

Project Design

Course Title: Creative Writing 300

Class Size: 25 students

Class Population: mostly juniors and seniors

Class Schedule: 2 classes per week: 1 ½ hour per class

Other-Parameters: Students need transportation to the Senior Home 5 minutes from campus.

Course Learning Objectives (Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes)

Successful students will be able to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- develop abilities to write creatively and expressively
- develop knowledge of creative writing and appropriate vocabulary for discussing creative writing
- recognize writing as a constructive, meaningful process
- recognize reading as an active, constructive process
- recognize the contribution of literature to cultures and societies
- recognize that talk is an important tool for communicating, thinking, and learning
- recognize listening as an active, constructive process
- develop abilities to write creatively in the following genres: poetry, plays, fiction, and non-fiction
- learn to teach some of the above skills in the context of a tutorial relationship

Initial Ideas for PBSL Design

Where on the continuum model do you see your course?

At this point, I see the course between Model II and III, given that the S-L component is required, and yet is only a modest part of the course content.

Timeframe for Service Project:

The class will spend six weeks at the project site, using our Thursday class (the class meets Tuesdays and Thursdays for 1 hour and 20 minutes.)

Product(s) of Student Work:

The seniors will produce a creative writing work in one of the four genres by the end of the six-weeks.

Resources Needed: Transportation to and from the Senior Home, pencils, paper, access to computers and printers.

Building Community

Activities to build community in the beginning of the course:

Within the context of the course, we will build community in the following ways:

- Do group activities in the first week and month of class: games and fun exercises
- Develop core values, classroom guidelines, and class objectives in the course. We will revisit them half way through the course, and at the end.
- “Break bread,” i.e. brownies, cookies, fruit, early on in course.

Activities to maintain community during the course:

- Do a class evaluation after 1 month of the course, and discuss.
- Sharing reflections on tutoring during Tuesday classes
- Sharing student writing during the course related to the S-L project (could be poems, essays, etc.)

Activities to celebrate the community at the completion of the course/project:

- Pot-luck meal at the Senior Home
- Individual presentations of seniors and students during “capstone class,” i.e. special class that may be outside of class time that is the final celebration of the course

What size groups will you use early in the course and how (if at all) do you want to build to larger teams?

- Combination of small groups (esp. at beginning, to increase safety) and large/whole group activities (so that everyone gets to know each other and benefits from all perspectives).
- Teams are not needed for this project

Problem Statement/ Contract with Partner Agreement Worksheet

- 1. Identify potential community partners who may need service work related to your course outcomes.**
 - the Senior Home

- 2. For each of the above community partners, what are some problems/issues your students may solve?**
 - The class can help address the issue of boredom for seniors
 - They can provide companionship
 - They can help foster creativity among the seniors
 - They can help give voice to the needs and views of seniors
 - Problem: how to engage with seniors to create a book of creative work together.

- 3. What assets does the client/community partner bring to solving this problem?
What assets will you and your students bring?**
 - The seniors will bring their time, energy and life experience to the project
 - The seniors will bring their willingness to put their thoughts on paper
 - The Senior Home will provide the opportunity for the students to be with people from a different generation and background
 - The students will bring writing and other academic skills to the table
 - The students will bring a willingness to be with the seniors in a mutually open and supportive fashion
 - The students will bring computer and other technical skills to help the seniors produce creative work

- 4. For each problem-based project, consider what service and learning outcomes can be addressed.**
 - The learning objectives of the course include developing skills and knowledge of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The project of working together to develop written work will involve all of these activities. The students will be working on their own skills throughout the course, and then they will have to learn to translate that knowledge to the seniors in their tutorials

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Problem Statement Worksheet (page 2)

5. Draft problem statement: (This is the contract your class will make with your partner. You want the problem statement to meet the following criteria):

- **problem/issue is clearly defined (problem is authentic, versus contrived; problem is open-ended for students to solve, versus a task to be performed)**
- **specific parameters, needs, constraints are included**
- **community partner's needs and expectations for the products/deliverables are articulated (there should be a clear connection between student work and course objectives)**
- **timeline for when products are needed**
- **community partner contact information for follow-up**

NOTE: The actual problem statement for your course will need to be created with your community partner and ultimately should be communicated from the community partner to the students (i.e. on letterhead or in person).

