service with learning.

One solution offered by Eyler to make reflection in service-learning courses more extensive is to incorporate *preflection*, in which students can anticipate possible issues or circumstances they may encounter in their work with the community partners by responding to specific questions posed by the instructor before beginning work in the community. Along with this, Eyler points out that an often-neglected opportunity for continuous reflection is on-site with community partners. “The key to effective reflection

during service is continuity; observations need to be continually processed, challenged, and connected with other information” (p. 526). Finally, if this continuous reflection model is followed, the post-service reflection can be “particularly satisfying for everyone involved” (p. 530). “It is an opportunity to consolidate learning, to examine where one has traveled in understanding over the course of the term, and to identify questions and issues yet unresolved” (p. 531).

Bringle & Hatcher (1999) offer another set of five guidelines for designing effective, continuous reflection: a) Clearly link the service experience to the course content and learning objectives, b) Create structure in terms of description, expectations, and the criteria for assessing the activity, c) occur regularly during the semester so that students can develop the capacity to engage in deeper and broader examination of issues, d) provide feedback from the instructor so that students learn how to improve their critical analysis and reflective practice, and e) include the opportunity for students to explore, clarify, and alter their personal values. This speaks to the findings of Eyler, Giles, & Muthiah’s findings that effective reflection is structured and regular. What Bringle & Hatcher add, however, are the ideas that instructors should give feedback on student reflections and that students should be allowed to submit several drafts of their reflections in order to fulfill the fifth guideline. This is really what makes critical reflection different from general reflection: while the instructor will point out areas of great critical thinking or comment on experience, they will also challenge and push students to think deeper, complicating their observations. They may even make suggestions for diving deeper, such as asking students to try to see things from

the perspective of the community partner or to come up with a mutually beneficial solution.

Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah (2004) imply a reflection structure that becomes what Ash & Clayton (2004, 2005) come to refer to solidly as *critical reflection* within service-learning courses. Natasha Kenny from the Centre for Open Learning and Educational Support (2010) identifies two early and useful theories of critical reflection. She cites Mezirow saying that critical reflection “occurs when we analyze and challenge the validity of our presuppositions and assess the appropriateness of our knowledge, understanding, and beliefs given our present contexts (Mezirow 1990). Brookfield (1990) explains that critical reflection involves three phases:

1. Identifying the assumptions that underlie our thoughts and actions
2. Assessing and scrutinizing the validity of these assumptions in terms of how they relate to our “real-life” experiences and our present contexts.
3. Transforming the assumptions to become more inclusive and integrative, and using this newly-formed knowledge to more appropriately inform our future actions and practices.

Ash & Clayton take this one step further by insisting that the instructor plays a key role in getting students to “assess, scrutinize, and transform” their assumptions by providing feedback that guides them through these critical thinking skills.

In an effort to build a reflection model that allowed students do just that, Ash et. al. responded to Eyler’s call to develop “measures that allow students to show us, rather than tell us, that they have attained greater understanding, ability to apply their knowledge, problem-solving skills and cognitive development” (Eyler, p. 11) by developing a reflection model called The DEAL Model (Ash & Clayton 2004; Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005; Ash, Clayton, & Day, 2005), which is both a model for structured reflection as well as part of a model that can be used to assess student

learning in a service-learning course by examining student reflections. The DEAL Model is grounded in theoretical work provided in Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1956) and Paul and Elder's *Critical Thinking: Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life* (2002). It was "developed as a mechanism to guide and quantitatively evaluate student critical reflections in service-learning courses by using outside ratings for depth of learning and critical thinking" (p. 241). It is a three-step reflection process that moves students through critical reflection and towards assessing their own learning by a) describing their service-learning experience, b) examining this experience in light of specified learning objectives for academic enhancement, personal growth, and civic engagement, and c) articulating their learning in their reflections.

The second step involves the most critical thinking as it calls students to examine their experience within three categories using different prompts for each. The first category, academic enhancement, guides students through connecting their service-learning experience to course materials. Essentially, this is an exercise in comparing and contrasting theory and practice. The second, personal growth, prompts students to explore things they have learned about their own personal characteristics, including strengths, weaknesses, sense of identity, assumptions, and convictions. Molee et al sum this up by saying that, "Students consider how they learned to be the way they are" (p. 242). The final category in the second step of the DEAL Model, civic engagement, prompts students to consider how their contributions to community partnerships are working, as well as the work of the community agency as a whole. Further, students are asked to envision real and sustainable change they may be able to enact within the community agency.

Ash & Clayton's (2004) approach to reflection "more clearly demonstrates rather than reports learning; pushes students beyond superficial interpretations of complex issues; and facilitates academic mastery, personal growth, civic engagement and critical thinking" (p. 140). The third phase above, "articulating their learning in their reflections" has become an assessment tool for student learning called Articulated Learnings:

Whatever the forum for reflection, the *articulated learning* phase brings each reflection activity to a close and establishes a foundation for learners to carry the results of the reflection process forward beyond the immediate experience, improving the quality of future learning and of future experience (related to service or to other aspects of their lives). (p. 142).

Ash & Clayton's model of Articulated Learning (AL) is used not only to ensure student learning in service-learning courses, but to assess this learning as well.

The AL is structured in accordance with 4 guiding questions: 1) What did I learn?; 2) How, specifically, did I learn it?; 3) Why does this learning matter, or why is it significant?; and 4) In what ways will I use this learning, or what goals shall I set in accordance with what I have learned in order to improve myself, the quality of my learning, or the quality of my future experiences and services? The authors argue that "The AL is designed to be a foundation for learners to carry the results of the reflection process forward beyond the immediate experience, improving the quality of future learning and experience (related to service or to other aspects of their lives)" (p. 51).

While very structured and clearly focused on reciprocity between benefits to the community partner as well as assurance of student learning, The DEAL model can be daunting for instructors. Essentially, for every reflection students do, they are required to respond to prompts in three steps. Further, step two includes three "sub-steps". Not only is this quite writing intensive for students, but it is potentially a lot of work for the

instructor as each reflection (by now several pages in length) requires prompt feedback to the student. While there is evidence that writing intensive first-year composition service-learning courses are beneficial to students and increase writing skills (Chaden, Graves, Jolliffe, & Vandenberg 2002; Wurr 2002), it seems that this can easily be overdone, especially if students are also required to submit other pieces of academic writing and a final project within that same semester.

Lenore M. Molee et. al. (2010) reviewed the DEAL model extensively to test if so much structure and required writing is actually of benefit to students, and if learning really is increased. Their study looks at the reflections (following the DEAL Model) of two undergraduate service-learning courses at a large teaching university in the northeast United States, one first-year and one upper-level seminar course. They found that students were generally able to identify and describe concepts in areas of academic enhancement and personal growth, but “few could analyze and synthesize, and even fewer were able to evaluate these concepts” (p. 246). “Results suggest that more than one-third of students were unable to identify and describe a civic engagement concept. None could fully evaluate the civic engagement concept.” In terms of critical thinking, students’ levels were found to be poor to fair. “Few were adequate and almost none achieved the level of ‘good’” (p. 246). “Using the DEAL Model, we found that, similar to other research on reflection, the depth of learning scores for the majority of students fell into the categories of lower-order thinking skills (identify, describe, and apply) and their critical thinking ranged from poor to fair” (p. 246).

These results are significant, although clearly need to be replicated to make a case for disregarding such an accepted reflection structure as the DEAL Model. What can be seen, however, is that there is likely a happy medium between the general reflection journal Anson cautions against and something as involved and potentially cumbersome as the DEAL Model. Chapter 3 provides guidance on striking such a balance, and suggests reflection prompts appropriate to a first-year service-learning composition course.

### **Reflection and Reciprocity**

From the research presented thus far, it is clear that many scholars feel that reflection in a service-learning course enhances the focus on reciprocity. John Saltmarsh says that, "...the student's service relationship in a community setting should be defined by reciprocity and mutuality, the same qualities of relations that define the interactions between students and teacher" (p. 88). "Reflection is fostered in a pedagogical context of relationships and connections defined by dialogue" (p. 89). He maintains that journals in a service-learning course are a place where students can engage in working out the struggles they have and that in "confronting and naming these struggles...learning emerges" (p. 90).

As seen above in the history of reflection, critical reflection better allows students to "confront and name these struggles," (p. 178) as Anson indicates, with instructor feedback and the opportunity for students to create multiple drafts of their reflections. Critical reflection also better ensures reciprocity, as instructors have insight into what is unfolding within the partnerships through their constant reading of (and commenting on) student reflection. The *civic engagement* piece of the DEAL Model (as described above)

specifically addresses reciprocity. Though results of Morlee's study show that students struggle with this piece, it is worth finding ways to guide students through considering both how their contributions and partnerships are working, as well as the work of the community agency as a whole as the questions posed really do get at the heart of reciprocity between student learning and community benefit.

While the importance of reciprocity has been established, not all scholars agree that learning can so easily be ensured through the reflection models presented above. Amy Rupiper Taggert (2007) cautions having instructors give feedback on student reflection, as it can cause students to think of their writing as only for an audience of self and teacher, writing what he or she thinks the teacher will want to read (a common critique of first-year composition courses in general). According to Taggert,

Writing for self and teacher can be in conflict with the community engagement principles of reciprocity, cross-cultural communication, and seeing text as social action...If the students are not already prepared to see the community members as contributors to their learning or part of the dialogue into which their writing enters, simply putting them into a new environment and asking them to write about it may only minimally change their outlook and deepen the understanding of the world around them. (p. 56).

Drawing on Deans' models of writing *for*, *with* or *about* the community, this is a clear criticism on writing *about* the community, both in reflection as well as the academic writing for the course.

Rupiper Taggert rightly addresses the role of authorship in reflection and the tensions created when incorporating instructor feedback. If the true goal of reciprocity within service-learning courses is to ensure a balance between student learning and benefits to the community partner, such rigorous reflection begs the question "and then what?" In other words, what are students doing with the knowledge they gain through

critical reflection? How do we (as instructors) ensure that they take that learning back into their community partnerships? Janet Eyster (2002) would say that the key is to have critical reflection continue when students are on-site during their service-learning experiences. The same reflection practices that are done after an experience should be done, at least occasionally, during a service-experience.

This is an area of opportunity for instructors of first-year composition service-learning courses. Not only can instructors do what they can to ensure reciprocity and practice of what students are learning through their reflection, they can present another real-time, real-world rhetorical situation in which students can use writing as a tool of communication. Having students reflect while on-site could also lead to student learning that Molee et al. (2010) found to be lacking in the civic engagement category of the DEAL Model, as student could step back from, reflect on, and then perhaps act on an issue they are presented during their service-learning experience all at the same time.

For example, a first-year composition student (let's call her Jane) meets with her community partner who, in this instance, is a second grade class wherein the college student is working on a collaborative book of poetry with the students. This is the fifth semester for this particular project, so the relationship with the community partner is fairly well established. There is a new student in the class who will be entering the project just as most students are working on revisions. Unsure how to help this student, the college student speaks with the second grade teacher for some feedback. In doing so, Jane learns that this is the third new school for this new student in a year as his family moves often. Though the teacher has given Jane good advice on how to allow the student to participate (by helping with the introduction to the book and submitting a

short poem), she still struggles with the larger social issue of a child who is in and out of schools and what this is doing to the child's learning and social skills.

