Service-Learning in the Community College Composition Classroom: Lessons Learned from Sustainable Projects at One Community College

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ABSTRACT

Service-learning is one way to address the needs of at-risk students who may be both un-engaged and under-prepared for the rigors necessary in the college classroom. Since many states are now placing developmental students into college credit classrooms to improve the attrition rates of under-prepared students, employing strategies such as service-learning may be one way to engage these students. This paper addresses how Lone Star College-Kingwood has incorporated service-learning into the campus curriculum since its inception in 1985. The best practices at Lone Star College-Kingwood over the last 20 years may help inform instructors on the best practices and challenges for creating a successful, sustainable service-learning curriculum for the under-prepared, under-engaged student.

Introduction

Answering the question of how to incorporate service-learning into the composition classroom of a community college has been a difficult puzzle to solve. The concept of service-learning changed from its original inception in 1985 at Georgetown University. College students have also changed and now include many at-risk students or students lacking traditional college preparatory skills. In many states, including Texas where we

teach composition at Lone Star College-Kingwood, students testing as not college ready are placed into freshman composition classes with co-requisite classes in the hope of improving attrition rates. Many studies validate service-learning as one way to connect to an at-risk population of students (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Giving students a leg up, 2016; Greenwood, 2015; Kisker, Theis, & Olivas, 2016; Zahn, 2016; and Becker & Paul, 2015). Therefore, considering what service-learning projects have been successful and sustainable at Lone Star College-Kingwood may assist composition instructors in developing sustainable service-learning programs. The definition of service-learning has also changed from the idea of wealthy, privileged students reaching out to an underprivileged community with service projects to an at-risk population of students learning to become agents of positive change in their communities. Understanding the changing definition of service-learning's role in a larger growing civic engagement department in colleges and universities can assist composition instructors in helping students to understand the need for clear writing to research problems in their communities and express solutions.

Background of Service-Learning at Lone Star College

In 2000, Lone Star College (LSC), seeking to retain the at-risk population of students common at community college campuses, joined other Texas colleges to become part of the national service-learning movement begun by Campus Compact in 1985. The Campus Compact, involving Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford Universities, was created to connect with a community that had become disdainful and suspicious of academic life, seeking to counter a belief that university students were "materialistic and self-absorbed, more interested in making money than in helping their neighbors" (Campus Compact). Campus Compact aimed to help students who were already involved in service to the community by giving them better support structures and encouragement. More than 1,100 colleges and universities over the years have joined this project to "pursue community-based teaching and scholarship in the service of positive change" (Campus Compact).

The concept of combining service with the classroom evolved into an intersection of three important concepts: civic engagement, practical experience, and academic study. A program that began to transform students from being merely career-oriented to being engaged morally and civically in their communities (Stanton & Erasmus, 2013) has become a charge for many educators to teach students "what ordinary people can do to improve their communities" (Kisker, Theis, & Olivas, 2016). Those instructors who use service-learning in community colleges wish to inspire

students to be "knowledge seekers" and also "action leaders in local communities" (Zahn, 2016). Thirty years of national study of the service-learning phenomenon has underscored benefits of the program to students (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000), especially the at-risk student body common at community colleges (Greenwood, 2015). Despite the evidence of a connection between student success and service-learning programs, creating a consistent service-learning program at Lone Star College has been difficult. The roadblocks to the program at LSC include challenges in maintaining faculty interest, a lack of reliable community partners, faculty fatigue for difficult projects, and an inconsistency in the upkeep of the website (resulting from a loss of administrative support for service-learning programs), and a lack of reliable community partners.

Despite these challenges, many faculty members have created viable, effective, and ongoing service-learning projects at Lone Star College-Kingwood (LSCK). The purpose of this paper is to examine two successful service-learning programs at LSCK and evaluate both the difficulties and the successes to determine how service-learning programs can continue to thrive on this campus and on other campuses that also struggle with sustaining service-learning programs. Understanding how to implement a strong, sustainable service-learning program, including integration into composition classes, may be one way to augment student success for the at-risk student population at community colleges across the country.

Challenges at Lone Star College-Kingwood

The challenges faculty face when implementing student-learning at Lone Star College-Kingwood (LSCK) mirror the challenges faced by faculty at other community colleges since the student demographics at LSCK are like the demographics of students in community colleges across the nation.

Student Demographics

A complex of six full campuses, ten satellite centers, two university centers, and six program specific locations, Lone Star College in Houston, Texas, enrolls diverse students who struggle financially, and many of the students attend part-time. The demographics vary between campuses, but overall, the system serves students with a wide range of ethnicity: 31.7% White, 15.1% Black, 38.5 % Hispanic, 8.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.2% Asian, .3% American Indian, 3.2% multiple and 2.6% unknown. The population is mostly female (60.2%). The demographics of Lone Star

College-Kingwood nearly mirrors the same statistics of the overall LSC system. Most of the students across the Lone Star College system and in Kingwood attend part time, around 70.5%. The majority of the students at the LSCK campus are from the Humble School District (38.5%) and the New Caney School District (10.5%), which have an income per capita of $20,098 to $20,899 and a median household income of $42,129 to $44,552. 69.5% of students at the LSCK campus are under 24 years of age.

These demographics show that the LSCK campus fits the nationwide community college student profile: students whose family and work obligations, as well as long commutes and financial constraints, restrict them from many extracurricular activities enjoyed by full-time college students living on campuses; these students often are strained to attend class obligations, without time for additional service-learning activities (Kisker, Theis, & Olivas, 2016, pp. 220-221). Time constraints on both students and faculty in the community college setting are reasons some instructors have tried to exchange the successful outcomes of service-learning with other alternatives that may be less time consuming, such as extracurricular visits to an art museum (Diaz, 2016), or civic engagement activities conducted on campus, such as deliberative dialogues (Kisker, Theis, & Olivas, 2016, pp. 222-223), both of which hold value to students for engaging active learning and civic agency.

Service-learning scholarship has measured other varied positive outcomes of service-learning from an ability to change students' perspectives and understanding of social issues to increasing students' motivation to learn and apply that learning to helping their communities (Becker & Paul, 2015, p. 185). Faculty must balance student needs and community opportunities for service-learning to meet the course learning outcomes. The following review of different approaches in implementing service learning at LSCK can help other community colleges gauge what may work in their campuses and communities.

Communication with Faculty

To make service-learning viable for the Lone Star College System, facilitators need to reassess faculty needs and to examine what has and has not worked for service-learning programs throughout the system. The first roadblock to a successful program is a well-maintained service-learning website or another means of communicating to faculty the requirements and community partners willing to participate. Community partners and needs change, as do the faculty who are willing and able to participate in current community needs. The original website created for the Lone Star College system ambitiously set out a program for instructors to use with forms, timelines, and a

handbook with 50 plus pages of helpful advice on how to establish a service-learning program for the classroom, including specific suggestions for reflection on the service. Two committees diligently compiled the handbook in 2001 and 2002 (Friesen, K., Friesen, C., & Longnion, B., 2002). Since the college's initial rigorous investment in the program seventeen years ago, administrative support for service-learning has declined: the new website only lists the contact names of faculty on each campus.

Recent scholarship outlining successful service-learning programs demonstrates the need for administrative support for both sustainability of existing service-learning courses and the development of new programs (Alexander, 2017; CCCC, 2016; Cary, 2016; Getto, Leon, & Getto-Rivait, 2014; Juárez, 2017; and Wells, 2016). This scholarship shows that the recent and successful service-learning courses underscore the necessity that faculty new to service-learning have time to create courses with the support from seasoned faculty, sharing and developing programs with community partners, and evaluating and improving courses over time. LSC provides several yearlong professional development programs in leadership and development for cohorts of newly hired faculty or faculty transitioning to new positions. Adding year-long professional development programs for faculty to create service-learning courses, such as the program outlined by J. M. Wells (2016), would help to improve current service-learning knowledge gaps at LSC.

Furthermore, a well-maintained service-learning website may work more effectively if faculty could modify and update it with willing community partners to make the information more current. Many instructors do not use service-learning in the classroom because they do not have knowledge of good community partners with service needs that fit the learning outcomes for a diverse set of classrooms (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002, p. 14). When interviewing faculty with good and sustainable service-learning projects, we have found that they often operate in anonymity, and some were unaware that they had been conducting service-learning projects, which in turn means that students were not receiving service-learning credit on their transcripts. For instance, in Spring of 2018, Lone Star College-Kingwood Cosmetology and Esthetics programs were asked to style the hair and apply the make up for 100 models, ages ranging from 4 to 16 years old, for the Creative Works "Atlantis The Lost City" Fashion Show held at the Humble Civic Center, all benefiting programs for victims of human trafficking. This opportunity arose, the students participated, but the instructors never considered how this community outreach constituted a service-learning project (C. Mullins, personal communication, April 10, 2018). Improving the website and then cultivating a continuing discussion on campus can help to invigorate a weak service-learning program.

The Case for Civic Education in the Writing Classroom

In "Semiology, Ideology, Praxis: Responsive Authority in the Composition Classroom," J. Laditka (1990) spoke to the challenges and necessities of equipping writers for citizenship. He explained that his "paradigm of composition is changing to one of critical literacy, a literacy of political consciousness and social action" (p. 366). Separating the world of the classroom from the world outside is difficult: "as responsive teachers we must recognize that classroom discourse is ideologically charged regardless of individual teaching practices" (p. 357). Teachers should not be afraid of reaching beyond the scope of writing, he argued. We agree. We should embrace our role and influence on society as a whole: "I believe composition classrooms should enrich the affective component of morality, enhancing the likelihood of our survival on this planet" (p. 368).

A few years later, E. Ervin (1997) took up the topic of civic engagement in writing classrooms. She asserted that "we should actively accompany [students] in the transition from virtual-public discourse to real-public discourse, from class participation to civic participation" (p. 389). We educate for citizenship because, as she pointed out, "like it or not, teachers represent to students—not to mention the nonacademic public—how intellectuals behave, what they do with their knowledge and convictions" (p. 384). Classroom practice, in other words, has an impact on the outside world, and instructors can respond to this reality proactively.

Perhaps the most powerful argument in favor of citizenship education in composition classrooms springs from the 2009 National Council of Teachers of English report entitled "Writing in the 21st Century." K. B. Yancey (2009), a former NCTE president, discussed the new reality of writing that has emerged in our technologically-advanced world. Thanks to smartphones, tablets, and social media platforms, people from all walks of life "want to compose and do" and are both the "recipients and creators of our news" (pp. 4-5). Writing can be accomplished quickly and shared instantly, often shaping our identities within society: "through writing we participate—as students, employees, citizens, human beings. Through writing, we are" (Yancey, p. 7). Because writing provides a voice, and that voice can now be amplified and shared in myriad ways, composition teachers have both the opportunity and the responsibility to "help our students compose often, compose well, and through these composings, *become* the citizen writers of our country, the citizen writers of our world, the writers of our future" (p. 1; emphasis in original). Along with teaching the fundamentals of sound writing, Yancey implied that the writing teacher can help

students think critically about competing ideologies and equip them with the skills that make their voices heard in ways that will change the world for the better.

Considerations for the Writing Teacher

Instructors who agree with Yancey, Ervin, and Laditka that civic engagement does, indeed, belong in college composition classrooms must determine how best to implement critical pedagogy in a way that presents clear objectives for student learning and avoids potential pitfalls. Scholars have provided some valuable suggestions for implementation. One important consideration is the topic of citizenship itself. A. J. Wan (2011) argued "the terms and boundaries we use to define citizenship are vague at best and often go uninterrogated" (p. 29)—we use the word *citizen* as a catch-all term without really defining it, in other words, in what Wan calls "ambient awareness" (p. 32) of the term. Assuming citizenship goes beyond a designation of legal status, what aspects does the teacher emphasize in the classroom? If citizenship is defined by participation in society, Wan asked, "What counts? What is most effective? Voting? Critical reading? Letters to the editor? Public writing on blogs and wikis? Social change? What kind of citizenship is being produced and promoted? Most important, do all students have access to the same types of citizenship?" (p. 36). That last question is particularly pointed. If composition teachers do not spend time thinking about the definition of citizenship, then overlooking the reality that not everyone has an equal opportunity for full participation in it can become problematic. Writing instructors should "acknowledge the limitations of what citizenships can do for students" and "create a space where our own citizen-making through the teaching of literacy is a more deliberate activity" (p. 46).

Even as writing teachers deliberate on what aspects of citizenship to emphasize, discussions about civic engagement often veer into the political. Politics are personal, often extremely controversial, and the resulting disagreements can obscure the objectives of the class and derail productive conversations. Ervin (2006) suggested some considerations that would help remove the political partisanship from citizenship education in the writing classroom. She identified four rhetorical strategies—branding, framing, coalition-building, and agitation—that can be employed to introduce students to public issues carefully and deliberately, and, most importantly, without "counterproductive partisan connotations" (p. 419) that might alienate students with differing political ideologies, and, by doing so, take the emphasis off the goal of developing students into citizen writers.

Other recent scholars have emphasized the importance of reciprocity among student learners, community partners, and members of groups for whom service may be provided in the community. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (2016) outlined six criteria for peer evaluation of service-learning or "community-engaged projects." Reciprocity, first on the list, emphasizes how community-engaged projects need to benefit and be evaluated by all stakeholders—students, teachers, community partners, and community members.

In the Classroom: Potential Models for Implementation

Even if the writing instructor heeds the advice of Ervin and Wan and takes a deliberative approach to implementing service learning, every teacher is unique in his/her approach. However, patterns have emerged. Some courses use contemporary and historical non-fiction writing as a foundation for rhetorical analysis and a springboard for student compositions (Bizzell & Fish, 2009; Juárez, 2017; Hatcher & Studer, 2015). Others go further, providing opportunities for civic engagement through written activism in the classroom and even hands-on participation in service-learning programs (Ervin, 1997; Herzberg, 1994; Alexander, 2017; Cary, 2016; Guzmán, 2019; Kayser, 2017; Lietz & Tunney, 2015; McLeod, 2017; O'Connor, 2017; Wells, 2016). Textbooks, such as D. Lazere's textbook (2015), offer a text-based approach to critical pedagogy implementation. The book takes traditional fundamentals of rhetorical study, such as argumentative structure and logical fallacies, and presents model texts on current, contentious issues, such as income inequality, corporate subsidies, racism, patriotism, from a variety of perspectives. Through the process of rhetorical analysis, students are exposed to important contemporary, social, provocative issues, making it possible for students to see the real-world impact of composition.

A text-based approach to civic engagement can also draw from historical examples of rhetoric related to major social movements. P. Bizzell (2009), responding to a critic of critical pedagogy, discussed an anthology that she co-authored with B. Herzberg: "Our book *Negotiating Differences* focuses on controversies that have already been decided: for example, slavery has been abolished…students focus on the rhetorical strategies employed by the various players battling for power to influence the nation's course regarding slavery" (p. 96). Since the issue has already been settled, political minefields can be avoided, and students can see the historical impact of texts in the shaping of our democracy. Whether rooted in history or current events, these

text-based approaches provide sound instruction on rhetorical methods, while also engaging students in important issues of the public good.

Early adopters who combined rhetorical analysis with real world participation included E. Ervin (1997), who suggested a "conceptual framework" for civic participation in the writing classroom. While she initially used a text-based approach like those mentioned above, she found that student interest in such topics did not necessarily manifest itself in real-world action. She concluded that students required "structured opportunities" for community service (p. 384). She guided her class in projects responding to local community needs. Other early adopters connected the writing class to a service opportunity from the beginning and used community service as a springboard for writing instruction, such as B. Herzberg (1994), who acknowledged potential pitfalls in connecting community service to a writing class, pointing out that simply engaging in written reflection after a service project "is not sufficient to raise critical or cultural consciousness" (p. 309). Instead, his students used class time to examine the underlying issues that make the service project necessary. Because his students were participating in a community literacy initiative, they read about literacy and education issues and inequalities in the US. Reflecting on his students' final papers, Herzberg observed that they showed a personal understanding that community service "carries beyond personal acts of charity" (p. 317). Students were able "to question and analyze the world" and "also to imagine transforming it" (p. 317). These students, coming to terms with a new awareness of their own roles in the common good, exemplify Yancey's "citizen writer," demonstrating the positive impact that service-learning can have on individual students and on society.

Critical pedagogy is not without naysayers, who worry about professors being candid about their ideologies and values, which, in turn, might not align with those of their students. They are concerned with whether quality writing instruction is taking place in these composition classrooms. S. Fish (Bizzell & Fish, 2009), a particularly outspoken critic, responded to Bizzell by arguing that teachers should separate their professional identities from those personal ideologies and beliefs, leaving them out of the classroom. Ultimately, Fish pointed out, writing teachers are paid to teach writing. When they attempt to connect writing with citizenship by bringing social issues into the classroom, they are veering outside of their areas of expertise and failing to do their jobs. Another early critic M. Hairston (1992) shared similar concerns when she criticized "a model that puts dogma before diversity, politics before craft, ideology before critical thinking, and the social goals of the teacher before the educational needs of the student" (p. 180). Hairston concluded that a better way for freshman writing courses to deal with issues of diversity and community would be to allow them to write

about their own unique and diverse experiences. As a result, these courses would help young writers emerge "with confidence in their ability to think, to generate ideas, and to present themselves effectively to the university and the community" (192).

Contrary to these early critics, recent scholarship shows the effectiveness of service-learning combined with first-year composition courses, such as the model suggested by S. H. O'Connor (2017), and with even upper-level writing courses (Alexander, 2017) and literature courses (Guzmán, 2019; Halady, 2016; Kayser, 2017). O'Connor's course, Writing in the Community, combines textual analysis by or about leaders of social change, 20 hours of community service, weekly short writing assignments, a writing project for a community partner, and a final personal narrative written by students to make sense of the course materials. Using her students' own reflections, which combine narrative with service-learning changes, she highlights the "valuable tools in fostering critical consciousness in a service-learning classroom" (109). The upper-level writing and literature courses combined literature with the unique opportunities available in their local communities— Guzmán with farmworker families in California, Halady with Native American traditions in North Carolina, and Kayser with oral history of southern women in Louisiana.

The recent scholarship on sustainable service-learning programs in writing classrooms include several common characteristics: reciprocity between the students and the community partners (Guzmán, 2019; Kayser, 2017; Lietz & Tunney, 2015; Cary, 2016; Alexander, 2017; and Wells, 2016), student engagement in the choice of projects (O'Connor, 2017; McLeod, 2017; Alexander, 2017), and written texts to support the learning outcomes of the course, both those texts studied by the students and written by the students (Cary, 2016; Guzmán, 2019; Halady, 2016; Hatcher & Studer, 2015; Kayser, 2017; O'Connor, 2017).

Highlights of Service-Learning Projects at LSCK

Taking advantage of service needs in the college's community can be one way to begin service-learning in the classroom. Reviewing the successful service-learning on the LSCK campus reveals that the best service-learning project is student driven, where students diagnose a community need, create, and undertake a service plan to address the community need. However, accomplishing this objective for service-learning, all while completing the learning outcomes of the course, may seem to be an impossible task for busy faculty, especially those at community colleges. Juárez (2017) criticizes Ashley Holmes' *Public Pedagogy in Composition Studies* (2016) for only including case studies from elite and well-funded institutions. Juárez argues that Holmes' deletion of

case studies from community colleges does not help these institutions that struggle with funding constraints, heavier faculty workloads, and students with shorter time to degree completion. Yet, many students and instructors at LSCK have accomplished this fine balance to create sustainable programs for service-learning in their coursework.

Sustainable Projects

Two examples of sustainable service-learning classes at LSCK are M. Griffith, a business professor, and B. Shmaefsky, a biology professor, who require service-learning of all students. Both professors have had great success with this program, especially for at-risk learners. Shmaefsky claimed the most significant success of service-learning is the ability to engage at-risk students since service-learning empowers students by engaging them in real world problems and having them apply solutions learned from academic study. Both Griffith and Shmaefsky share a belief in volunteering and specifically, in the intersection of civic engagement, volunteerism, and academic study for the service-learning program to empower and engage their students.

