

# Your Good Deed Could Save the World: Fighting Austerity is a Feminist Must

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**Abstract:** This essay frames some of the author's personal experiences fighting austerity at her institution while relying on the feminist methods of institutional citizenship (Cox and Riedner) and strategic contemplation (Royster and Kirsch). Showing how rhetoric can reflect and enable austerity, the piece outlines how austerity culture at her institution is a microcosm for a larger cultural dynamic for which austerity is culturally constructed, not financially necessary. The author argues that fighting this culture is a feminist must because it punishes low-income students and the institutions serving them. Not everyone experiences austerity the same, while academic culture promotes individual achievement over collaborative social justice activity, which can be barriers for fighting austerity and hence feminist action.

**Keywords:** austerity, feminist institutional citizenship, strategic contemplation, campus activism

Some might consider a fight against institutionalized austerity to be beyond their pay grade, or work for which they do not have capacity. While recognizing that some people might have barriers for fighting austerity, I argue that fighting austerity is not just care work but also rhetorical and cultural work for which members of our field are of course well-trained to undertake. Through some scenes of my journey as a witness to growing income inequality enabled by my institution, I show how austerity affected my self-efficacy, led me to a new way of seeing and made me consider how feminists can take the lead challenging austerity. Borrowing from Annica Cox and Rachel Riedner, I identify some of my work as a "feminist institutional citizenship," a generative set of practices with its centerpiece--collaboration across silos. Feminist institutional citizenship can be in tension with the dominant demands of academic work that values individualist goal-making. I rely also on reflective methods that Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch call "strategic contemplation" and associate with feminism, "an ethics of hope and care" which can inspire "responsible, rhetorical action" (147).

Strategic contemplation can be a means to *kairos*, reading the room. It requires paying attention to, engaging with and even composing texts that could be considered "ordinary, routine, even mundane" (Royster and Kirsch 147). Significantly, strategic contemplation can be used to interpret and critique pertinent circulating narratives the stories "we are in," that shape and affect

our work. These texts can even include the landscape--place. Strategic contemplation ultimately had me assess austerity culture, supported by its rhetoric, as patronizing, discouraging and, unfortunately, ubiquitous. As Vicki Dabrowski points out, austerity has an emotional component—prohibiting its recipients from “adapting and planning for the future” when their expectations are compromised, their dreams seem impossible (152). Fighting austerity is care work because it challenges a culture that relies on hierarchies between people and fails to acknowledge the self in Other, the I in thou. Austerity advocates promote it as financially necessary, but I show that the rhetoric and budget models at my institution suggests austerity is ideological, a choice. Moreover, the dynamic between the three campuses that make up my institution is a microcosm for a larger higher education budget model and its corresponding culture that seems necessary to critically assess. I emphasize next my efforts to take responsibility for my privilege by confronting austerity showing that I have also been a victim of austerity which in turn shapes my insight. My experience suggests that an “ethics of hope and care” (Royster and Kirsch) cannot flourish in an austerity culture. Fighting austerity therefore is a feminist must.

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My transformative confrontation with austerity took began during a research trip to Minneapolis traveling from an Airbnb on a bus to the National Federation of Settlement archives housed at a University of Minnesota library. Most US settlements were closed in the 1950s as low-income people were moved from their neighborhoods to public housing high-rises to make way for highways and neighborhoods built for the middle class. I study the culture in Detroit in particular, the Motor City, at the epicenter of mid-century highway and urban renewal development. I wanted to look closely for evidence of any rhetorical engagement with powerful stakeholders among settlement leaders about the closing of settlements that accompanied the demolition of low-income neighborhoods. Unfortunately, this research was interrupted in more ways than one when I got an inconvenient phone call from my associate dean as I got off the bus at the library, a call that would profoundly change my relationship with the institution where I was educated and educate.

As I stood outside the library leaning on a fence, this dean hinted strongly that the funding for the writing center position I was about to take over from a retiring lecturer would not be funded moving forward. I was shocked and devastated to hear the news. I had gotten my start in Rhet/Comp through writing center work. It had also taken a while for my turn at this job when I meanwhile had waited it out with other small administrative gigs.

My work at the archives in Minneapolis those next three days was doomed. I had trouble concentrating and focusing. Archival material is fuel that can carry me for a year or even years, but this time the work felt black, my note taking mechanical.

