



Genre Analysis and the Community Writing Course

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This article chronicles changes in the author's service-learning pedagogy, concentrating on his recent attention to genre and its consequences for course design. The cumulative influences of rhetoric, discourse community theory, collaborative assignments, and genre theory are traced. The core claim, however, is that instructors should help students grasp the concept of genre as social action. Included are descriptions of assignments for first-year and advanced courses, plus student samples of genre analysis memos.

When I began introducing community-based writing projects in my college courses a decade ago, I mainly wanted to get students to engage in robust forms of rhetoric. My mantra was *audience*: analyze your audience, adapt to your audience, anticipate multiple audiences, compare academic and workplace audiences. I was in graduate school, and soon enough I became immersed in composition theory, at the time dominated by talk of discourse communities, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies. Soon my key words became *community* and *culture*, and I started asking my service-learning students other kinds of questions: What is a discourse community, and how might you leverage that concept in your work as a writer? How should the history and context of your community partner shape your writing task? Which values, habits and conventions characterize the culture of your community partner and the readership for your project? How can you craft a writerly identity attuned into that culture?



But I didn't abandon audience. I continued to prod students to consider the basic demographic characteristics of their intended readership, gave them Aristotelian schemas to work with, and borrowed audience terms from technical communication (multiple audiences, gatekeeper audiences, hidden audiences). But to operationalize my newfound sense of writing as situated social activity, of how context shapes every occasion of reading and writing, I added an agency profile assignment as the prelude to community writing

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projects. If, I posited to students, we understand partner nonprofit agencies as discourse communities to which we apprentice ourselves, don't we need to understand those contexts before stepping into them as writers? From this perspective, writing is seen less as a set of rules or textual moves and more as a means of acting within particular communities and organizations.

The agency profile asks students to interview community partners and review agency publications to discern the ethos of the organization, to sketch its history, and to analyze how writing circulates within it.¹

But soon I shifted my pedagogical attention to *process*, although here I deploy that term differently than is typical in composition studies. A bit of background: I began my teaching career in a writing program in which the spirit and language of composition's process movement had become naturalized, and thus we designed assignments in multiple drafts, emphasized invention and revision, built in extensive peer review, acknowledged the recursive character of composing, and so on. As a graduate student experimenting with service-learning within that context, I emphasized how community-based writing projects likewise demanded extensive drafting, sharing, and revising. They also, I argued, gave students compelling motives to persist through several drafts to meet the needs of their community partners and local audiences. Yet the renewed attention to process that I refer to in this essay was not about revision-building revision into my service-learning pedagogy always was (and still is) a given. My thinking about process really changed when I started assigning *collaborative* rather than individual



writing for-the-community projects. Requiring students to work as authentic co-authors on projects introduced seismic changes to their composing processes and to my teaching process. I turned to collaborative projects in part for my own teaching survival—I couldn't keep track of twenty different projects at once—and in part on more principled grounds—workplace writers typically compose collaboratively. But simply telling students to work in teams, I discovered quickly, is not enough. Students usually have few models of collaboration to follow other than the dysfunctional dynamics that characterize so many group projects in traditional classrooms. My response was to build in more opportunities for practice with, and reflection on, the collaborative writing process.

I started by inviting students to share narratives of prior collaborative projects (lots of griping here, but also some bright spots) from which we drew up class guidelines for co-authoring; I then required them to kick the collaborative writing process into action by composing agency profiles in project teams, making the profile a fairly low-risk test run of the collaborative process; and I debriefed each team after the agency profile and required each group to compose a one-page team plan memo to guide their work (the memo outlined roles and responsibilities, preferred modes of communication practices, checks and balances to ensure accountability, the timeline, and so on). Also, after Robert McEachern's "Problems in Service Learning and Technical/Professional Writing: Incorporating the Perspective of Nonprofit Management" appeared in 2001, I often assigned it to help students anticipate the complexities (and potential frustrations) of collaborating with short staffed and under funded community organizations.