If Jane takes a moment, within that same day, to go through a structured reflection exercise, she can unpack her concerns and confront any assumptions she is making about the situation. Further, she has a true expert at her disposal (the teacher) with whom she can discuss her concerns and learn more about the issue. While it is unlikely Jane will be able to address this systemic issue single-handedly, she can work through the issue and perhaps come to a better understanding of how and why this happens, and what is done to help these children. She may even find a way to help this particular student in some small way during the remainder of her service-learning experience. This scenario, at least for this moment, takes away the "audience of two" cautioned by Ruper Taggart and allows the student to focus solely on his or her own thoughts and the needs of the community partner.

One other area of research in reflection that can also inform the practice (and assurance) of reciprocity is that of emotion and learning. In 2006, Felten, Gilchrist, & Darby called for service-learning research that "explicitly consider(s) the roles emotion may play throughout the reflective learning process" (p. 42). The authors state that "Emotion... is an essential part of the thinking process, not simply a catalyst for reason nor inherently an obstacle to or a distraction from rational thought" (p. 41) and argue that service-learning research does not explicitly include emotion as an important part of service-learning practice, learning and, specifically, reflections. "Just as service and learning are mutually dependent in good practice, we need to acknowledge that both reason and emotion are essential components of the reflective learning process" (p. 41).

Manuel G. Correia and Robert E. Bleicher (2008) answered this call by acknowledging that they see the implications for integrating emotion into reflection, but cautioning that reflection should be based on both emotion and thinking, and “the emotion-based reflections are leveraged on behalf of thinking reflections” (p. 42). They go on to say:

In agreement with Bringle and Hatcher (1999), we consider a (service-learning experience) to become educative when reflective thought allows the student to develop a new understanding of the situation that leads to a change in state of mind and a more informed or improved action. Following this logic, it is necessary to take into account students’ feelings and emotions about the service learning experience and use them as catalysts for reflection that leads to learning. (p. 42).

It seems essential to consider the role of emotion in reflection, especially in a first-year composition courses wherein students are both exploring their role as academic writers and engaging with an (often) new community at the same time. Most composition instructors would agree that emotion is something that can cloud academic essays and keep students from critically examining controversial issues from a neutral point of view, judging only the facts at hand. In fact, many first-year composition courses are structured around just that: getting students to think critically about not only an issue, but the range of facts and opinions on such an issue. The semester might be built around a single issue (global warming, a natural disaster, or homelessness, for example), wherein the course readings present a variety of issues and perspectives inherent to that event. Students, at the end of the course, are then asked to write an argument presenting one side of an issue.

It is true that not all service-learning partnerships are, on the surface at least, emotional. For example, tutoring students or creating a newsletter for an agency might

not immediately come across as situations fraught with emotion. However, in a service-learning course that is truly reciprocal, all parties need to be ready for anything since there are not rigid guidelines set to limit the scope of interactions. It seems wise for service-learning instructors to be aware of the research behind emotion in service-learning to have tools at their disposal should a student (or students) find themselves in this realm, unable to look beyond their emotions to see things objectively.

Without the structure and guidance suggested by Correia and Bleicher (namely referencing a variety of sources from different perspectives), students would likely chose a “side” of the issue based on emotion only, including their previous experience with the issue or even just a “hunch” based on their political, religious, or social views. This is, of course, not the case with every student, but is possible of such an open-ended assignment with little guidance. As a former high school English teacher, I can attest to this often being the case with final senior research papers. Students would present on a controversial issue they felt very strongly about, and the final product was clearly driven more by emotion than solid research and an open-mind for different perspectives, as was often shown in both their lack of support for their own position as well as the lack of acknowledgment of a counterargument.

There is much more research (and enduring questions) on the role of emotion in service-learning that is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is too important not to mention as something service-learning practitioners should consider. While this is a brief introduction, the one take-away is that critical reflection is one very effective way of addressing and discussing emotions that students may encounter (and possibly struggle with) as it guides students through a process that can help unpack raw

emotions and turn them into a true learning experience. One role of a first-year composition course, then, especially one that incorporates service-learning, might be to teach students to acknowledge the role of emotion in both their service-learning experience as well as in the academic writing they need to do throughout the semester. Reflection, then, is an excellent tool to complicate this and ask students to confront the emotions that surface, the reasons behind them, and ways to use the experience to work towards a solution.

### **Unexpected Benefits of Reflection: Beyond the “Norm”**

The accepted importance of critical reflection as well as the overwhelming support for structured reflection shown above are essential for any service-learning instructor, especially in composition, to be aware of and to strive for when developing a service-learning course. However, it is worth briefly presenting a few different structures for and outcomes of reflection to show that there is value and importance in any reflection exercise that takes place, and that reflection doesn't have to rest solely on the student.

In some cases, reflection can highlight the learning that occurred in a service-learning experience that might otherwise seem to be a failure. In 2010, Geoffrey W. Bateman wrote an article for *Reflections* called “Queer Rhetorics and Service-Learning; Reflection as Critical Engagement”. He recounts an upper-level service-learning writing course he taught that coupled readings on a variety of LGBTQ issues with service-learning and community engagement to help students develop as writers in personal, academic, and civic contexts. The service-learning component of the course was an attempt to bring two often disassociated groups together: members of the LGBTQ

community and the homeless in Boulder, CO, by offering a dinner that would hopefully foster conversations about similarities and differences between these two groups of people. Bateman first considered the service-learning experience a failure as only three people showed up for the meal that was planned: one homeless man, a staff member from the community gathering house that hosted the dinner, and a board member who came to show support. However, in the end he saw learning through the critical reflection done by his students. In fact, he mentions a “sustained critical self-reflection of how we experienced and made sense of the course” (p. 93).

“As important as the more formal writing assignments were for my students, the intellectual interactions that journaling provided us not only fostered a critical awareness of the rhetorical worlds we were exploring, but helped us all better see our role within them” (94). In terms of reflection (Bateman later read Deans’ work and identified that this course was writing *about* the community), Bateman says:

Even though I now tend to design courses in which writing serves as the means of community engagement, looking back, I am reminded of what students gain from such a regular and sustained reflection on their own learning, for it speaks to their very real need to forge connections with, process through, and respond to the material they study. (p. 96).

In addition to student learning, the reflection process was incredibly valuable for Bateman as an instructor, as he was able to learn from this experience and change his approach to the service-learning components of future courses he will teach. This, in turn, will be not only of benefit to his future students, but will hopefully provide a rich and more engaging experience for the community partners, ensuring a truly reciprocal relationship.

For Bateman, incorporating critical reflection into the course from the beginning may have enhanced this course in a number of ways. Perhaps (though maybe also ideally), guiding questions focused around benefit to the community may have led some students to question and/or comment on the likelihood of their invitations being carefully considered by the populations they were sent to. Critical reflection entries (read more often by the instructor) may have revealed students' fear that no one would show up, or that one group would be over-represented. This could then have led to mid-stream tweaks to the project, perhaps including targeting more populations with invitations or calling each person as well as sending an invitation. At the very least, critical reflection could have prepared students earlier for the possibility that the event might not be well attended but that there is much to learn from that outcome (staving off the disappointment felt the night of the dinner).

Another example of a critical reflection exercise that is "outside the box" and of great benefit beyond student learning is that enacted by the Nuestra Casa (Our House) project done by Eva M. Moya and G. Nunez Guillermina to raise Tuberculosis awareness on the U.S. Mexico border (2013). In this project, a travelling exhibition was designed that included artwork, communication events, access to health promoters, as well as social media outlets to raise awareness in a variety of ways.

For this project, Moy and Guillermina asked that both students and community participants who attended the exhibitions participate in critical reflection. For their part, community members were asked to leave responses, written on cloth, on a clothesline outside of Nuestra Casa immediately after they visited (p. 135) as well as on social medial. These messages were to share images and facts that stuck with them as they

toured the exhibit as well as any feedback they wished to leave. Students then read through all of the responses and analyzed them to identify key themes. In all there were 840 messages on pieces of cloth (trapitos) to review. As students worked through the responses, they were asked to reflect on the quotes and images they found to be most compelling. Student responses were then incorporated throughout the mounting of the exhibit (p. 141).

This particular exercise shows that reflection can go beyond the journal, and can truly be a collaborative exercise between student and community partner. While not always a practical model for soliciting instructor feedback and certainly lacking the intensive writing of a more structured journal, the Nuestra Casa project shows potential for new kinds of collaboration that really emphasize reciprocity and the value of the words and ideas of the community. This project is a great image for combining the importance of critical reflection with the absolute essential focus on reciprocity in a first-year service-learning composition course.

With the importance of both critical reflection and true reciprocity between student learning and community benefit established in this and Chapter 1, Chapters 3 and 4 will present a guide for developing a first-year service-learning composition course using these best practices.

### CHAPTER 3: BEGINNING STAGES OF PLANNING A FIRST-YEAR SERVICE-LEARNING COMPOSITION COURSE

Chapter one included a review of literature supporting incorporating service-learning into a first-year composition course (Gardner 2002; Chaden et al 2002; Deans 2002; Deans & Bacon 2002; Rousculp 2005; Gring-Pemble 2010). The reasons for this fit are numerous. Edward Zlotkowski (2005) points out that service-learning in general is well-suited to first-year students given the intersection between the needs of first-year students and those addressed in service-learning courses (Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthiah 2002; Vogelgesang et al. 2002; McNenny 2002; Crissman 2005; Kuh 2005; Hatcher et al 2010). Further, service-learning has been found to be a useful tool in increasing retention between the first and second years of college (Vogelgesang et. al 2002; Crissman Ishler & Upcraft 2005; Siegel 2005; Zlotkowski 2005; Hatcher et al 2010; Ling Yeh 2010).

Specifically, first-year composition service-learning courses present students with real-life rhetorical situation as well as a tangible audience other than the instructor (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, & Watters 1997; Heilker 2002; Deans 2002). Research also indicates that such courses have a greater impact on the improvement of writing skills of students than traditional first-year composition courses (Vogelgesang 2002; Wurr 2002; Feldman et. al 2006) most likely because of the “real world” writing situations presented, as well as a personal investment in their writing (Sommers and Saltz 2004; Mikolchak 2006).

Chapter 2 highlighted the importance of critical reflection in service-learning courses, especially in composition courses where students are required to use their

service-learning experience to inform their writing (Anson 1997; Eyler 2002; Deans 2002; House 2013). Chapter 2 also presented a few commonly used models of reflection in service-learning courses, such as journals (Anson 1997), The DEAL Model (Ash & Clayton 2004; Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005; Ash, Clayton, & Day, 2005), and tools such as prefection (Eyler & Giles 1999). Finally, the last Chapter showed that critical reflection helps ensure a reciprocal balance between student needs (including academic learning) and the community partner, as it is a guide for both the student to work through challenges and connect their service-learning experience to course content and provides a forum through which the instructor can interject as needed to ensure constant appraisal of the position of the community partner (including benefits of the service-learning project).

Given the importance of critical reflection and the viability of a first-year service-learning composition course, the next step is to put best practices from the research into designing an effective course. This Chapter presents research on the planning phases of designing a first-year service-learning composition course, including options for community partnerships that have been successful for other instructors. It also includes a plan for incorporating critical reflection throughout the course, using a combination of the models presented in the previous Chapter. The next and final Chapter will address some of the more technical pieces of course design, such the syllabus, assignments and grading. As such, Chapters three and four are written specifically to instructors who wish to embark on teaching a first-year service-learning composition course.

It is important to note that this Chapter will refer to *The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning; Service-Learning Course Design Workbook* as a guide to

designing a service-learning course. As it was published in 2001, this guide is now nearly fifteen years old. However, it is still widely used and referenced by many service-learning scholars. Today, many universities have developed their own guides to developing service-learning courses, taking into account the unique needs of the particular school (or even program). However, several reference the *Service-Learning Course Design Workbook* as a source (or even framework) for their policies.