Creative Writing 300/Senior Home Problem Statement

The seniors at the Anytown Senior Center need opportunities for creativity and for interacting with young people. In an effort to help provide opportunities for creativity and meaningful activities for residents at the Senior Home, the students in Creative Writing 300 will help 25 seniors produce a piece of creative writing during their six classes together. In an effort to collaborate in a mutual manner, the students will also produce a piece of creating writing. The entire collection of work will be put into a “book” at the end of the course in May. The students determine how best to educate the residents on different styles of creative writing and demonstrate a clear understanding of the skills and genres of writing before they begin their work together. Students will also determine how best to engage the seniors in organizing and producing the collection of creative works as a book. Students will receive training on how to teach writing of this sort as well as guidelines for how to work with seniors. The course instructor and the Senior Home’s Activities Director will oversee the logistics of the visits and the work together. Any difficulties between students and residents will be brought to the attention of the supervisors immediately. \

Example problem statement letter from Senior Center

Dear Students in the Creative Writing 300 class,

At the senior home, we are dedicated to meeting the needs of seniors of Anytown. At the current time, we have a specific need we are hoping your class can help us meet. Seniors often experience boredom and decline in health as a result of lack of creative outlets and social contact outside of the senior population. In our effort to provide seniors with opportunities for creative expression and for social contact with young people, we are asking that you spend time with seniors and work with them to develop a book of creative works. We believe that your class, using your knowledge and skills in the areas of creative writing, organization and communication, could provide important service for the Senior Center and our clients.

Specifically, we need help providing opportunities for creative expression for the 25 seniors who use our center. A successful response to this need would: demonstrate an ability to teach creative writing skills; demonstrate respect for and interest in seniors; result in a book of creative writing for which both students and seniors would submit pieces for publication and both would contribute to its organization and completion.

In completing this work, we ask that you attend weekly visits with the seniors at the senior center for six weeks, including the orientation on the first week. It will be important that you read through the orientation materials before the first session, and that you attend all six sessions. In the event that you must miss one, please communicate your absence in advance whenever possible to us and to your instructor. We will do our best to match you with seniors with whom you have something in common. You will need to act in a professional and respectful manner while at the senior center and with the seniors, and communicate any problems or conflicts to me and/or your instructor as soon as they arise.

We hope you will find this opportunity to be a rich and rewarding experience. We will certainly benefit from your knowledge, skills and service!

Community Partner Relations

Who will you work with?

- The Senior Home in Bennington, Vermont.

How will you establish rapport/initiate this relationship?

- The instructor and the Director of Activities at the Senior Home have been in contact. They met at a Service-Learning summit at the college last year.

What are your course needs/ “must haves”?

- We need 25 seniors
- We need transportation

What does the partner need/want from this relationship? (to be filled in when you meet)

- The partner is looking for rich and meaningful activities for the residents of the Senior Home
- They are especially eager to have the residents have young people around

What will you ask of the partner in terms of feedback to you/students?

- We will ask the Activities Director to do an evaluation of the activity and to provide feedback to the instructor and students

Who will write the problem statement? When?

- The instructor will draft the problem statement in the fall for a spring course. The Activity Director will review the problem statement and together they will develop a final statement. (Since this is new for the Activity Director, we thought it was appropriate for the instructor to take the first crack at it.)

Where might this partnership lead over time?

How might this (reasonably sized initial) project connect to future work with this partner?

- In theory, this class could be duplicated at any point, given that there are always residents at the home and the course is taught every year.

Building Student Capacity

What are your overall learning goals (knowledge, skills and attitudes)?

- develop abilities to write creatively and expressively
- develop knowledge of creative writing and appropriate vocabulary for discussing creative writing
- recognize writing as a constructive, meaningful process
- recognize reading as an active, constructive process
- recognize the contribution of literature to cultures and societies
- recognize that talk is an important tool for communicating, thinking, and learning
- recognize listening as an active, constructive process
- develop abilities to write creatively in the following genres: poetry, plays, fiction, and non-fiction
- develop sensitivity and understanding of the struggles of senior citizens
- learn to teach some of the above skills in the context of a tutorial relationship

What do students need to know and be able to do before the PBSL project begins?

- Students will need to develop some basic understanding of the four genres of creative writing. As a 300 level course, the students, in theory, have these skills to begin. To be sure, we will spend the first 5 weeks of the course reviewing these skills and providing ample opportunity for students to do their own work.
- The instructor will provide some training and provide guidelines for 1) how to work with seniors, and 2) how to teach creative writing. We will do at least two practice lessons on each other before we begin.

What prior knowledge, skills and attitudes do your students have? How can you find this out?

- The students will have to be willing to work with seniors. They also need some training on what was mentioned in the last class. Part of the writing in the first part of the course will ask students to write about older people, how to work with them, and other related topics. We will use their writing to get at their attitudes. The skills we will review in class.

What learning activities can you begin with that will build confidence and assure student success?

- We will have practice sessions before we go to the Senior Home
- We will provide feedback from that
- We will build in a trial period with the seniors to make sure that we have a good match
- Each student will meet her senior before we do any work. They will chat casually and we will make sure we have a good fit before we begin.
- We will test the students on the fundamentals of how to teach the four genres before we go to the Home

What information and practice do you want to provide students at the beginning of the course and what do you want them to learn later in the course?

- I think I have explained that above

What learning activities can you use to build a base of knowledge and skills?

- Answered that above

Project Management

1. What will the roles and responsibilities be for each:

Faculty: The instructor will help to organize the project with the community partner, teach the course, and oversee the management of the project

Students:

- Attend class and go to all S-L visits. Be sure to contact instructor and Senior Home ahead of time if unable to attend class or make a visit.
- Students will write a short reflection every week describing their visit, with special focus on ups and downs of the visits. This reflection should provide ‘red flags’ for instructor.

Community Partner(s):

- Will help to define, organize and supervise the project. The partner will help with the evaluation after the course is over, and will communicate any needs or concerns throughout the course.

How will you build student ownership? What role will they play in planning? How can you include students in being part of the management of the project?

- Students will not be involved in planning or management of the project
- Students will hopefully build ownership as they get to know the residents more and more. They will be co-producing the final product.
- Students will have ownership of their part of the course, because they will be teaching/facilitating and will be helping to determine the final product

3. **What are some potential problems that might arise? Which of these problems are of real concern and which can be part of valuable learning experiences?**

- Potential problems may result if there is a bad match. We will have introductory sessions that will hopefully avoid that.
- Student “no show” can create disappointment and resentment on the part of the residents. The instructor will have to really emphasize this.
- Seniors get sick, they can be moody, and they die. These can be valuable, if difficult, experiences.

a. **Which of these problems are your problems and which are/should be the students or community partners? How will you assure you don’t solve every issue “for” the students?**

- We should allow the students to work out problems when they can. But, we do not want to put the students or the residents in an awkward situation where a situation becomes untenable or too difficult. Some difficulty is not necessarily a

bad thing, if it can be worked through constructively.

b. **How might you prevent the problems of real concern? Can you include something in the problem statement or in building community and capacity that can alleviate some problems? What tools can help structure the work to help with management?**

- We will have the initial “introductions” that are really a trial run for the student and the resident
- The instructor and the Activity Director will be in weekly contact after every visit
- Class will discuss visits every week in order to address issues
- Students will write a weekly reflection piece so that instructor can keep on top of problems as they emerge

c. **How might you respond if one of these problems occurs?**

- The instructor and AD should be in constant contact and can deal with issues right away

4. **How often and when will you build in time to reflect on how the project is going and make any necessary changes to the project? (Think about this question in terms of yourself, your community partner and your students.)**

- Students will have weekly reflection from the site
- Students will do initial feedback of the course after 1 month
- DA and instructor will talk every week about progress and problems

Reflection

What activities, knowledge, skills, and work need reflection?

Developing relationships with seniors (communication skills, attitudes toward seniors, professionalism)

Collaboration on creative work, including the creative pieces with seniors and the final book.

What reflection strategies can you use on an on-going basis to keep a pulse on the class?

Weekly journals through which students describe what they did, what they learned about the course content, the goals of the project, and themselves. Journal questions will center on these themes but vary from week to week.

What reflection strategies will you use for specific purposes?

After the first visit, we will have a reflective group discussion to explore first impressions and address any problems with senior-student matches.

After the final visit and the completion of the book, we will meet one last time with the seniors and senior center staff for a meal and celebration. As a part of that event, we will reflect together, in some kind of creative and appreciative way, about the whole project, and conduct an evaluation to discover what went well and what could be improved next time.

How do you plan to use reflection toward the end of the course?

At the end of the project, students will write a reflective self-evaluation assessing their learning regarding the goals of the project and any other significant learning experienced. We will take time in class for students to share insights that they had as a result of their participation in the project.

Assessment/Evaluation Worksheet

1. *What are the learning objectives that you want to assess?*

- develop knowledge of creative writing and appropriate vocabulary for discussing creative writing
- recognize writing as a constructive, meaningful process
- recognize that talk is an important tool for communicating, thinking, and learning
- recognize listening as an active, constructive process
- develop abilities to write creatively in the following genres: *poetry, plays, fiction, and non-fiction*
- learn to teach some of the above skills in the context of a tutorial relationship

2. *What is the evidence that you will use to assess learning objectives?*

- Weekly journals
- Final product
- Self-evaluation at project's end

3. *Consider one piece of evidence you will use to assess an assignment. What criteria will you use to assess effective learning?*

- For the journals, we will define the criteria as a class, but I will be sure that the criteria include addressing the following categories each week: description of what they did, saw, heard, felt, experienced; exploration of what they learned regarding course and project objectives; and sharing of insights and learning about themselves.

4. *How frequently will you do the assessments?*

See #2 above

5. *What are the different modes by which you will do the assessments?*

- Instructor assessment of journals
- Group (students, instructor, seniors, senior center staff) assessment of final product
- Student self-assessment of learning

6. *Who will do the different assessments?*

See #5 above