ENGL 254: Writing and Communities—A Peer Review of Teaching Project Benchmark Portfolio

Rachael Wendler Shah
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, rshah@unl.edu

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Peer Review of Teaching Portfolio
English 254: Writing and Communities

Rachael Wendler Shah, Assistant Professor
English Department

Spring 2017
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OBJECTIVES OF THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE AND CONTEXT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Course Outcomes for English 254 New</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Contexts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 254 Students: Overview and Prior Knowledge</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Goals for the Class</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHING METHODS AND ACTIVITIES</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Design Overview</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backward Design: Outcomes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes from Previous Sections</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing From Community Unit</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing About Community Unit</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing to Community Unit</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection Activity Data</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Survey Data</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husker Writers Analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLANNED CHANGES TO THE CLASS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY AND OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PORTFOLIO PROCESS</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Course Syllabus and Aim and Scope Document</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Assignment Sheets</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OBJECTIVES OF THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

This portfolio is designed to provide a substantial opportunity for me to reflect on, document, and increase teaching effectiveness of English 254: Writing and Communities. I explore how well the course met my teaching goals and the departmental course goals for Writing and Communities, with a particular focus on how some of the new English Department mission statement priorities are actualized in the class.

This reflection is particularly important as the section of Writing and Communities analyzed here is a pilot for the Husker Writers program, a new public writing initiative launching next year that will involve 10 UNL graduate students who teach their own classes in linking their classes with local high school courses. Findings from this portfolio will be helpful as I support these graduate student instructors—including many who are entirely new to community-based teaching—in effectively teaching UNL English classes with a community partnership component, especially in light of the goals of the new UNL English Department mission statement.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE AND CONTEXT

Official Course Outcomes for English 254

English 254: Writing and Communities focuses on how writing works in a social context, fulfilling the general education requirement for a writing class (ACE 1). Departmental course outcomes, informed by ACE requirements, center on writing skills (including rhetorical awareness, revising, offering feedback on writing, sentence-level editing, and self-reflection) and primary research strategies, with a special emphasis on how social dynamics impact writing.

New Institutional Contexts

The English Department Mission Statement

This class is situated in a department that is currently pursuing a renewed, collective sense of vision across the areas of literature, film studies, composition/rhetoric, and creative writing through a mission statement introduced this year. The department is highly encouraging faculty to articulate their courses with this statement. The mission statement presents English classes as fostering “imagined reasoning,” or “the ability to use the imagination to think hypothetically about the world in all its diversity,” with a particular emphasis on:

- pursuing social justice
- affirming diversity,
- engaging with a broad array of real and imagined communities,
- fostering a sense of belonging, and instilling a desire for civic engagement.
With this mission statement in mind, I shifted the target section of the class to focus even more explicitly on supporting students as they interact across difference and engage with local communities.

*Husker Writers Pilot*

This class section served as a pilot of Husker Writers, a new initiative launching next year at UNL with a $75,000 grant from the Coordinating Commission on Postsecondary Education. Husker Writers will involve 20 high school teachers, 11 UNL instructors (primarily graduate students), and up to 10 non-profit partners in creating public writing opportunities for students. Many of the Husker Writer collaborations will involve partnerships between high school and college classes, including several sections of 254, in addition to other UNL English classes such as Immigrant Literatures, Uses of Literacy, Writing and Argument, and Women and Pop Culture, which share the goals of the new mission statement. As coordinator of the program, I will host a one-week summer workshop on public writing and community partnerships, facilitate several Saturday support workshops, offer individualized mentoring to teachers, and host a reflective retreat at the end of next school year. Lessons learned in this Husker Writers pilot in 254 can be used to support other instructors next year.

The target section of 254 described in this portfolio incorporated a semester-long partnership with a class of 10th grade students at Lincoln North Star High School, one of the most diverse high schools in Lincoln.

*English 254 Students: Overview and Prior Knowledge*

The course fulfills the ACE-1 general education requirement for writing, and therefore attracts students from a range of majors, including STEM and social science. As many students enter UNL with AP credit that fulfills first-year composition, they frequently have 254 as their first or only college-level writing class. AP classes often focus on timed writing, however, which means I feel a responsibility to cover some foundational skills (such as academic research writing, revision practices, and peer review skills) that are covered in first-year composition. Most students in the honors section are freshmen or sophomores, and as an honors writing class, the course is capped at 20 to provide opportunities for extensive individualized support.

Students in the honors sections are predominantly white, and most come from relatively privileged educational environments. In the target section for this portfolio, I began the course with a short written reflection on previous experience interacting across difference, and 2/3 of the students explicitly described having very little experience communicating across difference. Statements like “In my life, I’ve generally been surrounded by people who are similar to me” were common. About 1/3 of responses suggested more substantial experience interacting across difference, including attending a diverse urban high school, phone banking for a political
candidate, or navigating a conservative family as a lesbian. The large majority of students had not been immersed in environments where their key identities are not the norm. Therefore, the emphasis on communicating effectively across difference is perhaps especially important for this population of students.

My Goals for the Class

My overarching goal for the class, infusing the departmental aims and scope of the class with the English Department mission statement and my personal commitment to teaching for the public good, is to support students in making more intentional, rhetorically effective, and self-reflective choices in their communication—especially in communicating across difference. To practice this, the course involves writing and communicating with a variety of audiences, from academic communities to local publics, with a range of purposes and genres. As this is the only college writing class many students may have, these skills and thinking habits should prepare them for the writing they will do in future college classes and after college. Given the rapid rise of algorithmic filter bubbles, online worldview enclaves, and dangerous and unethical political discourse, these skills and ways of being are particularly important for today’s students.

TEACHING METHODS AND ACTIVITIES

Course Design Overview
In my version of the class, I pursue many of the course goals through community-based learning in partnership with a class at one of Lincoln’s most diverse schools, along with writing assignments that asks students to write from a community, about a community, and to a community. As described in the syllabus, the main units and assignments in my version of the class include:

- “Writing From Community”: a creative non-fiction piece representing one of the students’ communities, written to an audience who does not share this community identification. We began this unit by reading and analyzing examples of other non-fiction pieces written across difference.
- “Writing About Community”: An exploratory, multivocal research piece that synthesizes primary research (interviews) with scholarly sources to examine the multiple perspectives and stakeholders of a community issue. This unit involved both individual proposal conferences with instructor and small-group workshops (1-hour meetings with groups of 3 students in which we workshoped each paper for 20 minutes) for extensive feedback.
- “Writing To Community”: A public argument, geared to a specific community, that attempts to impact how the audience thinks, feels, or acts. Topics are linked to the research paper, so students can draw on their research and audience awareness from
the last unit. Each student crafted an argument proposal. We studied “sticky principles” from Made to Stick and applied these to the argument design.

- Final Reflection: An analysis of a specific piece of student writing or the collaboration with the high school students for how strategies for communicating across difference are employed.

### Backward Design: Outcomes

Below, I describe how I addressed each of the outcomes. These outcomes come from the department’s Aim and Scope sheet, with the exception of the last outcome, which I added as a goal for the class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Students will build on prior experiences with invention, drafting, revising, and final editing and with the rhetorical concepts of audience, purpose and context | - Multiple drafts due  
- In-class activities on invention, revising, editing  
- Proposals, authors’ notes, and annotations ask students to describe rhetorical choices  
- Individual proposal conferences with instructor to support invention and rhetorical choices | - Initial drafts graded for completion  
- Proposals, authors’ notes, and annotations graded for metacognitive sophistication in addressing rhetorical choices  
- Proposal conferences allow instructor insight into invention process |
| 2. Students will learn to analyze the social dynamics of actual contexts for writing | - In-class analysis of how context & power dynamics shape mentor texts  
- 3rd project geared toward actual, community audience & context  
- Opportunities to write to real audience of high school students  
- Final paper discusses communicating in actual contexts | - 3rd project graded in light of author’s note describing context, including plan for circulation and tailoring  
- Final paper graded for analysis of strategies for adapting to context |
| 3. Students will learn strategies for researching the uses of writing in a community. The emphasis is primary research, but students may also work with secondary research. | - Practice interviews with high school students and in-class interview technique day  
- 2nd project requires 3 interviews | - 3 Interview highlight sheets graded |
| 4. Students will learn revision strategies and gain new insights about revision | - Annotations on 1st paper describe revisions  
- Hands-on revision activities in class | - Final paper describes potential future revisions  
- Grading considers revision |
| 5. Students will refine their | - “Movies-in-my-mind” peer | - Small group workshop |
| **skills at providing constructive response to peers' writing** | review that involves peers in describing their reading experience  
- Class activity on prioritizing feedback  
- Feedback letters to high school students  
- Small group workshops and workshop letters | letters graded  
- Feedback letters to high school students graded |
|---|---|---|
| **6. Students will have opportunities to reflect on the development of their writing and learning** | • Reflection freewrite after each unit  
• Verbal reflection in pairs  
• Final reflection paper  
• Culminating wikistix reflection activity | • Final reflection paper graded |
| **7. Students will gain practice in sentence-level editing and proofreading** | • Hands-on class activities on semicolons, dashes, and quote integration strategies  
• In-class editing | • Sentence-level editing considered in project grading |
| **8. Students will grow in their ability to communicate effectively across difference** | • 1st and 3rd project require writing to audience who is different  
• 1st project peer review with someone who is not part of the community represented in the piece  
• 2nd project involves interviews with someone who disagrees with student and fair representation of that view in paper  
• Regular opportunities to meet with and write to diverse class of high school students (including 4-corners debate on statements like “Men can be feminists” and “The confederate flag should be banned”).  
• In-class discussion of strategies for communicating across difference  
• Final paper explicitly addresses interacting across difference | • Effectiveness in interacting across difference considered in grading all major projects |

**Changes from Previous Sections**

In this version of the course, I heightened the focus on communicating across difference—an implicit focus in the previous versions that I attempted to make more explicit. I did this, first of
all, by sharing with students at the beginning of the class that this was a goal, and starting with a freewrite about past experiences and goals related to communicating across difference. In the writing from community unit, I added in a peer review activity in which peers who were not from the community profiled in the essay read the papers, as well as a set of annotations in which students describe their thinking in communicating across difference. The second project shifted from an argument about a local place to a multivocal exploratory essay on a community issue, in order to encourage students to more deeply engage stakeholders and perspectives that differ from their experiences. The third project changed this semester from a tour stop skit to a community argument to adapt in order to the priorities and interests of my new high school teacher partner. I also refashioned the final exam to be a reflection on how the student communicated across difference, to align this final exam more clearly with the main goals of the class.

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT LEARNING

In the next sections, I analyze work from each of the three major assignments, discussing examples of strong student work, examples of student growth over the unit, and examples of students who struggled with the assignment. Then, I offer analysis of final reflection activities, a student survey, and our Husker Writers partnership. All student names are pseudonyms.

Writing From Community Unit

Example of Strong Student Work: Kerry

One strong example comes from Kerry, a student who was seeking to complexify narratives of military families beyond the happy reunion videos that circulate on YouTube. She drew on class discussions of organization in speaking across difference, as we looked at models that often began with lighthearted narratives or sections that encourage identification with the author, before turning to material that may be more challenging for readers (a move that follows a Rogerian rhetoric stance). She intentionally begins with her own happy military homecoming story, in which her Dad surprised her at a church play as a child, to draw readers in. Only after this vivid narrative does she suggest that the “glamorization” of military homecoming videos only capture part of the story, and people rarely consider what happens after the cameras stop rolling. She then proceeds to offer readers her own “video series” of scenes, such as the silent ride home in the car after an airport goodbye, and a request by her father when she was 9 to play his favorite song on the piano at his funeral, as well as small moments like lying on her father’s back while he does pushups. She concludes with her father’s military retirement ceremony, which occurred while she was drafting the paper, reminding readers that many military families never have an ending like this one. Throughout, she draws on extensive sensory detail and narrative. Her annotations mostly focus on organization choices, which stories she chose to “explode” for audience impact, and phrases she added to mitigate possible reader misunderstandings given that readers do not come from a military family. Overall, the
paper clearly incorporates effective attempts to shape material to have an impact on an audience that does not share her background, as well as skillful descriptive writing.

*Example of Student Growth: Megan*

A student who showed the most change over the unit was Megan, a student who had converted to Catholicism, and was attempting to write about this community of Catholicism converts to UNL students. The original purpose of the paper was to illustrate the idea that contrary to many stereotypes, Catholicism is primarily about love. Early drafts were laden with theological jargon without explanation (e.g. Eucharist, consecrated Host, transubstantiation), and included one or two paragraphs that seemed not to take into account her diverse audience. For example,

> For practicing Catholics, same-sex marriage is not allowed, abortion is not allowed, contraception is not allowed, and divorce is not allowed. But while I learned that there are certain "non-negotiables" within the Catholic faith, there is also the amazing power of forgiveness. Just because you're gay, or you've had an abortion or a divorce or used contraception does not excommunicate you from the Church, as much as you might fear (or wish) that it would. The word compassion, from the Latin *compassio*, means, quite literally, "to suffer with." The Catholic Church, and her members, suffer with you, pray with you. And the Church is not just for believers, the Church is for everybody. And yeah, it's really difficult to struggle with things the Church says are not allowed (such as same-sex attraction in a place that will never allow marriage between same-sex couples). But it's worth it. Truth is worth it, and true love necessitates a willingness to sacrifice.

This paragraph does not seem to recognize the experiences, identities, and values of possible readers, how such readers might respond, or why this paragraph may work against the main idea of the paper.

Megan did a peer review with a queer, non-religious student who, as part of the “movies in my mind” protocol, narrated her own experience reading the paper, including places in the paper that she felt herself resisting Megan’s argument and places she was confused—and why. After this peer review, Megan came to see me for office hours, as she realized her paper was not achieving its purpose. We brainstormed together, and she decided to shift her audience to Protestants who are suspicious of the Catholic faith (believing Catholics don’t have a genuine, personal spirituality), and to shift her purpose to demonstrating that religious rituals are not empty, rote gestures. The next draft included a large overhaul (the paragraph quoted above disappeared along with several others, jargon was eliminated or explained, and new sections—including much more narrative rather than theological explication—were added). As Megan recognized in her final reflection paper for the class, she continued to struggle a bit with the idea of focus in this paper, as revisions may not have been deep enough to reorient fully to the new audience and purpose, but the next version was much improved in terms of effectiveness in writing across difference. Overall, I think Megan benefitted from being challenged to see her words through the eyes of others.
Example of Student Struggle: Brian

Brian had a more difficult time with this assignment, which may partly be because he was gone for a week during the unit at a conference out of state. He missed the “Movies in My Mind” peer review, and while I encouraged him to go to the writing center to make up this peer review, he did not go. He wrote about pre-med students, trying to challenge the ideas that premed students are naturally smarter than others and that premed students assume science is the most difficult and worthwhile pursuit.

He began his essay by detailing his former beliefs, perhaps without realizing the ways this might alienate non-science readers:

Most importantly, I loved that science made me feel smart. Whenever I would get a concept faster than my classmates or the highest score on a test, I would feel superior to those around me. I believed that science was the pinnacle of intellectual pursuits and that other fields were somehow just naturally less rigorous.

Here, Brian may have been trying to emulate a move we discussed in class from Chimamanda’s “Danger of the Single Story,” in which she begins by describing herself making the same kinds of mistakes she hopes to challenge in her audience, in order to reduce defensiveness. However, Brian may not realize how opening his essay in this way may have the opposite effect, as he describes himself enjoying feeling superior to his potential readers. He begins to challenge the idea that science is the most difficult and worthwhile subject later in the essay, but not very convincingly, as his most powerful narratives don’t seem to support this idea. Most of the piece is written in summary rather than scene, and he has very little descriptive or sensory detail. In addition, this was the only student who did not include annotations.

Overall Analysis of Writing From Community Unit

I appreciate how this unit challenges students to really consider their audience, and to attempt to communicate well with those who come from a different perspective—communicating is different than simply “expressing yourself.” I think the “Movies in My Mind” activity supported this focus on audience, and I did note that the student who struggled the most with writing across difference did not participate in the activity. At times, I was (and continue to be) worried about how this activity might impact minoritized students (e.g. the queer student who read Megan’s paper), though I made the pairings myself, and thought long and hard about which students might be equipped and comfortable to respond to particular peers.

While some annotations were rich, I felt overall that these could have been more reflective and insightful. Next time, I would like to spend more time talking about annotations, and modeling annotations (perhaps on mentor texts). I would also like to assign more annotations, as with only 4 comments, there were often significant rhetorical moves that went undiscussed.

Overall, I think students learned from and enjoyed this unit, and I appreciated the added benefit of beginning the semester with a personal narrative that helped us build community in the classroom.
Writing About Community Unit

Example of Strong Student Work: Casey

Casey tackled the question of recent mandatory minimum legislation in Nebraska for her multivocal research paper. Remarkably, she secured interviews with Corey O’Brien, Nebraska’s Assistant Attorney General, who feels that minimums are necessary, and State Senator Paul Shumacher, who recently introduced legislation against mandatory minimums, as well as UNL professor Fran Kaye, who has worked extensively in prisons. I remember Casey excitedly telling me that these three had committed to interviews, sharing that she was going shopping for professional interviewing clothes in preparation.

In her paper, Casey delves into the details, explaining the nuances of two bills that were under consideration, defining legal jargon for non-specialist readers, and even finding a factual error in Senator Chambers’ LB447 Statement of Intent. I was particularly impressed at how she put her sources in conversation with one another (e.g. “Fran Kaye, a professor at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, would also argue against O’Brien’s claim that mandatory minimums act as a deterrence”).

I appreciated her commitment to clearly explaining O’Brien’s viewpoint, quoting the strongest evidence from his interview, including a particularly poignant quote about the need to protect children from sexual predators, even as she personally disagreed with his perspective and pointed out that most mandatory minimum laws involve non-violent drug offenses. I also saw her openness to where the evidence led, as she began the research thinking that eliminating mandatory minimums would be simple solution to ending prison overcrowding in Nebraska. However, after analyzing prison population statistics and finding that O’Brien and Shumacher (men on opposite sides of the mandatory minimum debate) both agreed that overcrowding issues went much deeper than mandatory minimum policy, she acknowledged the complexity of the issue.

In this paper, I saw an undergraduate student joining a Nebraska debate about mandatory minimums, speaking directly to decision-makers and putting their thoughts in conversation with her own voice.

Example of Student Growth: Emma

Emma’s paper addressed the issue of prejudice against female and minority medical students, as it related to affirmative action. Specifically, she was interested in how assumptions that getting into medical school was “easier” for these students could impact those students in medical school, through stereotype threat, microaggressions, or other problems. As an aspiring medical student herself who had been dismissively told she’d have “no problem” getting into medical school because of her gender, Emma was personally invested in this topic. In her second draft, however, her group workshop peers and I noticed that two of her interviewees were white male medical students, and the third, a white woman, was not well integrated into the text. Additionally, the other sources she was pulling from did not explicitly integrate the voices of people of color or women, or theories such as critical race theory. After a conversation about the importance of representation and seeking out different voices in issues
like this, in the next draft, Emma added a wider range of voices to her paper, including new interviews and sources, producing a much stronger draft.

She still at times struggled to accurately represent the voices of others. For example, she included the following:

Opponents of affirmative action tend to push for a colorblind approach which is a method that ignores differences in order to establish equality. According to Carey Ryan and her colleagues in the Department of Psychology from the University of Nebraska, “a colorblind ideology would thus... promote harmony between ethnic groups. According to this colorblind ideology, then, race and ethnic distinctions can and should be ignored and people should be treated in an identical manner” (618).

This sentence makes it appear as if Ryan and her colleagues support colorblindness, which seemed a bit strange to me, so I looked up the article that Emma was referencing. I found that the authors were describing colorblindness in order to critique it—a point that is not made clear in Emma’s quoting. While this student made significant strides in considering whose voices to include, there is still room for growth in considering how voices are represented.

Example of Student Struggle: Andrea

Perhaps the student who struggled the most with this paper was Andrea. She wanted to write about a topic related to Asperger’s syndrome, as her brother has this syndrome, and she wanted to learn more information that could be useful to support him or advocate with him. During our proposal conference, I suggested that her topic of “Asperger’s” was compelling but quite broad, and she should look at narrowing it down to a particular community issue. I gave examples such as the neurodiversity debates around whether or not treatment should be offered, mainstreaming versus special education classes in high schools, and training requirements for special education teachers in rural schools. I suggested that she look up a few research articles on the topic to see how other scholars were narrowing the issue, and follow up with me once she had decided on a narrow topic. I emailed her a week later, and she said she had settled on the topic of how to support self-esteem in people with autism. I responded by asking if she had found articles and search terms related to that topic, to make sure that she had a clear focus, and she did not respond to this question. Her second draft was reasonably well-written, but unfortunately very broad, as it offered several pages of history on Asperger’s syndrome, a lengthy discussion of her brother’s experience, and little information that specifically addressed the question of self-esteem. I suggested that she focus the paper before the final draft, and offered to help do this in person.

In her reflection on this paper, Andrea noted that she struggles with procrastination, and this negatively impacted her writing process. She left each draft until the last minute, and when she sat down to write, she hadn’t done any research yet, so she had to settle for articles that she could get through Google, rather than through the library, due to time constraints. Then, “the articles that I had to settle for didn’t really necessarily deal directly with my topic, which was another reason that my focus wasn’t very good.” When she was encouraged again to focus the topic during the small group workshop, she reported having trouble finding motivation to do so, and focused on her other classes in the 10 days between her group conference and the final due date. She switched her topic to the question of whether to treat Asperger’s, though much of the original material was left in—“I mostly did this because I had
already written about it and wanted to keep it in.” She wrote, “If I had the chance to write this paper over again, I would definitely not wait until the last minute to do research and to write. If I had taken my time to actually think about my research and writing, the paper would have been much stronger.”

**Overall Analysis of Writing About Community Unit**

This version of the unit was different than previous versions, as I switched from a researched argument to a multivocal, exploratory paper that sought to lay out the thinking and evidence from multiple perspectives on an issue. Based on the final products, I think this new focus encouraged a better interaction with different perspectives, as students were not seeking a counterargument move to “take down” opposing voices, and there was no pressure to refute evidence that disagreed with an argumentative thesis. While I did have one or two students that still gravitated toward an argumentative thesis and did not deeply engage multiple perspectives, most students worked hard on interviewing different stakeholders and integrating voices they disagreed with.

I’ve taught research papers often, and over time I’ve developed my scaffolding structure of invention activities during class, individual proposal conferences, in-class research and source integration activities, small-group workshops, and hands-on editing—with 5 different draft due dates. When I teach research in first-year composition, I also include an annotated bibliography to break the scholarly research processes into smaller steps and guard against last-minute researching. I removed this assignment for 254, replacing it with 3 interview summary sheets, as the focus in 254 is primary research. However, I think I may need to do a little more scaffolding for students like Andrea, in research as well as topic selection. Next time, I will require follow-up in-person conversations when a student leaves a proposal conference without a clear topic, and I will also include a due date for a list of initial sources.

**Writing to Community Unit**

**Example of Strong Student Work: Sharon**

For her final community argument, Sharon decided on a slam poem about the practice of straight people visiting queer bars, which she performed live and with much passion in front of the class. She begins by describing a typical club scene (“loud club music pounds my eardrums”), then revealing that this place is “our place of freedom.” She touches on the history of gay bars, and acknowledges, “Even now, this place is hard to find, unless you know the right people/And by the right people, I mean The Gays./Knowing one is like having your own backstage pass into queer culture.” Here, the poem more directly challenges her target audience of straight allies who visit queer spaces, reminding them that they only have to see what they want to, they can close their eyes to the hatred, and they can “leave”—unlike others in the club. She continues:

How much did you have to pay for your backstage pass?
A post on Facebook about how “You’re not gay but you believe in equal rights” or maybe you kissed a girl in college so now “you like totally get it” or
someone on the street thought you were a lesbian because of your short hair?

Because obviously being mistaken for one of us is the worst thing that can happen to you, right ally?
You want to experience our culture, get a gold star, but not actually get your hands dirty in this fight.

In her powerful last line, she asserts:

You wanna know how much I had to pay for my backstage pass?
My safety, my security, my peace of mind.
If I want to hold my girlfriend’s hand in my left one walking home at night
I better be holding my keys like a weapon in my right

Several students spoke to me about the power of Sharon’s poem as it was under development, as many had not considered this perspective on the problematic aspects of straight people visiting queer bars—a practice particularly popular as a bachelorette party activity. As she identified in her final reflection paper, Sharon intentionally began with relatable scenes and offered opportunities for the audience to understand why queer spaces were important to queer people before shifting to a more pointed questioning of her audience. Sharon effectively used the “sticky” principles of emotion, concreteness, and stories. Particularly powerful was her use of emotionally-evocative, concrete imagery (“I better be holding my keys”). We spent a great deal of time in class discussing which genre is most appropriate for a particular audience and purpose, and Sharon’s choice of a slam poem worked beautifully for her intent.

Example of Student Growth: Kayla

Kayla had done her research paper on impending NEA funding cuts, and her interviewees (including the executive directors of the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra and the Nebraska Arts Council) recommended that average citizens not only advocate for arts funding, but also participate in arts programs. Therefore, Kayla’s initial plan was to create a brochure about arts education opportunities in Lincoln. However, through conversations with peers and me about genre selection, she started to realize that this approach was not particularly persuasive or “sticky”—and I was pleased to see her consider moving beyond what I often find is a “default” genre choice for students, the brochure. Finally, she settled on a children’s book, geared toward Lincoln parents and children, that told the story of a little girl’s dream of participating in a variety of arts programs in town (visiting the Sheldon Art Museum, etc). The story began with a preface letter to parents about the importance of arts education, and ended with a list of 20+ opportunities (including free programs) after the story. On the back page, she included quotes from Lincoln citizens about why they valued participating in youth arts programs.

Through peer review, however, Kayla realized that her initial ending to the story didn’t support her argument, as the ending had the girl waking up with excitement to participate in art class in school—this seemed to suggest that schools cover the need for arts education, and no additional programs are necessary. Thinking more deeply about how narrative can function as argument, she revised this ending to reposition the girl as excited about opportunities in town for her to experience art. Also, during class activities, Kayla worked to integrate the sticky
principle of “Appeals to Identity,” in order to position the audience’s identity as connected to her main goal for the piece. She revamped the wording and illustrations to invoke Lincoln’s sense of identity (e.g. “With her eyes shut, she saw a town dressed in red, where people eat Runza and wear CORN on their head.”). Her illustrations, all of which featured local arts locations (and prominently used the color red), reinforced this rhetorical move visually.

Figure 1: Page from Kayla’s Book

As Kayla reported in her final reflection essay, “More than ever this semester, I have spent time thinking about who will read what I write. What do they value? What do they think about my topic? . . . . Knowing writing is primarily used as a form of communication, it seems a bit ridiculous that this idea of writing with a specific audience in mind had yet to resonate with me until this semester.” The development of her project over the course of the unit demonstrates how Kayla sharpened her consideration of her audience.

Example of Student Struggle: Seth
Seth’s aim in his argument was to convince an audience of book lovers that video games should also be considered as “literature.” His original plan was to remediate Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” as a video game, encouraging his audience to recognize that the form could host complex literary moves. Thinking more, however, he realized that simply remediating “A Modest Proposal” may not clearly communicate his main point, so he shifted to a video game about a book lover encountering a video game club. Seth clearly put extensive time into this project, coding the entire video game from scratch, including creating images and designing multiple possible endings. The multi-level storyline follows a book club participant who is encouraged by the leader of the club to challenge a video game club that meets concurrently. The “battle” level involves selecting arguments to make to various members of the club, which are then refuted by the club members.
As Seth developed his project, he kept several aspects of satire, such as a “Health” bar on the side during the battle level that slowly recedes based on the “stench” of the video game club—an attempt to mock the stereotype of poor hygiene among video game players. However, in the final version, the satirical nature of these small moves may not have been clear to his audience; satire is, indeed, tricky to master. Seth also sometimes did not anticipate the needs of an audience different than he (for example, in the screenshot above, “GTA” references the violent video game Grant Theft Auto, an acronym his target audience of book lovers may not recognize). Seeing the sheer amount of effort Seth put into the project, I think perhaps he got so wrapped up in perfecting the genre that he may have lost sight at times of the larger rhetorical purpose. He was aware of many of these shortcomings of the piece—naming several in his final reflection paper before I had given him final feedback on the project.

*Overall Analysis of Writing To Community Unit:*
Last time I taught this class, everyone worked in the same genre for the final project, which allowed me to teach the craftsmanship of that genre, but we missed out on the opportunity for
students to practice identifying which genres are effective for particular audiences, purposes, and contexts. This time, opening up genre selection to students, almost every student chose a thoughtful and appropriate genre for their particular intent, demonstrating strong rhetorical thinking—a move I pushed as I repeatedly asked them to think and write about their choices during the unit. The downside was that some of the final projects didn’t “look” as professional, especially in visual design aspects, as I did not have time to teach the specific technical skills for executing each genre. Yet, overall, I think it is most important to teach students the practice of rhetorical decision-making, given my primary goal of helping students communicate more effectively for particular contexts. The diversity of genres the students produced (including board games, zines, t-shirts, listicles, and video essays) helped students see how strategies for communicating across difference can occur in a wide range of modes and contexts.

Reflection Activity Data

In one of our concluding activities, I asked students to identify a “takeaway” from the class, and to sculpt it out of wikistix. Several students identified particular sticky principles, some referenced aspects of their high school partnership, some discussed writing skills (such as learning to put sources in conversation), and others made statements about principles for communicating across difference (such as Kroll’s Aikido rhetoric move, which involves beginning with agreement). Kayla, for example, created two sculptures that had a few significant differences. She shared that she learned that in communicating across difference, we often tend to focus on the differences, rather than first finding the commonalities, and pointed out to the class that both sculptures had identical base structures. We spent a significant amount of time this semester talking about listening to others’ perspectives, and trying to find productive commonalities as a starting point for discussion, and I appreciated that this appeared to resonate with Kayla and others.

However, an absence in the wikistix takeaways and the final reflection papers was engagement with anger over injustice and how to understand confrontation. In my previous version of the course, one of the mentor texts was an excerpt from Anzaldua’s *Borderlands: La Frontera*, in which she expresses raw anger at colonialism. I cut the text this time because of time constraints, but I felt the absence of Anzaldua. I’d like to do more with how to engage anger over injustice, as I don’t wish to promote the idea that the only valid kinds of communication across difference are conciliatory.

Final Survey Data

At the end of the course, I conducted a survey about the class goal of communicating across difference. In the first question, I listed some major course components, and asked which component was most helpful in learning to communicate across difference.
I was pleased to see that students selected a wide spread of different components, which I think indicates that multiple aspects of the class addressed the goal of communicating across difference.
By far, the most prominent response was increased interaction with the high school students, as students wanted more than the three scheduled trips and intermittent opportunities to communicate via writing. I take this as a good sign that the college students were invested in the community partnership component of the class and saw it as a valuable, real-world opportunity to practice course concepts.

And finally in the survey, I asked students to sum up what they learned about communicating across difference. Here are their responses:
Many students referenced that they learned how difficult communicating across difference was, and I hope this recognition indicates some of the deep thinking about communicating across difference that went on during the class.

**Husker Writers Analysis**

In their suggestions for changing the class in future iterations, as noted above, many students requested more time and contact with their high school partners, as they seemed to really enjoy this aspect of the class. The high school students opened up in sometimes surprising ways to my students, and I witnessed conversations about parents that had recently been deported, the nuances of entering public debate in light of Islamic religious commitment (e.g. how to debate lowering the drinking age when your religion forbids drinking?), and the nature of feminism across cultures. One of my students shared that this partnership was foundational to her decision to pursue education as a major. Yet the high school class was struggling at times,
as over half of them were failing the English course in April, and missing partnership assignments and absences sometimes made sustained relationships between classes difficult. There was also some high school student resistance to our final planned activity, a live student reading at a local coffee shop and youth center—resistance that I believe may understandably stem from discomfort in sharing writing publicly. I turned this into a learning moment by hosting a generative conversation about the resistance with my students, taking into account power dynamics in the partnership. In future versions of Husker Writers, I would love to incorporate more opportunities for high school students to have input into the partnership design.

**PLANNED CHANGES TO THE CLASS**

Perhaps the most significant change to the class design I’d like to pursue next time is rethinking how to integrate our high school partners, especially in ways that allow the high school students to have a voice in the partnership design. If I teach the class in the spring, I would have opportunities to visit the high school partner class to propose various ideas and gather youth feedback. I would also like to find ways for more consistent interaction with our partners, as requested by my students. One opportunity may be virtual communication, and though we ran into technical roadblocks this time, we may be able to troubleshoot so that students can live chat or share work via google docs in future semesters. Teaching the class on a Tuesday/Thursday schedule may also allow for easier visits to the high school, as the longer class time would allow more space for travel.

Smaller tweaks to support student learning include more time and scaffolding for the annotations in the first unit, additional check-ins for students who leave the research proposal conference without a solid topic, check-points that encourage students to locate sources earlier, and class time devoted to talking about anger, confrontation, and power dynamics. For example, I would like to do a class discussion of the recent Heineken commercial about talking across difference, “Worlds Apart,” to help students realize that these kinds of conversations cost more to some folks than to others.

One option if I were to totally refresh the class in a future version would be to reorient the class to enduring questions in talking across difference: “Is colorblindness effective?” “What does it take to listen across difference—especially to listen to anger?” “How can we learn about ourselves through interacting across difference?” “What kinds of experiences help people gain capacity in talking across difference?” “What strategies are useful for speaking across difference?”.
SUMMARY AND OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF PORTFOLIO PROCESS

This portfolio process was valuable to me, as it allowed me significant space to reflect on student learning outcomes. I appreciated the opportunity to deeply consider my course goals a full semester before I began, which gave me lots of time to sharpen the class design before I launched the course in January. The refresher on Backward Design was very helpful, especially as my job now includes supporting novice teachers in both English 357 (composition theory for preservice teachers) and English 957 (composition theory for new graduate instructors), and I am working to teach Backward Design to them. This version of English 254 is more clearly aligned to my main goals than previous sections, because of both the time and space to create a strong backward design for the course.

The most interesting part of writing the portfolio, for me, was the examples of student growth—places where I could see thinking change over the course of a unit. Analyzing how and why this growth occurred proved very generative for me in thinking through how different parts of the class were working to foster development, and how this process could be scaffolded even better for students in the future.

And finally, this experience was useful for the chance to talk with faculty across disciplines about teaching strategies. University life does not often provide chances to talk with colleagues about teaching, so I relished the opportunity to exchange ideas with others. As colleagues, we are collectively pursuing a vision of strong student education as part of the land-grant commitment of the University of Nebraska, and it was revitalizing to have a space to engage in that work together.
APPENDIX A: COURSE SYLLABUS AND AIMS AND SCOPE DOCUMENT
English 254h: Writing & Communities, Spring 2017
Section 01 MWF 10:30-11:20, Andrews 116
Instructor: Dr. Rachael Wendler Shah

General Information

- Office: Andrews 126E
- Office Hours: Mondays 4:30-5:30, Wednesdays 11:30-12:30, and by appointment. Please contact me in advance if you will be attending office hours so you do not have to wait while I meet with others.
- Telephone: (760) 331-9148 (cell—please use only in emergencies)
- Email: Wendler.Shah@unl.edu
- Course Web Site: Blackboard

Course Description:

A queer teen hesitates before clicking “post” on a Facebook post where he comes out. A graduating senior drafts an email of UNL advice to her younger sister, about to begin college. A student intern struggles with his new boss’s request to create a PowerPoint presentation on behalf of the organization. The most important writing we do is often in relation to communities, as we represent, research, join, and confront groups of people through writing. This class challenges you to think about what it means to write in relation to others—and in particular, how to write across difference.

We’ll begin by looking how to write from communities, as we examine what it means to write on behalf of a group to a different group. You’ll have a chance to help others understand a key idea about one of your communities. Next, we’ll write about communities, as we write about multiple perspectives on a community issue through primary research. Finally, to practice how to write to communities, you will transform your research paper into a community argument that is designed to have a generative impact on a public audience.

Throughout the course, we’ll be involved in writing in communities by engaging in a partnership with local high school students, a collaboration that will allow you to write for audiences beyond the classroom and bring rhetorical choices to life. We will be writing for these students as audience, giving and receiving feedback, and participating in complex discussions of community issues with them, giving you on-the-ground experience in communicating with real communities. Together, you and your partners will have the opportunity to develop your writing and thinking skills.
Learning Goals

This class will challenge you to:

- Build on your prior experiences with composing (including invention, drafting, revision, and editing) and the rhetorical concepts of audience, purpose, and context
- Explore strategies for communicating across difference
- Analyze the social dynamics of actual contexts for writing
- Practice strategies for researching the uses of writing in a community
- Learn new revision strategies and gain new insights about revision
- Provide constructive response to peers’ writing
- Reflect on the development of your writing and learning
- Gain addition practice in sentence-level editing and proofreading

Required Texts and Supplies

Readings available on Blackboard.

$20 for required printing, copying, and materials costs.

Recommended: Made to Stick (2007) by Chip and Dan Heath.

Major Assignments

Representation Essay: Using descriptive language and anecdotes, you will represent one of your own communities in a piece of creative non-fiction geared for an audience who does not identify with this community.

Multivocal Research Paper: In this assignment, you will conduct primary and secondary research into multiple perspectives on a community issue, seeking out and effectively representing the voices of different stakeholders.

Community Argument: Inspired by your research paper, you will craft a composition that makes an argument to a particular community. Part of the challenge will be choosing a genre (infographic, video, twitter campaign, etc), audience, and purpose that will be most impactful.

Final Reflection: In your final assignment, you will reflect on and analyze strategies for communicating across difference in either (A) one of your pieces from the semester or (B) your community partnership with local youth.
### Required Course Work

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1: Representation Essay</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit 2: Multivocal Research Paper</td>
<td>3/17</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit 3: Community Argument</td>
<td>4/24</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Reflection Paper</td>
<td>5/3</td>
<td>10%</td>
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**Short Assignments & Community Partnership**
(workshop letters, response papers, communication with youth, community grading etc.)
Continuous 20%

### Course Policies and Additional Information

**Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:** This class functions as an intellectual community for exchanging, borrowing, and extending ideas. However, you should avoid turning in work completed for another class (including a high school course), asking someone else to compose your assignment, and using the words or ideas of others without acknowledgement. See UNL's Student Code of Conduct ([http://stuafs.unl.edu/dos/code](http://stuafs.unl.edu/dos/code)).

**Attendance:** A goal here is the creation of an engaged, supportive, and active intellectual community around writing, which means your attentiveness, energy, and regular contributions during class are critically important. This class includes in-class discussion, interactions with local secondary students, small-group conferences and peer group work, and when you are missing, your colleagues and community partners are affected.

Students are allowed 3 absences. These two absences are to be used for issues like illness, job interviews, etc. *Only official University of Nebraska Lincoln absences with written documentation are excused.* Starting on the 4th absence, each absence will result in a 1% deduction from your final grade. **According to the English Department’s attendance policy, missing more than 9 classes will cause you to receive an F.**
If you must class, you are responsible for finding out about any important information shared during class. Attendance includes conferences and the required writing center visit in addition to class meetings.

Three tardies will count as an absence. I take attendance at the beginning of each class. If you come in after the start of class, you are responsible for checking in with me after class to make sure that you are recorded as tardy and not absent.

Class Climate: As this class involves discussions of public issues, there will likely be a healthy variety of perspectives in the class. Disagreements help sharpen thinking, but it is critical to remain respectful.

Community Partnership and Community Grading: To practice writing to communities, this class includes a community partnership with local youth. The youth will be giving you feedback on your work communicating in community collaborations through an evaluation form, which will be 2% of your final grade.

Involving our partners in evaluation emphasizes their role as important collaborators and orients you toward the perspectives of your partners, not only toward the instructor’s perspective. This practice is supported by scholarship on ecological writing assessment, which emphasizes reports from the whole environment of learning, the impact of assessment on power dynamics, and the creation of useful, quality feedback. The youth will be trained in how to evaluate, asked to provide concrete evidence for their ratings, and provided with a guided evaluation form (available on Blackboard) designed by the high school teacher and me. If you feel the evaluation you receive is inaccurate, you will have the opportunity to ask the high school teacher and me to review the grade.

Conferences: Individual and small-group conferences with me will be scheduled during the semester, and class will be cancelled to make time for these meetings. A missed conference counts as an absence.

Late Work: Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the stated due date. Major assignments will be deducted 5% per 24-hour period late, and homework assignments will not be accepted late.

If a serious and unavoidable problem arises, however, you should contact me well in advance of the deadline to determine whether or not an extension for the work will or will not be granted. Computer problems are not an acceptable excuse for a late assignment, so remember to back up your work (try Dropbox—it’s free! Crashplan is a great paid option, because it backs up your work automatically).

Students with Disabilities: I’m committed to universal design (the idea that we can make learning environments that are accessible to all students), but I’m still
working to put these ideas into practice. Please let me know if any of the activities or assignments are inaccessible to you, and we will work to revise them.

Also, Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) provides individualized academic support for students with documented disabilities. Support services can include extended test time, textbooks and handouts in alternative formats (electronic texts, Braille, taped texts, etc), classroom notes, sign language interpreters, and transcriptionists. SSD not only accommodates students that have visible disabilities, but students with other varying types of disabilities that impact college life. If you have a documented disability that is impacting your academic progress, please call SSD at 472-3787 and schedule an appointment. If you do not have a documented disability but you are having difficulties with your coursework (such as receiving low grades even though you study more than classmates or run out of time for test questions when the majority of your peers finish their exams in the allotted time), you may schedule an appointment to discuss the challenges you’re experiencing.

**Technology:** In order to foster in-class engagement and community, this class will include limited use of technology. No laptops, cell phones, or other devices may be used unless indicated for a specific activity. Please see me if you need a particular device for documented accessibility reasons.

**Writing Center:** All writers need readers. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Writing Center can provide you with meaningful support as you write for this class, other classes, or for nonacademic purposes including creative writing, cover letters and resumes, applications for graduate school, and a wide range of other forms and genres. Knowledgeable peer consultants are available to talk with you as you plan, draft, and revise your writing. Please check the Writing Center website ([www.unl.edu/writing](http://www.unl.edu/writing)), or stop by the main center in Andrews, for locations, hours, and information about scheduling 25- or 50-minute consultations.

**Writing Lincoln Initiative:** The Writing Lincoln Initiative (WLI) is a collaboration between UNL students and community volunteers who partner with writers of all ages and backgrounds to provide a friendly and supportive space for writing in Lincoln. If you’re interested in working with literacy learning in the community by joining WLI, please contact them via [writinglincoln360@gmail.com](mailto:writinglincoln360@gmail.com) or visit their website at writinglincoln.org. They’re always looking for new volunteers.

**Grades:** Your final grade will be determined according to the standard scale:

- A+= 97+
- A = 93
- A-=90-92
- B+ = 87-89
- B=83-86
- B-=80-82
- C+ = 77-79
- C=73-76
- C-=70-72
- D+= 67-69
- D=63-66
- D-=60-62
- F = 59 or below.

Specific grading criteria will be provided on assignment sheets.
Daily Schedule

Daily Syllabus
“For Class” indicates homework due at the beginning of class on the date listed. This daily syllabus may change to meet the needs of the class and our community partners. Make sure to pay attention to whether you are supposed to have a hard copy, upload, or bring certain materials to class.

Mon, Jan 9th:
In Class: Introduction to ourselves, the class, and the first assignment.

Wed, Jan 11th:
For Class: Bring hard copy of “I am From” Poem (and be prepared to share it with the class).

In Class: We’ll share your poems

Fri, Jan 13th:
For Class: Watch Adiche “Danger of a Single Story” and Wendler “My Life with Aspergers.” Be prepared to discuss the following questions:

- What is Adiche trying to accomplish in the talk? What does she mean by “a single story” and why are they “dangerous”? How does she challenge the single story of Africans in her talk? What strategies does she use to make her audience less defensive towards her message?
- What is the main point of Daniel’s talk—what is he trying to accomplish with the audience? What strategies does he use to make this point? In particular, consider his structure and use of emotion—how does he use these elements strategically?

In Class: We’ll discuss the videos and begin thinking about your own project.

Mon, Jan 16th: MLK DAY NO CLASS

Wed, January 18th:
For Class: Read “The Courage of Community Members.” Note: This is an article I’ve written that is accepted for publication pending some revisions. Please do not share with people beyond our class. Be prepared to share your ideas for how we can make our high school partnership strong.
**In Class:** We’ll start work on our representation essays and discuss our community partnership.

**Fri, January 20th:**
**For Class:** Bring hard copies of your high school partner letter(s). These letters should (a) represent yourself warmly to establish a strong relationship with your high school partners, given our discussion during the last class (b) comment on at least two pieces of information in the biosheets, and (c) ask at least 2 questions. If you have one partner, letter should be 1.5, typed single-spaced pages; If two partners, write 1 page each (you can reuse material!). Include some kind of visual that represents you.

**In Class:** We’ll work on developing your drafts.

**Mon, January 23rd:**
**For Class:** Upload first rough draft of story.

**In Class:** We’ll talk about scene vs. summary.

**Wed, January 25th:**
**For Class:** Continue working on your representation essay.

**In Class:** We’ll continue developing your drafts.

**Fri, Jan 27th:**
**For Class:**
1. Upload your second draft of the representation essay and author’s note.
2. Print two hard copies of your representation essay and author’s note (single spaced and double-sided ok) and bring them to class.

**In Class:** We’ll peer review.

**Mon, Jan 30th:**
**For Class:** Continue working on representation essay. If you have a laptop, bring it today. Have access to your draft during class.

**In Class:** We’ll discuss annotations.

**Wed, Feb 1st:**
**For Class:** Upload 3rd draft of representation essay. Have access to your draft during class (hard copy or digital).

**In Class:** We’ll polish the representation essays.
Fri, February 3rd:
For Class: Upload final draft of representation essay.

In Class: We’ll reflect on the first assignment and begin discussing the next one.

Mon, February 6th:
For Class:
1. Wander around campus and/or downtown Lincoln for at least 30 minutes. Go inside buildings. Take pictures of objects or places that are connected to community issues you might be interested in researching.
2. Wander the internet for at least 15 minutes, looking for information on local or community issues (hint: try a Google News search for Lincoln, surf UNL news site, or try googling issues you are interested in).
3. Upload your favorite 2 pictures from your physical wandering and 1 screencapture from your digital wanderings as PowerPoint slides to blackboard.

In Class: We’ll do a World Café activity to brainstorm topics for the research papers and sign up for conference times.

Wed, February 8th: Visit to North Star High School 9:40-11:00

For Class: Continue working on proposal (nothing due).
In Class: We’ll meet with our youth collaborators for icebreakers and a discussion of your first paper.

Fri, February 10th: No Class—Conferences with Rachael to Discuss Topic Choices

For Your Conference: Bring a hard copy of your 1-page single-spaced proposal (proposal template on Blackboard).

Mon, February 13th:
For Class: Send out 3 interview request emails, BCC Rachael (sample email on Blackboard).

In Class: We’ll discuss interview strategies and interview question development.

Wed, February 15th:
For Class: Continue research. If you have a laptop, bring it to class today.

In Class: We’ll discuss digital research.
Fri, February 17th:
For Class: Continue research. Bring laptop if you have one.

In Class: We’ll collaborate with our high school partners digitally, and work on library research.

Mon, February 20th:
For Class: Continue research.

In Class: We’ll work on finding your thesis and discuss subheadings.

Wed, February 22nd:
For Class: Upload at least 3 pages of a first draft.

In Class: We’ll discuss how to integrate sources.

Fri, February 24th:
For Class: Have access to your draft and notes about your sources during class (hard copy or electronic + laptop)

In Class: We’ll discuss how to integrate sources.

Mon, Feb 27th:
For Class: Upload full, complete first draft.

In Class: We’ll discuss how to respond to the writing of others.

Wed, March 1st:
For Class:
1. Bring hard copies of mini-workshop letters for high school students. If you have 1 partner, letter should be at least 1 single spaced typed page. If you have 2 partners, letters should be at least .5 pages each. See criteria on Blackboard.
2. Upload 3 interview summary sheets

In Class: We’ll discuss the workshop letters and continue revising your draft.

Fri, March 3rd:
For Class:
1. Upload second draft, ready for classmates’ and instructor’s comments. Note: draft must be complete.
2. Bring two copies of your draft to class to give to your workshop group.
In Class: We’ll discuss small group workshops and your papers. We’ll be signing up for conferences today, so have access to your calendar.

Mon, March 6th:
No Class—Group Workshops

For Your Workshop (due BEFORE your workshop):
1. Mark-up your colleagues’ papers, bring these to the workshop
2. Upload your workshop letters to Blackboard AND bring a hard copy of each letter to give to the authors at our meeting.
   Bring a copy of your own paper (hard or digital), and have some way to take notes on our discussion

Wed, March 8th:
No Class—Group Workshops

For Your Workshop (due BEFORE your workshop):
3. Mark-up your colleagues’ papers, bring these to the workshop
4. Upload your workshop letters to Blackboard AND bring a hard copy of each letter to give to the authors at our meeting.
   Bring a copy of your own paper (hard or digital), and have some way to take notes on our discussion

Fri, March 10th:
No Class—Group Workshops

For Your Workshop (due BEFORE your workshop):
1. Mark-up your colleagues’ papers, bring these to the workshop
2. Upload your workshop letters to Blackboard AND bring a hard copy of each letter to give to the authors at our meeting.
   Bring a copy of your own paper (hard or digital), and have some way to take notes on our discussion

Mon, March 13th:
For Class: Register for a writing center account and make a reservation for this week—forward appointment confirmation email to Rachael.
Have access to your draft during class (laptop or hard copy).

In Class: We’ll work on revising the drafts.

Wed, March 15th: No Class—Instructor at Professional Conference
By Class Time: Upload the 3rd draft.
Visit the writing center before spring break.

**Fri, March 17th:** No Class—Instructor at Professional Conference  
By Friday at 5:00: Upload final research paper and author’s note.

**Happy Spring Break!**

**Mon, March 27th:**  
For Class: Bring in writing center appointment verification for attendance credit.  
In Class: We’ll reflect on the research paper and begin talking about the community arguments.

**Wed, March 29th:**  
For Class: Read Made to Stick “Concrete” and “Credible.”  
In Class: We’ll discuss “sticky” community arguments.

**Fri, March 31st:**  
For Class: Read Made to Stick “Emotional”  
In Class: We’ll discuss more “sticky” community arguments.

**Mon, April 3rd:**  
For Class: Read Made to Stick “Unexpected” and “Stories”  
In Class: We’ll perform our own idea clinic.

**Wed, April 5th:**  
For Class:  
1. Be prepared to present your idea clinic  
2. Read Made to Stick: “Simple”

In Class: We’ll present the idea clinics and brainstorm about your “commander’s intent.”

**Fri, April 7th:**  
For class: Read “Not Your Mama’s Bus Tour” (Blackboard).  
In Class: We’ll discuss how to match genre and audience with purpose.

**Mon, April 10th:**  
For class: Upload argument proposal.  
In Class: We’ll discuss the arguments.

**Wed, April 12th:** Visit to North Star High School 9:40-11:00  
For Class: Continue work on community argument draft.
In Class: We’ll engage in a community discussion with our high school partners.

Fri, April 14th:  
For Class: Continue working on argument draft  
In Class: We’ll discuss strategies at work in your own project.

Mon, April 17th:  
For Class: Bring and upload 2 complete drafts of your community arguments.  
In Class: We’ll peer review the community arguments.

Wed, April 19th:  
For Class: Continue revising community argument. Have access to all final drafts of major projects.  
In Class: We’ll talk about revision plans, and the public reading writing excerpt selection and final reflection.

Fri, April 21st:  
For Class: Continue revising community argument. Bring a laptop today.  
In Class: We’ll work on the community argument author’s note and receive feedback on our arguments from our community partners.

Mon, April 24th:  
For Class: Upload final community argument  
Upload the piece you’d like to include in the class publication  
(8 pages max)  
In Class: We’ll practice public writing excerpt delivery and share the final community arguments.

Wed, April 26th:  
For Class: Continue working on final reflection.  
In Class: We’ll do reflection and celebration activities.

Fri, April 28th: Public Reading With High School Students, Time TBA (note: will include time outside of class)  
For Class: Be prepared to present your writing excerpt.  
In Class: We’ll do our community reading!
**Wed, May 3rd 12p:** Upload final 3-page reflection on composing across difference.

**Option 1: Reflection on Community Reading Piece.**
Analysis of why that excerpt/piece is effective at speaking across difference, what strategies from the class you used, what you would change in the piece if you had more time. Quote from your piece and at least 1 course reading to illustrate.

**Option 2: Reflection on Community Partnership.**
Analysis of how collaborating with youth helped develop your ability to communicate across difference, and what you will do differently in future interactions across difference. What class principles were present in your interactions? What strategies did you and your partner(s) use? Explore at least one specific moment/interaction or text (feedback letter, slam poem), and quote from at least one course reading.
### English 254 Writing and Communities
#### Aim and Scope Document

#### BULLETIN DESCRIPTION
- **Credit Hours:** 3
- **Course Format:** Lecture 3
- **Course Delivery:** Classroom
- **ACE Outcomes:** 1
- **Groups:** Writing, Rhetoric, and Culture

Extended writing and its uses in and by various communities.

English 254 focuses on the study and practice in writing in communities. “Communities” is understood broadly; instructors may choose to have students explore disciplinary communities, campus communities, home or family communities, online communities, etc. Students will be guided to examine how communities and individuals within communities use writing for multiple purposes: to set the terms of membership in the community, forge a communal identity, deliberate over important matters, research and make informed decisions, make arguments, communicate information and ideas within and beyond the community, create new knowledge, influence a broader conversation or another community, and so on. Through their major writing projects, students will participate in community conversations and make choices as writers based on what they learn about writing in the communities they study. This course gives students the opportunity to practice writing in a supportive, student-centered environment.

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<th>Goals</th>
<th>Recommended Practices</th>
<th>Assessment Strategies</th>
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<td>1. Students will build on prior experiences with composing (invention, drafting, revising, and final editing) and with the rhetorical concepts of audience, purpose and context by undertaking a minimum of 3 projects and producing (at minimum) the equivalent of 30 pages of polished prose (typed, double-spaced). These formal projects should be informed directly or indirectly by students’ developing understanding of writing as a social practice and students’ study of writing in community/ies.</td>
<td>Teachers can support students in exploring new approaches to invention, revision and final editing by using class discussion or informal writing assignments to connect the work of studying writing in a community directly to the composing process. Relevant key terms that surface in students’ research on writing in a community, for example, should be applied to students’ developing drafts or the work of composing. As is true of writing courses at the 100-level, students should receive considerable feedback on their drafts at various stages of composing.</td>
<td>Instructors will respond to and assess students’ texts at different stages of the composing process paying particular attention to students’ demonstrated understanding of writing as a social process. Instructors will respond to and assess students’ attempts at using specific research and revision strategies introduced in the course. In the final course grade, instructors will pay explicit attention to students’ abilities to inquire into the social dynamics of writing practices and to negotiate the ethical and rhetorical challenges of writing in, about, from or against a community.</td>
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<td>2. Students will learn to analyze the social dynamics of actual contexts for writing, and interpret published texts through an understanding of writing as a social practice.</td>
<td>Class activities (such as required readings, discussions, informal writing assignments) may engage students in consideration of such terms as “discourse community” or “context for writing,” “representation,” “consensus/dissensus,” etc. The class might consider what kinds of rhetorical moves are (de)valued</td>
<td>Instructors will respond to and assess students’ efforts to explore the social dynamics of writing (including students’ abilities to identify and negotiate ethical and rhetorical challenges) in ways that are productive for students’ own writing projects.</td>
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across a range of texts in a community; what’s at stake ethically for writers and community members in various texts, interpretations and rhetorical strategies produced within (or about) the community; and/or how communities use writing to negotiate conflict.

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<th>3. Students will learn strategies for researching the uses of writing in a community. While the emphasis of this course is on conducting primary research, students may also gain additional experience with secondary research as well.</th>
<th>Significant class time should be spent modeling, discussing and practicing specific strategies for conducting primary research on writing in a community. Such strategies might include: focused observation, interviewing, varieties of textual analysis, etc. Also, students should be guided in conducting secondary research appropriate to their projects and purposes for writing.</th>
<th>Instructors will assess students’ abilities to plan and carry-out community-based research on writing and provide feedback to students during the inquiry process so that students can hone their research skills.</th>
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<td>4. Students will have opportunities to learn new revision strategies and gain new insights about revision by developing a more finely tuned understanding of how writers conceptualize their work and possible communities of readers for their work.</td>
<td>Class activities should support students in applying insights from their research on writing in a community (particularly their developing capacities to make finer distinctions about contexts and purposes for writing) to their own drafts-in-progress.</td>
<td>Instructors will respond to and assess the quality of students’ efforts at revision as well as students’ ability to articulate in substantive and compelling ways their purposes for writing and the contexts into which they are writing.</td>
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<td>5. Students will continue to refine their skills at providing constructive response to peers’ writing by producing at least 3 substantive, written responses to peers’ or community members’ texts-in-process.</td>
<td>Students’ can be guided in applying course concepts to the work of responding to drafts-in-process. Written responses should address writers’ goals, suggest specific revision strategies, and draw upon concepts taken up in the course.</td>
<td>Instructors will assess students’ peer review processes through class observation, students’ written responses to peers, Blackboard exchanges, and/or students’ reflective statements about peer work.</td>
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<td>6. Students will have guided opportunities to inquire into and reflect on the development of their writing and learning in terms of the concepts taken up in the course.</td>
<td>Classroom practices such as author’s notes and self assessments can provide students opportunities to document and analyze their reading and writing as socially-situated practices. Students should understand the importance of documenting claims about their learning with textual evidence from their writing.</td>
<td>In the final course grade, instructors will pay explicit attention to students’ abilities to reflect on and analyze their own writing processes in terms of the concepts taken up in the course.</td>
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<td>7. Students will gain additional practice in sentence-level editing and proofreading their writing, and</td>
<td>Students should continue to hone their proof-reading skills and develop facility with stylistic</td>
<td>Instructors will examine final drafts of texts for evidence of control in style, syntax, and grammar, and</td>
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in identifying and attending to appropriate stylistic conventions for citation and formatting.

demonstrated ability to work productively with stylistic conventions.

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<th>Language to be added to syllabus:</th>
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<td>The University requires information on ACE (when relevant) and ADA to be on your syllabus. The English department recommends the following language, which may be modified to suit your specific syllabus. Note, you must now include some version of the &quot;Opportunities&quot; language of ACE, wordy as it is. Not all sample syllabi may reflect this requirement.</td>
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<th>Achievement Centered Education</th>
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<td>This course is also certified as an Achievement Centered General Education (ACE) Outcome 1 course. Therefore ENG 254 will help you meet the following general education outcome: “Write texts, in various forms, with an identified purpose, that respond to particular audience needs, incorporate research or existing knowledge, and use applicable documentation and appropriate conventions of form and structure.” To help you achieve this outcome, English 254 will provide you opportunities to draft, receive feedback on, and revise three extended writing projects, composed for different purposes and audiences. You'll have a chance to integrate outside sources into your texts, which you'll document in conventions appropriate to the form employed. You'll also be invited to draw and reflect on your existing knowledge, using the writing process to see your experiences in new ways. At the end of the term, a few randomly selected students may be asked to provide samples of their work (the final version of each major project) so we may assess the course’s overall effectiveness in helping students to achieve ACE-1 requirements. Please let me know if you have questions about this collection process.</td>
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<th>ADA language to be added to syllabus:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) provides individualized academic support for students with documented disabilities. Support services can include extended test time, textbooks and handouts in alternative formats (electronic texts, Braille, taped texts, etc), classroom notes, sign language interpreters, and transcriptionists. SSD not only accommodates students that have visible disabilities, but students with other varying types of disabilities that impact college life. If you have a documented disability that is impacting your academic progress, please call SSD at 472-3787 and schedule an appointment. If you do not have a documented disability but you are having difficulties with your coursework (such as receiving low grades even though you study more than your classmates or find you run out of time for test questions when the majority of your peers finish their exams in the allotted time), you may schedule an appointment to discuss the challenges you are experiencing.</td>
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APPENDIX B: ASSIGNMENT SHEETS
Assignment: Representation Essay
Rachael Wendler Shah, Eng 254h, Spring 2017, Unit 1

Assignment Goals

• Demonstrate the ability to skillfully “speak from” or represent a community
• Take into consideration the needs and possible reactions of an audience dissimilar to you
• Articulate your rhetorical choices
• Develop persuasive and descriptive writing skills

Purpose

Through creative non-fiction, your challenge is to represent a community you identify with to an audience of people who is not of that community. You can either:

(1) communicate something about your community that you wish outsiders understood (Adiche’s TED talk challenged stereotypes of Africans as in poverty and needing help) OR

(2) share something that you’ve learned through virtue of belonging to your community (e.g. Daniel’s TED talk argued that we should work to ensure everyone has a place to belong).

Drawing on personal experience, you will help an audience who is not part of your community come to have a richer understanding of that community or something you’ve learned by being part of that community.

Audience

People who do not belong to the community you are describing. You can either choose a specific audience (e.g. teachers, UNL students), or stay with a broad audience. Note that your high school partners will also be reading these, so keep content appropriate for 10th graders.
Details

Due Date: Final draft due 2/3. See syllabus for a list of earlier drafts (missing/late drafts will detract from your final grade).

Length: 5-7 pages.

Communities

Consider broadly the communities you are part of as you think through possible topics for this paper. You might choose an identity-based community (e.g. Chicana, male, bisexual, Muslim, introvert); a community formed around an interest you have (e.g. football player, sorority member, brony, honors student); or a community formed around a place (small-town Nebraska, Chicago, gated communities, Whole Foods), job (retail worker, farmer), or experience (people in interracial relationships, people who go on international missions trips). You might also consider an “intersectional”—composed of the intersections of two or more identities—community (black feminist, gay man in Nebraska, working-class college student).

You will be sharing this paper with classmates, so make sure to choose a community you are comfortable discussing in semi-public settings.

Content

Using personal experience (yes, I’m asking you to use “I”), you will show your audience aspects of this community that contribute to the argument you’re making about that community or demonstrate the “truth” that you’ve learned by being part of that community. Consider what you might do to keep your audience engaged and to persuade them of the point you are attempting to make.

Some strategies identified from other writers that you might consider borrowing if they fit your topic and purpose:

- Include concrete details in stories
- List vivid memories (short, quick memories) that paint a robust picture of who you are
• Juxtapose humor and seriousness
• Introduce scenes that don’t have to do with the target community to encourage identification
• Use evocative metaphors and analogies
• Locate difficult issues in childhood to minimize defensiveness in readers
• Frame call to action in terms of what is best for readers, or “imagination,” or other reasons than pity
• Start with something in common to build connection and empathy
• Wait to reveal that you are part of the target identity to delay possible dis-identification
• Use a two-pronged thesis that unpacks different facets of the main idea for two different types of audiences (e.g. Daniel’s don’t give up on belonging & reach out to those who don’t belong).
• Include visuals to encourage reader engagement
• Start with a strong hook to engage readers
• Describe yourself doing the thing you are critiquing to minimize defensiveness

Aim for engaging, evocative writing with fresh language and vivid details (avoid clichés!). Remember to “show don’t tell”—e.g. don’t tell us that sorority girls can be fiercely intelligent by stating it directly, show us through a story.

You are welcome to use sources beyond your personal experience, but this is not required. Additional sources should be cited in MLA format.

As this is creative non-fiction, you’re not bound to the traditional rules of academic discourse (e.g. thesis statement in beginning, clear topic sentences, formal academic tone). Feel free to break from these traditions to achieve a certain effect.

Annotations

To demonstrate your intentional, rhetorical decision-making, you will annotate your story by including 4-7 comments in the margin that
explain why you made certain choices to communicate effectively across difference.

**Grading**

I'll be looking for skillful representation of a community that clearly makes an argument about the community or something learned from that community, anticipates the needs and possible reactions of an audience who is different, effectively uses strategies to persuade (from the list above or other strategies you determine on your own), includes thoughtful annotations about the strategies used, employs fresh/vivid language (no clichés), shows rather than only tells, and makes grammatical, style, and format (MLA format) choices that are appropriate to the occasion.

This project is 20% of your final grade.
Assignment: Multivocal Research Paper
Rachael Wendler Shah, Eng 254h, Spring 2017, Unit 2

Assignment Goals

• Demonstrate the ability to thoroughly and responsibly represent the voices of a variety of stakeholders/perspectives on an issue
• Delve into the complexities of an issue
• Conduct primary research (interviews) and secondary research (scholarly and popular sources) and integrate these into academic writing
• Develop academic writing skills

Purpose

In the last unit, you represented one of your own communities; in this unit, you will be representing multiple communities, stakeholders, and perspectives as you create an essay that allows the audience to listen to the voices of various people involved in an issue.

Your purpose here is NOT to prove a point (though you can take a stand in the intro or conclusion if you wish). The goal is, instead, to delve into the complexities of an issue and allow readers to understand the different perspectives.

Audience

General academic audience who is not very familiar with your topic.

Sources:

Your paper should include at least 7 total sources. At least 3 interviews, at least 2 scholarly books or articles, and at least 2 sources of your choice (e.g. additional interviews, additional scholarly sources, popular sources).

Interviews: You’ll interview at least three people. As you select interviewees, gather different perspectives—different ways of thinking about the issue, different life experiences with the issue. For example,
you might interview a member of the swim team, a fan, and a professor who studies the social psychology of sports. Or, you might interview two school board members and a teacher who all disagree about school vouchers. In class, we’ll discuss strategies for preparing for interviews and analyzing interview data. You should quote from all three interviewees in your paper.

**Scholarly Research:** Using the skills you learned in your first-year writing classes, gather at least two scholarly sources (i.e. peer-reviewed articles or scholarly books). Choose your sources wisely to ensure you have good material for your paper!

**Choice Sources:** Determine your additional sources to help you fill in needed background information, explore important counterarguments, or hear from additional perspectives that need to be represented in the paper. **In the age of fake news, it is critical that you verify these sources.**

**Source Integration:** Make sure to integrate these sources thoughtfully, showing your ability to paraphrase and introduce quotations in various ways correctly. Consider signal phrases, block quotations, paraphrasing, using commas and colons, and quoting short phrases as part of your own sentence.

Your goal is to put these sources *in conversation*. What would these people say to one another? Where do they agree or disagree? Rather than just stating what each source says, use more sophisticated moves like “X brings up important points that complicate Y’s argument” or “If we consider X’s point about cheating in schools, this has important implications for Y’s argument about gender and school segregation.”

**Introduction: Hook, Key Terms, Context**

Your introduction should prepare readers for your thesis. To get them ready, you’ll need to catch their attention (the hook) and help them understand the background and key terms surrounding your issue. For definitions, rely on definitions by scholars rather than dictionaries. A tip: have someone unfamiliar with your topic read your introduction.
They should have a clear sense of what’s being discussed by the end. If not, revise!

Given all this work you need to do to prepare readers, your introduction will likely be more than one paragraph—or even more than one page—before we move to your thesis.

**The Body: Subheadings (Your New Best Friend)**

Subheadings are one of the most powerful tools of academic discourse. They help keep your organization crystal clear for your and your reader, and help readers navigate quickly through your writing. Choose at least two subheadings to chunk your main argument.

Here are some examples of subheading sets:

- **Background:** The History of X in Nebraska
- **Outlining the Problem:** The Dangers of X
- **Toward a Solution:** New Approaches Toward X and Implications

- **Admissions Requirements at University of Nebraska-Lincoln**
- **What Does the SAT Measure and What Should it Measure?**
- **What Causes the Correlation Between High Scores and High Parent Income?**
- **What, Then, Should We Do?**

- **Guns on Campus:** Recent Developments at UNL
  - The Case for Conceal-Carry at UNL
  - The Case Against Conceal-Carry at UNL
  - A Possible Middle Ground?
- **Next Steps for UNL Students Invested in Their Safety**

- **Overview of Recent Rush Changes in UNL Sororities**
- **Voices from Sorority Members**
- **Voices from Fraternity Members**
- **Voices from Panhellenic Council**
- **A Possible Resolution**
Consider what chunks would make the most sense for your topic.

**Details**

**Due Date:** Final draft due 3/17. See syllabus for a list of earlier drafts (missing/late drafts will detract from your final grade).

**Length:** 9-12 pages.

**Format:** Follow the NEW MLA manuscript format. You will need a Works Cited page.

**Grading Criteria**

This paper is 30% of your final grade.

I’ll be looking for complex discussion of different perspectives on the issue (including consideration of various stakeholders and possible counterarguments, with fair representation of multiple voices); sophisticated integration of sources; clear organization with subheadings; strong introduction that engage the reader, provide necessary context, and offer a clear thesis; impactful conclusion that recaps without being stale and ends on a powerful note; effective academic discourse (style, tone, grammar); inclusion of a dash and colon; and all assignment requirements.
Assignment Sheet: Multivocal Research Topic Proposal
Rachael Wendler Shah, Eng 254h Sprint 2017, Unit Two

Assignment Overview

A proposal is a persuasive document pitching an idea. In academia, people write proposals for research papers, conference presentations, articles, and books, allowing the audience (usually an editor or professor) to gauge the appropriateness of an idea and offer feedback. In the professional world, proposals allow a client or supervisor to evaluate a possible idea.

In this assignment, you will write a short proposal (1-1.5 full pages single-spaced) for your research topic idea. Your proposal will include the sections detailed below.

Proposal Sections

Use subheadings to introduce each of these topics.

Student Background: Share a bit about your background. What is your major and your professional aspiration? What are your passions and hobbies? What is unique about you?

Topic Overview: Briefly describe your research topic and identify your community that is connected to this topic. Define key terms (not through dictionaries) and provide necessary context. What are people disagreeing about? Identify at least 3 perspectives or stakeholder groups to the issue. Integrate quotes/paraphrases/data from at least two cited sources to show you are starting to engage with the conversation around your topic and there are sources available. (This will be the longest section).

Exigence: Why does this topic matter now? Why does this topic matter to you? How will doing this research project be helpful or interesting to you as a person? What community are you considering speaking to for the following unit, when you use your research to make an argument?

Interview: Discuss whom you might interview on the topic (you will need 3 interviewees). Consider the need for gathering different perspectives and hearing from different stakeholders.

Research Question: List 3-4 well-developed possible research questions related to your topic (one MAIN, overarching question, and the rest secondary).

Alternate possibilities: Briefly identify at least two other ideas for a research topic.

Feedback Questions: List any questions you have for me on your topic or the research process.

Working Bibliography: Create a MLA Bibliography for your two (or more) sources (doesn’t count in your page count).
**Topic Criteria**

As discussed in class, topics should:

- Be connected to a particular community you are involved with
- Involve multiple, competing perspectives
- Invoke your passion
- Be rich enough to justify a full research paper on the topic
- Provide possibilities for your community argument in the next unit

**Details**

**Due Date:** Your scheduled conference. Bring a hard copy to your conference with Rachael.

**Length:** 1 to 1.5 single-spaced pages, 11 pt font.

**Grading:** I’ll be looking for a clear description of a topic that meets the criteria above, thorough engagement with each required section, and strong prose. As always, feel free to stop by office hours or set up an appointment if you have any questions. I’m happy to help!
WORKSHOP LETTER ASSIGNMENT

First, read through your colleagues’ papers, marking them up with straight underlines (strong sentences), wavy underlines (sentences that need attention), circles on typos, and marginal comments. **Highlight the thesis.** You can mark little problems or praises on the paper, because we won’t focus on these at the workshop.

Write a 1 page, single-spaced letter for each author. Address the letter to the author (“Dear Amy,”) and sign your name at the end (“Sincerely, Roberto.”). You should detail both the strengths and your suggestions for improvement (at least two strengths and two suggestions for improvement for each letter). Prioritize your feedback—for example, if there is a problem with the logical development, don’t focus on comma splices. **Remember to be specific and quote from the draft for each point you make.** Write the letter you would like to receive—be encouraging and helpful!

You will both upload the letters and bring one hard copy of each to the workshop, along with your marked-up copies of the manuscripts, and a copy of your own manuscript and a pencil, so you will be prepared to be workshopped yourself.

As you write the letter, you might consider the following characteristics. **Don’t answer each of these questions—these questions are just to spark your thinking.**

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**THESIS.** Does the thesis statement clearly identify a narrow topic that will be explored? Could you locate the thesis easily? Is it insightful and worded smoothly? Does the written thesis match the paper, or could it be tweaked to better represent the core of the author’s ideas?

**ORGANIZATION.** Is the essay clearly organized in identifiable “chunks”—similar thoughts grouped together? Are the chunks arranged in a logical order? Are the subheadings descriptive, and does the text under each one fit the subheading? Do you have any ideas for a better subheading structure? Do you see clear transitions that explain how ideas are related?

**FOCUS** Is it clear how each section of the essay supports the thesis statement? Does the author “link back” to the thesis statement? If not, do you have suggestions about how the author could better link to the thesis, or how the author could change the thesis statement to fit the body of the essay?

**SOURCES** Does the author engage sources thoughtfully throughout the paper? Does the author integrate interviews and scholarly research effectively? Is there a good balance of summary, paraphrase, and direct quotation, so that outside sources clearly support but do not dominate the paper? Is all information cited? Does the author use a variety of quote integration strategies? Do you see the author using illustration, extension, authorizing, and countering?

**QUOTE SANDWICHES** Do signal phrases introduce the quote or paraphrase, and does the author reference the credibility of the source frequently to authorize (top piece of bread)? Does the author use compelling verbs to introduce sources, and not just “says”? Is the evidence
specific and compelling (middle of sandwich)? Does the author comment insightfully on the quotes/paraphrases and avoid leaving any quotes hanging by themselves without comment (bottom piece of bread)? Do you understand how the evidence from sources proves the point the author is trying to make?

LINE OF REASONING. Are all of the points developed fully? Do the ideas build on each other, or are they just listed next to each other? Are there any places where you are wow-ed by an point, confused, or unconvinced?

REPRESENTING COMMUNITIES. Does the author deeply and fairly represent various perspectives, or does it seem like one perspective is presented disrespectfully, shallowly, or in a skewed way? Does the author pull in the strongest arguments and ideas from each perspective, and not just present weak evidence from some in order to make his or her own perspective seem better? In the paper written in such a way that people from all perspectives would agree with how they and their ideas are represented (even if they don’t ultimately agree with the stance the author takes in the conclusion)?

INTRODUCTION/CONCLUSION. Does the introduction start with a compelling hook, provide all necessary background and context, and clearly state the thesis? Does the conclusion review without directly restating the main points, and leave us with an interesting, resonant thought?

AUDIENCE. Is this written for a general academic audience who is only vaguely familiar with the topic? Does the author provide any necessary background for the audience to understand, and is the tone right for an academic audience (nothing too informal or stilted)?

LOCAL ISSUES. Do you notice any patterns at the sentence level? For example, awkward phrasing, lengthy sentences, ambiguous use of “it” or “they,” missing commas? Or strong sensory details, complex and varied sentence structures, masterful use of dashes? **If you choose this as one of the 4 issues you’re discussing, name a pattern and give multiple examples (don’t just point out one instance)**
Assignment Sheet: Community Argument
Rachael Wendler Shah, Eng 254h Sp 2017, Unit Three

Assignment Goals

- Practice crafting an argument to a particular community, demonstrating intentional rhetorical choices about how to reach that community.

- Apply “sticky” principles (simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotion, stories) to creating an effective argument for a real-world audience.

Purpose
In the last unit, you demonstrated a thorough understanding of the various perspectives on a topic, and in this unit, you are invited to make an explicit argument about that topic to a particular community. Your goal is to change the way your audience thinks, feels, or acts about your topic (for some of you, this may require shifting the focus a bit from your research paper, as you transition from an academic paper to a community argument).

Audience
You will define a specific community that you are targeting as an audience. “The general public” is NOT a specific community audience. Examples of specific audiences include our partner class at North Star high school, college-aged women, and first-time homebuyers. You may consider your primary audience (the people you are directly targeting), and your secondary audience (others who may come in contact with your argument) as you compose.

Genre
You will be asked to choose a genre for your argument. Genres are categories or types of something that share certain characteristics, for example: brochures, websites, flashmobs, comedy news shows, slam poems, and online tutorials.

Choose a genre that is a good fit for your audience (they will find it valid and interesting), for your argument (you can communicate your argument effectively in this genre), and for you (you are interested in and able to compose in this genre). **Consider effective examples of your chosen genre to make sure you understand the characteristics of your genre and to guide you in your own composition.**

Crafting a Sticky Argument
We’ll be analyzing arguments in class and exploring rhetorical concepts from *Made to Stick*. Apply these concepts (Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotion, Stories) in ways that fit your particular goals and context. You do not have to apply
every sticky principle, but strong arguments engage one or two sticky principles in very deep ways, or multiple sticky principles in some way. Consider the following principles:

SIMPLE: How have you encapsulated your idea in an image or key phrase?

UNEXPECTED: How have you broken the audience’s “guessing machines”? Is the unexpected aligned with your purpose, or is it a gimmick? Have you created a knowledge gap or mystery to keep them engaged?

CREDIBLE: How are you creating your ethos? How are you using authorities or anti-authorities?

CONCRETE: How have you made these abstract ideas concrete through images, stories, or props? How have you made statistics or numbers meaningful, through the human scale principle?

EMOTION: How are you using pathos: humor, Mother Theresa Effect, appeals to identity?

STORIES: What stories have you incorporated into your stop to bring your topic to life?

Author’s Note
Along with your argument, you will include an author’s note (two-three paragraphs) that identifies: your target community audience, your commander’s intent, a brief description of which sticky principles you used and how, a couple sentences of how you tried to appeal to your particular audience, a brief explanation of why you chose this particular genre, and how you could potentially get this argument to its audience (e.g. if you make a series of flyers, where could you post them?) . In other words, use this space to help me see the intentional rhetorical thinking behind your choices in composing—how you were considering your audience, purpose, and context to be as persuasive as possible.

Details

Due Date: Monday, April 24th, at the beginning of class. Upload your argument or a link to your argument to Blackboard, unless your argument genre requires a hard copy, in which case you can bring it in person.

“Length”: Your arguments will be of different “lengths” as you are working in different genres, but make sure you create an argument that is meaty enough to be effective for your audience. You’ll receive approval from me about the “length” of your argument as part of the proposal process.
**Grading:** I’ll be looking for effective choices regarding genre, purpose, audience, and rhetorical strategies. Your argument should make a persuasive, clear case that is tailored for your particular community audience. Demonstrate your credibility by following the conventions of your genre (e.g. a PowerPoint should have bullet points rather than lengthy paragraphs) and producing a high-quality product (e.g. high-resolution images, grammar choices that are appropriate for the audience). I’ll also be looking for skillful application of some sticky principles.
Argument Proposal
Delete italicized directions and add your own text

Name:

Main Point: What do you want your audience to do, think, or feel differently after encountering your argument? Sum up in 1-2 sentences. (e.g. “UNL students will stop using single-use plastic bags at the bookstore.”)

Audience: Who is your SPECIFIC audience (“general public” is too vague, but “UNL’s Panhellenic Council” is specific). This is not always the case, but do you have a primary audience you are targeting first and a secondary audience that might also see your argument? What do you know about your audience (age, values, characteristics, level of familiarity with the topic and what background information they will need, likely counterarguments, etc)?

Genre: What genre do you hope to use (e.g. slam poem, listicle, booth in front of UNL’s Union). Describe the rationale behind this genre—why it is appropriate for your audience (will they find it interesting and convincing), your topic (will you be able to fully communicate your argument in this genre), and you (are you interested in and comfortable composing in this genre)?

Genre Examples: Paste the links to 2 effective examples of your genre here (e.g. two brochures). Using these examples, describe what conventions are common with this genre (e.g. what makes a brochure a brochure?), and what strategies you could steal from the effective examples you found.


Technology: Will you need to use a technology to create your argument? Why this particular technology? Do you know how to use it or want to learn?

Circulation: How could you get this argument to your intended audience (e.g. creating a website that no one knows about will not be effective in getting your ideas out there).

Argument Abstract: In a paragraph, describe what your argument will look like. What will you include? Be as specific as possible.

Questions: What questions do you have for Rachael?