Throughout this Chapter and the next, I will refer to the *Workbook* as well as guides since published by individual universities that best support a model of developing a first-year service-learning composition course that uses critical reflection as a means to ensure reciprocity between student learning and benefit to the community.

### **Writing for What? Choosing a Writing Model**

Chapter one detailed the three writing models presented by Thomas Deans (2000; 2003): writing *for*, *with*, and *about* the community. There is certainly a place for all three, especially when considering service-learning from a broad perspective, across disciplines. However, in a first-year composition course that incorporates service-learning, careful attention needs to be paid to the writing component itself. Which model is best for accomplishing course goals and objectives? Which is best for the needs of the community partner? It is also worth noting that a course can incorporate more than one model.

For example, most first-year composition courses include an argumentative paper, typically as the last major writing assignment. The various skills associated with this paper are many and necessary for the development of effective academic and professional writing: analysis and incorporation of sources, presenting and supporting a

claim, articulating counter-arguments, and formal writing tone, to name a few. In a first-year service-learning composition course, students can certainly still write such a paper *about* their service-learning experience. In fact, writing *about* the community not only meets several rhetorical goals of first-year composition, but is also needed to some degree to finalize reflection. Essentially, when writing *about* their service-learning experience, students can draw on their complete and thorough critical reflection as a primary source for a piece of academic writing. They can also position themselves *into* the argument and offer praises and critiques without the fear and possible trepidation that comes with the more public documents inherent to writing *for* or *with* the community.

Writing *about* the community in a first-year service-learning composition course is inevitable. Critical reflection is writing about the community and the service-learning experience as a whole. A final argumentative paper is also often written about the community. The focus on writing *with* the community throughout this thesis is intentional as it best serves a focus on reciprocity but seems to be the least used model. It is best suited to the final project and perhaps a few interactive documents with the community partner throughout (for example the Proposal Letter assignment in Chapter 4). Writing *for* and *about* the community certainly have a place in a first-year service-learning composition course as long as they aren't the only models used.

However, in a composition course that is concerned with the benefit to the community partner as much as the student learning, some sort of writing needs to be produced *for* or *with* the community. Ann M. Feldman et. al. (2006) see "writing about" as the standard in most service-learning courses, but argues that doing so many not

allow students to “come to understand and appreciate writing’s rhetorical power to give shape to situations and influence outcomes” (p. 18). As I have argued, writing *with* the community gives the community partner the most agency and chance to be a part of the final product.

### **Planning: Connecting Community Partnerships with Composition Outcomes**

According to Feldman et. al (2006), reciprocal community-based relationships lead to improved writing among first-year students. This claim is supported by others who have studied the impact of service-learning on student writing skills (Martin 2000; Wurr 2002). This makes sense, given that such relationships give students a real-world rhetorical context for their writing, as well as a real audience. Students may also be a bit more concerned about the quality of their final product since it will be used by (and perhaps distributed by) the community partner. As presented in the previous section, the model for which to frame this writing in a first-year composition course (or any service-learning course, for that matter) will depend on whether you ultimately want students to write *for*, *with* or *about* the community. In some cases (especially when an instructor plans to have students write *about* the community partner in a final paper as well as produce a collaborative project with the community), the decision about whether or not to write *with* or *for* the community can be made alongside the community partner, depending on their needs. I see writing *with* as the most mutually beneficial, and will elaborate on partnerships where this has been shown to be a strong model (namely working with K-12 students) later in this Chapter. However, this is not to take away from the merits of writing *for* the community when it is appropriate and serves a real need.

Even if the writing model of the collaborative writing project will not be decided until community partnerships are established, it is important to determine the course goals and objectives before meeting potential community partners. This is not only to have a focus for the course itself, but to present to the community partner options for a final project. While course goals and objectives for first-year composition may vary by (or even be set by) institution, most are based on the desired outcomes for first-year composition set by the U.S. by The Council of Writing Program Administrators. The categories for desired outcomes presented are Rhetorical Knowledge; Critical Thinking, Reading, and Composing; Processes; and Knowledge of Conventions. These desired outcomes, in addition to providing a guide for any first-year composition course, show areas where service-learning can enhance and deepen student knowledge. A few such desired outcomes, as well as how service-learning can be incorporated, are presented below (“WPA Outcomes”)<sup>7</sup>:

1. *Gain experience reading and composing in several genres to understand how genre conventions shape and are shaped by readers’ and writers’ practices and purposes.*

Whether writing *for* or *with* the community for the final project, students can be exposed to and compose in a variety of genres and for a variety of purposes. For example, students may write to inform by creating a brochure or newsletter for the community partner. They may write to entertain or persuade through a collaborative book of writing or poetry. In each of these instances, students also need to analyze the existing conventions of writing in each genre (either by reading a general sample of that which

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<sup>7</sup> The WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition (2014) are available online at <http://wpacouncil.org/positions/outcomes.html>. Outcomes on the website are not numbered. Numbering in this section is for organizational purposes only.

they will be expected to create or by studying the existing texts published by the community organization).

In his 2003 book *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric with Readings*, Thomas Deans gives several assignment options for each of the three writing models he presents. As previously mentioned, some of these are now a bit dated, especially as service-learning composition practitioners have found much less cumbersome ways to write *with* the community than those originally posited by Deans. However, Deans is still a highly respected and often quoted theorist on service-learning in composition, and therefore many of his suggested assignments are still applicable and meet current WPA recommendations. Further, this same book not only suggests writing assignments but readings to assign as background as well.

In terms of genre analysis, Deans sees writing *for* a community organization as ideal for both exploring new and varied genres of writing as well as having students tackle these genres in their own writing. His recommendation is that students immerse themselves in whatever genre (or genres) are requested by the community partner. Deans gives the example of a news release, and suggests that students be asked to examine several models of news releases including past releases from the community partner, those from other local nonprofit organizations, and releases from local businesses. Students would then analyze each to identify common rhetorical features such as length, pattern of organization, tone, and visual layout (p. 357). In addition, I would suggest using such an analysis to identify audience and purpose and to critically reflect on the audience and purpose of the newsletter they have been charged with writing *for* their community partner. The corresponding writing assignment, as

suggested by Deans, would be the newsletter created for the community. This piece of text should be all the stronger given the genre analysis done by students, and the reflection on the audience and purpose for their own piece.

I would offer here a further pedagogical suggestion. In keeping with the true reciprocity this thesis is advocating (including giving students a choice of sites and soliciting input from the community member on the genre of the final project), such genre analysis when writing *for* the community can be done in small groups whose members are working with the same community partner and/or on a similar project. The instructor can facilitate small group discussions about the genre at hand and guide students toward places they may find a variety of examples to analyze. If combined with critical reflection journals, the instructor could then offer specific feedback on each student's analysis of the audience and purpose for their final writing piece to be sure they are on track with the expectations of the community partner.

When writing *with* the community, genre analysis can be very similar to that explained above for writing *for* the community, but this time the community partner would participate in conversations and analysis of similar pieces of text. Tiffany Rousculp (2005) taught a service-learning composition course wherein students created a 'zine with their community partner. "Zine" is a very specific genre of writing, and it would be safe to assume that some of the participants, if not most, are unfamiliar with it. While Rousculp speaks at length about the final project and the importance of community input, she spends little time explaining the process leading up to creating the final product. This project would lend itself very nicely to a collaborative genre analysis by both students and the community partner. Utilizing the same exercises

recommended by Deans above (analyzing several 'zines from different authors for a variety of purposes and audiences) would strengthen the understanding of the project in general and would give both parties the tools they need to enter into this unique rhetorical situation.

Writing *for* and *with* the community work well for genre analysis as the nature of the final assignment is that it will likely be something beyond a traditional academic paper. However, such analysis and practice can even be done when writing *about* the community. Commonly a writing *about* assignment involves using an issue facing the community partner as the topic for a traditional academic argument. This is not without its merit, as students need to understand the purpose and audience for this type of writing as well. However, there are other genres within a writing *about* model. Deans suggests having students compose an agency profile report that the agency can use when seeking funding or other assistance. In the sample he offers (p. 286-291), students conduct interviews and do field research to create a document that includes a brief history of the organization, their objectives and goals, as well as recommendations of resources available to help further those goals and objectives. A desired outcome listed by the WPA that can also be achieved by each of these examples is: "*Develop facility in responding to a variety of situations and contexts calling for purposeful shifts in voice, tone, level of formality, design, medium, and/or structure.*"

2. *Use strategies—such as interpretation, synthesis, response, critique, and design/redesign—to compose texts that integrate the writer's ideas with those from appropriate sources.*

Critical reflection is a great tool to meet this outcome. When presented and done correctly, this is just what should happen: students interpret, synthesize, respond to,

critique, and then redesign their own thinking in regards to an experience from their service-learning partnership. Students then go one step further to compare their own thinking with that presented in course materials, thus making a concrete connection between the academic content in the course and their service-learning experience.

Students can “integrate (their) ideas with those from appropriate sources” as they begin to use their critical reflection journals as a primary source for writing assignments as they reflect on their own experiences/ideas/assumptions in contrast with those of others through research. Some of this may come from the genre analysis above and some may be a very specific exercise in confronting an opposing view that they find in the published literature on the chosen topic. Once again, this exercise can be used not only to further the practice of critical reflection, but to frame conversations about the rhetorical situation in general (audience, purpose, and tone specifically as they analyze the reasons for differing opinions and outcomes).

3. *“Experience the collaborative and social aspects of writing processes.”* This is really the essence of overlap between the desired outcomes of first-year composition and a first-year service-learning composition course. Students experience writing as both a personal (i.e. reflection) and a social act (from peer revisions to the final project itself). Here again writing *with* the community is a great way to achieve this collaboration, as students will work hand-in-hand with the community partner on a piece of writing. Other common “social” aspects of writing akin to first-year composition courses, such as peer reviewing, can still be practiced in the classroom, but after very real, very interactive writing occurs within the community.

Rousculp's 'zine project is again an excellent example of such collaboration as she very much stresses seeking input from the community all along the way (including the theme of the course) and always ensuring community members have a voice (p. 36) by avoiding editing unless mutually agreed upon and having a reading at the end of the semester wherein writers get to read the pieces they wrote. Cheryl Hofstetter Duffy (2003) has a similar focus on collaboration and social writing in her classes that partner her first-year composition students with international students to write newsletters. The time spent together is both social (the students learn from each other formally through their writing as well as in informal conversations) and collaborative (the newsletter is the work of everyone collectively). Both of these projects are discussed further in the next Chapter.

Once again, writing *about* the community can address this outcome as well. Though students typically write *about* the community in isolation, their research comes directly from their social interaction with the community member. Their academic arguments, for example, can be made all the richer by incorporating interviews with community partners as well as their own observations throughout the project. In fact, in an example above Deans categorized a community agency profile as an assignment written *about* the community though the assignment itself relies heavily on information provided by the community partner. While writing *with* and *for* the community are a very natural fit for exploring the social and collaborative nature of writing, assignments written *about* the community can still explore these elements as they benefit students, the community partner, and the final written product itself.

A complete list of the WPA desired outcomes for first-year composition can be found online. There are certainly more areas of overlap, but these present very direct connections to service-learning and demonstrate the importance of a model of writing (namely *with* the community) to ensure reciprocity between student learning and real benefit to the community partner.

