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## A Culture of Civic Action: Deliberative Pedagogy for Composition

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A CULTURE OF CIVIC ACTION: DELIBERATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR COMPOSITION

by

Trevor Sprague

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2021

## ABSTRACT

### A CULTURE OF CIVIC ACTION: DELIBERATIVE PEDAGOGY FOR COMPOSITION

by

Trevor Sprague

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2021  
Under the Supervision of Professor Shevaun Watson

Despite rhetoric and composition maintaining a role as a producer of democracy, democratic deliberation has not appeared widely as a pedagogical practice, outside of reinforcing traditional modes of argumentative writing. This dissertation articulates the dispositions and practices for a deliberative pedagogy in composition that supports students' development of rhetorical understandings of social-political life, actively redresses exclusions and inequities in dominant understandings of democracy, and engages the discipline with a progressive vision of social change. Agency and citizenship are re-theorized as a grounding to this pedagogy, making clear how a wide variety of communicative acts support the processes and aims of public deliberation and constitute the behaviors of democracy as a way of life. Drawing from two semesters of in-class study, I demonstrate how employing deliberation as a method of instruction, as thematic content for class study, and as a technique for classroom management encourages students to recognize and self-consciously frame their day-to-day writing and speaking as democratic action. The major findings include that deliberative pedagogy leads to transformative change in students' attitudes towards democracy, expands students' sense of self-efficacy in writing and communicating on public issues, and supports students in exercising reflective, democratic control over the conditions of their education.

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For my wife,  
my daughters,  
and my whole family who  
supported me through this journey

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## Chapter One: On Deliberation, Democracy, and Education

### Introduction

The research presented in this dissertation rose out of my desire to make my teaching something of more tangible public purpose. I have always felt higher education to be connected to the development of a fulfilling life of service to my community. Many universities make clear that they see such a link informing the work of educating students. Excerpts from the mission and values statements of schools around the country reveal an overwhelming concern with the development of “engaged,” “dedicated,” “thoughtful,” “reflective,” and above all, “productive” citizens. That so many institutions of higher education are proud of their success in creating these wonderful individuals should serve as some salve for those of us concerned by headlines like these appearing every day: “Post-election, political partisanship on Main Street is Spiking” (CNBC 1 Dec 2020); “A Cold War Between Red and Blue America” (*The Atlantic* 4 Nov 2020); “Is US Politics Beyond the Point of Repair?” (BBC 9 Feb 2020). Surely, this is so much fake news, and we can remain hopeful that the collective efforts of America’s colleges are doing the yeoman’s work of building and maintaining a diverse citizenry that reflects the demographics of contemporary America.

If we want to continue to maintain composition teaching as a space for the production of both practicing, engaged citizens and the phenomenon of democracy, then I believe we need pedagogies that are well-theorized and committed to explicitly accounting for themselves as political endeavors. This is in keeping with a growing tradition of critical pedagogies that make political consciousness-raising central to their practice (Freire 1970; hooks 1994; Shor 1996; Giroux 2003; Kopelson 2003; Parks 2014). The deliberative composition pedagogy I propose in this dissertation provides a sound theoretical base for such an ethically- and politically-

committed teaching practice. The politics underwriting my pedagogy does not demand the formal exercise of elite modes of communicating, teaching stale processes without connection to real lives or problems, nor does it require that we shy from actively redressing the systemic exclusions from higher education and democratic life that characterize current-traditional teaching which prioritizes those elite discourses. I should be clear that a progressive vision of higher education's role in society guides the research and discussion I present here. It has become impossible, however, for me to think about my political commitments in education without picturing the normally good-natured face of Stanley Fish frowning at me from behind a copy of *Save the World on Your Own Time*. I encountered both that book and a 2003 article of the same name for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* early in my teacher-training, and his admonitions have stuck in my mind ever since. In these texts Fish imagines a narrow lane for academics:

Academic virtue is the virtue that is or should be displayed in the course of academic activities—teaching, research, publishing. Teachers should show up for their classes, prepare syllabuses, teach what has been advertised, be current in the literature of the field, promptly correct assignments and papers, hold regular office hours, and give academic (not political or moral) advice...my assertion is that it is immoral for academics or academic institutions to proclaim moral views. (Fish n.p.)

But later in that article, Fish proposes a simple test for universities to decide whether some decision they have made—curricular, policy-wise, or some other—is properly within that lane. He writes, “the basic test of any action contemplated by a university should take the form of a simple question: Has the decision to do this (or not do this) been reached on educational grounds? (“Save the World” n.p.). And so, I have begun asking myself, what *are* the educational

grounds on which I have decided to center democracy and advocacy in my research and teaching? Just in case I should find myself in an elevator with him, I'd like to have an answer on hand.

For the beginnings of a response, I turn to others who have countered, as does James Berlin in "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," that those like Fish fail to recognize that the distinctions they make between the academic and political arenas is itself a political distinction "imbricated in ideology." More contemporaneously, I have been influenced by the work of Steve Parks, among others, whose commitment to reimagining the discipline as an engine of social change is a central feature of his work with community publishing. Parks encourages the discipline to shift from emphasizing the development of individual student voices who may enter and exert influence in rhetorical forums, and instead to "move toward a collective voice" that can take advantage of "the foundational moment for strategic interventions in networks of power" (522). I believe, as did Freire, that the work we do in writing classrooms is always already political in nature (*Pedagogy of Freedom* 68). This is true whether we believe our course content to be value-neutral or not, as that content is predicated on a history of social relations of power that has determined which forms of communication are valued, which goals are worth aiming at, and ultimately whose voices are most important. The educational grounds for making more explicit political and ethical commitments in and through my teaching, then, is that we are educating students to enter a social and political world in which they will meet and need to negotiate between competing interests and values, to be able to identify and create opportunities to challenge inequity and injustice. To educate students only to step quiescently into a life of labor, to accept whatever dictates any authority should hand them, whether an employer, an elected official, or otherwise, would be the truly immoral stance for an educator to

take. This perspective, I believe, makes the best use of Freire's sense of dialogic action, which blends action and reflection to form a praxis, enabling transformation to take place. Freire believed that activism could easily become separated from practice—what he referred to as “naïve activism,” which can devolve into action for its own sake; even well-intentioned social action can become misguided.

While reading for this project, I came across an earlier Milwaukee colleague's dissertation on topics related to my own. In it, John Raucci held up a mirror that was painful to look in. He writes of his own experience as a Ph.D. student:

Despite many progressive political commitments, I had not been politically active beyond my teaching. I started to ask: At what local community centers have I given my time for tutoring reading or writing? What political movements and protests have I participated in? Helped organize? How many times have I volunteered to assist my graduate student union [recently neutered by the previous governor], even when they have asked me repeatedly for time and help? The unfortunate answer to all of these questions, at the time, was none.

To see my own struggles so candidly presented laid bare for me the difficulty that comes with engaging different arenas of public discourse. Such inaction felt incompatible with my teaching and research goals, and hypocritical to an extreme. Still, I persevered with my research, continuing to pursue ways of speaking and writing in their various public forms for application in the classroom. I began asking myself, is the classroom enough? Is there enough of public meaning, public importance, happening in college classrooms to make that my singular focus? Certainly, a great deal of scholarship in rhetoric and composition addresses the ways that higher education generates and reproduces the social world of a democratic society. Even the critiques

of democracy and citizenship that I address in these pages make clear that some meaningful link between school and “the real world” exists.

Rhetoric and composition, as a discipline, continues to wrestle with how best to make real impacts in the most fundamental systems of oppression and violence. Through professional activities like service, research, and teaching, compositionists have for many years attempted to devise practices and pedagogies that upend these systems. Our more recent turn towards public composition has broached important concerns about our ethical stance as researchers towards the communities we hope to engage (Wells 1996; Weisser 2002; Gogan 2014; Holmes 2018; CCCC Statement on Community-Engaged Projects in Rhetoric and Composition) as well as towards our students as we ask them to pursue such engagements. In addition to pushing the ongoing discussions about how to assess and value our own public writing and scholarship, many also recognize how important these teaching efforts are. Nancy Welch has argued that activist and social movement rhetorics are crucial areas of practice and research for the field, urging that we must attend to “the history of rhetorical means that have won social change” (46). Welch’s co-editors of a recent volume, Susan Jarratt and Jonathan Alexander, continue this same line of thinking; in their opening essay to *Unruly Rhetorics: Protest, Persuasion, and Publics*, Jarratt and Alexander theorize politics as founded on unruliness—of bodies being shifted from their assigned positions in society. They identify the political as “the collective groan of deeply felt precarity and vulnerability sounding out” (12). The challenge they identify for rhetoric and composition is to develop a clear account of “ethical action in the aftermath of unruliness. What do we do after we hear the groan?” (14). Although we may, as a field, generally favor or give more attention to those discourses that seek an opening up of the field of public discussion and seek acknowledgement of what was previously invisible, composition’s relationship to official

power structures and state-sanctioned violence hasn't always appeared as clearly as many would like; a growing body of scholarship in composition challenges the discipline to make clear ethical and political commitments to social justice and to openly practice what we preach.

Change in the field's political commitments is a matter of time and will, and we do seem to be on the right track. The difference in response across three parallel examples, separated by 50 years, is telling. In response to police violence against protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, the CCCC Executive Committee decided to change the location of the annual conference from Chicago to St. Louis, by which action they meant to express our discipline's opposition to "the language of the nightstick" ("Secretary's Report" 270). Ben Kuebrich, writing about composition's troubled relationship with power, police, and social progress, notes that in 2015, "while there was some discussion, unfortunately the [CCC] conference was not moved from Florida in response to Trayvon Martin's killing and Florida's Stand Your Ground law," and Kuebrich goes on to argue that "since racist police and vigilante violence happen within systems and institutions of power institutions taking bold stances can form part of a national response" (588, note #2). The next opportunity for a bold stance would come less than three years later. In June 2017, the NAACP issued a travel advisory for the state of Missouri in response to the passage of Sen. Gary Romine's "Jim Crow Bill—SB 43" and to a wave of racist attacks and incidents (including deaths at the hands or in the custody of police) across the state (NAACP n.p.). Planning for the 2018 CCCC in Kansas City was well underway at the time, and eventually the Conference Executive Committee issued a statement that the CCCC "takes seriously the concerns that are included in the NAACP Missouri Travel Advisory," and would follow the spirit and letter of the "Convention Siting and Hostile Legislation: Guiding Principles," which states that:

We will work to change state or local policies in host convention cities that diverge from established CCCC positions or otherwise threaten the safety or well-being of our membership.” To do so, we will consult with local groups and “arrang[e] activities and opportunities for members to support those who are disadvantaged by offensive policies...as a vehicle for nonviolent protest. (“CCCC 2018 Statement”)

Unlike in 1968, however, the statement also makes clear that the CCCC could not move the site of the convention, at the cost of “hundreds of thousands of dollars in penalties” (“CCCC 2018 Statement”). Looking back on the 1968 convention, Richard Marback challenged the committee’s justification for the move, and arguing that they did not make any clear distinctions between the police and the protesters at the DNC or examine those groups different access to and relationship with state power (190). Calling for a more “just language” in the face of police violence did little more than reaffirm the field’s commitment to a “civil rhetoric” that can only work by “differentiating and excluding itself...creating a distance from police violence *and* disenfranchised groups” (Marback 191, emphasis added). Kuebrich speculated in 2015 that “our field’s identity has shifted since [1968], perhaps moving us closer to scholarship, pedagogies, and community-university partnerships situated to address social conflicts and work alongside disenfranchised groups” (568). Although the bold stance Kuebrich hoped for may not have materialized, the CCCC’s more active involvement with community advocacy groups and enabling its members to find participatory spaces of protest and support for minoritized groups are certainly steps in the right direction—away from a disinterested, “civil rhetoric” and towards real social change for justice.

More recent efforts across the field have continued to try to foster tangible change. Very recently, in June of 2020, Association of Teachers of Technical Writing president Angela M.



Haas published a “Call to Action to Redress Anti-Blackness and White Supremacy,” in which she presents specific, considered methods by which non-black association members may “mobilize our (proximity to) white privilege and use our rhetoric and technical communication skills to redress anti-Blackness in our spheres of influence” (n.p.). Haas encourages her colleagues to plan their allyship and to make public their actions to redress the marginalization of people of color within the profession. ATTW has, like CCCC, wrestled with the ethics of convention sites—during the debate over the 2018 CCCC in Kansas City, Missouri, ATTW made the decision to change venues, relocating to Kansas City, Kansas in an effort to “prioritize the voices and safety of our most vulnerable members,” as then-president Michelle Eble published on the association’s blog (n.p.). The professional organizations of the discipline, in addition to these types of group actions, also continue to foreground scholarship in areas like antiracist assessment practices (Inoue 2015), anticolonial rhetorical practices (Ruiz and Sanchez 2016), and standard language ideologies (Guerra 2016).

Continuing in this kind of work, the overarching goal of this dissertation is to make tangible steps linking my work as a teacher and scholar of composition and rhetoric to progressive change in the public sphere. To accomplish this, I have developed my teaching practices to make direct confrontation with social and political problems the defining feature of my classes, and this has laid the groundwork for my commitment to deliberative democracy as an effective model for change. The early chapters first work to clarify the theoretical underpinnings of the pedagogy I employ. I devote a chapter each to explicating the terms *agency* and *citizenship*, which come to the fore in any work that engages questions of “the public” or democratic deliberation. Agency is central concern of democratic theorists, but a theory of agency is also a central component of any pedagogy. Citizenship, as I will show, has a long

provenance in the scholarship of higher education, and I bring to those discussions relevant scholarship from political science to build on composition's body of knowledge about how writing instruction is implicated in the development of citizens and citizenship. By exploring each of these key terms in a full chapter, I provide the warrant for implementing a deliberative composition pedagogy as distinct from other critical traditions in the field. Additionally, these chapters help to establish how this pedagogy engages composition scholars in a meaningful dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. Overall, this dissertation makes the case for teaching composition deliberately, adopting a critical ethical stance towards students, academic institutions, and the larger society in which they are embedded; I argue this stance marks an urgent need for composition studies, which has maintained for itself a key role in the production of democracy, but without adequately accounting for or addressing the unequal distribution of democratic goods in society—citizenship, enfranchisement, access to official avenues of power. Fully realizing the democratic potential of composition instruction requires us to make our classrooms spaces where the daily experience of democratic life is made central to the content and practice of our teaching. Without such efforts, we continue to practice democracy as an ambient, ill-defined super-term, referencing Amy Wan's 2011 criticism of the field. The result is that even our most well-intentioned efforts at community-engaged teaching and public writing can easily reinforce the existing structure of power and access to resources; students seek to leverage their rhetorical resources and university credentials to enter an intensely competitive neoliberal marketplace which defines success purely in terms of individual profit and makes citizenship synonymous with working tirelessly to support the economic life of the state. Deliberative pedagogy directly intervenes in these processes of enculturating students to the marketplace by reestablishing the value of reflective engagement with diverse interests,

recognizing the capacity of all people to impact a social lifeworld by deemphasizing and de-centering citizenship as a goal of education, and of prioritizing community goals and public goods over and beyond mere accumulation and individual financial and social attainment.

### **Deliberative Pedagogy Across Disciplines**

It is, from the outset, important for me to clearly define what deliberative pedagogy is, what it does, and in response to what contexts it has been developed. Later in this chapter, I introduce my additions and revisions to deliberative pedagogy specific to the writing classroom as a way to establish my original contribution to the scholarship on both deliberative democracy and rhetoric and composition. Deliberation has a natural home in communication studies, in which much of the pedagogical work done on the subject focuses on developing students' capacities and efficacy in structured deliberative discourse. Deliberation should not, however, be taken as synonymous with argumentation or debate. Rather, deliberation in its most basic form can be understood in terms laid out by former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Ford and current president of the Kettering Foundation, David Mathews: "To deliberate is to carefully weigh possible civic actions, laws, or policies against the various things that people hold dear in order to settle on a direction to follow or purpose to pursue" (Forward to *Deliberative Pedagogy*, x). Argumentation is thus only one type of discursive action that can take place within a deliberative setting, which might appear alongside testimony, personal narrative, question-posing, and many other forms of communicating. Deliberative pedagogy, to begin adding conceptual depth, is a term of far more recent genesis that has grown out of the "deliberative turn" in political theory since the early 1990s (Shaffer, "Teaching" 94). Professor of Communication Studies at Colorado State University Martín Carcasson explains that it is "best understood as a teaching philosophy focused on equipping students with the mind-sets and

skill sets necessary for high-quality participatory decision-making in the face of ‘wicked’ problems” (3). Timothy Shaffer, a communications scholar and Assistant Director of the Institute for Civic Discourse and Democracy at Kansas State University, notes that deliberative pedagogy “is situated in a growing literature that explores the experiences, possibilities, and promise of integrating deliberative democracy into educational settings, and specifically into higher education” (Shaffer et al. 21). In this section, I review the most relevant literature on deliberative democracy and the literature on deliberative pedagogies that has been developed from it in just the past decade or so.

As they are frequently presented, deliberative pedagogies are meant to make direct interventions in the perceived “death” of democracies. Shaffer, one of the most prolific promoters and developers of deliberative pedagogies, writes that “this perceived death... is not from natural causes. Instead, it has come about because of particular political actors and policies—or because of people’s disengagement from political life because they see themselves as outside of the realm of influence because of their lack of capital” (Shaffer 35). In many ways, the decline of democracy, or at least the decline in public trust in democratic institutions, is a discursive phenomenon. Sociologist Nina Eliasoph described in great detail the mental and social contortions Americans go through in order to avoid talking about “politics.” Describing her fieldwork among local, grassroots activist groups, Eliasoph creates a stark portrait of the “shrinking circle of concern” as thoughtful, engaged activists are put under pressure by increased publicity and the norms of polite or civic culture, in which talking too much about political issues, as opposed to the concerns of home, family, and property, is viewed as inappropriate or rude. The result is a pervasive form of self-censure as the audience for public talk widens. She concludes from her studies that “civic etiquette made imaginative, open-minded, thoughtful

conversation rare in public, frontstage settings. The more hidden the context [of political discussion], the more public-spirited conversation was possible. Politics evaporated from public circulation” (230). Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt’s *New York Times* best-selling book, *How Democracies Die*, argues that the steady erosion of political norms, when polarization becomes an entrenched fact of life, and when elected officials are willing to break the norms of democratic governance or refuse to maintain democratic safeguards contributes to this “death.” Erik Jones, professor of European Studies at John’s Hopkins University, puts it most damningly in the title of his 2018 review of their book: “Democracies Don’t Die, They are Killed.” It is, Jones explains, no accident when our democratic institutions are weakened; it is the consequence of deliberate action on the part of a few powerful interests, and the scrupulous inaction on the part of many. Scholars of all stripes interested in democracy have thus been called to develop theories and practices to stanch the bleeding and resuscitate democratic life.

Against the backdrop of these concerns about the decline of democracies around the world, scholars in communication studies, political science, sociology, and education have developed deliberative pedagogies as a lively field of contemporary research. Deliberative pedagogy has its roots in theories of deliberative democracy. A robust scholarship of democratic theory since the 1980s has placed deliberation, often used interchangeably with “discussion,” at the heart of democratic processes. In this view, democracy becomes not only a set of institutions or governing structures, but a daily way of relating to one’s community and the larger society around them. Generally credited with coining the term “deliberative democracy,” political scientist Joseph Bessette writes of the early American republic, “reflecting a view widely shared by the leading liberal statesmen and theorists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the framers believe that if democracy was to be successful, lawmaking must reflect what Publius

called ‘the cool and deliberate sense of the community’” (1). Many political scientists and theorists before and since have taken public deliberation to be the critical feature of how democracy “ought” to work (Chambers 1996; Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Bohman 1996; Nino, 1996; Benhabib 1996; Dryzek 2000). As political scholar John Dryzek confidently states, at least among democratic theorists “the essence of democracy itself is now widely taken to be deliberation, as opposed to voting, interest aggregation, constitutional rights, or even self-government” (1). He further argues, the point of critical theories of democracy is not merely identifying or learning about the forces that distort or disrupt democratic practices, but also in encouraging the abilities of citizens to organize and counteract those forces (21). Deliberation, as these and many other scholars hold, provides one of the best methods for countering the anti-democratic tendencies.

Deliberative democracy is not, however, without its strong critiques. Introducing their collection of essays addressing the problem of “democratizing deliberation,” Derek Barker, Noëlle McAfee, and David McIvor describe the early theories of the 1980s hypothesizing “a rather narrow conception of deliberation as rational discourse,” and the result was that deliberation became stereotyped as an impractical, sterile process divorced from reality (1). In part, the emphasis on rational discourse stems from the widely influential theories of the public sphere of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, who have questioned exactly what counts as “public reason,” or what types of discourse are permitted within public deliberation. Habermas’s historical and conceptual exegesis of the public sphere rests heavily on the notion of privatized individuals engaging in rational-critical discussion or debate. His major early text on the subject, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, details how, over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the bourgeoisie as a social group coalesced around new

economic arrangements and the new socio-political realities their new economic status made possible. In his descriptions of eighteenth-century salons, we find the beginnings of his theory of communicative rationality. The openness and inclusivity of thought, the mutual respect and willingness of interlocutors to treat one another as equals he finds in the salons would develop into the core of his normative standards for rational public discourse in his later work. Working contemporaneously across the Atlantic, John Rawls is intimately connected with theories of public discourse by his famous thought experiment posing the “veil of ignorance.” Arguing in his important 1971 text, *A Theory of Justice*, that the problem of distributive justice, or how to realize a socially just distribution of goods and capital in society, is best answered by a deliberative process by which individuals approach issues of justice from behind this veil, in which “no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities his intelligence, strength, and the like.” He continues, “I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities” (11). This veil of ignorance, in Rawls’s theory, enables the “original position” for public discourse, by which he means to adopt a fair and impartial point of view when reasoning about matters of justice. In both Rawls’s and Habermas’s cases, the theories they develop about public reason are hypothetical and seek to determine the ideal approach to public discourse, which has come to be known as the “rational proceduralist” model of democratic deliberation (McAfee 21). As political philosopher Noëlle McAfee describes it, in this model “citizens are guided by a will to come up with universalizable norms or at least norms that are acceptable to all those affected by any given policy” (27). In order to maintain the legitimacy of public decisions, however, it is necessary in this model to exclude

“irrational” agents; the criteria for rationality or reasonableness being firmly rooted in Rawls’s and Habermas’s idealized theories.

More contemporary theoretical accounts of publics and counterpublics have supplied analytical frameworks grounded in the actual experience of democracy and public discourse. Critiquing Habermas’s conception of the bourgeois public sphere, Nancy Fraser argued in 1992 that, “despite the rhetoric of publicity and accessibility, that official public sphere rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions” (59). The irony of the public sphere as Habermas envisioned it, Fraser notes, was that the supposed inclusivity of the public sphere was enabled by the formation of a vision of “rational” public discourse that was tied to dominant white, middle-class ideals of politeness, language, and eloquence. Although, in Habermas’s theory, existing distinctions of status or class were “bracketed and neutralized,” in practice this resulted in the closing of the public sphere to women, the working and lower classes, and people of color. The notion of counterpublics is important to understanding the complex, often asymmetrical relations of power between social groups. In his influential study *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner explains that “some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public.... This kind of public is, in effect, a counterpublic: it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status” (56). Women’s, racial, or queer counterpublics, for instance, in their association as a group and expressive of that group identity, force some level of recognition by the wider, “official” public sphere and call into question the social arrangements and forces that perpetuate subordinate status. This is the milieu of activist politics calling for greater extension of democracy, for reflection on the consequences of public policy and law, and for the redistribution of social power and goods. Warner, Fraser and others thus demonstrate how deliberative processes bound by normative conceptions of what



“counts” in public discourse can easily serve to reinforce an existing, unjust status quo. We should rightly be concerned, given the history of exclusions from public life, that participation in democratic activity requires those who stand apart in any way from the dominant class or culture to relinquish a sense of individual or group difference in order to remain within a larger, normative public sphere. Scholars such as Seyla Benhabib and the contributors to her volume *Democracy and Difference*, however, find that “the institutions and culture of liberal democracies are sufficiently complex, supple, and decentered so as to allow the expression of difference without fracturing the identity of the body politic or subverting existing forms of political sovereignty” (5). Said differently, participatory, deliberative activity can allow, and indeed benefit from, the inclusion of counterpublic discourses without compromising the aims or processes of deliberation itself. The question for educators, then, is how best to encourage or operationalize these kinds of reflective and inclusive deliberative activity in the classroom.

One of the strongest and most active proponents of deliberative pedagogies is the Kettering Foundation (KF), located in Dayton, Ohio. A nonpartisan research institute, Kettering focuses on the primary question, “what does it take to make democracy work as it should?” ([kettering.org](http://kettering.org)). It supports researchers, publishes a number of papers and books each year, and offers collaborative learning opportunities such as the Deliberative Democracy Institute (DDI). The DDI draws participants from around the world for intensive sessions aimed at building relationships and networks between organizations or other institutions dedicated to furthering democratic practices. The foundation approaches democracy as a local, citizen-focused, community enterprise, rather than a top-down, national form of government. As they explain, their research is “conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation” (“Core

Insights”). KF researchers have identified a set of “democratic practices” that define the importance of deliberation as part of the everyday practice of democracy:

Democratic practices are variations on the things that happen every day in communities. In order for these routine activities to become public, citizens have to be involved. Yet this doesn’t mean that communities have to do anything out of the ordinary—they just have to do the ordinary in different ways. If the routine business of politics is done in ways that are open to citizens, the routines can become democratic practices.

(“Democratic Practices”)

Deliberation factors in as one part of an ongoing process, which KF orients specifically around collaborative decision-making. After identifying and framing issues of common concern, “when people move on to assess the possible consequences that might result from one course of action or another, Kettering would say they are making decisions deliberatively” (“Democratic Practices”). The model of deliberation KF promotes through its publications, support for academic research, and community action remains one of the most successful and widely adopted deliberative processes.

Practitioners and researchers of deliberative pedagogies typically maintain an explicit connection between the university and the democratic society. In the introduction to the 2008 collection *Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education*, Laura Grattan, John Dedrick, and Harris Dienstfrey write that universities are the traditional sites of intellectual innovation that “[reinvigorate] the larger public and democratic purposes of academic life” (5). These editors continue by citing the work of sociologists Carmen Sirianni and Lewis Friedland, who argue that colleges and universities are, in the early decades of the twenty-first century, embracing their roles as “architects of a flourishing democracy” (qtd. in Grattan et al., 5). This sense of

democratic mission in education is reflected in scholarship on deliberation across disciplines. Writing in the Kettering Foundation's 2012 annual newsletter, *Connections*, Joni Doherty attached to deliberative pedagogy the subtitle, "An Education that Matters." Responding to the American Association of Colleges and Universities 1998 challenge for "higher education to rethink its mission for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" in ways that reaffirm the university's roles and responsibilities within communities, Doherty claims that "deliberative pedagogies...redefine the mission of higher education as one in which the boundaries between the 'ivory tower,' professional life, and the body politic are blurred" (25-26). Most recently, a group of scholars collaborated to disseminate pedagogical research in deliberation outside of the confines of the Kettering Foundation. As editor Maxine S. Thomas indicated in her preface to the collection, these young and active scholars recognized, despite the ongoing support from the foundation, the need for publications to undergo rigorous peer review in the established journals and publishing houses in order to reflect the professionalization of the growing work in deliberative pedagogies. The resulting book, *Deliberative Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*, was published in 2017 and represents the work of scholars from many countries and disciplines engaging with deliberative practices in both the content of their courses and through their teaching practices.

### **Minding the Gap**

Although there is a broad and growing literature in deliberative pedagogies, spanning women's and gender studies (Al-Atiyat), journalism (Romano), engineering (McMillan), education (Alfaro), and communications (Shaffer, Carcasson), there exists to my knowledge only one published treatment of deliberative pedagogy within rhetoric and composition. Notably, however, its author, Maria Farland of Fordham University, is not a rhetoric and composition

specialist, but is rather a scholar of nineteenth century American literature. As is not unusual with literature scholars, especially at private, liberal arts universities, she found herself teaching First-Year Writing in the spring terms of 2005 and 2006. Her essay, “The Deliberative Writing Classroom: Public Engagement and Aristotle in the Core Curriculum at Fordham University” was published in the Kettering Foundation’s 2008 collection referenced earlier, *Deliberation and the Work of Higher Education*. In it, Farland reflects on her “experiment with deliberative pedagogy in a first-year seminar,” which in the context of Fordham’s curriculum, meant a course examining “the rhetoric and ethics of academic argument” (91).

The course Farland describes follows a blueprint familiar within current-traditional rhetoric; Aristotle’s *topoi*, summarized as the effort to “formalize a system for coming up with, organizing, and expressing ideas, typically including the following injunctions:

1. Use Definition
2. Use Comparison
3. Explore Relationship
4. Examine Circumstances
5. Rely on Testimony and Authorities” (Gocsik, qtd. in Farland 93).

Farland appears sensitive to negative attitudes towards this kind of current-traditional “modes” curriculum in which students typically complete a series of discrete writing assignments employing each one of these *topoi*. As she writes, “at times, the very familiarity of these exercises can make them predictable and stale” (93). However, Farland maintains that “the logical and rhetorical operations contained in the *topoi* are indispensable to virtually every form of academic and nonacademic writing” (94). The problem with such approaches, in other words, is not the content or practice of the *topoi* themselves, but when they are divorced from connections to broader social questions or when they do not build students’ interest in the writing topics. Her experiment with deliberative pedagogy was thus aimed at “reanimation of rhetoric’s

origins in forms of public engagement,” accomplished by “[focusing] our attention on social issues that were actively present in the campus community and part of a larger social community as well” (94).

In structure, Farland’s writing course began with involving students in deliberative forums around a variety of issues: alcohol use/abuse on campus, apathy and student engagement, and “My Generation—Who are We?”. Using deliberative materials such as the National Issues Forums “issue guides,” which have been regularly published on major national problems and aim to aid individuals and organizations in facilitating and participating in deliberative forums, she frames spoken and written communications as deliberative contexts by emphasizing alternatives and trade-offs rather than “predictable, partisan alignments” (106). Students would thus experience deliberation about a challenging topic, what David Mathews calls “wicked problems” that resist easy or straightforward answers and require ongoing discussion as contexts change and new information is created or discovered.<sup>1</sup> Building upon the experience of deliberating, students would then complete writing assignments foregrounding one of the five topoi. The assignment following from the students’ deliberations about the campus’s policy toward alcohol included a short essay on the ways that “alcoholism” might be defined, also employing the topos of contrast to consider what different definitions tell us about attitudes towards alcohol use and addiction. Farland writes, “what is at stake in these kinds of written and oral deliberations is not so much the question of how certain policies might affect alcohol consumption, but rather the question of the difficulties and challenges that inhere in making claims about causation and

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of wicked problems was first articulated by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, in “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning.” *Policy Sciences*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1973, pp. 155-169.

antecedents,” fostering conditions under which students might better assess “the logical and rhetorical effectiveness of their claims” (97).

The value of deliberation, and of deliberative pedagogy for writing, as Farland reflects on it, is twofold. First, as many of the scholars I discuss in the preceding section have made clear, “meaningful public talk and deliberation can combat cynicism and alienation among the young and can empower citizens to believe that they can affect change in their communities” (90). There is, in other words, clear value for democracy itself in making these kinds of democratic practices native to the university classroom. The other value proposition, for Farland, is located squarely in how the practices of deliberation can emphasize the traditional kinds of skills that a writing class is “meant” to develop. Her perspective is worth quoting at length:

The deliberative classroom involves student writers in meticulous research, sophisticated thesis formation, balanced evidence gathering, and an evenhanded consideration of a range of possible counterclaims, weighing alternative interpretations and comparing analyses that have been made of that might be made in response to the issue under scrutiny. Most of all, the deliberative classroom highlights the importance of reasoned argument, when argument is understood as driven by a set of underlying values and value tensions, and when, after closely reading and confronting a range of formulations and evidence, effective argument involves accounting for and weighing the trade-offs involved in different approaches to an issue. (93)

It is clear from this that, at least for Farland in the context of Fordham’s first-year seminars, that deliberation’s main benefit is that it supports a version of argumentative writing that matches with current-traditional pedagogies. She is unequivocal, for example, in claiming that “student writers must learn the importance of motivating arguments,” in the rhetorical sense of

“motivation” as the “intellectual justification, rationale,” or the “facts and arguments used to support a proposal” that is given in Joseph Williams’ and Gregory Colomb’s argumentative textbook, *The Craft of Argument* (qtd. in Farland 90). Ultimately, then, the account of a deliberative writing classroom that Farland presents values deliberation for its more nuanced, multivocal argumentation that “strives to resist predictable, partisan alignments” (106). She positions a deliberative framework as an antidote to stale, unreflective writing in “the modes,” where students’ subjects are not meaningfully tied to real-world audiences, or fail to represent the complexity inherent in most issues or questions that carry broad, public significance. Farland concludes that deliberative approaches to teaching writing “demand that students are active, engaged, and empowered,” and thus such approaches “promise to respond to broader institutional demands for active and mission-based classroom activity” (108). As far as this goes, I believe Farland is correct in her assessment of the institutional value of deliberative approaches to education; it is, however, only a partial picture of what deliberative teaching brings to the writing classroom and what the particular value of these practices may be for writing programs and the larger institutions in which they are situated.

Farland’s account of a deliberative writing classroom is explicitly an Aristotelian account of argumentative writing—but argument or persuasive speech is not the only kind of discourse that is present or valued within deliberative processes. Further, the nature of real-world deliberations seldom aligns with the ideal of rational-critical debate that typically characterizes theories of deliberative democracy. Arabella Lyon, in her book *Deliberative Acts*, outlines three critical perspectives on Aristotelian persuasion as the only model of deliberative discourse. First, the Aristotelian approach “presumes a powerful speaker (even a demigod) and a docile audience,” rather than a relationship between equal partners; second, persuasion is ends-oriented

towards “hopeful, future outcomes;” and third, “Aristotelian persuasion, born of the *polis*, presumes a common core of interests, knowledges, and spaces” (33). Lyon’s response to these critiques is to recognize the diversity and complexity of deliberative situations, which often involve participants who do not overlap in their lived experience. As she writes, “contemporary deliberations, however, often engage members of disparate communities who refuse, counter, or do not attend to the opposing arguments. Furthermore, the power differentials are embedded complexly in cultural differences that minimize any particular speaker’s appeal across issues” (33). In her own critique of traditional conceptions of deliberation, what she calls the “centered” model of deliberation, Iris Marion Young argues that deliberative democracy “ought not to be identified with processes of discussion in face-to-face settings,” and instead, “we should understand process of discussion and decision making that we evaluate under norms of deliberative democracy as occurring in multiple forums and sites connected to one another over broad spans of space and time” (113). Young’s critique of the centered models of deliberation goes so far as to include those espoused by the Kettering Foundation, the National Issues Forums, and in the deliberative polling methods of James Fishkin that have been used to promote public discussion in the US, New Zealand, and Mongolia, among others. The trouble with these models lies in their adherence to this Aristotelian emphasis on persuasion: “[these models] conceive deliberation as a give and take process of discussion aimed at persuasion within a single group that meets face to face and arrives at deliberative outcomes in a determinate period of time” (115-116). Like Lyon, Young conceives of deliberative spaces as involving a complex array of communication styles and discursive acts. This fact is tied to her criteria for evaluating the quality of deliberative political processes, in which inclusion figures prominently. Young



understands inclusion to be a more elaborate concept than many theorists typically allow for, however; she explains,

The formal opportunity to contribute and be witness to the contribution of others is not sufficient for effective inclusion. A process of political communication should also be inclusive of diverse communication styles and enable informative contributions that do not take the form of argument. In large-scale democracies characterized by massive social differentiation and inequality, we should think of inclusion not only in terms of individuals, but in terms of structural social groups who stand in unequal relations to one another. Inclusion thus requires compensating for the potential marginalization of some groups through mechanisms of special representation. (120)

To satisfy a criterion such as inclusion, we must account for the ways in which personal narrative, inquiry, remonstrance, storytelling, dissent, and other forms of performative discourse can all be involved in deliberation in ways that are not easily reducible to or recognizable as argumentation. It is on this conception of deliberation as more than merely a formal context of political discussion and persuasion that I ground my deliberative pedagogy, attempting to aid students in developing a robust set of rhetorical practices and sensibilities for engaging in public deliberations wherever they are encountered.

### **Deliberation and the Practice of Critical Pedagogies**

Whether one believes institutions of higher education *can* make an impact in the continued life of democracies tends to be a product of how one views the relationship between individuals, education, and democratic life. What, or whose, interests does higher education serve? Which interests *should* it serve? To whom or what are institutions of higher education accountable? One of the most common reference points for these types of questions is John

Dewey. The Progressive-era reformer articulated a clear role for nations in ensuring and promoting the education of their people; indeed, for Dewey, education was the primary driver of change and the betterment of societies. In *Democracy and Education*, he writes “a society which not only changes but which has the ideal of such change as will improve it, will have different standards and methods of education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs (81). For Dewey, progressive change was at the heart of education, and provides the warrant to argue for the state’s responsibility to ensure access to education for all. The experience of diversity and including a diversity of experience in democracy was, for Dewey, a critical element of maintaining healthy democratic life—the same was true of the educational spaces that promote, rejuvenate, and progress that social life. And, at the heart, progressive change was aimed at the realization of freedom, equality, and a full human life for all. Dewey recognized the necessity of education in establishing the conditions to realize these goals. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey writes “no person and no mind were ever emancipated merely by being left alone. Removal of formal limitations is but a negative condition; positive freedom is not a state but an act which involves methods and instrumentalities for control of conditions” (392). Becoming educated—not merely trained to complete a task efficiently—involved the student with a variety of these methods and instrumentalities in the form of schools, mentors, and teachers and engaged them directly with the process of education as the ongoing practice of realizing human freedom.

The notion of education as the practice of freedom was not unique to Dewey. An equally influential figure in the development of theories of democracy and education is Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose major work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is required reading for anyone interested in critical pedagogies. Responding to the political context of Brazil in the

1940s, where literacy was a requirement for voting in national elections, Freire recognized early on how education fundamentally impacted an individual's role within and experience of democracy. His concept of *conscientização*, translated as "critical consciousness" or "consciousness-raising," remains one of the central projects of critical pedagogies. It refers to the process by which a student moves towards awareness of the structural conditions in which they live, work, and learn, and engages in the praxis of reflecting on those conditions and taking action to dispel the dominant mythologies that maintain an oppressive status quo. Freire's theories of education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* illustrate the types of students that different models of education produce. His major critique is of the "banking model," which is teacher-centric, and assumes the perspective that teachers have knowledge, which they "deposit" in students through memorization and rote learning.

Irving Peckham articulates his real concern with the enthusiasm many writing teachers approach the project of transforming students through critical consciousness-raising. He opens his book, writing, "I am particularly concerned about classroom strategies that I and other progressive teachers might be employing that contribute to the reproduction of social class relationships in spite of our intent to challenge them" (2). Peckham explores in detail the processes of "crossing over" that students from working-class backgrounds try to do through schooling, and how those processes, despite appearing on the surface to be upending or breaking down social hierarchies, in fact can serve to reinforce the underlying assumptions of the stratified status quo: the myth of meritocracy that holds the "cream will rise to the top," and the corollary assumption that in such a system, failure to achieve or improve one's status is a purely an individual failing and not the result of systemic structures or forces. Such critiques are important for critical practitioners to bear in mind. For me, Peckham's challenges find some resolution in

the kind of practice imagined by Steve Parks, who argues in his 2014 article for *College English* that we, teachers of composition and rhetoric, have “settled for a soft vision of progressive change” (506). Exploring the discipline’s intense interest in community-engaged teaching, Parks tries to imagine composition as a field invested in actually changing the conditions that perpetuate systemic exploitation of “distressed communities” (507). It is a certainty that not everyone within the field believes that such an explicit and active progressive political orientation is possible, desirable, or even morally permissible for the discipline. However, as composition and rhetoric teachers and scholars continue to employ and develop critical pedagogical practices and continue to re-theorize and redefine the field’s relationships to public sociopolitical life, it is also clear that political neutrality hasn’t really been an option for some time. Pedagogical approaches such as the deliberative model I present in this dissertation adopt critical ethical stances towards students, academic institutions, and the larger society in which they are embedded, stances which are warranted by the working terms and principles under which composition has operated for over a century. To close this introduction, I outline how this dissertation examines the theoretical bases for and practical applications of deliberation across the chapters that follow.

### **A Look Ahead**

Each of the next two chapters examines the conflicted natures and roles of the concepts of *agency* and *citizenship* as they we typically find them in composition studies, and then applies new conceptions of these ideas to a developing, deliberative pedagogy for composition. Agency and citizenship are concepts of particular concern because of their deep connections to theories of democracy. I take as a starting assumption for this dissertation that *some* link exists, tacitly or otherwise, in the minds of the general public and composition specialists alike, between higher

education (literacy education in particular) and democratic life and governance. Taken together, conceptions of agency and citizenship that decenter traditional and normative views of democratic *community* and *belonging* open up a critical space from which we can imagine a rhetoric of public discourse that supports students in developing the conditions for social change. Using students' reflections and analyses of deliberative practices employed in the classroom, as well as my own observations and field notes, I argue that our conceptions of deliberation and democracy need to change in order to challenge the role of elite discourses, such as supposedly disinterested, rational argumentation, in defining legitimate democratic discourse, and in doing so expanding the horizons of democratic participation and broadening the reach of our teaching by demystifying what it means to speak, write, and act in ways that demonstrate public purpose. This reorientation in both theory and practice works actively to realize the goals of many in our field who would see composition instruction as a powerful tool for progressive social change. Following from students' self-reported attitudes and dispositions towards civic life and public forums of deliberation, this deliberative pedagogy for composition invites students to explore the rhetorical challenges and affordances of public discourse, and to view public discourse as a shifting, value-laden arena in which all people participate regardless of legal status, class, race, or other factors.

Specifically, Chapter Two first asserts a strong conception of agency that is not merely rhetorical, but also democratic, is necessary for composition and how such a concept of agency undergirds the experience of democracy as an intersubjectively shared mode of living. Examining the developing concept of agency through the past several decades in composition scholarship, the chapter illustrates the most dominant trends of thought and highlights several notable disagreements emanating from competing notions of agency. Exploring the limitations of

agency understood as a principally *rhetorical* phenomenon, it arrives at a challenge found in the scholarship of Steve Parks, to move us into “a sense of agency as change, as something that redistributes how power and resources are distributed” (521). To respond to this challenge, with the explicitly political aims it posits for composition instruction, I introduce the concept of *democratic interagency* from the work of political scientist Michael Ferguson. If, as Parks’ would have it, the work of composition instruction overlaps with the work of democratic change, then all the work we do in the classroom invokes and prefigures the interconnected processes of forming and legitimizing public opinion, which in turn are the basis of democratic governance. At the end of the chapter, I demonstrate how the concept of democratic interagency provides the warrant for redefining

Chapter Three moves from this reconsideration of agency to look closely at critiques of the concept of citizenship itself and the traditionally held views linking literacy and composition education to the ideal of “good” citizenship. Strong critiques from Karma Chavez, Juan Guerra, and Amy Wan in recent years have troubled the notion of citizenship as an unambiguous *good* to form the telos of such education. Both university demographics and public attitudes and ideas about citizenship have changed over the past half-century. The legal status of students no longer appears as a given, but instead operates as one more invisible resource distributed unequally across the student body. It is furthermore a resource that is inscribed unequally on *students’ bodies*. Language, race, and culture, so condition the real experience of citizenship that it does not—it *cannot*—deliver on the promise of inclusion and belonging offered by the American mythology of the melting pot and the “country of immigrants.” Paradoxically, then, citizenship as both a legal status and as a cultural touchstone of belonging can be profoundly *undemocratic*. Thus, this chapter asks how de-centering the persona of the citizen as the telos of composition

instruction creates the space for developing teaching practices that engage democracy as a way of living among plural others, who may in fact share nothing in common. This critique of commonality as the basis of democracy also comes from the work of Michael Ferguson and follows from the conception of democratic interagency explored in the previous chapter. By the end of the chapter I offer a vision of democratic-deliberative practices that call students to make committed engagements with public writing. Students discover these practices as inquiry, criticism, response, and revision of positions and perspectives encountered in the daily interchange of democratic society. More in-depth discussion of the kinds of practices I employ and examples of the public writing and advocacy that students engage in appears in the following chapter.

In Chapter Four, I first detail my research methods across four semesters of teaching in large, midwestern, urban research university. For my data collection, I first draw from Wendy Bishop's *Ethnographic Writing Research*, positioning myself as participant-researcher. Across four sections of composition classes spanning two academic years, I implemented a variety of deliberative practices in class. I designed a "Civic Agency" Survey that students completed at the outset, and again at the end of the semester, with questions eliciting a range of responses about students' familiarity, comfortability, and attitudes towards public deliberation and democratic processes. To supplement this quantitative, self-reported data, I conducted interviews with students from each class, identifying key informants who showed particular engagement with the unique design of the courses or with the notion of public deliberation itself. These interviews allowed students to reflect upon their experiences with deliberating about course structures and having a high degree of control over the conditions of their education, and it is the insights drawn from these interviews that I rely most heavily upon.

The chapter then continues to present the results of my research from four sections of writing classes—in both ENG 101 and 102, both halves of the two-semester FYC sequence, and two sections of ENG 240, a special topics class with the general title of “Rhetoric, Writing and Culture.” For these two sections, I designed my individual courses with the explicit goal of implementing deliberative practices in the teaching of writing and rhetoric, under the title “Rhetoric, Democracy, Advocacy.” This chapter considers the implications of teaching public writing through deliberative practices and within the revised conceptions of democratic citizenship and agency detailed in earlier chapters. The discussion in this chapter outlines a deliberative pedagogy for composition by examining the starting assumptions for deliberating about class structures and organization, relying on students’ my own reflections to consider the trade-offs involved with different choices about when, where, and how to deliberate, and exploring the potential and challenges for implementing deliberation on a programmatic basis.

Further, the *publicness* of their deliberative labor in class is not something abstract, in that they seek to address a generalized, imaginary, every-person audience on issues “common to all of us.” Rather, taking Ferguson’s critique of commonality as a foundation, public deliberation as I present it calls students to rhetorically attend to the vast differences in subject positions that members any given community possess and their own fragmented, overlapping, or partial identification with various communities. As they reflect on the different relationships that people take relative to problems of public concern, they are also able to identify and analyze the rhetorical effectiveness of a great variety of discursive contributions to public deliberation, including protest, social media, community organizing, and performance actions that attract broad public attention. Through their involvement with public writing projects, students connect



their academic work to their concerns and experiences in the larger communities they participate in.

Chapter Five concludes this dissertation by making the strongest case for a deliberative pedagogy for composition. The model that I propose in this dissertation is neither one-size-fits all, nor is it a “plug-and-play” product or method that can be acquired by interested instructors and put into practice with minimal preparation. It is, rather, a dynamic and flexible set of dispositions, practices, and approaches to teaching that draw from and reinforce a participatory, deliberative conception of democratic life. In contrast with the deliberative classroom detailed by Farland earlier, my conception of deliberation is not bound to a particular idea of “good” argumentation and does not necessarily make the teaching of argumentative practices the central concern of the course. This is not to say that I do not value such practices or think that students do not benefit from explicit instruction in how to motivate and give clear warrants for their arguments. Rather, it is simply the case that argumentation is not the only, nor even necessarily the most important, mode of deliberative discourse presented in class for reflection and practice. A deliberative pedagogy for composition can, and I believe should, teach students more than merely argumentative writing—a discourse that springs from the position of privilege enjoyed by the dominant heteronormative, affluent, white, male culture and that has historically set strict boundaries on what kinds of speech “count” in public forums. The stance enabled by such elite discourse is one of distance from the lived experience of poverty, oppression, and disenfranchisement that people from outside the dominant culture experience as the basic facts of life. From that distance, it seems easy to make arguments about what “we” should do. But the devil has enough advocates already. Teaching an expansive deliberative discourse helps students to identify the diverse means by which others—who may share nothing in common with them—

seek to enter public conversations, and to recognize those contributions *as* deliberative discourse. Ultimately, such teaching supports the goals of deliberative democracy more broadly: including more and more voices in public discussions, relating personal experience to public problems, balancing consequences and benefits of various actions, and generating a sustained culture of local democratic engagement.

Although I will detail specific teaching practices and activities using deliberation, I want to insist on developing a deliberative *pedagogy* and not merely a curriculum. This is because the position of the teacher and the relationship they take to their students are as, if not more, important than simply having students deliberate. I align the deliberative pedagogy that I propose in this dissertation with a current and evolving understandings of what pedagogy is. Mark K. Smith argues that conflating terms like teaching with education, or curriculum with pedagogy in fact misses the larger goals of the two latter terms (Smith 2019). Education, he writes, “is a deliberate process of drawing out learning (*educere*), of encouraging and giving time to discovery. It is an intentional act” (2019). The nature of pedagogy, then, also transcends the tools or specific practices used to encourage learning of discrete skills. What I propose here is in fact a pedagogy, insofar as it 1) incorporates a specific theory of agency, which I detail in Chapter Two (Brown “What is pedagogy”), 2) begins with a teacher’s active condition and belief about the goal(s) of education (Smith 2019), and 3) encourages a praxis, or informed, committed action based on the learning that happens deliberatively in dialogue and reflection with others. These principles capture what I believe are the most important dispositions that instructors can cultivate in themselves in order to successfully and consistently run classrooms that meet the highest democratic ideals of deliberative practice.

## Chapter 2: From Rhetorical Agency to Democratic Interagency

The degree to which we can claim one's words have enacted change in the world is a central concern of rhetoric. The effects of one's communications point to issues of agency, or the power one may wield to influence other's views and actions. As such, agency—in all of its iterations and definitions—has long animated discussions of what rhetoric is and what rhetoric does or can do in the social, material world. It is not my purpose in this chapter to attempt even a partial history of the rhetorical tradition in relation to agency, but rather to establish a far more recent starting point, or point of departure, for a discussion of the concept of agency as it relates to my aims with deliberative pedagogy. Instead, I rely on Michael Leff's summation of the traditions of rhetoric, from Isocrates and Protagoras, through Cicero and Quintilian, and extended through the Renaissance to briefly gloss the discipline's conceptions of agency and establish a theoretical perspective against which I will distinguish my own. Although these traditions are far from monolithic in their characterization of the rhetor's relationship with audience and message, Leff has ably demonstrated that this particular lineage, often termed "Ciceronian humanism," entails an intense focus on the individual agency of speakers, and continues to hold the attention of rhetoricians even today (213-214). He finds that the concept of agency in this tradition is ambiguous, but productively so, in that the supposed power of the orator/agent

ironically implies humility before the audience, because the power to move and persuade an audience requires accommodation and adaptation to its sentiments. The audience necessarily constrains the orator's intellectual horizons, modes of expression, and even representation of self, and so, if orators are to exert influence, they must yield to the people they seek to influence. (216)

This apparent tension between agentive power and social and contextual constraints came to define the humanistic rhetorical tradition. And, although he goes on to trouble this perspective in his analysis, Leff writes, “one of the most widely accepted judgments about traditional humanistic rhetoric is that it contains a strong, almost totalizing, emphasis on the agency of the rhetor” (214). Other scholars have stated this plainly, supporting Leff’s assessment: Robert Scott writes that “to take the speaker as active and the audience as passive is quite traditional” (qtd. in Leff 214), and Wayne Brockreide concludes that this transactional account of the rhetor’s agentive power is “pervasive historically...from the practice of the sophists...to the thrust of many twentieth-century textbooks in public speaking...” (124-125). The creative and persuasive power of the speaker has, in many ways, remained at the heart of our descriptive and analytical scholarship as a discipline. As a result of this focus, the concept of agency has been a continual presence in the development of rhetorical theory and pedagogy.

Over a four-day meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies (ARS) in 2003, scholars of rhetoric, writing, and communication sweated together over the question, “how ought we to understand the concept of rhetorical agency?” In her report of these proceedings, Cheryl Geisler is unable to offer a single answer to that question. What arose, instead, among the varying viewpoints, theories, and ideological commitments of the participants, was a series of further questions, reflecting just how complicated the notion of agency is and how it is enmeshed in rhetorical education: Just what sort of quality or phenomenon is agency? How do we know it when we see it? How can the appearance of agentive activity be identified and evaluated so that we can hone our teaching practices to develop students’ agency more fully? How have new digital technologies and multiplying contexts of writing and communication complicated our notions of agency? Offering no definite answers to these questions, but instead highlighting the

many productive areas of research into rhetorical agency that participants in the ARS discussion have undertaken, Geisler suggests that the question of agency is probably the biggest challenge the discipline of rhetorical studies has to reckon with in the early part of the twenty-first century.

The significance of the question of rhetorical agency was seen by the participants of the ARS meeting to arise from the postmodern critique of the autonomous agent (Geisler 10). This critique faults traditional rhetoric for privileging what Dilip Gaonkar called an “ideology of human agency” which has held that a firm causal link can be made between the communicative action of a rhetor and real social change in the world at large. Gaonkar, in critiquing the “humanist paradigm” of rhetorical criticism with the individual creative agent/rhetor at its center, describes this ideology as:

A view of speaker as the seat of origin rather than a point of articulation, a view of strategy as identifiable under an intentional description, a view of discourse as constitutive of character and community, a view of audience positioned simultaneously as “spectator” and “participant,” and finally, a view of “ends” that binds speaker, strategy, discourse, and audience in a web of purposive actions. (32-33)

In this view, responsibility for discursive choices and their intended or expected effects in the world resides firmly within individual human actors. While most rhetoricians still hold that some degree of efficacy can be attributed to an individual rhetor’s action, this point is far from settled. Perspectives offered at the ARS session ranged between claims that agency is a mere illusion that should be abandoned, to those holding that even if it is illusory, it is a necessary and productive fiction that provides the rationale for our work with students (“How Ought” 12).

Just as the ARS meeting was not the first foray the discipline has made in the study of agency, Geisler's report was by no means the end of the conversation. Joshua Gunn and Christian Lundberg, both participants in the ARS working groups on this question, responded to Geisler in their 2005 article, "Ouija Board, Are There Any Communications? Agency, Ontotheology, and the Death of the Humanist Subject, or, Continuing the ARS Conversation." In this essay, the authors charge Geisler with believing that posthuman approaches to agency are inherently nihilistic, and further, accuse her of a position of "rhetorical evangelism, an approach to the study and teaching of rhetoric that is ethically righteous in respect to the classical norms of civic culture, and particularly the moral responsibility of 'civic engagement'" (94). Gunn and Lundberg fear that "a dogged commitment to conflating agency and responsibility leads to a permanent anxiety" over the character of rhetorical agency that only reinforces the "moral entrepreneurship" of the discipline, by which term they mean the imperative to define and generate normatively "good" civic action (95). In her own response continuing this conversation, Geisler clarifies that her concern is not with the postmodern critique of the subject itself, but with its implications for the actual practice of teaching and engaging students with rhetorical concepts ("Teaching" 108). The challenge for teachers of rhetoric, Geisler writes, is "once we recognize the complex and fragmented forces that necessarily come into play in any rhetorical performance," we must develop a more appropriately theorized rhetoric in light of the critiques of post- theories ("Teaching" 112). Geisler concludes that, given the fragmented nature of the postmodern subject, agency must be found within the complex interactions that arise between people in the great variety of contexts this entails, with the work of teaching rhetoric being more properly invested in the tasks of engaging students with the "recruiting and legwork" that help create the contexts in which their discourses may become successful ("Teaching" 112). This

conversation, carried out in the pages of the field's top journals, was often heated and remains ongoing, but suffice it to say that the trend of scholarship in the immediate aftermath has been toward abandoning or seriously revising the traditional view of agency as a sort of possession or quality of individual human actors (Gorzelski; Leff; Scott), in favor of conceiving agency as distributed among human and nonhuman actors (Herndl and Licona; Miller) and as emergent, that is, as appearing through interaction (Cooper; Kerschbaum; Parks). We can agree that agency arises in the particulars of discursive contexts, and we recognize that it may not be equally available to all members of society given their different subject positions ("How Ought" 14).

Gunn and Lundberg's concern with the field's "moral entrepreneurship," by which they mean the insistence in rhetorical studies on the development of normatively "good" citizens, is evidence of the strong connection between agency and civic action in rhetorical studies, or else their fears needn't be stated. From even before Quintilian's defining the orator as *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, the good man speaking well, the proper employment of trained rhetorical faculties has been within the institutions of public life. This tradition continues to inform rhetorical studies today. Dedicated space at the major disciplinary conferences is given to scholarship under the heading of "rhetorical citizenship," and a great amount of research on this spans our journals, identifying unique communities and the array of rhetorical resources they employ to build and circulate discourses aiming to position them as *citizens* rather than in their merely private capacities. Such projects, aimed at capturing a stronger sense of citizenship for marginalized communities, align with the goals of challenging normative conceptions of citizenship that keep huge numbers of people confined to the margins and left out of the mainstream of democratic life. Composition scholars such as Amy Wan have clearly demonstrated how the teaching of writing and literacy education more broadly have been made

central to the popular understanding of who the citizen is: literate, economically productive (that is, not dependent), and at home in the modes of public discourse expressing the norms of reasonableness and polite culture. She notes that composition scholarship often argues that “successful writing instruction plays a key role in the preparation of good citizens, situating the classroom as a space that can reinvigorate democratic and participatory citizenship” (“In the Name” 28). Such pronouncements litter the mission statements and learning outcomes of rhetoric programs and courses. Citizenship appears casually, as a sort of by-product of education, in some texts: Wan cites Pamela Takayoshi and Cynthia Selfe’s introduction to *Multimodal Composition*, which identifies how U.S. higher education’s goals have been the production of “intelligent citizens who can both *create meaning in texts* and *interpret meaning from texts*” (“In the Name” 31). Others, such as Dominic Delli Carpini’s *Composing a Life’s Work: Writing, Citizenship, and Your Occupation*, make the link between rhetorical training and citizenship explicit. Delli Carpini explains in the preface to the textbook that it “attempts to restore the natural connections between work and civic responsibilities,” because “as streamlined educational programs promise job preparation without the fuss of general education courses, more and more students are *trained* to do a job without developing the critical and rhetorical skills to examine the implications of that work on the wider community” (xxi). Finally, Kathleen Blake Yancey, in “Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” her 2009 report for the NCTE, continually calls composition to the production of “citizen writers,” well-versed in those models of writing available in the new century. Literacy, and writing instruction especially, in these ways becomes intimately connected with the institutions of democracy and the exercise of what we might call “democratic agency,” which is the primary focus of my discussion in this chapter.



Agency, then, whether we like it or not, is a crucial concept for composition studies, especially in the first year, because it grounds our understanding of what kinds of work we are preparing students to do, and what capacities we are intending to help them develop. If, as has been the case in traditional rhetoric, agency is a capacity or possession of the individual rhetor, then pedagogies that aim at developing the unique, individual “voice” of the student, or that help them to clarify and develop their own processes for creating effective compositions, make perfect sense. As Shawna Shapiro and her colleagues have framed agency, it is broadly understood “to include all actions, intentional and not, and encompasses the idea that all actions have impacts on others” (33). Shapiro et al. conclude from this starting point that the goal of writing instruction (and specifically for multilingual writers in their analysis) is to develop students’ control over their writing acts and the consequences of those acts. The importance, then, of the postmodern and posthuman critiques of agency is that our understandings of what happens when students write, when they seek wider audiences or circulation for their texts, and when they experience frustrations and impediments in these efforts, are significantly troubled and complicated. What is needed, and what many of the scholars introduced above have attempted to provide, is a more robust theorization of agency that is appropriate to the aims and practices of composition instruction.

In this chapter I argue that the discipline’s multi-layered relationship to democracy, the felt connection of writing instruction to the production of citizens and *something* identifiable as “good” citizenship, calls for a conceptualization of agency that is rooted in a more complete theorization of democracy as a discursive form of life. In the same way that *agency* or *citizenship* are invoked in conflicting and amorphous ways within the field, so too does *democracy* float throughout our professional discourse as a related, “ambient” term, to use Wan’s sense of that

label meaning flexible, shifting, and unexamined “commonsense” beliefs and attitudes towards democracy. Wan asks two questions of compositionists who put citizenship at the center of their teaching: “(1) What assumptions and implications surround the frequent use of citizenship as a rationale and goal for literacy learning? (2) What kinds of civic behaviors are administered through university-styled literacy?” (“In the Name” 29). The first question I address directly in the following chapter, examining citizenship within composition at length. The second question I take as a jumping-off point for my own question, which I explore here; namely, for what *kind* of democracy is university-styled literacy preparing students? Or, put differently, what model of democracy is currently supported by the civic behaviors encouraged by current models of composition and rhetoric instruction? Before addressing the concept of agency that I argue is best suited to supporting a deliberative pedagogy and composition’s mission to sustain democracy, I must first explore how democracy, rhetoric, and agency are currently intertwined across composition and the disciplines that influence it.

Within composition and rhetorical scholarship, in order for the concept of agency to provide greater clarity or explanatory power, it is often paired with a qualifier that limits the scope of which kinds of actions are being considered. Take, for example, the long discussion among members of the ARS about how to understand *rhetorical* agency (Geisler; Gunn and Lundberg). We are meant, in using that term, to attend specifically to those actions involving students’ various uses of language to achieve different ends. Within political science, it is similarly commonplace to consider the appearance of *democratic* agency. In that context, scholars are concerned with identifying and understanding the processes of discovering or forming public opinion, which in turn provides the legitimation for democratic forms of governance (Ferguson; Allen; Habermas; Arendt; Barber). Composition studies maintains for

itself a special relationship to the ongoing reproduction of democracy by educating young citizens, but it is simultaneously the case that our conception of democracy is sometimes unclear or without definite or meaningful reference to democratic theory. The many commonsense notions about what sort of phenomenon democracy is that we have inscribed in our handbooks and scholarship leave us with an impoverished sense of what it means to live in a democratic society. Benjamin Barber provides an influential critique of the prevailing, liberal model of democracy, founded in a “radical individualism” and characterized by mass elections for representative office. This mode of engagement, which Barber terms “thin democracy,” in fact undermines democracy, because winning in mass elections is generally a function of how much money is spent on campaigning and advertising (*Strong Democracy*). A “strong” democracy, by contrast, is one that is characterized by more complete, “bottom-up,” local control over public questions and resources; this local, participatory form generates a more coherent sense of the public will, but also requires more engagement from individuals over time.

Democracy understood principally as a procedure of vote aggregation for the election of (usually) wealthy, elite representatives is a weak and uninspiring sense of the term. This is the case, despite being almost precisely what the founders had in mind when they guaranteed a republican form of government. The goal of representative government, as Madison wrote in *Federalist No. 10*, would be “to refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country.” In particular, the founders were afraid of direct democracy, not trusting in the mass of the public to avoid the influences of demagogues and passions of the moment. The advantage of a republican government was, to Madison “the substitution of representatives whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to local prejudice” (*Federalist No. 10*), and

to Hamilton, in describing the value of the Electoral College as the method for determining the presidency, “that the immediate election should be made by men most capable of analyzing the qualities adapted to the station” (*Federalist No. 68*). Edmund Burke, an influence on many of the founders, wrote of the duties of elected representatives: “it is [the representative’s] duty to sacrifice his repose, his pleasure, his satisfaction, to theirs; and, above all, ever, and in all cases, to prefer their interests to his own. But, his unbiassed opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you; to any man, or to any set of men living” (10-11). All of these qualities of men (and only of men, in early American discourse), were tied to the values of the wealthy, educated, and leisured class. Mark Longaker, in his analysis of early American republican rhetoric, *Rhetoric and the Republic*, neatly demonstrates how “republican publicities favored the economic elite by privileging the cultural markers of the bourgeoisie” (15-16). In particular, the supposed ability of elites to transcend their individual preferences and to bracket off their private interests in favor of the common good was among the prime requisites of civic distinction in the developing republican rhetorical culture (Longaker 39).

Furthermore, a sense of democracy that asks only for occasional attention and participation is one that obscures or obliterates a meaningful sense of agency for regular people within democratic societies. A seminal figure of the Progressive Era reforms in American education, John Dewey noted, “democracy is much broader than a special political form... It is... a way of life, social and individual” (“Democracy” 543). Merely participating in an occasional election does not suffice, and ultimately cannot sustain a robust, healthy democratic government. Dewey figured education as the principle means of continually regenerating the civic life of the country, and his commitment to the democratic ideals of education have remained influential throughout the twentieth century and into the current century. And yet, our

democracy today faces many of the same challenges Dewey discussed in his time: widespread distrust and disengagement from political processes, political apathy, and entrenched partisanship. Composition and higher education more broadly continue to make efforts to reinvigorate democratic life through scholarship and teaching, but as critiques like that offered by Amy Wan demonstrate, our successes are piecemeal and perhaps even merely coincidental to other pedagogical or institutional goals. Something more is needed to bring focus to the democratic potential of composition and rhetoric instruction.

One remedy to the challenges of “thin” and “ambient” appeals to democracy lies with a reconceptualization of democracy itself. One theory with transformative potential comes from political scientist Michael Ferguson, who argues for a “democracy-as-activity” framework. Her book, *Sharing Democracy*, first provides a critique of the mainstream of democratic political theory, which “often presume[s] that we need commonality in order to produce shared identity, affective bonds between citizens, and a sense of collective agency” (5). Ferguson goes on to argue that “the dominance of this commonality orientation comes at a significant cost: it generates false and misleading problems for theory and practice, and it directs us on a never-ending search for the elusive commonality that could unite everyone in a democracy” (13). She then offers an alternative, democracy-as-activity, which presents a more coherent theorization of agency for today’s globally connected and massively diverse democracies. This alternative view of democracy, Ferguson writes, “takes political freedom rather than commonality as its focal point. Political freedom is the freedom to engage in this ordinary capacity for meaning-making (or what Hannah Arendt calls world-building), the freedom to shape the world we share together with others” (27). Introducing the term “democratic interagency,” or the intersubjective exercise of political freedom among plural others, Ferguson provides just the sort of theoretical

groundwork for a more appropriate rhetorical program for the postmodern subject that Geisler and others have asked for. This alternative, democracy-as-activity, is itself emergent and distributed among plural actors in their daily, discursive, and as Ferguson observes, completely ordinary interactions.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will bring Ferguson's notion of democratic interagency into conversation with current scholarship on agency from composition in order to better understand the relationship composition instruction bears to the preparation of individuals for participation in democratic life or activities. This is a meaningful exchange because Ferguson's concept provides the foundation for re-theorizing democracy, and in turn agency, as more than just a vote-counting procedure and opens the space to design teaching practices that develop students' awareness of and efficacy in participating in democratic life among diverse others. A freedom-centered democracy is, as Ferguson argues, "a nonhierarchical one in which the power to shape the world is dispersed and shared intersubjectively," and is based in a conception of agency that arises as we go about our daily lives (29). As students explore an array of communication styles and genres, written and otherwise, they have the opportunity to experience agency in this way, arising from the various contexts and interactions they identify and use rhetorical means to participate in.

### **Debating the Relationship Between Agency and Pedagogy**

The example of Geisler's exchange with Gunn and Lundberg is only one of the critical discussions of agency in the field over the past several decades. Several other notable exchanges have occurred in the pages of our journals that, taken together, raise key questions about student agency that are still open-ended and highlight the deep divisions that exist among teachers of composition and rhetoric. In this section I provide a developmental timeline of agency in the

discipline to underscore the importance of this concept for developing pedagogical practices, and finally to suggest what has started to become a dominant mode of thinking about agency in the most recent decade.

In the 1990s, tensions flared over the field's growing adoption of so-called "political" teaching practices rooted in the critical, liberatory theories of Paolo Freire, Ira Shor, and others. At the root, the discussions, and in some cases controversies, that erupted had to do with defining the nature of the relationships of authority and agency among students and teachers. Jane Tompkins, in her 1990 essay for *College English*, "Pedagogy of the Distressed," gave voice to the concerns about teacher's authority and relationship to students that at some point or other have consumed most of us. She describes the "performance model" of teaching as an analog to the "banking model" that Freire decried. Teachers are meant to have the answers, students the questions. What teachers do in class, Tompkins explains, has more to do with securing their own status, prestige, and a good opinion from their students and peers than it does with imparting any particular benefit to the students themselves. Responses to Tompkins were varied, and often polarized. Some, such as Robert Martin, defended the authority and knowledge of teachers, claiming "some real value to some of what a university can teach," and defending that "some teachers know what this is better than some students" (357). Other responses were more accepting of the aims of critical pedagogy and valued the expertise and perspective that students brought to bear on classroom discussions when the expectation of teacher-centered practice was left behind. As Patrick McGann writes, "I have been continually surprised by students' willingness to speak out when I'm not in charge, as well as the diversity of experience and knowledge they bring to discussions..." (360). The debate of teaching writing craft versus teaching so-called political content would eventually jump out of the pages of journals, with one

of the most widely publicized incidents occurring at UT-Austin. That case, as many will remember, involved an acrimonious debate over Linda Brodkey and her colleagues' attempt to critically revise the required first-year writing course, and the eventual resignation of the entire committee tasked with that revision effort (Mangan 1991; Brodkey 1994). At issue here is both student and teacher agency; the degree and quality of agency students experience under a given curriculum, and the extent to which teachers' agency in crafting and delivering a curriculum either develops or suppresses students' agency.

One participant in that heated debate, Maxine Hairston, wrote in *College Composition and Communication* in 1992, decrying that “those who advocate such [political] courses show open contempt for their students' values, preferences, or interests” (181). For many, if not most students, they want to attend college to build the skills and knowledge that will help them secure a career, social standing, and financial stability. In Hairston's view, writing courses should focus on craft, understood as a neutral capacity and fluency with composing to serve whatever ends the student decides. I have struggled, as have many teachers, with the question that this perspective appears to beg: is it my job to help my student write the best racist/sexist/ableist/etc. essay they possibly can in order to secure a job? Can my only concern in the classroom be with the quality and clarity of sentences when those sentences are meant to wound, stigmatize, and oppress others for instrumentalist ends? Is it my role to suppress or abdicate my own agency to present contexts that challenge students' pre-conceived notions (and yes, their professional ambitions), or do I have a larger responsibility to society to exercise my discretion and agency to try and cultivate in students both the desire and capacity to promote greater justice and equity in their communities? Defenders of critical and alternative pedagogical practices reject the very premise that value- or ideology-free teaching is possible. This reinforces Freire's key insight, that the structure of



education reflects the structure of class, race, and gender in a society. Or, as Tompkins paraphrases, “to the extent that the teaching situation reflects the power relations currently in force...to that extent will the students themselves, when they come to power, reproduce that situation in another form” (653). Does my own agency as a teacher, responding to situations of inequity and injustice built into our social and political institutions, take a back seat to the pragmatic, instrumentalist goals that many students profess? What is the responsibility to the larger community of teachers in directing or creating rhetorical contexts that encourage certain kinds of development in student rhetors? Whereas Hairston would seem to have teachers surrender their own agency in service of students, the very examples of radically ideological teachers that she cites actually foreground the agency of teachers in shaping the goals and values of higher education in ways that end up supporting student agency. This is true because, far from derogating student agency by failing to teach them an instrumentalist set of writing skills for addressing the variety of public issues they may face, the critically-minded courses offered by such teachers actually broadens the range of contexts, actors, and conditioning forces to which students are exposed. As agency emerges from the complex interrelationships between human and nonhuman actors and a given environment, expanding the scope and variety of communicative contexts and critical perspectives to which students are introduced can simultaneously add new or previously unrecognized rhetorical constraints to student writing and help them develop the rhetorical sensitivity, dexterity, and resources they possess to engage those constraints through writing and communication.

On either side of this critical pedagogical debate, the central questions about agency revolve around what kind of teaching practices best cultivate student agency. Does a model of teacher authority with wisdom and experience to impart better serve the goals of composition

than a model of distributed authority where the teacher “gets out of the way” of students’ own expertise and experience? Leaving aside the question of course content for the time, currently in the discipline’s history, the notion of agency appears as a more or less definable quality, a capacity within students that can be cultivated by careful instruction. This sense of agency as individual capacity has retained a great deal of currency despite the scholarly debates presented in this chapter. Returning to the 2003 ARS roundtable on the concept of rhetorical agency, many of the papers coming out of that conference express concerns about agency that together present a developing sense of agency’s importance, but also its complex and multifaceted character. Geisler cites the cohort of younger scholars aiming to move beyond studies of those with easy access to traditional rhetorical agency:

The gay body as a public statement about HIV/AIDs (Brouwer, cf. “Precarious Visibility”), the role of physical place in the rhetoric of community action (Blitefield, cf. “Standing”), femicide in postcolonial India (Dube, cf. “Women Without”), and racial politics in the nineteenth century (Wilson, cf. “Racial Politics”). Instead of characterizing rhetors in terms of what they lack, these scholars seem to be moving us toward a richer understanding of rhetorical agency by examining how rhetors without taken-for-granted access do, nevertheless, manage to exercise agency. (11)

The studies Geisler cites are only a small selection of the scholarship highlighting the particular rhetorical practices and resources that marginalized groups and communities have employed to represent themselves as citizens and make political claim on the rights and resources of the larger societies in which they are embedded. In these kinds of accounts, agency is being figured as *something* one can have or not have. Writing in 2009, Gwen Gorzelski defined agency as students’ “ownership of their developing ideas and texts” (66). Despite the growing

conversations taking up postmodern critiques of agency, ownership, possession, and use have remained watchwords in understanding the concept of agency in much composition scholarship.

A third scholarly exchange, contrasting two influential community-based composition scholarship projects, demonstrates how questions of rhetorical agency carry high stakes for the development of writing curricula and pedagogies. In *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, Linda Flower argues that community-based pedagogies and community literacy projects have removed rhetoric from the center of writing instruction. Instead, such programs focus on a version of critical cultural theory that has accepted the postmodern position on the individual rhetor's lack of power. The critical perspectives she questions tend to emphasize uncovering systems of oppression and marginalization and offering critique to demystify or alienate such hegemonic structures in the hope of developing more just states of affairs. The effect of such critical theory, Flower writes, is to enable us "to relate to Others in an urban community as victims or at best as comrades in arms—united in a theorized battle plan (that academic intellectuals supposedly understand better than do the victims)" (115). Through her work in Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center, Flower and colleagues have since developed teaching practices and publications that are geared toward public inquiry and "dialogues across difference," rather than the activist and advocacy-based teaching that she feels characterizes the critical turn in rhetoric and composition studies. By the end of her article, Flower seeks to expand the range of discursive actions recognizable as "the work of rhetorical agents," arguing that we must look beyond "acts of eloquent public advocacy or rational argument demanding warranted assent." Instead, we can and should look for rhetorical agency emerging from discourse that engages with conflict, negotiates between internal and external pressures, and aims to enter "genuine dialogue not geared to win a debate...so much as open a

door to inquiry” (214-215). Rhetorical agency, for Flower, appears in the furtherance of community conversations.

The question of how we relate to others—as victims or comrades—prefigures the question of agency for Flower. She invokes the prophetic pragmatism of Cornel West, an influential philosophy in composition studies expressing “an unflinching critique of injustice driven by the prophet’s sustaining vision of an alternative reality...and the pragmatist’s unflagging search for the options and alternatives that allow transformative praxis” (Flower 188). West’s work is to remind us all to “affirm the agency and capability of the powerless,” and Flower finds her example of contested agency in the experience of Raymond, a black teenager passionately committed to an ambitious writing project about teen drug use in his community (188). She describes how Raymond completed an original play on the subject of drug use, which was then presented at the Community Conversation hosted by the Community Learning Center (CLC). After Raymond’s English teacher expressed anger at the CLC’s apparent affirmation of Raymond as a writer, despite his “unedited text, with its mix of unconventional punctuation and dialogue, Black English Vernacular, and garden-variety errors of grammar and spelling,” Flower reflects how “the question of agency often becomes: what does it take to be seen as a *writer*?” (189-192). Flower then closely examines a number of different accounts of agency, from the highly individualistic, to the postmodern notion of the human agent embedded in a complex network of conditioning factors. She then makes explicit her use of the term rhetorical agency: “*a performative public practice of interpretation and dialogue*” (italics original, 205-206). The strength of this conceptualization is that the agency she locates within “community literacy...foregrounds everyday people, engaged in a collaborative, intercultural inquiry into matters of lived significance” (206). In this dialogic exchange, diverse individuals and groups

come to represent themselves and their lives in ways that are then taken up and interpreted through the experiences of diverse others. Everyone constructs new understandings through exchange. And the value of this dialogic rhetorical agency is that it shifts the terms by which people come to view and know one another, helping the whole community develop a “vocabulary of worth” that allows them to talk through, about, and across difference (206).

Agency, for Flower, is about meaning, interpretation, and most of all, is a thoroughly discursive phenomenon.

Responding directly to Flower’s influential work, Steve Parks presents a defense of the critical pedagogical perspective and proposes further steps the field could (or *should*) take in order to realize progressive social change. Drawing from his work with Syracuse’s New City Community Press, Parks relates the experience of working with Westside Syracuse residents to organize community resources towards potential developments in that neighborhood. Parks is explicit about the role and nature of agency in his critique of Flower. He argues that the field must “move beyond a sense of agency as rhetorical, *as something used to sponsor a circulation of dialogue*, to a sense of agency as change, as something that redistributes how power and resources are distributed” (emphasis added, 521). For Parks, rhetorical agency is insufficient for the discipline, both as a goal of instruction and as a theoretical concept. For, as he explains, rhetorical agency stops short of enabling strategic, collective *action* that aims to shift the underlying conditions of power in local contexts. In Flower’s example of the “think-tank” session, she argues that such group sessions enable marginalized people and perspectives to find voice and ultimately shift the nature of the discussions. For Parks, merely speaking with one another in new, even in more just terms, is not enough. Until this new mode of talk is translated

into a strategy for realigning existing relations of power, it remains merely a nice thought experiment.

Parks's utopian vision of the discipline resonates most closely with the concept of agency that I wish to put forth here. He asks that we consider what we are teaching students about the nature of community if our classroom writing stops short of engaging students with the collective action of those communities. Rhetorical agency that only exists within the safe confines of the classroom is really no agency at all. In support of this vision, Parks writes:

I would argue that we must move beyond a volunteerist ethos, where individual students learn to understand the power of their individual rhetorical agency in the context of temporary forums, and move toward a collective voice, premised on coming to understand how community histories can act as the foundational moment for strategic interventions in power networks. Rather than seeing such work as outside our disciplinary parameters, I would argue that gaining this understanding draws on the very meaning of "*community* partnerships" the belief that a collective appeal to common values is a primary way to understand a neighborhood, a region, or a nation. (522)

One can imagine Hairston would have a few choice words about Parks' sense of mission. But the fact remains that the traditional emphasis composition has placed on developing the individual voice of student rhetors, throughout the development of some of our most prized and influential pedagogical traditions (such as process and expressivist pedagogies), represents not a natural and inevitable organizing of the resources and practices of higher education, but rather only one possible organization that developed from and is best suited to reinforcing the larger social and political structuring of power and resources that produced our institutions of higher education in the first place. As Parks and others have recognized, to imagine changing that status quo, to

“move our field outward toward community struggles and engage our students in the collective work of community building” (522) requires not just a better sense of rhetorical agency underpinning our current pedagogies, but a new conception of agency itself and a new theorization of the relationship composition and literacy education bear on communities at the local, regional, and national levels.

These varied and ongoing discussions in the field about the nature and characteristics of students’ agency carry heavy implications for our teaching practice. A vision of agency that privileges the choices and actions of individual rhetors has clearly dominated the field, and some of our pedagogical traditions reflect that emphasis. Process and expressivist pedagogies, for instance, focus on developing the skills, talents, and resources of individual writers, and especially their unique, personal “voice.” The notion of “voice” has long stood in for student agency; indeed, the assumption at the heart of expressivism is that every individual possesses a unique voice that *de facto* has value and deserves to be heard. Joseph Harris, in his history of the field, *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*, dedicates an entire chapter to the concept of voice. In it, he notes that “one of the strongest appeals of English has been that its study involves more than just technical training in the skills of reading and writing, but instead deals with the growth of students as whole persons” (34). Authenticity, individuality, and voice are inextricably tied up in the expressivist school of thought. Peter Elbow, reflecting on this tradition, which he was prominent in developing through the 1960s and 1970s, wrote in a 2007 article how he and others tended to think of the importance of student or authorial voice:

*Voice is an important dimension of texts and we should pay lots of attention to it.*

*Everyone has a real voice and can write with power. Writing with a strong voice is good*

*writing. Sincere writing is good writing. My voice is my true self and my rhetorical power. The goal of teaching writing is to develop the self.* (italics original, 168)

Elbow, furthermore, connects voice explicitly to agency, when he claims that skeptics of voice representing postmodern critiques of the individual subject's capacity for truly free action "seemed to go so far as to deprive individual persons of any agency to make a difference in the world" (168-169). Individuals, in theory, gain rhetorical agency through rhetorical training and thus develop their individual ability to effect change in the world. And, even within collaborative action, a theory of individual human agency emphasizes this as the joining of individual forces, rather than the emergence of a different, collective sort of agency altogether. Although, as Elbow reflects, the writerly voice has fallen out of vogue in composition scholarship, it persists in influencing the field—whether as voice itself, or as the individual agency of the writer. That concept, too, despite the significant troubling of agency from postmodern and poststructural theories, continues to be present in both teaching and scholarship in the field (Ewald and Wallace; Gorzelski; Shapiro et al.). In the section that follows, I detail three influential contemporary accounts of agency that address the concerns of postmodern, posthuman, and new materialist perspectives, in order to better locate how contemporary discussions of agency continue to play a central role in the composition classroom.

### **Agency in Contemporary Rhetorical Theory**

Rhetoric's insistence on a strong sense of individual agency, understood by way of the notions of voice, possession, and ownership has begun to give way to fragmented conceptions of subjectivity responding to postmodern theories. The review of literature presented above highlights some of the major scholarly debates about agency that have unfolded over the past several decades. Within the last decade, however, scholarship on agency has appeared that does



not despair over the critique of the subject, but instead draws upon networks of complex theories of performativity, phenomenology, and cognitive science, and also better accounts for the appearance of agency within the increasingly digitally mediated nature of composition. I explore in this section three accounts of agency encountered in practice, from Marilyn Cooper, Carolyn Miller, and Stephanie Kerschbaum. Highlighting these scholars will draw attention to the many ways in which current discussions of rhetorical agency are, in fact, already charged with democratic purpose.

Cooper frames the central problem of “the death of the subject” clearly, writing that “if we accept that we live in a globalized world in which not only economies, cultures, and languages but also environmental crises are increasingly intertwined in complex systems, and we accept the death of the subject—the death of the centered, conscious, rational self—the possibility of agency seems increasingly impossible” (420). Cooper’s response, like others, is to try to rescue some concept of rhetorical agency tied to responsibility for a shared social world. And she understands the stakes of this project clearly:

A robust theory of agency is needed to buttress claims for the efficacy of rhetoric. Such a theory should not assume that agency is a possession and should acknowledge that students (as rhetors) are always productive agents. But, most importantly, a workable theory of agency requires the death not only of the modernist subject but of the whole notion of the subject. (423)

Her attempt to maintain space for strong concept of agency is rooted in phenomenological and psychological accounts of human will and metacognition: “the awareness of having an experience without halting it or distancing oneself from it,” as phenomenologist philosopher Glen Mazis explains in making his distinction between merely “negative” freedom from

constraint with a “positive” account of freedom that “requires commitment and foreclosing one’s options by making choices and seeing them through” (158-159). A more positive account of freedom like Mazis describes is important for Cooper because she adopts a phenomenological view of agency in which individuals are both conditioned by and condition the world around them as they act in life. In making the link between freedom, constraint, and agency more explicit, we find what is perhaps Cooper’s most important contribution to the critical discussion of agency in the face of the postmodern death of the subject. Our traditional conceptions of freewill are misguided and misleading, she argues, because it is only “in the sense that our actions are always our own” that we have freewill (440). The individual’s relationships with their surroundings, histories, and contexts form the starting grounding for any intentional action. Thus, no individual and no individual act is entirely free from conditioning factors or constraints, but neither do those constraints reflect a linear causality, negating a meaningful sense of freewill, as the strongest postmodern critiques of the human subject hold (440). Remember that Cooper believes, and is seeking to rescue individual agency, which she maintains “is necessary for the possibility of rhetoric, and especially for deliberative rhetoric” (426). In her account, agency refers to an ongoing process of meaning making. It is an embodied process in that response to stimuli, or perturbations, including emotional responses, which Cooper understands as “intentions to act in a certain way,” are made manifest in the neural structures of the individual rhetor’s brain (430). We are impacted by our surround, by which term Cooper understands as the interwoven influence of our “inheritance, past experiences,” and the physical and social contexts we inhabit, even as we impact the world around us through our actions (421). Thus, no individual rhetor is quite the same person they were in the past, as their store of meanings—emotional responses and memories—grows through living and interacting with the world. And,

according to Cooper, it is these embodied meanings, the neural structures, dispositions, and habits, that allow us to recognize rhetorical agency. As she writes, “the skills that enable a skilled rhetor to realize possibilities for action are often so engrained in the nervous system that their deployment is barely conscious; they prepare—or dispose—a person to act in a certain way in a given situation, and to do so instantly and seamlessly” (434).

Having argued that the best way to understand agency is as an emergent and embodied phenomenon is “through the notions of assimilation, structural determination, circular causation and structural coupling,” which she adopts from the work of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and neurophenomenologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, Cooper turns to present a vision of “responsible freedom” that accounts for the individual’s interaction with a diversity of others, “who have [their own] opinions and beliefs grounded in the experiences and perceptions and meanings constructed in their brains” (442). A pedagogy of responsibility, grounded in a sense of agency that is not a personal possession but a phenomenon realized through interaction, aims to help students understand that their writing and actions are serious matters, and that “what they write or argue...makes them who they are” (443). The accumulation of experiences, responses, memories, perturbations and their effects, literally reshape the mind of the individual rhetor and places them “in an ongoing becoming” of the individual (428). Moreover, this process of becoming through one’s writing and speaking encourages us to look for the cultivation of rhetorical skill and ability in places outside of the unique “voice” of the rhetor. For, as Cooper puts it, “rhetors—and audiences—are agents in their actions, and they are responsible for those actions, but they are not the sole cause of what happens” (439). Looking deeply into the neurobiology of communication, and the physical, bodily changes that occur as we interact and communicate in our lives, Cooper is able to provide a far more nuanced account

of agency more suited to the postmodern context of rhetorical scholarship. It is this vision of agency that creates the space for imagining how individual rhetors, be they students, citizens or non-citizens, or members of a local community, experience their embodied agency as it emerges in public, intersubjective contexts.

The concept of distributed agency has heavily influenced those pedagogies that emphasize community, intersubjectivity, and the relationship between literacy education and networks of social and political power. New materialist perspectives consider nonhuman actors as possessing or displaying agency themselves, rather than merely existing as constraints or affordances for agentive human actors. In her analysis of rhetorical agency from a new materialist perspective, Carolyn Miller considers how reactions to automated assessment or machine scoring reveal our professional intuitions and anxieties around agency. The difficulties for rhetoric in coming to any sort of consensus on the question of agency, she argues, “arise from the conflict between realities of political and economic power and ideals of civic participation and social justice” (143). Our pedagogical anxieties about the loss of the humanist subject are a product of the desire to make rhetoric a productive art with real value for both its practitioners and audiences. Miller turns to performance theories of rhetoric to generate an understanding of agency not as a possession, but as an attribution in interaction. She suggests “that we think of agency as the *kinetic energy* of rhetorical performance...If agency is a potential energy, it will be thought of as a possession or property of an agent (like a stationary stone), but if agency is a kinetic energy, it must be a property of the rhetorical event or performance itself” (emphasis original, 147). Miller is thus able to present agency as emergent—as arising and existing in interaction.

In an informal survey of composition and speech teachers, Miller solicited their thoughts and reactions to automated writing assessment technologies, and also a fictional automated speech assessment she called AutoSpeech-Easy. One area that respondents to the survey highlighted as being of special importance was the role of audience in performance. Miller points to respondents' objections to students "speaking *through* a camera *to* a computer" to reveal that performance requires the "unmistakenly present... Other, someone who may resist, disagree, disapprove, humiliate—or approve, appreciate, empathize, and applaud" (149). In other words, she writes,

To produce kinetic energy, performance requires a relationship between two entities who will *attribute* agency to each other. Indeed, much of what inexperienced writers and readers have to learn is how to attribute agency to the invisible, mediated other within a written text, how to produce kinetic energy in a textual performance. (emphasis original, 149)

The element Miller's survey participants identified as most important within rhetoric's understanding of audience was interaction. The rhetorical tradition, Miller makes note, citing Michael Leff's analysis referenced earlier, has always been attentive to the many ways that writers/speakers and their audiences provide feedback and so mutually influence the performance itself.

Interaction, for Miller, appears as the key ingredient; she writes, "interaction is necessary for agency because it is what creates the kinetic energy of performance and puts it to rhetorical use. Agency, then, is not only the property of an event, it is the property of a relationship between rhetor and audience" (150). She adopts the language of *attribution* to explain that it is the relationship between more than one subject, "through attributions they make about each other

and understand each other to be making” that allows us to discover agency. Significantly, her argument in this case is not to deny post-human accounts of machine or nonhuman agency, but rather to acknowledge that many of us are currently positioned, culturally and economically, to deny the agency of machines. Given time and experience, this situation may (and she believes *will*) change, and she concludes that a better understanding of agency such as she offers may make it easier for us to determine “how and where to draw the line—between the human and the nonhuman, between the symbolic and the material” (152). It is appropriate, then, that we look principally at the contexts of human interaction in our teaching; rhetorical interaction is the *sin qua non* of democracy, and especially so for deliberative accounts of it.

A third account of agency from within rhetorical studies comes from Stephanie Kerschbaum, whose 2014 article “On Rhetorical Agency and Disclosing Disability in Academic Writing” considers a specific type of rhetorical performance—that of disclosing disability in academic writing. Kerschbaum asks how the notions of embodied, emergent, and interactional rhetorical agency can enrich our understanding of such performances, and vice versa. She considers differences between disclosure in written work and disclosure that occurs as a result of physical presence, such as occur regularly with people whose disabilities are more immediately visible and, thus, tend to invite recognition and response from others (57). What is significant for her is the “uniqueness of each moment of disclosure,” despite the frequency with which they may occur, that contributes to each rhetorical performance (59). The unpredictability of the arrival of a moment of disclosure, of the responses to such disclosure leads Kerschbaum to treat agency as “a rhetorical negotiation between speakers and audiences, a negotiation in which individuals do not have full control over their own identity” (60). The nature of the contexts of

disability disclosure she discusses are contested, fraught, and “always consequential” and thus she finds them rich sites for investigating the emergence of rhetorical agency.

Kerschbaum shares an anecdote from journalist John Hockenberry, who writes in his memoir of a time he was approached by a woman on a subway train who comments upon the appearance of his legs. Hockenberry is in a wheelchair, and he began to refuse the interaction on the terms the woman had set, as she was “demanding that I acknowledge a relationship with her that I wasn’t prepared to admit I had. . . . I was part of this woman’s experience of disabled people. That experience was so powerful that she suspected I might be sharing it with her. But I was not. ‘No, I am John! I am a person, not a wheelchair. You must deal with me as I think of myself’” (qtd. In Kerschbaum, 58). This reflection is significant for how it highlights the ways that tension, contradiction, resistance, and denial can saturate our day-to-day rhetorical relationships. The case of unwanted or unchosen moments of disability disclosure reveal that the interactions in which we identify agency are not entirely the making of one or either party involved. Kerschbaum argues that, “by treating agency as a rhetorical negotiation between speakers and audiences, a negotiation in which individuals do not have full control over their own identity, it becomes possible to identify some of the complexities of naming and claiming disability within kairotic space” (60). One of the main values of such claiming, she goes on, lay in identifying and claiming a minority identity that offers the possibility of coalition-building and mobilizing political and social action.

Like I do, Kerschbaum draws from the accounts of agency of Cooper and Miller to explore what the frustrating and contested sites of disability disclosure in academic writing tell us about agency. These complicated forms of written communication reveal much about the kinds of interactions and relationships we all may encounter in public life. Negotiating the terms

of her disability disclosures is, for Kerschbaum, a political act. Although it invites others to “read [her] in particular ways” that she cannot fully control, the potential for mutual change among interlocutors is always present (68). She returns to consider the influence of audience within such acts. She writes, “just as a writer cannot fully imagine all the potential and future readers of a text, I cannot predict all the different orientations readers may take toward my written disclosures. But deciding how to shape those disclosures is a deeply agentic act even if that act does not result in the kind of responses I want” (69). By highlighting the specific challenges faced by disabled people in choosing whether, when, and how to disclose disabilities in their professional scholarship, Kerschbaum throws into sharp relief how “identity and agency are rhetorically constructed through mutual interaction” (69).

The accounts of rhetorical agency that Miller, Cooper, and Kerschbaum provide give us the important sense that agency is emergent, interactional, and performative. In the section that follows, I will bring these characteristics from rhetoric scholarship on agency to the context of the theory of democracy that underlies my argument for a deliberative pedagogy in composition. The conception of democratic interagency I offer in this dissertation offers a productive framework and a way forward for teachers of rhetoric and composition to retain a sense of rhetoric’s value as a productive art without trying to nostalgically resuscitate the autonomous authorial agent. I aim in particular to respond to Miller’s suggestions concluding her essay, that

We should be concerned less about empowering subaltern subjects and more about enabling and encouraging attributions of agency *to* them by those with whom they interact—and accepting attributions *from* them. We should examine the attributions we ourselves are willing to make and work to improve the attributions that (other) empowered groups are willing to make. (153)



This excerpt gives a sense of mission to the discussion of agency in rhetorical studies. The pedagogical battles over political content and ideology in the classroom are ongoing, but part of what they represent is the disciplinary struggle to understand and defend the value of what we do. And, as Steve Parks indicated, there is a *need* to move our discipline outward into the communities our students identify with. He asks difficult questions about our roles as teachers and, I would add, sponsors of democracy:

If [students] never experience the direct struggle to build *community* agency, work within and against power structures, and see the nuanced literacy that has to result, what have they learned about the nature of power and language? If students are not involved in a *strategic* understanding of community, what can we actually be said to be teaching about *community* literacy? About the goals of cultural theory? For these reasons, perhaps a focus on how English studies can work within the grassroots activism for community justice needs to become part of our curriculum. Perhaps we need to move beyond the social and toward the political. (emphasis original, 522)

A shift to better theorizing and aiming to understand democratic interagency as a product of composition and rhetoric instruction supports this outward move. It calls and enables us to explore the possibilities generated through the intersubjective relationships of individuals and the networks of social, economic, cultural, and political power with which they interact.

### **Defining *Democratic Interagency***

Democracy is a discursive phenomenon. It appears only in communication occurring among people; it is thus essentially rhetorical. Hannah Arendt, in her landmark 1958 book *The Human Condition*, writes:

Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition, for speech is what makes man a political being.... Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves. (3-4)

The problems of democracy are thus also essentially rhetorical, and the experience of agency, individual or collective, is central to understanding democracy as a form of life and to the rhetorical means by which it is instantiated and negotiated. Our experience of democracy is made problematic by the essential fact of pluralism; as Arendt writes, “plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (8). Political theory as it has developed from the Enlightenment onward, has been invested in clarifying and refining the ways in which we understand how to deal with this plurality; rhetorical theory, with no less a lineage, has been invested in developing our understanding of the variety of ways we communicate to be effective agents in this pluralistic world.

In many respects, sovereignty is the basic question of political theory; the questions of who exercises political power, how, and under what, if any, restrictions are especially important in large, diverse democracies. Furthermore, for democracies, sovereignty remains inextricably entwined with the concepts of agency and plurality. The most familiar understanding of democracy is that it is a form of governance in which “the people,” however that comes to be defined, exercise sovereign, meaning final and unfettered, power over their affairs. Under monarchical forms of government, sovereignty is a far more straightforward principle, where authority and law derive singularly from the person of the monarch, whose word, literally, becomes law. But the notion of sovereignty itself is troubled when the term moves from referring

to the *person* of the monarchical sovereign to the far less easily identifiable *collective* sovereign or *demos*. Democracies face the problem of determining who shall constitute the *demos*, and how they come together to exert political power. Who “the people” are draws the boundaries around the collective, democratic sovereign. But as anyone who has ever lost an election or felt disappointed by the results knows, it is hard to imagine oneself as exercising unmitigated power. Political scientist Danielle Allen describes democratic sovereignty as paradoxical, explaining that “democracy puts its citizens under a strange form of psychological pressure by building them up as sovereigns and then regularly undermining each citizen’s experience of sovereignty” (*Talking With Strangers* 28). For Allen, sacrifice is an essential fact of democracy, and yet sacrifice is antithetical to the notion of sovereignty, the ideal of “uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastery,” as Arendt writes in *The Human Condition* (234). Arendt continues to argue that the basic fact of plurality is the root of the challenge to democracies, as

No man can be sovereign because not one man, but men, inhabit the earth—and not, as the tradition since Plato holds, because man’s limited strength, which makes him depend upon the help of others. All the recommendations the tradition has to offer to overcome the condition of *non-sovereignty* and win an untouchable integrity of the human person amount to a compensation for the intrinsic ‘weakness’ of plurality. (emphasis added, 234)

The notion of non-sovereignty, the experience we all have of needing to compromise, to negotiate, and to cope with loss and frustration in the discursive processes of self-government, requires that a theory of democracy be founded upon a clear understanding of agency, human and rhetorical.

From this idea of non-sovereignty, political scientist Michael Ferguson develops, in her 2012 book *Sharing Democracy*, the conception of democratic interagency that I will also rely on

in building a deliberative pedagogy for composition. Traditional democratic theory posits that “the agency of ‘the people’ is brought into being by an agreement that defines the intentions and purposes of joint action” (Ferguson 111). What she calls the “imaginary” of collective agency comes into being by a mutual agreement of individual agents, “in the moment when each of us commits to perform a particular action together” (114). Theorists appeal to this vision of the sovereign democratic agency—this imaginary of the *demos*—as the ground to legitimacy in democratic rule. The individual citizen, construed as a sovereign subject, freely enters into relationship with others to define collective goals and values, and in the process draws metaphorical borders around “the people,” making both explicit and tacit decisions about the prerequisites for inclusion within the political community.

Much scholarship in political theory has sought to clearly delineate the distinguishing characteristics of a “sovereign democratic agency” and the procedures by which is arrived at. The common agreement that (appears to) justify a collective agency appears in two ways in contemporary political theory. For Jürgen Habermas, the prior agreement operates as a set of “first principles.” As he explains, the agreement acts as “social boundary conditions...not immediately at the disposition of the citizens’ will” (301). John Rawls, in an equally influential account, specifies a constitution as that which “the citizen body fixes once and for all,” citing such essentials as basic political equality, freedom of speech and association, and equal protection and due process under the law (232). Other theorists such as Philip Pettit and David Schweikard, as Ferguson notes, have concerned themselves instead with procedures, clarifying by what processes the will of the people is determined (Ferguson 115). Here, the apparent paradox of non-sovereignty presents a serious challenge to these traditional justifications of democratic rule. As Ferguson explains, “since this imaginary posits that collective agency arises

from a prior agreement, any claim that calls the commonality of this agreement into question is a potential threat to the legitimacy of democratic rule” (115). For Ferguson, neither constitutional first principles nor procedural stipulations are a sufficient ground for understanding collective democratic agency.

Instead of these traditional bases for conceptualizing agency, the writings of philosopher Charles Taylor on collective political agency provide Ferguson the basis for articulating democratic interagency as emerging in interaction. Taylor makes a key distinction between *monological* and *dialogical* agency. The monological agent should be familiar as the autonomous humanist subject discussed earlier. For Taylor, an individual person or single self, with “reflection, evaluation, and will” constitutes the monological agent (*Philosophical Arguments* 171). In contrast, dialogical agency is characterized by plurality and difference appearing within collective action. Ferguson explains, “dialogue is the example par excellence of this kind of agency: interlocutors do different things in a conversation, but they can still be understood to be doing something together, and they can (but do not need to) come to understand themselves as a ‘we’ doing this together” (122). In a diverse modern democracy, disappointment and sacrifice are routine experiences, and especially so in the case of minority groups who have been excluded from participation or lack equitable access to the traditional democratic institutions. Such regular experiences lead many groups and individuals to disidentify with the collective agency, calling into question the supposed commonality that justified the exercise of democratic rule in the first place.

The solution to this is found divorcing our conception of collective agency from particular institutions or procedures, and instead focusing attention on the intersubjective sharing we all engage in on a daily basis. Claims to commonality operate as political claims about “who

*we are.*” They are political claims in the sense that they seek to organize and situate power in the service of particular interests at the expense of some others. A more expansive definition of “the political” that comes from critical feminist scholarship allows that any aspect of our lives we share intersubjectively has the potential to enter the realm of the political. It is this understanding that leads to Ferguson’s succinct definition of democratic interagency: “the dialogical exercise of political freedom in the company of others” (131). Because it is not tied to particular institutions, this conception of agency is democratic in that it belongs to equally to all humans. Additionally, it is democratic in that it is a form of self-government: “we govern ourselves by making sense of the world in that we seek to shape our world not just for ourselves but for the plural others who inhabit it with us” (131). When we share our individual experiences in the intersubjective, feminist sense of the political, we encourage others to incorporate those experiences into their own understanding of the world, often in the hope of building a more just, equitable world. Neither agreement nor even persuasion is required in this account. It is, as Ferguson notes, “a non-sovereign form of self-government: no one is sovereign over meaning,” and “insofar as world-building relies upon both instituted and instituting imaginaries, on the repetition of established practices as well as on their critique, transformation, and rejection, it is an everyday occurrence” (131). Perhaps most importantly, this conception of democratic interagency allows us to account for those do not or cannot participate in state-oriented politics as democratic actors. Ferguson is thinking in these cases of the kinds of people that democratic states risk excluding: “those who are deeply critical of or who outright reject the legitimacy of a sovereign democratic agency that purports to include them” (132). Separatist factions, African Americans distrustful of democracy through ongoing sacrifice and exclusion, non-citizens, and those who do not register

to vote but engage actively in protest and social movements—all of these are recognizable as democratic actors regardless of their choice or inability to participate in formal institutions.<sup>2</sup>

Ferguson’s critique of commonality-based democracy stems from her more general recognition that plurality—a life among diverse others—is a basic fact of modern democracies. More importantly, it is because of this fact that commonality-based accounts of democracy fail. This account’s insistence on sharing values and policy positions in common results in the erasure and silencing of less affluent, minority, immigrant, and non-citizen communities. That this state of affairs represents the status quo is significant for two reasons. First, because it draws attention to the need to re-imagine a democratic life that invites greater participation rather than concentrating power and resources in the hands of a select few. Second, once we accept the need for such revision, it becomes possible to respond to the challenges that are and will be leveled against attempts to more equitably distribute both power and capital and to achieve a more just society.

Ferguson chooses to illustrate the protest march as her primary example of democratic interagency. Rather than appealing to the type of coalition politics that is common among feminist and other left-political movements, Ferguson explains how the protest march exemplifies the intersubjective sharing in the exercise of political freedom I detail above. Regarding coalition politics, she follows the critiques of scholars like Brenda Lyshaug and Jodi Dean, who challenge the “tactical solidarity” that results from the emphasis on common goals. Dean argues that “the tactical solidarity of coalition politics relies on the *contingent meeting* of

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<sup>2</sup> These example communities are drawn respectively from the work of Charles Taylor on the Quebecois separatist movement, Danielle Allen’s explication of the school desegregation controversies in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and Robert Putnam’s “political turtles,” who express political sentiments and goals, but actively disengage from traditional voting practices.

disparate interests” (emphasis added, 27). That contingency of sharing goals or values underscores for Ferguson that even the modified ethical perspectives on coalition that Dean and Lyshaug offer are locked into the logic of commonality. In contrast, the protest march can be re-read as a democratic imaginary of intersubjective sharing—of the democratic interagency of individuals, and not just the agreements negotiated among coalition and movement leaders.

In two principle characteristics of protest marches we can experience the democratic interagency of all individuals. First, she explains, “protests are cacophonous,” in a more literal sense of that word: “demonstrations usually express not a single position with a single voice but multiple positions with multiple voices” (Ferguson 154). While it is true that the organizers of a march may have a particular policy objective in mind, they cannot control the expression of every individual who chooses to participate. As Ferguson illustrates,

A reproductive rights rally, for example, might be organized in order to put political pressure on the Food and Drug Administration to approve a new form of emergency contraception. The marchers who attend will include some who carry posters distributed by march organizers that reinforce exactly the message the leaders hope to convey. But some of the marchers will carry signs supporting abortion on demand, or opposing abstinence education, or calling for action on AIDS. Some marchers will connect the question of reproductive freedom to other government policies—for example, to health care, foreign aid, or war.... While it is possible to imagine a protest organized with such discipline (or perhaps on such a small scale) that the participants stay entirely on message, ordinarily demonstrations are characterized by a plurality of voices. (155)

A more specific illustration of this point is the Occupy Wall Street protests, which were quickly and roundly criticized in the media for their supposed lack of coherence, leadership, or guiding



principles. And yet, Ferguson maintains that such protests are “an intersubjective experience that is grounded in the fact of our plurality. It is meaningful for me that all these people came to the same protest precisely because they are not me” (155). For this reason, the protest is a prime expression of democratic interagency. Participating and acting in public with others, not for the same reason or with the same perspective but authorizing one another as plural actors to appear and speak in public in the exercise of political freedom. And, Ferguson argues, “this is an intersubjective authorization: each of us acting in public authorizes the others, confirming and demonstrating that we all have political freedom, that we all have the capacity and the right to shape the world in which we live” (156).

In her final chapter, Ferguson asks that we reorient our thinking to the ends of democracy. “When we engage in politics primarily to achieve particular outcomes,” she argues, “we instrumentalize political action: when we see our activity as valuable only insofar as it produces the results we desire. This outcome orientation to politics can undermine motivation to act” (139). The necessary change, for Ferguson, comes in the development of what she calls “democracy sense,” by which she refers to “the awareness that each of us has the capacity to make sense of our world intersubjectively, that is, to try to shape how we and others experience the world” (139). This concept blends together the acknowledgement that we live among diverse others with whom we must co-construct our shared world and acceptance of the fact that we may pursue particular outcomes in political life, but we cannot guarantee the outcomes. Democracy sense, then, also reminds us of our basic non-sovereignty while calling to attention that we nevertheless play a role in shaping the world. Rather than abandoning our political goals in the face of such uncertainty, we should attenuate our emphasis or attachment to them to remain open to the value and, as Ferguson believes, the pleasure of continuing to participate in political life. If

we take as our aim, as Parks suggested for composition studies, the cultivation of a culture of civic action then we need to consider how this sort of re-orientation to democracy can help us in our endeavors to educate in the service of democracy. In part, I believe this requires an aspirational project for composition—a pedagogy that lays the groundwork of skills and dispositions for deliberative democracy attempts to accomplish the reorientation. In the following section, I bring Ferguson’s theory of democratic interagency into direct conversation with composition studies, arguing that this concept brings focus to and motivates the civic mission of composition and provides a sound basis for a deliberative pedagogy that can achieve that mission.

### **Democratic Interagency in Rhetoric and Composition**

Democratic interagency, as I have presented Ferguson’s account, should already resonate with the accounts of rhetorical agency given by scholars such as Marilyn Cooper and Carolyn Miller; democratic interagency is encountered in interaction, it is not a possession or capacity of any one individual, and it allows for a diversity of rhetorical performances including loss, sacrifice, and disappointment to nevertheless be experienced as agentic situations. What is new about democratic interagency, at least from the perspective of rhetoric and composition studies, is its emphasis on the exercise of political freedom and its recognition of the diversity of utterances and written forms of communication that can constitute that exercise. Whereas other theories of public discourse or deliberation attempt to limit or restrict the kinds of discourses that are permissible as contributions to public conversations, Ferguson’s theory of democratic interagency instead opens us to the democratic potential, and to what may have been previously hidden or ignored rhetorical effect, of nearly any communicative form. Recall, for contrast, my explanation of Maria Farland’s deliberative composition classroom from Chapter One. The value

Farland gives to deliberative practices is that it enables her to teach “the right way” to participate:

The deliberative classroom highlights the importance of reasoned argument, when argument is understood as driven by a set of underlying values and value tensions, and when, after closely reading and confronting a range of formulations and evidence, effective argument involves accounting for and weighing the trade-offs involved in different approaches to an issue. (93)

That particular form of argumentative discourse is certainly valuable, but it is only one part of the story of democratic discourse. This vision of deliberative teaching brings focus to formal argumentation to such an extent that it obscures the democratic nature or potential of any other way that students might write, speak, or act in the world they share with others. Part of the problem with Farland’s account of deliberative teaching, I believe, is that it operates under the more traditional theory of rhetorical agency that I recommend we abandon.

Whereas rhetorical agency is primarily associated with the individual’s capacity to choose among rhetorical resources, respond to constraints identified in a rhetorical situation, and potentially effect change through discursive action, democratic interagency more closely concerns the public character of an individual’s communicative actions. In other words, rhetorical agency tends to turn us inward, on the internal workings of a rhetor’s mind and decision-making processes, whereas democratic interagency focuses us outwards, on the daily situations of interaction and exchange in which individuals will find themselves. It is not, then, a difference of kind between the two concepts. Indeed, it is easily possible to view rhetorical agency as being a central part of the “dialogical exercise of political freedom among plural others” (Ferguson). However, it would be wrong to simply equate the two. Shifting from

rhetorical agency to democratic interagency as a conceptual basis for teaching writing and rhetoric is a significant move because a pedagogy built around democratic interagency creates a space for critical reflection upon the individual's relationship to larger political and social structures. Further, this move helps to decenter the figure of the citizen as a focus of composition instruction. That is to say, the development of the individual citizen, with their particular rhetorical agency, is no longer the focus of such instruction; rather, students come to view themselves as writing and communicating in a huge variety of ways that broadly involve them in the ongoing project of democracy. They can learn to seek the exercise of democracy in most any area of their lives.

To say that I want to *bring* democratic interagency into the composition classroom is something of an overstatement, since the whole concept already revolves around the understanding that we already are within the contexts of democratic interagency when we're interacting in our daily lives. This is perhaps most easily recognized when we are interacting within the boundaries of institutions, like universities, that are linked directly to the maintenance of a democratic society. We might also, however, imagine contexts in which we interact that are less obviously democratic in nature to try to locate democratic interagency in the world at large—a farmer's market, a community theater performance, a neighborhood block party. Democratic interagency is present—it emerges—within many such contexts. My aim, then, is to clarify what is democratic in our classroom agency, especially when teaching composition deliberately. By clarifying what is already democratic about students' agency within and outside the classroom, we can open up for them a world of composing possibilities that includes the ways they speak and write every day as having more than merely personal significance.

I want to remember at this point Parks's critique of agency "defined as the ability to make decisions in a deliberative fashion," and "actualized in the *discussion*," rather than in real political change brought about by democratic action. Empowering our classrooms as places wherein "real" change is made may seem an impossible task. Students traditionally do not have access to the levers of power that might realize such change, even within the educational institutions they attend. Student governments are limited in their scope and powers, major financial and staffing decisions are made by professional administration or even appointed boards of regents. Even within the individual classroom, students are used to teachers as the final authority, and have experienced little input into the design or day-to-day working of the course. Outside of the school, many students in their first year have never had the opportunity to vote, and may only recently have turned 18. While it's true that in recent years younger people have become more involved in social activism than previous generations, that in itself does not necessarily amount to the experience of realizing political change. It's of course also true that not all college students fit nicely in the 18-22 demographic, and many older students will have had ample opportunity to participate in traditional democratic processes like regular elections. Speaking broadly, however, students across the board tend to experience social and political power through its effects on them, rather than actively driving change themselves. The deliberative classroom can begin to change this however; the first step in creating a "culture of civic action" lies in educating people in the processes and practices by which they can exert control over their shared world.

A theory of democratic interagency supports the aims of rhetoric and composition in at least three important ways that go further than do our current conceptions of rhetorical agency. First, as I will explore in depth in the following chapter, it enables us to de-center the citizen as

the primary figure of democratic life—the intersubjective experience of sharing in public discourses extends beyond the legal categories of citizen and non-citizen. This is not to say that we have to *ignore* citizenship. Rather, encouraging students who are citizens to examine and reflect upon the many interactions they might have with non-citizens within deliberate situations broadens the horizons of democratic activity. Conversely, we can supplement the critical practices of identifying and supporting the rhetorical actions of marginalized individuals and communities, or we might call them counterpublics, by positioning those practices as not merely being aimed at entering mainstream discourses, but as essential to our understanding and experience of democratic practice itself.

Second, the concept of democratic interagency supports the more flexible, open understanding of deliberation that has gained currency in democratic theory over the past several decades. Whereas earlier accounts of deliberation, according to Derek Barker, Noëlle McAfee, and David McIvor, “drew a sharp line between reason and rhetoric, thinking that deliberation had to be protected from the undemocratic forces of partiality, emotion, inequality, rhetoric, and coercion” (12), theories of deliberation in currency today allow for and value narrative, storytelling, testimony, and other non-rational forms of communication. Political theorist Jane Mansbridge, for instance, argues that “everyday talk,” that occurs in the media, in official public forums, and “that occurs in formally private spaces about things the public ought to discuss,” coalesce as a recognizable deliberative *system* (85). Similarly, Iris Marion Young argues that “we should understand processes of discussion and decision making that we evaluate under norms of deliberative democracy as occurring in multiple forums and sites connected to one another over broad spans of space and time” (“De-centering” 113). Considering how everyday talk among people paves the way for more formal political address and decision-making expands

the scope of deliberation in ways that opens students to experience their personal, private, or purely local concerns are actually quite significant in the ongoing processes of democratic world-building. Even the seemingly innocuous, as Mansbridge explains, shapes the contours of the deliberative system and the range of public issues available for discussion. An open conception of deliberation encourages students to examine “even the snort of derision one might give at a sexist television character while watching with friends” for its rhetorical and democratic salience (“Everyday Talk” 88). The inclusion of many such forms of talk, and writing, enable us to see conflict where it exists in our communities more readily, where it has previously been hidden from and by official channels of power.

Finally, to avoid the problem of endless deliberative talk that leads nowhere, deliberative practice founded on a theory of democratic interagency supports a culture of civic *action*. One aim of teaching students deliberatively, and *to deliberate*, is to achieve what Elena Fagotto and Archon Fung, political theorists at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, call “embeddedness.” As they argue, “when that habit [of deliberation] is embedded in a community’s political institutions and social practices, people frequently make public decisions and take collective actions through process that involve discussion, reasoning, and citizen participation rather than through the exercise of authority, expertise, status, political weight, or other such forms of power” (“Sustaining” 129). In other words, deliberative teaching presents alternatives to the political status quo for making decisions, and the limits on what issues are available for consideration. This benefit of deliberative teaching follows upon the other two I have outlined above. Broadening our sense of inclusion in democratic processes by de-emphasizing citizenship as the animating force of democracy and similarly expanding our understanding of what “counts” in deliberative discourse supports students in self-consciously

bringing their everyday talk and action into the realm of political or civic action. Effectively, we can lower the threshold for political advocacy and activism in order to overcome, as Ferguson describes, the “many pressures there are on us to accept our world, and our understanding of the world, as given” (140). Furthermore, contemporary models of deliberation do not place achieving consensus at their center, which has in the past left those models vulnerable to exactly the kind of criticism Parks leveled: namely, that all this talk leads us nowhere. Indeed, as John Dryzek recognizes, deliberation cannot make consensus its goal, when difference is an essential condition of deliberation (“Difference” 72). Instead, he argues, “deliberative democracy is more interested in the production of collective outcomes in problem-solving contexts” (73). What matters is not that everyone agrees, but that the deliberative process has involved as many voices as possible who all come together recognizing that their diversity will not be “overcome” in collective decision-making, but that it will be respected and taken into account by the community’s deliberations.

With this theoretical basis of democratic interagency supporting a vision of deliberative democracy within and beyond the classroom, in the following chapter I turn to examine whether developing citizenship is a necessary or helpful goal for composition education generally, and within the deliberative pedagogy I propose in this dissertation more specifically.



### **Chapter 3: Re-Examining Citizen-Making in Composition**

In this chapter, I connect the teaching of composition to a particular theory of democratic action—one that is primarily deliberative, collaborative, and discursive—in order to address the concerns of scholars in both rhetoric and composition who argue that citizenship has been under-theorized and over-utilized (Rufo and Atchison 2011; Wan 2011). Karma Chavez argues that, despite the number and variety of studies in the many exclusions from citizenship and public discourse, “most of the rhetorical theory and criticism published in the field takes the value and ideal of citizenship for granted, ignoring altogether or, at best, reframing appeals that challenge the very bases of citizenship and the nation-state” (163). Her goal is to build rhetoric as a discipline not constituted by normative, Western, and citizen discourses, and aims to accomplish this not by the normal appeals to greater inclusion in the current paradigm, but by breaking from the dominance of rhetoric’s citizenship narrative. Amy Wan, similarly, has noted how writing teachers often “see citizenship building as an integral goal of the classroom” and figure the skills of composition as the antidote to impoverished civic discourses (2011, pp. 29). However, at the same time, she argues, “the terms and boundaries we use to define citizenship are vague at best and often go uninterrogated,” with the result that we can easily ignore concerns about inclusion, access, and the impact of citizenship (29). As I will show, strong critiques of citizenship like these point the way to new directions for rhetoric and composition to theorize its role in contemporary public discourses and to effectively address concerns about inclusion and access to democratic modes of life through classroom practice. What is needed, I argue, is a strong theory of democracy for composition, one that de-centers the citizen and citizenship as goals in themselves and instead enables teachers and students to clearly position their discourses across a variety of (counter)publics without insisting on a normative vision of a common democratic experience.

Political scientist Michael Ferguson offers a theory of democracy that rejects the assumption of commonality as the basis for citizenship. Her account of democracy “prioritizes the active practice of sharing a life together with plural others” (162). Ferguson’s account is based on particular conceptions of plurality connected to both monological and dialogical concepts of agency she draws from the work of political philosopher Charles Taylor, and on Hannah Arendt’s notions of world-building and “sharing-the-world-with-others” that raise questions of sovereignty and legitimacy in democratic life. She first illustrates how the notion of sharing, as typically construed by political theorists, is defined as an objective sharing “that insists that when we share, we must share some *thing* in common” (39). In terms of citizenship, Ferguson demonstrates, the thing we possess in common may be a national language (either *de facto* or *de jure*), an environment or geographical center, a common culture, or a shared historical reference. This objective picture of sharing, she argues, results in a theory of democracy that assumes such sharing is necessary to democracy (41-42). As second consequence is that democratic theorists tend to be concerned principally with identifying what citizens *should* share, in addition to locating different things that they do share. The objective picture of sharing, then, results in a normative vision of citizenship that maintains control over what qualifies as the *right kind* of commonality.

In the sections that follow, I will first explore critiques of citizenship that raise questions about access and inclusion in democratic life. Chavez’s earlier essay explored how modes of “differential belonging” institute a form of cultural citizenship that may better confront exclusions from U.S. democracy (“Border [In]Securities” 137). Her later work, however, argues that efforts to merely build wider inclusion will not fundamentally change the hegemonic, normative function of citizenship. Kenneth Rufo and R. Jarrod Atchison offer a review of

citizenship within rhetoric studies, arguing that by extending a political dimension to nearly any act or utterance, we are in danger of completely collapsing the private and the public, an end they describe strongly as fascist (210). A somewhat different critique comes from Juan Guerra, whose recent book takes up a particular theory of deliberative or discursive democracy in more depth than most scholarship in composition. Guerra is particularly concerned with the role that language difference plays in the experience of citizenship and argues that greater attention is needed to the inseparable twining of language and culture if we are to have a more productive vision of cultural citizenship. Finally, Amy Wan's work in *Producing Good Citizens* highlights the potential pitfalls for composition of reinforcing a vision of citizenship bound to capitalistic notions of value and productivity. After this review of critiques of citizenship, the following section unpacks the theory of democracy Ferguson offers as a remedy to the assumption of commonality as the basis of citizenship. In its place, Ferguson illustrates the concept of *democratic interagency* and an Arendtian, dialogical concept of sharing that she believes characterize truly democratic life. Her theory, I demonstrate, provides rhetoric and composition a way out from the bind of normative citizenship that Chavez and others have identified as a major challenge to our field. Finally, I conclude by offering a deliberative pedagogy for composition that draws on Ferguson's theory of democracy-as-activity. This pedagogy is founded on processes for collaborative decision-making among plural others—the defining feature of contemporary democratic life. Most importantly, composition instruction for democracy, using this framework, does not require appeal to normative conceptions of citizenship in the ways described earlier.

### **Citizenship in Composition Instruction**

Turning to the major journals of the field reveals a wealth of interest in citizenship over time, and especially in the past few decades. Shifting focuses for this interest has led to fruitful consideration of a wide variety of aspects, institutions, and impacts of composition instruction. One common way compositionists have engaged with citizenship, often indirectly, is through the critical project of recovering the histories and rhetorics of marginalized groups. A number of studies have explored Native American and other indigenous rhetorical practices of self-representation (Nordstrom 2015; Cushman 2008; Bizzaro 2004; Young 2004), and others bring to light literacy education efforts aimed at specific communities that have been denied or experienced less access to traditional educational institutions (Kates 2006; Greer 2015; White 2015; Schneider 2007). In many of these studies, the authors demonstrate how particular communities employ novel discursive practices to build up, defend, and advance representations of themselves and their identity groups as citizen-members of the larger polis. These efforts are significant because, despite the pluralism so often lionized in American society, minority ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups have labored under the hegemonic force of the dominant white, English-speaking culture, often experiencing marginalization or exclusion from official channels of power and representation.

Many in composition have approached citizenship in a similar way, as merely one element of student identity placed in combination with another significant qualifier. Some common connections are citizen-writer, citizen-worker, and citizen-critic. This last term, citizen-critic, was most notably applied by Rosa Eberly at the center of her 2000 book examining the formation of what she called “literary public spheres.” Her argument places literary texts and the public discussion they can elicit as a revealing link between English education and democratic life. Applying the term citizen-worker, Chase Bollig challenges the terms of the “is college worth

it?” debates and responds to the increasing pressures universities face regarding tuition costs, student debt, and diminishing job markets by arguing for composition’s value to students. Bollig takes a pragmatic view of the pressures students face, arguing that composition should speak to the needs of these citizen-workers, who may not fully appreciate what composition education has to offer in their search for meaningful employment after college (2015). Kathleen Blake Yancey, in her 2009 report from the NCTE, made “a call to action...a call to help our students compose often, compose well, and through these composings, become the citizen writers of our country, the citizen writers of our world, and the writers of our future” (“Writing in the 21st Century”). Her language invokes the influential notions of social constructionist scholars like Patricia Bizzell, Joseph Harris, and James Porter, situating the student as both creator and constituent of the social and political future of the country. Citizenship, from that perspective, loses its commonplace value as a legal category or invocation of national belonging, and instead resides in the activity of co-creating this future reality through discourse. Laurie Grobman draws from Yancey’s work, further extending the terms of rhetorical citizenship by positioning students as “rhetorical citizen historians.” As she writes, “rhetorical citizen historians produce both original historical and rhetorical knowledge, and promote democracy through conscious, deliberate rhetorical historical work” thus embeds students in critical practices of challenging and recovering histories and negotiating unequal and shifting discourses between members of communities (237). The work of collaborative construction of a shared social world is also carried through Frank Farmer’s examination of counterpublics and zine culture, in the figure of the “citizen bricoleur.” In each of these cases, the person of the citizen is identified with some set of other concerns which individuals must negotiate. The citizen, in the mind of composition studies, is actively engaged with socio-cultural, political, and economic forces through their

discursive activity. Developing students' facility with that activity is widely viewed as our province.

Underpinning these and other scholar's work is an understanding that the classroom is a place of becoming, a stopping point on the way to a more fully realized life as a citizen: socially aware, critically engaged, and of course, literate. This is a role many in composition have made the foundation of their pedagogies, building upon Rosa Eberly's rendering of the classroom as "protopublic" space ("From writer, audiences, and communities" 1999; *Citizen Critics* 2000). Susan Wells had earlier argued that we ought to imagine our classrooms as "concentrated version[s] of the public" (1996, 338.). Emily Donnelly broadly categorizes pedagogical work that follows this trend in one of three ways; classroom as micropublic, classroom as protopublic, and classroom as counterpublic (2008). Each of these positions the classroom and the student in some specific constellation with the public-at-large. The writing in such classrooms is figured as public-facing, often meant for an audience outside the classroom, whether this through public writing like letters to the editor (Weisser 2002) or writing tasks specific to the needs of a community partner (Flower 2008). The movement of composition's social turn of the 1980's continued and developed into a disciplinary concern with community and civic engagement in what Paula Mathieu would eventually term the field's "public turn" (2005). Within the public turn, scholars have challenged some previously unexamined assumptions about the academy's relationship to the larger public sphere. Keith Gilyard explicitly connects the work of composition to the influential philosophies of Cornel West, challenging the role of public universities and other institutions of "the training ground for citizenship," arguing for greater efforts to make "public interests and public good...crucial aspects of your critical reflection [on composition]" (116). Within composition studies, the scholarly emphasis has been on identifying

and composing for these public interests and public goods, and less on bringing clarity to the persona of the citizen.

We can see that, across composition studies, a persistent sense of concern with citizenship develops in the weight of research and classroom practice seeking to connect the civic and the academic. This concern, however, seldom results in specific definitions of the citizenship composition hopes to produce. We are interested in citizenship, but if asked who or what the citizen is, the responses would be as varied as the individual interests of composition scholars. We share a sense of what kinds of discourses we expect students to participate in after leaving the university, but there is often no complete sense (and certainly no single answer) of what type of democratic participation is valued. It is as though we have been victims of what political scientist Benjamin Barber has for several decades critiqued as “thin democracy” (Strong Democracy 1984). Barber’s critique of representative democracy, typified by the United States’ system, describes thin democracy as a system “whose democratic values are prudential and thus provisional, optional, and conditional (4). The real trouble with this, for composition studies in the U.S., is that “from this precarious foundation, no firm theory of citizenship, participation, public goods, or civic virtue can be expected to arise” (4). Barber finds the cure for this in his concept of “strong democracy,” which begins and is continuously practiced locally through iterations of strong deliberative and participatory institutions, before expanding outward to involve ever larger communities in the deliberation over common goods and aims. This critique clarifies the trouble that composition studies has had in theorizing and enacting the relationship between the academic and the civic. Rolf Norgaard charges that “composition’s current love affair with the civic...urges that we try to escape the four classroom walls and, moving beyond the classroom door, have students write in ways that make their work live and breathe in a public

sphere” (“Desire and Performance at the Classroom Door,” 256). He further challenges composition to consider that “underlying much of the interest in shifting classroom discourse to civic discourse is the presumption that what seems constrained in the academy—the student’s own agency—becomes real and unfettered on the street...”, and thus to revise our thinking about how student agency becomes, supports, or intertwines with civic agency (256). Whether and how our work in composition classes develops student’s (eventual or actual) civic agency is necessarily entwined with the conception of democracy that a given instruction holds. What is missing from composition scholarship is threefold: a direct reckoning with who counts as citizens and how we define that citizenship, and with what theories of democracy our classroom practices resonate with and support. Without questioning the democracy we hope to build, our critical efforts at enfranchisement in the training ground of citizenship will fall short.

From here, I turn to explore three significant critiques of the nature and role of citizenship within composition. As I will show, each of these three scholars, Karma Chavez, Juan Guerra, and Amy Wan, approaches citizenship as a problematic element in a modern university characterized by greater diversity than at any point in history.

### **Challenging Normative Citizenship**

So far as rhetoric has been principally concerned with public discourses, or with the public character of varieties of discourses, Karma Chavez notes that scholarship has dealt with public address and the “great speeches” of politicians and other prominent citizens of Western nation-states (2015, pp 163). More broadly, rhetoric has explored the civic practices of ordinary citizens, especially of those who are seeking inclusion in state and national discourses. Of critical importance in this scholarship is Robert Asen’s discourse theory of citizenship. Asen notes, discourse practices present “potentially accessible and powerful everyday enactments of



citizenship” for the important reason that concrete civic actions such as voting or running for office are limited, periodic exercises, whereas “discourse practices suggest a frequency and sustainability to civic engagement” (2004). In this vein of scholarship, citizenship as a concept and as a social phenomenon becomes intelligible through how people speak and find circulation for their discourses. Within Asen’s discourse theory of citizenship, “the public” is conceived as a modality of circulation, rather than a particular forum or even an aggregation of individuals. Many scholars have worked in this vein to provide analyses of the public rhetoric of prominent individuals, presidents and other political representatives, and of everyday people. In this tradition, Kristian Kock and Lisa Villadsen write, introducing their collection *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Deliberation*, that we principally understand “citizenship as a discursive phenomenon in the sense that important civic functions take place in deliberation among citizens, and that discourse is not prefatory to real action but is in many ways constitutive of civic engagement” (1). Democracy is discovered within and among citizens’ discourses—it is there that we find what Gerard Hauser terms “rhetorical democracy.” That term, for Hauser, captures the defining characteristic of modern democracy; the complex, intertwining, contested relationships found in civil society (Rhetorical Democracy 12). This, in turn leads us back to the problem of locating rhetorical citizenship, or the need for “the creation of a discursive practice in which citizens may pursue the possibilities of civic engagement” (12). It is in the search for such discursive practices that Chavez develops her critique of rhetoric’s reliance on normative conceptions of citizenship.

Chavez first argued against normative discourses of belonging such as she locates in large, national LGBTQ and migrant advocacy groups, and instead argues for discourses of “differential belonging,” derived from feminist scholars of color such as Gloria Anzaldua and

Chela Sandoval (“Border [In]Securities”144). The discourse of differential belonging presents a strategy for producing cultural citizenship that calls us “to desire relations across lines of difference” (144), and that can include linguistic diversity in the production of counterpublic, citizen discourses. Differential belonging speaks to a coalitional politics; Chavez uses as examples the discourses of smaller LGBTQ and immigrant right’s groups that directly critique the emphasis on “conventional, partnered relationships and conceptions of normality” in the written statements of larger, national advocacy groups (145). The result of those normative discourses is the centering of traditional notions of citizen-belonging to the exclusion and erasure of LGBTQ immigrants. The smaller advocacy groups, Wingspan and *Coalición de Derechos Humanos* (CDH), instead worked together to co-produce documents linking queer rights with immigrant rights. By critiquing the normative emphasis of the larger groups’ publications, this new coalition enacts differential belonging by shifting “the modality [of belonging] to other affective and relational registers” (145). Chavez’s later work, however, extends her critique of normative citizenship to include even those efforts that make inclusion under the heading of citizenship a goal.

Chavez argues that “widening the scope or including more voices” is not in itself a sufficient remedy to the exclusion of non-white, non-male, non-Western rhetorics from public forums and participation in state discourses (“Beyond Inclusion”163). Her reasoning is that, despite the wealth of interdisciplinary scholarship naming new varieties of citizenship behaviors, we simply cannot ignore that the predominant understanding of citizenship is tied to legal concepts of status and state recognition, and that it is “a product of modern state development and also of the colonial creation of national borders” (165). As a result, even when we are trying to understand counterpublic discourses in their civic dimensions, we end up speaking primarily

about those who are seeking or already have that special legal status. Thus, Chavez argues, if we conceive of the political as the exclusive realm of citizens and also only imagine activist discourses as discourses of citizens, we “preclude the lives, experiences, and practices of numerous collectives and individuals who have always engaged in practices that are justifiably called rhetorical and political, but that don’t conform to this norm” (165). Inclusivity as a goal of scholarship and pedagogy, as it is often invoked, falls short because, “all inclusionary logics seem to share the fact that they reinforce the existing structures and tend to obscure those structures’ flaws” (166). For Chavez, the insistence on inclusion also makes offering alternatives to it more difficult, which perhaps explains in part the disciplines’ slipping into making citizen a vague “super-term,” and also the relative lack of direct research into democratic theory from scholars in rhetoric and composition.

Juan Guerra’s recent book, *Language, Culture, Identity and Citizenship in College Classrooms and Communities*, is one of few major works in composition studies that examines teaching practice directly through a specified theory of democracy, presented as an alternative to commonsense assumptions about democracy as a form of government or system of voting. He advances a concept of cultural citizenship suited to and defined in relationship with the notion of “discursive democracy” that he draws from political scientist John Dryzek’s 2000 book, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*. Dryzek’s notion of discursive democracy marks an important development in the theory of deliberative democracy, and stands in contrast to two other forms: minimal democracy, or social choice theory, and difference democracy, characterized by an emphasis on the “the variety of oppressions and so subject-positions” that emerge in democratic life (58). Minimal democracy, in Dryzek’s work, represents what is commonly thought of as democratic governance—a political system in which

individuals pursue their interests in a competitive public life. It emphasizes the distinction between private and public life, and limits understanding of the latter to specific and well-defined political forums or institutions such as the voting booth (56).

The theory of discursive democracy situates the realization of democratic life in the ongoing experience of public, deliberative discourse taking place in multiple, overlapping public spheres. Most importantly, these public spheres are not understood as specific political institutions or forums—it is not the space that defines deliberation, but rather the process of contestation among discourses which might include forms beyond the calm, dispassionate, “rational” argumentation typically associated with deliberative practices (Dryzek 71-71; Guerra 104-105). Guerra’s conception of citizenship and of the role language diversity plays in negotiating identity is presented as an attempt to reconcile Dryzek’s discursive democracy with difference democrats—among whom Guerra includes himself and the huge amount of education and composition scholars he cites in the book.

What we think of as citizenship must be seen as a direct consequence of the different ways in which language and culture are implicated in the production of a particular kind of identity, one that is fluid and multi-faceted but simultaneously acknowledges and responds to the ever-present linguistic, social, cultural and political opportunities and constraints that govern our lives (97). Put otherwise, a cultural account of citizenship acknowledges how citizenship becomes enacted differently through the particulars of the individual, with their intersectional identities (including linguistic backgrounds), acting within a given socio-cultural and political context. Citizenship is thus fundamentally unstable, de-linked from an understanding that it is an achievable status or category. This move toward troubling easy conceptions of citizenship is an important one for Guerra and for the field. Language is only one characteristic, though

nevertheless a primary one, that works to maintain certain groups as strangers. Guerra's theorizing of discursive democracy presents a way compositionists might begin to teach for democratic activity that resists normative ideals of socio-linguistic homogeneity. However, we will see that cultural citizenship as a concept is not without its own problems.

The notion of cultural citizenship comes most directly from anthropologist Aihwa Ong, and Guerra's is only one account among many. The term in Ong's sense refers to "cultural practices and beliefs produced out of negotiating the often ambivalent and contested relations with the state and its hegemonic forms that establish criteria of belonging" (738). As Chavez notes, others have multiplied conceptions of cultural citizenship along specific characteristics and identities. For example, Toby Miller, Renato Rosaldo, and others have established concepts of sexual citizenship, social citizenship, and consumer citizenship (165). Scholarship of such specific types attempt to explain how the behaviors, discourses, and values of those particular spaces are negotiated in the ways Ong describes. The result is a sense of citizenship that is, at least potentially, so broad and expansive that virtually any behavior qualifies as a mode of civic engagement. This is the critique of citizenship in studies of rhetoric that Kenneth Rufo and R. Jarrod Atchison offer: by extending a political dimension to nearly any act or utterance, we are in danger of completely collapsing the private and the public, a result theoretically and historically tied to fascism (210).

A third significant critique of citizenship within composition comes from Amy Wan, in her 2011 article for *College English* "In the Name of Citizenship," and her later book expanding her arguments, *Producing Good Citizens*. Wan offers a two-pronged critique of citizenship that addresses both the troubling ways the term is employed among compositionists, and the nature of the concept itself. The first part of her critique stems from what she calls the "ambient" nature of

the term throughout composition. By this, she refers to how “the flexibility of the term can imbue the work of higher education...with a sense of its larger societal impact while the terms ambiguity allows for unspoken and sometimes conflicting beliefs about what citizenship is” (29). She charges, that although compositionists have worked for many years to maintain a sense of the larger public purposes for which they are training students, we have not always attended to the “material and legal consequences of citizenship” as they accrue differently among students (35). Specifically, she questions the notion of participatory citizenship as a primary value of literacy education, writing that it:

assumes an unspoken agreement about [citizenship’s] definition and the possibility of using the classroom to distribute politically neutral participation skills. This assumption of a neutral ‘goodness’ elides citizenship’s other definitional possibilities as a *status* or *standing*, possibilities not easily accessible to all students merely through participation. (“In the Name” 36).

Recognizing the real possibility of continuing exclusionary practices, Wan asks that, as a field, we more closely attend to our definitions of citizenship in order to clarify what kinds of citizenship behaviors we are hoping to cultivate, and thus how to better realize the aspirational potential of the concept as a basis for writing and literacy instruction.

The second element of Wan’s critique stems from the explicit link made between that concept and capital production, which she expands upon in her book *Producing Good Citizens*. The “good” citizen is typically figured as a “productive” citizen, that is, one who finds and maintains employment and participates as a consumer in the larger economy. This image of the citizen as economic agent, or more typically today as “human capital,” as the dominant cultural perception of citizenship has been well over a century in the making. Successive efforts at

reshaping education in response to rapidly shifting economic and social conditions have had the result (intended or otherwise) of reinforcing the underlying structures of power and subordination that keep immigrant and other marginalized communities flowing into un- or semi-skilled, entry-level work, equipped with only the “safest” forms of literacy that do not tend to lead to challenges to the status quo. Under this regime, assimilation is the primary goal, and, as Wan demonstrates, the U.S. government played an active role in defining a vision of citizenship alongside a vision of Americanness that profoundly influenced the education and opportunities afforded to new immigrants and others. Ultimately, because composition and literacy education have been a principal mode of maintaining this vision of citizenship, teachers and scholars in our field bear some responsibility for unpacking the “ideological freight” (Brandt 20) that comes with the term citizenship and devising teaching practices that better reflect our disciplinary goals and the egalitarian mission that has characterized the modern field of rhetoric and composition.

In the following section, I return to take up Chavez’s argument that inclusion alone will not resolve our troubled reliance on citizenship, connecting her critique of citizenship with that of political scientist Michael Ferguson. At the heart of Ferguson’s theory of democracy is a strong critique of the insistence on “commonality” as the defining feature of citizenship, which she resolves by building a picture of intersubjective sharing as the necessary activity of democracy.

### **Democratic Interagency and De-Centering Commonality**

Concerns about just who “counts” as a citizen, and how, are re-circulated in national media through ongoing conversations about changing demographics (Oakford, “The Changing Face of America’s Electorate”), projections of which minority group will soon dominate the electorate (PNAE Voting Brief, “The Changing Face of the Nation), and how the incorporation

of “different” groups into the political structures of the country stands to change familiar political processes (Salem, “It’s time for Muslim Americans to do politics like other minorities”).

Whether or not these fears are at all based in fact is beside the point. Rather, embedded in this type of discourse is the tacit understanding that minority groups may not already be fully participating citizens in ways that are recognized by the dominant culture. The implication is that they still have more work to do, establishing a civic identity as a distinct group and yet simultaneously positioning that group identity within the mainstream of American society. There is, however, the possibility of adopting a perspective that allows us to decenter the citizen as the bearer of special rights and privileges and as the particular agent of democratic action. Michael Ferguson’s book, *Sharing Democracy*, offers such a critical perspective on democracy that accepts, as Paolo Freire described, “before it becomes a political form, democracy is a form of life” (28-29).

Ferguson first details the central argument of mainstream political theory: only if we are united by some sense of what we all share will we truly realize the “democratic affect,” that is, the feeling of concern for the well-being of our fellows that motivates compromise and self-sacrifice in matters of governance. She then demonstrates how the drive for what is common is in fact an anti-democratic influence and should be refused. Arguing that we abandon the drive to find the “correct” source of commonality to unite citizens, her framework of activity-oriented democracy emphasizes that democratic life is a matter of day-to-day intersubjective world-building. This is because identities “are not produced by the passive fact of commonality but by the active doing of human agents” (79). A single commonality, say for instance citizenship or speaking English as one’s first language, is at best insufficient for the creation and sustenance of a democratic collectivity. This is because, while the question “who is a citizen?” may be able to



definitively answer the question “who is an American?” in a particular instance, the category of citizenship clearly does not complete a sense of democratic identity. Neither is English as a first language a sufficient condition for determining who “we” are, even when citizenship is not in question. The work of translingual scholars confirms the plurality of Englishes within America; further, the monolingual history of America simply elides the fact that the linguistic tapestry of the country was woven from the languages of various immigrant groups, slaves, and the indigenous population (Matsuda 2006; Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur 2011). Other diverse markers of cultural, religious, or ethnic identity might similarly confound an easy answer of who “we” are in America; habits of citizenship are as diverse as are the backgrounds of our demographic fabric. In traditional political theory, identification with a localized ethnic or cultural group, say LGBTQ identity or immigrant status, is a concern because it relocates the *thing* being shared not with the polity as a whole, but with the so-termed parochial values of the in-group. Challenges to common sharing among *all* citizens, then, become challenges to the basis of democracy and concern for the “common” good.

Danielle Allen offers another illustrative approach to the problem of commonality that should make Ferguson’s arguments more concrete. Analyzing the effects of calcified distrust among citizens, Allen’s main site of inquiry is the racialized experience of American life during the height of the Civil Rights movement seen through such iconic moments as the image of Elizabeth Eckford being cursed and pursued after trying to exercise her constitutional right to attend school in Little Rock, Arkansas. Distrust, as a product of racial segregation and systemic oppression, is in evidence through everyday citizen behaviors. The behavior of Elizabeth Eckford—quiet acquiescence in the face of white aggression—is as much a citizen behavior as is the dominance expressed by Hazel Brown and the white crowd gathered to take and hold public

space. Allen begins by acknowledging that during the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 60s, “citizens on both sides of the ethnopolitical divide had difficulty imagining a future together” (xviii). And yet, throughout this period and other moments of national tension, the political imaginary of *one people* has remained constant. Allen exposes as myth the notion that, “out of many, citizens should become one.” That metaphor of oneness, in reality, could never adequately or accurately describe the state of affairs among the American citizenry—not at the founding, certainly not during the Civil War or the Civil Rights period a century later, and not now. Most importantly, she argues, “the metaphor of oneness is generally inadequate to describe the proper aspirations of a democratic people to solidarity and community” (13). To move closer to achieving those ideals, we need ongoing public talk—the daily interchange of experiences, ideals, frustrations, and empathy among groups and individuals. What is needed, in short, is the ongoing activity of democracy in everyday life such as Ferguson espouses.

The alternative to the objective theory of sharing is the Arendtian vision of intersubjective sharing. This concept focuses on the individual’s experience of sharing, rather than on the presence of the thing being shared independent of the individual. For Arendt, “commonness is a quality of the human experience of the world: things are common only when we experience them as shared with other subjects” (47). One important function of shifting to this view of sharing is that it changes the nature of claims to commonality from seemingly neutral observations about the world to political claims that act upon the others with whom we claim to be sharing. As Ferguson puts it, “in the intersubjective view [claims about commonality] are hermeneutic claims about how we should make sense of and understand the world that we share” (51). Since such claims seek to persuade, and seek the agreement of others, they are rhetorically charged. Our rhetorical ability to communicate and create shared meanings is thus

central to Arendt's notion of "world-building," that is, "building a world that we experience as shared in common with plural subjects" (53). The recognition of a fundamental plurality is, for Ferguson, related to the experience of *non-sovereignty*, or of recognizing that no one subject is wholly independent from others. This point is important for Ferguson because the goal of democratic politics should be to cultivate "openness to...moments of disagreement and difference in a way that enables further interaction, as opposed to encouraging withdrawal" (59). The commonality-oriented view of democracy that generally predominates has produced just this type of withdrawal, as people are routinely exposed to disruptions of the supposed unity of citizenship within political processes. Political theorist Danielle Allen describes how one effect of this has been the entrenchment of political distrust, and how indeed "the metaphor of oneness is generally inadequate to describe the proper aspirations of a democratic people to solidarity and community" (13). The regular experience of loss and frustration—of *non-sovereignty*—becomes an erosive force for democracy when inclusion in a common citizenship is the ideal.

I wish at this point to return briefly to Chavez's critique of citizenship from the terms of inclusion and connect her work with that of Ferguson. Chavez has argued that inclusion as it is normally figured is insufficient as a goal for rhetoric in the effort to resist hegemonic, Western, heteronormative discourses. Ferguson, I believe, would agree. As she states, "people are included in democratic interagency when they can participate in the intersubjective practice of world-building" (133). This vision of inclusion leaves open the possibility for frustration, loss, sacrifice, and even of being shut out from public forums. Interaction, however, is the point. Ferguson writes,

Inclusion, understood in this way, is not about achieving certain outcomes. It is not a matter of winning an argument or securing a seat at the table. It is not about reaching an

agreement about who “we” are. It is not about feeling heard, being recognized, or being treated as an equal. Rather, inclusion is a matter of ongoing interaction—interaction that may itself aim at some of these goals but that need not achieve them in order to be inclusive. Inclusion is sharing in the activity of shaping the world with others, which is always going to be characterized by non-sovereignty, by loss, by not getting what one wants.... We can get a response from our interlocutors that may not be the response we want, that may be rude or offensive, but that is still a response that keeps our interaction going, rather than shutting it down. (133)

This is not the rosiest picture of democratic life, I recognize. However, it does respond to Chavez’s argument that “alternatives and critique are precisely what are necessary to counter the persistent reinscription of this narrative [of inclusive citizenship] in Rhetoric” (166). Ferguson’s theory of intersubjective democratic action leaves space for “the lives, experiences, and practices” of individuals that can justifiably be viewed as both rhetorical and public or civic in nature that Chavez argues is a necessary step for the field (165).

What, then, to offer in place of commonality? Ferguson outlines a perspective of intersubjective world-building that I argue is already deeply rhetorical insofar as it occurs principally through discursive action and is thus appropriate to a re-examination of citizenship and democracy in composition. Her framework owes much to theorists of radical democracy such as Sheldon Wolin and Chantal Mouffe, for whom the fundamentally plural nature of civic bodies presents a serious challenge to traditional conceptions of liberal democracy such as the republican and deliberative models (Mouffe 2000; Wolin 1993). Ferguson’s concept of democracy shares the radical democrats’ emphasis on encouraging and uncovering dissensus. Rather than an objective locus of unity, what is needed to sustain democracy and realize its

values of equality, respect for individual liberty, and basic human rights, is a proliferation of (potentially) agonistic forums of interaction. Where such forums exist, citizens have ample opportunities to interact with others, discovering meaningful differences and expanding their sense of the diversity of the demos. That demos, Ferguson notes, is always “only one imaginary among many” (129), and significantly for composition studies, the encounter with other possibilities occurs discursively as groups and individuals represent themselves through their (counter)public discourses. As an example, recall the demos made possible by San Franciscans that opened this essay—citizens of that city were clearly able to recognize the way in which non-citizens carry a stake in the community life and can be present at the table in deciding matters of education for all children living in the city. Encounters with difference like these challenges static conceptions of citizenship and belonging, expanding the possibility for dwelling among others without the need to make a flattening consensus the primary aim of democratic life.

The democracy-as-activity orientation requires a departure from rhetorical scholarship that, although it has pushed forward our understanding of how public discourses appear in their rhetorical character, often still explicitly assume a site of commonality grounding the rhetorical interaction of multiple publics. As Chavez argues, recalling her critique, citizenship itself—in its various cultural instantiations, in the search for inclusion in democratic discourses, or the recognition of rhetorical practices *as* citizen-rhetorics—is often that site of commonality. Gerard Hauser, for example, asserts that although a shared (ideal) reference world doesn’t necessitate consensus, “it does entail that despite disagreements its inhabitants belong to same culture...” (“On publics” 279). Culture, in that view, may be quite broadly defined, and yet the fundamental exclusionary force of a presumed commonality remains. Sharing, in Hauser’s rhetorical democracy, maintains the objective character that Ferguson challenges. Still, such critiques and

revisions of public sphere theory from within rhetoric studies begin to illustrate how the re-imagining of democracy as activity works for composition. Democracy is more than a clearly defined structure of political organization or even a rote method of decision-making, and thus should be presented, theorized, and modeled in the classroom in more nuanced ways. Rather, democracy-as-activity calls our attention to how democracy is a set of communicative practices, situated, embodied, and arising intersubjectively in nearly any interaction. It is the shared negotiation of the world we (however broadly defined) engage in when we meet with others. Rather than locating democracy in any given set of state or public institutions, Ferguson locates “democratic interagency” within “the dialogical exercise of political freedom in the company of others” (131). This understanding of agency resonates with current scholarship on rhetorical agency, more and more frequently understood as distributed, embodied, and enacted rather than as a specific capacity of individuals (Geisler 11-12).

### **Re-orienting to Democracy without “Commonality”**

“For most people,” writes Michael W. Apple, “literacy has a nonpolitical function” (193). However, literacy, as we have seen, has been indelibly linked to the political and economic future of the nation. The image of the productive worker-citizen is cemented in the public imagination, so much so that the many attempts at restructuring primary education through project-based, arts and humanities focused, or other specialized schools are seen as quaint, unusual, or even as holdovers from the hippies. That these schools offer curricula, remembering Berlin’s understanding of that concept given above, “encouraging the production of a certain kind of graduate” that differs from the dominant worker-citizen is the challenge they create for themselves. It is no surprise that many of those schools struggle financially and must constantly engage in public relations campaigns to stay open. The extent to which such project differ from

the normative vision of education for citizenship often reflects the extent to which they struggle to gain footing. Apple makes the connection between literacy education and a common citizenship explicit: “the process of defining both what counts as literacy and how it should be gained has always had links to particular regimes of morality as well. Literacy was often there to produce economic skills and a shared system of beliefs and values, to help create a ‘national culture.’” (193). Literacy education as a whole has been a primary support for the sense of national unity or commonality. Across the country, particularly in the era of standardized tests, most students have read the same books, written to the same essay prompts, and been tested on the same “important” historical facts.

All the ways that composition instruction has traditionally engaged students in public discourse have helped students to forge common identities as citizens. Despite the many ethnic, religious, and cultural differences among students from across America, and including international students, they have generally shared in experiences of composition classes that emphasize civic unity and the individual’s ability to identify and work towards the common good. Even the many courses that send students out into “their” communities presuppose an easy identification with the organizations, businesses, and other stakeholders with which they partner. Often, the relationship between school and community organization is established in advance through administrative or other official channels, with clear expectations for how the work done with students will serve both the curricular goals of those students and the aims of the partnering organization. At best, these partnerships help students find shared interests and call them into new (counter)publics they may not have previously identified with. At worst, they raise these expectations and insist on relationships of commonality that students do not feel, or even experience as further alienation from mainstream groups. In such courses, we may thus

unintentionally perpetuate the unequal distribution of social goods that already exists in American society.

Through this ill-defined or uncritical sense of common communities, we are thus a part of a huge amount of work across education that is centered on teaching students about the political institutions and social practices that supposedly unite us. This is what has traditionally been known as civics. But a similarly huge amount of scholarly hand-wringing has been done by groups such as the National Association of Scholars, who bemoan the rise of what they call the “New Civics.” In their understanding, this term refers to a sort of plot to replace the teaching of civics properly figured—of the great men and great actions of American government—with left-wing social justice activism. For someone like K.C. Johnson, professor of history at Brooklyn College, the teaching of civics or of citizenship is properly rooted in content courses in U.S. Political and Constitutional history or “Western Civilization.” These quiescent, neuter terms appear unobjectionable, and so fuel groups who believe the so-called New Civics to be so many attempts to use liberal arts education to “bludgeon students into social justice advocates” (135). This vision of a civics rooted in some well-defined and static political and cultural past treats citizenship as a sort of laurel adorning the worthy, rather than as an active and ongoing practice.

The impulse to find what unites “us” as citizens is strong, and understandable. But it is this impulse that allows Johnson to opine without apparent irony that “topics critical to state civics requirements” are being crowded out by scholarship that “a generation ago... would have been considered African-American or women’s or ethnic history,” as though there is a necessary or meaningful difference between those and “American History.” The fear of such critics is that giving attention to difference in our experiences of democratic life will inevitably erode the sense of what citizens share in common. Michaele Ferguson provides one possible response to this



fear. She offers a detailed account of the dominant line of thought in democratic theory, which operates under the assumption that commonality is necessary for citizens to effectively continue a self-governing state. The general notion is that only if we are united by some sense of what we all share will we truly realize the “democratic affect”; that is, the feeling of concern for the well-being of our fellows that motivates compromise and self-sacrifice in matters of governance. The types of civics education Johnson and others desire is explicitly geared towards maintaining a shared sense of “our” history and “our” institutions. Without such a base of shared experience to build democratic affect, they argue, we have no incentive to pursue the greater/public/common interest instead of our own self-interest.

This affective connection to our fellows is a matter of belief, rather than knowledge. Because no certain knowledge of another person’s internal motivations and aims can be found, we tend to place faith in others on the basis of assumptions we make about our shared value systems and concerns. Simple formulations demonstrate this clearly: we both own similar farms in the same township, so the availability of subsidies that affect my farm likely impact yours in the same way; we both work mid-level jobs in large firms, so my concerns about taxes are likely similar to your concerns about taxes. In many cases such assumptions might hold true. They may even be strengthened, or our two positions brought into closer alignment, through ongoing social interaction. Coffee shop talks with neighbors and participation in social clubs or interest groups tend to support the coalescence of viewpoints. Affective ties are the product of such human action and interaction, but that insight is often lost under the assumption that it is some fact of commonality that allows the relationship to develop. Rather than recognize that democratic affect can be successfully generated through mutual, ongoing activity, we instead rely on the weaker basis of an imagined unity or shared perspective.

This unity is unlikely to ever exist in reality. Even among relatively homogenous populations, who “we” are imagined to be is always the subject of the individual’s belief and their particular experience of democratic affect. As Ferguson explains,

‘The people’ is always only one particular imaginary of the people among many, an imaginary that is not to be confused either with the persons who subscribe to that particular imaginary or with the persons understood to be included in the imaginary. The demos is always plural rather than singular. (130)

The account of multiple, overlapping *demos* she offers resonates with the work of Hannah Arendt, especially in her major text, *The Human Condition*. For Arendt, power is spontaneously generated through collective gathering. The decision to come together for a purpose is analytically prior to any decisive action the group might take. It is especially important, then, to understand the relationship between the production of democratic affect and the eventual exercise of democratic agency. Who fits inside “the people” to a great extent conditions the exercise of popular rule; both of these ideas—the constitution of the people and of what it means to rule—are the subjects of a great deal of critical scholarship.

One major strain of democratic theory is involved in fleshing out the details of democratic institutions, and to debating the relative strengths of various models of democratic rule: direct, deliberative, radical, participatory, classical, etc. David Held puts it simply: “Democracy means a form of government in which, in contradistinction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule” (1). This perspective is emblematic of that strain of democratic theory that views democracy as one type of regime, variable in structure and institutions but largely stable in its distinctions from other forms of political organization. A more recent and lively line of scholarly questioning pursues the elusive nature of “the people” within a

democracy. Scholars of this emphasis challenge the drawing of traditional boundaries around citizenship, analyze the ethnocultural, geographic, and historical bases for defining *a* people or a nation, and debate how such boundaries are to be settled in the contemporary geopolitical milieu. Robert Dahl posits the two fundamental questions of democratic theory along these two strands: “who ought to comprise ‘the people’ and what does it mean for them ‘to rule’?” (3). In most cases, as Patchen Markell points out, ruling means simply “the exercise of authoritative control” and debates among political theorists amount to so many disagreements over *who* rules under a given institutional arrangement of democracy (1). A far less explored question remains, as Markell observes, about *what the people do* when they rule, that calls attention to the possibility of different orientation to democracy altogether.

Rather than being primarily a form or type of political regime, turning to democracy as a sort of qualifier for public activity brings with it the opportunity of further critique and reformulation of the notion of citizenship. From classical Athens onward, critics of democracy have challenged the ability of large groups of strangers, often linguistically, culturally, and geographically diverse, to effectively coalesce in such a way as to effectively exercise sovereign agency. The people, from this perspective, are “nothing but a formless multitude, incapable of government” (Markell p. 2). Broadening our perspective on democracy, the notion of self-governance becomes as much a matter of day-to-day shaping of a shared social world as it is of formal political institutions.

### **Deliberative Pedagogy and Democracy in Composition**

Why attempt to link public deliberation and discussion with composition education specifically? As Steve Volk notes, although the link between education and democracy has, at least in the United States, appeared self-evident, it is also true that educated people are still

capable of electing unqualified officials, and “that advanced degrees don’t inoculate one from anti-democratic tendencies (2). The challenge, Volk argues, is to “identify what are the crucial interactions between education and democracy that can make a difference in the direction of producing more democracy” (italics original, 2). If one adopts this perspective and begins looking for how, then, to better educate for democracy, then of course composition remains a rich vein for studies in how our students build the skills and dispositions of a life of democratic action. One such interaction that I argue would be profitable for composition to explore is in developing pedagogies that employ deliberative discourses as teaching methods, as thematic content or resources, and as major assignments in first-year and upper-division courses.

A deliberative pedagogy, informed by a theory of *inter-agency* and of citizenship without the drive, such as Ferguson provides, is characterized by collaborative community decision-making at multiple levels. Course policies like grading, daily work, what counts as “participation,” and others are subject to structured deliberations in which the teacher factors as only one stakeholder among many. The larger goal of helping students become more critical and effective communicators is served by ensuring access—to traditional institutions of public deliberation, and to the opportunity to define new public spaces. A deliberative pedagogy is rhetorical in that invites students to explore the contingent nature of issues that face the various publics or counterpublics with which they identify. It helps students understand and question how public discourse assists in advocacy and distributes power. Students learn about intersubjective world-building by participating in building the conditions of their classrooms. This first involves students in a space of *rhetorical listening*, using Krista Ratcliffe’s terminology. Rhetorical listening, as Ratcliffe explains, operates on a cultural logic that recognizes commonalities and differences, offers the rhetorical stances of recognition, critique,

and accountability, and occurs by “listening metonymically” (94-98). This last function is critical because it offers a model for communication across difference without collapsing entire groups into an monological entity (99). Accountability as a rhetorical stance signals inclusion in Ferguson’s sense because it means “recognizing that none of us lives autonomous lives, despite the grand narrative of U.S. individualism” (Ratcliffe 31). Students learn from their peers about diverse experiences and relationship to the institutions of higher education, and work toward collaborative decisions that address common goals—a commonality experienced as shared participation in the process, in Arendtian terms. Deliberative practices employed in constructing the class itself thus invite rhetorical discourses from students within the classroom configured as a public sphere.

A deliberative pedagogy asks students to identify and produce a wide variety of genres that can be self-consciously connected to public purposes. It is thus informed by critical pedagogy’s commitments to social reform and student empowerment. As a critical practice, a deliberative pedagogy creates space in which students can reflect on their identities and experiences as citizens and members of multiple overlapping publics—including the many ways that experience may have been frustrated or stymied in actual practice. In this discursive space, we identify exclusions, uncover hierarchies of social and political power that maintain these exclusions, and by identifying, create the conditions for creatively reimagining the boundaries of citizenship and public life. By explicitly reframing democracy as ongoing discursive interaction as Ferguson does, it creates the possibility for students to reflect on their past experiences of exclusion or marginalization from the rhetorical stance of critique, and thus to see even those moments in the way Chavez might desire: as a non-normative experience of democratic life.

Steve Parks correctly asks of critical pedagogies that they do more than talking in isolated classrooms about the building and exercise of collective power (522). Talking about democracy and preparing students to participate in new ways cannot take place solely within the classroom, and so our teaching should encourage students to locate publics and counterpublics with which they may identify and to explore how their own writing contributes to the circulation of these discourses. Rhetoric and composition both are concerned with the production of rhetorically savvy individuals, capable of leveraging a full quiver of semiotic resources in negotiating with power and achieving political goals. This presents highly individualistic rather than collective teaching goals. And, while a rhetoric of individual capacity may prepare some students to successfully navigate the rhetorical terrain of power in the status quo, it also tends to reinforce the view that “implicitly and explicitly [privileges] citizens’ rhetorical practices and the rhetorical practices of citizenship” (“Beyond Inclusion” 165). A deliberative pedagogy founded on a framework of agency understood as the exercise of freedom to engage in intersubjective world-building decenters the citizen as the isolated, individual agent and focuses students instead of the practices and processes that truly characterize democracy as a mode of life: “a cacophonous democracy in which we regularly encounter difference and disagreement as constitutive of democratic action itself” (Ferguson 160); a democracy in which students and others can better understand their rhetorical communication as striving for “world-building,” without the need for a unachievable shared reality.

## Chapter 4: Making Deliberation Work in the Classroom

This chapter presents the results of my data collection over two semesters of implementing deliberative practices in my classrooms and examines the challenges of operationalizing the theories of agency and citizenship presented in the previous chapters. Most students in first-year composition classes have likely not reflected in-depth upon their experiences of citizenship and would likely have a hard time explaining in what ways they feel themselves to be efficacious agents. From the perspective of the teacher, the revised theories of agency and citizenship I adopt may serve a useful explanatory function for making sense of students' deliberative writing and communication in class. The aim of deliberative pedagogy as I present it, however, is not merely to reframe how teachers see their students, but to change how students see themselves as participants in democratic life; that is, to help them start internalizing the concepts of democratic interagency and of citizenship as the daily practice of democracy in everyday life rather than as completed status.

If democracy in America is, in fact, dying, then it is because people have for too long found the exercise of democracy to be abstract, impersonal, ineffective, or they have been denied access to power altogether. Change, if it is to be democratic in nature and aim at democratic ends, must come from below. No quick statutory change or shift in the rules of the Senate, for instance, will suddenly revive democratic institutions in our country. Steve Parks, as I noted in chapter two, finds that composition studies needs to move away from privileging the individual student as a discrete agent, and to adopt a more communal ethos to “move our field outward toward community struggles and engage our students in the collective work of community building” (“Sinners Welcome” 522). Change from below thus means educating students now who will approach the project of democracy differently in the future. Practicing a deliberative

pedagogy that seeks to change individuals' relationships to the political power structures represents laying the groundwork for systemic change over time. Several powerful aspects (I describe them as myths) of the dominant American culture work, at least partly, in opposition to this goal. The first is the peculiarly American strain of rugged individualism that holds we are each responsible for our own conditions in this world. In the neoliberal context of today, individual responsibility can be so heavily prioritized that large swathes of the populace can minimize or outright deny the impacts of systemic pressures such as structural racism, misogyny, or poverty, to name only a few. The second myth, well-known in education scholarship, is the myth of meritocracy which works hand-in-hand with individualist thinking. If one believes that every person has an equal opportunity at success in life, then hard work and perseverance are up to the individual, and failure to achieve can be blamed solely on personal (usually moral) failure to make the most of one's opportunities. These types of American myths have helped to maintain the concepts of agency as an individual capacity for effective action, and of citizenship as an achievable prize. The challenge for a deliberative pedagogy that works from alternative models of agency is that it asks students to stop believing themselves to be isolated individual agents, and instead to see themselves as part of a larger, continuous system of interactions and interrelationships.

Although deliberative pedagogy adopts a more collectivist, community-minded ethos, it is important to note that it does not insist on using deliberative practices to arrive at consensus or to identify a single "common" good. The theory of democratic interagency that underlies this pedagogy acknowledges a huge variety of discursive and interactive behaviors as part of the experience of agency. Recall Michaela Ferguson's characterization of democratic interagency as a "dialogic exercise," in which individuals may engage in a wide variety of communicative



actions or produce an array of textual objects, and yet may still conceive of themselves as participating in the same sort of phenomenon as other individuals. We may be doing different things, but we recognize that we are doing *something* together.

My classroom-based research questions have developed out of my scholarly work around these theories of democratic interagency and citizenship without the myth of commonality, alongside of my experiences making democracy a central tenet of my teaching practice. I take as granted at the outset that rhetoric and composition instruction is intimately connected to the reproduction of democracy in some form. This has been established by scholarship since the earliest days of the field that explore the civic value of rhetorical training. However, as the strong critiques of student agency and citizenship presented in the previous chapters make clear, a new configuration in how we teach composition with democratic intent is necessary as the contexts of public discourse and civic action continue to change in the face of shifting demographics, movements for social justice, and increasingly complex inter- and intra-national relationships. To explore how making deliberation an essential part of composition instruction reshapes this relationship, I ask the following questions. How does our understanding of deliberation change if we do not rely only on face-to-face, spoken modes of communication? If, as Karma Chavez posits, citizenship serves primarily a normative and exclusionary function, what does this mean for composition classes that purport to cultivate young citizens? Further, can instruction in deliberative processes overcome the tendency towards exclusion, and what does that look like in classrooms? Finally, if we define democracy as a “way of living” and not merely a model of government, what contributions does deliberative composition instruction make to improve that life? What are the experiences of deliberative teaching for both students and instructors that may reshape their attitudes towards and beliefs about the nature and value of democracy? To gain

insight into these questions and the issues they present, I conducted classroom-based research, positioning myself as both teacher and participant in the deliberative processes we explored as a class.

## **Methodology**

A number of models exist for classroom-based, teacher/observer research that have been taxonomized variously as teacher-action, practitioner, or teacher-researcher methodologies. Most iterations share a number of core assumptions or approaches. Ruth Ray in her chapter in Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan's *Methods and Methodologies in Composition Research* lays out a number of important assumptions for classroom research; namely, that

research should account for context (of the classroom, school, and community) in all its complexity; that researchers are active participants in this context; that research should be conducted primarily to inform and improve practice as well as to advance theory; that some research can profitably focus on the detailed and the particular—on one classroom, even one student—in the search for insights into specific learning environments; and that knowledge and truth in education are not so much found through objective inquiry as socially constructed through collaboration among students, teachers, and researchers.

(175)

Generally speaking, the aim of teacher action or teacher researcher methodologies is to improve understanding of what teachers do in the classroom in order to promote successful learning or achieve other pedagogical goals. Within Benjamin Miller's survey of a decade of recent composition dissertations, what he labels Practitioner/Teacher Research involves "narrative or anecdotal descriptions of 'what worked' in a classroom, writing center, writing program, etc., or in the author's personal experiences of writing or performance" ("Mapping" 153). Importantly,

Miller distinguishes Practitioner methodologies from Ethnographic ones in that the former are oriented “toward future action and enactment vs. understanding of a (possibly unique) system” (153). While of course each classroom is unique, teacher-scholars nevertheless make consistent curricular plans in the hope of creating replicable success with students from term to term. Many classroom researchers employ mixed methodologies, however, seeking both theoretical understanding as well as practicable lessons for future teaching. A variety of specific research methods or practices, including critical approaches are placed appropriately under this heading.

A number of prominent studies on composition research methodologies have appeared since the 1980s that suggest the transformative potential of this kind of classroom research. James Berlin argued in his chapter “The Teacher as Researcher: Democracy, Dialogue, and Power” that teachers’ expertise in their classroom context gives them the perspective and the power to “challeng[e] the hierarchical power structures of the schools” (10). As his title suggests, this democratizing potential of teacher research is great, and is one of the primary reasons this type of methodology is appropriate to exploring a deliberative pedagogy in composition. Ann Berthoff, similarly, views teacher-researchers as agents of change in her chapter “The Teacher as Researcher,” published in the collection *Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change*. As teachers, she argues, our own compiled experiences in the classroom are the greatest influence on and source of change for the pedagogies that shape ours and our students’ experiences in the classroom (30). Our best course, she writes, is in “looking and looking again at what happens in the English classroom” (30).

Methodological diversity in composition research is the subject of a growing conversation within the profession (Kirsch 247). Feminist research perspectives, for instance, represent less a single identifiable approach to research than a lens or disposition from which

researchers approach their data and processes. Patricia A. Sullivan, in her chapter within her and Kirsch's co-edited volume, argues that much research in composition has remained agnostic about the influence of gender on writing and writing processes, noting that "we have been slow to take into account either the patriarchal structures and values embedded in our culture that students bring to the classroom or the way that men's and women's differential relationships to various cultural institutions, including the academy, influence their discursive practices" ("Feminism and Methodology" 39). In addition to feminist critique of existing bodies of knowledge within composition, then, Sullivan posits that feminist empirical research "seeks to generate new knowledge about the relationships between gender and composing" although "there are no uniquely feminist methods for gathering evidence" (49). Regardless of the specific research methods a teacher researcher employs, then, careful attention to the role of gender across the range of classroom activities and interactions is a necessary element of any project that aims at reshaping the institutional structures of the university.

Ethnographic research methodologies have become more prominent in writing studies just in the past 30 years. Previously, the dominant trend in composition research focused on students written texts as the primary object of study through a variety of approaches (see Bazerman and Prior 2004; Hyland 2006). However, as Russel K. Durst argued in 1990, more scholarly attention to the contexts in which writing and learning take place is necessary (402); since then, the discipline has delivered. By 2004, Juzwik, Curcic, Wolbers, Moxley, Dimling, and Shankland have noted, research focusing on context and social practices dominates the field. Exploring how ethnographic methodologies can be valuable in composition research is crucial for responding to Gesa Kirsch's charge to composition scholars, that "only by understanding the nature and assumptions of various research methodologies can scholars and teachers in

composition make informed decisions about the relevance, validity, and value of research reports” (“Methodological Pluralism” 247-248). Theresa Lillis argues that ethnographic research is valuable for the field as both method and methodology, because “involving multiple data sources and sustained involvement in contexts of production, enables the researcher to explore and track the dynamic complex situated meanings and practices that are constituted in and by academic writing (355). Wendy Bishop similarly makes a strong case for the value of ethnographic approaches to classroom research in her book, *Ethnographic Writing Research*. She argues that ethnography appeals to our field for several reasons:

ethnography challenges the dominant positivist view of making knowledge. It demands attention to human subjectivity and allows for author-saturated reconstructions and examinations of a world. Equally, it is generative and creative because writing research ethnographies are overtly rhetorical; they are producing informed stories and arguments about the world. (153)

Bishop recommends that: 1) researchers pursue projects that arise naturally out of their experiences as writing teachers, 2) take copious teaching notes in order to capture many experiences and creating a convincing sense of presence in the classroom, and 3) aim for thick descriptions and narrative accounts of what takes place in the classroom, among many other practical concerns about coding, survey design, and interview methods. One important point of connection between ethnographic methodologies and teacher-researcher or critical methodologies is in how ethnographers tend to treat issues of race, class, and gender. As sociologists Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw argue in their handbook *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, ethnographers “treat the relevance of gender, race, or class for everyday life in ways that differ significantly from common theoretical approaches which set

forth a priori assumptions and definitions” (133). Although, as indicated above, a researcher invested in a feminist perspective, for example, may assume from the start that these are significant matters, they “place priority on how people themselves deal with gender, ethnicity, and class within the dynamics of specific instances and situations” (134). The dynamics of deliberation are no different from those of other areas of life; an individual’s race, gender, or socio-economic class will intensely condition when, how, and even whether they are able to participate in public discussion. Thus, observing as a teacher-researcher how diverse students act while participating in classroom deliberations has much to reveal about the gendered, racial, and class-based dynamics of public talk.

## **Methods**

I conducted formal, IRB-approved research in two of my classes, during Spring 2019 (Class 1) and Spring 2020 (Class 2). I collected three forms of data in each class: teacher observation notes, student surveys, and semi-structured interviews with students. In both classes, I introduced my students to my research project and goals from the outset of the course, giving them a broad overview of what data I would be gathering, and indicating that a formal recruitment of volunteer participants would take place later in the semester. Given the highly sensitive political culture we live in today, I felt it was important to be immediately transparent about the political nature of the course methods and goals, as well as my intention to gather data that students might feel was related to their political identities. In order to avoid any sense of obligation or coercion to participate, a fellow graduate student familiar with my study attended a regular class session part way through the semester for recruitment. I left the classroom and this colleague read to students the recruitment script that detailed the purpose of the study and the data collection methods to be used (Appendix A). Two separate informed consent forms were

distributed to students, one indicating willingness to have the student's civic agency survey results included in my data, and the second indicating willingness to complete a one-on-one recorded interview with me (Appendix A). Students were informed that participation was voluntary and would not impact their standing or evaluation in the course. As an additional measure to mitigate any risk for students, their signed consent forms were not returned to me until after the semester ended and grades had been submitted so that I could not know which students did or did not choose to participate.

### *Teacher Observations*

During the course of the two semesters of my research, I kept an ongoing record of my own thoughts and reflections on the two classes in the form of ethnographic observation notes. They encompass the day-to-day details of managing the classroom and my comments about individual students' actions, or significant moments arising during our preparation for or in actual deliberations. In particular, as the semesters progressed, I began to develop character sketches of the students as they participated in, resisted, and reflected upon their experiences with deliberation in class. Observations about my own experiences as the instructor tended to fall into three categories:

1. Events during actual deliberations in class; who spoke, how often, on what kinds of subjects, and whether students responded to each other or only to me.
2. Enacting deliberation as class exercise; flow of conversation, evidence of confusion/apprehension or excitement/enthusiasm.
3. Coursework and focus; how the writing and deliberation goals of the course each being served, balance between the two.

I use these collected observations to think and talk “in between” the data provided through the student interviews and Civic Agency Survey results. Taken all together, they help provide different perspectives on my research questions and raised new questions along the way.

### *Civic Agency Survey*

The survey I designed for this study was adapted from the Research Self-Efficacy Survey created by Shevaun Watson for use in research writing classrooms to gauge students’ perceptions of themselves as effective users of a range of information literacy skills. Watson adapted existing self-efficacy instruments, and in her own research statistically validated the Research Self-Efficacy Survey as a reliable indicator of students’ awareness of existing and new research skills. Self-efficacy is an important element in deliberative settings, as participants’ desire to be influential in deliberations—no one likes to feel like are shouting into the void. Therefore, a self-efficacy survey geared toward students’ experience of agency as communicators in public, civic life is a useful tool for understanding the impact of direct instruction in deliberative processes in shaping their attitudes and participation in that life. The survey was given twice during the semester, as a pre- and post-course activity to gauge changes in students’ self-perceptions over time. My Civic Agency Survey is composed of two sections, the first asking students to rate their confidence in completing certain kinds of actions related to democratic institutions and deliberative practices; the second captures students’ sense of their own effectiveness and ability to influence the social-political world around them, or in other words, their self-perception of various citizenship behaviors.

In Class 1, 16 out of 20 students volunteered to allow me access to their survey results, with all 16 respondents completing the survey both times. From Class 2, the entire class of 24 volunteered their survey responses initially, with 15 students completing the survey both at the



start and the completion of the course. The total sample size of survey responses thus reflects the diversity of the classes as a whole, including a range of ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, and socio-economic backgrounds, as students shared this information with me during the course of our classes.

**Civic Agency Survey, Spring 2020**

**Thinking about your role in a community...**                      **Student ID #** \_\_\_\_\_

Rate your level of confidence on a scale of 1-6 of being able to do the following things when it comes to writing, speaking, and engaging with fellow community members. Your answers will have bearing on your course grade, and are meant to create the opportunity to reflect, so please assess yourself as honestly as possible.

*Using the scale at right, rate how confident you*

Not Confident			Moderately Confident		Very Confident	Don't understand the question
1	2	3	4	5	6	X

*are:*

1. Discussing political issues or policies with new people or strangers? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Discussing political issues or policies with friends or family? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Using social media or the internet to express political opinions? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Working with others to effect local (campus or community) change? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Participating in issue-focused groups or organizations? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Inviting or encouraging others to participate in such groups? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Participating in local or community campaigns (for elected office or other)? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Participating in local (rather than state or federal) elections or referenda? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Researching local or national issues on your own? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Making presentations or otherwise circulating information on issues of policy? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Evaluating news sources for accuracy, objectivity, or evidence of bias? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Distinguishing between opinion/commentary and reporting? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Finding tools to develop an informed position on political or social issues? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Communicating effectively with those whose views differ from your own? \_\_\_\_\_

**Using the same 1-6 scale, do you see yourself as...**

1. Someone able to effect change at a local (campus, neighborhood, community) level? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Someone who can speak on behalf of yourself and others? \_\_\_\_\_

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 3. Having something to offer your community and fellow citizens?                   | _____ |
| 4. Being part of the campus community?   | _____ |
| 5. Being part of a community outside of or beyond the college?                     | _____ |
| 6. Being part of something larger than yourself?                                   | _____ |
| 7. Being personally responsible for what happens in/to your college and community? | _____ |
| 8. Being responsible for the actions and policies of elected officials?            | _____ |

*Student Interviews*

Surveys alone are inadequate to provide a complete or complex enough picture of these classes, and as I was interested in students’ experience of participating in deliberations and engaging with public discourses, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine students who served as key informants. Interviews ranged between 45-60 minutes in length. Beginning with a standard set of open-ended questions allowed me to pursue follow-up questions or topical digressions from the original questions where appropriate. This form of interview is typical of qualitative research in the humanities and social sciences (Bernard 1988) and is useful when only one opportunity to speak with informants will be possible (RWJ Foundation 2008). Two interviews with students from Class 1 were conducted in person and audio recorded with a handheld digital recorder, and all students were assigned pseudonyms for reference in this study. The remaining seven interviews occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, and so were conducted using Zoom video conferencing to allow for a face-to-face experience and audio recording. The questions were designed to elicit students’ value judgments about the processes of deliberation and their interpretations of events that took place in class. In response to Patricia Sullivan’s argument that research in composition “tend[s] to generate our problematics from gender-neutral perspectives...and those of us who conduct empirical research generally assume that we must control for our personal biases and cultural situatedness in order to be objective,” I believe it necessary to attempt to account for the gendered experience of deliberative situations and

discourses (51). This is addressed first by ensuring that the student sample was representative of the class composition, being almost equally split between male and female students (no students involved chose to self-identify as transgender or non-binary), as well as reflecting racial and class diversity. Second, the interview questions and the inclusion of my own observation notes in the data attempt to “[insist] that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter... That is, the race, class, culture, and gender assumptions of the researcher her/himself [are] placed within the frame of the picture that she/he paints” (Harding qtd. in Sullivan 50). Thus, without being unfairly leading, multiple questions open students to possible reflection on how gender, race, or other factors and also my choices in reading materials or in-class actions as the instructor may have impacted their experience of deliberation its goals.

#### **Civic Agency and Deliberative Pedagogy Interview Questions**

1. How often have you participated in community or group elections, both before and after this class?
2. How would you describe your attitudes towards or about the democratic process?
3. Have those attitudes changed recently, and if so, what do you feel prompted those changes?
4. This course was meant to introduce you to the processes of democratic deliberation—how familiar with what deliberation means would you say you were before taking the class?
5. What elements of our classroom deliberations did you enjoy most, or feel were the most beneficial to the class?
6. What elements were not successful, to your mind?
7. Could we have benefitted from more early, direct instruction in *how* deliberations can/should work?
8. How comfortable did you feel speaking up in large- or small-group discussions?
9. What factors (race, class, gender, other) might have influenced your level of comfort, for the better or worse?
10. How well did your instructor explain the process of deliberation, and the expectations for how the class should participate?
11. How did the process of deliberating about the course structure make you feel about the themes, content, and work of the class?
12. What new things did you learn through the deliberative process?

13. Do you feel your perspective was listened to and taken into consideration by the whole class during deliberation? What experiences from class make you feel that way?

14. Given the benefits and experiences of deliberation in this class, what do you see as the value of deliberation in communities outside of school?

15. After learning about deliberation and connecting both research and writing to the work of democracy, do you feel more confident about your ability to affect change in the communities around you?

16. In what ways might having more practice and/or greater awareness of deliberative processes make you more confident in your ability to effect change in the communities around you?

17. *Where* do you see deliberation happening in your communities, after learning about it in this class? Outside of obvious places like Congress, in what ways has your view of *what deliberation can be changed*?

18. What is hard about deliberation at state or national levels—is this only something small, intimate groups can do?

19. Have you had any other classes where you felt you had some control over how the class was structured, taught, or the work done in class?

20. If so, in what ways did your instructors accomplish this?

### *Student Profiles*

For gaining a more complete understanding of my students' responses to both the Civic Agency Survey and the interview questions, a real benefit of my observation notes was the development of brief profiles of the nine key informants. These profiles allow me and my readers to see the people behind the responses in greater detail—their backgrounds, interests, and personalities as they appeared in the classroom. In addition, they allow me to share my own sense of a students' development over the course of a semester, revealed through the many conversations we had that are otherwise not available in my data. Below, I provide these sketches before moving on to present the results of my interviews, maintaining the order in which each student is represented so readers can begin to develop their own sense of who these students are.

*I previously had Cora in class for English 101 several semesters ago, and I was happy to see her again for English 240. She's a senior now, much more firmly into her major, environmental science, and she brings an interesting perspective as a Belgian immigrant. She lived in Belgium until she was 15 and completed high school in Minneapolis. Cora maintains a lot of contact with her family overseas, and early this semester had the unfortunate experience of struggling to avoid deportation due to issues with her visa. Thankfully she was able to remain and even brought some of her experience as a non-citizen into our class discussions. She's an outspoken feminist, and despite remaining somewhat aloof from her classmates, always emerges as a leader in small group and paired discussions. She tells me that sometime last year she really began taking her education seriously, and I can see that difference between my first class with her, when she was quiet and often behind on her work, and now.*

*Eve is a naturally shy person and gives the impression of being unsure of herself when questioned. She struggled with her attendance early in the semester, but surprisingly, once the pandemic hit, she was one of the most consistent and active participants online, even coming to my informal check-in sessions more than anyone else. I asked her about why she feels so unsure about speaking up, and she shared that she's feeling out of her depth, intellectually, in college. Over the course of the semester, though, I found her to be insightful and incredibly supportive of her classmates. She has yet to declare a major, but is already working on a minor in women's and gender studies—when I asked why she doesn't make that her major, she told me that she had a lot of other interests that she wanted to explore alongside that, and as she said, "honestly I think I have better chance at getting a job with something else on my resume."*

*Jake is tall and African American, so immediately introduced himself to the class by joking that he does, in fact, play basketball. He's 20, and a political science major, but confided*

*that he wouldn't have signed up for my class if he didn't need the gen-ed requirement it fulfilled. Jake has a low, soft voice, and speaks with a slow, measured cadence that gives the impression he's thinking carefully about what he wants to say. While he's never the first one to raise his hand or jump into a discussion, he's never shy about contributing and simply likes to pick his spots. In one conference, he shared that he likes to feel like he has some experience about what's being discussed, which has helped him because our class has allowed him the space to speak as a young, black man. In the end, Jake was the first from his class to volunteer for and complete an interview for my research.*

*Lina is a first-year student, and came to Milwaukee from a relatively affluent city in northern Wisconsin. Short, with long brown hair and a relaxed, BoHo aesthetic, she is of mixed white and Latina heritage, and appears relatively shy and reserved in class. For the most part she keeps to herself until someone else draws her into a conversation, but once she's in it, she's very open and friendly. Getting to know Lina more, she expressed that she "doesn't know much about politics," and just hasn't given much thought on too many issues. Given the political nature of our class, I was interested in seeing what kinds of communities she felt most drawn to as we progressed through our readings and assignments. She's interested in nursing and biology as a major, but by the end of our class she showed a lot of interest in public discussions on immigration and the role of immigrants in our economy and society. When I asked her about this, she shared that she feels she doesn't know much about her father's side of her family, many of whom have stories of immigration that she wished they talked about more.*

*Maddy recently turned 21 in her junior year and is majoring in women's and gender studies. She comes to class from the other side of campus, so is usually a bit breathless but ready to get down to business. Maddy emerged early on as a leader in both large- and small-group*

*discussions, volunteering for an early week to give a presentation and manage a discussion about several readings. When we discuss issues or readings, she always draws connections between her other classes or life experiences and the topic at hand to illustrate her understanding of a concept. She is white, outspokenly feminist, and grew up in Milwaukee. Maddy described herself to me in conversation as being in the process of a “political awakening,” which partly led her to declare her WGS major and was what made her interested in taking my class.*

*Peter is always waiting for me when I arrive in the classroom, I hoped out of eagerness, but in reality because his previous class is next door. He doesn't lack for engagement with our class, though, and signed up for it in part because he felt it jived with his business major. When asked why that is, he responded that business is all about deliberating and making decisions to benefit whatever organization you're with. Peter is from the Milwaukee area, lives with his mom to save money while he's in school, and is getting more active in UWM's student government and other organizations. He is of mixed white and African American background, and says that his experiences as “the only black kid” in an affluent private high school have really shaped his thinking about college and his career goals. He'd make a great media personality—he seems to be one of the few students who always seems to know what's in the news, and he likes to talk with me about current affairs while we get ready for class.*

*Trent may be the mellowest person I've ever met—though I'm not sure if he's cultivating an image or not. He is very conscious about his style and appearance, but more importantly, he has discussed a number of times the rhetorical significance of appearances and performance. He told me near the end of the term, “I guess we're always performing for somebody, right? Like, even just yourself.” His voice is always calm and delivered slowly—I think of him and Jake as*

*being similar. They both want to be understood and both want to feel like they know what they're talking about. Trent identifies himself as progressive, and that he comes from a more-or-less (his words) working-class background. He has a tendency to get long-winded in his responses in class. Although he could easily talk over or interrupt others early on in class, he actually acknowledged that to the whole group on the day he was the discussion leader and promised to keep working on it. He made a number of friends after that day, including Maddy and Cora, who he began sitting near and working with frequently.*

*Victor is 20 years old, making him a full two years older than most of his classmates as a first-year, and comes from a smaller city northwest of Milwaukee. He is white, comes from a working-class background, and is scruffy, talkative, and extremely friendly. Heavily interested in sports and majoring in kinesiology, he quickly engages his peers with pre-class chats about recent games or highlights and seems to like to draw in a larger audience for his conversations. He previously attended a small community college before transferring to complete a four-year degree. That experience, along with his age, translates to a great deal of confidence and active participation in class. In the early weeks, he was usually the first to raise his hand or dive into to open conversations—his personality at times appears overwhelming for some of his peers. As class went on, though, he mellowed out, and I could see him visibly “appraising” the classroom before he would offer a response. Talking with him after one class, he told me he was becoming more aware of the space he takes up as we had read and discussed the ways many people are shut out of conversations. He wants to keep working on that and contribute to an open and welcoming space for everyone.*

*Garrett arrives to class with his longboard, Buddy Holly glasses, and new suggestions for our class playlist that I keep going while everyone is settling in. He'll turn 26 later this*



*semester, making him the oldest student, and only upper-classperson in the group. Music is his first passion, and political philosophy is his newest—he’s taking an upper-level course in the subject alongside my class and loves to share with me what they’re reading and discussing there. Garrett is a talker—the kind who doesn’t seem to know where his sentences are going when he starts them, and he doesn’t seem bothered about where they’ll end up. He likes to teach, which especially showed up on the day he was meant to lead a discussion and activity, and instead delivered a sort of lecture about the new Milwaukee streetcar system, The Hop. It was a really thorough exploration of the public discussions, problems, and questions surrounding that local topic, but it was also 10 minutes longer than the activity was meant to run. For someone who describes himself as not participating actively in politics, he was consistently one of the most vocal and informed participants as we discussed public issues centered around Milwaukee.*

## **Findings**

Approaching the first day of a deliberative composition course, I knew that I did not want the deliberations to be an entirely formal, rigidly structured enterprise, as some accounts of deliberation would have it. While there are benefits to such structure in terms of ensuring certain kinds of discourse and reaching particular ends, my purpose has always been to show that deliberation can be much *more* than a formalist exercise. To get students experiencing and reflecting on the great variety of communication styles and actions that occur in the public sphere and contribute to public deliberation through a complex array of rhetorical elements, I wanted them to approach deliberating with one another without too many preconceived notions about “the rules.” In Class 1, I wanted the entire structure of the class to be open for deliberation. We set aside two class days—a full week, including readings and handouts for homework—just to discussing the elements of the course, following a broad agenda I presented. Together, we

needed to make decisions about grading, weekly work, and some kind of final project, in order to satisfy the institutional goals for a FYC course. Beyond that, the specifics were up to the students to identify through deliberation.

An open-structure deliberation of this sort is geared towards discovery and broadening the variety of perspectives and concerns that are in front of participants for inspection. It may not, however, be the best suited for a college classroom that needs to establish its parameters and move on with the other work students are responsible for. The results of this first deliberation on course structure, in other words, were mixed. In many ways, it accomplished its purpose and helped students to think critically about how and why their courses were structured in particular ways. As I noted at the time,

On the agenda, I delineated time for presentation of options, and a separate time for discussion and questions. However, the very first student who spoke, rather than presenting a different option for grading, provided a comment about the first item on my agenda, relating it to her past experience in 101. Other students immediately took up this discussion, which did result in a pretty thorough understanding of the drawbacks and upsides to portfolio grading. (7 Feb 2019)

Victor was one of the most vocal students during this first run at deliberation. As one of the only students with other college experience besides the previous fall semester, he recalled to the group several classes he had previously taken in which he and other students felt the grading was too rigid, unfair, or unrealistic. Other students were able to respond, expressing both agreement and support, as well as offering counterpoints. The majority of the first class period of deliberation unfolded in much this way, as my observation notes illustrate:

I didn't need to suggest every option, many students did provide the substance for those choices, but rather than being laid out in an organized manner during a specific phase of the deliberation, they arose through synthesis of multiple people's contributions.

Occasionally I felt it necessary to take a turn at speaking and provide some clarification of what I felt we were hearing. One student then wrote out our options for grading to that point: portfolio, contract, or a "hybrid" system. We left those to be considered without making a decision for the time being. (7 Feb 2019)

The timeframes for discussing each part of the deliberation agenda were abandoned almost immediately. This was, I noted at the time, for two reasons. First, a common problem with class discussions, "about 40-50% of the class were dominating the conversation. They were doing a great job responding to one another, taking turns, and moving the conversation along, but they definitely provided too much cover for other students to hide behind" (7 Feb 2019). We needed more time, and more direction from me as the facilitator, to bring the rest of the class into the discussion. Second, it became clear that students still had many questions about the different options for grading and the type and number of assignments they would have to decide upon. Ultimately, asking them to first identify, then develop a fuller understanding of the consequences of different options, and then to decide on the direction the course would take was too much work for two class periods. Class 1 ended up taking two full weeks to discuss and then decide upon the grading and assignment expectations. From my perspective as instructor, this was a mixed success. Students had engaged one another in a surprisingly critical discussion, were willing and able to take responsibility and control over the conditions of their education, and produced thoughtful written reflections, narratives, and arguments that they contributed to the deliberations. It just took too much time to allow such free-ranging deliberative processes.

Contrast this experience with that of Class 2 the following spring. With the goal of preserving some of the critical discourses that we achieved in the first class while also making the deliberations more manageable from the point of view of the instructor, I decided that Class 2 would only deliberate about grading schemas for the class. At the time, I felt that “between grading, written assignments, and final projects, having control over how the course will be graded will probably be the least familiar thing for students, who often get a lot of leeway in deciding about topics for writing and research projects” (22 Jan 2020). To encourage students to focus their discussion on what makes different models of grading work and what the various benefits and trade-offs of those models are, I produced a brief deliberation guide loosely modelled on the National Issues Forum guides. After giving a general introduction to the topic for deliberation and the aims for our class discussion, this document outlines how three different grading schemes would work, and it attempts to present the pros and cons involved in each. One concern that I tried to guard against in creating this document and participating in the deliberations was the possibility for me to “steer” the discussion towards my own preference for grading. For example, when presenting the benefits and trade-offs of a given grading system on the written document, I made sure to discuss an equal number of points related to each option, as well as keeping those sections of a similar length and written with a neutral tone. In face-to-face deliberations, I chose not to start the discussion by offering my own perspective, which could have provided easy “cover” for students to simply go along with, without actually exploring what their own interests and values were. At the time, I felt my efforts were largely successful, as I noted after our first day of deliberation, “the students really seemed to appreciate that there could be significant effects from the choice of how they’d be graded. Almost everyone in class spoke up at some point without prompting, and a general consensus seemed to be forming

around the fairly traditional, points-based option. Not my preference, but that's the whole point!" (27 Jan 2020). However, the position of authority instructors occupy doesn't just go away because they say they are open to students' wishes. A number of the interview participants remembered, even weeks after the class ended, the influence that I seemed to exert on the direction and eventual outcome of the deliberations. Most interestingly, they both valued my attempts to stay out of the way during the discussions, but they were also very sensitive to the rhetorical nature of the authority and power structures typical in university settings.

In one particular day of Class 2, an instructive display occurred that I recorded in detail in my notes, and it is worth presenting as a vignette here. Early in the semester, I assigned a complex essay for students to read and craft written responses to. Dana Cloud's "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34" introduces readers to the effects of self-silencing demonstrated in the lives of Black textile workers in the wake of a militant 1934 labor strike. For decades afterwards, participants and observers would avoid, downplay, and skirt in their day-to-day discourses the major issues the Black textile workers had risen up against in the first place, a rhetorical effect Cloud argues is "linked fundamentally to a system of combined race-, gender-, and class-based oppression and exploitation" (178). These disenfranchised citizens were taught, through the brutal suppression of the strike, to keep quiet. In that week, our class was learning about the rhetorical nature of deliberations, asking questions like who is authorized to speak? When? And, what conditions enable some to speak when others cannot? I present my observation notes in full here.

*February 12, 2020*

*Today's discussion took up Dana Cloud's essay on self-silencing as a racial and gendered effect of public discourse. My goal was to get students thinking about how various*

*communities might experience the ability to speak in public extremely differently from one another. The essay is dense, and I gave it to them over the weekend to be able to process and write out their responses to it. We began class in a large circle, which has become our sort of default starting point before we decide whether to move into smaller groups or break out for individual writing work. Tyler and Rachel (pseudonyms given) had signed up to facilitate the discussion and prepare an activity about how it relates to public deliberation.*

*In their activity, they wanted to explore what different people felt were some of the pressures acting on them when it comes to speaking in public. After discussing the text as a large group for comprehension and to address big questions, we broke into small groups to think about where we had experienced/could identify the “rhetoric of silence” working in our own lives. In most of the groups, as I floated around the room, students were generally talking about they felt as though they were able to participate and be heard in their communities, and that most people had a say in government. We came back together as a class and each small group shared some of their thoughts or insights to that effect. Tyler wrote out the general categories of comments that people shared on the board, broadly divided between feelings of “access and inclusion” on the one hand and “marginalization” on the other. The student leaders then made the interesting choice to tie the discussion back to our experience of deliberating with one another directly in class. Tyler and Rachel asked everyone to share their thoughts about what it felt like for them participate in class discussions in general—from across all their classes—and how they felt about our several rounds of in-class deliberation specifically.*

*The first several students to comment were all white, male students, each of whom discussed feeling comfortable and respected in participating. No surprises there. Then, with only one exception, the women in the class shared experiences of feeling ignored, interrupted or*

*talked over, and not feeling as though they had anything valuable to contribute to class discussions. Two African American students, both men, similarly discussed their experiences with teachers who they felt didn't expect anything from them, or seem to value them when they did participate in class. Peter was one of these two, and he went on to connect to Boyd's essay. One female student, Aranxa, went even further, discussing how in her family, which she described as traditional and really conservative, education wasn't really seen as valuable for the women in the family. She didn't feel she had much support from outside the classroom for what she was trying to do inside it. The results of hearing about these stark differences were eye-opening—I mean literally, I was looking at the men who had spoken first sitting with wide eyes as the women and minority students shared their experiences. The discussion about these differences that came next was thoughtful, reflective, and generally led by the students who shared these experiences of marginalization. The whole dynamic of who was speaking had reversed as a result of the discovery process.*

What appeared from this particular class was a sense of disconnection between the way students think about democratic life in their communities—where they almost universally talked about equality of opportunity for speaking and participating—and the way they think about life in their classrooms. Whether or not students *expect* classrooms to be democratic spaces, many clearly do not experience them that way. They are keenly aware of the hierarchical relationships between teachers and students, and even in some cases of how other “outside” forces impact what happens to them in class. On the whole, they seem to think of democracy as something that occurs “out there,” while the classroom is a space of structured expectations—which also accounts for the sense of novelty many students felt about our practices in the classroom.

By far the biggest source of data and insight concerning my research questions was the one-on-one interviews conducted with these key informants after each class had concluded. Although I don't present a selection of responses covering every interview question, my goal is to give a significant portion of what each student had to say. The nature of the interviews was such that students were not explicitly invited to discuss specific instances of deliberation, such as those we conducted about the structure and grading schema for each class. However, as I had hoped, these experiences were significant enough that students recalled them in connection with one or more of the interview questions, and thus I draw these quotes from different points in each students' interview. I find it helpful to begin with students' attitudes towards and understanding of democracy as they have experienced it so far. Table 1 shows selected responses from the interviewees, with several noteworthy patterns arising. First, almost all students expressed anxiety or ambivalence about democracy—however they were defining it in that moment. For instance, in four consecutive interviews, students raised the issue of the Electoral College being a part of the American system that they didn't understand or felt un-democratic to them. This begs the question: can instruction in democratic deliberation shape a students' understanding of how democracy can (or perhaps *ought to*) work, in order to improve democratic life?

Table 1: Attitudes towards democratic process

Cora	I think it sounds good, like democracy is a good theory, but in actuality it doesn't always work out and sometimes it can be pretty disappointing.
Eve	<p>The democratic process within the United States, I'm a little bit apprehensive about this...because, like, the Electoral College and all that stuff, and like so many people have an attitude of. Not like my vote doesn't matter, and that becomes like a large group of people and I feel like elections oftentimes don't actually translate [to] what the majority thinks.</p> <p>Especially with politics...like the candidates, you don't necessarily have a bunch of control over, there's a finite group of people that you can vote for. And it's like you kind of just go with the one that's closest to what you're thinking. But it's</p>



	kind of like no matter what they always have like private interests in mind and stuff. So I don't know. That's very cynical, but it's just kind of how I feel.
Jake	I guess I like it, but it's it has its flaws, as does like any system. I think there's a lot of things we could do better and change, but it's kind of difficult when, like the people in power don't think things should be changed.
Lina	I think it's it allows people to have there's a diversity of opinions, like a lot of people's voices are spoken for. I think there's like a majority, maybe sometimes a minority voice isn't heard, heard much. But as a majority, I think like a lot of opinions are spoken for.
Maddy	Like, I think in theory, it's great. And like, I like that I can participate, but sometimes I feel like it doesn't always work the way it should, for example, with the Electoral College for presidential elections. I'm just... I don't feel like that's a good representation of everybody placing a vote because it is based on this group and like blah, blah, blah. And it's just how many [electors]...  I think, like, if it fits you and what you want and your narrative and whatnot and it's like favoring you, then you're going to go for it. But if it's not, then it's going to be the other way. And I think that goes with everything, not even just elections and stuff, like if something turns out like in your favor, you're going to favor it. You're going to be like, OK, like this worked for me. So it's all good, I guess, but...so where does where does principle come into it?
Peter	Yeah, pretty bad, to be honest. I mean, frankly, I know I've only been here 20 years, so I've kind of had an exciting time. But I think that especially just within the Democratic Party, I don't really feel like I have like a place. And just overall, it seems like democracy doesn't like work for certain people at certain times, which is very frustrating for me especially.
Trent	I came into a pretty jaded. Like, I have a very strong memory of four years earlier hearing or eight years earlier hearing that Obama won and thinking this is the coolest thing in the world. And then when it was my turn to vote, it was this is probably the worst outcome. And it seems like the system shouldn't have allowed it to happen. But the more that you think about it, the more the system doesn't have any provisions against keeping this from happening.  Yeah, it's really about resources, right, and that's where I see our democratic system failing us, because those resources are only available to the people that have either exploited or stand to gain from our democratic system.
Victor	I think that we live in a very interesting country. Obviously, it's a... we're a free country, but also at the same time, I think there's still a lot of underlying things that obviously being a white male in western Wisconsin, I definitely have more

	liberties or things that I can benefit from, more so than my buddy who's from the heart of Milwaukee and who's African-American.
Garrett	I've sort of pulled back from a lot of the political elections just because I don't feel always educated enough to think that I have a good understanding as to the things that I would want to be represented. And I think a lot of the times, too, I have a huge problem of never feeling like there is someone who represents my voice that I, uh, appreciate or would want to be heard.

Several of these responses indicate a concern with what representation means, and how people can truly have their needs and desires represented through the democratic process. Responses from Eve, Lina, and Maddy, for example, each express concern that some voices, or some people, are routinely being ignored or kept out of public discussions. For Peter and Garrett, this was connected to their personal sense of voice, and that they themselves were not accurately or adequately represented. Table 2 gives a selection of student responses that show they believe the goal of more full representation can be better realized through deliberation. This is true of the classroom situation, however, are students able to make the connection between their experiences of representation and being heard in class to the larger processes of democracy in our society?

Table 2: Benefits of classroom deliberation

Cora	I like that everyone just could say whatever and we could bounce off of each other like one person would say something and then we just go around like that, I like that we could just build on the person before. So having that sort of open forum led to lots of ideas being expressed.
Eve	Rather than having, like [the instructor] lead the discussion every time and have your questions coming from your perspective every time, it was coming from like different perspectives, which a lot of times I think prompted questions that were like, really new that I wouldn't have thought of or that maybe you wouldn't have thought of it.
Lina	I think small groups were really beneficial. I think small like start with small groups and then kind of bringing them together at the end. When we split up, I think more people talked more because I remember standing by some people who never said

	<p>anything in class, like when we were small groups, they had so much to say. And I think their opinions weren't really heard because, again, they were like too shy or like me and they didn't really want to say in front of some big group.</p>
Maddy	<p>Everybody more or less, not being afraid to counter an opinion or an argument or whatever like statement was made like, 'hey, did you think of it this way? Like this is how I think of it? Or did you mean this?' The openness to question I think was something I really liked and I found very valuable because like I don't know about everybody else, but sometimes like in my head, I'm like, oh, like I have this opinion and I think it's right. And I think it's good to be humbled on that and to get a sense of what other people are thinking, because it can lead your mind and your opinions to favor not only yourself, but other people.</p> <p>I liked that it was a comfortable, respectful space to do so and question people and try to reach, you know, more of an understanding of everyone around us.</p>
Peter	<p>I just thought the actual deliberation like <i>led</i> to something, like we weren't just deliberating and not getting to an end thing. It was, like, people express their opinions, like the STEM majors and the other people and whatever, and like people also change their opinions. A lot of people change their opinion.</p>
Trent	<p>I think just those, like, deliberation discussions gave me a better feeling of, like, productivity and sharing than I've had in a lot of other classes with similar discussions.</p>
Victor	<p>We were so like into it and everybody was like, given all their input. And then, even people that were in the class that had never said anything or weren't as talkative were starting to like all of a sudden, like they're like kind of getting pretty passionate about what they want to do the research on...yeah. And getting the chance then to think about, you know, why should the assignment be set up a particular way? How does it...how should it be graded? How big should it be? What kind of restrictions should be on it?</p>
Garrett	<p>I actually really liked the one that we did on the public transit, and I felt that to be very helpful because it was recognizing a problem that I didn't quite know about in my current community that I live in sort of address this problem that, you know, currently Milwaukee has terrible public transit. I think anybody who moves here realizes that. And so it brought this to my attention because I had only lived here for maybe a year before then and I was commuting from Tulsa and to get into the city where there is a pain in my butt.</p> <p>And so this being able to actually see the problem and then research it and sort of see it from both of the different perspectives as to why we're doing the streetcar and sort of what could benefit out of it and what could and benefit out of it. And then to also hear from the students things that were happening with the bus, different reasons why they might drive instead or their concerns with wanting public transit and why it would actually benefit the students here.</p>

	It was like a very interesting thing for me because it actually led me to really, truly understand how beneficial public transit can be good in your community. And to be able to support something like that was something that was very key, because actually after that that summer, I had started using hop a little more.
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A significant interest reflected in the interview questions was the actual experience of deliberating in the classroom. The two classes had slightly different experiences, as I developed my practices over time. I discuss the major differences in the following section in greater detail. Table 3 shows several responses interviewees offered about their experience deliberating over different grading schema. What is most salient in these responses is the sense of change brought about through sharing. During the in-class deliberations, students offered narratives of their past experiences, reflections about what motivates them to engage with schoolwork, and opinions why a particular grading system (whether points-based, percentage-based, or otherwise) was most clear or simplest for students.

Table 3: Responses about grading schema deliberations

Cora	I'm white. So that's a little help there. So that definitely makes it easier. I mean, I have a bigger platform than some other people, I think, or just I have access to a platform, I think.
Eve	It was definitely beneficial to deliberate because I think a lot of the people, you know, were siding with like the like the norm of like point-based systems and that kind of stuff. And then after talking about it and like getting people's perspectives on it, a lot of people, I think, changed their mind and, but then when we actually voted, it kind of shifted. And I feel like it's because people saw that. A majority of people were comfortable with that other type of grading system, so then they felt comfortable agreeing with that in a way.
Jake	But, like, just basically the way we talked about things and like, the open discussion type where, you know, like how I proposed a topic and one person's just like, 'oh, like I think like this about it,' and then I was like 'well I go about this view of it.' I think in a lot of college classes actually like that really doesn't happen even though it should be happening like that type of back and forth discussion.

Lina	If you remember when [class deliberated about] the grading contract, it was like the lowest and nobody went for it. And we discussed it and talked about it. And then people understood kind of what it was and the flexibility that it offered. And then and then they changed their mind. So I just thought that that was interesting to watch play out, because I myself that I was actually initially like, I don't like the grading contract idea.
Maddy	So I think there were like personal stakes in it. So that's why, like possibly like why people, like, voiced how they were feeling their previous comforts. And I think because we all kind of had a common goal, like in mind, like obviously it was like how we were going to be graded, how our class was going to be structured. And it was like a goal of like comfort for everyone in a sense. So I think that's, you know, part of the reason why people, at least myself, felt comfortable voicing my opinion in that discussion.
Peter	I think learning more about the [grading] systems, because, you know, obviously I've had those systems before, but they...you don't get exploited. Nobody explains what they are, really. I mean, it seems like a simple to grasp concept. It's percentages and points, but like, it's not necessarily so. I think that having that discussion, especially hearing the opinions of other people who had, like, strong preferences, like percentages and their reasons for that, I think that that was really helpful for me.
Trent	<p>I've had a lot of classes where students will lead discussions generally about like a piece of literature or, I don't know, some form media. It's all roughly the same. But I think, and I don't really understand what it was about this class, maybe it was just the group or the material discussed or how we were prompted to discuss it. I don't think I have a conclusion on that. But, the discussions and deliberations we had in class generally seemed a little bit more fruitful.</p> <p>...</p> <p>We were either discussing something that you didn't agree with or that you did agree with and you had to defend or oppose it. And I think that. That conversation was. What's the word, that conversation was absolutely well managed and comfortably, comfortably posed and directed towards a common goal, even if we didn't share common opinions.</p>
Victor	<p>Everything that we were saying there, I think that was for me, like, the single handedly most beneficial, just like for everybody, and realize that what we've been doing the whole semester, like...</p> <p>Everybody was kind of taking it in, even though they were maybe not saying as much about it. Yeah. And getting the chance then to think about, you know, why should the assignment be set up a particular way? How does it how does how should it be graded? How big should it be? What kind of restrictions should be on it?</p>
Garrett	I think the benefit [of deliberation] in how we wanted the class structure to be was interesting because it was actually the first time I've ever had that really that much freedom within a class to be able to sort of dictate what we wanted to do with our course. I mean, there is [sic] professors that ask you what you want to read and stuff

	<p>like that, which always makes you feel a little more better about yourself being able to choose the work you want to actually be passionate for.</p> <p>And that was another interesting thing, too, because I found that the more the professors have deviated from the original scale of how we “should be” assessing students, it almost seems as if I usually end up doing better in a class that has a different grading scale than the sort of systematic, you know, one through a hundred percent. It makes me want to be more engaged within the class.</p>
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Table 4 represents just a few of the insights students shared, ranging from the effect of having an teacher present in deliberations, to the gender and racial dynamics that permeate our society and police the ways that women and minorities fee they are able to contribute their voices. Many students discussed issues of representation within democratic processes more broadly, and within the context of our classroom deliberations. While none of the interview questions directly asked about representation, it is significant that this was a recurring theme in students’ responses.

Table 4: Rhetorical constraints on deliberation

Cora	<p>Well, I grew up in, like, not even my family, just like the schools that I went to, kind of we had to talk always because a lot of our classes were participation based. So I think I just kind of learned that from the get go from just education for me was speaking up and saying your opinion.</p> <p>I'm white. So that's a little help there. So that definitely makes it easier. I mean, I have a bigger platform than some other people, I think, or just I have access to a platform, I think.</p>
Eve	It's one of those psychological things where it's like, you know, you see everybody raising their hand for that. And you're like, OK, I'll raise my hand to that bandwagon.
Jake	Yeah, I definitely think there were some racial [constraints] at times, where like because I was African American, I was able to speak on something because it was through my experience where, even like with gender as well.
Lina	Maybe if I don't want to get something out during class, I can go over it and really connect like a lesson through writing. I don't know. Personally, I think writing about something is helping me remember the topic and get involved better
Maddy	Like being like a woman, like I have had many times my opinion, my thoughts have been shot down because I'm just a woman and I'm too emotional and I'm too like

	bitchy or loud or whatever, like other people explicitly have said, like, 'oh, you're just you're just a woman.'
Peter	<p>I think if you're talking about a black issue, for example, I'm going to feel a lot more comfortable to discuss problems in the black community. I've lived in the black community. I've gone to school on it, whereas someone like Elliott or another white person might, you know, they can't speak to that experience. Or I think that white people can definitely talk on those issues. I'm not I'm not one of those people that's like if you're white, you can get like support black people like.</p> <p>No, I think you can. There's an extent, obviously, but I think that it's still, like, adds a layer of discomfort if you're trying to talk on issues that haven't personally affected you. But I still think that fine. It does add a layer.</p>
Trent	I guess, like the instructor/student dynamic is still so strongly ingrained in a lot of us because we are either close to our earlier sources of education or are so out of education that we look for the instructors for guidance. And so, in a classroom with an instructor present, I feel like it's natural for conversation to be fragmented. I like looking for approval.
Victor	If I was the minority in the classroom, I definitely think it would definitely change how I how I would go about the class just because I, I wouldn't want to offend anybody by the topics I was bringing up or I wouldn't want to like. I would maybe just be more self-conscious of, like the topics that I was bringing up just because of the strict fact of, OK, maybe I had more privilege when I was a younger kid than this kid who is a first generation college student who's never been here or his family has never been here before.
Garrett	Yeah, we're able to sort of draw from a bunch of different resources that we had prior to this experience, such as previous classes that I had taken that sort of have influenced me, like which ones were good, which ones are bad.

In addition to the various benefits students saw within the processes we employed in class, there are of course limitations to deliberation in composition classrooms that should be addressed. Comments pointing to these limitations tended to fall into two categories; those aimed at in-class deliberations specifically, and those representing anxieties or concerns about deliberation as students perceive it in the larger community and world. Table 5 presents some concerns students raised in their interviews.

Table 5: Limitations to deliberation

Cora	<p>The broader you're going to go, the more differences of opinion or different mindsets you're going to meet. And then it'll get harder to reach a consensus or just, you know, talk to each other because everyone is going to want to put out their opinion and then, it'll be maybe less efficient, like it's definitely it's obviously valuable and it has to happen, but it'll take longer to get anything.</p>
Eve	<p>Helping to lead discussions and keep a balance between who's talking, so that definitely like having somebody as sort of like a facilitator or moderator who knows what deliberation is all about and what the expectations are to kind of guide things.</p> <p>To have, like, a good... a structure of like what this thing is or a definition of what it is. And it's like a definite outcome of what it's supposed to do. And then you put it to application. I think that would be helpful because... I guess the way that we were doing it, it was just kind of, like, what we already have, like our preconceived notions about deliberation, and then we're just kind of going into it, like assuming what it is.</p>
Jake	<p>There's obviously differences between communities. And although what the white suburb is probably set up with is there's not enough Targets nearby or something. I think it's like it has to do with, also, a sense of like power, I guess, in a sense, whereas like in the black community it's always like we've always kind of felt like second class citizens, that we're always like scraping to get by and then it's getting to a point where like, OK, like they're just killing themselves, like, you know, like what are we going to do? We just don't support ourselves or we just feel like we're like, you know, in the white community where, you know, things are probably always being given to them by most people are like most members, you know, they worry about, you know, what type of dog I'm gonna get today or like, you know, like my dog's not on the leash.</p> <p>I'm trying to connect the dots between what was going through that woman's [Amy Cooper] mind. And like I saw the post today about like what happened to George Floyd is what she hoped would happen to Christian Cooper. It's like, and then her first statement is "I'm not a racist, I was just afraid," I was like, well, your first instinct was very first thing you did was to weaponize his race against him, so he would be afraid of the police or he would change his mind to just leave you alone or, like, whatever.</p>
Lina	<p>Like not everyone had a voice, even though we didn't want to [make it that way]. It's just, I know there was like five people that were in class, but, you know, like there's five people who always contribute. And they're very opinionated people who I just think sometimes that they are the only voices are heard.</p> <p>...</p>



	<p>I walked in and I know that I was just like, oh, my gosh, I'm so scared because I guess I feel like some people I knew there were upperclassmen in my class. I think that was very intimidating.</p>
Maddy	<p>But there could be that possible feeling of like my opinion doesn't matter, like it doesn't matter in a public sphere. So why would it matter in my class, which I can't speak to? I mean, necessarily, but that could be a possible reason as to why somebody in that group setting might not want to speak.</p> <p>I think, you know, if everybody's kind of coming to like, you know, like a consensus and like you're kind of like, 'oh, well, I don't I don't want to deviate because I don't like you or want to make people like that or like we're all trying to come to this common goal.' So should I just agree with them? Because everybody else is feeling that way and it's kind of for all of us. So, I mean, I think it could skew it like, you know, like that sometimes.</p>
Peter	<p>I just think it's important to hear the viewpoints of other people. I think if you surround I mean, if you surround yourself by people that only think like you, then you're just going to be in an echo chamber of people that think like you and you're not going to get knowledge or new world views and new perspectives.</p> <p>And I constantly do the same thing over and over again. And so, I think it's really valuable to to have discourse on things and to have people sharing their opinion, even if you don't agree with it.</p>
Trent	<p>I mean, generally ideas are just scary. And having an idea that someone's going to disagree with is a scary prospect because your idea becomes, you know, something that's real at that point. And while nothing we were talking about was so like earth shattering and like, you know, we're going to come to blows over this kind of thing. It's still we weren't actually deliberating about abortion, for example.</p> <p>The instructor student dynamic is still so strongly ingrained in a lot of us because we are either close to our earlier sources of education or are so out of education that we look for the instructors for guidance. And so in a classroom with an instructor present, I, I feel like it's natural for conversation to be fragmented. I like looking for approval. And that's not necessarily like a true drawback of this class because I understand that an instructor has to be there.</p> <p>But I think that it is a like a limitation that can only be removed by having the instructor removed or by having the instructor lead. And one or the other doesn't necessarily lead to what this class needed.</p>
Victor	<p>I personally, I'm a very outgoing, talkative person, I am super, super, but exactly no way I always found them super beneficial just because it gave me a platform to always, like, say what I was talking about. I'm sure on the flip side that there was people in the classroom that maybe were like. I'm a freshman in college and I don't want to talk to a group of other people because I don't feel comfortable, so they might</p>

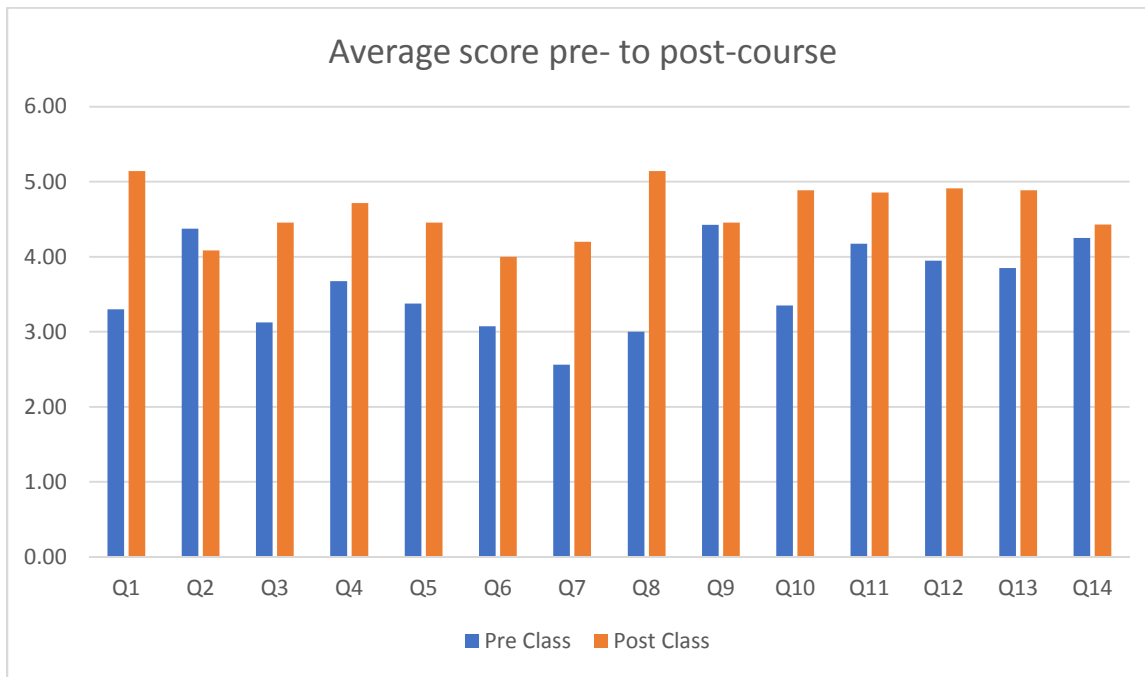
	have maybe again, I can't even I don't know for sure just because I'm just trying to give another side of the devil's advocate.
Garrett	<p>I want to say the difficulty is something that's common within most democracies, our democracies, and I think it's the problem of stalemate. So you always get into a lot of like you spend so much time trying to prepare all this information and trying to get everybody to see the different views of it and sort of to discourse on it and then figure out a plan of action.</p> <p>And so there was like a couple of days where I felt like we had maybe missed out on days that could have been spent doing something. But instead we spent trying to figure out where the class wants to go after this.</p>

Several of these comments, such as those by Trent, Victor, Garrett, and Lina point to difficulties of classroom management that are not unlike the challenges instructors face in facilitating conversation in any given class. Whether due to shyness, anxiety, lack of preparation, or other cause, many students just do not actively or, it seems, willingly participate in classroom discussions. That these types of concerns show up in a deliberative classroom begs the question, in what ways can structured deliberations overcome or mitigate the most typical challenges that students face in entering classroom discussions? Garrett’s response also shows that the practice of deliberation can appear ancillary to the “real” work of a class. Despite generally valuing the experience, Garrett nevertheless questioned whether we could have gotten more “work” done if those deliberations had moved along more quickly. The other general category of response, as we see in Cora, Eve, and Maddy’s comments, point to broader challenges of deliberation. Cora recognizes that the goal of deliberation may not be clear, or even the same, for all participants—are we principally interested in reaching consensus on an issue? On discovering as wide a range of perspectives as possible? Whatever the case, deliberation takes time and effort that may frustrate the goals of participants if the process becomes drawn out or unfocused. Eve’s comment reflects that familiarity with a given process for deliberating may cause confusion, which speaks

to the need for careful planning and trained facilitation of deliberations, in classrooms or elsewhere. I will address these sorts of practical concern for teachers in the discussion section that follows these findings.