A month later I was invited to a meeting where the writing program director and I were told by dean administrators, which included the financial manager, that indeed the positions for the

writing program director and writing center program on our regional University of Michigan campus in Dearborn, were being cut indefinitely because of a budget crisis. At one point in the discussion, I mentioned the expansively funded and staffed writing center at the flagship Ann Arbor campus. The financial director said firmly, “We are not Ann Arbor.” I guess I was supposed to be satisfied with that response. I was not. During my entire adulthood, I have witnessed the rich get richer and the poor get poorer with the University of Michigan as my primary case study.

## Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Me

Whether or not by deliberate design, the relationship between Ann Arbor and its regional campuses Dearborn and Flint is a prototype showing how income inequality, and its partner austerity, is enabled through a calculated financial culture that benefits powerful investors. The funding formula works out so that each Ann Arbor student receives four times the funding than Flint and Dearborn students. Dearborn and Flint campus students are considerably more low-income, nearly half of them Pell-grant eligible, about the same percentage of Pell-grant eligible students in Michigan overall (“Facts and Figures”). As Charlie Eaton argues, endowment “spending has primarily benefited students from privileged backgrounds” (1) Endowment-rich schools like the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor can afford to spend more per student as meanwhile lower-income and less privileged students, who more typically attend schools like mine, are supported by tax dollars stingily appropriated. As a result, lower-income students who attend regional universities are disadvantaged by debt upon graduation compared to their wealthy peers. As Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier explain, “This ‘new normal’ of disinvestment, privatization, and regressive imposition of increasing charges on working-working class and poor students further exacerbates...inequalities” (98). The wealthy, whose taxes could be used to better fund schools like mine, are incentivized by tax breaks to invest in endowments that in turn benefit more privileged students who attend schools like the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor (Eaton 119).

As an alumnus of the Ann Arbor campus, I had already been long alarmed about the proliferating opulence on the Ann Arbor campus vis-à-vis the austerity culture on my campus, and comparable austerity also on its other regional comprehensive universities in Flint. Ann Arbor’s central administration’s reliance on its endowment and out of state tuition favors itself over its comprehensive campuses. These comprehensive campuses statistically better serve the 51% of Pell-eligible Michiganders. Dearborn’s campus is even especially credited for enabling economic mobility (“Top Performers”). Having received my BA in 1990, I was among the last in-state college students to pay relatively affordable tuition as the current culture of austerity in US higher education was established. Beginning in the mid-80s, states began disinvesting in higher education as policies eliminating taxes on endowments benefitted investors. Schools like the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor grew their endowments, enabled via cozy alumni networks of the well-heeled. Ann Arbor’s endowment has grown precipitously since 1985 from one billion to ten billion by 2015 and

nearly doubled itself again to 17.2 in the past eight years (Castilla 3, Jordan). All the while, opportunistic financiers established a student loan culture as low-income students have bridged the gap of rising tuition through self-financing (Eaton).

## Rhetoric Buoys Austerity

Ann Arbor's rhetoric affirms and parallels its culture of inequality and hierarchy, which enables austerity. I have more status on the Ann Arbor campus as an alumnus--a potential or actual donor, who might also peddle the university's brand by wearing its clothing and attending its sporting events--than as a faculty member on one of its regional campuses. As a micro example, when I sought online help from an Ann Arbor library a couple of years ago, I was asked in the menu to identify my "status." My choices, in order, were: UM Undergraduate, UM Graduate Student, UM Faculty, UM Alumni and, last, Other\* (example, includes visitors, people not associated with U-M as well as Flint and Dearborn members)." It seemed not cool to be identified as "Other." I complained to the library's communication's director about this language and some of it since has been reworded (Rohan). I would consider communication with library higher-ups about its list that Othered its regional campus members as an anti-austerity move and a feminist must if considering "ethics of care" and "responsible rhetorical action" as a component of feminist work. As Royster and Kirsch also point out, an ethics of care requires engaging with communities respectfully "as we join the world in theirs and work with them to set in motion a different, more fully rendered sense of rhetoric as an enterprise with a future" (147). Rhetoric can reflect and enable austerity culture. Confronting it can improve the institution, and thus the lives of most vulnerably affected by its policies when considering that austerity can inhibit hope in the future.

Whomever came up with this list unself conscious of the term "Other" to describe its Dearborn and Flint campus colleagues likely didn't know or consider that so many of our students are low-income, first generation or people of color disproportionately ("Facts and Figures"). Rhetoric by central administration also unproblematically emphasizes hierarchies between faculty on the Ann Arbor campus and its regional campuses. As typical, the former president of the University of Michigan, Mark Schlissel, has argued that the budget model is fair because "[w]e [the university] have one global research university and two regional campuses that are much more local in their focus" (Saikh). But Dearborn students reportedly hail from 78 countries ("Facts and Figures"). This hierarchical language parallels claims on central administration's current public affairs website that UM-Ann Arbor has "high research activity" and "competes for faculty and students with other national and international institutions that do similar levels of research" but that "UM-Flint and UM-Dearborn are regional schools whose faculty and academic programs are held to different standards than UM-Ann Arbor" ("Our Three Campuses"). Indeed, faculty on the Dearborn and Flint campuses teach more classes than those on the Ann Arbor campus relying on a teacher/scholar model, and some if not most faculty do less research quantitatively than Ann Arbor faculty. However, in what field, is it not unfair or even corrupt to judge a scholar by their institution or even rank?

Our Dearborn campus has in fact been named as a top producer of Fulbright scholars (“Top Producers”). The term “different standards” sounds patronizing, Othering even.

The emphasis on hierarchical differences between Ann Arbor and its regional campuses in central administration’s rhetoric has been a necessary defense because it rationalizes the status quo budget model. We hear the argument that the Ann Arbor endowment is not for Dearborn and Flint students because this endowment has been earmarked for specific purposes by donors. The donors are entitled to their goals with the money, so any resources from it going to the regional campuses would be unethical. As Fabricant and Brier put it, “The ever greater reliance on new sources of private revenue for public goods [i.e. higher education] has led to an especially deleterious effect on those least able to pay” (23). The institution in this way has strayed from its original mission. The University of Michigan was established to serve the state through a land grant from the US government with money officially appropriated for its growth in the mid 1800s. Even though the university has a long history of gaining private donors, it has been and is still a state-supported public institution (Castilla and Hodgeson 6).

## **Collaborating to Fight Austerity, a Formula for Feminist Institutional Citizenship**

I was able to run the writing center for one year as a lame duck director. I enjoyed the work immensely, particularly the training of the writing center consultants with faculty guest speakers across the campus. The loss of not being able to run the center did not entirely hit me until the following year when I was no longer running it, which contributed to feeling like my career had dead-ended.

Overall, I just felt alienated. The future seemed bleak. As when October 2018 I dragged myself to Ann Arbor for an event showcasing research projects that incentivized collaboration across the three campuses, called the “Cube” research initiative. Maybe I could reignite some excitement about my research working with others? As it would turn out, the research I found most interesting featuring place-based learning was being conducted by faculty on my campus who were presenting a poster at the event, research I already knew about and was peripherally involved in. The psychic effort it took to attend an event like that which earlier in my career I had thrived on, this time brought me to tears and felt like a bust. I was preoccupied, could not “unsee” Ann Arbor’s lavish resources that made me think of inequality vis-à-vis the growing austerity on our campus, as strategic contemplation helped me put my experience into a greater context I was only beginning to fathom. The Cube event’s accoutrements were a sucker punch: a barely touched spread of expensive food and rows of plastic nametags for attendees not picked up, mine ironically not there even though I signed up for the event. Attendees also got a “goodie bag,” flashing LED-lit ice cubes for. . . I don’t know, to remind attendees like me about austerity on the Dearborn campus in contrast to extravagance on the Ann Arbor campus?

I put the LED-lit cubes in my freezer for a while, which affirmed my alienation when I opened it. Eventually the lights in the cubes died so the cubes migrated--still in their dolled-up purple mesh bag--to a drawer in our house where batteries and LED-lit items await a second life in vain. Of course, financing the three campuses equitably is very complicated I might be told. The LED-lit cubes, their purple mesh outfit, and the unclaimed plastic name tags, come from an entirely different funding source than the writing center director position in Dearborn. At least the take home goodie bag did not include cake. "Let them eat LED-battery-powered purple-meshed dressed up not real ice cubes!" was trickier.

As my energy to complete traditional academic research felt sapped, I became energized otherwise in fighting the austerity that led to my alienation and lost productivity. I began to speak out when encouraged by others as I transitioned from a more individualistic to collaborative mindset. In 2018 the Ann Arbor campus had just initiated a scholarship program called the Go Blue Guarantee for all students whose family income was less than \$60,000, but a program as such had not been developed for Dearborn and Flint. I posted a speech questioning that decision which I had given at a regents' meeting on Facebook. A U of M Ann Arbor librarian Facebook friend commented that Ann Arbor's campus stakeholders claim to value diversity, equity and inclusion, but their passivity regarding their regional campuses' austerity culture suggests its policies lack legitimacy and efficacy. She suggested I make my post public.

Inspired by that, with some help from my friends I went a little guerilla warfare on the University of Michigan Alumni Facebook page after it took down an infographic I put up there with statistics about the unequal funding between Ann Arbor and Flint and Dearborn's campuses. The Webperson, presumably as a response to my torn down infographic, posted an article bragging about the Go Blue Guarantee. In comments, my friends pointed out that the Go Blue Guarantee was not extended to Dearborn and Flint students. We accidentally maybe provoked some online posters, who stumbled upon our online conversation, to admit that Ann Arbor could not give this scholarship to Flint and Dearborn students because too many of them needed it! I guess I was becoming an activist taking on the University of Michigan's PR machine.

In a way the work was too easy, the claims too lame. But since it had the power, it needed not to have integrity, class, or even peddle or ponder the truth. Elitism was a cloak like a sweat-shirt worn to a football game or a cap worn jogging. As several alumni punctuated in comments on this development of the Go Blue Guarantee in Ann Arbor that was not extended to students on the Flint and Dearborn campuses: "Go Blue." Go Blue is in reference to the schools' colors, maize (yellow) and blue. Doesn't really matter if the matter is complicated: just say Go Blue and feel good? As my colleague who witnessed this online debate posed, "Have the words Go Blue replaced, 'keep calm and carry on' as a way to steamroll over the [regional] campuses, which some alumni seem to read as business liabilities." An ethics of hope and care in this case when fighting austerity with responsible rhetorical action was engaging with the average person on the street, or

on the Facebook page in this case. This exercise also reveals how austerity can be identified and perpetuated by ordinary texts produced by ordinary people carrying water to norm larger scripts of inequality they are not fully aware of. It seemed ethical, care work, to point out to these alumni that their comments, had they understood the greater context, were cruel.

Thereafter I began collaborating and engaging more fully with the developing movement called One University or IU, that included part-time faculty, full-time faculty and students across the three campuses all working to confront those in power enabling austerity. The work has been fundamentally rhetorical as we brainstorm strategies which included meeting with regents, meeting with legislators, and writing op-eds.

## **Showing Up and Speaking Out: Feminist Institutional Citizenship in Action**

Our most successful activity fighting austerity in the past three years has been promoting and providing data for a rally in spring 2021 that was organized by the three student governments from Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Flint, called “Fund our Future.” Students demanded that the university’s central administration commit \$10 million per year to Flint and Dearborn campuses for at least five years (Kosnoski and Held, Benevidas-Colon). Considering that austerity can rob people of their ability to plan and imagine the future, the agenda had kairos. Dearborn and Flint students spoke on their campuses and then took buses to Ann Arbor for the main event, a set of speeches on the steps of Rackham Hall in Ann Arbor.

Funding our Future could be regarded as a “big bang coalition” (Eaton) when groups otherwise siloed bond and organize through collective effort for a shared cause. Efficacy might be especially achieved if a coalition ‘bargains with bankers’ to hold powerful actors accountable for the financing enabling austerity. In California for instance, 2,000 students marched to the “flagship branch of Bank of America” and “put a face on those who don’t pay their fair share” (Eaton 178). While those confronting a big bank might not consider themselves feminists, nor did all members of our Funding the Future crowd, these efforts show how activist work can be defined as feminist work when it implements ethics of hope and care through responsible rhetorical action.

Our “big bang” rally ended with a march past then President Mark Schlissel’s house. Some students told me they were uncomfortable with that idea and thought the planned chants about Schlissel were going too far. Some Dearborn students in fact went back on the bus instead of marching. A student walking next to me also happened to tell me she was uncomfortable about the idea but was marching anyway, too. I told the student that in this case, Schlissel had kind of asked for it. He created division with his rhetoric and made loads of money. So, she should feel empowered by speaking up if she was upset about inequality and interested in social justice. I understood why the student was unsure about following the crowd, but the crescendo of the rally

in front of Schlissel's house felt authentic. As wealthy capitalist Nick Hanauer warns, "If we do not do something to fix the glaring inequalities in our society, the pitchforks will come," I was at home with my anger and frustration about austerity and the rhetoric justifying it—poorly so. When it comes down to it, the bad rhetoric crafted and encouraged by those with power that misrepresents our students bothers me the most. Hence, confronting it as care work.

After this grande finale walking to my car, I passed by a church with a marquee that said, "Your good deed can save the world." Ann Arbor was talking to me. A good sign, literally. This was the old Ann Arbor, before she became so corporate thanks to the university's growing endowment the past thirty years and before the bankers took over. When higher education was more substantially funded, hippies had been in charge of the place. Poetry littered Ann Arbor on building walls and bathroom stalls. Aware of strategic contemplation as a method with my work with IU thus far, I pondered whether my participation in the rally was a good deed and thinking about my conversation with the student reluctant to march. The effort was collective. I didn't spearhead it. I just drove 50 miles from my house and showed up. However, returning to my "alma mater" to fight like a mama bear for many students who have not had some of my privileges, but for whom I feel a connection, who I love, felt destined and uncorrupted.