Armed with a list of desired course outcomes, the next step to designing a first-year service-learning course is to develop community partnerships. Some projects (many of which are successful) have all students working at one site, so students do not have a choice in community partnerships. The reasons for this vary. In some cases, such as the Neustra Casa project described in Chapter two, this is due to logistics. As this project was a travelling exhibit, it took the work of all students combined to set up, run, and then move a single exhibition. Other projects, such as the Community Literacy Center project at Carnegie Mellon University, are long-running partnerships wherein each new class contributes a little more to an ongoing project. Others, such as the “Queer Rhetorical and Service-Learning” class taught by Geoffrey W. Bateman (2010), offered one site due to an admitted lack of planning and research on service-learning best practices.

Though there are such successes to the contrary, research on the needs of first-year students (as seen in Chapter 1) indicates that it is important to give students a choice when it comes to their service-learning placement to give them a voice in the direction of the course and the nature of the final project. This gives students a sense of ownership as they can select the site that best fits their strengths and goals for the course. The instructor will need to consider the needs of the community partner as well,

keeping the student and course objectives in mind. While goals of the course will include discussion of the rhetorical situation, instructors may want to avoid sites with multiple needs that could overwhelm students with choices about genre, audience, and purpose. While the instructor won't be able to screen for every possible outcome with the community partners, asking questions specific to needs and ideas about a final project can help narrow down the field to those whose needs are most closely aligned with course goals as well the experience and comfort levels of students.

However, it is not necessary to have a large number of possible sites. Doing so adds stress to the instructor, does not allow time for building quality relationships with the community partners, and makes it difficult to track progress at each site. Robert Bringle and Julie A. Hatcher state:

...we think the quality of the design, implementation, and growth is at least as important as the number of partnerships. Developing better partnerships between the campus and the community is at the heart of renewing community engagement" (quoting the Kellogg Commission, 1999, p. 504).

Bringle and Hatcher clearly stress the quality of the community partnerships over quantity. After reviewing several service-learning syllabi, it seems that a common number of placement options is three (Campus Compact). This still gives students a choice, but also ensures that the instructor has the time to maintain meaningful relationships with each site while keeping track of student progress and the balance of benefits between student and community.

When choosing sites, it is important to keep the course goals in mind, as a close fit between course content and community needs are essential to creating true reciprocity (*Workbook*, p. 23). If students struggle to see the connections or if the community partner is just "playing along" and not really benefitting from the partnership,

service-learning will be compromised and a model of volunteerism is fulfilled instead. According to the *Course Design Workbook*, "To satisfy one at the expense of the other violates the service-learning norm of 'reciprocity', wherein campus and community as well as service and learning are symbiotically related" (p. 23).

It is easy to imagine that possibilities for combinations of writing models and community partnerships are seemingly endless. In terms of writing models, students could create brochures, press releases, newsletters, or informative articles. They could also work with the community agency to create a co-authored history of the organization or compilation of short stories from residents. Add to that a large list of community organizations (adult education centers, homeless shelters, group homes, food pantries, etc.) and the task of narrowing it down can be overwhelming.

I suggest that a good first step to gain focus is to think carefully about Deans' writing models in terms of both the type(s) of writing required throughout the semester and the genres of final projects that will be of mutual benefit to both student and community partner while fulfilling course goals and objectives. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, any combination of writing *for*, *with*, or *about* the community can be effective if the rhetorical goals are considered along with the needs of the student and community partner. Many successful courses utilize at least two (Hofstetter Duffy 2003; Deans 2003; House 2013). I maintain that writing *with* is the most reciprocal, but is best suited to the final project. Writing *about* can occur throughout the semester in both critical reflection and in a longer academic writing piece. In this instance, structure starts to take place knowing the models of writing the service-learning composition course will follow.

For example, my own course would include a final project where students create a writing project with the community partner (again, the parameters and genre would be selected by the student(s) and community partner so cannot be determined before the semester begins as discussed in Chapter 1). Leading up to this, students would write in a variety of genres for a variety of purposes and audiences, and both *for* and *about* the community to gear up for the final writing *with* piece. For example, Assignment 2 (see Appendix E) has students research an issue present at their community partner site and present an argument for a solution. This paper is *about* the community, but in a sense is also *for* them, as they may be able to use the research and possible solution. The purpose is clear, but the audience is really up to the student. Assignment 3 (see Appendix F) has students write a proposal letter *for* the community partner, and this time the purpose and the audience are up to the student. For example, they could write a letter to a local foundation asking for a grant to fund an after-school program at the community site or they may write to a local business asking for assistance gathering supplies. Both assignments, as well as the ongoing critical reflection, are to get the students thinking deeper about their community partner and their needs in preparation for the final writing *with* assignment.

### **Writing With: The Benefits to Students**

For a first-year service-learning composition course that focuses on reciprocity between student learning and benefit to the community, I have argued that a writing *with* model is the best choice. But writing with whom? One critique of the writing *with* model is that can throw college students (some of whom would be classified as basic writers) into the role of “expert” in a collaborative writing project, wherein the community partner

offers content expertise and the college student is expected to refine the final written product (Kraemer 2005). While this will not always be the case, it is worth being aware of when determining the scope of the final project and the roles of the student/community partner.

However, with so many possible community partners (with varied needs, goals, and participants), are there some that have proven success under a writing *with* reciprocal model? The answer is “yes” (Deans 2003; Hofstetter Duffy 2003; Rousculp 2005; Faulkner-Springfield 2011; Moya & Guillermina 2013). As mentioned in Chapter one, there have been several published successes wherein first-year composition students work with K-12 students on a collaborative writing project (Conniff & Rogers Youngkin 1995; Martin 2000; Sayer 2000). In addition to successful writing with models within these collaborations, there is research to support mutual benefit for both the college and the younger students.

Marion A. Eppler et. al. addressed this link specifically in a 2011 article entitled “Benefits of Service-Learning for Freshmen College Students and Elementary School Children”. The course used in the study was a first year honor’s course in which the college students tutored at-risk elementary school children in reading. The study examined changes in social attitude and motivations among the college students as well as changes in achievement motivation and progress in reading in the elementary students. The study found that the college students had increased self-esteem and they “became more likely to value service as a way to gain new perspectives... (and they) came to see service-learning as a way to foster their personal growth and development” (p. 108). While the authors admit that more research needs to be done, they did see

improvement in the reading scores of some of the elementary students, which is in line with past studies showing positive effects for children tutored by college students trained to use a structured reading curriculum (e.g., Allor & McCathren, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2001). The authors state that “...our findings show benefits of s-l experience for both students and the community” (p. 112) while acknowledging that few studies report data from both sides.

While Eppler et. al.’s study shows social and perhaps even emotional improvements in the college students, it did not assess possible gains in their academic learning. More research is needed specifically in this area to show if student learning is increased for first-year students in a partnership with younger students. However, there is promising research to show that students’ writing skills do improve (Martin 2000; Wurr 2002; Feldman et. al 2006), which is some evidence of achievement of academic goals within such a collaborative service-learning partnership.

In fact, Adrian Wurr’s study (2002) of the impact of service-learning on the writing performance of first-year composition students found the essays produced by students in a service-learning section of first-year composition to be superior to those produced in a traditional section in a number of ways, including use of rhetorical appeals, logic, coherence, and mechanics. Through comments gathered from students’ final reflective essay on their semester-long service-learning experience, Wurr offers possible reasons for the better writing produced in the service-learning section. First, it seems that the students’ had a greater awareness of the impact culture has on language and learning. One student in particular commented that daily conversations with the supervisor of the service-learning site helped (her) to describe the situation better in writing (my

assumption here is that the student is referring to depicting and summarizing the experience in her own writing) and how to represent the opinions of others (p. 112). Further, Wurr speculates that a reduced number of grammatical and mechanical errors comes from the more careful proofreading that came with writing about topics that were meaningful.

There is also research to show that collaborative writing among elementary students (both among their peer group and with adults/mentors) has a positive impact on their writing skills (Comber & Nixon, 2004; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Gring-Pemble & Garner 2010). Within the framework of a *writing with* model, students could both collaborate with each other (on a common theme and with peer review, for example) as well as the college students participating in the service-learning experience. The same student cited above in Wurr's study said that, "I learned how to express myself even from what a child said" (p. 112). That is a profound statement, and a good indication that both the college students and the elementary students can learn from each other.

In addition to a growing body of evidence about the reciprocal benefits of a partnership between college and K-12 students, there are several successful models that point to the viability of such collaborations. After seven years of teaching service-learning composition courses, Cathy Sayer (2000) found that pairing college students with inner-city public school students on collaborative writing projects was a great success for both the students in her class and their younger counterparts. Michael John Martin (2000) had his students partner with children in a public housing project and found that:

When students analyzed... a particularly meaningful or troubling moment during a Village workshop or tracked a child's development over time, their writing

involved them and engaged their experience to a degree that they had seldom experienced before in academic writing. They paid more attention to details, reflected more thoughtfully on their work, and had a stronger sense of what I call the social and political 'contexts of importance' of their thinking. (p. 16).

Shirley E. Faulkner-Springfield (2011) had her first-year composition courses correspond with tenth grade students in a public high school in Durham, NC through letters about "the moral, intellectual, social, and psychological factors that affect their transition from high school to college" (p. 66). For the college students, "the general purpose of the course is to introduce students to the concepts and theories of writing expository essays and to the study of the essentials of English composition and rhetoric" (p. 66). "Ultimately, this course helps students learn that a piece of writing must effectively serve its purpose" (p. 67). The benefit for high school students was to not only write for a purpose as well, but to seek "inspiration, motivation, and guidance about academic and social problems that affected them, their families, and their community" (p. 68).

While these are just a few models, each shows that such writing *with* projects can benefit both the college students and the community partner, both in terms of writing skills and more personal/social aspects. The true nature of the final collaborative projects will need to be fluid through the planning phase, leaving room for input from the community partner, but having some examples of successful project to draw on can guide this decision. Cathy Sayer (2000) states, "We cannot just sit in our offices, define a community's needs, and design course syllabi and assignments to address those needs without the input of our community partners, imposing our 'service' on them in a hierarchical fashion" (p. 20). While this is true, Sayer doesn't account for the voice of the student, an equal partner in a reciprocal relationship. Thomas Deans and Zan Meyer-

Goncalves (1998) do so by suggested that each agency suggest 2-3 projects so that students can chose that which interests them the most and/or can offer input on the ultimate final project (if there is only one for the class).

Once partnerships are established and options for the final project begins to take shape, the work of carefully embedding critical reflection into (and throughout) the course begins to ensure the reciprocity is maintained throughout the course, especially between ensuring student learning and attainment of academic outcomes and benefit for the community partner.

### **Embedding Critical Reflection throughout the Course**

Chapter two presented several models for structuring critical reflection in a service-learning course. Those most relevant to a service-learning composition course are:

- a. “The 5 C’s” presented by Eyler & Giles (1999): connection, continuity, contexts, challenging student’s perspectives, and coaching.
- b. Bringle & Hatcher’s five guidelines for effective, continuous reflection (1999): a) clearly link service experience to course content; b) be structured; c) occur regularly; d) instructors provide feedback; and e) allow students to clarify and make changes.
- c. The DEAL Model (Ash & Clayton 2004): a) students describe their service-learning experience; b) students examine the experience in light of learning objectives; and c) students articulate learning

As pointed out previously, The DEAL Model becomes cumbersome as the second step (students examine the experience in light of learning objectives) involves responding to

further categories of prompts: academic enhancement, personal growth, their learning through a prescribed Articulated Learning model used for study of student learning in a service-learning course.

