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Online Access: Grant Writing as Reciprocal Service-Learning at a Hispanic-Serving Institution

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Introduction

In Spring 2022, I had the opportunity to teach our upper-division, undergraduate grant writing course. I taught at our public, four-year university for ten years and, though I had never taught a grant writing course before, had been a Ph.D. student in Texas Tech University's Technical Communication & Rhetoric Program for two years. I was enrolled in a grant writing course myself that same semester.

The course I agreed to teach didn't have a history of filling and was vulnerable to cancellation for several reasons. Though we have a technical writing certificate that includes the grant writing course, the course proposal was outdated, does not fulfill a general education requirement, and is not part of a major. However, we had some enrollment success moving the course online. I wanted to offer students a valuable learning experience and find a way to help recruit students to the course. As a non-tenure track faculty member, I put myself in a vulnerable position by accepting a course that historically got canceled, but I was afforded some security through my three-year contract. So, I began to think about ways I could fill the course. My mind went directly to service-learning. I've taught First-Year Composition service-learning in the past, so I had some experience and realized if I was asking students to write grants, why not be writing grants for our local non-profits?

Grant writing courses only occasionally leverage service-learning as part of their pedagogy. However, service-learning is one way to increase access to experiential learning, strengthen career readiness, and deepen students' connections to the local

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community. Especially for marginalized students who may not be able to afford to take more “traditional” internship positions, service-learning can be an excellent opportunity to gain experience.

Of course, Writing Studies, in general, has a rich history of using service-learning. For example, Beaman & Jackson (2019) offered best practices and challenges for creating service-learning courses at community colleges. They found, through scholarship and analysis of their own community college’s service-learning courses, that “service-learning programs attest to the transformational power of these programs when students, especially at-risk or underprepared students, recognize their own agency to make change through action in their communities” (Beaman & Jackson, 2019, p. 83).

Current research supports teaching grant writing and other technical communication courses as service-learning courses (Jones, 2017; Bentley & Swan, 2018); some even specifically note the strength of service-learning technical communication courses in online spaces (Soria & Weiner, 2013; Bourelle, 2014; Nielsen, 2016). In particular, “through service-learning activities, students in online technical communication classrooms develop professional skills, contribute to the classroom and community, and take greater responsibility for their education” (Nielsen, 2016, p. 250). This scholarship highlights a precedent for teaching service-learning courses as online courses and service-learning in a fully online modality can be successful.

Scholar-teachers have also addressed how service-learning grant writing courses meet social justice needs and goals (Presley, 2020). However, research also suggests service-learning is sometimes run on a deficit model for first-generation students because instructors approach these students “as a homogeneous, deficient group and reduce learning to an input-environment-output (I-E-O) model” (Taylor et al., 2019, p. 350). Taylor et al. (2019) argue for more acknowledgment that “learning is a process of becoming, a process in which individual learning is always embodied, social, and contextualized” (p. 359).

With this research in mind, I took the existing course and redesigned it into a fully online and asynchronous, service-learning, grant writing course for the first time.

Service-Learning at California State University Channel Islands

Though the term “service-learning” appeared in Sigmon’s 1979 publication, “Service-Learning: Three Principles,” to describe students who received internship credits for participating in community-based projects and which offered a foundational view of

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service-learning pedagogy, the term “service-learning” has expanded to include many definitions and pedagogical practices. These practices range across schools and contexts and vary widely even between courses on the same campus. Experiential learning and community-based research have many crossovers; in some instances, these approaches are combined (Preiser-Houy & Navarrete, 2006; Goss et al., 2010; Nandan, 2010; Dorner et al., 2017). Some scholars even remove the criteria of college credit, citing how service-learning is “a method through which undergraduates work alongside faculty mentors on projects collaboratively designed with community partners, includes active reflection, and enhances the content and experience of their programs of study” (Anderson et al., 2019). Though service-learning has diverse contexts, applications, and even definitions, a resounding agreement is that service-learning achieves course objectives through both engaging with a community and reflecting on that experience. In *Writing Studies*, I use Baca’s (2012) definition that the goal of service-learning is “to apply academic objectives in specific community settings by using critical, reflective thinking while creating a sense of civic responsibility” (xi).

