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English Departments' Relationships to Community: An Experiment at the Heart of Disciplinary Identity

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As is the case across the humanities, the changing nature of disciplinarity in English departments is not uniform. Many departments still exist with traditional notions of inquiry and curriculum and ignore community engagement or understand it in narrow ways. For a variety of reasons, writing courses and compositionists more easily than literature scholars and creative writers can embrace current concepts of community engagement. Common in undergraduate writing classes as service-learning, community engagement is less common in graduate courses, where the heart of disciplinary and departmental identity is, by and large, more directly challenged. This article offers an example of one graduate seminar that involved students in community engagement in a relatively traditional English department. This course, "Sites of Writing," engaged literature students in scholarship totally unfamiliar to them and involved them in community inquiry. While the evolution of one discipline does not mirror exactly the evolution of others, significant parallels exist, particularly among scholars interested in community engagement and its close alliance to cultural studies; readers in disciplines besides English will, no doubt, trace patterns in their own disciplines similar to the ones described here.

Humanities disciplines are being rejustified in epistemological and civic terms, and older questions of culture and identity are being resituated. A complete retransformation has not occurred, but . . . the New Academy [is] . . . a broad-based movement that has grown up around the edges and increasingly within the departments of the "old academy." It is composed of new ways of thinking, reconfigurations of disciplines, new modes of teaching and assessment, and new forms of scholarship.

Julie Thompson Klein

What relationships can English departments have with the communities in which their institutions are located? Using traditional understandings of the work English departments do, we might say "not much." Although Klein (2005) thoroughly and convincingly laid out the complex history through which the New Academy and its possibilities for community engagement have emerged, the traditional English department, and especially the traditional English scholar and teacher, still exist, oftentimes supporting traditional curricula and inquiry that work against community involvement and public scholarship. What follows is a very particular scene in which disciplinary identity is challenged at a powerful locus – graduate education – within a relatively traditional English department, a scene that surely is replicated in many other disciplinary settings and institutions. The graduate seminar modestly exemplifies com-

munity inquiry and research, an unusual phenomenon in the English department where it was taught. Its challenge has thus far created no departmental conflict, but the course has significantly affected the way its students understand the shape of disciplinary inquiry. Change happens slowly in academia, and one way it occurs is through the education of students who go on, through their teaching and scholarship, to push disciplines into new identities as well as into interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity.

Community Engagement in English Studies

Traditionally, literature and creative writing faculty have had limited interactions with communities, and, when they have had, it is in indirect and narrow ways, as when their scholarship sometimes focuses on authors of local interest. Even this kind of community interaction is usually left to journalists or to faculty already tenured who are comfortable moving away from the types of scholarship that departments and institutions traditionally recognize and reward. A more direct means of engagement occurs when scholarship is disseminated to the community through lay publications and public lectures, or when creative writers give readings in the community at public libraries and such. These means of interaction, via the published scholarship on authors of local and/or regional significance and public lectures and readings, embody few of the principles of community engagement and public scholarship now circulating through the academy: The interaction faculty enact is primarily to deliver a product. The product is knowledge of literary texts or authors, conceived of as subject matter, and the audience interacts with the subject matter as a recipient not as an agent.

In other words, the means of interaction with the community is largely one-sided, with faculty *delivering* and a community audience *receiving* that which is delivered. This lop-sided interaction diverges from more contemporary models through which engagement makes knowledge about, for, and, more dramatically, with communities, categories of interaction Thomas Deans articulated in 2000. In *Imagining America: Scholarship in Public: Knowledge Creation and Tenure Policy in the Engaged University*, Julie Ellison and Timothy K. Eatman (2008) offered this broader and more inclusive definition:

> Publicly engaged academic work is scholarly or creative activity integral to a faculty member's academic area. It encompasses different forms of making knowledge about, for, and with diverse publics and communities. Through a coherent, purposeful sequence of activities, it contributes to the public good and yields artifacts of public and intellectual value. (p. iv)

As concepts of community engagement have evolved, they have thus moved far beyond the unidirectional model most common in literary and creative studies.