The DEAL Model is often used, and certainly such detail of reflection is not without merit, especially in a composition course. However, depending on the frequency of reflection required (continuous, according to Bringle & Hatcher), reflection journals could become quite a burdensome writing requirement for students, not to mention very time-consuming for instructors who would need to (as critical reflection requires) provide feedback on each entry and allow for student revisions. Further, if The DEAL Model is used in conjunction with other proven strategies for reflection, namely *preflection* as suggested by Eyler & Giles as well as engaging in reflection during the service-learning experience (Eyler 2002), it is easy to see how reflection could become the primary genre of writing, perhaps taking away from other course requirements such as an academic argument or summary and analysis.

Critical reflection is crucial to ensuring reciprocity in a first-year service-learning composition course, as has been shown in this thesis. Specifically, this reciprocity should be a balance between student (academic) learning and the needs of/benefit to the community partner. A blend of the critical reflection models presented above (and in Chapter 2), then, can best serve this focus. By pulling out the pieces of critical reflection that ask students to assess their own learning as well as their ideas/questions/assumptions that may be impacting the community partnership, we can narrow down the focus on reflection exercises while still maintaining the integrity of critical reflection.

As such, the following can serve as a framework for incorporating reflection into a first-year service-learning composition course. A guide for incorporating this into the course syllabus can be found in Appendix A.

### **Structure for Reflection Journals**

Based on the models above, I suggest three sections for reflection: prelection, immediate reflection, and critical reflection (both prelection and immediate reflection are modeled on the work on Eyler & Giles). The *critical reflection* section will be the most rigorous, and the section that will be most likely subjected to instructor feedback and drafting. However, the prelection and immediate reflection will guide this section and are aimed at getting the student to think about the role of the community partner and what they are getting out of the meetings.

1. *Preflection*: Preflection is to be done before each meeting with the community partner. It is an opportunity to *reflect* on the previous encounter and prepare for what may come this time. Guiding questions should be given, but students should be allowed to respond to only those that are relevant and helpful. This is really an exercise to help them prepare for the service-learning experience and to work through their own thoughts, and not yet a deep critical thinking exercise (as the critical reflection piece will be). Guiding questions could include: What are your feelings going into the meeting today? Why do you think you are feeling this way? What will you pay specific attention to today in terms of issues covered in class? Are you excited or apprehensive (why or why not)? What are you hoping your community partner will gain from today's meeting?

2. *Immediate Reflection*: Similar to prefection, this is a chance for students to write down their thoughts while it is fresh in his/her mind. Just as with prefection, the student needn't be overly concerned with working through issues at this point. This is more of a record on what they will critically reflect on later. Guiding questions can include: What was the biggest success today? What systemic issues did you see at play that either helped or hindered your goals? What did your community partner gain from today's meeting? What might they need from you to make even more progress next time?
3. *Critical Reflection*: Drawing from The DEAL Model as well as The 5 C's and Bringle & Hatcher's five guidelines, critical reflection should be where students analyze their experience in terms of their own perceptions (and perhaps assumptions and beliefs) as well as connecting this experience to course material and goals. Guiding questions should be specific to give students a structure for critically thinking about their experience. I would suggest the following prompts:
  - a. First, list any particular successes or challenges that stand out to you from your service-learning experience (reference your prefection and immediate reflection notes for guidance).
  - b. How might your own experiences, including upbringing, belief system, or life experiences, be shaping your perception of any challenges you are facing?
  - c. Put yourself into the shoes of your community partner. How might she/he/they be seeing this same issue, given their own experiences?

- d. What can you offer as possible solutions to this issue? How do you imagine your community partner would react to that idea?
- e. What connections do you see between your service-learning experience and material we have covered in class? What do you better understand now because of your experience?
- f. What else have you learned through your service-learning experience that we haven't yet touched on in class?
- g. How does all of this tie into the writing project? What will your next steps be in working on the project with your community partner, given what you have explored in this reflection?

The commonality in these three steps of reflection is that all ask students to both assess their own learning as well as the needs of the community partner. This is the heart of the matter, really. In order for there to be true reciprocity between student learning and the needs of the community partner, students need to explicitly analyze these two things. Finally (and this is something I have not seen in the models presented in service-learning literature such as the DEAL model), there is a tie to the writing project. After all, that is the collaborative goal. Failure to tie the reflection and experience to that is to take focus from that which is intended to benefit the community partner. This is essential to maintaining the reciprocity inherent in the relationship.

While the structure and guiding questions for critical reflection are a relatively small portion of the course syllabus, they are a major part of ensuring a successful service-learning experience for both students and the community partners. Critical reflection also helps students better prepare for the final writing project. As such, the

previous Chapter and sections from this one have been devoted to incorporation of critical reflections in a first-year service-learning course. Once this crucial piece is established (along with community partnerships) instructors can begin to plan the specific assignments and how to tie the service-learning experience into writing goals and objectives and teaching the rhetorical situation. Chapter four delves into more of these specifics so readers can begin putting research and best-practice into the course design of their own first-year service-learning composition course.

## CHAPTER 4: SYLLABUS AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

The previous Chapter presented best practices for the beginning phases of designing a first-year service-learning composition course that is centered on ensuring reciprocity between student learning and community benefit through the use of critical reflection. Specific writing goals, including how each could be addressed in a first-year service-learning composition course were covered as well as research indicating increased writing skills for students in service-learning classes versus traditional sections of composition (Martin 2000; Vogelgesang 2002; Wurr 2002; Feldman et. al 2006). Chapter three also offered suggestions for building strong and sustainable community partnerships as well as project ideas that have been shown to benefit both students and the community (Deans 2003; Rousculp 2005; Eppler et. al 2011; Moya & Guillermina 2013). Additionally, a model for critical reflection was presented that was both manageable for students and the instructor and structured in a way to encourage critical thinking on the part of students. Suggestions were given for prompts to be included in students' reflection journals, including prelection, as well as evidence that having students constantly reflect (including while at their community site) is beneficial.

What remains in such a course design are the details of the course, including the syllabus itself and the specifics of the writing assignments. The writing assignments are the true test of the balance between student learning (including rhetorical issues and writing skills as well as personal growth) and awareness of and benefit to the community within the service-learning component of the course. When critical reflection is well explained and embedded throughout the course, students should have the

background and primary source material they need to embark on the writing assignments with a true sense of issues facing their community partners and genuine questions that will guide topic selection and research questions. Further, as detailed in Chapter 3, the writing model for each assignment (*for, with, or about* the community) needs to be considered as much as the writing goals and objectives. This Chapter provides an example of a progression that is focused on both the needs of the community and the student and that addresses goals of first-year composition.

Interestingly, there is a lack of literature on creating an effective syllabus for a first-year service-learning composition course, even though there is sufficient evidence that such a combination is effective. There are, however, published successes and failures of such courses, as were presented in Chapter 2 and 3. Using these courses as a guide, as well as available syllabi and literature on best practices on creating service-learning syllabi in general, we can ascertain what a quality syllabus for such a course would look like.

The best practices from these existing syllabi as well as the research presented throughout this thesis on reciprocity and critical reflection can be combined into a viable course design for a first-year service-learning composition course as a contribution to filling the gap in literature on such a syllabus. Further, discussion of the writing assignments in such a course serves to combine many of these ideas as it is in these assignments that the first-year composition student can truly participate in the real-world rhetorical situations service-learning provides.

Finally, this Chapter will explore what Veronica House (2013) refers to as the Reflective Course Model. This course model can be applied to the creation of the

syllabus itself as well as the specific assignments to ensure critical reflection is woven throughout the course. As will be demonstrated in what follows, House's assignment progression lends itself to developing students' awareness of the rhetorical situation over the course of the semester so they are (I would argue) more fully prepared for the final project written *with* the community.

## **Syllabus**

A full sample syllabus for a first-year service-learning composition course can be found in Appendix B. Many instructors have a set style for their syllabi, whether due to university requirements or personal preference, which makes it unnecessary to go through each and every component here. However, there are a few key elements that set a service-learning syllabus apart from that of a traditional course in order to inform students upfront about the nature of the course. Specifically, the policy statement and course description need to be clear about what service-learning is and how it fits into the course.

A student's first impression of any course often comes through the policy statement, as this is the first glimpse students will get of what will be expected of them, how much work a given course will require, as well as technical policies such as attendance and late work. In a course with a service-learning component, it is important to state upfront what separates this course from traditional sections and how it will benefit students without adding an unfair amount of work compared to those traditional sections. Most colleges and universities have a designation in their course catalogue for service-learning courses, and the current trend is to add one credit to any course with a considerable service-learning component. Beyond such designations, however, each

instructor has the opportunity to set the stage for that particular class in his/her own policy statement.

It is important to not only mention, but to define what service-learning is early on to give students an idea of what is meant by the term service-learning and what the pedagogical basis for the course is (Ohio State 2002). In most cases, instructors present their guiding definition of service-learning in the policy statement of the syllabus. This is the practice in multiple examples of syllabi presented on the Campus Compact website (2013). While definitions will vary, it is important for each instructor to clearly state the definition of service-learning that most closely fits his or her individual philosophy and focus for service-learning somewhere in the syllabus itself. The definition that guides my course design as well as best embodies the reciprocity detailed throughout this thesis is from the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning Course Design Workbook* (2001):

Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity change both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content. (p. 23).

Once service-learning has been clearly defined, the rest of the course description needs to cover the required elements of the course, both those required by the institution and those necessary to the service-learning component. These must be closely tied together throughout the description and the rest of the policy statement to show the integration of service-learning into the knowledge students will gain from this course. As was detailed in Chapters 2 and 3, it is also important to be clear that critical

reflection will be a constant practice and will serve to tie course objectives to the service experience itself.

Kerrissa Heffernan (2001) defines course objectives as "concrete measures by which goals will be realized and are usually expressed as relationships between specific concepts" (p. 13). In the full syllabus example in Appendix B, the goals are global: larger ideas that students can gain understanding of through the course (like "See writing as a tool for entering the social conversation and giving marginalized citizens a voice"). In contrast, the objectives are measurable outcomes that are connected to the larger goals ("Develop academic and public arguments about a social issue that you see at play within your community agency"). Showing this difference allows students to anticipate what they will mostly likely deal with internally (goals) throughout the semester and how they will be expected to demonstrate those to the instructor and their peers (objectives).

### **Writing Assignments: The Rhetorical Situation and the Community Partner**

In "Community Service Writing; Problems, Challenges, and Questions," Nora Bacon (1997) presents the successes she has seen in the Community Service Writing Programs at Stanford and San Francisco State University. These successes were compiled over seven years. Bacon gathered program evaluations from students, teachers, and community-agency staff (sic), and offers the following list of the most frequently identified "sources of satisfaction" in the courses (p. 41):

- The writing was meaningful because it had a "real" audience and purpose.
- The assignment exposed students to new people and environments.
- The project gave students valuable information about or insight into social issues.
- Students took pride in their final products.
- The assignment lends itself to collaboration.
- The assignment gave students a leg up in work on a research paper.
- The writing made a genuine contribution to the community organization.

- Students working with community service agencies were highly motivated and thoroughly engaged in their writing.

Bacon's list of successes illustrates that service-learning does provide students with real rhetorical situations, including a tangible audience and purpose for their writing (Heilker 1997; Cooper & Julier 1997; Wurr 2002; Deans & Bacon 2002; Duffy 2003; Faulkner-Springfield 2011). These points also demonstrate the kinds of take-aways that students emerge with when they are required to critically reflect on their own learning and the role of and benefit to the community partner. This is no accident; Nora Bacon and other composition service-learning practitioners utilize critical reflection in their courses to ensure the overlap of this reciprocal relationship and the rhetorical situations students engage in through their writing.