California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) is the 23rd campus in the California State University system (CSU), the nation’s largest and most diverse public university system, educating 477,000 students a year across the 800 miles from Humboldt to San Diego (California State University, 2022). Students at CSU represent 95% from California and 87% first-year students come from California public high schools (California State University, 2022)

Established in 2002, CSUCI is the newest CSU and has about 7,000 students. Students who identify as Underrepresented Minority (URM) make up 59% of the student population, and 62% identify as first-generation college students (CSU Success Dashboard) and, because of their location in that identity, bring strengths to the classroom. In line with Jean (2017), I want to challenge the use of labeling these students “at-risk” or “underprepared.” Jean (2017) argues that “labeling a segment of the student population as ‘at-risk’ because they have experienced historical poverty and vicious discrimination, however, is problematic” (p. 28) and underpins how these students “benefit tremendously from campus housing, experiential learning, club involvement, and overall engagement” (p. 28). Not only do students benefit from service-learning, but they also bring valuable assets to the service-learning experience.

Community engagement is a CSUCI mission pillar, and CSUCI has an active Center for Community Engagement as part of the CSU system-wide community engagement initiative. The CCE (2022) shares “each year over 1,800 CSUCI students enroll in a service-learning course providing on average over 40,000 hours of service to the community” (Center for Community Engagement).

Using an asset-based model, I created a partnership with our Center for Community Engagement (CCE) to turn our existing grant writing course into a service-learning course where students chose a CCE community partner and worked with them to develop a full grant packet. As a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in a predominantly Latinx community, this course is a useful case study for how students worked with local community partners on grants to help support the specific needs of this community, relying, in part, on their own lived experiences and expertise. Students became a bridge between the community and the university (Jones, 2017).

This article will explore the access granted by a fully online and asynchronous course for students who juggle jobs, school, and family and how the course enabled these students to work with community partners on real grants addressing real community needs. These connections fostered reciprocity by giving students valuable grant writing experience while providing a free grant writing service for local non-profits with already stretched funds. Grants ranged from working with land conservation, to resources for immigrant families, to a local LGBTQIA+ youth foundation. This article, that involves using student reflections, community partner surveys, and pedagogical analysis will argue how the course's fully online nature helped increase students' access to participate and engage in service-learning by writing grants for their community partner clients.

Asset-Based Model

When I introduce my university's context, I want to make clear that my students' material and social realities, their lived experiences (Collins, 2000), and their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) can all be used as assets in their education. Bourdieu (1986/2011) used cultural capital to help explain how power was maintained, transferred, and upheld in society through three sources: objective (goods, art, literature), institutional (education), and embodied (language, gestures). Inherent in Bourdieu's cultural capital is a deficit model many have now challenged. For example, Yosso (2005) made a move away from deficit interpretations and instead took cultural capital further through community cultural wealth, "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and used by communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (p. 15). Yosso's specific focus on Latinx students and communities is especially relevant to my students' experiences at an HSI. Yosso outlines six forms of capital in her work: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, social capital, navigational capital, familial capital, and resistant capital; all braided together to form community cultural wealth. Many other scholars have used a

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community cultural wealth framework to inform their own pedagogy and practice (Huber, 2009; O'Shea, 2016; Fernández et al., 2020).

Inspired by Morrison's (2017) work on asset-based pedagogy in library science, I wanted to make sure to not only acknowledge the assets my students bring into the classroom but to give them the space to leverage their strengths and skills in the academic work they do. Morrison (2017) deftly argues how "the traditional academic space invalidates the knowledge of cultural wealth my students bring to the classroom" (p. 181). However, I set up my course to try and work against this invalidation. Through their work with community partners, one goal of the course was to validate and have students see how they could wield their cultural wealth to impact their own education and the local community.

An asset-based model applies not only to students but to community partners as well. For example, other scholars have examined how communities, not just students, use community cultural wealth (Fernández et al., 2020). Therefore, asset-based service-learning requires that we work with community partners rather than view community partners as needing "help" or "rescue."