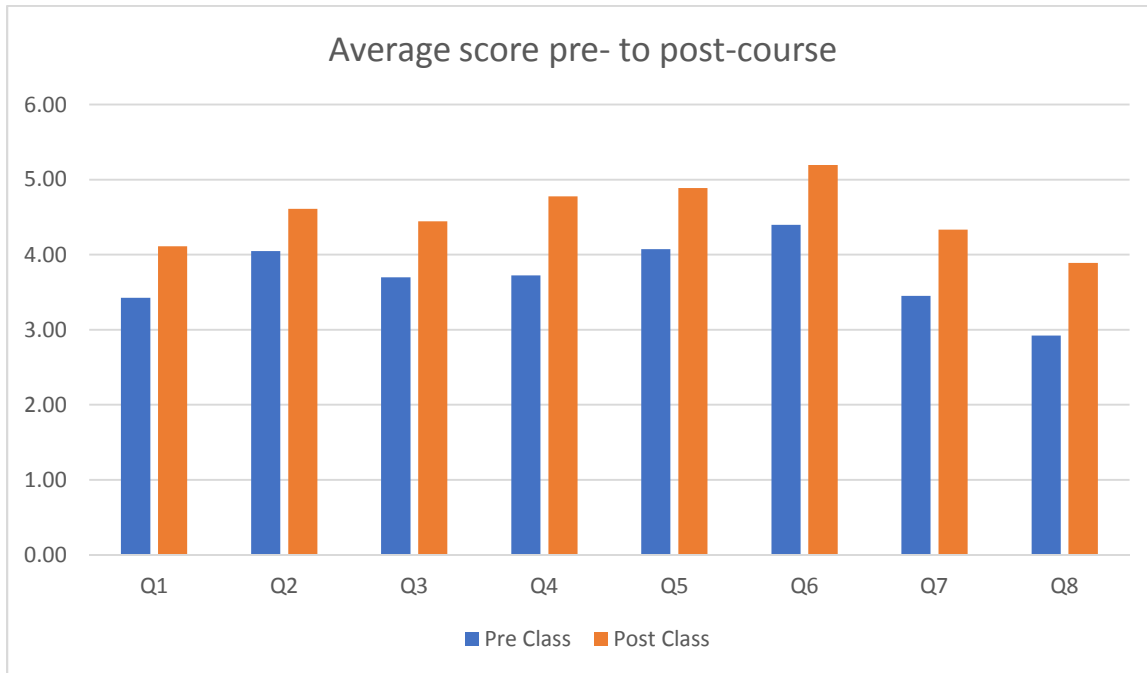
The other source of data I collected, the pre- and post-course Civic Agency Survey, yielded useful information that bears upon the more detailed reflections students provided in their interviews. I divided the survey questions into two sections as seen on the survey itself, which for clarity here I call the “Civic Skills and Dispositions” and “Citizenship Self-Perception” question sets. Figure 1 displays the change in survey responses for the Civic Skills questions from the beginning of the course to the end, with the most obvious result being a general increase of about one point across all of the questions. Regardless of the starting point, the final responses to each question averaged between one and two points of increase in students’ sense of self-efficacy or competence in the question area.

Figure 1: Civic skills and dispositions question set



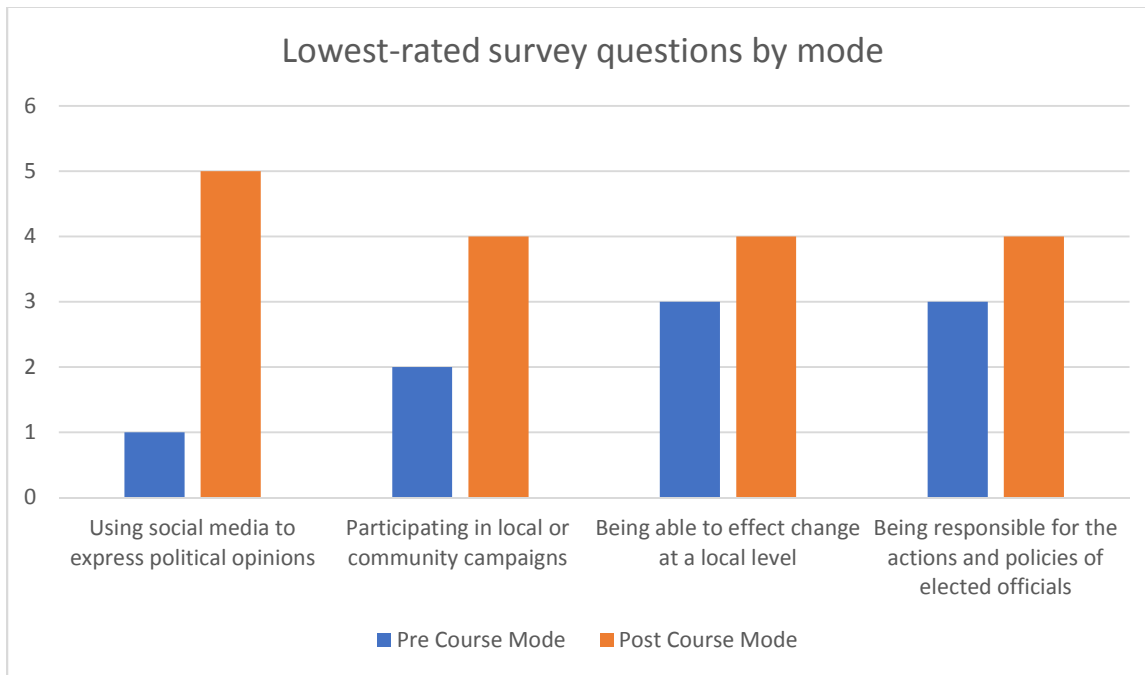
A similar increase is shown in the survey responses to the second set of questions, which addressed students’ perceptions of their abilities speaking and acting in interaction with others in public life. Figure 2 presents this data, indicating a one-point average increase across all questions.

Figure 2: Citizenship self-perception question set



In addition to the average scores across all survey participants, it is useful to examine which questions received the overall lowest scores. Figure 3 below presents these results. The questions in the first set which received the greatest number of either one or two responses among all students asked them to rate their level of comfort “using social media or the internet to express political opinions” (question 3) and “participating in local or community campaigns (for elected office or other)” (question 7). In the Citizenship Self-Perception question set, the lowest-rated questions asked students to what degree they see themselves as “being able to effect change at a local level” (question 1) and “being responsible for the actions and policies of elected officials” (question 8).

Figure 3: Lowest-rated survey questions by mode



I do wish to be careful about overstating the significance of the survey results, as a sample size of two class groups is not adequate for making strong, generalizable claims. Rather, I see the value of the current survey data as supporting the observations I made during these classes, and reflecting consistency in the statements the students made during their interviews.

## Discussion

The data presented above both support important conclusions about a deliberative pedagogy for composition as well as raise productive new questions for further exploration. In this section, I organize my discussion around several key insights that arise from my collected data and that relate to my major research questions. As a reminder, I posed the following questions: 1) how does our understanding of deliberation change if we do not only consider face-to-face, spoken communication? 2) If citizenship primarily serves a normative, exclusionary function (Chavez), what does this mean for composition classes that expect to cultivate young

citizens? 3) In what ways can direct instruction in deliberation overcome these tendencies towards exclusion and erasing difference? And finally, 4) what are the contributions of deliberative composition teaching to reshaping student and teacher attitudes towards and beliefs about the nature and value of democracy? In response to these questions, the key takeaways from my collected data appear as several themes:

*Transformative change through deliberation*—evidence of shifts in students' perspectives and understanding as a result of learning about and participating in deliberative speaking and writing.

*Deliberation, composition, and rhetoric*—benefits of deliberation for learning and internalizing rhetorical concepts and skills, and the mutual support of deliberation for composing and composing for successfully deliberating.

*Enacting and facilitating deliberation in composition classrooms*—practical concerns relevant to teachers interested in deliberative pedagogies; lessons learned through experience and directions for future study.

The experience of the specific class day that I relate from my observation notes above speaks to the need for a different sort of training or instruction for democracy than traditional civics requirements provide. Garrett, during his interview, expressed directly that he felt this was the case. Supporting this further, historian Steve Volk makes the very same argument in his essay on deliberative pedagogy from 2017: “you don’t learn to play the piano by reading a book about it; you don’t learn to practice democracy by taking a course on it” (n.p.). If students don’t experience the exercise of democracy before they actually arrive at the polls, or the town hall, or even the PTA, then what quality of democracy do we actually expect? I suspect that it is very

much like what we see now, where seemingly every day a new article bemoans the hyper-partisan, Balkanized state of American society. The experience of my students suggests that engaging with deliberative practices as both an object of study and through application offers students a vision of democracy that is significantly different—I would say improved—in at least two respects. First, students see and experience a model that is inclusive in ways that American democracy, as they reported in their interview responses, currently is exclusive and distant. They recognize a growing variety of communication styles and modes as contributing to democratic discourse. Whether it is, for Jake or Peter, the presence of black bodies in spaces where they have typically been denied access, or, as Eve and Maddy discussed, the possibilities social media affords to leverage personal connections to make more persuasive appeals; in most cases of the students I interviewed, they expressed clear perspectives that more than just reasoned argumentation was meaningful and valuable communication within democracy. Second, rather than a democracy of individuals competing to advance personal interests in official forums, students locate a democracy that emerges from and encompasses their daily lives and the various communities they inhabit. The individual, they recognize, is in fact best served when all people are present to weigh in on public issues; community and solidarity become more important goals than winning a given election. As many of my students discussed during class, and Lina, Peter, and Tyler, to name only three, made clear in their interviews, overcoming their cynicism about democracy helped them envision themselves as members of a political community bearing responsibility for the most vulnerable and ignored among us.

### *Transformative change through deliberation*

For many students, the value of deliberative discussions lies, as responses in Table 2 by Cora, Eve, Maddy, and Victor indicate, in the potential for change that comes with a more

inclusive and expansive discourse. This finding is in keeping with the great deal of scholarship done by communications scholar James S. Fishkin, whose deliberative polling methods have been used to guide constitution building and official planning in countries around the world. Fishkin has observed that, given the opportunity to deliberate, “in every case, opinions on politics and policy change significantly, often to a large degree. For the most part, the considered judgments revealed...differ significantly from the respondent’s initial responses” (“Consulting” 129). The opportunity to hear and reflect, not only on information provided on a given issue, but on the perspectives and experiences of diverse community stakeholders generates positive change in individuals’ beliefs about common issues. In other words, as Fishkin and co-author Bruce Ackerman write elsewhere,

When ordinary people have the chance to seriously consider competing sides of an issue, they take the opportunity to become far more informed. Their considered judgments demonstrate higher levels of knowledge and greater consistency with their basic values and assumptions. These experiences demonstrate that the public has the capacity to deal with complex public issues. (*Deliberation Day* 4)

Garrett expressed the matter even more clearly. He believes that our country is not doing a good job educating young people in what it actually means to participate in democracy, instead, allowing passive media consumption to shape political opinions. For him, the value of our deliberative practice was that it provides students with exactly the sort of instruction he feels is missing and that students like him, who have “pulled back from” participating in civic life, would benefit from. Each of the students interviewed left with a strong sense that practicing deliberation was a valuable exercise, not only within the classroom, but as something that could benefit larger communities.



Moving from thinking about deliberation generally and towards a specific instance of deliberation in my classes, one of the complex issues students approached through deliberation was the grading schema each class would follow. While this is something that instructors of all disciplines wrestle with each semester, students are mostly left out of the process and experience grading as something done *to* them and lack serious opportunity to reflect on how and why grading works in different sorts of ways. The approach to this deliberation was significantly different between the two sections. In Class 1, my desire was to have students develop a set of grading practices through the deliberations themselves. I asked that they discuss the number and types of assignments we would undertake (within the limitations of the university course descriptions and requirements), and by what means I should eventually assign grades. To facilitate this evolving deliberation, I provided them with a Deliberation Aid worksheet to take notes, and write out their understanding of the various options uncovered through the class's deliberations (Appendix B). Overall, as I recorded in my observation notes, this process took much more class time than I had originally allotted, and the relatively unstructured nature of the deliberation—I did not provide background materials on grading or a set of options for discussion of benefits and tradeoffs—made the end goal less clear for everyone. In Class 2, I learned from these challenges and approached the deliberations with far more structure. Taking the “Issues Guides” produced by the National Issues Forums as a model (“Coming to America”), I presented students with a brief deliberation guide for grading (Appendix B), detailing three possible models from which we might choose. The first was a percentage-based system in which students maintained a 100% score by completing the required elements of the course and meeting the standards for each assignment, the second was a system of assigning points to their written assignments, participation, and final projects that also weighted each element of the

course, and the final model was a labor-based grading contract that detailed the amounts and quality of work required to receive a particular grade, providing clear rubrics for each element of the course.

What these responses indicate is that the type of shift in perspective observed by Fishkin is precisely what occurred as students shared and deliberated about grading for our classes. For many students, what changed was not just a preference about grading, but their assumptions about why grading is done in particular ways—for instance, because it’s the university’s norm, or for instructor’s ease—as well as their understanding of how they respond to grading in particular way. Many students initially felt that a more traditional, points-based assessment of their assignments, attendance, and participation was the most transparent option. My observations revealed that, in both sections, several students shared in deliberation about the deep anxiety they generally felt about seeing points on their assignments. After a week of preparation and deliberation, quite surprisingly, both sections overwhelmingly voted to adopt a labor-based grading contract—a schema that had been the subject of many negative comments and opinions during the deliberations. The change reflected a shift in priorities for how the grading system should serve the students’ interests. Instead of purely valuing personal clarity about their grade and where they stood in the class, students expressed appreciation for the flexibility the grading contract offered them, the relief of anxiety for their classmates, as well as greater opportunity to speak and work directly with me on their grades.

The change that students experienced is also reflected in the data from the Civic Agency survey. As seen in the graphs above, students’ responses to each question improved from the beginning of the term to the end. While without surveying a larger population it is difficult to draw generalizable conclusions, the data do demonstrate that students connect their work and

experiences in the classroom to their expectations of what democratic citizenship looks like. One of the realizations I find particularly compelling is in the change of students' sense of responsibility not just for their own role within their communities, but for the actions and policies of elected officials. As the survey results indicate, these questions consistently ranked lowest among students' reported answers in the pre-course surveys; in addition, these two questions received the highest percentage of one and two responses, while experiencing the same or greater shift upward in the post-course survey as other questions. As I observed at several points in both classes, students wrestled with the question of what it means to take responsibility for actions that you don't physically participate in or are only indirectly connected to through representative government. This is especially true in the case of elected officials for whom the student didn't or wouldn't have voted. Peter discussed how he "was making, like, a lot more calls to my congresspeople" than ever before (personal communication to author, 10 May 2020). Lina, in a similar vein, expressed how "I feel like I now have the need to speak for the people who are shy, since I know that is me. I know that I am not one to speak out but [still] have [my] opinions. I know I'm not alone with that. So I kind of do feel this need now that I am encouraged to get involved" (Lina interview). Extending his understanding of responsibility in community life, Jake was able to relate our work in class to the larger social upheavals centered on police violence against people of color. As he stated,

But there are times when you get a sense that, like everybody's doing about this right now, I mean, I'm looking at Minneapolis right now, along with Georgia and many other places. I think when it gets to the point of, like, just becoming set up in the sense or, like just become like, OK, I'm tired of this. This is...it's got to stop, which I feel in a sense is

like, OK, like after every time it happens, it's like it's a surge of like this needs to stop or like, you know, something's got to change. (Jake interview)

Jake finds that a community may engage in deliberation through an ongoing, informal process of discussion. Assuming responsibility for one's community occurs, at least in one way, when he enters informal forums in black communities for gathering perspectives on the issues facing the community. Given enough pressure, such communities can, as we continue to see even months after the inciting incidents in several states, enter into larger public discussions through mass protests and demonstrations which are circulated by national media and other sponsors. This process not only enables other, perhaps distant communities to hear the perspectives voiced in such protest, it also encourages the generation of more writing, talk, and other communication further expanding the range of viewpoints recognized in the public discussions. All of this, I argue, is deliberative in nature; as I related from the scholarship of John Dryzek in my introductory chapter, a conception of deliberative democracy "that emphasizes the contestation of discourses in the public sphere" is a more robust, contemporary model of deliberation than those that have valued the contributions of supposedly disinterested speakers capable of "bracketing and neutralizing" (Habermas; Longaker) their discrete interests and identities (Dryzek 78).

Ultimately, the students in my study demonstrated and discussed the change they experienced through deliberation in multiple ways. Their surveys show a measurable increase in their personal feelings of self-efficacy in participating in public deliberations and civic life. This is supported by their detailed interview responses, where they report learning about how grading and assessment impacts them in class in deeper ways than they previously considered. They

further discussed how deliberative practices help them to see a different, and improved, way of approaching democracy.

*Deliberation, rhetoric, and composition*

A second insight that emerges from the data is that deliberations are rhetorically rich sites of invention and exploration for students. All of the interviewees acknowledged the benefit of structured deliberations for improving the quality of face-to-face discussion. In particular, many noted, it became easier to acknowledge and account for their own relative positions of privilege, and to begin practicing more critical listening with regard to the perspectives and statements of others from backgrounds different than their own. At the same time, several students also showed a sophisticated awareness of the kinds of rhetorical constraints that student participants in deliberations might be responding to. The kind of developing rhetorical sensibilities that are on display here form an important goal of any course in composition or rhetoric. That deliberative practices can produce these kinds of reflections connects to one of my main research questions, namely, whether students come into class being aware of the normative and exclusionary power of citizenship. Many have themselves experienced marginalization, and they connect the larger phenomenon of exclusion in society to what they feel and experience in classroom settings. Through the deliberative processes we implemented in class, however,

In many ways, the rhetorical sensibilities students discover and hone through spoken deliberation support their development as effective communicators in written and other modes of communication. Interviewees discussed a number of occasions when they were challenged as communicators by interactions in deliberative situations that sparked meaningful reflection and revision of their written work. Much of this work took place in open discussion during class, but students were also asked through their weekly assignments to identify different contexts for

deliberation outside the university. In other cases, students related that an experience during deliberations itself became the exigence for composing other kinds of texts. Eve shared with me that she would frequently find herself using her daily journal to continue processing discussions we had in class, or further pursuing her own thoughts about the issues we approached through in-class work. Though she declined to share her private writing directly, she related a specific instance where she began writing about the issue of representation in public discourse, connecting her feelings about the record number of women who had been elected to Congress in the recent 2018 midterm elections. Whereas she had previously just been happy to see more women elected and “hadn’t thought much more about it” (personal communication to author, 31 March 2020), our class discussions about what counts as representation and who experiences it helped her develop her views about representation in Congress. “You really pissed me off—well not, like, *you*, but I guess what I learned in class. Like, in 2020 why do we still celebrate this?” (personal communication to author, 31 March 2020). In Eve’s case, practicing deliberation sparked more writing; for others, writing helped them approach the task of deliberating with more confidence. Lina, in her interview, stated, “Maybe if I don’t want to get something out during class, I can go over it and really connect like a lesson through writing. I don’t know. Personally, I think writing about something is helping me remember the topic and get involved better” (Lina interview). Lina developed a particular habit of preparing “speaking notes” for herself before most class days. In some cases, she told me, she “had strong feelings and wanted to get the words right” (personal communication with author, 20 April 2020), or didn’t want to leave a class not having said something she thought was important. Students engage in writing for a number of important purposes connected to deliberation; at times as preparation, reflection, practice, or as a way of continuing the learning and exploration that began in deliberation.

Many people equate deliberation with rational argument—recall the article by Maria Farland illustrating her use of deliberation in a first-year writing seminar. For Farland, the value of deliberation was its emphasis on the structured presentation of reasoned arguments, the skills for which she argues are valuable *prima facie* for all students. However, most universities offer argumentative writing courses, and many first-year composition programs still encourage students to produce some written work, often called a “researched argument.” There is nothing particularly new or controversial about that, and reams have been written on the practice of argumentation. For many students, mine included, that mode of communication is uninspiring, feels ineffective, or simply appears foreign. More to the point, it is only one mode of engaging in public questions and public deliberations, and not necessarily the one best suited to achieve a desired effect.

The students in my classes became more attuned to, and intensely interested in, what appeared to them as new ways of engaging in public deliberations. For Tyler, who enjoys following national politics, the Covid-19 pandemic created the opportunity for him to experience a far more local political culture. During his interview, he related,

So, I've recently signed up for Nextdoor. I don't know if you have that app, but just because I was curious what we were talking about in this time period, everybody was at home and it's been like seeing the deliberation go on in these posts. They're very they're very much more local and immediate than the Facebook posts are. Um, they're generally, like, of the same content as like a local person's Facebook post, like, did anybody see that new black box being put up on the street? What is it? Is going to kill us? And someone responds, “I don't care.” And it's just [a] 5G [station]. And, like there literally was one of those posts on my Nextdoor the other day, like things like that, where people are talking

about, like, very pertinent and pressing things, like not enough like sanitary wipes at the grocery store or things like that. And then you have to delve into these comments of people taking this issue of there not being enough wipes. (Tyler interview)

Tyler shows that his idea of what counts as deliberation is expanding, as well as his sense of where this kind of public discussion can take place. Jake felt a similar expansion of what kinds of discourses and contexts can be recognizably deliberative, drawing specifically from his experience in the black community:

I feel like it's not a completely formal process. I feel like sometimes it can be informal, but formal in the sense like the barbershop is like have always been known like in the black community, for a man to be, like a place where they can freely speak their mind without one anywhere. So I think, like a lot of this celebration kind of happens in the barbershop because it's a lot of like, you know, talking and like back and forth going about, you know, it could be like a wide range of topics, you know, a basketball player like, you know, how they feel like black men and black women are active in the community and how they feel about, you know, how the our representative is treated, you know. So, I think the barbershop is definitely like the first place that pops into my mind about places that have deliberation that happens. (Jake interview)

These kinds of discussions demonstrate that direct instruction in deliberation opens students to (see) new sites of rhetorical action. The barbershop, for instance, is a well-known context of black culture and social life; Jake is already aware of the barbershop's significance for his community, but he is now coming to view that space through a new lens—that of public deliberation. He comes to see the barbershop as a space where ideas are discovered and tested and a group develops a complex sense of itself as a community. This is, I argue, analogous to



Ferguson's conception of the protest march as the exemplar of democratic interagency. To paraphrase her language, the barbershop community is multivocal, it is cacophonous. The people who gather there do so as individuals, and they may come to that space with very different goals in mind. As Ferguson said of the protest march, the "express not a single position with a single voice but multiple positions with multiple voices" (Ferguson 154). Providing both practical experience in deliberation and leading students to expand their sense of where deliberation takes place and what it looks like, I argue, are some of the biggest benefits of a deliberative pedagogy that places democratic interagency and difference at its heart.

Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, given the limited access to libraries and other more typically academic resources, students sought out new forms of making meaningful contributions to public discourses. As I was able to make observation notes of over the course of several weeks, Elliott, a student from my English 240 class who declined to complete a formal interview, devised a project drawing on the developing rhetorical and symbolic significance of surgical masks and other personal protective equipment. As a way of coping with the stress of prolonged isolation, he wanted to engage his creative interest in hand embroidery and textiles. He further saw this effort as a way to make a meaningful contribution, producing masks at the time when the nation faced a critical shortage of protective equipment. After creating a number of masks, he distributed them to friends and acquaintances, asking them "to decorate or write on the masks *something* that evokes how they are feeling, about the quarantine or the world or healthcare; whatever" (personal email to author, 1 April 2020). He would then gather these masks into a gallery or album, as images of each person wearing their mask, with a facing page including that person's explanation of their choices and a brief essay of his own about the project. In a video conference we held together, reflecting on the rhetorical nature and

significance of this project, he articulated how the face mask was this “totally ordinary object that was taking on new political significance” (personal communication with author, 30 March 2020). Blending the imagery of the mask with his creative outlet of sewing and embroidery engaged both the goals of the class to explore public issues and his very real, personal need to cope with the experience of quarantine and his precarious life circumstances. Through the images he would collect, personal and political messages wedded to the contentious object of the mask also operated within the frame of a photograph revealing something of the personal circumstances of the people wearing them. Whether they chose to wear their decorated mask outside, as a tacit statement about the need for individuals to accept responsibility for community health, or inside their homes, granting viewers a look behind the curtains at the very different circumstances in which people are living through this crisis, the whole experience of the project held the potential to meaningfully impact public discussions about mask-wearing and social distancing. I asked that he try to imagine in what kinds of deliberative contexts his project might have some influence; he thought first about sharing it on his social media, “where some of my family back in California are all pissed off about having to wear masks, and I just don’t think they get it, you know?” (personal email to author, 13 April 2020). Two days later, one of the earliest large-scale anti-mask protests that received national media attention occurred in Michigan; I received an email later in the day from the student with a link to a news story and simple message saying, “You see this?! We JUST talked about this!” (personal email to author, 15 April 2020). The student, in a later conference, also reflected that “I keep seeing on social media about how ‘we’re all in the same boat,’ but I’m not in the same boat as Jeff Bezos. I live alone in a new city and won’t make rent this month” (personal communication with author, 24 April 2020). Elliott felt that his project would help him express in an impactful way that could be

easily circulated the very different impacts that this public health crisis is having across communities and demographics. The unfortunate reality of his circumstances meant, ultimately, that this project didn't come to fruition as he had imagined. Despite the great deal of planning, writing, and sewing that he *was* able to complete, we ultimately had to devise an alternative writing project. His reflections, however, and our shared experience of developing this project, remain valuable and instructive.

What these statements from students and my recorded observations reveal is that students are, in the relatively short span of a single semester, able to recognize public deliberations as something more than just officially-sanctioned talk in officially-sanctioned spaces. Rather, they understand deliberations as a diffuse network of interactions that occur daily between diverse groups and individuals. They locate deliberation in their classrooms when they are encouraged to share and negotiate a vision of what higher education should look like. They locate deliberation through their efforts at composing texts with public meaning and significance—images of mask-wearing, for instance. They locate deliberation in social networks and local communities, where questions are raised, opinions offered, images laughed at and shared. They locate deliberation through participating in activism, experiencing directly what it feels like to put their bodies into spaces where the public contends over values, policies, and goals. This complex, unending, and even mundane vision of public deliberation constitutes the conditions of democracy as Michael Ferguson figured it—a daily lifeworld of intersubjective action, talk, and reflection among inescapably diverse fellows.

### *Enacting and facilitating deliberation in composition classrooms*

The final set of considerations I will discuss pertains to the teacher or facilitator's experience of implementing deliberations in a composition classroom. It is, of course, possible to

approach deliberation in writing classrooms as did Farland—as a useful context for crafting argumentative writing. This is one facet of enacting a deliberative pedagogy—having students write for public, deliberative purposes. The more nuanced concept of deliberation I offer, based in contemporary scholarship and interdisciplinary practice, however, supports a pedagogy of open deliberation involving a huge variety of communicative modes. A more complete deliberative pedagogy considers also how public deliberation provides a rhetorically rich content for a composition course, structures class activities that have clear rhetorical aims and measurable learning outcomes for writing, and lives into the democratic mission of literacy education by making the course itself a site of deliberation involving all of its stakeholders.

Openness to co-constructing a course from the ground up through deliberation with students is perhaps the most challenging and frightening hurdle for an instructor to cross. My own mixed success with the first course’s deliberations led me to scale back my expectations for this project and what could be accomplished within a single semester. The essence of a deliberative pedagogy for composition, as I argue for it, however, is just this disposition of openness. Careful scaffolding of students’ participation in classroom deliberations, through presentation of background materials, discussion, and supporting documents like the deliberation aid I offered students can generate results that are workable for teachers and students and align with the programmatic or departmental goals for courses. Further, as my students expressed in their interviews, they developed a more complete understanding of the ways college courses are put together, including how different grading and assessment practices influence them in a variety of ways.

Even during such open-ended classroom deliberations, students remain aware of the traditional power hierarchies between teachers and themselves. Eve and Tyler both recognized

this in their interviews; “the instructor student dynamic is still so strongly ingrained in a lot of us because we are either close to our earlier sources of education or are so out of education that we look for the instructors for guidance” Tyler related, and Eve echoed, “I think, like, the pros of you being there to help guide the conversation outweigh, like, the kind of way you [being involved as instructor] influenced it.” How are instructors able to overcome this? Thinking aloud through what it would mean for the instructor to be uninvolved as she responded, Eve talked her way into a more complete understanding of what the trade-offs and benefits of teacher involvement are:

I think to a certain extent, maybe like you don't trust the process [with a teacher involved], you think maybe people had other reasons for voting one way or the. But I don't think there's any way to avoid that, and I'd like to make it like an anonymous thing. Hmm. I don't know that that would be beneficial either, because then you're not really having an open discussion about it.

I don't know. But because, like it it's one of those psychological things where it's like, you know, you see everybody raising their hand for that. And you're like, OK, I'll raise my hand to that bandwagon.

That's an interesting question. I can see it going both ways, where I could see it being taken a lot less seriously by everybody and, and sometimes when there isn't like, somebody who is the superior, like watching or helping to guide the conversation, then it either doesn't go anywhere or there's one or two students who just take control of it entirely.

And I think it's important to have you there to answer questions because it's not something that we're used to. Like, I know I had a lot of questions. We were asking a lot of questions about it. So, I think it's important. I think it's better that you're there to answer questions and to guide the discussion.

The teacher exists as a stakeholder in deliberations about class structures whether or not they choose to participate. Furthermore, even if they remain absent from the deliberations, the instructor still exerts pressure on students' talk by their choice of background materials, the degree to which they instruct students in how to participate, and by setting the expectations for the end result. I maintain that the benefit of having the instructor present and active in classroom deliberations outweighs the possibility that they may unconsciously push the end result in their preferred direction.

Teachers involving themselves in deliberations can approach their role ethically in several ways. First, they must explicitly acknowledge and account for their interests in the outcome of deliberations. This might take form of statements such as “We are all stakeholders in the eventual decision we make about this course because what happens in this classroom affects each of us in some ways. My stakes will be different than yours, but they should not matter any more or less than yours.” Secondly, in presenting background materials, as I did when my classes deliberated about grading schemas (Appendix B), instructors should acknowledge that those materials cannot account for all possible organizations, and alternatives may arise during discussion that should be considered. Third, teachers adopt an ethical approach to deliberating with students by remaining non-directive and not assuming a privileged speaking role within the deliberations. In practice this is difficult; if students are instructed in how deliberations will take place beforehand, the instructor has already conditioned the kinds of contributions students are

able, or likely, to make. If all students are required to speak in turn, the instructor has constrained other forms of entering the deliberation that occur in more natural speaking situations— interruptions, questions, disagreements, tangents, or emotional reactions. It is not important that some of these communicative actions can be seen as negative, they are nevertheless legitimate contributions to deliberation under the model I have presented in this study. By maintaining a limited amount of speaking time for themselves, refraining from responding by clarifying or rephrasing students' contributions, keeping space for silence, and by trying to avoid speaking both first and last, instructors can mitigate some of the stronger influences their intrinsic power in the classroom.

Students should be encouraged to speak only for themselves and from their experiences. This follows from the experiences of well-established organizations such as the Frank Zeidler Center for Public Discussion, a Milwaukee-based non-profit that facilitates deliberations for community school, faith, and business partners. Under the Zeidler Center's model of facilitated discussion, being guided to avoid generalizations and speaking only for oneself builds trust among interlocutors and humanizes participants engaged in difficult conversations ("Our Mission"). This goal also supports participants in deliberations by encouraging speakers to tell stories, give testimony, discuss the emotional impacts of various experiences, and offer other communicative acts beyond just reasoned argumentation. This type of personal speaking also supports participants in recognizing those diverse contributions *as* deliberative—as contributing new meaning and knowledge about the potential effects, trade-offs, or benefits of proposed actions. By uncovering and humanizing the motivating values, ideals, and principles that individuals base their perspectives on, communication across difference becomes easier and people become more recognizable as sharing in a democratic life.

The biggest goal for deliberation in composition classes should be to facilitate student writing in a variety of ways. As my student's interview responses demonstrate, they engaged in writing in a variety of formal and informal ways that they could directly recognize as supporting deliberation. Eve kept a daily journal she began using to process our in-class work. Tyler self-consciously approached his use of social media as a deliberative act. Garrett valued the experience of researching and preparing written informative materials for his classmates about local issues like the Milwaukee Hop streetcar. Some well-known exercises are already suited to helping students learn about how to deliberate. Using background readings about public deliberations, students can compose written reflections that support the development of a personal theory of deliberation to guide their understanding. Being provided polemical, argumentative, and other kinds of interested texts, students can complete rhetorical analyses that consider how authors frame the major concerns and arguments of their texts, and by what means the authors seek to enter in public deliberations. For example, I provided students with several essays from a 2016 collection edited by Sarah Leonard and Bhaskar Sunkara entitled *The Future We Want: Radical Ideas for the New Century*. Drawing from my observation notes in Class 1, I recorded that:

The most interesting thing about these essays for the students became that they were from a book that is explicitly made up of socialist policy arguments. I don't think many of them had ever encountered something with such a clearly presented political agenda. Students often struggle with understanding what *bias* actually is and are likely to see any expression of a position or opinion as reflecting something that's "just biased." Victor, Eli, Mariah, and Jerome (pseudonyms applied) all led the class discussion to consider how the label "socialist" makes people crazy in this country. They each made really on-



point statements about how owning that label might both help and hurt the authors trying to make their arguments. (5 March 2019)

I returned to these same essays in Class 2, with similar results. Whether or not they agreed with the arguments in question, students spent ample time in discussion and in their written responses considering how factors like political affiliation or representing a “radical” or non-mainstream position influences how a given argument is taken up by public audiences. Many students began making efforts to more clearly define the perspectives they bring to any given issue, locating themselves within a complex, diverse socio-political world. One of the primary benefits of deliberative pedagogy is that it provides students with new frameworks for viewing and engaging in the writing they do in their daily lives. By learning to view their daily composing as, at least potentially, deliberative, students actively develop a sense of themselves as doing the kinds of things citizens do in a democracy. Using Michael Ferguson’s terminology, in other words, students become aware of how they exercise their political freedom in their communities through their various forms of writing, engaging in democracy as a way of life.

### **Limitations of Current Study and Directions for Future Research**

The biggest limitations to this study are the sample size of students participating and the limited perspective of a single teacher researcher. Not only replicating the deliberative courses in first-year writing classrooms, but expanding the scope to other types of advanced or special topics courses under the direction of other instructors would not only expand the sample size, but allow for the incorporation of other teachers’ observation notes and create a more objective perspective for analysis. Collecting data from courses outside of first-year composition courses would also expand the typical age range of student participants, with students older than 18-19 being more likely to have participated in local or federal elections and to have developed more

social and political links as adult members of their communities. Further benefit could be gained by following the same group of students through two semesters of English 101 and 102. This would provide more time for direct instruction in deliberative practices and allow students greater chance to connect their in-class experiences to their lives outside of school. In addition, depending on the departmental goals for English 101 and 102, where often the second semester course focuses more directly on research and writing, students can engage with more prolonged deliberation on a single issue or set of issues. This would reinforce how public deliberations operate as a site of both knowledge creation and discovery.

Larger sample sizes would also help correct the potential for a sort of confirmation bias, where the students who are most likely to have volunteered to participate in the research are similarly likely to have enjoyed or had positive experiences with deliberation in the classroom. While the current sample reflects the composition of the two sections in terms of both race and gender, that by no means guarantees that the experiences of some women or people of color, who in their interviews indicated that they felt their race or gender actually *enabled* them to speak or write more effectively on various issues, is generalizable to those groups as a whole.

The research questions guiding this dissertation emphasized students' relationships to democratic institutions, the academy and the classroom, and the types of discourses they understand as deliberative or democratic in nature. In future research, a narrower focus on the kinds of assignments and practices instructors can prepare that directly support deliberative contexts would further benefit the development of deliberative pedagogy by providing sets of proven practices. This would in turn facilitate teacher training and implementing such practices at a programmatic level.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this project, I argue that the processes of public deliberation provide both meaningful thematic content for student writers to critically engage with and also classroom practices that democratize higher education and cultivate active, rhetorically savvy citizenship behaviors. This project demonstrates that students have strong, often conflicted, feelings about democratic life stemming from their early experiences as adult members of the political community.