To an instructor taking on service-learning for the first time, Bacon's list of "sources of satisfaction" can be daunting and, in some cases, hard to measure. At this point in the course design process, it is important to remember that service-learning courses can go wrong (Bateman 2010; Kesler Rumsey & Nihiser 2011). For most first-year composition instructors new to service-learning, some items listed by Bacon (for example, exposing students to new environments and offering assignments that lend themselves to collaboration) should come naturally through the service-learning component itself. Others (giving students real rhetorical situations, offering insights on social issues, and a "leg up" on research papers) can be fostered through careful course design, namely in the variety and progression of writing assignments below. The rest of the items on the list (specifically that students make a genuine contribution to the organization and that they are highly motivated and thoroughly engaged in their writing) would be, to me, icing on the cake. Most instructors would hope for this, but shouldn't

judge the success of the course on such lofty goals. Should students strive to make a real contribution to the organization? Yes. But is it possible that, for a variety of reasons beyond their control, they won't? Absolutely.

One scholar has put many of the attainable measures mentioned by Bacon as well as a focus on critical reflection, reciprocity, and providing real rhetorical situations into a guide for the writing assignments in a first-year service-learning composition course. Veronica House is Associate Director for Service-Learning and Outreach in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder. She created a service-learning Writing and Rhetoric course for first-year students at CU, and through her experience created the Reflective Course Model (2013). House articulates the concerns presented in previous Chapters about the intensity and time burden of requiring so many reflections with so many steps and prompts (as in The DEAL Model). House does acknowledge that such models come from good intentions, namely to avoid reflection assignments that “produce shallow thinking, generalizations, stereotypes, and clichés” (p. 28). To counter this, she offers a simple solution: “stop assigning separate reflections. Instead, embed reflection into every assignment- make the entire course reflective” (p. 28).

House is a strong advocate of critical reflection. She says that “Shallowness of thought manifests in uncritical reflection that indicates an inability to analyze an experience and its connection to academic concepts” (p. 30). She also challenges service-learning composition teachers to “think about how to scaffold reflective assignments throughout the semester to maximize student learning” (p. 30). This is a fair challenge. If we truly are to have students constantly reflect (Eyler 2002; Ash &

Clayton 2009), even at the community site, would it not also make sense to have students reflect as they complete required writing assignments?

House offers excellent suggestions for assignments that are reflective by their very nature, and a few assignments for my own course are modeled after hers. However, for the many reasons detailed in Chapter 2 and throughout this thesis, abandoning a critical reflection journal (as House has done) isn't supported by literature. Further, research on using House's model alone is needed, but the idea itself is strong. Critical reflection works best when done continuously throughout the course, so it seems a reasonable assumption that adding a reflective element to assignments can't hurt. I suggest that both can be done. Therefore, some of the writing projects detailed below are modeled on assignments Veronica House includes in her Reflective Course Model but I still maintain the structured critical reflection and prompts detailed previously.

All four writing projects below address desired outcomes as articulated by The U.S. Council of Writing Program Administrators (see WPA Outcomes in Chapter 3). Additionally, a variety of writing *for*, *with*, and *about* the community projects are presented. While a *writing with* assignment should be present as a truly reciprocal project between students and community partner, other assignments within the course may include writing *for* and *about* the community. As long as the assignment itself and critical reflection ensure that the student considers the role of the community partner, these too can be reciprocal in their own way.

Before moving on to the specifics on each assignment, it is important to reiterate a few key points from this thesis. First, true reciprocity (as detailed in Chapter 1) means

being open to the needs of the community and being willing to adapt the course content (as much as appropriate to maintain the integrity of the course goals and objectives) to meet those needs. If a proposal letter isn't appropriate, for example, instructors should work with the community partner on another such piece of writing that will still allow students to write *for* the community partner with a set purpose and audience. The same writing goals can be addressed, and the purpose of the assignment will better suit the community partner. I have also tailored the assignments to fit with the type of community partner I have determined to be very viable for this course (K-12 students). This will vary among instructors as well, and as such the assignments can be easily modified. The real key to be able and willing to adapt to the needs of both the students and the community partnerships developed for any given course offering. Assignment details as they would be presented to students can be found in full in the Appendices (B-E).

The progression of assignments, as well as a suggestion of grade weighting, is represented in Table 1 below. A detailed description and discussion of each assignment is below the table. Each assignment begins with an overview taken from the complete assignment sheet in the Appendices.

Table 1: Grading Weights

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Weight</b>
1	Academic Summary and Analytic Response	10%
2	Causal Research Paper	20%
3	Proposal Letter	15%
4	Critical Reflection Journal	25%
5	Final Project and Presentation	30%

## Assignment 1: Academic Summary and Analytic Response

**Overview:** Throughout your academic career you will be asked to summarize and respond to the texts you read, and this assignment will ask you to do so in a way that focuses on rhetorical aspects of an article. To prepare for this assignment we will critically examine social issues that you will likely see at play in your community partnerships. As we read and discuss these texts, we will practice various strategies for summarizing and analytically responding.

The goal of Assignment 1 (which can be found in full in Appendix B) is for students to read chosen texts with a critical eye towards the author's central message, purpose, and intended audience. The texts presented should correspond to issues students are likely to encounter in their community partnerships. In Chapter 2, I was critical of Anson's "frames" in that they were assumptions of what social issues students would encounter and may unfairly bias what each student looks for in the partnership. For that reason, I suggest that these readings be more general, not social issues (for example, in my course pairing first-year students with K-12 students, I would suggest topics such as Common Core standards or the focus on standardized testing in schools instead of access to education for poor youth). The key here is to use this assignment as an opportunity to introduce rhetorical situations that are at play in both what students read and in their own writing. In terms of service-learning, this is an excellent opportunity to discuss the "real world" rhetorical situations students will be exposed to.

An assignment such as this is a great first writing assignment for a first-year composition service-learning course. Students may not have had many (if any) interactions with their community partner at this point, but will have an idea of what service-learning is and who their community partner is. This first assignment is their opportunity to look at more global issues that will likely be at play in their community partnership, and to begin to identify their own assumptions and experiences with these

issues. As such, it is important to have students participate in critical reflection before they submit a final draft of this paper, especially in regards to the analytic response. Having them reflect on what personal beliefs and experiences came to mind (or manifested themselves) in early drafts of this assignment can go a long way to helping them unpack and confront any negative or pre-conceived ideas before they get too far into their community partnership. One critical reflection before the final draft (with time for teacher comments) would be appropriate for such a small assignment, but could make a big difference in the content of the final draft as well as their own mind-set for the potential needs of the community partner and issues they may face. The guiding questions can follow the format of those presented in Appendix A, but can also be tailored to the suggested readings.

In terms of the rhetorical situations presented in this assignment, the reality is that one real audience students are and will continue to be required to write for throughout their academic career in his/her instructor. This *writing about* assignment is written for the instructor, but the purpose is very real: to examine a larger social issue students will likely see at play in their community partnership, and to examine how their own beliefs and experiences may color the experience. The addition of critical reflection into the assignment, as House implies, shifts the purpose from merely writing for the sake of writing to learning about and challenging real and existing social issues.

This short essay is a good first assignment as it introduces several elements that will be present throughout the course. First, it is a great opportunity to begin discussing service-learning placements and to prepare students to handle issues they may encounter. By providing academic readings from reputable sources, the instructor can

model the types of research that will be expected throughout the course. Second, students can practice critical reflection on a “generic” issue that they can analyze critically without jumping into a possibly emotional response to something they see at play in their community partnerships. Instructor feedback on reflections for this essay can be useful for students as they work to see both sides of an issue and think critically about possible solutions. Finally, this can be a great tool for discussing the rhetorical situation. In the case of the assignment, the audience is the instructor. However, students may very well write something similar as they work with their community partner and begin to analyze texts they may model for the final project. The response section is a great space for students to explore tone and infusing their own opinions (when supported) into an argument. With the stage set, students can then begin working on writing pieces more directly connected with their individual service-learning experiences.

### Assignment 2: Causal Research Paper

**Overview:** In the summary and analytical response paper, we worked on analyzing an argument and responding with a supported critique. For this assignment, you will analyze an issue you see at play in your service-learning partnership. Through critical reflection you will analyze your own experience with this issue, including potential biases or preconceived notions. You will then conduct research to help you consider the issue from multiple points of view and to determine the format for your final paper. You will either write about three causes that results in the problem (the effect) or three effects that result from the problem (the cause). (House, p. 39).

Assignment 2 (for full assignment see Appendix C) is based on an assignment created and used by Veronica House as part of her Reflective Course Model. This is, in some ways, a typical academic argument that is a staple in most first-year composition courses. Students engage in research and analysis of sources, present an argument,

and acknowledge opposing or conflicting points of view. In the context of a service-learning composition course, however, this *writing about* paper is written in response to a real social issue with the purpose of increasing understanding of the root of the problem and the complicated mechanisms impeding a solution. One major difference between this assignment and a traditional academic argument is that this is assigned early in the semester, typically a few weeks into the semester (but after students have begun their service-learning partnership). This is done to take students through a crucial step in critical reflection, namely confronting their own preconceived ideas and assumptions. It also means that students can work towards their final *writing with* project to be completed at the end of the semester (in place of the traditional academic argument which is typically the capstone assignment in a first-year composition course).

In addition to library research, students must also consult with the head of their community partner organization (or someone with deep knowledge about the organization if the director is not available) in an interview to determine, from the point of view of the organization, what the main social issue facing the organization is. This aids in making sure the community partner has a voice in the assignment (reciprocity) even though the final paper is primarily written *about* them. Students are then allowed to choose how they wish to frame their further research: either on three causes that lead to the problem (the effect) or three effects that result from the problem (the cause) (House, p. 39).

The general purpose of the assignment is exploration of a social issue, but students can also define a more specific purpose. For example, they may see this research as something they could easily modify as an informative piece for the agency's

newsletter. They may also consider including it as background information for the next assignment, the Proposal Letter. The audience can also be determined by the student. Is it the community at large, to better understand why that organization exists? Is it the community organization itself, so employees and volunteers can better understand the issues at play? Either way, it is a real audience. Assigning this paper early in the semester allows students time to determine who would most benefit by reading this argument.

One main goal of this assignment, according to House, is to teach students that they need to “substantiate their emotional response to their community work” (p. 30) through careful research that acknowledges and incorporates multiple viewpoints. “They learn that one of the most difficult, but also most important, aspects of formulating a strong argument is in acknowledging, understanding, and integrating opposing or conflicting points of view” (p. 39). This important but difficult writing skill is reviewed mid-semester with a mid-semester revision driven by critical reflection. Students review their paper with a particular eye towards the community partner to be sure their voice is included. House suggests that students identify areas in the paper that could benefit from a first-hand account from someone at the organization and then conduct further interviews. Students then incorporate these voices into their revision. House asserts that:

Through this process of inquiry and revision, students challenge or deepen their original ideas and document their learning through written argument. In this assignment, without needing to write a separate reflection students performed the equivalent of the ‘Describe’ and ‘Examine’ stages of the DEAL Model. (p. 40).

To further the critical thinking required in the Causal Research Paper, students reflect on what they are learning to propose a solution to the problem they are

researching. This leads to the third assignment, in which students write *for* the community partner in the form of a Proposal Letter (a common assignment in many service-learning composition courses, in addition to House's).