One goal of this service-learning grant writing course was to teach students and give them the opportunity to learn how to work in coalition with their community partners. Before students began researching funding opportunities or anything else, they met with their community partners so community partners could share their goals, needs, and experiences with students. The community partners are the experts -- they know their organization and its projects, and most have had past success securing grants. Students then used their own assets to research funding and write a grant packet the community partner could use as a launching point for applying for funding. Many grant writing instructors have their students call their community partners "clients" to acknowledge community partner expertise. However, I wanted the language to match the CCE language used in their databases and on the website, something that students interacted with, which is why we referred to them as community partners. Also, "community partner" centers on the idea that we are working in partnership with the organization, not on behalf, or in place, of them.

The (New) Course

Our grant writing course is capped at 22, and I had 15 students enroll. By the end of the semester, one student had dropped, and one student withdrew, so I ended up with 13 students engaged in the course. The students must be in upper division standing at

the time of enrollment, so the course consisted of a mix of transfer and non-transfer juniors and seniors.

At our university, students must register with the CCE if they are involved in a service-learning course. Although the course is listed in the catalog as a service-learning course, many students were unaware the course involved service-learning. Though this could be a major issue in a traditional service-learning course, one affordance of the course's asynchronous online modality, and the project's writing intensive nature, was that students did not have to go physically to a location for their service-learning project and could conduct the whole project asynchronously from home. Waldner et al. (2012) specifically highlight access as a benefit of online service-learning, citing how online service-learning "can engage populations that otherwise may be unable to participate in a service-learning activity" (p. 126) such as students with disabilities or students who live in remote locations.

Much in line with the demographics of the university (the overall campus is 66% women), the class was all women except for one man. Most students in the course were also English majors. In our English Program, 52% of our students are Hispanic/Latino, 34% are white, 10% are Black/African American, and 3% are Asian. My class demographics matched the English Program as a whole.

These statistics are only one small aspect of my course and students' positionalities. Demographics are important to understand the context of our university and the class but do not tell the whole story. The "incompleteness" of this demographic data is why I found it so important to insert my students' voices into this piece and rely on their reflections and their own words, to share their experiences, successes, and challenges with this course.

It is also important to discuss my positionality in this course. I am a full-time lecturer, non-tenure track, faculty member, and I have been teaching at my institution for ten years. I'm a white, queer woman, mother, and current Ph.D. student. Though I do not share the majority of my students' racial or ethnic cultures, I do come from a working-class background where my mom and stepdad worked as servers at a restaurant for most of my childhood and teen years. Like many of my students, I have a blended family and am the first person in my immediate family to pursue a graduate degree. Like my students' contextual information, I write about these various positions not as a deficit but with the need to acknowledge the various contexts we inhabit when we prepare and teach a service-learning course. As discussed often in service-learning, preparing and teaching a service-learning course requires extra labor (Ziegert & McGoldrick, 2008; George-Paschal et al., 2019; Yusof et al., 2020), so it's important to know that I am NTT faculty (like many faculty who teach service-learning courses

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at my university) because NTT faculty have already high teaching loads (I teach a five-five load). One consistent tension in service-learning is the amount of extra work teaching a course like this requires.

However, the extra work is worth it, including the time it took to change modality to an asynchronous online course.

Grant Writing and Access

Since 2012, our grant writing course has reached sufficient enrollment numbers only when offered online, so I knew that offering the course asynchronously would provide the best chance of attracting enough students to run the course. As many scholars have pointed out, access is not just about “getting in.” Particularly for a HSI like CSUCI, “access entails a more complicated process of taking up residence as a writer and rhetor on a college campus” (Lloyd, 2019, p. 55). One way students who may have geographical constraints can still “take up residence” is through online courses.

In student surveys and reflections, one theme was how the online environment enabled them to participate in the course. One student used the term “accommodating,” and one specifically noted how “online courses are always a better option for me; the stress and time required for meeting in person takes away from my ability to learn/focus/enjoy the material.” I knew conducting a service-learning course fully online would present unique challenges, but I also know good pedagogy is good pedagogy, no matter the modality.

At the beginning of all my classes, online or not, I have students fill out a “Learner Info Survey” to learn more about them, and so students have the chance to share, privately, any information they’d like me to know. One question specifically asks how students are feeling about being in an online class. The students overwhelmingly responded that the online modality offered them access to courses they would not be able to take otherwise. Students “appreciate the convenience and flexibility of online class” and were “excited,” “appreciative,” and “comfortable.”