I have suggested how identifying, confronting and speaking out against austerity-enabling rhetoric is care work and I think my experience mentoring students at this rally is the best example of how fighting austerity can have a feminist dimension and is a form of "feminist institutional citizenship." This is a phenomenon when, as Cox and Riedner assert, the "expertise of a broad range of stakeholders com[e] into coalition" (22). Faculty and students across three campuses had rallied for our future together—maybe like a family. Relatedly, while I shared some hesitation in physical activism that day, marching, the mentoring with student activists I engaged with that day comfortably fit with my ongoing work as a teacher. This mentoring could be regarded not only as teaching but, again, as care work which Cod and Riedner also identify as a component of feminist institutional citizenship (21). That day, I reflected foremost on the sense of responsibility I felt not only to confront inequities sponsored by my alma mater but to fight for the future of my students. Our action was collective. Our future was collective, too. Hope and care for students had become more fully integrated with my healing, my own lost hope from the austerity measures that stymied what I thought would be my career trajectory.

I wished more faculty were there though. I understood that my colleagues first might be too busy responding to austerity to fight austerity or were just exhausted--particularly the women considering that Covid-19 pandemic mitigation disproportionately burdened women with childcare and academic care labor responsibilities (Altan-Olcay and Bergeron). Furthermore, not everyone experiences austerity the same way (Dabrowski 68). Even if austerity can dampen a faculty member's optimism about the future as resources are cut or compromised, feminist institutional citizenship might seem like a distraction from the more pressing requirements for succeeding in



academe. Faculty are taught to “keep going, and otherwise ignore gendered organizational practices [austerity in this case]” as a survival tool in a publish or perish culture (O’Meara 353). As Suzanne Bergeron and Özlem Altan-Oclay point out, “Definitions of academic work and success continued to be based, for the most part, on the idea of the autonomous entrepreneurial academic subject working to meet existing performance expectations” (5). We are rewarded institutionally for thinking individualistically. Some might rightly feel like activism would hurt their chances at future opportunities inside institutions if alienating higher-up leadership. Untenured faculty might not take the risk of working for a committee not regarded as official by the institution like IU. However, feminist institutional citizenship should be a frontload essential for improving institutions, or even saving them, so we can continue with the work we have been trained to do, are rewarded for and value such as teaching and research.

This activism can even move the institutional needle, benefitting students, situating this activism as care work. Shortly after our rally university regents announced that the Go Blue Guarantee, earlier just for Ann Arbor students, would be extended to Flint and Dearborn students (Jesse “U-M Extends Go Blue Guarantee”). Although this new program would turn out to be not so guaranteed, the decision by regents suggested to those of us on the IU committee what could happen if we all worked together with students and across campuses as a collective “agentive practice” (Cox and Reidner), working across silos, hierarchies and rank.

## **Feminist Institutional Citizenship and Strategic Contemplation: Speechmaking Across Silos**

As another example of an agentive practice that could be regarded as feminist institutional citizenship that at the same time shows the mental challenge of activism, IU organized a bigger stunt to further our agency born by coalition for the December 2021 regents meeting that was in Ann Arbor: coordinating 3-minute speeches by faculty, staff and students from three campuses. Collectively our speeches emphasized how austerity measures were compromising the learning of students on our campuses who were already stressed economically and not to mention by the Covid-19 pandemic and its mitigation policies.

Reflection, that would turn out to be strategic, was built into that day’s events for me. I arrived early to Ann Arbor for this meeting and took a walk across campus. To get to the building where the regents meeting would start, I cut through the large parking lot near the football stadium. If Ann Arbor was talking to me again, she was either proud or pointing out ridiculousness by showing who was important. Every coach, and assistant coach, and related staff member, had their own parking space. Of course, this is big money Big Ten sports, but what a super strange culture for someone arriving to earth from a spaceship. I wondered where the noble laureates and nobel prize winners parked. I knew the answer: in their driveways or the parking garages like everyone else.

I was having my doubts. Was making a speech to the regents as a collaborative project to fight austerity another good deed—that is care work—or distraction from my work back on my campus finishing up finals, an inevitably not collaborative and quite pressing chore? Coming to Ann Arbor to big bang coalition and inventing agentive practices in so many meetings prior, took a lot of energy. Feminist institutional citizenship can be an intimidating calling.