Simultaneously, they express continuing faith that democracy as a set of practices for living among others is good in itself. Many students have not, however, had any direct instruction that asks them, “how can we go about democracy in ways that improve both the outcomes and the experience for all people?” As a discipline, rhetoric and composition has in its “public turn” made a major investment in civic, community engagement through its scholarship and teaching. In their volume *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen-Scholars and Civic Engagement*, David Coogan and John Ackerman write that through this civic drive, universities are “responding to decades of diminished public funding by searching for new revenue streams, some of which translates into incentives for the ‘scholarship of engagement’” (11). To the extent that universities are involved in the project of civic engagement in the service, theoretically, of democracy, Coogan and Ackerman continue that it typically reflects the “corporate desire to conflate civic virtue with entrepreneurialism; it strengthens the political base of the university and ensures that the university has a key role to play in the redefinition of the polis and city-state” (11). As we explore developing teaching practices that involve students in public forums and democratic life, we should be careful of our motivations and reflect deeply on what interests our efforts may end up serving.

As I wrote in my introductory chapter, because composition and rhetoric has maintained for the discipline a multilayered sense of connection and responsibility for the (re)production of democracy in society, it is incumbent on us to thoroughly account for the kind of democracy we are trying to realize. Too often, our efforts towards building citizenship focus on the culture of individual attainment and emphasize the marketability and economic potential of rhetorical capacities rather than building a culture of community solidarity by supporting students in approaching their daily communication and interaction as holding democratic value. My goal has been to address this tendency by first going back to the theories of democracy, citizenship, and agency that undergird our teaching practices in order to offer new conceptions of these key terms and a practical framework that incorporates them. The questions I posed for this project arose from strong critiques of citizenship already circulating in rhetoric studies. Amy Wan identified the economic anxieties that typically adhere to the notion of citizenship, and result in the valorization of work and economic productivity as the markers of “good” citizenship. Karma Chavez explains that “most of the rhetorical theory and criticism published in the field takes the value and ideal of citizenship for granted, ignoring altogether or, at best, reframing appeals that challenge the very bases of citizenship and the nation-state” (“Border” 163). One major strain of scholarship in the field examines the various unique rhetorical actions marginalized communities have employed to seek recognition as citizens, but without challenging the fundamental exclusionary function the term implies. I turned to scholarship in political science to try to discover what conceptions of citizenship operated outside my field and what we might learn from them. In the process, I recognized a gulf between the conception of agency as it is viewed by democratic theorists and as it is understood in contemporary rhetorical studies. This gulf, while not insurmountable, had yet to be seriously crossed by scholarship in composition and

rhetoric; reconciling a theory of democratic interagency as sharing the exercise of political freedom, articulated by political scientist Michael Ferguson, with current accounts of rhetorical agency as an emergent, embodied, and distributed phenomenon became crucial to understanding what composition studies can do to reshape our ideas about citizenship and democracy.

The research questions that arose from my interest in democracy and education became more defined as I encountered these kinds of critiques and theories from scholars across multiple disciplines. The need for teaching practices more clearly rooted in democratic life became apparent to me early on in preparing for this project, even before I could articulate on what grounds that need was based. To explore what gaps in current composition and rhetoric scholarship exist on these issues, I asked:

- 1) How does our understanding of deliberation change if we do not recognize only on face-to-face, spoken, and argumentative modes of communication as valid contributions?
- 2) What are the implications for composition instruction of a conception of citizenship primarily characterized by exclusion and sanction by state forces?
- 3) In what ways do deliberative processes practiced in classrooms overcome the tendency towards exclusion?
- 4) If we define democracy as a “way of living” among diverse others, what contributions does deliberative composition instruction make to support that life?
- 5) How do students and teachers experience deliberation in classrooms in ways that may reshape their attitudes towards and beliefs about the nature and value of democracy?

Investigating these questions, I conducted research in two classes in which I implemented deliberative practices as a way of structuring and administering the courses, as a thematic content

presented for rhetorical analysis and reflection, and as a useful practice for students to learn that both informed their various ways of composing and for which those compositions held great value. What emerged from my research is a framework for deliberative practices that make them appropriate and effective tools for instruction in rhetoric and composition that make direct interventions into the field's problematic relationship to citizenship specifically, and its poorly-theorized relationship to democracy more generally. Concluding this study, I return briefly to the two major theoretical concepts of the earlier chapters, agency and citizenship, to draw out what I have learned and what I believe is most instructive for others who may wish to make public deliberation a core element of their teaching or scholarship.

### *Agency*

Students have often struggled to conceive of themselves as effective enough communicators to engage in large public questions. Composition and rhetoric studies have also long recognized that students experience agency differently, and with greater or lesser awareness of the constraints upon their individual rhetorical agency. A deliberative pedagogy makes a direct intervention in this struggle by expanding our understanding of what modes of communication are available, and valuable in talking about these big issues. Moreover, a deliberative pedagogy founded on a theory of democratic interagency calls students to recognize the contributions of all the diverse individuals with whom they share physical and social space, regardless of status, class, race, or other constructed divisions. A deliberative composition pedagogy supports students in the development of their rhetorical abilities, such that they can, as Carolyn Miller argued for, better recognize and attribute agency to the diverse others with whom they interact.

As I wrote in Chapter Two, shifting from rhetorical agency to democratic interagency as a conceptual basis for teaching writing and rhetoric is a significant move because a pedagogy built around democratic interagency creates a space for critical reflection upon the individual's relationship to larger political and social structures. Further, by de-centering the individual subject as the possessor of agency who then wields their rhetorical skills and command of argumentative and persuasive modes of speech and writing, deliberative teaching encourages students to re-conceptualize themselves as existing always in complex networks of actors. In the everyday talk of their daily interactions, students come to reevaluate the contours of deliberative contexts, recognizing a greater variety of communicative action as meaningful to democratic life.

I strove to introduce students in my classes to a variety of public talk and writing, framing it explicitly as deliberative, especially where that might not be immediately apparent. Conversations among friends or family; reading, viewing, and posting on social media networks; participation in sites of community life—I believe that wide variety of media and modalities of communication are necessary to making deliberative writing classrooms meaningful and successful. This is even more true when more than just “academic” modes of communicating are constitutive of the democratic life that we're trying to help students engage in more reflectively, and with greater awareness of the rhetorical resources they bring to bear on that life. I discovered that many, not to say most, students see themselves as passive subjects of democracy who make little impact on public affairs, and whose representatives and elected officials bear little resemblance to them and have little to say that reflects their values and voices. The outcome of any given election does little to change this perspective one way or the other. This would be distressing if it weren't obvious by looking at the composition of state and local legislative bodies. Students as a group tend to occupy a position of powerlessness—they are seen as still

being in preparation for “real life,” and many are still excluded from official democratic processes due to their age, despite bearing the (long-term) consequences of policy-making right now. Many also are denied citizenship and access to the social resources that status is meant to confer. In short, there are many pressures and conditions under which students labor that make them keenly aware of the *limits* of the agency afforded them and attributed them from official sites, democratic, rhetorical, or otherwise. Where composition instruction is poised to make serious inroads is in helping students discover, invent, and ultimately leverage a greater variety of rhetorical, semiotic, social, and political resources they may already possess *as democratic discourses*; that is, we can help them to recognize and make more attributions of agency among themselves and their communities, discovering new *affordances* they have as intersubjective agents in democratic life.

### *Citizenship*

A pedagogy that assumes all students have access to or experience an equal life as citizens is dangerous. Most teachers, and especially those at large universities with significant international student populations, may expect to occasionally have non-citizen students in their classes. In these cases, however, those students’ status is not a matter of contention; the opportunity to study abroad is typically celebrated, and whether international students intend to remain in the country post-college doesn’t bear on their status as citizens with a connection *somewhere*. Far less visible, unless they choose to disclose their status, are undocumented students. The tendency in public discussions of undocumented persons is to treat them almost exclusively in terms of, almost metonymically, *as being* this status. But, as some excellent recent books by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio and Roberto G. Gonzales reveal, undocumented persons are not a monolith, they are a population as diverse and complex as any other in America



(Gonzales 2016; Villavicencio 2020). These students have been present in college classrooms for decades, but in light of recent public debate about legislation such as the DREAM Act and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, the position of these students in our classrooms has renewed significance for teachers. When we center citizenship as an endpoint of college education, it can amount to making false promises, offering students access to a lifeworld to which they may never be fully allowed to realize, either legally or through the daily oppressions of a dominant culture.

The concept of citizenship carries with it unspoken assumptions about language, culture, and race. Advancing citizenship as an unambiguous good and as the proper *telos* of education runs the risk of reinforcing existing structures of exclusion and oppression—what feminist critic Amy Brandzel calls the “normative subjectivities” of citizenship. These are, she argues, “based in whiteness, settler coloniality, heterosexuality, maleness, affluence, and able-bodiedness” (3). Recalling the critique of Karma Chavez detailed in Chapter Three, we cannot ignore that citizenship is commonly and widely understood to be wedded to legal concepts of status and state recognition, and that it is, as she writes, “a product of modern state development and also of the colonial creation of national borders” (165). To the extent that citizenship is identified, tacitly or otherwise, with such exclusive norms, then the search for what is *common* to all citizens will always lead to frustration, disaffection, distrust, and to the maintenance of strong boundary criteria for inclusion in “the people.”

Rhetoric and composition studies continues to develop its relationship to democracy in the scholarship and teaching of our practitioners. From within the now widely acknowledged “public turn” (Mathieu 2005; Farmer 2013) in composition, a growing number of academics are envisioning a “political turn,” in which the discipline makes an explicit commitment to a

political mission. In the first major foray that address the current political moment, the editors of *Writing Democracy: The Political Turn In and Beyond the Trump Era*, Shannon Carter, Deborah Mutnick, Jess Pauszek, and Steve Parks, make the case for such a turn, aiming with their collection “to contribute to efforts to reclaim (or redefine) democracy as an egalitarian, inclusive political economic system that supports human and all planetary life and well-being” (3). These authors frame this turn as a political movement, with the goal of creating “a strategic roadmap for how to reclaim the progressive and political possibilities of our field in response to the “twilight of neoliberalism” (Cox and Nilsen), ascendent right-wing nationalism at home (Trump) and abroad (LePen, Golden Dawn, UKIP), and hopeful radical uprisings (Black Lives Matter, Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring)” (*Writing Democracy Project* n.p.). Within this roiling social and political landscape, it seems citizenship itself is up for debate: who counts, who belongs, who matters. In the wake of the 2020 presidential election, we have seen almost immediate calls for unity from across news media (“As President-Elect Joe Biden Doubles Down” 26 Nov 2020; “Biden Urges Unity” 25 Nov 2020; “Yes, There is a Common Ground” 16 Dec, 2020). Many people on both ends of the political spectrum, however, are finding it increasingly difficult to imagine a political future working cooperatively with their opponents. For those on the left, especially, a return to the pre-Trump (arguably pre-Obama) status quo of bipartisanship is itself an abdication of the responsibility to push the arc of American history in the direction of social justice and greater democracy. It was, after all, that status quo that led us into interminable, unjust wars, oversaw the increasingly rapid erosion of the social safety net, and the explosion of the carceral state and for-profit prison systems. What are we to do if we truly can’t find anything common among our diverse American communities?

If ever there was a time in living memory when national unity seemed an unobtainable goal, it is now. The experiences of my students practicing deliberative ways of communicating across difference, however, points me toward the possibility of abandoning this search. These students did not self-consciously frame their deliberative writing and speaking in terms of their citizenship, and they recognize themselves as participating in a democratic life with others who may not share the same legal status as them. Jake recognized the long history of exclusion from political power that the African American community has faced, and nevertheless finds the exercise of deliberative communication a successful, even thrilling, way to engage with the larger culture to make sure the needs of his community are heard and addressed. “It sounds like there's a possibility,” he explained,

You see in there, that being able to deliberate well or having some practice in this has the potential to help if there's conflict between communities or if there are communities that don't...maybe are adjacent but don't really see each other in a real way, that if people are able to cross those boundaries and have conversations about issues. Yeah, that's basically what I'm trying to say. But like, just like a chance for life, things to be more like for people to understand each other better. (Jake interview)

Maddy, during her interview, wrestled with the notion of the “common good,” wanting to maintain some space in which, not common identities or perspectives existed, but in which diverse people understood the very process of identifying, respecting, and allowing for our differences to inform public discussions as constituting a common good. She expanded, “not everyone's going to agree on every single point. But if we can get to a space where it's being utilized for the common good of everybody, I think that's really the point in getting everyone's voices heard, as well, in a way. [I think it's] fair to say that one of the big values of

[deliberation], anyway, is in discovering new perspectives that otherwise might be marginalized or unheard” (Maddy interview). These student and others in my classes began to approach the topics and issues we examined from a position of openness to difference in experience. What in some cases appeared initially as mere partisanship, or one “side” of an issue having the facts while the other ignored them, they came to see as representing the complexity of values and perspectives informing people’s decision-making. They can come to see, with some practice, that finding a common starting ground or common goal for public deliberation is likely futile, and liable only to frustrate and derail those discussions. Further, finding something common, in most cases, is an *undesirable* goal, as it inevitably courts exclusions and leads to the omittance or erasure of meaningful aspects of some individual’s experience.

A deliberative pedagogy founded on a robust understanding of democratic interagency, or the exercise of political freedom to engage in intersubjective world-building, relieves us of the need to look for commonality, or even to consider the citizen as the primary agent of democracy, and instead centers the practices and processes that truly characterize democracy as a mode of life: “a cacophonous democracy in which we regularly encounter difference and disagreement as constitutive of democratic action itself” (Ferguson 160). Through learning about, practicing, and reflecting upon deliberative communication as it appears in the varied contexts of daily life, students are encouraged to expand the horizons of political life. Making such practices central to composition and rhetoric education helps us out of the bind of teaching *for* citizenship. It enables us to emphasize communication and participation across difference, to stop seeking a mythical unity and instead approach public problems through ongoing processes of deliberative exploration and discussion rooted in the lived experiences of all the people and communities affected.

### *Final Thoughts*

I have been challenged, in writing this dissertation, to examine the political commitments that I have, unfortunately, been inexcusably lax in supporting through direct action, advocacy, and participation. I have been content to offer critique where the political realities of injustice require more of us. I find myself in Nancy Welch's critique of postmodern academics, whom she argues have avoided the need to take concrete stands on public issues (*Living Room* 58-60). Welch directly tackles the problem of inaction in her book, arguing that "when we remove the tension between exposition and assertion we fall short of teaching all that's needed both to analyze and go up against systems of oppression, to assess a situation, and when needed take a side" (70). In my introductory chapter, I asked whether there was enough of public meaning and value in my teaching to satisfy this moral imperative. My sincere hope is that by practicing the deliberative pedagogy I lay out in these pages, I have moved myself closer to answering "yes." But, remembering Freire's definition of praxis for critical transformation, more is needed. More action, involving students in meaningful deliberations about the structure and goals of their education and about problems they face in their lives outside the university. More reflection, continuing my research into democratic practices and ways of communicating that further the aims of social justice. Learning and education are ongoing processes. As I continue to learn more about democratic deliberation and how my students engage with it in new, hopefully unexpected, ways, I also intend for them to continue learning as they apply what they have learned in the rest of their university careers, and in the social and professional lives as members of a complex democracy.

A course that makes public deliberation and democracy central to its goals should emerge from the local conditions of the university it is situated in—social, political, and material.

Preparing course materials from local and student newspapers, university archives, and community organizations enables an instructor to foster discussions and writing about public issues rooted in local experiences. Students are encouraged and supported to connect their ideas about democracy to issues they may be directly involved with every day, rather than whatever hot-button national issues are dominating the media. Two examples that students in my courses particularly connected with were the development of the Milwaukee Hop, a streetcar system serving limited areas of Milwaukee's downtown commercial areas, and the debate and eventual decision to allow the city of Waukesha, which lies outside of the Great Lakes Watershed, to access water from Lake Michigan for municipal needs. Both projects generated considerable controversy and public discussion, drawing in participants reflecting a wide array of interests and perspectives. The Hop system was proposed as a way to stimulate commercial and economic growth in the downtown area, eventually to spread outward to Milwaukee's residential neighborhoods. Despite the intention to "further [enhance] Milwaukee's cool factor and its world-class corporations, cultural attractions, educational institutions and architecture" ([thehopmke.com/what-the-hop/](http://thehopmke.com/what-the-hop/)), the project drew criticism for focusing public funding on relatively affluent areas of the city. Many working-class people who keep those world-class buildings running were left with long commutes and no access to the new amenity. The Waukesha water access project similarly saw a contest of viewpoints, with many people and organizations speaking out and producing texts and media about the potential environmental costs of creating such a large new draw on Lake Michigan's resources, and introducing a new avenue of pollution through the return of treated water the lake basin, regardless of what public water needs would be served. Both cases generated a wealth of news reports, opinion pieces, radio and broadcast features, and discussion across social media, among other useful textual

artifacts. These kinds of local materials can be compiled as a course packet for distribution, offering students significant coverage of the issue through a variety of sources, or assign students a brief research writing project asking them to explore local sources of information and develop a sense of the multiple interests weighing on a topic of public concern. In either case, developing a sense of how multiple genres they discover, and eventually create for themselves, contribute to public deliberations makes concrete the lesson that such discussions aren't confined to the statehouse or congress.

Many students do not have much experience with academic writing or the expectations of scholarly inquiry when they enter the university. Likewise, many beginning students lack direct experience with democratic institutions or political action. To make the connection between their education and democratic life appear significant and sincere is the first challenge of the instructor employing a deliberative pedagogy. The challenge that I did not expect when I first set about my classroom research was in making democracy itself feel relevant, worthwhile, and exciting. Each of my interviewee's responses to the very first question show that they harbor serious doubts and anxieties about what democracy is, what it can reasonably achieve in the world, and whether it remains a workable model of governance in today's complex societies. I believe that democracy is at its best when it is at its most local; yet, when asked nearly any question about democracy, students' default understanding is of politics at the national level, usually as they have seen it filtered through news and social media. Within this challenge, however, also lies the opportunity for meeting it. Investing students in deep explorations of their local communities, as students but also as members with a stake in the social life of those communities, aids them in developing the new types of democratic sensibilities that I believe are necessary to overcome political ennui and detachment from democratic institutions; leaving behind a search for commonality when

difference will always define us, recognition and acceptance of those differences as constitutive of democratic life, worrying less about citizenship and more about speaking from one's experience and valuing the experiences of others. Public life *can* be reinvigorated by instructing students in deliberation, in the thousand ways we write and talk every day that build the shared lifeworld of the community.



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## Appendices

### **Appendix A: Study Recruitment Script, Description, and Consent Forms**

#### Recruitment and Consent Script

Study Title: A Culture of Civic Action: Deliberative Pedagogy for Composition

We are inviting you to participate in a research study that is based on the deliberative pedagogy you're experiencing in this course. Your instructor, Trevor, has developed these methods as part of his dissertation project, and wants to collect data from this class about your experience of the course itself and of using deliberative processes more generally. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and has no bearing on your grades in this course. In fact, Trevor won't even know who has consented to participate until after the course is finished. I will be collecting these Informed Consent forms from you and storing them until the end of the term.

Participation in this project is very simple. We would like to use your responses to the Civic Agency surveys you completed and the beginning of the course and will complete again at the end. We also want permission to look at your major written work from throughout the class. Finally, we will later in the semester ask for volunteers to complete brief interviews with Trevor after the class has finished. There will be a separate Informed Consent for this part of the study that will only be sent to you if you choose to participate in the study as a whole. The interviews are the only part of the study that require any additional time on your part, otherwise everything happens within the course itself.

I'll ask you to read the Informed Consent carefully, and to please let me know of any questions you may have. If you haven't yet turned 18, you are still able to participate, but I will need a parent or guardian's signature on this form. I encourage you to take it with you if this is the case, have them sign it, and please contact me if they have questions or concerns, and then you can return the completed form to Dr. Shevaun Watson, in Curtin Hall room 406. If you are willing to participate, we thank you very much, and simply ask that you sign and date the form in the space provided on the last page.

## **You are invited to participate in a research study!**

### **Study Title**

A Culture of Civic Action: Deliberative Pedagogy for Composition

### **Researchers**

Principal Investigator: Shevaun Watson

Student Principal Investigator: Trevor Sprague

### **What is the purpose of this study?**

To explore the value of using deliberative processes as both a method for organizing and constructing composition classes and as thematic content for those classes. As deliberation requires cooperative weighing of options and promotes building consensus, it offers instructors new ways of granting students significant control over the circumstances of their own education.

### **What will I do?**

For most people, there is no additional work required from you. For this classroom-based research as part of my dissertation, I will take observations notes on our course sessions and collect your major written assignments. I will also collect the self-efficacy surveys you complete at the start and finish of the course and ask for several volunteers to complete brief interviews about your experience in the course. You just need to fill out the consent form if you are willing to have your survey responses, major written assignments, and any interview responses used for a research study. A separate consent form for participating in the interview process will be distributed later, and interviews will be conducted after the completion of the course.

### **Risks**

There is very little risk to you. Participation is voluntary. Your choice to participate (or not) has no bearing on my evaluation of your work and your course grade. The risk of a breach of confidentiality will be limited because we will not collect private identifiable information from you during the research activities. Survey responses will be anonymized after they are collected, identifiers (names or student ID numbers) will be removed from written assignments, and interviewees will be granted pseudonyms for their responses.

### **Possible benefits**

By participating in this study, you can contribute to developing teaching methods based in democratic deliberation and improve our understanding of how college-level writing and research help prepare people for active public lives.

### **Duration**

Spring 2019 semester.

### **Number of participants**

We hope to recruit up to 24 participants during this semester. A separate request for volunteers to complete interviews will be distributed later, with the hope of between 10-12 volunteers.

### **Confidentiality and Data Security**

We will not share any identifying information with others. You will be represented anonymously or given a pseudonym when appropriate. All data will be stored in a locked office or on a password protected computer, and that data will be kept indefinitely for possible use in future research studies or publications.

**Contact information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you can contact:  
Dr. Shevaun Watson at [watsonse@uwm.edu](mailto:watsonse@uwm.edu) or  
Trevor Sprague at [tsprague@uwm.edu](mailto:tsprague@uwm.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact:  
UWM's Institutional Review Board at 414-229-3173 or at [irbinfo@uwm.edu](mailto:irbinfo@uwm.edu)

**Please sign below if you are willing to participate.**

**Signatures**

You do not need to be 18 years old to participate. If you would like to participate in this study, please fill out the **two** lines below, and if under 18, have your parent or guardian do so as well:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (**Print**)

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent or Guardian (**Print** if student is under 18)

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher obtaining consent (print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Interview Consent Form

We're inviting you to continue participating in a research study by consenting to a brief one-on-one interview. Participation is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now, you can always change your mind later. There are no negative consequences, whatever you decide.

### What is the purpose of this study?

To explore the value of using deliberative processes as both a method for organizing and constructing composition classes and as thematic content for those classes. As deliberation requires cooperative weighing of options and promotes building consensus, it offers instructors new ways of granting students significant control over the circumstances of their own education.

### What will I do?

This portion of the research study involves only an interview about your experience in the English 102 course that used the processes of democratic deliberation to build and organize the course.

The interviewer will ask you several questions related to your experience of the course, and your understanding of deliberation forms an important part of democratic citizenship more generally. These interviews will be audio recorded, and you won't be asked to identify yourself. The interview should take between 30-45 minutes, but may run as long as one hour based on how the conversation goes.

### Risks

There are no additional risks to this portion of the study that you have already consented to participate in. The interviews will be audio recorded, but you will not be asked to identify yourself, and the research will assign you a pseudonym whenever they reference your specific responses to interview questions in the research write-up or for future publications.

### Other Study Information

This consent form applies only to the interview process, which was previously explained in the original Informed Consent.

### Number of Participants

Although the interviews will be conducted individually, we hope for between 10-12 participants in this phase of the research.

### Confidentiality and Data Security

Who can see my data?	Why?	Type of data
The researchers	To conduct the study and analyze the data	Responses to interview questions
The IRB (Institutional Review Board) at UWM	To ensure we're following laws and ethical guidelines	Responses to interview questions

The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) or other federal agencies		
Anyone (public)	If we share our findings in publications or presentations	If we quote you directly in any written publications or conference presentations, you will be granted a pseudonym

No identifying information will be collected during the interview process.

<b>Where will data be stored?</b>	Audio recordings will be stored on the researcher’s password-protected laptop. Written transcriptions will be stored in the same way.
<b>How long will it be kept?</b>	Indefinitely

### Conflict of Interest

The interviews will be conducted by the Student Principal Investigator, who is also the instructor for the course. Consent for the interviews will be obtained by the S.P.I.’s faculty advisor, and the interviews will be conducted after the completion of the semester.

### Contact information:

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you can contact:  
 Dr. Shevaun Watson at [watsonse@uwm.edu](mailto:watsonse@uwm.edu) or  
 Trevor Sprague at [tsprague@uwm.edu](mailto:tsprague@uwm.edu).

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact:  
 UWM’s Institutional Review Board at 414-229-3173 or at [irbinfo@uwm.edu](mailto:irbinfo@uwm.edu)

### Signatures

If you have had all your questions answered and would like to participate in this study, sign on the lines below. Remember, your participation is completely voluntary, and you’re free to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants do not need to be 18 years old in order to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Participant (print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date



Name of Researcher obtaining consent (print)

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Signature of Researcher obtaining consent

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Date

## Appendix B: Course Grading Deliberation Guide, Deliberation Worksheet

### Classroom Deliberation Aid

You can use this sheet to help you clarify options and positions, consider the possible consequences or drawbacks of various choices, and to help yourself keep track of how today's discussion progresses. You can of course use other ways of note-taking instead or as well.

#### 1. Grading policy

##### Key Questions

- a. How many divisions/categories, and which?
- b. Weight of each category in final grade, and why?

	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:
Basic description			
Positives			
Drawbacks?			

Comments from others:

Key concerns:

#### 2. Assignments

##### Key Questions

- a. What kinds? Reading? Writing? Researching? Others?
- b. How many, how often?



	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:
Basic description			
Positives			
Drawbacks?			

Comments from others:

Key concerns:

3. Final Project

Key Questions

- a. How will it ensure we cover the required research element?
- b. How much flexibility can we allow for individual choice?

4.	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:
Basic description			
Positives			

Drawbacks?			

Comments from others:

Key concerns:

## English 240 Course Grading Options

**Option 1: *straight-up regular old grading. Each major component is given a “weight” in the final grade. You’ll receive a letter grade on a standard 100% scale for each component.***

- Weekly discussion lead/assignments	25%
- Midterm Paper	25%
- Final Paper	35%
- Class citizenship	15%

### Discussion Lead:

Each week, we’ll take up an issue of local or larger concern through our reading that presents opportunities to think about what challenges people working in the public sphere encounter with their efforts at communication.

Each week, you and one partner will take responsibility for leading discussion about the readings for that day. You should prepare a handful of questions based on your reading to help spark some conversation and be ready to help push things along with follow up questions. You could also approach this responsibility differently, with a small activity or exercise that might get folks thinking about the text and the issues in new ways.

### Daily/Weekly Assignments:

Each day (usually) we will have short writing assignments revolving around themes or concepts from the texts. These will normally take the form of a series of short prompts or questions for you to respond to. This writing serves a couple purposes. First, it helps prepare you for class discussion because writing is thinking, and writing literally generates new thoughts you wouldn’t have had otherwise. Second, writing, like everything, takes practice. This gives you a chance to experiment, and me a chance to provide you with formative feedback along the way. Finally, these assignments all build towards the major mid-term and final projects. You’ll be drafting material along the way, so the big things don’t feel quite so big all at once!

Daily assignments will not be graded individually, but marked complete/incomplete. Your grade for this component will represent the totality of this work.

You will receive written feedback from me on drafts of the major projects, as well as through peer-review. Evidence of substantive revision through multiple drafts of your work will be a significant factor in your grade for the two major papers. Each major paper will have it’s own assignment details, including a general rubric outlining the goals and expectations for that assignment.

**Option 2: this one follows a points-based system, where every element of the course receives a score. Your final grade will be taken as your percentage of the total available points for the course.**

Weekly Assignments—150 points (15 weeks x 10 pts each)

Discussion Lead—100 points (rubric will be provided)

Midterm Paper—250 points

Final Paper—300 points

Class Citizenship—200 points

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Total: 1000 points

A	1000-950
A-	949-920
B+	919-890
B	889-850
B-	849-820
C+	819-790
C	789-760
C-	759...

The course will still be divided into three segments, thematically, giving some shape to our work and framing the major writing projects.

Weekly readings will introduce different rhetorical situations and issues of local/national significance that impact citizens. In class we will explore how citizens and interested groups create and discover information related to these issues. This will involve discussion, as well as research and writing activities.

The Discussion Lead assignment will look the same as detailed in option 1, but I will additionally provide you with a rubric of expectations against which you'll be evaluated.

You'll see how the different points values create a similar "weighting" structure, reflecting (relatively speaking) the significance of each element to the course. The assignments themselves will largely be the same, with only slight changes to reflect the evaluation criteria. We'll also still meet individually several times in the semester for conferences to discuss your major writing projects and other relevant work.

**Option 3: a labor-based contract grading system. You use the contract details provided to make a decision for yourself about what you expect you're able to commit to over the semester.**

## Grading Contract

**“C”** -This stands for “core” requirements. This is the most basic labor that we will complete in this course.

- Complete and turn in both the midterm and final projects on time;
- Participate in a final project conference with me to develop a drafting and revision plan;
- Complete and turn in daily assignments, with no more than 5 late or missing;
- Attend class regularly and participate in individual and group activities, ideally missing no more than 4 regular class periods;
- Come prepared and actively give and receive feedback during Peer Review of written projects;

The rest of the contract explains how you may access the higher grade ranges through your rhetorical labor. You'll notice that these are basically boosting the core labor in certain ways.

**“B”** -

- No more than 2 late daily assignments, none missing;
- Practically perfect attendance (1-2 absences/late days);
- Come prepared with your self-assessments and materials to lead each of our regularly scheduled conferences;
- Demonstrate revision of your major projects.

**“A”** -

- Meet regular deadlines for all daily work and segment projects (ok, maybe 1 late assignment...)
- Participate actively in class, creating opportunities for others and showing that you take responsibility for our learning community and working collaboratively;
- Demonstrate *significant* revision, and not merely editing and proofreading, of your segment projects in the portfolio, according to your revision plan done in conference with me

## Trevor C. Sprague (he/him)

### EDUCATION

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University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, WI, Ph.D. Rhetoric and Composition Jan 2021

Dissertation: "A Culture of Civic Action: Deliberative Pedagogy for Composition"  
(Shevaun Watson, chair; Rachel Bloom-Pojar, William Keith)

My dissertation develops a new theoretical framework for teaching rhetorical democratic action and developing habits of citizenship through a deliberative pedagogy for composition. A qualitative study of multiple sections of first-year composition courses employing this pedagogy examines how public deliberative practices used as classroom methods and as thematic content develop students' democratic agency. These practices are based on a new theorization of democracy as shared discursive activity, and a critique of the perceived need for commonality as a precondition for citizenship.

DePaul University, Chicago, IL, Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse 2013-2015

University of Westminster, London, UK, M.A. English Literature and Cultural Studies 2011

Saint Olaf College, Northfield, MN, B.A. English Literature and Philosophy 2007

### PUBLICATIONS

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Sprague, Trevor and Keith, William (2018) "Review of *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*. Edited by Timothy J. Shaffer, Nicholas V. Longo, Idit Manosevitch, and Maxine S. Thomas. (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017)," *Journal of Public Deliberation*, vol. 14, no. 1.

"Characterizations of Otherness: Physiognomic Practice in Kipling's India." *The Kipling Journal* vol. 86, no. 346, 2012, 7-20.

#### Manuscripts Under Review

"Re-examining Democracy and Citizen-Making in Composition." Under review.

#### In Preparation

"It Takes a Village: Neighborhood Networks and Anti-Capital Community Rhetorics."

"'Brigadiers' and Rational Debate: Towards a Generative Agonism Online."

### HONORS AND AWARDS

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James A. Sappenfield Fellowship 2019-2020

Alice Gillam Award 2017

Chancellor's Graduate Student Award 2015-2016; 2016-2017; 2017-2018

## ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

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<b>Graduate Research Assistant</b> , Dr. Shevaun Watson, UW-Milwaukee “Teaching Research Differently: Assessing the Efficacy of an Information-Literacy Based Composition course.” 2018-2019 CCCC Research Initiative Grant, \$10,000.	Aug 2018-August 2020
<b>English 101 Program Coordinator</b> , UW Milwaukee Writing Program	Aug 2017-May 2020
<b>Teaching Mentor</b> , UW Milwaukee Writing Program	Aug 2016-Dec 2018
<b>Graduate Research Assistant</b> , Dr. Patricia Mayes, UW-Milwaukee “Agency as ‘distributed action’: Investigating the incremental, intertextual, and interactional construction of what writers do.” UWM Research and Creative Activities Support Award.	May 2016-Dec 2017
<b>Graduate Teaching Assistant</b> , UW-Milwaukee English Dept.	Aug 2015-May 2020
<b>Instructor of English</b> , ATS Institute of Technology; Chicago	Jan 2013-Aug 2015
<b>Adjunct Instructor of Communication Skills</b> , Western Technical College; La Crosse, WI	Jan 2012-Aug 2012
<b>Adjunct Instructor of English</b> , Viterbo University; La Crosse, WI	Aug 2011-Aug 2012

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

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- “Teaching Democracy without Citizens: De-centering Commonality toward Democracy-as-Activity.” Conference on College Composition and Communication, Pittsburgh, PA, 2019.
- “Public Deliberation in Composition Pedagogy” Thomas R. Watson Conference, Louisville, KY, 2018.
- “Generative Agonism and Democratic Deliberation.” Conference on College Composition and Communication, Kansas City, MO, 2018.
- “In the Crossfire: Mediated Deliberation and Contested Citizenship.” Rhetoric Society of America, Minneapolis, MN, 2018.
- Seminar, “The Rhetorical Presidency in the Post-Cold War Era.” Rhetoric Society of America Institute, Bloomington, IN, 2017.
- Workshop, “Play, Humor, and Rhetoric.” Rhetoric Society of America Institute, Bloomington, IN, 2017.
- “Stasis in *Obergefell v. Hodges*: Judicial Rhetoric and Matters of Social Justice.” Feminisms and Rhetorics Conference, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH, 2017.

“Processes of Assessment in Composition: The Politics of Media and Mode.” Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference, Milwaukee, WI, 2016.

## **COURSES TAUGHT**

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### **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**

- 240 Rhetoric, Writing and Culture: Special Topic, “Rhetoric, Democracy, Advocacy” 2018  
Topics course I developed teaching writing for public engagement, connecting the rhetorical tradition with contemporary democratic discourse.
- 102 College Writing and Research (4 sections) 2016-2017  
Second of the 2-semester sequence in first-year composition, focused on research and information literacy.
- 101 Introduction to College Writing (6 sections) 2015-2019  
First course in the 2-semester sequence, introducing college-level reading developing academic writing habits.

### **ATS Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL**

- 1010 English Composition (3 sections) 2014-2015  
Equivalent course to first-year composition, and a general education requirement for all students.
- 1005 Reading for the Sciences (2 sections) 2015  
Specially-developed course supporting students concurrently taking Anatomy and Physiology courses.
- 0910 Reading Comprehension (6 sections) 2013-2015  
Developmental literacy course for students in a professional nursing program.
- 0920 Traditional Grammar (4 sections) 2013-2015  
Writing-intensive class aimed at developing students in a professional nursing program.

### **Viterbo University, La Crosse, WI**

- 103 Composition and the Elements of Argumentation (2 sections) 2011-2012  
The first course in the 2-semester sequence of first-year writing, focused on building critical research and composition skills for undergraduate work.
- 104 Literature and Composition (1 section) 2011  
Second foundational course, providing students with a basis in the study of literature and critical response.
- 105 Accelerated Composition (1 section) 2012  
Course was developed for students with higher placement test scores, replacing the 2-course first-year writing sequence with a single semester.
- 307 Argumentative Writing (online, 1 section) 2012



An online section offered through the College of Adult Learning, examining the formal elements of argumentation.

**Western Technical College, La Crosse, WI**

English 1 (2 sections) 2012  
General education introduction to study of literatures in English, designed for transfer credit to 4-year universities.

Written Communication (2 sections) 2012  
Writing intensive course equivalent to first-year composition, designed for transfer credit to 4-year universities.

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

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Modern Language Association  
National Council of Teachers of English  
Rhetoric Society of America  
Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition

**REFERENCES**

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Dr. Shevaun Watson  
Associate Professor of English;  
Director of Composition  
UWM Department of English  
P.O. Box 413  
Milwaukee, WI 53211  
414-229-4511

Dr. Rachel Bloom-Pojar  
Assistant Professor of English;  
Rhetoric, Professional  
Communication and Community  
Engagement Program Coordinator  
UWM Department of English  
P.O. Box 413  
Milwaukee, WI 53211  
414-229-411

Dr. William Keith  
Professor of English;  
Chair, Department of Teaching and  
Learning, School of Education  
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Milwaukee, WI 53211  
414-229-4511