Writing courses are often an exception to the traditional community engagement enacted in English departments. As Richard E. Miller (1997) wrote, "[w]ithin composition studies, we tend to be more receptive than most to the idea that valuable academic work can occur in a variety of contexts" (p. 223). An early and common context of inquiry for compositionists has been classrooms, but classroom contexts are only one of many, many sites of academic inquiry on which scholars focus. Miller went on to say that, "revitalizing the project of higher education begins with the revision of where one understands valuable academic work to occur and committing oneself to working in those places" (p. 223). It is no surprise to academicians interested in community interactions that notions of "work" (what counts as work and what counts as knowledge) drive disciplinary and institutional attitudes toward scholarship. It is also no surprise that composition scholars and practitioners lean more easily toward community engagement, particularly through service-learning projects in undergraduate writing classes and community inquiry about, for, and with local communities. Since the emergence of composition and rhetorical studies in the late twentieth century – as a field, sub-discipline, or discipline – it has been interdisciplinary, incorporating methods, values, and missions from anthropology, linguistics, education, sociology, and other disciplines. Its disciplinary identity has been fluid. It has often focused on the pedagogies and politics of student learning and the social contexts in which literacy instruction occurs. The material world has been present in composition studies in ways it is not in literary studies.

Composition courses across the country (at Ohio State University, for example) send students in their writing classes into the community through various routes. When Ohio State's service-learning projects began in the 1990s, students in basic writing classes worked as tutors in inner-city grade-school classrooms. The model included learning opportunities for both groups of students involved. The college students engaged in teaching and self reflective activities about literacy; the grade schoolers received extra attention to their learning. In other words, this kind of English department service-learning project embodied important principles of the new community involvement: reciprocity, mutual benefits to town and gown, and reflective learning. Ohio State's community service projects have grown from that small beginning into an extensive program with its own administrative offices, not unlike what has happened at other institutions ("Learning" and "The Ohio State").

It should be noted, however, that service-learning in Ohio State's English department began in the basic writing (remedial) courses, a program peripheral to the main English department (in function, staffing, curriculum, physical location, and goals). At present, service-learning is housed entirely outside of the department. I mention these facts to suggest how service-learning, even at an institution with extensive commitment to it and a long-standing history of community engagement, need not involve the English department

centrally in service-learning efforts even when English courses are involved. English departments may remain isolated from community engagement and maintain separate identities even when they are next door to community learning initiatives and projects.

I turn now to the University of Missouri-St. Louis where I teach in its English department, one that has service-learning projects in a few of its required undergraduate writing courses. One small set follows the Ohio State model and has its students tutor in local schools and at other community locations. Another small set of courses involves students in fund-raising efforts, first for a Sri Lankan school and subsequently for other purposes. Both projects, brought to the fore whenever a campus office wants to account for the university's outreach efforts, are nonetheless peripheral to the department's work in multiple ways. They are little known among faculty, tenure-line faculty especially. They have never been the subject of a department meeting or any curricular discussion. The university instructors are faculty off the tenure line. The students who enroll in the courses are never English majors, so the department's faculty never see them and never hear, as one does informally from students, what occurs in other classes. These projects are valuable and many undergraduates and community members have been involved. But they are in many ways peripheral to the English department. They escape the notice of most faculty and English majors, and they have no effect on the undergraduate major and none on the graduate program, both mainstays in disciplinary identity.

I write all this as prelude to another way in which community engagement has been attempted in the University of Missouri-St. Louis' English Department, a way that gets more at the disciplinary identity of English studies and at the heart of what scholarship in English can become. The purpose is not to diminish but rather support the efforts thus far undertaken, but with the understanding that graduate education across the disciplines has perhaps a much greater opportunity than required writing courses to make disciplinary and institutional change because the community service projects mentioned above are at the margins of the department, not the center. They no doubt affect more university students than the graduate seminar I will discuss, and by sheer numbers they reach more widely into community settings. But in other ways, this small effort has a slim chance to more readily gain the department's attention and make a more substantial move toward a change in our graduate course offerings and, ideally, redefine scholarship, the coin of the realm in research universities such as mine. Change at the center will necessitate different conceptions of scholarship, a fact that is not news to this journal's editors and readers, nor to members and affiliates of Campus Compact, nor to those who are already deeply engaged in building the New Academy.