Strategic contemplation, reading and interpreting the story I was in, had helped me be long sensitive to big picture messaging on the part of our institution, messaging that laid bare its austerity culture and celebrated unapologetically our main campus's flush resources and lavish plans. One presentation at the meeting showed the blueprints for yet another building for students, Ann Arbor's, of course, not ours. A \$25 million dollar donation from a wealthy donor, Larry Leinweber of the Leinweber Foundation, made possible the planning of a sprawling new science building for which the state of Michigan was also kicking in matching funds ("UM receives \$25M gift," "University of Michigan Regents Meeting"). In between speeches we held up paper tombstones naming programs that had been cut on Dearborn and Flint's campus such as the Africana Studies program on Flint's campus and, also, of course, the writing center on our campus.

I fell in love with everyone who spoke for IU. One speech stole the show, difficult to do. A Flint undergraduate student laid out poignantly the major problem at hand: he felt like "a second-class citizen, a sideshow, an afterthought." Precisely. That was the message we were supposed to internalize with the policies, the culture, the rhetoric. I would tie myself to the railroad tracks if I could, were not giving a 3-minute speech at a regents' meeting the watered-down equivalent, to get any upper-administration mucky-muck to respond substantially to critique of regressive policies that might lead any hardworking, low-income, self-made and minority person to feel like second-class citizens at the University of Michigan.

At the very end of the meeting, a statuesque, elderly African-American gentleman stood up and asked to talk to President Schlissel. As the man began talking for what would turn out to be about ten long minutes, his booming voice was quivering, his pain palpable. He introduced himself as Chuck Christian, said that he was dying of cancer and that he drove to Ann Arbor from Boston. He spoke about his lifelong trauma having been sexually abused by a University of Michigan doctor, Robert Anderson, whose actions were under investigation (Jesse, "Ex-football player"). He had put off his treatable cancer treatment because he feared doctors.

Christian's words were disturbing. They stayed with me the whole next day in competition with the afterglow of our group's collaborative mash up "big bang" speech happening. Austerity: death by a thousand cuts. I struggled to process how the entire experience added up along with my maybe not so charitable knee-jerked thought: Christian's expressing pain over his abuse by Anderson, and by proxy the University of Michigan, had stolen IU's thunder that afternoon. I remembered later, after finals were over, my thoughts walking through the athletic compound

parking lot on the way to the meeting, the parking spaces just for coaches. On second thought, Christian didn't steal our thunder. He was our thunder. Christian's pain, although in a whole other category than the collective pain of austerity our group had laid out, punctuated the effects of an institution that was not in the habit of listening, that rewarded some actors over others and in some cases, to a destructive effect, destroyed bodies and lives. While the people with power in that room could be moved to have empathy, their institution had allowed corruption to continue for years, in the case of a doctor who was a sexual predator. Ignoring profound problems had been trending for a long time and was baked into the culture of the place, the built environment even, its material space. The athletic compound parking lot showed a culture: who was important and had priority at an institution that was resource-rich but also enabled resource starvation, that is, austerity.

The silence after Christian spoke, no doubt in part because of shock, symbolized perhaps that this administration really didn't need to respond substantively to individuals without institutional power, even if these individuals were making good points, their facts and logic hard to argue with. But as a collective voice, IU and Christian's standing up was a powerful collective blueprint. As Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier suggest, austerity needs to be fought along with "other progressive campaigns for social justice" (5). Thinking inclusively about our speeches and Christian's, suggests a formula for action that might be activated writ large, when those suffering from a culture of corruption and disinvestment find common ground and fight power with truth together. Feminist institutional citizenship can include those outside of the academe who might not even share the same experiences with academics but who have the similar goals in seeking justice, equity, and the transformation of institutions.

As it would turn out the Go Blue Guarantee designed for Dearborn and Flint has not been as substantial as the Ann Arbor scholarship program, which suggests the strong hold austerity culture can maintain even when confronted. Unlike the Ann Arbor's program, the Dearborn and Flint program has a grade point average requirement, which eliminates a portion of our students from the scholarship. Ann Arbor, which has a higher-grade point requirement for acceptance than its regional campuses, does not have the grade point requirement for its Go Blue Guarantee (Kosnoski and Held). In this sense an Ann Arbor student, after acceptance to the university, could maintain their scholarship, even if getting a 2.0 throughout their college career. Dearborn and Flint students could lose their scholarship with its 3.5 grade point requirement on the other hand and would not be able to get this scholarship in the first place with say at 3.3 or 3.4 grade point that otherwise could get them accepted to the university. That students on Dearborn and Flint campuses would need to be exceptional students rather than just accepted students, fits with the larger cultural picture that has enabled inequality between the campuses in the first place. As Fabricant and Brier put it, "Students not defined as 'elite' or 'gifted' are expected to bear the costs of diminished investment in education" (136). The caveat that those students on our campus receiving the Go Blue Guarantee must be extra special, not just accepted students who are also low-income, parallels

also claims made by the writers responding to my friends and colleagues remarks on the University of Michigan's alumni Facebook page. Funding low-income Dearborn and Flint students would be too much to ask because there are too many low-income students.