To further accommodate the realities of an intense collaborative process, plus the necessary shuttling between campus and community, I rearranged the class schedule, substituting project team conferences for several regular classes. During peak project weeks, this usually meant canceling every other class. I found that in half-hour team meetings in my office I could get project-specific updates and give project-specific advice that regular class sessions did not allow. Canceling regular sessions also opened time for teams to meet with their community partners, and I wanted to send the message that just as much learning should happen there as in our regular classes. Overall, my teaching and students' learning processes looked and felt quite changed when



compared to those accommodated by my earlier course designs.

As this brief narrative suggests, I have revised my teaching habits and assignments over the years, sometimes with new priorities muscling out older ones, but more often in an additive spirit. Each new specialized vocabulary—for audience, for discourse community, for process—has become institutionalized and, I hope, integrated with my pedagogy. The process of course revision continues, and the newcomer is genre.

Genre Knowledge

Carolyn Miller, Charles Bazerman, David Russell, and Amy Devitt, among others, have alerted composition studies to the importance of genre and genre theory. They have argued convincingly that far from static structures or simple formats, genres are vital tools that shape the work of readers and writers, and that their importance to writing and the teaching of writing has long been underestimated. As confirmation that genre has arrived, some recent textbooks put it at their center (Devitt, Reiff, and Bawarshi; Mulvaney and Jolliffe).

David Jolliffe is the only scholar I am aware of who has drawn explicit connections between service-learning and genre theory.² While explaining the limits of my “taxonomy of purpose” (writing for/about/with the community), Jolliffe makes a convincing case that instead of attending only to the rhetorical *purpose* of writing, we should also examine the *tools* writers use to get their work done—and genres are among the most significant of those tools. Grounding his analysis in activity theory, Jolliffe argues that the genres that students use or are assigned in a given course signal how involved they really are—as writers—with civic communities (in the case of service-learning) or with the academic disciplines (in the case of writing across the curriculum). For example, if students in a service-learning course are indeed involved as writers in the activity systems of their community partners, those students, rather than sticking only to academic genres such as the essay and journal, should be appropriating the tools/genres that their community partners typically use.

Jolliffe’s emphasis on genre as a measure of involvement marks a step forward in assessing community-based writing curricula. He reminds us that the language of rhetoric, while essential to service-learning practitioners, is not



enough. However, I credit Anne Beaufort's *Writing in the Real World: Making the Transition from School to Work* with changing my teaching. Beaufort's ethnography of novice writers in a nonprofit organization is not exactly about service-learning—all four women that Beaufort profiles have already finished college—but the study resonates powerfully with what I have observed as my students have done writing-for-the-community projects over the years.

She argues that in order to succeed, fledgling writers need to operationalize five kinds of knowledge: *rhetorical* knowledge, *discourse community* knowledge, *process* knowledge, *genre* knowledge, and *subject matter* knowledge. This taxonomy helped me to name the kinds of knowledge that I

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had been stumbling toward in my early course revisions and to grasp how I had been giving short shrift to genre knowledge and subject matter knowledge.

By calling attention to genre, Beaufort motivated me to revise my courses, although those changes in course design play out somewhat differently depending on whether I am teaching a first-year service-learning course or an advanced one (more on this in a moment). By including subject matter knowledge, Beaufort suggests that even skilled writers and sophisticated rhetors often stumble when they are not familiar enough with *what* they are writing about. The implications of this for community writing pedagogies are troubling, as students are often asked, on short order, to work not only with a new discourse community-itself a daunting task-but also with new (to them) subject matter. Beaufort's insights and my own experience prompted me to formalize a pedagogical practice I had been moving toward tacitly: Even when students assert a preference for trying something entirely new, I assign them, when possible, to projects related to their majors and/or prior experiences, allowing them to leverage accumulated subject matter knowledge.

Two Courses

I typically teach two kinds of service-learning courses. One is first-year writing course that devotes most of its time and attention to academic writing as keyed to a particular theme (usually economic justice) and features small but significant writing-for-the-community projects that students do in teams



of two or three. The other is an advanced course that tips toward professional writing, with semester-long, collaborative writing-for-the-community projects at its hub.