Mine is a department that has not embraced engaged scholarship as

a central feature of its disciplinary and institutional identity. But the small way in which I have enacted community engagement in a graduate seminar is, by contrast to the other examples, located much more centrally within the department, as I have pointed out. The instance I write of here involved me, a tenured faculty member, and graduate students in English, instead of non-tenure-line faculty and undergraduates across the disciplines. Both of these facts create a greater likelihood that tenure-line faculty will hear, informally, about the course and potentially give it some thought, mechanisms that in the long run help facilitate change. As Klein (2005) wrote, "change . . . results more often from a slow and even unidentifiable shift of viewpoint, not a single argument or sudden epiphany" (p. 218). Arguments built to directly espouse community engagement and public scholarship cannot be counted on to change my department's graduate or undergraduate curricula or to move it toward community engagement, but informal and indirect means may.

Because literature held hegemony in English departments when I did my graduate work, because composition and rhetoric were not disciplines one could be degreed in, and because these disciplines were not represented institutionally in departments (with just a few exceptions), I have been trained in English, composition, and rhetorical studies. I have been, from the time of my graduate work, at least bi- or tri-disciplinary. Because, also, I came to my current institution as a tenured associate professor and because the department has a history of allowing faculty to design and teach courses tailored to their own interests, as long as required courses are staffed, I invented a graduate seminar[1] that took aim directly at the nature of disciplinary identity in the focus of the inquiry it undertook, the eclectic and non-canonical course readings chosen, the research projects assigned, and the topics of class discussion.

Literacy and Inquiry in "Sites of Writing"

One of my main disciplinary reasons for designing this course, Sites of Writing, was to urge students to envision the world of writing as much larger and multi-purposed than they usually think of it, given their undergraduate and graduate emphases on literary writing, an emphasis with which the vast majority of our students come equipped.[2] Linguists and rhetoricians (and some literary scholars) understand ordinary writing and language to be worthy of scholarly inquiry and recognize that language serves many purposes besides ones of aesthetics and cultural preservation. I wanted our students to learn about those other worlds, and so the readings I chose and the tasks I set required students to move far outside what they already knew to be the world of English studies. In this motive, composition studies and community engagement parallel each other.

Instead of works that would be considered literary, we looked at writing in community settings in which the community was at least as important as

or more important than the text. We looked at collaborative writing in engineering and scientific organizations, a women's writing group in the Tenderloin District in San Francisco, the diary of a North Vietnamese physician written during the Vietnam war, African American sermons with pastors and congregation both contributing to the emergence of the sermonic event. In this last instance, we encountered evidence that the sermon does not actually exist prior to or without the congregation's interaction during its delivery, and so postmodern literary theories about what constitutes a text were literally grounded in an ethnographic study of the formation of a sermonic text. Such grounding created a bridge between literary studies familiar to our graduate students and community sites and methods of inquiry and served as a foundation for the more involved community study the final course projects asked of them. We also read about how the academy (in English studies particularly) embraces the natural but only insofar as it is an abstraction, never as a geographical or material location where scholars and teachers live and work. Our readings about the natural world were both theoretical (*Placing the Academy: Essays on Landscape, Work, and Identity*) and reflections on nature (*Riverwalking*) (See Appendix A: "Reading List"). The materiality in many of the readings grounded our inquiry outside of academic abstractions and inside of communities. For example, one of the chapters in *Placing* is entitled "What I Learned from the Campus Plumber," and another, by a philosopher in the Pacific Northwest, "Six Kinds of Rain: Searching for a Place in the Academy."

As is apparent, the writers we read and read about are not part of any English literary canon nor was their primary value aesthetic (although some books were beautifully written). Located in distinct communities, these books and our class discussions focused on what each showed us about the "work" writing did, the multiple layers of work it did, and the range of audiences for whom it did its work in the communities the writing was embedded in and functioned for. This kind of focus is closely tied to public scholarship as it is being performed in the New Academy. For example, the North Vietnamese physician wrote her diary between 1968 and 70 to record her work in South Vietnam tending injured soldiers and questioning her own Communist identity. This diary was written primarily for herself and secondarily as a contribution to her family's long tradition of journal-writing. It was only by the efforts of an American soldier and his Vietnamese translator during the war that the diary became part of that tradition when it was returned to the writer's family thirty years after it was found at the site where the writer had been killed by American soldiers. But it also did much more work than originally intended. By the combined efforts of the former soldier, his brother and other relatives, a host of Vietnamese citizens, and a Quaker organization, the diary built bridges between nations formerly at war and between families on opposing sides through multiple processes that involved many communities: the American locating the doctor's family, the American's family and the diary-writer's traveling across continents, the family's donating the diary to the Vietnam Center and Archive

at Texas Tech University, and the Americans creating a website and a documentary film ("Finding") devoted to the book and the processes of reunification.