Business and service-learning

Griffith's decade long history of integrating service-learning projects in his project management class has led to the development of a semester long assignment that requires students to self-select a project that will benefit "a business, a community group, LSC-Kingwood, a church, or an individual client" (M. Griffith, personal communication, November 10, 2016). Griffith explained that he had limited success with student engagement the first semester he assigned a project. Allowing students to choose their projects has led to greater student engagement and success with project completion. Griffith has developed a 10-page assignment guide that provides the timeline to complete the project, including four required presentations and the overall parameters of the assignment. Normally students find their own community partners in their randomly assigned groups of five to seven students, but in spring 2014 and 2015, he guided the class toward an online project, the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM) Recruitment Challenge (AFPM: American Fuel and Petroleum Manufacturers, 2015). The petrochemical industry challenged universities to help them problem-solve an industry need: 10,000 baby boomers a day retire, and this industry finds that not enough millennials are filling employment

positions in this industry. In this competition, Griffith's assignment and project design for the teams in his class led to great success for his students. Although Griffith emphasized that the importance is the learning that occurs in the management of the service project and not the outcomes, these projects have contributed to successful outcomes over the years.

In Spring 2019, Griffith's students presented on their group projects, which included both the students' confessions of the difficulty of the program while balancing school, family, and work obligations as well as the transformative nature of the community-based projects. Part of the project involved evaluations of the projects' failures and successes and the reciprocity of benefits to students and community partners. Even projects that did not work as planned were mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. Students' descriptions of the failures can be valued as transformational threshold learning moments, defined by J. M. Wells (2016), as opportunities for reflecting and improving the sustainability of service-learning work for both students, faculty, and community partners. The Spring 2019 class presentations were marked with nostalgia as Griffith has retired from teaching. The successes for his courses' learning outcomes and the students' personal comments on the transformational experience for them inspired the department to have Griffith mentor his replacement in order to continue service-learning in these courses.

Environmental science and service-learning

Like Griffith, Shmaefsky has developed several successful projects for students in his environmental science class. He generated one of the projects in collaboration with the art gallery. The project was born as Shmaefsky and K. Larson, LSC-Kingwood art gallery director, were discussing the need for the arts in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in order to create STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics). Larson had contact with the photographer W. Nicole, who had taken some photographs of the displacement of the Batwa people in Uganda. Nicole explained that "these indigenous hunter-gatherers lost their forest homelands when Uganda created Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in 1991 to protect critically endangered mountain gorillas, and like many disenfranchised indigenous peoples around the globe, [these people] struggle to survive and thrive in a strange new world" (Nicole, 2016). The artist took photographs to illustrate the Batwa people's distress but was unable to take the time to organize and interpret the material from her photographs. Because environmental science seeks to balance the needs of protecting the environment with those of the human populations,

Shmaekfsky capitalized on the opportunities in Nicole's photographs by having students assist in analyzing this dilemma between the gorillas and the Batwa people. His students used the principles learned in the class to perform the following service for the non-profit organization: they "selected artwork provided by the photojournalist, developed a video for the exhibit, and designed reduced-scale models representing Batwa culture and current living conditions" (B. Shmaefsky, personal communication, November 13, 2016). This project was completed over several semesters with different groups of students. The value of this type of collaboration across disciplines is outlined by Wells in "Transforming Failures into Threshold Moments: Supporting Faculty through the Challenges of Service-Learning" (2016), which documents the importance of pairing novice faculty, new to service-learning, with seasoned faculty to develop new service-learning courses and work across disciplines.

Shmaekfsky's students have also identified and completed many relevant and timely community needs dealing with environmental science. Six students in his 2016 class researched and wrote a multi-media news story about "the people affected by the Flint, Michigan water contamination crisis," examining the causes and problems that led to the crisis in hopes of preventing future crises (Maxson, et al., 2016). After the Hurricane Harvey related campus flooding at LSCK in 2017, another group designed "strategies for reducing rainwater runoff that causes flooding on campus." Their analysis is based upon "the principles of a nationwide philosophy of urban development called Low Impact Development (LID), [a program] being promoted by a regional policy group called the Houston-Galveston Area Council" (Shmaefsky). These students are extending their research and ideas beyond the classroom by writing a proposal to share with the Director of Maintenance at LSCK and entering their projects in a contest sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency. Another group of students identified local environmental issues, and by using a plotter printer, these students created posters, which they will distribute on campus and will loan out to local schools and libraries to educate the public about local environmental issues. The third group of students also "provided research data on a pollution project in Bangladesh being pursued by the Environmental Defender Law Center in Washington, DC: part of program called On-Call Scientists run by the American Association for the Advancement of Science." These students assisted "with a project for reducing pollution from tanneries in Hazaribagh, Bangladesh." The fourth group of his students is "serving as facilitators for the Lone Star College-Kingwood STEM Day. They are demonstrating a biology activity and will be sharing their college experiences with the visitors." These projects underscore Shmaekfsky's investment in