First-Year Writing

I used to welcome just about any genre into my first-year service-learning courses, so long as it was invited by our community partners and not wildly beyond the ken of what I thought my students could handle. But now I am much more picky. No more creating brochures or handbooks. No more designing newsletters or webpages from scratch. I suggest to community partners that my first-year students are best poised to handle projects that share some kinship with the essayistic or research genres that typically prevail in first-year writing courses. While I am intrigued by how service-learning can expand the kinds and purposes of writing in first-year courses, I still see my first-year course as in large part about helping students find their footing in the dizzying newness of academic discourse. In that sense, I am a bit stodgy and traditional; I nod (not grudgingly) to the university's expectation that first-year writing be a starting place for learning academic genres and habits.

For the first half of the semester, my students compose personal and critical essays, and starting at mid-semester they begin service-learning projects that I have set up in advance with several local nonprofit organizations. I opt for genres akin to the essay both to make the community-based and classroom-based parts of my course reasonably coherent and to steer first-year college writers toward projects that I believe they can do, and do well, in four to five weeks. When asked, nonprofits reveal an appetite for such writing: they ask students to compose profiles of their clients, staff, and volunteers to post on their websites; they need journalistic articles on events to feature in their own newsletters, or to submit to local newspapers; they can use internal research reports on topics relevant to new or ongoing agency initiatives. First-year students generally find such genres both engaging and challenging.

So how I limit the diversity of genres when soliciting and assigning projects marks a key change from my earlier teaching practices, but so does how I deal with genre *after* projects have been selected and assigned. Early in the project trajectory, but usually after they write the letter of understanding and agency profile, I ask students to do an abbreviated genre analysis that involves their



seeking out at least three examples of their project's genre or genre family. For example, if asked to write an online profile of a nonprofit volunteer, the project team needs to find several examples of such profiles on the Web. Then they list the recurrent features and conventions—large and small, verbal and visual, textual and contextual—that they observe in those examples, sorting those items in the categories “absolutely essential,” “common to most,” and “optional/variable.” To spur them to an awareness of how genres act on readers, I ask them to consider how the intended audience typically reads such genres (Will most scan and skip around? Read it slowly and sequentially?), and to anticipate how readers would react if certain features of the genre were absent or changed. Initially I did this just as a homework assignment and in-class activity, but now I require students to follow up our initial in-class discussion of each group's sample genres with a formal oral presentation or a collaborative memo.³ Below is an example.

TO: Prof. Deans
FROM: Tyler Sagardoy, Karla Ovalle,
Sreela Nambodiri
DATE: November 9, 2004
SUBJECT: Genre Profile for the Village of Arts and Humanities Group

The following memo explains the genre our group will employ for our community project. We began by visualizing our core audience and our profile's specific objective. We then analyzed the various similarities of the sampled profiles by identifying common traits, interpreting their function within the profile, and understanding the rhetoric behind each characteristic.

Elements

Our group studied an eclectic assembly of profiles of the desired genre. The profiles come from various sources—one from the Internet, one from the Village of Arts and Humanities, one from yourself, Prof. Deans, and two from the Haverford College Career Development Office. In addition to diversity of medium, the people covered differed—one was an African-American storyteller, one survived breast cancer, one practiced dentistry with charity, one served as President of Children Now, and one who works with a Hispanic children's group.

Absolutely Essential

- Heading with person's name
- Person's accomplishments after joining organization



- Smooth and relevant transitions
- Concise, objective, accessible language
- A presentation of a positive connotation

Common to Most

- Person's reason for joining organization
- Personal history
- Brief information about the organization
- Engaging vocabulary

Optional/Variable

- Quotations
- Personal anecdote as an introduction
- Specific dates of accomplishments
- Contact information concerning the person profiled and/or the organization he or she works for

Content

The profiles varied in structure and techniques used, but each profile was tastefully and appropriately positioned. A couple began with anecdotes concerning the person's reason for joining and remaining with his or her particular organization, while others began spouting information about the person directly; a few alluded to the profiled person's history then revealed his or her accomplishments with the world, while others showed the world's bureaucracies and his or her place within them. Most profiles were well structured—a few even took advantage of space and budgeted words well for transitions. In a third-person, non-negative tone, the profiles pulled themselves together and often complemented itself in certain parts—especially with the introductions and conclusions.