We did not try to fit the readings into any classification system used in literary studies nor did we use much of the theoretical frameworks often applied to literature and creative writing. We did, however, undertake scholarly analysis at the same level of complexity that graduate English courses involve, but the subject of the analysis and its purposes were different. Theories about the "work" writing does provided frameworks that allowed a much more inclusive analysis of writing than does literary study and a much greater engagement with diverse communities, activities much closer to public and engaged community scholarship.

Because we focused so much on ordinary writing and ordinary people, we redefined the subject matter of the course away from individual, great authors. Women in the Tenderloin District were community members. Collaborative writers in engineering and industry were workers serving industry needs. Pastors in African American churches "wrote" for their jobs. When we scanned history, we did not try to create a narrative of the historical development of writing; instead, we took samples of it from various real-world communities, like the nineteenth century rhetorical education of African Americans which occurred primarily outside of educational institutions. When we studied the Vietnamese physician's diary, as I suggested above, we focused on the writer and the text but equally on the American soldier who preserved the diary after the war, the communities intertwined when it was written, and their interrelationships when it was eventually published in English in 2007 and somewhat earlier in Vietnam.

When we read *A Murder in Virginia: Southern Justice on Trial*, a book written by a historian, not an English scholar, we focused on illiteracy and literacy in multiple communities and how the community literacies and politics intersected with the trial outcomes of four illiterate African Americans accused of murdering a white woman in 1895 Virginia. In this book, students found a dramatic but entirely factual narrative that reached back to a period between the Civil War and the dominance of Jim Crow laws. Through this narrative, students learned the power of the African American press and African American women's clubs. And they saw cooperation between blacks and whites to right racial wrongs in the justice system. The power of narrative, especially when it is well-written, has the potential for lasting impressions on readers in ways that purely abstract, analytical, factual, historical, or theoretical renderings do not. The course thus taught about more than its professed topic, Sites of Writing, just as community scholarship can entail deep involvement with cultural issues.

Because we also read about marginalized groups and ordinary writing composed by ordinary people, some readers may liken the course to one in

cultural studies, a comparison that would not be entirely wrong. Still, many of the works were written by scholars in composition and rhetorical studies, and, for purposes of this discussion, I would not want readers to subsume these disciplines completely under the aegis of cultural studies, partly because of the institutional context in which this course was delivered.

We also read a book entitled *Beyond the Archives: Research as Lived Process*, a collection of narratives about where research originates and how it proceeds. This book astonished many members of the class and, perhaps more than any other, foregrounded inquiry methods completely unfamiliar to most if not all of them, serendipitous processes grounded in the ordinary. Students had never known, they proclaimed, that a grandfather's trunk or a graveyard could yield the beginnings of legitimate research. Nor had they known the recursive processes scholars undergo as they first get hooked on a hunch or an idea and let that lead them into scholarly endeavors. Schooled to conduct research that synthesizes what other scholars have said, that argues for one or another critical reading of a text, that is thesis-driven and argumentatively tightly controlled, they were astonished to learn that there were other possibilities – that published scholarship could involve the personal and include narrative, that subjects besides high art and culture were worthy of study. That knowledge, that awareness alone, changed the students, but the changes went deeper. One student, who had suffered from writer's block throughout her graduate career, caught glimpses of why she was blocked via alternative inquiry the course presented. She began on a path that, a semester later, left her unblocked and reveling in her writing.

