Composing A Public Syllabus: Writing for Movement-Building, Activism, and Social Justice

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### 1. Title: Composing A Public Syllabus: Writing for Movement-Building, Activism, and Social Justice

**Abstract:** This collaboration centers on the examination of genres of activism to construct a public-facing syllabus that explores the role of writing in activism. Public-facing syllabi have been a prominent form of political education seeking to engage communities outside of academia (Dillon, 2018). Our public syllabus will consist of three units that we argue are invaluable for social justice movements: technical communication, multimodal communication, and oral communication. All three contribute to the narrative strategy of movement-building. In a moment where movements for social justice are recognizable, prevalent, and constantly evolving (e.g., #BLM, #MeToo, #SayHerName, Indigenous Land Rights movement, Environmental/Climate Justice, etc.), this project highlights how various forms of communication contribute to the strategies and tactics of activism. It will provide organizers, activists, community members, and teachers ways into studying, teaching, and enacting writing for movement-building, activism, and social justice.

### 2. Facilitator information:

For each facilitator (your group needs at least two), include a paragraph with the following information:

[Erin Green](mailto:egreen11@umd.edu) (she/they) is a PhD Candidate in Language, Writing, and Rhetoric at the University of Maryland. Their research is about Black queer community literacies in activist movements. Erin brings expertise in community-engaged work, specifically community political education and public writing. They can be contacted via email at [egreen11@umd.edu](mailto:egreen11@umd.edu).

[Gabrielle Isabel Kelenyi](mailto:kelenyig@lafayette.edu) (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of English at Lafayette College in Easton, PA. She recently earned her PhD in Composition & Rhetoric at University of Wisconsin-Madison, where her community-engaged research focused on community literacies and writerly self-efficacy. Gabbi brings expertise in community-based teaching and research as well as experience with bringing activist frameworks into composition pedagogy and praxis to this project. She can be contacted via email at [kelenyig@lafayette.edu](mailto:kelenyig@lafayette.edu).

### 3. Primary Contact: Gabrielle Kelenyi (kelenyig@lafayette.edu)

### 4. Description (please include a Works Cited):

What are the purpose and goals of this collaboration? Who are the intended audiences? Why is this collaboration important to start? Why now?

This collaboration centers on the examination of genres of activism with the intention of constructing a public-facing syllabus that explores the role of writing in activism. Public-facing syllabi have been a prominent form of political education seeking to engage communities outside the walls of academia (Dillon, 2018). For example, in 2016 Candice Benbow curated an entire public syllabus called “The Lemonade Syllabus” after the release of Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* album. With over 200 sources, Benbow’s (2016) public syllabus provides accompanying books, songs, films, and poems that center Black womanhood. Many more—including academics, advocacy groups, organizations, and government agencies—have utilized the public syllabus as a genre to reach the public, and sometimes specific communities, and provide education and resources usually centered on justice and change (African American Intellectual History Society, 2018; Chatelain, 2014; UVA Graduate Student Coalition for Liberation, 2017; Social Science Research Council, 2020). Thus, this collaboration is important to start because composition and rhetoric are critical, yet publicly understudied or underacknowledged, components of social justice movements. In a moment where movements for social justice are recognizable, prevalent, and constantly evolving (e.g., #BLM, #MeToo, #SayHerName, Indigenous Land Rights movement, Environmental/ Climate Justice, etc.), this project would develop a public-facing syllabus that highlights how various forms of communication contribute to the strategies and tactics of activism.

Our public syllabus will consist of three units that we argue are invaluable for social justice movements: technical communication, multimodal communication, and oral communication. While different forms of communication will be examined and constructed, all three contribute to the narrative strategy of movement-building (Creative Interventions, 2023; Narrative Initiative, 2019; Racial Equity Tools, 2020). The technical communication unit will focus on the professional and technical writing needed to sustain social justice movements. These include requesting permits for demonstrations, writing petitions, and other bureaucratic documentation. The multimodal communication unit highlights ways of communicating our demand for change in various ways outside of the written word (e.g., art, music, signs, infographics, etc.). The oral communication unit interrogates the fundamental practices of social justice movements like speechwriting, protest chants, interviews, and more. Taken together, these units would aim to help organizers, activists, and community members train the next generation of change agents in the writing that powers movement-building.