While House's Reflective Course Model is fairly new and untested, it is not hard to imagine that some composition instructors might be critical of this assignment. On the surface, it is much more complex than a traditional argument, in that it takes what is typically a straightforward claim and complicates it by asking students to write about either cause or effect. House stresses the importance of utilizing the community partner as a primary source through interviews. I agree that this can help students through the potentially complicated task of teasing cause and effects out of an issue. If the student gets stuck, a further interview with the community partner may uncover further background information on the issue that can help. It can also bring up more key words and focus for research. Doing critical reflection along with the assignment (also suggested by House) is essential as well. Students can not only explore the issue they are addressing, but questions and frustrations with the assignment, allowing for instructor feedback before actually beginning to draft (if needed).

Even if students do struggle with the overall assignment, they will practice skills they can continue to develop throughout the remainder of the course. For one, they can use critical reflection to determine where learning did take place. Did they perhaps gain a better understanding of audience and/or purpose? Did their exploration of the issue lead to conversations with the community partner that is helping shape the final project? Did they determine a good topic and audience for Assignment 3: Proposal Letter? In truth, any given assignment can go badly for any student at any time. Critical reflection

gives students and instructors the opportunity to explore failure, if need be, and to learn from it. As mentioned, even students who struggle should emerge with an idea for Assignment 3, which will give them further opportunity to conduct research and place themselves into the rhetorical situation.

### Assignment 3: Proposal Letter

**Overview:** You are now about halfway through your service-learning experience. In your critical reflection journal as well as Assignment 2, you have been exploring a social issue (or perhaps issues) that you see at play in your community partner agency. Assignment 2 also challenged you to assess the causes and effects of this issue. The next step is to use what you have learned to offer a solution. For this assignment, you will chose a specific audience that may be able to help your community partner in some way. You will then write a letter to them describing the problem and offering a solution that they can play a part in. For example, if your community partner was a non-profit animal rescue, you may have determined that they are very low on pet food due to a recent drop in recurring donations from pet stores. As a potential solution, you may write a proposal letter to the Veterinary Club at the college asking them to organize a yearly pet food drive on campus.

Thomas Deans suggests proposal letters as a writing assignment option in a service-learning composition course in the chapter on “Writing with the Community” in *Writing and Community Action* (2003). Deans asserts this is a writing *with* assignment since community input is sought in both defining the problem and proposing a solution. This could also be seen as writing *for* the community, as the final product will be written solely by the college student *for the benefit of* the community. In either case, the purpose is to address an existing problem and propose a solution to a specific audience, with input from the community partner. Whether viewed as writing *with* or *for* them, this is a truly reciprocal assignment. (See Appendix D for the full assignment).

In this assignment, “...students apply the rhetorical strategies that they have studied, such as how to tailor an argument to a particular audience using rhetorical

appeals, and study how the genre of the proposal letter is used to enact localized change” (House, p. 43). With input from the community partner, students identify an issue affecting the organization with which they are working and identify a possible solution to that problem. According to House, this is “a critical exercise in transforming students’ knowledge into action and takes students through the process similar to a DEAL reflection” (p. 43). House presents this assignment as writing *with* the community partner.

The sample Proposal Letter presented by House is from a student working with the Snowboard Outreach Society (SOS), a non-profit devoted to giving underprivileged youth in Colorado the opportunity to participate in outdoor winter sports. In his Proposal Letter, the student wrote to a manager REI, a chain of outdoor stores, suggesting that employees be given the option of donating their annual dividend check to non-profit organizations, such as SOS. The student’s purpose and audience are clear and real. The letter, with the permission of the SOS, was sent out.

Such an assignment allows students to not only engage in a real-world rhetorical situation, but it can offer a sense of accomplishment after spending so much time (through critical reflection) grappling with social issues prevalent in their community partnership. This is a chance to enact real change, and in a reciprocal manner with the input and help of the community partner. For example, in my proposed partnerships with K-12 students, I can imagine that one social issue the first-year composition students may explore would be bullying. In their particular partnership, they may determine that a large class size is contributing to the problem since one teacher struggles to monitor so many students. For the proposal letter, the composition student might write to the PTA

and ask for parent volunteers for this class to help monitor behavior and keep students on task.

In my course, I would introduce Assignment 4 (see below) early on so students can be thinking about and talking with their community partner about possibilities for the final project. Though it is labelled as number 4, it should be evolving over the course of the semester, with a few weeks near the end of the course devoted entirely to the final project and planning a presentation/reading. Assignments two and three can potentially be “heavy” (dealing with potentially complex social issues and then asking for assistance, which might be outside of many students’ comfort zones), so the final project can offer some levity and collaboration, ending with a celebration.

#### Assignment 4: Final Collaborative Project with the Community Partner

**Overview:** Throughout the semester, you will be working with younger students on writing skills. While you will be working on specific skills (grammar, organization, sentence structure, etc.) you will be working together on a piece of writing that will serve as the final project for the class, both for you and your community partner. Early in the semester you will work together on what you want the final product to look like. Will it be a book of poetry? Short stories? A record of family histories? The format is up to you and your partner, but will need to be approved by me. The most important thing is that you do it together- write with your community partner. Everyone’s voices need to be present in the final product. Finally, you will present your project at a reading that will be attended by our class, the students/class you work with, as well as their teachers, parents, and administrators. This event is a celebration of the work you have done this semester as well as a chance to showcase the writing you will have done with your community partner.

This project can take many forms (see Appendix E for the full assignment).

Drawing from *writing with* successes already mentioned gives a good variety of options.

Michael John Martin (2000) writes about a project in which his composition students worked with children in a public housing project on creative writing projects. The look of the final project is determined anew each semester (with input from the younger

students), and can range from a book of poetry to short stories to slam poetry to be performed. Martin's students offer suggestions on topics and for revision, and also contribute their own work to match the theme of the final project. Martin saw a cross-over in the academic writing of his students. "They paid more attention to details, reflected more thoughtfully on their work, and had a stronger sense of... the social and political 'contexts of importance' of their thinking" (p. 16).

Cathy Sayer (2000) leads a service-learning composition course in which her students work in small groups with inner-city public school students to write journal and reflective essays about their experience. In this project, the college students can use what they have learned through their critical reflections to help the younger students analyze and articulate their experiences. The final product may be individual essays in this case (rather than a collaborative book), but the idea is still that the college student is working alongside their community partner on a piece of writing that is meaningful and useful to the community partner.

Cheryl Hofstetter Duffy (2003) made a deliberate shift from having her students write *for* and *about* their community partners (in this case, international students) to having her students write *with* the community partners on a collaborative newsletter. Topics were chosen together, and writing was done in pairs or groups to ensure multiple perspectives as well as a strong group for revision and editing. This project can easily be used with K-12 partners or with community agencies.

One final example is the 'zine project presented by Tiffany Rousculp (2005). Students worked with community partners to create a 'zine as well as hosting a reading for family and friends to celebrate the collaborative work. Both community partners and

the college students contributed writing to the project, and all contributed to peer editing. Not only is this another example of a collaborative writing project, but brings up the point that such projects should be shared and celebrated.

The projects presented here are not tied to specific rubrics. To do so before establishing community partnerships would not be in the spirit of true collaboration. *Writing with* projects such as these should be established between the students and their community partners to meet the needs and wants of both. Through critical reflection, both throughout the course and specific to this assignment, students can lead the way on ensuring these reciprocal benefits.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has presented research and best practices on incorporating service-learning into a first-year composition course. Service-learning is a viable option for first-year composition, given the needs of first-year students in general and the benefit to the university, especially in regards to student satisfaction and retention. As highlighted in Chapter 1, a crucial element of successful service-learning courses is reciprocity. While benefit to the institution is a part of this balance, the needs of students and of the community partner must be equal to ensure academic learning and attainment of course objectives on the part of the student while also making community needs and input a priority. In a composition course such as this, a proven way to ensure this focus on reciprocity, as well as student recognition of his/her own learning is the incorporation of critical reflection throughout the course.

Chapter 2 outlined the history and popular models of critical reflection, as well as discussion on best practice and proven successes. Critical reflection is key to a successful first-year service-learning composition course that focuses on reciprocity as it guides students through a constant process of discovery and challenge to their perceptions as they put themselves in the shoes of the community partner. It also engages students in a deep analysis of their own learning, so they can not only assess the outcomes for the community partner in the service-learning project, but their own learning and engagement with course goals and objectives.

Chapter 3 put critical reflection into action, offering suggestions on how to use the best-practices from existing critical reflection models without overwhelming the

writing component of the semester with structured reflection and articulated learnings (Ash & Clayton 2004). This Chapter also gave specific prompts and advice for organization for embedding critical reflection throughout a first-year service-learning composition course.

Finally, Chapter 4 offers practical advice for the final technicalities of creating a first-year composition course that includes service-learning, including the syllabus and writing assignments, as well as discussion on how such a course can present real-world rhetorical situation to students and how critical reflection can aid in the practice of these skills. Specifically, the writing assignments are effective in reaching these goals if they are a part of what Veronica House calls a “reflective course”, wherein each assignment includes critical reflection and a constant focus on reciprocity. Through this process, and with guidance and feedback from the instructor, true reciprocity can exist between student learning and community need and benefit.

Throughout this thesis, Deans’ models of writing *for*, *with*, and *about* the community have been presented, including benefits, drawbacks, and examples of each. While *writing with* the community offers the best opportunity for true collaboration, writing *for* and *about* the community have value within the course as well, especially as a way to ensure that the service-learning experience and the needs of the community partner are present in some way in each and every writing assignment. In fact, most service-learning composition courses include two or even all three models.

With critical reflection as a constant practice, instructors can create a course that both furthers writing skills for students, by doing just what service-learning is supposed to do: giving students real-world rhetorical situations such as audience and purpose to

write for. By taking from best-practices in regards to writing assignments and course design, it is possible to build a course with deliberate focus on community relationships, needs, and outcomes as well as ensuring student attainment of the essential writing skills the course exists to impart. With all of these elements in place, service-learning is a very viable option for a first-year composition course.

While the ideas presented in each chapter (reciprocity, critical reflection, thoughtful consideration of the writing model) are supported with research, combining them into the course design proposed in Chapters 3 and 4 has not been done. Veronica House's Reflective Course Model comes close, but still eliminates an ongoing critical reflection journal and does not address the writing models presented by Deans (by now almost a given in service-learning composition courses). Further research is needed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of a course design that combines this many best practices. Specifically, more analysis is needed to determine if such a concentrated focus on reciprocity between the needs of the community partner as well as students is more prominent as a result of critical reflection embedded throughout the course. Questions remain, but such a course design seems promising given the research presented.

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## APPENDIX A SYLLABUS

### Syllabus: First-Year Composition with Service-Learning

#### Course Description

Writing is a response to a context. Writing is a process of revision. Writing does not exist in a vacuum; it is a cultural act and it involves choices. This course encourages you to ask questions about your writing situations so you can make the best choices for your writing. You will walk away empowered to write more effectively, not only for other academic classes but also for situations you will encounter in everyday life. To this end, we will use the metaphor of writing as a conversation as a guide. As a component of both writing and awareness of context, you will participate in service-learning as part of this course. Readings will center on social issues and you will experience many of these first-hand in the community. Writing will be done with the community focusing on the common thread of social awareness and community literacy.