Design

The beginning titles vary—some are catchy zingers while a few state the profiled person's name and position. Using compact, impacting paragraphs, words are budgeted well and concisely cater to the central ideas. All profiles analyzed did not separate paragraphs by a heading, nor did excessive graphics illustrate points that potentially detract ideas from the words. The only graphics used were a facial photograph of the profiled.

Audience

The profiles were designed for the general public, but in different ways appealed to many smaller audiences, including philanthropic groups or liberal learners researching. Vocabulary levels reside above the national reading level—words are neither excessively formal nor exotic. We must market our profile on “Big Man” toward schools, their facul-



ty and administrators, and collaborators and community groups from everywhere. Our words will appeal to a comprehensive group-or vocabulary will be at a high school freshmen level, but we hope to present a deeper, better-connected context with our words for the more enlightened.

Format

The two-pages and five-hundred words will begin with a small introduction and conclusion—a gateway and exit for the reader. We found the profile given to us by the Village to be very dry. Because we are much like our readers, we think a couple elements ought to be altered to make for a better read.

Advanced Course

My advanced community writing course, titled *Writing as Community Action: Theory and Practice of Writing For Nonprofits*, blends professional writing and the liberal arts, especially rhetoric. At its core are writing-for-the-community projects in a wide range of workplace and civic genres (webpage content, volunteer handbooks, research reports, public relations materials, newsletters, proposals). In advance of the semester I negotiate several potential projects with local organizations, but in this course I also invite students to explore original projects options at organizations with which they are currently involved.

Unlike with my first-year course, with this one I feel little allegiance to academic discourse. Students devote nearly all their energies to nonacademic genres—mainly to their community project genre but also to the memo. Also unlike the first-year course, this one is not gathered around a particular theme because students work with too many different kinds organizations—environmental advocacy groups, neighborhood organizing coalitions, public health nonprofits, etc.—to make that feasible. Instead I include readings from classical and contemporary rhetoric that raise broad questions about how rhetoric relates to ethics (Plato’s *Gorgias*; selections from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and Burke’s *Rhetoric of Motives*; Katz); selections from composition theory that underscore the social nature of composing (Faigley; Ede and Lunsford); several pieces that examine school-to-work writing transitions (Anson and Forsberg; Doheney-Farina; excerpts from Dias, et al.); an ethnography that follows novice writers in a nonprofit agency (Beaufort); a few pieces on service-learning generally (Morton; Franklin; McEachern) and how it informs writing (excerpts from Bowdon and Scott; excerpts from Deans, *Community Action*); a two week unit on visual design (Tufte; R. Williams;



excerpts from Schriver); and a handbook on style (J. Williams).

Last time I taught the course I added a strand on genre and genre theory. This came about in part because genre has been a hot topic in composition studies and in part because I had decided to adopt Beaufort's five knowledges (rhetoric, discourse community, process, genre, subject matter) as a schema for thinking through community-based writing. Beaufort helped me to develop a more precise vocabulary for community-based writing and to frame several of the readings and course assignments that run in tandem with the major agency project: audience analysis activities (rhetorical knowledge); the agency profile memo (discourse community knowledge); the team collaboration plan and timeline memo (process knowledge); and the new genre analysis memo (genre knowledge). I couldn't find a way to address subject matter knowledge, except to affirm Beaufort's reflections on its importance and to steer students toward projects connected to their majors and prior experiences.

To make the genre component work, I supplemented Beaufort's chapter on genre with a lecture on Carolyn Miller's notion of genre as social action, plus introduce terms such as "genre set" and "genre system" (Bazerman, "Systems"). The aim of that lecture was to dispel the popular conception of genre as a static format, to explain how genres act on readers by cueing reader expectations, to spur awareness of how genres do certain kinds of discursive work within genre systems and discourse communities, and to loop back to Beaufort's claim that emerging writers need to operationalize genre knowledge as one key to success. The lecture also helped set up the genre analysis assignment, which began very much as in the first-year course but resulted in more extensive memos that reflected not only on genre but also on how genre relates to an array of rhetorical concerns (including visual design) raised in earlier readings and class discussions.

The genre analysis memo is not the same as a style sheet. While genre analysis helps students identify many of the regularized textual and visual features that should prevail in the final drafts of their agency projects, I also want students to think about what a particular genre *does* to readers and how genre variation can provoke a spectrum of consequences. This is not a huge assignment—just two or three single-spaced pages—and comes after community projects are underway, on the heels of the letter of understanding, agency



profile memo, and team plan memo. Students generally find this assignment easier than the others, perhaps because they are already knee-deep in their projects or because, after having written two earlier memos, their emerging genre knowledge about memo writing helps them to write a memo on genre.

I present two samples of genre analysis memos here. The second reveals students, as is often the case with service learning projects, struggling to triangulate a genre that does not fit into any obvious category.⁴

MEMO

DATE: APRIL 10, 2003
TO: PROFESSOR DEANS
FROM: TEAM CHARLOTTE'S WEB (LINDSAY HILLS, ADRIA ROBBIN)
RE: GENRE ANALYSIS MEMO

The following memo offers a brief analysis of the genre for our community writing project. In order to do this effectively, we consider the common elements among the genre samples, followed by an analysis of their content and design aspects. We then assess the needs of our own audience in relationship to our discourse community and offer a thumbnail sketch of what elements we hope to incorporate into our Volunteer Guide.

Extracting the Elements

In order to perform our Genre Analysis we gathered together a variety of volunteer guides/training manuals. Of the five guides we used, three were from the internet, one of which was similar in purpose to the one we will be designing, as it was for the National Association of LGBT Community Centers; one was an internal Bryn Mawr College training manual used for a tutoring program; and one was from an outside non-profit. When flipping through the guides it was clear that the content and design elements could be divided into the three groups outlined below.

▪ **Absolutely Essential**

- Table of contents
- Cover
- Page numbers

▪ **Common To Most**

- Welcome letter to the new volunteer
- How-to section of clerical protocols and responsibilities of the volunteer
- Sample documents that the volunteer would need



• **Optional/Variable**

- List of the board of directors
- Mission statement or history of the organization
- Location of the organization; list of branch offices
- Codes of conduct
- Who's who in the office and their contact information
- Credits for the manual
- Tables and images
- Volunteer rights
- Additional resources

Considering the Content

The internet guides we found seemed to be very factually based. They were straight forward and matter-of-fact. The "FIRST" guide did offer a bit of informal narrative to break up the monotony of the factual information that was essential to their guide.

The Bryn Mawr College guide clearly had a different audience than the other pieces, as it used cultural acronyms unique to the discourse community, making the piece an exclusive resource to those already within the community. The "Bread Basket" guide uses a great deal of personal narrative in order to evoke pathos in its new volunteers, immediately making them feel like they are part of the community.

Deconstructing the Design

The internet guides were all outlines, some structured numerically and others with bullets. All three had hyperlinks, allowing the volunteer to easily flow from one piece of information to the other, accessing only the portions they needed. Other than that, the internet guides were limited in their design elements. The Bryn Mawr College guide book used a more juvenile Oldstyle font, in some ways questioning the ethos of the organization. The cover shows no reoccurring design elements, and in many ways is overcrowded with unnecessary bullets and poor formatting. On a first glance, one might not take the program seriously at all. The "Bread Basket" offers a consistent look throughout the guide, offering a strong sense of credibility to the new volunteer.

Anticipating the Audience

The Volunteer Guide we are creating for The Attic needs to grasp youth's attention. We will use common design elements such as "The Attic" font, which is more contemporary than some of the more standard fonts, as well as common images/logos in order to draw their initial attention. As far as content is concerned our main goal is that new volunteers have a resource guide to which they can continually refer throughout their time at The Attic. On the serious side, it will address policies, rules, and legal issues; on the lighter side, it will have information regarding the "Gay Ghetto" or the



Philadelphia Gay-neighborhood and the social traditions of The Attic. It is essential to the success of our Volunteer Guide that we take into account the language used both in the queer community as a whole and among the youth of The Attic itself.

Finalizing the Format

Despite the fact that a Volunteer Guide has never been developed for The Attic, we will draw upon the five sample manuals we collected to help us in our development process. We also realize that the lack of previous volunteer guides or manuals of any kind and the youth-centered nature of The Attic allow us some liberties in design and content. However, we would like to retain some elements common to our sample guides in order to maintain a credible and professional image for the organization. The fact that our Guide has to be approved by the YPC will also allow us to gain feedback from current youth and Youth Staff in regards to the format, style, content and the overall feel of the Volunteer Guide. This process will serve an important role in the development of the Volunteer Guide. We look forward to sharing our ideas with the youth and receiving constructive feedback in an attempt to make a Guide that will be both helpful and attractive.

MEMORANDUM

To: Tom Deans
From: Jeph Gord and Samara Schwartz
Date: March 23, 2004
Subject: Genre Analysis: NSNP Project

This memo presents an analysis of the genre that we feel best describes the historical exhibit that we are creating for the Norris Square Neighborhood Project (NSNP). Due to our audience and the form that our exhibit will take, we are working with a unique genre. Defining this genre will provide us with applicable examples as we approach our project and determine how to address our audience.

Defining our Genre

Our genre does not fit neatly into a single category.

- It seems to be most like an historical **museum exhibit**. It is composed of images and captions, or “labels” in museum terminology, which are organized in some way that will make sense to the audience - most often, chronologically. The pictures will need to convey the area’s history with the help of information-dense but concise labels.
- But our audience is not composed of museum-goers. The exhibit will become part of the Center, to be enjoyed casually by all who frequent the friendly, colorful space.



The exhibit might be conceived as a **poster board presentation** or an exhibit at a **children's museum**.

Considering the Genre

With these ideas in mind, we collected a variety of examples. We chose to gather so many because our project's genre does not neatly align completely with any genre we have found. Beneath each example is a brief listing of the example's strongest features.

- Labels included in Magill Library's Women's History Month exhibit
(Formal tone; almost no contrast except with subheads; small font/label size)
- Integrated Natural Science Center (INSC) senior thesis poster board-style presentations
(Varying degrees of formality, contrast, and other design elements)
- An exhibit panel from the Franklin Institute Science Museum, representing the 2004 Benjamin Franklin Awards exhibit
(Professional design; image-heavy; simple 20-words-or-less, child-friendly labels)
- A community children's museum web site: www.discoverymuseums.org
(Colorful design; community feeling; large images; labels that aren't information dense)
- A pictorial history text: *Venice, California: Coney Island of the Pacific* by Jeffrey Stanton
(Formal tone; very effective images that tell a story; dull design)
- A step-by-step guide for museum curators: *Making Exhibit Labels* by Beverly Serrell
(Examples of effective and ineffective labels; concise labels, book itself has dull design)

We noted which elements they have in common. (We referred to all of the above as exhibits.)

Absolutely essential

- An introduction to the exhibit
- Design that reveals the exhibit's ethos
- Photos/images

Common to Most

- Straight-forward information vs. editorial (limited amount of analysis)
- Quality labels
- Short, often varying in length
- Relatively simplistic vocabulary
- Information-dense



- Easy-to-read fonts
- Repetition of visual elements and words, especially jargon
- Attention paid to importance of alignment
- Contrast with fonts/subject headings
- Proximity: the label is closest to the image it describes

Optional/Variable

- Pathos that brings the exhibit to life
- Non-photographic visuals: Graphics/charts
- Creative design

Extracting the Basics

Drawing upon these examples, it seems that our project should incorporate elements that fit into all three categories.