Some of the students' comments, in fact, are probably the impetus for this article. When we read and discussed *Beyond the Archives*, one and then another and another of the experienced graduate students asserted and then defended their assertion that the class should replace or be taught concurrently with or in addition to the department's required course on "Bibliography, Research Methods, and Literary Criticism," a course the department treats as introductory to graduate study. If this course were to become part of the required introduction, it would lay the foundations of community engagement and public scholarship the New Academy seeks to explore. Excited when I began the course about the inquiry it offered, I had no certainty that students would be equally excited to do work they were largely unfamiliar with. Nor could I have foreseen the particular inquiry the students would pursue nor the exact influences it would have on their lives and, potentially, on our graduate program. I turn now to the students' final projects.

From Textual Analysis to Public Inquiry

Prepared by this extensive study of divergent communities and the work writing and other literacies did in them and by several weeks' study that disrupted their traditional notions of knowledge and inquiry, the students were ready for the final course project, one that took them into communities for their research (See Appendix B: "Final Project"). Most of the communities students entered were local and all had local ties. Most involved living writers and literacy learners whom the graduate students interviewed, adding a living component to the textual study in which they had always engaged.

A sampling of the projects will help readers further imagine the community interactions these graduate students undertook. One student studied the writing center at a local community college because he knew little about writing centers but he knew a worker at this one. Through observational research, he saw writing center theory in action in ways that he proclaims will influence his high school teaching and his future doctoral studies. Another student studied her sister's journal. The initial impetus was the student's conviction that her sister was an excellent writer even though the sister herself did not believe so. Through close reading of the text and interviews with her sister, my student unearthed definitions of "writer" that had shaped her sister's belief about what constituted real and true writing. While her journal writing might have felt real and true, her school writing did not, and yet it was the measure by which the writer judged the quality of her writing. The process of this research, not surprisingly, touched on the nature of the sisters' identities and their relationship, a very intimate community. The inquiry process created moments of tension between them and caused the journal writer to stop writing for a while. The tension abated and the writing quickly resumed, and what the student in my class learned, first, is the real power of community inquiry, emotional as well as intellectual. Additionally, learning how her sister defined "writer" gave my student an awareness that urged her to cross the boundaries between school writing and "real" writing, as she prepared to teach first year composition as a teaching assistant. Reflective as this particular student is, she will carry these lessons with her, long-term, into what I expect to be a sustained teaching career.

Another student, following accepted scholarship in psychology and other fields, studied how three local women had used journal writing as a mechanism of healing. She herself was personally connected to such uses of writing, and it is clear that her study has helped her solidify a philosophy of teaching that honors students' diverse needs, a crucial perspective for one who teaches in an urban, low-income school as she does. Another student studied a local language-learning institute for non-native speakers of English. A volunteer there, she learned through observational research and interviews the depths of community ties among the students and between them and the institute's

leader. The student has also, most probably, found the focus for her continuing graduate studies. Other students studied electronic communities that mattered to them and a magazine that grew out of a local arts community in the mid-twentieth century. In other words, the students in this class had to move into living communities (with one exception) and outside those traditionally studied by English scholars. Composition scholars, certainly, study such communities frequently. In fact, many but not all of the texts we read were written by compositionists. But students in literature typically do not study such communities nor often find any interest in them. This particular collection of readings, however, and the course design excited the same impulses that motivate people to pursue graduate education in English.

"The 1926 Lists"

One of the most interesting projects, and one I would like to present in some detail, was a student's study of her grandfather's writing, its content and significance to her as a family member and as a reflection of the century of his life. She interpreted his writing in the context of current literacy research that shows literacy's intersection with technological, economic, and other changes (Brandt, 2001). With her permission, I include an extended excerpt from her essay, which won the department's award for the best essay written in a graduate composition studies class. The piece is entitled "The 1926 Lists" and the writer is Mirra Anson. She begins with a narrative, a pattern she had seen in our course readings, and she weaves it into a scholarly analysis of literacy in community domains.

> One of the most vivid and earliest memories I have of my grandfather is the way he washed his hands. The bathroom in my grandparent's house was right off the kitchen, and my grandfather would ceremoniously wash his hands in the bathroom sink after working on the farm all day in preparation for the dinner prepared by my grandmother. I remember one day specifically when I was about six years old, I was in the kitchen with my grandmother "helping" to put dinner on the table. My grandfather came inside and said to me, "Come on, and let's wash up for dinner." He turned on the water, lathered up, and took my hands inside his. I remember thinking how small my hands looked next to his, how pale, and how untarnished mine were in comparison, even under the guise of suds and running water. It was amazing how he got his hands clean everyday for supper – he removed every speck of dirt from under his nails, scrubbed clean the ashes that settled there after burning the trash, and washed away all evidence of outside work to reveal squeaky clean hands.