According to the *Ohio State University Faculty Guide to Creating Service Learning Courses* (2002), "*Service-learning* is a form of experiential education characterized by student participation in an organized service activity connected to specific learning outcomes, meets identified community needs and provides structured time for student reflection and connection of the service experience to learning" (5). If you do your part, your service-learning experience will enhance your understanding of course content and larger social issues. You will walk away a stronger and more informed, active citizen of your local community. In addition to your work with the community, your course work will further your skills as a writer and participant in the conversation. Key objectives include the following:

- Developing critical reading practices to support research and writing;
- Understanding writing as a rhetorical practice, i.e., choosing effective strategies for addressing purpose, audience and context;
- Developing a repertoire of strategies for addressing a variety of specific rhetorical situations, i.e., different purposes, audiences, and contexts;
- Learning important elements of academic discourse, such as forming and critically investigating questions, using sources effectively and ethically, and writing effective summaries, analyses, and arguments;
- Increasing information literacy through practicing strategies for locating, selecting, and evaluating sources for inquiry;
- Developing effective research and revision processes, including peer collaboration and response, and using feedback to guide revision.

These skills will be practiced in class as part of assignments and as part of your community partnerships.

For the service-learning component of the course, you will choose between three community sites. We will discuss possible projects and goals for your partnership in class, but ultimately the final project will be a collaborative piece of writing between you and the community partner (I will approve each project). You will need to choose a project that fills a genuine need for the community and furthers the skills you will gain in this course (we will discuss this in more depth in the first few weeks of class).

**Critical Reflection Journal Prompts:**

Again, reflection is key to this experience. You are expected to produce thoughtful, critical journal entries before and after each service learning experience so you have a place to record thoughts and a record of what you plan to do/change/implement from week to week. This journal will be used to guide your final project, so the more thought and work you put into daily reflections, the less stress you will encounter when selecting final project topics and evidence.

*After each meeting:*

1. What was the biggest success today?
2. What systemic issues did you see at play that either helped or hindered your goals for today?
3. What was your biggest struggle?
4. How were the literacy needs of the youth met today both by your participation and that of the agency itself?
5. What are your goals for next time?

*Before each meeting:*

1. Now that you have had some time to think and reflect, do you want to revise your goals for today at all?
2. What are your feelings going into your meeting today (nervous, excited, hopeful, unsure, etc.)? Why do you think you are feeling this way?
3. What will you pay specific attention to today in terms of issues covered in class? How might this affect your interaction with the students?
4. Are there any questions you have for the community contact or me at this point?
5. If you have not already done so elsewhere, briefly list what you will be doing with the students today.

**Coursework and Grades**

Assignment	Title	Weight
1	Academic Summary and Analytic Response	10%
2	Causal Research Paper	20%
3	Proposal Letter	15%
4	Critical Reflection Journal	25%
5	Final Project and Presentation	30%

## APPENDIX B ASSIGNMENT 1

### **Assignment 1: Academic Summary and Analytic Response**

**Overview:** Throughout your academic career you will be asked to summarize and respond to the texts you read, and this assignment will ask you to do so in a way that focuses on rhetorical aspects of an article. To prepare for this assignment we will critically examine issues of literacy that you will likely see at play in your community partnerships. As we read and discuss these texts, we will practice various strategies for summarizing and analytically responding.

**Purpose:** Your purpose for writing this essay will be to accurately portray major ideas in the text and to analytically respond to the text by evaluating the author's strategies for conveying those ideas. Choose one of the following texts to examine critically, summarize accurately and objectively, and respond to with a thoughtful rhetorical analysis.

**Readings to choose from:** TBD by each individual instructor

**Audience:** Your audiences for this assignment are your instructor and your classmates. Although your readers are familiar with the text you've chosen, you should thoroughly represent its main ideas and key points, and provide accurate textual evidence throughout.

**Requirements:** You will create one document that is composed of two parts: a summary and a response. Your **summary** should accurately and objectively represent the author's purpose and main ideas in approximately 300 words (about one double-spaced page). It should also adhere to the guidelines for academic summary covered in class.

To achieve your purpose with your audience, use the following strategies in your summary:

- Introduce the text in the beginning of your summary so your readers know which text you are summarizing. Include the author's name (if known), the article title, the date of publication, and the publication title within the first few sentences;
- Focus on the writer's arguments by reporting the text's thesis and key points. Show that you understand the "big picture"—the writer's purpose and how he or she achieves or supports it;

- Avoid giving examples and evidence that are too specific so you can focus on the overall argument. Do *generalize* about types of evidence, kinds of examples, and rhetorical strategies used by the author to support the argument;
- Use author tags/attribution so that your reader understands that you are reporting the author's ideas;
- Use an objective tone and an even mix of paraphrased and quoted source material.

Your **response** should be approximately 300 words (about one page) and should answer the following question: *Did the author successfully achieve his or her purpose with his or her intended audience?* Logically, in order to answer this question, you will need to do the following: identify what the author's purpose is; who the intended audiences are (explaining any assumptions, values, opinions or beliefs the identified audiences hold); and explain why the rhetorical features (listed below) prove whether the author did/didn't achieve his/her purpose.

Your response should answer this question by including a thesis (which is how you answer the question), reasons to support your thesis, and evidence to support your reasoning. Critically respond to the text's effectiveness by analyzing purpose and audience, and use the rhetorical features as evidence to support your assertion.

- **Purpose:** You must address the author's purpose, since you are answering the question: *Did the author successfully achieve his or her purpose with his or her intended audience?* When addressing purpose, consider what the text's aims are and whether they're clear for the audience.
- **Audience:** You must also discuss the intended audience, since you will be answering the question: *Did the author successfully achieve his or her purpose with his or her intended audience?* When considering audience, you'll first need to identify the audiences the text is addressing and explain any assumptions, values, opinions, or beliefs they hold. You could also consider whether the audience is easily identifiable or rather vague and how this impacts the article's effectiveness.

**Draw your evidence to support your assertions about purpose and audience from the following rhetorical features:**

- **Occasion/Genre/Context:** Does the author effectively respond to the occasion (i.e. the reason for writing)? Did the author choose an appropriate genre for the text?
- **Organization and Evidence:** Did the author support his or her contentions in a logical order? Does the type and quality of the evidence the author uses appropriately realize the purpose to this audience?
- **Language and Style:** Did the tone and style support the author's purpose?

**Keep in Mind:**

- Begin your essay with a summary of the text, then lead into your response with an effective transition from an objective academic summary to an analytical response that is well supported with textual examples. Although writers have successfully combined summary and response, for this assignment you should summarize then analyze.
- Improve your credibility with your audience by avoiding spelling and grammar mistakes.
- Type your essay in a readable, 12-point font and double-space it.

**Paper Length:** 600-700 words (about 2 pages)

**Workshop Date:**

**Worth:** 10% of your final course grade

## APPENDIX C ASSIGNMENT 2

### **Assignment 2: Causal Research Paper**

**Overview:** In the summary and analytical response paper, we worked on analyzing an argument and responding with a supported critique. For this assignment, you will analyze an issue you see at play in your service-learning partnership. Through critical reflection you will analyze your own experience with this issue, including potential biases or preconceived notions. You will then conduct research to help you consider the issue from multiple points of view and to determine the format for your final paper. You will either write about three causes that results in the problem (the effect) or three effects that result from the problem (the cause).

**Purpose:** The purpose for this essay primarily to is analyze an issues at play in the community agency you are working with in your service-learning placement. However, you may identify a more specific purpose for this piece of writing. Do you want this to be useful to your community partner? Will it be background information to present to someone who could potentially help your community partner? Could it become an informative piece for the agency’s newsletter? We will utilize your critical reflection journal, peer review workshops, and writing conferences to hone your purpose.

**Audience:** Your audience for this assignment will also be determined by you. By asking yourself some of the same questions above in “Purpose”, you will determine who you think would be a good target audience for this piece.

**Requirements:** You will need to conduct research on the issue you are exploring. Sources must be credible. A primary source needs to be your community partner, whom you will need to interview (possibly multiple times). You should work with your community partner to determine the challenges facing the agency, and then use your scholarly research to examine the issue from multiple viewpoints. Your paper will be a discussion of the problem in the format of either cause or effect (see Overview above).

#### **Keep in Mind:**

- Research is key to fully understanding the issue you are writing about and to support your conclusions.
- Improve your credibility with your audience by avoiding spelling and grammar mistakes.
- Type your essay in a readable, 12-point font and double-space it.

**Paper Length:** 3-4 pages

**Workshop Date:**

**Worth:** 20% of your final course grade

## APPENDIX D ASSIGNMENT 3

### **Assignment 3: Proposal Letter**

**Overview:** You are now about halfway through your service-learning experience. In your critical reflection journal as well as Assignment 2, you have been exploring a social issue (or perhaps issues) that you see at play in your community partner agency. Assignment 2 also challenged you to assess the causes and effects of this issue. The next step is to use what you have learned to offer a solution. For this assignment, you will choose a specific audience that may be able to help your community partner in some way. You will then write a letter to them describing the problem and offering a solution that they can play a part in. For example, if your community partner was a non-profit animal rescue, you may have determined that they are very low on pet food due to a recent drop in recurring donations from pet stores. As a potential solution, you may write a proposal letter to the Veterinary Club at the college asking them to organize a yearly pet food drive on campus.

**Purpose:** Your purpose, in general, is to persuade your audience (chosen by you- see below) to provide assistance to your community partner to help address the issue you identified in Assignment 2 (see the example in the Overview above). The tone needs to be professional and informative while also stressing the need.

**Genre:** You will write a formal letter to an audience of your choosing.

**Audience:** Foremost you should choose an audience who is worthy of receiving the idea and that is in a position to offer assistance to your community partner. You may utilize parts of your Causal Research Paper to demonstrate the need, but keep in mind that the person you are writing to likely receives requests like this at various times. Think about how you can set yours apart by creating a sense of urgency and by demonstrating a real need. Draw from your critical reflection journal for specific examples or details that may be helpful to share in your appeal.

**Paper Length:** 1-2 Pages

**Workshop Date:**

**Worth:** 15% of your final course grade

## APPENDIX E ASSIGNMENT 4

### **Assignment 4: Final Collaborative Project with Service-Learning Community Partner**

**Overview:** Throughout the semester, you will be working with younger students on writing skills. While you will be working on specific skills (grammar, organization, sentence structure, etc.) you will be working together on a piece of writing that will serve as the final project for the class, both for you and your community partner. Early in the semester you will work together on what you want the final product to look like. Will it be a book of poetry? Short stories? A record of family histories? The format is up to you and your partner, but will need to be approved by me. The most important thing is that you do it together- write with your community partner. Everyone's voices need to be present in the final product. Finally, you will present your project at a reading that will be attended by our class, the students/class you work with, as well as their teachers, parents, and administrators. This event is a celebration of the work you have done this semester as well as a chance to showcase the writing you will have done with your community partner.

**Purpose:** The purpose for this assignment is for you and your community partner to practice the writing skills we have been learning about and sharing with them throughout this semester. Whatever the format, the final product needs to incorporate the writing skills you have reviewed with your community partner.

**Audience:** Your audience is the general public. You are working to create a collaborative piece of writing that will be appealing to everyone present at the final reading as well as the classmates and peers of both you and your community partner.

**Author:** Be sure that it is clear there are multiple authors on the final piece. Our goal is to write with our community partners, not for our about them. Consider letting students write an introduction to the book or to their individual pieces. Be sure each author is named by his/her work. Finally, make sure there is a good balance of writing by you and your community partner(s) in the final product.

**Presentation:** You and your community partner will work together to plan a presentation of your final work. Public readings are common, but you may imagine a different way to share your work. The most important thing is to involve your community partner and be sure they have a say. If you have questions or concerns, we can work through them in class.

**Paper Length:** TBD by you and your community partner

**Worth:** 30% of your final course grade (including the final presentation)