Maintaining elitism on the one hand while touting inclusion on the other—shape up and you can get your money—University of Michigan's central administration, with Schlissel at the helm, had been doing its job. The job perpetuating inequality through policy that leads low-income students to borrow money to finance their education inside a larger system that disinvests in regional campuses like mine (Fabricant and Brier 138). A poor rhetorician, Schlissel was a pretty good messenger for the system that rewards elitism. He did fall on his own sword shortly after the roll out of the Go Blue Guarantee 2.0, that kind of includes Dearborn and Flint students now. He was caught violating a university code of conduct when sexually harassing an employee and was fired (Jesse "University President").

## Austerity and Greater Contexts

It would turn out that feminist institutional citizenship fighting austerity was not just care work but scholarly work as well. If at first it seemed that feminist institutional citizenship work, that relied on collaboration and also producing and circulating non-scholarly yet persuasive and potentially efficacious texts, was taking me away from producing the work I was trained for, one-authored, peer-reviewed research. Yet, it was eventually emotionally resonating and serendipitously scholarly that I found out about the cuts to my position as the writing center director when on the way to the archives that June day in 2016 in Minneapolis to pursue the completing a scholarly case study. I had gone to the archives to get a better sense for why those running settlements in 1950s did not fight back very hard when their work was downsized or destroyed. I eventually put together some parallels between higher education's austerity culture and the austerity culture that pushed poor people out of their neighborhoods, and also pushed out the settlement leaders who were mostly women running settlement boards in 1950s Detroit. I hadn't at first considered neighborhoods being raised, and settlements also being raised and closed, as an austerity project. In the historical case, powerful and layered policy--enabled also by a new brand of social worker that normed the removal of the poor from their existing neighborhoods to public housing that was considered better. Social service agencies that had begun as grassroots place-specific funding organizations merged with the United Way mid-century and became more bureaucratic when cooperating with government agencies. Although money was available for building public housing, settlement homes were regarded as too expensive, white elephants (Trolander 29). Again, austerity is an ideological choice not a financial necessity. There was plenty of money circulating for urban renewal and the construction of public housing compounds, but not for maintaining already established low-income neighborhoods.

The policies hamstringing the settlements struggling to survive in the 1950s remind me of

the policies shaping the austerity culture on campuses like mine. The US government has created policies that rate college campuses using a set of metrics, such as time-to-graduate reporting and efficiency plans, that puts disproportionate stress on colleges that serve low-income students and students of color. Colleges with wealthier students and large endowments have fewer students taking out loans and struggling to graduate in the socially-constructed-as-ideal four-year time frame (Fabricant and Brier). In each case, mid-century urban renewal culture and higher education austerity culture, the lives of the most disadvantaged have been and are hyper-measured without their consent or collaboration. Social disinvestment coupled with austerity disposes people (Fabricant and Brier 32). Likewise by extension, I felt disposable as a writing center director within this culture that values accountability to spreadsheets not people or big picture goals of student success and faculty development that might even improve the bottom line down the road. But as Vicki Dabrowski points out, “If you have no value for capital, the state makes it harder for you to live” (150). Non-elite colleges don’t typically produce profits for investors. As a result, these institutions as engines of mobility are undervalued, even devalued, and at the very least not important enough to have curiosity about—as with Schlissel using the term “local” to describe our diverse regional campuses. Rhetoric shapes and reflects passivity about inequality and austerity at my institution, and by extension higher education as a whole. Coalition building with the formula of feminist institutional citizenship can bring together people to hold institutions accountable for the policies that are not just financially damaging but psychologically damaging as well—such as extreme austerity leading its victims to lose hope. Fighting austerity is care work.

It was ironic therefore that I got news about the writing center position being cut as I was walking into the archives with questions about the policies that led to the downsizing of female-run settlement culture. I had gotten a good taste of how someone in a leadership position in a neighborhood vulnerable to elimination by an austerity move might have felt. I also understood on two levels—personal and scholarly—why fighting back would be complicated even for those with privilege. Austerity can be so embedded in a culture aided by policy that it appears impenetrable, un-fightable, even the natural order of things, for which passivity about it might seem the only course.

