

The Better Alamance Project

New technologies and writing as citizenship

International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference

Minneapolis, MN ♦ June 13, 2014 ♦ [#IWAC14](#)

<http://www.betteralamance.org>

Derek Lackaff [@lackaff](#)
William Moner [@williamj](#)
Glenn Scott [@gwscott](#)
Dianne Finch
Elon University
School of Communications

Paul Anderson
Elon University
Writing Excellence Initiative

Session goals

- Describe how we are facilitating student writing and civic engagement across classes
- Demonstrate technologies
- Suggest design strategies
- Facilitate discussion

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Alamance, North Carolina, with a dark, semi-transparent overlay. The image shows a dense urban area with various buildings, streets, and green spaces. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Overview

Background and Context

[Better Alamance: Wiki](#)

[Better Alamance: Stories](#)

Better Alamance Project

- Technologies for community
- Inspired by Iceland: “Agile” projects: fast, iterative
- Core group of interdisciplinary organizers
- Students participate via class assignments, several then rotate into leadership roles

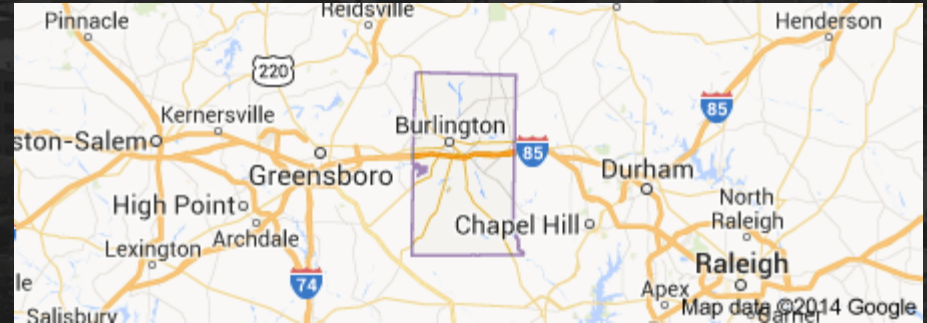
Alamance County, North Carolina

Small cities and towns

Deindustrialized

Sense of history

Immigration tensions



Elon University

Student Population

By State:

North Carolina: 17%

Massachusetts: 12%

New Jersey: 9%

Virginia: 7%

Maryland: 7%

Pennsylvania: 7%

New York: 7%

Connecticut: 6%

By Race:

Caucasian: 83%

African American: 6%

Hispanic: 6%

Multiracial: 3%

Asian: 2%

QEP/WEI Institutional Writing Goals

Writing to learn: to use writing to understand new content and perspectives, analyze information and problems, and generate knowledge.

Writing in a discipline: to develop and communicate ideas effectively to readers, for purposes and in contexts that are appropriate for his or her field of study.

Writing as a citizen: to communicate effectively with other members of his or her communities on issues of local, regional, or global significance.

Better Alamance: Wiki

LocalWiki platform

8 classes (25-33 students), ~400 articles

Objectives

Writing for civic understanding

Understanding digital collaboration / writing

Wiki Assignment Templates

- Short or long research article
 - Wikitext, photo(s), map, tags
- Article upgrade
 - Refine and develop existing article
- “Meta” article
 - Synthesize and organize existing content

Peer editing and collaboration

Better Alamance: Stories

Initiated in Fall 2013

Piloted through 2013-14 Academic Year

Purpose

Journalistic and long-form storytelling

Data-driven journalism

Interactive media and digital storytelling

Better Alamanace: Stories

“Tension Grows After the Closing of Local Food Pantry”

Written for Dianne Finch’s journalism course

Impetus for further **topic-driven** storytelling

What forms of storytelling work best online in a local context?

Poverty in Alamance County

<http://stories.betteralamance.org>

Interactive Media M.A. Capstone Project

Formal experiment in **scrollitelling** or **immersive experience**

Synthesis of stories from undergraduate coursework

Contributions by course

Writing: *Reporting for the Public Good* (UG)

Photography: *Digital Media Convergence* (UG)

Data: *Data Visualization* (MA) & undergraduate work

Web Design: *Interactive Media Capstone*



Reporting for the Public Good

- Writing course for journalism majors.
- 18 students.
- Learn various forms - straight news to commentary.
 - Yes! Genres and audiences.
- Collaboration percolated in campus coffee shop.
 - Third place/third space.



Special Visit: Novelist Jill McCorkle



Challenge: Write profiles

- Find volunteers, recipients, donors, providers.
- Capture sense of community.
- Transfer Jill's points about characterization to non-fiction.
- Agree on similar approaches for consistency.

All while working closely with Arielle.

Student Reflections

| “It was very beneficial to be able to work and be in direct contact with Arielle. She knew exactly what she wanted from us, and she was easily reachable. The assignment very well could have improved my writing; it was certainly different than anything we had done in the class until that point. I'm a lover of human interest stories, so this was my favorite story to write. I was able to create a character using Jill McCorkle's tips, so it was a good exercise.”

| “Working with Arielle sharpened my writing and made me focus on the details more so than I ever have.”

Other Projects

Bilingual health care communication resource for
Latinos in Alamance County

<http://student.elon.edu/sjasper/>

Undergraduate writing for the web (Prof. Finch)