Therefore, our intended audience for this collaborative project is community activists and organizers. As leaders and writers of social justice movements, their expertise and continuing education is crucial. Teacher-scholars and students in writing studies, sociology, or any social justice-oriented field are also intended audiences for this project. While our methods and orientation to this project come from writing studies, social justice is interdisciplinary. We intend for this syllabus to be used by these audiences in trainings, historical explorations of activism campaigns, and ongoing inquiry into changemaking best practices.

Our deliverable for this project would be a living public syllabus constructed in Canva. People would periodically be invited to contribute texts, media, and assignments to the document after its creation via a survey link housed on the syllabus. This project will provide community members and teachers ways into studying, teaching, and enacting writing for movement-building, activism, and social justice.

This collaboration is important to start, especially now, because of the current moments of rampant political injustice. Education and resources about enacting change are paramount for social justice movements, and we see creating and facilitating a public syllabus as just one way to achieve this goal. We believe academic stakeholders should see their work existing outside of the classroom and should commit to engaging with movements. Additionally, community members are looking for both materials to learn about movement-building, but are also looking for ways to contribute their knowledge and talent as well. We believe our project offers opportunities to accomplish all of these aims.

**References**

African American Intellectual History Society. (2018, September 8). *Prison Abolition Syllabus 2.0*. Black Perspectives. https://www.aaihs.org/prison-abolition-syllabus-2-0/

Benbow, C. (2016). *Lemonade Syllabus: A Collection of Work Celebrating Black Womanhood*. Issuu.com. https://issuu.com/candicebenbow/docs/lemonade\_syllabus\_2016

Chatelain, M. (2014, August 27). *The #Ferguson Syllabus*. Twitter. Retrieved November 13, 2023, from https://twitter.com/search?q=%14fergusonsyllabus&src=typed\_query

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Dillon, J. (2018, January 21). *Lists and public syllabi; or what the Internet ought to be good for*. #marginalsyllabus. https://marginalsyllab.us/info-updates/lists-and-public-syllabi-or-what-the-internet-ought-to-be-good-for/#:~:text=At%20its%20core%2C%20a%20public,power%20than%20informal%2C%20clickbait%20lists

Narrative Initiative. (2019). *Narrative Change: A Working Definition (and Some Related Terms)*. Narrative Initiative: Home. Retrieved November 13, 2023, from https://narrativeinitiative.org/

Racial Equity Tools. (2020). *Act, Strategies, Narrative Change*. Racial Equity Tools. Retrieved November 13, 2023, from https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/act/strategies/narrative-change

Social Science Research Council. (2020, October). *#coronavirussyllabus: a crowdsourced cross-disciplinary resource* [public-facing syllabus featuring research, writing, and initiatives relating to the coronavirus crisis]. https://covid19research.ssrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Coronavirus-syllabus\_20201019.pdf

UVA Graduate Student Coalition for Liberation. (2017, August 11). *THE CHARLOTTESVILLE SYLLABUS. ZINE #1 | by UVa Graduate Student Coalition for Liberation*. Medium. Retrieved November 13, 2023, from https://medium.com/@UVAGSC/the-charlottesville-syllabus-9e01573419d0

### 5. Annotated schedule:

What will you do when you are together? Please consult the [schedule](#_heading=h.z337ya) for the number of hours per day you have together. Zoom-only facilitators, make sure to build in lots of screen breaks. (Note that Zoom-only groups meet for slightly fewer hours than in-person groups because of the additional intensity of meeting on screen.)

#### DAY 1: THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2023

9:00 a.m.-9:30 a.m. EST: Breakfast & conference welcome

9:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m. EST: Keynote/workshop on a theme related to collaboration

11:15 a.m.-1:00 p.m. EST: Work session (includes breaks)

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| 11:15am-12pm  Think & