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## CCCC Statement on Community-Engaged Projects in Rhetoric and Composition

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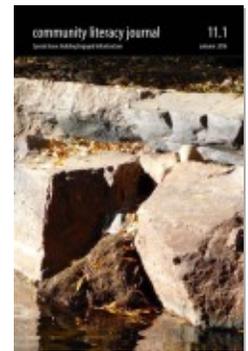
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Conference on College Composition and Communication: April 2016 (replaces the CCCC Position Statement on Faculty Work in Community-Based Settings, November 2014)

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# CCCC Statement on Community-Engaged Projects in Rhetoric and Composition

## *Conference on College Composition and Communication*

*April 2016 (replaces the CCCC Position Statement on Faculty Work in Community-Based Settings, November 2014)*

### **Preamble**

The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) represents teachers and scholars of writing and speaking whose work in and beyond colleges and universities regularly extends to sites for online learning, professional workplaces, and both near and far-flung communities. This statement provides guidelines for understanding, assessing, and valuing the community-engaged work colleagues may undertake across career stages, ranks, and roles. As such, it underscores the worth community-engaged work can have for individual participants, participating campuses, and disciplines associated with CCCC. As a resource for both faculty and administrators, this statement, we hope, will serve to credit teachers, researchers, and programs appropriately for their contributions to university-community partnerships that are anchored in rigorous scholarship and designed to enhance community capacity. This statement echoes others in related fields, which offer similar frameworks for valuing and evaluating academic community engagement.

### **Defining and Validating Community-Engaged Work**

We define community-engaged projects as scholarly, teaching, or community-development activities that involve collaborations between one or more academic institutions and one or more local, regional, national, or international community group(s) and contribute to the public good. We use the word *project* to denote well-conceived activities pursued over time to provide reciprocal benefits to both academic and community participants. Effective community-engaged projects can take many forms, shaped by local resources and needs, and can yield a variety of outcomes, including interactions, events, or artifacts of public and intellectual value. Interactions and events might include teaching exchanges, community writing or tutoring arrangements, and facilitated public discussions about pressing

issues of local concern (Flower; Goldblatt; Grabill; Peck, Flower, and Higgins), artistic performances (Heath; Jolliffe, “Shakespeare”; Long, Fye, and Jarvis), or policy debates. Artifacts may include publications by incarcerated writers (Jacobi), rhetorical histories of African American, Latinx, Jewish, and immigrant communities (Grobman; Lathan; Pritchard; Ramirez), digital humanities projects about local civil rights efforts (Carter and Dent; Mutnick), oral histories and digital storytelling projects and with local, historically underrepresented groups (Carter and Conrad; Jolliffe, “Arkansas Delta”; Kinloch; Licona and Gonzalez; Mutnick), newspapers about issues related to homelessness written by homeless individuals (Mathieu), or community publications about local, contemporary issues written by neighborhood activists (Parks; Kuebrich), as well as scholarly publications that articulate, theorize, and/or assess these efforts and their (potential) value to both the discipline and the community. Some community projects are long-standing and sustainable, while others are *ad hoc*, time-limited, or open-ended.

Many community-based projects are intensely local, and many blend pedagogical and scholarly methods and methodologies, making it difficult at best to define community-engaged work in general or establish set evaluative criteria. The Carnegie Foundation’s Community Engagement Classification offers one resource; the Imagining America initiative (Ellison and Eatman) instigated by the White House Millennial Council offers another. These and individual institutions’ articulated guidelines (Provost’s Committee, Michigan State; Phelps; “Engaged Scholarship,” UNC-Greensboro) model ways of acknowledging and rewarding discipline-driven community-based projects for the ways they build and reflect disciplinary knowledge, produce new, hybrid forms of theoretical and applied knowledge, and promote connections among universities and different communities. One constant in evaluating community-engaged projects is evidence of discernible, specific contributions such projects make to the public good.

