Course Design

Constellating Community Engagement in a Cultural Rhetorics Seminar

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Course Description

ENG 712: Theories in Public Rhetoric & Community Engagement is a required course for MA and PhD students concentrating in Rhetoric, Writing, and Community Engagement at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). The topic for this course rotates depending upon the teaching faculty member's area of expertise. In the 2020 rotation, Maria opted to theme the course around cultural rhetorics (CR), as an introduction to the theories and methodologies useful to practicing CR. To familiarize students with these practices, two goals structured the course. The first goal was for students to identify the practices and theories defining the field of CR. The second goal was for students to build a CR methodology in relation to their individual scholarly areas of study. As such, this course asked students to move beyond an orientation centered on 'what is cultural rhetorics?' to a more methodological orientation that invited them to consider 'how does one practice cultural rhetorics?'

Embracing the CR pillar of constellation, this course design offers a constellated, multi-vocal approach by several students (Claire, Gitte, Danielle, Chloe, Madison, Joni, and Angelyn) and the instructor (Maria).[1] In what follows, Maria explains the institutional context and theoretical framing of the course. The students reflect on their experiences in the course, which prompts a dialogue on a surprising outcome: how the course prepared students to engage in a range of community projects. We believe that others may read and build upon this course design to consider how they may embrace CR theories and practices to guide community-engaged work.

Institutional Context

There are four graduate concentrations in the English Department at UWM. ENG 712 is a course offered by the Rhetoric, Writing, and Community Engagement (Plan B) concentration. This is a recently revised plan which is grounded in rhetoric and writing studies but also offers students "opportunities to apply that knowledge in pedagogical, professional, and/or community

spaces" ("Graduate Plans: Summaries"). The curriculum is designed to support MA and PhD students who have wide interests in composition pedagogy, rhetorical theory, digital rhetorics, professional writing, and technical communication. Additionally, Plan B aims to support students who wish to apply their graduate education to higher education but also those with an interest in working in community settings.

As a new faculty member joining Plan B, I (Maria) suggested ENG 712 as a CR course for three reasons: one, my own graduate training centered on CR methodology and pedagogy; two, to my knowledge, an explicit course focused on CR had not been taught in the English Department at UWM; three, over the last few years there has been a growing embrace and demand for graduate students on academic job announcements for scholars whose work aligns with CR. For these reasons, my colleagues supported a CR theme for ENG 712.

Theoretical Rationale

The rationale for the course design grew out of my prior graduate experience as a student who took a cultural rhetorics graduate course and as a member of the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab.[2] These two experiences underscored an embodied, experiential, and practice-oriented approach to teaching CR. In addition, because I came from a CR graduate program, I developed a series of friendships with my fellow graduate students and mentorship relationships with faculty teaching and researching CR. Therefore, as I designed ENG 712, I consulted some of these colleagues (Phil Bratta, John Gagnon, Les Hutchinson, Katie Manthey) and mentors (Trixie Smith, Ames Hawkins, Julie Lindquist) to talk about the course structure.[3]

I scaffolded the course around a self-proposed final project, which included a proposal where students explained how the project practiced CR. Such an end goal was intentional to allow for flexible interest with how students may position themselves and/or their interests in the course. For instance, some students (especially GTAs) may want to explore pedagogical connections between CR and first year writing. Other students not enrolled in Plan B (taking the course as a student from a different English concentration) may desire using CR as an interdisciplinary lens to think about their dissertation design. Given the multiple entrances with how students may come to engage with CR, the course emphasized the practice and application of CR to students' specific areas of interest over mastery of CR theory. Evidence supporting the need to have students practice their own CR approach to a topic of their choosing is grounded in the "impossibility of simply laying out a 'universal' (or, an 'essential') frame for cultural rhetorics work" (Bratta and Powell). In this way, the course was designed for students to understand that "cultural rhetorics is

a *practice*, and more specifically an embodied practice, that demands much from the scholars who engage in it" (Bratta and Powell).

