WRITING-TO-SERVE: AN EHTNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A WRITING-ACROSS-THE-CURRICULUM APPROACH IN A SERVICE LEARNING COURSE

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ABSTRACT

Though Service-Learning and Writing-Across-the-Curriculum are two educational reform movements with similar histories and objectives, the two have for the most part remained separate in higher education. This thesis presents an ethnographic study of one course at the University of Missouri, Columbia that stands at a unique intersection between these two major reform movements: The MU Community Engagement Project (MUCEP).

Using traditional ethnographic research methods, including classroom observation, semi-structured interviews with course instructors and students, and artifact analysis, this study seeks to address the following questions: What genres of writing are assigned in this course and why? How do the writing assignments in this course affect (or not affect) students as citizens? How do the writing assignments affect (or not affect) the students as writers and thinkers?

The semester-long study finds that the course professor assigns genres of writing that help students think like activists through storytelling and research while offering them practice writing in genres used in the field of public service. The study also finds that, as a result of the written assignments, the six student participants developed more reciprocal relationships with members of the community and gained a deeper awareness of social problems as systemic. Students also developed their critical and creative thinking skills and motivation to engage in complex research. Finally, the study finds that courses like MUCEP, which are both “service-designated” and “writing-intensive,” require a substantial time commitment from students, which may be problematic in certain contexts.