## **Fighting Austerity as Emotional Repair Work**

The day after the meeting July 2016 when I learned that my dream to run a writing center was dashed, my family went to hang out with our friends who were finishing a Great Lakes regatta that ended on Michigan’s Mackinac Island. Sailors on shore having been on a boat for three days are genuinely happy people and are fun to be around. I can’t say the drunken sailor is a stereotype. Reeling still from the meeting, I had a respite from my broken heart when I got sucked into a crowded dance floor of sailor friends and acquaintances at the island’s Horn Bar. The place was packed, the space between people was comically zero. While I am normally claustrophobic and crowd phobic, to participate in that happy crowd was a comfort, a strong contrast to how I had felt

in the meeting the day before. My emotions had me consider how austerity divides us unnaturally and destructively. It forbids compassion and denies our dependence on one another. It forces us to perform as isolated individuals, passive actors taking marching orders from a bureaucracy designed by elites valuing profit over other values such as the mobility of first-generation, working-class college students needing support for example. Austerity to me is the opposite of love, not hate but indifference. Austerity disposes of people by making dreams harder if not impossible not only to imagine but to achieve. It does not nurture. Feminists must fight it. As Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers argue: "We have identified ourselves as separate and have tried to protect ourselves from one another. We have used rules and regulations as weapons and fought to make ourselves safe. But there is no safety in separation" (64). There was no separation between bodies and selves at the Horn bar. Dancing was a metaphor: love and joy between friends and strangers as a default human behavior. Austerity is fundamentally unnatural. As physicist and feminist Karen Barad's theorizes, "'others' are never very far from 'us'" (178-79).

We might be at the tipping point as institutions can no longer rely on austerity to function. As I wrote this essay, the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor graduate students were on strike demanding a living wage drawing attention to the university's reliance on cheap labor to run itself. By starving its regional campuses, the main campuses may also have gone too far enabling austerity. As schools like mine cut programs and lack money for tenure-track hiring, Research-1 schools like Ann Arbor are training graduate students for jobs that no longer exist, another microcosm of a larger system which more and more relies on efficiency, not care.

Large scale protests and the mobilizing of graduate students who can't make a living while training for full-time employment that might not exist also hints to a problem with austerity that Jewish civilization scholar, Jacques Berlinerblau calls "faculty fratricide." University leaders complicit in severe budget cutting compromise academic freedom, faculty governance and the tenure system. One of my colleagues calls this phenomenon "eating our own."

Those who embrace ethics of hope and care should challenge a culture that disposes of those who aren't interesting to the powerful. Again, not everyone will experience austerity the same or have the same power to fight it, and these differences can be legitimate barriers for collaboration. Yet, as Lee Nickoson and Kris Blair point out, listening can help mend division: "listen[ing] to voices of students, our community, to those who experience the world differently" (14). My fellow alumni writing "Go Blue" on a social media post that, if read closely, celebrates some low-income people but not others getting their college funded goes to show the ease with which otherwise good people can passively accept the status quo, too trusting of institutions or too tribal in their affiliations. Complicity was also the norm with those in power who went along with public policy that destroyed neighborhoods and moved the poor without their consent in the 1950s urban renewal cultural era.

My experience with austerity culture, my activist work in response to it and some loneliness with it, might inspire more transparency about the material constraints on our work across rank and region, particularly recently. In this essay I promote feminist institutional citizenship which challenges an “individualistic mindset” (Cox and Riedert). On the other hand, there need not be formulas for fighting austerity but rather missions for which practices emerge from shared values. In my case, these practices have included collaborating, coalition building, mentoring, reflection, and identifying injustice through rhetoric: writing, speaking and editing. I associate these practices with feminist work when holding my institution, that happens to be my alma mater, accountable to better care for its most vulnerable students. As philosopher and Detroit activist Grace Lee Boggs put it, “I want to ask people to ask themselves and each other what time is it on the clock of the world.” Put it another way, Barad, the feminist theoretical physicist, encourages us to “meet the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role we have in the world’s differential becoming” (396), I have shown how I confronted austerity when ‘taking responsibility for the world’s differential becoming,’ when reading the landscape around me, paying attention to institutional rhetoric and holding those with power accountable for it--practices of strategic contemplation that are tied to feminist ideologies and goals.

I think it’s time we all stop accepting austerity as the norm in our respective higher education cultures.

Your good deed could save the world.

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