## Principles for Evaluating Quality, Rigor, and Success

“Off-campus” or “engaged” projects are often labeled and undervalued as merely service. As CCCC members, we agree with Ernest Boyer that engagement is a critical aspect of community responsibility,<sup>1</sup> and that, when done well, community-based work blends traditional divisions of academic labor: namely, teaching, research, and service. When community projects are well developed and executed, those divisions are in constant interaction and reinforcement. When they are working poorly, they are imbalanced.

One of the most important aspects of effectively and fairly evaluating community-engaged projects is to recognize the incredible scope and variety of activities that constitute quality, rigorous, ethical, and successful examples. Some projects are easily identified as such because they result in familiar professional genres. For example, some community-engaged scholars work with social agencies to compose innovative curricula distributed through localized publications or popular

websites for nonacademic audiences. Still others—responding to the needs of a wider public that includes employers, citizen groups, legislators, and general readers—promote or advocate for research-based approaches to literacy development in blogs, videos, newspapers, newsletters, public interviews, or testimony before government officials.

Additionally, some community-engaged work in our field involves partnerships with organizations situated outside of the academy, such as community nonprofits, faith-based groups, museums, hospitals, prisons, tutoring centers, and English as a Second Language programs. Working in such contexts requires not simply a volunteer ethos but also considerable disciplinary expertise. Likewise, the production of effective community interactions, events, and artifacts that differ from traditional scholarly modes of communication involves both deep disciplinary knowledge and extensive critical and collaborative intellectual labor.

CCCC therefore encourages each higher education institution to establish criteria and processes appropriate to its culture and region for accurate, fair, and informed peer evaluation of community-based projects. Such criteria might include consideration of important but not fully tangible outcomes, including the following:

- How reciprocal was the project? To what extent did all the stakeholders involved (campus and community constituencies, which may include students and community members) benefit tangibly or intangibly from the project, its process, and outcomes?
- How well was the project informed by the significant and growing body of scholarship on community-based writing projects in our field? To what extent might this project potentially extend this scholarship?
- How open to self-evaluation and criticism are the stakeholders involved in the project, especially if the project is intended to grow or continue in the future? Specifically, are community members included in the feedback and evaluation process in meaningful ways? By what mechanisms is the project evaluated and community feedback solicited and reviewed? In what ways do the stakeholders work together to address concerns raised in the feedback and evaluation process?
- How ethically grounded was the project? Were appropriate permissions gathered to conduct community-based inquiry? Did the project take care to credit all participants and treat marginalized groups respectfully and fairly?<sup>2</sup>
- To what extent is new knowledge developed? New knowledge can take any number of forms, including published artifacts, performance events, media for community organizations, new teaching curricula, or new opportunities for community-university dialogue. To whom is this new knowledge valuable, and how can we know?

- (For long-range projects) To what extent is the project built to be sustainable? Does it have sufficient infrastructure and scaffolding? What resources provided by university and/or community stakeholders are available in the short and long term? What resources will be needed, when, and by what mechanism(s) will they be sought?

The application of such criteria will necessitate that graduate students, faculty members, and staff involved in community-engaged work carefully document each phase of their projects.

## Conclusion

This statement offers extensive information and guidance for administrators who evaluate community-engaged work in our field. It is also signals the importance of community-engaged work along with the people and programs that undertake it and stand to be evaluated. Given the ubiquity of traditional teaching-scholarship-service distinctions, we urge colleagues who do community-engaged work to attend to the complex, rhetorical contexts in which their efforts will be assessed and to respond accordingly. On campuses where community-engaged work may not be understood or valued robustly, we recommend (to whatever degree possible), colleagues translate their work into locally available, meaningful terms. Doing so supports the ultimate goal of this statement: to make visible and measurable the intellectual richness and value community-engaged work brings to academe. In the most productive settings, the evaluation of community-engaged work will engage teachers and scholars in dialogue with not only administrators but also community members themselves: the individuals for whom the “success” of any given project is a matter of lived consequence.

## Notes

1. As Shirley K. Rose and Irwin Weiser write: “The 1990 report authored by Ernest Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, and the 1999 report of the Kellogg Commission, *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution*, are frequently credited with initiating the discussion of ‘engagement’ in the higher education community” (1).
2. To this end, we refer readers to the important CCCC Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research in Composition Studies.

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