Anson continued:

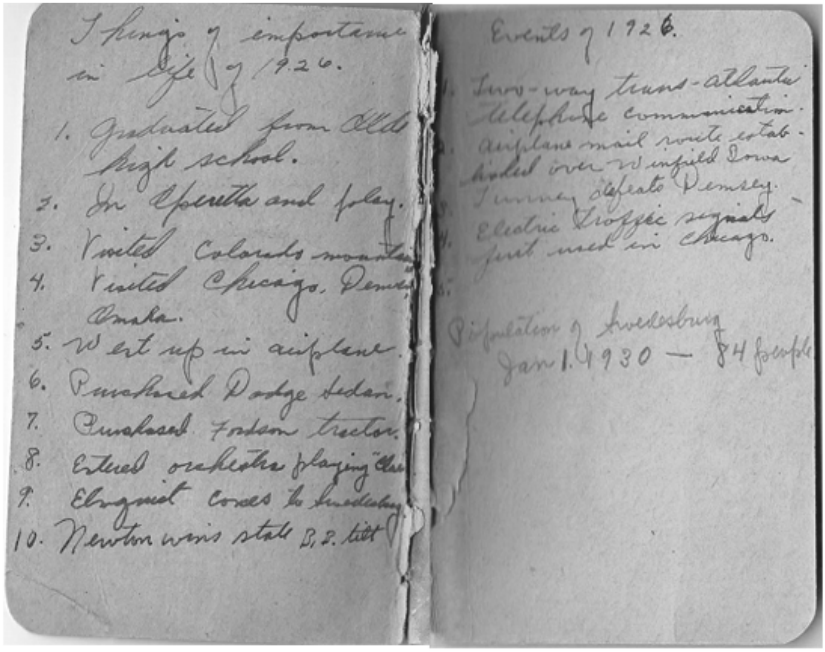
> It was as if this hand washing ritual represented an important transition from his day identity as an Iowan farmer during the 20th century to his other role as husband, father, and grandfather. Those working hands became hands that would not only eat dinner with the family, but engage in newspaper fights, games of checkers, and draw silly looking cartoon characters on blank sheets of butcher paper – all at the amusement of the grandchildren. Those hands would sometimes wave throughout the air as he told stories of his youthful shenanigans, or those of people he grew up with that had long ago passed away. But what I didn't realize until his death was that he also used those hands to write – and write a lot and write everywhere [including on the barn walls, according to Anson].

Anson continued:

> My grandfather was a serious journal writer in that he kept a journal for about every year of his life [nearly one hundred], even during his stay in the health care facility. One of those journals was from 1926 when he was twenty years old. Inside the front cover was a list titled, "Top Things of Importance in Life in 1926." On the back cover was another list, "Events of 1926."

Figure 1.

An image of the 1926 lists.



The above image may be difficult to read; therefore, a typed version is below:

Things of importance in life in 1926

1. Graduated from Olds High School.
2. In an Operetta and play.
3. Visited the Colorado Mts.
4. Visited Chicago, Denver, and Omaha.
5. Went up in an airplane.
6. Purchased a Dodge Sedan.
7. Purchased a Fordson Tractor.
8. Entered the Swedesburg Orchestra playing clarinet
9. Elingwist (?) comes to Swedesburg
10. Newton wins the State BB title

Events of 1926

1. Two way trans-Atlantic telephone communication
2. Airplane mail route established
3. Tunney defeats Dempsey
4. Electric traffic signals first used in Chicago

. . . . These lists were certainly not ordinary to my grandfather, but yet they are in the sense that they articulate the accumulation of his observations from just one year. They are made extraordinary by the fact that for years he kept the diary in which these lists were embedded (he kept all his journals/diaries), and his daughter (my mom) discovered them and passed them along to me. The mere idea that someone has preserved and analyzed his lists makes them do extraordinary work. Further, the lists communicate themes or elements of how he lived his life; they convey the forces that were shaping his literacy, and ultimately represent the forces that have shaped our own.

