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Writing Fellows Program 2017-18

One of the reasons I was most excited about the Writing Fellows program is that I know how useful it is to have a committed group of faculty discussing how to use writing in the classroom, and as I transitioned into my position here as Associate Director of Community Learning (from finishing my Ph.D. in Writing Studies), I wanted such a group to help me think about how I would move from writing being the central learning goal of my courses to a tool used to help students learn other course content. When I was teaching writing courses like Introduction to Composition or Writing for Social Change, I aimed for my students to understand ways that they can use writing as a means to gain deeper understanding of the world around them and to create change about which they are passionate, but the course goals always centered on what kind of *writing* expertise students would gain, whereas the goals for students in my courses at Trinity, like Building Knowledge for Social Change, are primarily focused on critical understanding of social issues and methods for addressing them.

What I found in the Writing Fellows program is that working through key questions about writing pedagogy with faculty from across disciplines helped me think about the complexities of teaching and assigning writing across fields, asking about issues like: How do we design assignments that allow students to explore ideas and engage their interests without being overly prescriptive? How can we incorporate multimodal elements into writing assignments to think creatively about research and presentations? How do you include writing instruction in class without sacrificing other necessary content? I often left these conversations wondering how I can use my position as a community learning administrator and my background in writing studies to help our faculty leverage their writing assignments to achieve their

community-based learning goals, another of the complex issues we talked about in Writing Fellows (e.g., What does writing for a course look like when you add a third party like a community partner whose needs need to be met?).

In response to these questions, I've begun to develop a series of writing resources for community learning faculty to help them consider *what* they are trying to achieve through community-engaged teaching and *how* writing can help them reach their goals. Writing acts as an important way for students to get beyond learning about the communities around them to practice what it means and feels like to take on identities other than just 'college student'--citizen engaging with a local issue, researcher of a larger social problem, media creator for a nonprofit. These are the civic, academic, and professional identities we want our students to inhabit, and to help faculty activate these identities within their students, I've been putting together writing guides and sample assignments across three kinds of writing that can help students learn about and practice these identities: academic writing, public writing, and reflective writing.

### **Academic Writing**

- Description: In academic writing, we ask students to summarize and analyze sources, to weave together primary and secondary research, and to make arguments that are relevant to the discipline they are learning.
- Examples of genres: annotated bibliographies, reading responses, analysis papers, research papers, research posters.
- Why this kind of writing matters for community learning: These are kinds of writing that students will return to again and again in their academic careers, and they are particularly important for students who are just starting in a discipline, orienting to the particular ways writing is practiced in a field. Encouraging students to connect their work in these kinds of assignments to community-based learning experiences helps them see deeper connections between community work and the scholarly inquiry they take on in the classroom.

## **Public Writing**

- **Description:** In public writing assignments, students are writing texts that will be shared with a more public audience beyond the college or university, often created for the express purpose of fulfilling a need expressed by a community partner.
- **Examples of genres:** policy memos, fact sheets, presentations for or with community organizations, editorials, videos, blog posts, infographics, data visualizations.
- **Why this kind of writing matters for community learning:** Public writing with community partners allows students to experience what it is like to do the work of writing for a local organization, of helping spread awareness or make moves toward policy change, which can help students see more specific ways that they can use the academic knowledge they are cultivating in class for a broader good now and in the future. It shows students what doing a discipline's work in the world can look like, even if at a preliminary level.

## **Reflective Writing**

- **Description:** In reflective writing, students critically consider their experiences in new environments and discuss what they have learned during their community work.
- **Examples of genres:** short paper, portfolios of recent work, multimodal assignment.
- **Why this kind of writing matters for community learning:** Strong, critical reflections are based around specific questions that relate to the learning goals of the course and are structured as a part of larger class activities of thinking through their community work. This kind of reflective writing can help students process their experiences and identify how they might use them going forward in their academic, professional, and personal lives, which are far more useful practices than writing up the sort of canned responses about how volunteering changed their life that can be typical of this genre.

Through these different types of writings, we can activate particular types of identities within our students. We want them to be more than just good students. We aim for them to become engaged citizens, digital creators, and social activists—people who understand how to find, interpret, and use information, people who understand that they have a voice and can find ways to use it to create change they want to see in the world. Writing is an important part of getting there, and tools for helping faculty find ways to integrate such writing with course content and community learning components are necessary to developing these engaged student identities.