From the surveys collected in the course, about half of the students worked full-time and/or cared for family members while going to school, which also affected their ability to attend class in person and on campus. I had many Zoom meetings with students while they were in their homes with family members walking through their blurred backgrounds, from their cars, from the library in-between classes they had to take in person, and even from break rooms. Students were able to access the course itself, my office hours, and set up appointments with me on their time and schedules. After a few discussions with various students worried about emailing their community

partners late at night after getting off work, we did a quick mini-lesson on how to schedule emails in Outlook so students could send emails during their community partner's "work day." This small affordance in Outlook was something I had taken for granted, but students were excited to learn, and it use as part of the course.

Of course, access has limitations. To participate in the course, students need access to the internet and a laptop, computer, or mobile device. Our university offers free Wi-Fi, and students can check out laptops or use the computers in the library to conduct their coursework if they do not have access to the internet or a device at home. Access to the course was also limited to students in upper division standing. However, a strength of this limitation is many students had already taken a mix of online and face-to-face courses in their first two years of college. As their responses to the learner info survey showed, many of them felt prepared and even excited about the online nature of the course.

Access to these courses, however, is only the beginning. Students gaining "entrance" alone is not enough. Instead, they need support, resources, and well-designed, equitable, and asset-based online courses to turn that access into more.

Grant Writing and Lived Experiences

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000), Collins discusses the importance of lived experience to knowledge construction and wisdom. She explains how lived experience is a criterion for meaning in a Black feminist epistemology as "those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences" (p. 257). Our students, too, can use their lived experiences as expertise, especially if our courses are set up in a way that gives students room to invoke, use, and rely on their lived experiences.

For our first grant, we worked with a local non-profit focused on animal rescue and I located a funder and grant opportunity. I had all the students write to this same funding source and work on the same grant, but individually. This allowed students, many without grant writing experience, to get practice writing grants. I then took the most substantial aspects of multiple grant proposals and submitted them as one packet to our community partner.

However, for the second grant, students oversaw everything. The asset-based model influenced my decision to have students choose their own community partners for the second project and second half of the course. Working with the CCE, I had a list of community partners interested in grant writing services. Before the semester

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began, the CCE facilitated Zoom sessions with these community partners, where I discussed the class and the project and provided an opportunity to answer questions. So, when the second project began, students chose a community partner from the list or, as in one case, chose a community partner not on the curated list. I created the list on a simple Google Sheets page with the name of the organization, the contact email, a link to their “profile” on our CCE database, and a short description of the organization. Setting up the second project this way gave students the opportunity to work on a project where they could put their own lived experiences into practice.

Many of our local organizations are specifically run by and offer services for our local Latinx residents, including migrant farmworkers. The ability to work with community partners with shared backgrounds was important to my students. For example, while chatting during office hours with one student, she shared how her parents are migrant farmworkers. In her discussion board post about the community partner she chose, she shared how “being a part of that community myself it is really important to me to do something to help in a bigger way than I've been doing...it's because of my immigrant parents that I am here today and like so many other immigrant parents they did whatever they could to give their child a better future.” Through the course, she was able to partner with a local non-profit that works on voter registration and hosts citizenship fairs for our migrant farmworker population. She had the opportunity to work closely with a community she cares about and for a cause she is passionate about. So, not only did she learn valuable grant writing skills, but she was also able to leverage her own identity and multilingual abilities to work with a local organization.

Since much of grant writing is about the research it takes to find funders and suitable grant possibilities, students leveraged their own knowledge about the community, their community partners’ past experiences, and what they learned in class in order to search for grants. For example, I attended a Zoom meeting with the student mentioned above and their community partner, where they discussed possible projects to find funding. At this meeting, the community partner commented on his gratitude for the student understanding the community. The student was able to make a deeper connection with the community partner due to her own life experiences. Later in the meeting, the community partner shared information with her about funders they had successfully received funding from before, giving the student a place to start her research on funders.

Allowing students to choose their community partners based on their own interests and/or experiences meant students entered the project with knowledge and more confidence. For example, one student explained how they “used my previous

volunteer work to help shape how I interacted with community partners.” While many students were nervous about working with a community partner, this student relied on their past experiences to help them work with their community partner. They drew on aspects of communication they learned in other contexts to situate themselves in the service-learning project.

Another student shared how “my nonprofit helps students who feel marginalized... my past experiences with interpersonal challenges helped me articulate why a supportive service is important to vulnerable communities.” This student used their own experiences to shape the rhetorical appeals in their grant work and convincingly share how supportive services are an important part of serving the people their community partner works with daily. This student relied on their expertise as a person who used similar services to the ones the non-profit she chose to work with provides.

In other words, students weren’t doing this alone. For each grant, students wrote a draft they turned in to conduct peer review, worked on revisions, then turned in a draft for instructor feedback, and worked on revisions again. Many students also came to office hours or asked for additional feedback on their revisions before submitting the grant packet to me and the community partner at the end of the semester. They had ample practice, examples, and learning activities throughout the course to help prepare them for the actual writing.

The community partners also relied on their own lived experiences to participate in a successful project. One community partner, when asked about their experience in the online format, commented, “2 years of the pandemic make that aspect familiar enough.” This community partner relied on what they had learned during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in order to have a successful partnership with a student.

As Gonzales (2019) found in her own case study in teaching technical communication at an HSI, specifically on the US/Mexico border, “we continue learning from the expertise of students and professionals who embody border(ed) identities and experiences, as their orientations to technical communication work echo the multiplicity and dynamism that we strive for” (p. 186). Our students’ abilities to bridge their lived experiences and their expertise with new writing skills they are learning and connect with community partners is one example of how we can make access be more than just entering our classrooms, virtual or otherwise.

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Reciprocal service-learning

One goal I had for the course was to make sure that the work we did with community partners was reciprocal; that both the students *and* the community partners benefited from the relationship achieved through the course. Part of the strength of service-learning is how “students can give back to the community as they learn about their community, reinforcing the reciprocal dynamics possible” (Remley, 2011, p. 127).

Students gained valuable experience writing grants, and community partners received a grant packet at the end of the semester with information about possible future funders. Students leveraged their grant writing experience on their resumes, in job interviews, and in other community work they participated in. One student wrote a grant for the non-profit they were going to start working with after graduation. Not only did their future employer get a grant packet for equipment essential to the research they conduct, but the student got grant writing experience and was able to show their future boss and colleagues a unique skill they possessed in being able to find funding, write a grant in response to that request for proposals, and find possible future funding opportunities.

Reciprocal service-learning is vital for many reasons. One reason is the possible mobility afforded by this type of learning, especially in regard to civic engagement (Scott, 2004). For example, Benenson (2017) examined how civic engagement is connected to economic mobility, particularly for low-income students, and found that “study participants were often able to mobilize and deploy the social and human capital assets that they accumulated through civic engagement into employment and education opportunities” (p. 998). I’m excited to see how my students’ new skills in writing grants will transfer into other areas of their lives.

Community partners recognized the course’s reciprocal nature. One community partner wrote that they agreed to participate with the class because “I believed it would be of benefit to both our organization and the student,” explicitly stating how the project benefits both the community partner and student. This community referred to themselves as “responsible for grants” in their organization and how the student’s efforts would support them in that role. Another community partner commented on how they are “in need of all the help I can get, and if that need can provide someone meaningful engagement in the professional world, mores the better.” Here, the community partner acknowledges they see the student’s work as a service, but they also recognize how this project could help with the student’s own professionalization as well.

Community partners also pointed out the sustainable nature of the writing students did on the grant. One community partner explained how “we have a nice finished product that we can take and adapt as needed for future applications as well.” Though at first it may seem that the grant packet is a “one and done” deal, the grant packet can form the basis or early writing for future applications. Even if funding does not occur from that specific attempt, the community partner still has the packet and can “take and adapt as needed” into future projects. Since this class is offered every spring, the packets could also be used as a launchpad for the next course if the community partner wants to work on the project again.

The goal of sustainability is also why I had students include possible future funders in their grant packets. Students needed to share the research they did on possible funders with their community partners so that the community partner could have a place to start when looking for other funding. As anyone who has worked on grants knows, sometimes the most challenging and time-consuming part is researching funders. Students had already put in that work and then shared it with the community partners to help sustain their work.

Unintended Outcomes

Multiple Literacies

When I started planning the course, I did what most of us do at first: I pulled up my learning objectives. As a full-time lecturer since 2011, I was not the person who wrote the learning objectives, and it was my first time teaching the course, so I needed to familiarize myself with the goals:

- Understand the fundamental components of a grant proposal, such as the abstract or summary, background and significance, specific aims/goals and objectives, project design and methods, sustainability, assessment, broader impacts, dissemination, budget, budget justification, and cover letter as well as the overall grant submission process.
- Locate available funding opportunities.
- Identify and practice the skills needed to prepare competitive grant proposals.
- Submit a completed grant proposal to an agency of your choice. (Jordan, 2022).

I knew from the beginning that the whole goal was for students to learn about what grants are, how to find funding, and how to complete a grant. So, under these course

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objectives, teaching this course as a service-learning course seemed like the best possible way to achieve these goals.

However, students not only learned grant proposal components but gained other literacy skills. One student reflected on how the service-learning aspect of the course was a “safe way to learn how to manage a professional relationship...thinking of how to approach the conversation and direction of the interaction.” This student points to the sorts of communication and interpersonal skills that are required for working alongside a community partner. As Deans (2012) argues, “relationship-building may not seem like a mode of literacy because it is not explicitly textual, but it is in fact a literacy because successfully negotiating new relationships with local citizens and community partners proves essential to producing both the learning and the texts demanded in service-learning contexts” (p. 229). Students not only learned this relationship-building and communication but did so in an online environment through emails, Zoom calls, phone calls, and even text messages in some instances.

Community Partner Response

One outcome of the course I did not expect was the response from community partners. Though they made it clear from our initial Zoom meetings that grant writing was a much-needed service and they were grateful the course offered them a free grant writing service through our students, I still hadn't expected the outpouring of support my students and I received from our community partners.

Another community partner with more experienced staff even noted how working with students through the class “helps to see a different perspective in how to write a grant. Doing so many grants, the application process can become rote, so having a fresh voice helps.” The community partners, as well, worked from an asset-based model. Community partners, many with more grant writing experience than the students, still recognized how having a different perspective, or “fresh voice,” helped them in their funding endeavors.

When I designed the course, I mostly thought about the end product: the grant packet. However, community partners shared other positive effects of working with students on the project. For example, one community partner shared how working on the grant “got our agency organized about our budgetary needs.” Students discussed possible projects with their community partners before searching for funding opportunities and writing the grant proposal. We had many class discussions on how a strong project helps make a strong proposal. Asking the community partner to highlight some of their problems or needs and then projects that address those needs

and estimates for a budget meant the community partner needed to have organized information for the student.

Another community partner pointed out how they not only submitted a grant but saved time. They shared how “we submitted a full grant application with 1/10 the amount of time input from me - that is a huge savings that allowed us to work on other pressing projects.” Time is incredibly important to non-profit organizations. Having a student work on a grant project meant even the community partners gained more access: access to other important projects, access to more support, and access to more time.

At the end of the year, I attended the CCE Celebration of Service, where one of the community partners we worked with was giving the keynote address that day. They pulled me aside to let me know they had learned so much through the students in my class about grant writing. Another community partner noted on their survey that participating in this project “helped one of our staff members learn more about grant writing as she moves into a new role.” When I first constructed the course, I didn’t think about the possible ripple effects my students and their work would have across the non-profit organization itself. To see the effects of my students sharing what they learned with their contact at the non-profit, who then shared it with their staff members, was a wonderful outcome I had not anticipated.

Social Connections

Though social presence (Rourke et al, 1999; Garrison et al., 2000; Lowenthal & Snelson, 2017) is an essential aspect of online courses and something I strive for whenever I teach online, I was still surprised by how often students brought up their social connections with each other, the community partner, or me as their professor in their reflections and survey responses. Though the possible loss of social connection is many people’s arguments against online learning, the students specifically made a point to bring up their social connections. When asked about the most valuable part of the class, one student responded, “All of it! Professor Jordan, Course materials and organization, community partners, classmates, class materials and research and my own introspection.” This student highlights not only social connection but also the affordances an online class offers through materials and organization and their ability to reflect on their own learning.

Students were also open about how they specifically learned from each other. In a reflection, one student commented on how the “discussion board posts also helped because it allowed me to see how my peers felt, what was going well for them,

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and what parts they were nervous about. Seeing that I wasn't alone in how I felt was relieving but it was also awesome to take some of the strategies that helped them and apply it to my own grant draft.” Here, the student shares how they were emotionally affected by reading their peers’ responses and how they took the advice and strategies their peers offered and applied it to their own work.

Another student specifically spoke to the strength of writing to the same funder and for the same grant as the whole class at the beginning of the semester. They wrote, “I also found that it was helpful to write the same proposal as my peers, that way we were able to share insight with each other and sort of figure out the process together.” The course’s online format gave students access to each other virtually, and as these students attest, they maintained social connections that aided their learning and their experience.

Challenges

We can only discuss service-learning courses if we discuss the labor involved in these courses for all parties involved - the faculty, any staff associated with the project, students, and community partners. Quite honestly, teaching this course felt like teaching three courses in one.

One difficulty that arose during the semester, particularly on our campus but possibly at others, was an email domain issue that led to two weeks where emails from students and me were not reaching community partners or landed in a community partner’s spam folders. What looked like a lack of communication, causing a flurry of concerned emails, was an unforeseen technical issue. Even though everyone was reconnected and the email issue was resolved, that two-week period created extra work for me as the instructor and moved the students’ timelines on their grants. The email domain issue that caused issues for our class was also a major issue for the staff at the CCE. My contact point had to make numerous calls, including to the community partners for my own course, to inform community partners about the situation.

Some community partners were also confused about the project. Though we had meetings before to the semester, I need to be more explicit and clearer with the community partners about what is and is not the students’ responsibility. A few community partners found grant opportunities with a quick turnaround timeline, and those students became stressed with that timeline. I need to make it clear that students still work within the framework of the course; students are not “unofficial staff” during the semester.

Also, students may not complete their work for the course which impacts their community partner. In my own class, as I saw the work start to dwindle, I wondered, what is my responsibility to the community partner? Luckily, this only happened with one student. However it put both the community partner and I in a somewhat awkward position as we tried to negotiate my responsibility as the instructor. Though this will vary by institutional context, how I handled the situation by sending the community partner any work I had received on the grant, and then I put the community partner's organization on a "priority list" for the next time I teach the course. This arrangement was, by no means, a perfect solution to this problem, and I am still working out how I want to handle a missing final grant packet in the future.

Lastly, we must acknowledge that grant writing, with its specific genre conventions, rules, and professionalization, can be a space for white language supremacy. In his 2019 Chair's Address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Inoue explains how white language supremacy is insidious, how "many of us can acknowledge White language supremacy as the status quo in our classrooms and society, but not see all of it, and so perpetuate it" (p. 357). The following year, Young extended white language supremacy to "include a critique and effort to defeat white rhetorical and communication supremacy" (2021, p. 627). Recognizing my own complicity as a white teacher in this space, I made choices in this grant-writing course to use a grading contract, to give students choice and agency in choosing their community partners and writing to projects important to them or closely related to their own experiences, and left room for reflection and listening throughout the course. Though these actions aren't a solution, they are a step in the right direction. Acknowledging how white language supremacy is enacted in our classrooms opens up areas for further research and interrogation of our pedagogy and practices.

Conclusion

Though labor-intensive, the online nature of this course offered students access to service-learning and using their grant writing skills. Students learned from and with each other, their community partners, and the course objectives and material. Creating service-learning courses in an online environment is vital for students who need the flexibility of an online course but could still benefit from service-learning experiences. This course illustrates that it's not enough to just give students access to a course through an online modality. Though that is an essential first step, the access granted to these students was achieved through a mix of the online modality, social support,

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and a reciprocal service-learning project that allowed students to use their cultural capital and lived experiences to create meaningful relationships and a sustainable final project. Access does not end with entry. Entry is just the beginning.

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