. . . In *Literacy in American Lives*, Deborah Brandt explores how literacy changed the lives of Americans over a fundamental 100 years, from 1895 to 1985. Literacy, according to Brandt, is a concept that can be viewed as a "staple of life," alongside with any other manmade convention or material system. Literacy, she argues, is a double edged sword in a sense. On one hand, literacy has been instrumental in expanding our democratic ideals and providing for individual upward mobility. Yet, it also has sorted and bracketed us economically and socially. Literacy, in other words, is complicated.

Although Anson is pursuing a doctoral degree in education and is thus familiar with multiple inquiry methods, discovering the personal and ordinary as subjects of study was new to her. Because of the background of all the other

students, the course asked them to study in completely new areas with unfamiliar methodologies and to write and organize material in formats they had never before used. With few exceptions, the students conducted their inquiry and their writing tasks exceptionally well, particularly given how far they were from their comfort zones. Many of the students were, unusually, in their first semester of graduate study. Their view of inquiry and scholarship has been altered from the ones they began with and will, no doubt, influence the kind of work they will want to do in the many other courses they have yet to take. Because students' views of any given discipline are, necessarily, limited, students sometimes fail to take risks in their research that faculty might well endorse, so authorized with the experience of this class and supported with its training, students may go on to move away from the traditional in the work they do in other graduate classes. As I have indicated above, some other the students also took their learning directly into the communities in which they work and live.

Graduate Students as Change Agents

Graduate students have some modicum of power to influence what a department delivers to them in the way of course work – what they enroll in, what they are excited about, what they talk about with faculty. Through the kind of indirect and informal change mentioned above, this course has the potential to influence change. For example, some of the experienced students wrote letters to the graduate director describing the importance of this class and what place it should have, permanently, in the curriculum. I know the graduate director to be open to curricular revision and while I do not think these letters will place the course in the position they advocate for, I expect them to get an audience and lay one more stone in the path toward curricular reform.

While adapting graduate education to community engagement in my department rests significantly on the will of individual faculty members, a recent addition to our non-tenure line faculty employs service-learning in her undergraduate writing courses. As staffing needs have allowed her to teach graduate seminars occasionally, she takes her awareness of community engagement into those seminars. Since our graduate program is small, the dose of community engagement available to our students through her and my classes thus has potentially greater effect than it would in a large program. Demand for graduate courses in the last few years has grown so that the director is eager to offer any viable course a faculty member proposes and because of the somewhat lax way in which new courses can be offered in my department, it is conceivable that Sites of Writing will be offered again. Additionally, the course has the support of the graduate faculty in composition, who put it forth as one they are considering as part of a revised curriculum for the composition emphasis. In these ways, several forces might well coalesce over the next few years toward a revised notion of graduate English study in my department.

Future Directions for Public Scholarship

Writing about the course, its public inquiry, and the challenges it brings to disciplinarity has united my own scholarship and community engagement in a way I have not done before. This course, certainly, could go much further into community engagement and public scholarship. It could, for example, incorporate readings about the topic, about the New Academy and its work. It could design projects that ask students to undertake scholarship with the community, much as the student who studied her sister did. For this course and others like it to have the greatest impact on my department, its sense of disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity, it would be one I could offer to undergraduate English majors. That ideal, I suspect, is a long way off. Curriculum battles, fought five to seven years ago in my department, make it unwilling to undertake overall in the undergraduate curriculum. Without a defined slot in the curriculum, English majors would have little reason to take such a course, even if I taught it without changes in the major. Instead, I focus my energies on the places where change is possible, in one graduate course and the academic and non-academic lives of its students. Whether or not the graduate curriculum changes, these students have. And I will continue to find ways for that to happen, as often as I can.

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[1]Although I invented the curriculum for this course, my thanks go to a former colleague, Eric Turley, who first suggested the course title and some of the readings.

[2]Ours is an urban institution that serves primarily first-generation college students from the local area. Although undergraduate English majors with an emphasis in composition and rhetorical studies are springing up around the country, they are still rare, and so our graduate students come from undergraduate studies in literature. Additionally, the graduate program offers only the M.A., and a sizeable percentage of its students are high- and occasionally middle-school teachers. The student demographics and student purposes for seeking graduate education combine with the department's traditional bent to bring into its graduate programs students with little other than literary training and interests.