To ground the course's embodied, experiential, and practice-oriented approach, I relied upon the four pillars of CR: (1) story, (2) decolonization, (3) relations, and (4) constellation (Bratta and Powell). While not all four practices must occur or be in operation at the same time to be seen as 'doing cultural rhetorics,' I emphasized the need for at least one of those pillars to be in operation. The decision to emphasize one over all four again emphasized the practice-oriented approach where students could 'try on a pillar' to reflect on the effectiveness of said pillar in relationship to their project. In essence, the pillars then served as a useful framework to discuss questions like, "What makes a rhetoric project a cultural rhetorics project?" and "What is cultural rhetorics pedagogy?"

Structurally, the course was divided into two experiences. The first half of the semester asked students to grapple with foundational CR texts and critical theory. For instance, the first three weeks of class, students read texts that were fundamental to the origins and development of what rhetoric and composition refer to as cultural rhetorics. These readings included a set of origin stories, which date back to the 1990s and early 2000s and feature Victor Villanueva's "On the Rhetoric and Precedents of Racism," Jacqueline Jones Royster's "Disciplinary Landscaping," and Malea Powell's "Dreaming Charles Eastman." These readings offered a glimpse into some of the foundational pieces advocating not for a CR orientation to the discipline but for a different, more culturally-conscious orientation to the discipline. My goal was to help students understand the scholarship and scholars whose work paved the path for CR to emerge. In doing so, students had an opportunity to realize how CR offers a re/orientation to the Westernized and canonized narrative of rhetoric and composition.

With the origins of CR mapped, students then engaged in a series of new readings that offered a critical re/orientation to the discipline (e.g. Ahmed; Maracle; King; Tuck and Yang). Collectively, these readings pushed students to critically reflect on the disciplinary narratives they have been told (i.e., "the canon" and Aristotelean histories privileging a Westernized narrative of rhetoric and composition). With a critical orientation toward the discipline established, the course then pivoted towards theory so students could begin to trace the crossovers and variances between cultural studies (CS) and CR. Students read historiographers (Cruickshank), cultural studies scholars (Hall), postcolonial theorists (Bhabha; Spivak), Indigenous theorists (Kimmerer; Warrior), and decolonial theorists (Mignolo; Tuhiwai Smith). These readings provided a layered orientation to the ideological and global shifts embraced by institutions and disciplines. In this way, the first half of the semester offered students two theo-

retical narratives: a CR narrative to rhetoric and composition and a narrative about the wider academic theoretical shifts embracing colonial critiques. Both narratives were essential to students understanding (1) what CR is in relation to the discipline and (2) why CR in relation to decolonialization is important.

The second half of the semester was organized around applications of CR in rhetoric and composition. We read works by authors who self-identify as cultural rhetoricians yet also identify with other rhetoric and composition scholarship (such as queer rhetorics, feminist rhetorics, Asian American rhetoric, embodied rhetorics, and even technical and professional writing). Unique to the course was the incorporation of actual authors into the class. Several of the cultural rhetoricians we read joined our class virtually for a portion of time (see syllabus for names of scholars). For instance, one week was themed around methodological ethics of CR. For that week, students read articles by Ames Hawkins, Phil Bratta, and John Gagnon; the authors later joined our class for 45 minutes to talk about the pieces, the methodological issues encountered in doing CR, and how they identify as cultural rhetoricians. Such experiences were essential to pedagogically modeling a constelled approach and fostering relationships through storytelling in rhetoric and composition. Cultural rhetorics, in this way, is its own disciplinary community where scholars are talking with each other and writing a new orientation to the traditional, Westernized canon.

The course projects mirrored much of the two-part structure of the course—reflection and revision—to emphasize the importance of practice over perfect production. There were four main assignments: (1) a cultural, rhetorical orientation statement; (2) a self-proposed seminar project; (3) a co-led student reading facilitation, where two students lead discussion based on the week's theme/focus and offered practice with pedagogical application of CR; and (4) weekly reading responses.

The Cultural Rhetorics Orientation Statement was the first assignment. This statement served as an opportunity for students to begin articulating how CR orients them to their work. In particular, students described their orientation within one of the following genres: (a) a research statement, (b) a teaching statement, or (c) a professional statement. Students submitted a draft of this statement midway into the course and then significantly revised at the end of the semester. Students also submitted a reflection narrating the changes made between their drafts as a method to document student learning. I developed the orientation statement assignment as a way for students to practice talking about their work to an audience that may be unfamiliar with CR.

A main objective of mine was for students to have an embodied experience of doing CR and reaffirming the belief that "it is here, at the space of embodied practices of the scholar—and not simply the scholar's attitude—that cultural

rhetorics connects those who study it and those who live it" (Bratta and Powell). As such, I structured the major project for the course as a self-proposed seminar project. This required students to create an initial project proposal that provided a tentative project title and description, a discussion on how the project is situated within CR, the various deliverables that would be connected to the project, a justification of why this project is worthwhile (connects to a student's research, assists with a student's exam, connects to teaching and/or professional aspirations), a list of sources to consult, and any specific questions for me. I acted as a CR mentor by offering suggestions regarding scope and readings and asking students to explain the purpose of the project to ensure there was a reciprocal component to each project.

During the second half of the semester, students submitted a progress report and updated me and their classmates about their projects. This report proved essential to students revising the general scope, objectives, and aims of the project. As I anticipated, many students ultimately changed their project proposals when they learned of and read about the projects of our virtual guests. Here again, the reflective and revisionary components of the self-designed project acted as a tool to reward practice over perfected products.

The assessment of the self-designed project encouraged the process of practicing CR, evaluating the students' abilities to: (a) articulate a cultural-rhetorics-informed project (evident in the proposal); (b) practice that project (evident in the progress report); and (c) demonstrate a developing cultural-rhetorics methodology (evident in the final project). Such assessment coincides with "cultural rhetorics approaches [that] move us beyond plain study and mere critique encouraging relational accountability and active engagement in making and building" (Gagnon 3). Having first understood rhetoric and writing studies as disciplinary narrative history, students then respond by layering critical theory on top of the Westernized canon of rhetoric and writing studies. Their responses to selective narratives become "rhetorical slippages," moments in which narrative gaps and discursive slips emerge and offer space for rhetoricians to respond (Gagnon 7). In this way, students in the course needed to learn the display narratives first, then, along with the critical theory, to begin to identify and practice a CR response.

Pedagogical and Methodological Student Reflections

At the end of the spring 2020 semester, I proposed the idea of collaboratively reflecting and writing about ENG 712. This invitation was open to all students who took the CR course and seven of the eleven students enrolled emailed me to indicate their desire to work together. Collectively, we believe the course was unique for several reasons. One, it was the first time the course was offered to graduate students at UWM and therefore a new experience for

all of us. Two, it was a course that occurred during the beginning of COV-ID-19 and, despite the shift to virtual learning, the class retained a close-knit, communal bond. In many ways, the very pillars of CR became even more relevant in the midst of a pandemic. Three, all of the students opted to create public-facing projects that operated on the principles of CR, which accounted for a more embodied and experiential course outcome. In the section that follows, seven students from ENG 712 reflect on their personal experiences in the course and discuss the two major areas in which CR became relevant: pedagogy and methodology.

Pedagogical Connections

Decolonializing Higher Education – Claire

I returned to graduate school to complete a PhD after several years of working at southern California community colleges as an adjunct professor, tutor, and writing center administrator. Since starting my PhD coursework, I have contemplated how the privileging of figures such as Aristotle, Socrates, and Burke as the forefathers of rhetoric, both ancient and modern, has obscured the rhetorical practices of feminists, Indigenous communities, Black Americans, and so many others. Yet I did not know what to call these problems or what larger system of thought they might be a part of.