developing projects that apply ideas learned in his classroom to service not only on campus, but also for local and international communities. Service-learning projects are required of all students in his environmental science classes, and although some enter the projects reluctantly, Shmaefsky believes the greatest impact is on at-risk learners who tell him that the service-learning component of the projects affected them significantly.

Lessons Learned for the Composition Classroom

Recent scholarship that mirror the success of Griffith's and Schmaefky's service-learning classes in the composition classroom include the following: Hatcher and Studer (2015), who combine scholarship on non-profits with students volunteering and critiquing non-profits in the community; O'Connor (2017), who uses rhetorical analysis of community activists and students' own reflections on community service; and Wells (2016), who documents the value of reciprocity in reflecting and acting on the reflection of community-based programs. All three articles use feasible models for making service-learning the center of the course, using guidelines for reciprocity of learning and conversation between students and community members, ensuring students' choice remains a central component, focusing on student learning outcomes, and requiring community engagement and service as part of the course. We could see any one of these programs or models based upon them working well on the community college campus.

We personally tried to mitigate the problems of requiring students to participate in service-learning outside of the classroom. Rather, service-learning remains an extra option that students may choose to complete in place of another assignment on the syllabus. But like Shmaefsky, we found that only the best students would choose to participate in these service-learning options. By making service-learning optional, at-risk students have not received the full benefits.

To integrate the optional assignments into a more effective service-learning experience that would mirror successes of other courses on our campus and draw on the current pedagogy on service-learning in the composition classroom, we recommend the following:

1. Have students identify and write an initial narrative about a need or problem in the community.
2. Have students research independently the causes associated with that need and possible solutions.

3. Require students to volunteer for a well-established organization of their choice to address the need or problem in the community.
4. Have students reflect on how well that organization deals with the need or how it falls short depending upon the student's research.
5. Have students present their findings and reflections to the class and to the community partner.

The course would focus on helping students both research the problem and the proposed solutions, reflecting critically about the ways their community is currently addressing that problem. This type of course addresses the problems of sustainability and reciprocity, the need for students to choose their own projects, and the problems of having the instructor not being sensitive to the students' personal political ideas. The instructor's role reverts to one of addressing the skills of competent researching and writing by helping students become better communicators, while at the same time providing students with the opportunity to become participants in and critical thinkers about their communities, learning to address the needs and problems within their communities.

Conclusions

At-risk students can benefit from community-based projects in first-year writing classes. Recent scholarship has shown that combining service with narrative reflection and rhetorical analysis can be transformative for students. A key factor for the success of community-based projects in the classroom is administrative support, allowing new instructors time to work in tandem with seasoned instructors and to have conversations across the curriculum about viable and sustainable service-learning classrooms. One suggestion for Lone Star College is to create year-long cohorts for professional development programs and have dedicated staff update a service-learning website for faculty and community partners. Drawbacks to integrating service-learning include the time needed for busy faculty and students to invest in the projects, as time is often at a premium. However, experienced faculty at LSCK with successful programs and current scholarship on service-learning programs attest to the transformational power of these programs when students, especially at-risk or underprepared students, recognize their own agency to make change through action in their communities.

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Julie Jackson is adjunct professor of English at Lone Star College-Kingwood. She has been a public-school teacher since 2008 and currently teaches Dual Credit English IV at Summer Creek High School in Humble. She received her bachelor's degree in English from Sam Houston State University in 2001. Her graduate studies in English, education, and multicultural issues led to a Master of Liberal Studies from Kent State University in 2007. Her graduate research focused on barriers to learning and teaching that exist within communities of color. Jackson pursued further graduate coursework in English in 2017, which was when she became interested in the relationship between community service and the freshman composition course. She believes passionately in the power of language to drive societal change, and strives to be a thoughtful, responsible, and empathetic teacher.