- Images and visuals that tell a story and will be enhanced by but not dependent upon labels
- Concise labels that have the qualities listed above
- Contrasting fonts and designs that bring the exhibit to life
- Thoughtful organization that attracts the reader (headings and sub heads) and encourages eye flow
- Repetition to unite our exhibit, perhaps in the use of a logo that appears on every label
- Adequate white space to keep the exhibit from feeling text-heavy
- Pathos that rings true with the NSNP's ethos

Anticipating the Audience

The historical exhibit we are creating needs to grasp the attention of NSNP children, volunteers, and community members who frequent the Center. Many of the people who we hope to reach through this exhibit are school children who participate in the organization's programs. We need to creatively display images in a way that will draw children into the exhibit and hold their attention long enough for them to read brief but information-dense labels that explain what the photos themselves cannot. Though older youth and adults will also peruse the exhibit, it will be best to stick with a fourth grade-level vocabulary so that it is accessible for the most neighborhood residents possible.

An historical exhibit at a museum or within a text would be more inclined to simply describe history in a straightforward and emotionally detached manner. However, we want to remain true to the communal, nurturing environment in which the exhibit will be displayed; it would be much more effective to relate the history directly to those who are reading it. This will involve being less formal with our vocabulary and using



inclusive words like “we” to create a feeling of community - that the NSNP is their organization and that our exhibit is their connection to their neighborhood’s past.

Finalizing the Genre

However, being more informal does not mean that we must sacrifice a professional design. By utilizing the examples we have collected and remaining true to the NSNP’s ethos, we can develop a quality exhibit that reflects the NSNP’s pathos as well. Our exhibit has a unique genre that we cannot precisely pinpoint, even after drafting this memo. But the fact that it does not neatly fit into any category in reality gives us the freedom to tailor our project to the NSNP’s needs. We look forward to using these various genre examples as we design our historical exhibit.

The student thinking evident in these documents may be more convincing than any argument I can muster for introducing genre theory to the service-learning course. We see novice writers focusing on genre as a tool-in-use even as they wrestle with related questions of rhetoric and design. That is as it should be, because while I want to give genre the attention it deserves, I do not wish to make it the centerpiece of my teaching. In the additive spirit of how I revise my courses, the new informs rather ejects the old.

Continuing in that habit, I now find myself intrigued by how activity theory—in which genre plays a pivotal role—can contribute to our understanding of the contradictions that emerge in community-university partnerships (Deans, “Shifting”). This turn to activity theory may be an extension of my interest in genre theory, and it may be in step with scholarly trends in composition studies, but I also like to think—and others articles in this issue affirm my hunch—that service-learning practitioners are especially inclined to revamp their courses regularly because they open themselves to the press of student writers doing work of real consequence and to the vitality of local civic communities.



Notes

1 For examples of agency profiles, see Deans, *Community Action*, p. 273-337, and Deans, Partnerships, 156-57 and 183-84. For a similar approach, see Bowdon and Scott's discourse analysis memo assignment (150-58).

2 For a good list of scholarship on genre theory in composition studies, see Rebecca Moore Howard's "Genre Theory: A Bibliography" <<http://wrt-howard.syr.edu/Bibs/Genre.htm>>.

3 For a similar genre analysis activity, see Deans, *Writing and Community Action*, 358. As for assigning a memo, I have found that asking first-year students to write memos introduces another set of genre questions-plus a dose of irony-because they are unfamiliar with the memo genre. Since I do not have time to teach the rhetorical and generic moves of the memo, many of their memos are clumsy, but I don't fret about this. In my advanced course I explicitly teach memo writing because students compose several of them.

4 For another approach to a genre analysis, see Bazerman, "Speech Acts."

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