It was in this course that I finally came to see decoloniality as a necessary approach to rethinking higher education. For instance, the elements of the course that solidified this realization were readings that both explicitly discuss marginalized cultural and rhetorical practices as well as demonstrated them. These include King's *The Truth about Stories*, which demonstrates conventions of orality, such as returns and repetitions to emphasize the ever-changing nature of reality and experience, and Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, which shows us the possibility of bringing together Western science and indigenous approaches to nature. King and Kimmerer's cultural ways of being, seeing, and writing are often not valued in academia. That was the problem I wanted to interrogate entering the PhD program, and I could see it and name it now as an effect of colonizing thinking about discourses and ways of being. In the community college setting, as well as the four-year university, a decolonial approach can push students not only to learn about a greater variety of communicative practices but also to assert the value of ones they bring with them as they move forward with their professional lives.

Story as Praxis in the FYC Classroom – Gitte

I came back to graduate school after teaching high school and college for fifteen years. What prompted me to return were questions that kept nagging at

me about institutional, departmental, and personal socially unjust practices when teaching multilingual students in FYC programs. Early in my teaching career, I took an assimilationist approach that reproduced monolingual ideologies about language and language difference. In graduate school, scholarship in translanguaging, critical race theory, anti-racist teaching, and culturally sustaining pedagogy moved my own thinking forward, but CR offered a comprehensive heuristic and set of concepts to both anchor and transform my understanding and practice.

The theories and research I was reading in class and Maria's modeling of the CR philosophy in her teaching were pivotal in the practical, pedagogical, and assessment decisions I made teaching my FYC course. It was so clear to me that my students were desperate to make sense of how COVID-19 had upended their lives, and in my communications with them we shared stories about how the pandemic had affected our lives, communities, workplaces, and course work. I had students who were working as RNAs at hospitals and nursing homes, or who worked in retail or at restaurants. I had students who suddenly became the breadwinners of their families; students who got ill with COVID-19; and students who witnessed people die from COVID-19. I had students who were struggling with their schoolwork because of the online environment and students whose teachers gave them way more homework than before. There were so many stories. Towards the end of the semester, I gave my students the option of writing a story-based research paper as an alternative to a more traditional paper. The students who chose this option—about three out of four—wrote papers with strong voices, but also with linguistic and rhetorical awareness and careful analysis of sources. They used their stories as an exigence to engage critically with information and stakeholder perspectives in a way that seemed invested and curious.

The Power of Story in Graduate Seminar Pedagogies – Danielle

I was a student in this class during the second semester of my PhD program. As a GTA, I was interested in professors' pedagogical practices, especially at the graduate level. A graduate seminar built on CR pedagogy—particularly story—was something I'd never experienced before. For instance, narrative was how Maria introduced us to CR. She told us stories of how cultural rhetorics came to be, stories of her own CR experiences, and stories of the connections between scholars whose works we were reading. It was important for us to take the time to draw lines of relationality between scholars through citations and for us to understand how CR emerged from other fields such as cultural studies, historiography, postcolonial theories, and rhetoric, which built a web of relationality between people and ideas. Maria embodied the content she taught us. She constellated ideas with us and allowed us to draw

our own individual and collective conclusions about what CR encompassed within the larger field of rhetoric. To aid in this collective knowledge-building, we worked collaboratively on digital class notes each week. While Maria scaffolded the general structure of these notes, we added in ideas presented in readings, connections we made between concepts, and how these things fit in—or didn't—with our idea of CR. I appreciated this, as it not only reflected CR pedagogy but also reflected a genuine care for our growth as individual students and as a class community.