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Appendix A: Reading List

Bazerman, C. & Prior, P. (2008). *What Writing Does and How It Does It: An Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Textual Practices*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Dang Thuy Tram. (2007). *Last Night I Dreamed of Peace*. New York: Harmony Books.

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Appendix B: Final Project Assignment

Sites of Writing - Final Project
Identification and Exploration of a Local Site

Background

As someone for whom St. Louis is not home, I am interested in learning as much as I can about it, and you can help me. My guess is that St. Louis and the metro area have a rich diversity of writing sites, historically and currently – well, it's more than just a guess. I'm sure of it.

What sites can you find and what can you learn about them—through personal interviews, primary sources such as the internal documents of a church (e.g., newsletters), other archival sources, secondary sources such as in a library or contemporaneous newspaper accounts of it? I've made a list of possible sites below; you may imagine others. I'll ask you to choose one, learn about it, analyze it, and eventually share your knowledge with the class.

The goal of the assignment is for you to learn as much about the site as you can, to analyze it contextually and rhetorically. As a class, the accumulated projects will showcase St. Louis sites of writing, what they say about what goes on here, what has gone on, what diversity we have, and how much writing sites are embedded in St. Louis culture, life, and history.

Prompt

As you already know, our class discussions are complicating the definition of "writing site" and looking deeply into multiple ways that writing functions within any given site. Your research into a St. Louis site asks you to investigate it as deeply as you can and use the insights from our class discussions and readings to explore the site and its functions, its reasons for existing, the contexts which influence it, any forces that push against it or support it, reasons for its demise (if it no longer exists), and so on. The end results will be two:

1. A brief presentation to class about the site
2. A written essay, 10 – 12pp (probably) that analyzes the site

Getting Started

The questions below should help you conceptualize the kind of research you should do. For any given site you choose, you'll have to adapt the questions, of course.

- What is the site?
- Origin of the site – why and how it came into being
- What interests you about the site?
- Who participates in the site?
- What work does writing do at the site?
- Do other things besides writing operate at the site? If so, how do they intersect with writing?

Possible Sites for Research

1. 19th century African American newspapers
2. 19th century German or Irish newspapers and their work
3. Abolitionist newspapers
4. 19th century African American women's clubs
5. Pre-Civil War African American schools
6. The Women's Sanitation Society, a Civil War women's organization that provided hospital care to injured soldiers. (I'm not sure if that's the exact name or how much writing it involved, but a local resource, Paula Coalier, would.)
7. Some aspect of Harris-Stowe University. What's its origin as an HBCU—when and why? Who were the players in its origins?
8. International Institute of St. Louis, the "area's leading refugee re settlement agency," "Area has rebirth as a hub for immigrants," http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/article_0949bd85-d591-597c-a0fa-ae00699d0e3c.html#Scene_1; "Open Arms Lead to Influx," http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/article_b485327d-7c44-5334-85c9-0a31da42f6aa.html; "Refugee from Iraq Grateful to Have Work," http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/article_23fba0b1-c10f-5501-b809-73afafb4a03a.html. St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 9/5/10
9. Vietnamese, Bosnian, et al. literacy sites
10. Ethnic churches
11. Contemporary ethnic newspapers
12. Notable (or not so notable) local diaries
13. Local normal school (?) and its history
14. Veterans for Peace (Korean War: Wilson M. Powell and Zhou Ming-Fu)
15. A faculty member's research – its origins, development, results, e.g. Richard Cook (Kazan biography journals), Sally Ebest (Irish women writers), Wendy Saul (in Asia), Virginia Navarro (in Asia, too, I think), Nancy Singer's, Jody Miller in Sri Lanka
16. The Gender Studies program on campus
17. The Center for International Studies
18. Community literacy centers (Girls Reading, Deborah Maltby)
19. Writing Centers (UMSL's, Merrimac's)
20. Sites related to one of the other books I ordered for class: *Women*

Writing the Academy: Audience Authority, and Transformation, Noise from the Writing Center, The Community College Writer: Exceeding Expectations

21. Something else

Author

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