Methodological Connections

Finding an Academic Home – Chloe

I am a first-generation college student. I grew up in a small Midwestern city in a working-class family. As far back as I can remember, my parents stressed the importance of education to me, and for years, everything I did was to achieve that goal. Now, as a PhD student, when I visit family over the holidays they tell me how proud they are and call me a "professor," even though I assured them that I'm not one. Their pride in me warms my heart, but I felt a bit like I was on a pedestal, a position that I didn't really feel comfortable occupying. I felt like the more success I had in the world of academia, the more I left part of myself behind. Navigating these tensions between family and academia, I found myself comforted by scholars like Victor Villanueva, Steven Alvarez, and others whose writing styles and research topics seemed to blur the line between academia and "real life" (Powell et al.). Still, I couldn't quite shake the nagging feeling that perhaps the only way to become a "real" scholar was to let go of my old life. If I'm being honest, I didn't expect this CR course to alter that feeling at all. But it did.

In reading "Our Story Begins Here," I came across this line: "We have been taught to separate academia from real life, and that academia is not a cultural community" (Powell et al.). I distinctly remember highlighting that and thinking, *finally*. The fact that such accomplished scholars could make such an explicit acknowledgement in a published piece made me feel that maybe CR was what I had been seeking. CR helps me feel at home because of its emphasis on relationality. It does not place academics on a pedestal; instead, it gives us the tools to stay connected to and serve the communities we come from. For me, CR doesn't just allow me to embrace all sides of myself but encourages it. As Julie Lindquist writes in *A Place to Stand*, "I was driven by my desire to prove that you didn't have to wear a suit—didn't have to leave the neighborhood—to be important" (15). CR has helped me to find an academic "home" without leaving the neighborhood. It's like I can finally settle in, get comfortable, and

get to work—leaving a welcome mat by the door so maybe someday, students and scholars like me can know they've finally found their place.

Cultural Rhetorics as a Decolonial Practice – Madison

During the first weeks of the course, Maria asked us to ponder the question: what is cultural rhetorics? As an MA student, I found the readings engaging, but our class discussions left me feeling confused and sometimes frustrated as I struggled to understand CR. What made it different enough to be considered its own subfield? And how is it different from other concepts of rhetoric? These seemed like simple enough questions, but even with the texts we read, I couldn't pinpoint a concise response. It wasn't until we spent time learning about decolonial theory that the jumbled pieces of CR finally began to come together in my mind. Decolonial practices call attention to colonial systems of power, challenge the rhetoric of modernity, and make space for multiple knowledge systems by reclaiming the power to control their own representation. This means that CR views decolonial practices as "an orientation that includes 'both the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will co-exist'" (Powell et al.). In other words, "Critique is not the end of the process of decolonization—it's the beginning" because it goes beyond the postcolonial frameworks and leads to action (Powell et al.). CR moves away from the criticism typical of traditional rhetoric, calling instead for action and works that grow into a more equitable culture. So, what is cultural rhetorics? Here is how I answer that question now: CR is built upon understanding meaning-making as situated in specific cultural contexts and/or communities and then engaging with decolonial methodologies to create space for those multiple knowledges to exist. Although I couldn't pinpoint exactly how or when it happened, CR became a fully embodied aspect of how I have come to view, and intend to practice, rhetoric.

Reorientation in the Final Stretch – Joni

It is never too late to shift positions, to reorient oneself to concepts previously outside of one's field of vision. I am a fifth-year PhD candidate in the Media, Cinema, & Digital Studies track with an emphasis in Writing Pedagogy and Administration. Furthermore, I currently hold a leadership position as a WPA in our first year writing program, which involves mentorship of incoming GTAs. I found delving into CR to be beneficial to me despite, and maybe even because of, my late stage in my program. I view my experience as a student of CR as a re-orientation; though it may be slight, I recognize that the smallest shift in my present trajectory will have a lasting impact. In the moment of extreme change we are in during the COVID-19 pandemic, a

flexible leadership style informed by a CR approach has been at the forefront of my mind: I see my work in my WPA role as a constant constellating of ideas from different places. There is now a fresh importance to slowing down, checking in with members of the team when needed, and taking care of the community of teachers and students of which I am a part, because each member of the community has a story to tell that is relevant to their needs from department leadership.

CR concepts have already proven useful as I work completing my dissertation as well. Constellating ideas means drawing knowledge together from different academic and cultural groupings in a way that acknowledges the histories and advantages of each. As I work with the environmental and energy humanities (in addition to film theory and history), engaging with CR in my project has become a guiding force. My aims have shifted to examine how historical film has influenced the discourse surrounding energy use, why these were the historically privileged discourses, and how to address environmental concerns in ways that incorporate broader perspectives to better serve environmental justice in the present. I will continue constellative practices in my scholarly work as I bring climate science and film scholarship together with questions about environmental discourse and public knowledge.

Cultural Rhetorics + Technical Communication – Angelyn

As an MA student studying Professional and Technical Writing, this class reoriented my view of community and expanded my understanding of narrative's role in technical communication. For example, I started to recognize my own positionality and how it affects my view of the world and the choices I make as a technical writer. This realization deeply impacted my views on what it means to write for a community and, more broadly, what constitutes technical communication. As I began to recognize that communities develop their own tactical communication practices, I realized these practices are often based in story (a CR pillar). This was new for me because I had not always considered stories as compatible with the supposedly "objective" field of technical communication. Yet in studying CR, I came to see narrative practices as the key to effective technical writing—stories help us to recognize the constellations of different ideas, build relationships with communities, and understand the structures of power present in our societies.

Angela Haas's essay, "Race, Rhetoric, and Technology," exemplifies this, reminding us that "all our users are not reflections of ourselves" (281). Stories have power. As a technical communicator, I must account for such power. This means I first need to listen to my particular audience's stories if I'm to understand and write for them. Technical communicators need to recognize that our audience is a complicated constellation of human experience, never

static or easy to delineate. A CR framework based on story helps technical communicators break away from the belief that we can segment our audience into convenient boxes or speak to them neutrally. Stories allow us to truly see the individuals that make up our users because stories help us to understand their lived experiences and see the world from their point of view. And while stories give us new methods of understanding our audiences, they also give us options for communicating with those audiences in more inclusive ways. To be clear, technical communicators are not just listeners of stories, we are tellers of stories. This class has helped me to reorient my view of technical communication to one that values the practice of storytelling and recognizes the potential narrative has for connecting with communities in more just ways.

Constelling Our Reflections: Cultural Rhetorics as a Tool for Community-Engaged Work

When I (Maria) was designing this course, my main objective was for students to develop an understanding of the concepts, theories, and pillars that define CR. And, even though the course was themed within a Public Rhetorics and Community Engagement seminar, my course design was less concerned with having students find linkages between CR and community engagement (CE). It was surprising to me how connections between CR and CE suddenly emerged in the class. To illustrate how students drew upon CR theories and practices to guide their work within communities, we (the students and myself) follow the tradition of "Our Story Begins Here" and offer a collective dialogue about how CR and CE began to coalesce. Such a structure mirrors CR and CE commitments in collective meaning-making.

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Us: Collectively reflecting on the course, one of the more surprising moments that emerged was realizing how integral coursework can be to community work. Often, we think about the academy and the various communities we inhabit as separate worlds; yet, there were clear moments where the two intersected.

Danielle: For sure! I saw how stories need to be honored and cared for as we enter into relationships with communities that we may work with. A story is more than words; it is an embodied experience. When a person chooses to share a story, they are trusting the listener with a part of themselves. As a PhD student hoping to engage in meaningful research with my own local community, I now see at a deeper level the need for being a part of a community before engaging in research pursuits with that community. This kind of work is messy. It takes time to build

meaningful relationships. I wonder how community-engaged graduate programs can adapt to allow graduate students to build the necessary relations before engaging in research for their dissertations? Incorporating cultural rhetorics pedagogy and methodology into graduate seminars can be a starting place.

Us: Danielle raises an important observation that really "sunk in" for all of us in this class: work within communities is often messy and being a researcher in a community can be fraught with tensions. There were so many of our discussions focused on relationships and, specifically, the cultural rhetorics pillar of relationality. These conversations asked us to consider how CR can alter the very locations of how you define a community and where you find it.

Gitte: Absolutely. This was the case for me. Looking at classrooms as communities is not in itself novel, but the pillars of CR help me both theorize about what community engagement looks like in the classroom and envision a community praxis in the classroom. By defining community as a "place/space where groups organize under a set of shared beliefs and practices," we can see the classroom is not just made up *of* different communities but functions *as* a cultural community (Powell et al.). In this respect, the classroom acts as a contact zone (Pratt 34). There are social, political, and material components that tend to shape hierarchies in the classroom because elements of the macro-structure manifest themselves in the classroom, as everywhere in academia.

Us: Gitte's remark, while situated within the classroom, extends to all of the various relationships we have in our community projects. CR demands that we reflect on our own positionalities in relationship to our projects. Such a practice acts to account for asymmetrical power relationships that on the surface may appear well-intentioned but in actuality cause more harm to a particular community.

Gitte: Yes. Not attending to power dynamics can be an obstacle to building trust in a community. However, I also see the application of CR in first year composition classes as having some particular affordances that can be drawn upon to foster a classroom community. For instance, by incorporating a story-based pedagogy built on CR pillars, we may be able to better sustain and integrate students' cultural and linguistic resources. We can strategically use our power and positionality as instructors to nurture students' relationality, reciprocity, and respect for each other and their cultural histories.

Us: This commitment to relationality, reciprocity, and respect was a thread we found woven throughout many of the self-designed final projects. For students like Angelyn and Joni, who self-identified as belonging to other disciplinary orientations, focusing on response and not just critique led to more community-oriented projects. Creating public-facing deliverables was a first in a graduate seminar for both of them.

Angelyn: Yes, it really was a first, and it took time to figure out how to do more public-facing work. In my final project, I looked at an online healthcare community. I was particularly interested in how the members of this online community jointly navigated their conditions through the telling of stories and the sharing of experiences and knowledge. As a student of technical communication, I was beginning to see a major disconnect between the information given to these patients by their medical professionals and the types of information the patients shared with each other. The information these community members received from their doctors was often incomplete and, at times, even inaccurate. Furthermore, the official medical information available on the condition did little to prepare people for what it was like to live with the condition. I soon noticed that these community members had taken the task of technical communication upon themselves by creating informational documents, infographics, blog posts, and videos that blended personal experience and advice with medical facts and knowledge. CR helped me to see that including community input into the technical communication process is not only valuable, but essential. Without listening to the needs of the community—as expressed by the voices of those within the community—information shared through official channels can fall short of its goals and fail to benefit its community audience.

Joni: For me, the thought of reaching an audience outside of academic journals with community-engaged work was very exciting but didn't seem possible before taking this course. My areas of interest within the environmental humanities are discard studies and theories of waste. My final project sought to visualize my personal experience learning about waste processes and trending cultural discourse on consuming, curating, and discarding objects based on specific criteria such as minimalism, usefulness, thrift, and even whether items elicit joy (as Japanese organizing expert Marie Kondo recommends). Dominant public discourse about consumption and waste strongly influence these decisions, and I see the potential to design a variety of community-engaged projects based on this line of inquiry.

Us: While Angelyn and Joni's projects applied many of the CR pillars to help them do more community-engaged discipline work, Madison's final project took a slightly different approach: using CR tools to reimagine and redesign community maps. For her, CR provides affordances to change community issues, not just disciplinary ones.

Madison: My final project for the class focused on decolonizing maps of Milwaukee, one of the most common things with which visitors and newcomers to the city engage. Maps are created as a communicative text to help people understand the world around them, but the rhetorical nature of their construction means that those with the power to produce maps have the ability to decide what particular view of the world is being represented. Given this, I had two goals for my decolonized map. The first was to reveal the power dynamics beneath the myth of cartographic objectivity, creating a space for decolonial options and reconstruction to materialize. The second was to move toward reconstruction and make space for decolonial options using the emergent mapping of trails as representations of the performative function of knowledge-making and the constellating of relationships through space. My intention, given how the project was situated within a common, everyday text, was to help the public reimagine the embedded connections between cartography and colonialism. Doing so, I wanted to illustrate a critical reorientation to the everyday person how maps symbolically represent a particular way of knowing and an understanding of maps as social constructions.

Us: And Madison's reimagining work was not the only project that embedded community-engagement experiences; Chloe and Claire share moments of using CR—not in the classroom or in their graduate education—but in very real and messy community work.

Chloe: During this course, I was also an intern for Vote Yes for MPS, a campaign to pass a referendum that would increase funding for Milwaukee Public Schools. Participating in the campaign while taking the CR course was pure luck. One of the things I love most about CR is how much it values story and the personal experience of vulnerable individuals and communities. I saw these ideas and values in action every day that I was at my internship. My responsibilities ended up going beyond the expected writing: I helped curate brief interviews with parents, students, and community leaders at schools around the city, completed data entry for voters and volunteers, and canvassed an entire territory by myself. My abilities as a writer certainly helped me in this position, but looking back now, I don't think that I would

call them my main contribution to this campaign, and furthering my writing experience is definitely not my main takeaway. What I really took from this position were the connections I made with people, the pride that came from working for a group so driven by the idea that students deserve an equitable education no matter what their zip code is, and the knowledge that I played a small role in something that will hopefully have a huge impact on students' lives. Experiencing all of this while simultaneously learning about an academic field that makes space for and values these ideas has left me invigorated. I want to take the experience I gained in my internship and the knowledge I gained in our CR course and incorporate the notion of connections, equity, and vulnerability into my work as a scholar and teacher.

Claire: While in our CR course, I was also receiving credit as a writing and editing intern for UWM's School of Freshwater Sciences. Working with this research team was a great way to see how academic research can have immediate impacts on a community. Learning more about science writing, though, has also shown me some of the barriers to communication and understanding that exist between academics (in the sciences and otherwise) and the communities in which they live. When writing public-facing documents, I often struggled to wade through the existing scholarship on subjects such as wastewater contamination. The CR course allowed me to think about the work I was doing in my internship in a different way, and the internship brought a sense of immediacy to some of the works we read in class. I have become much more attuned to the rhetorical nature of science communication as well as the deep importance of it, which enabled me to really take in works like Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* and sense an urgency in the discussion of Indigenous ways of knowing vis a vis typical Western scientific forms of communicating and understanding. As I continue to gain experience in science rhetoric, I plan to continue to look for ways to better communicate with the communities affected by research initiatives and to continue to interrogate the assumptions made by Western scientific paradigms so we might find room in those discussions for different ways of knowing and understanding the natural environment.

Us: We have all come away from this course changed, though in different ways. The theory and practice of CR have had a profound effect on how we view and conduct ourselves in the various roles we occupy both in and outside of academia. CR is often messy. It's rooted in stories, community, and the idea that we can rebuild academia and the world

around us into something better. We hope to take these stories, this knowledge, and these experiences to do just that.

Notes

1. This approach mirrors what cultural rhetoricians modeled in "Our Story Begins Here" and acknowledges the necessity in cultural rhetorics to represent the multiple bodies that influenced the course.

2. Lab members acted as collective authors of "Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics Practice," a pinnacle essay in defining "cultural rhetorics."

3. While talking through a course design with past cohort colleagues and mentors may not be unique to CR and could be practices commonly found in other graduate course prep, they are essential to what it means to practice CR as it demands an unwavering commitment to relationships, more specifically 'relationality,' vis-à-vis CR work.

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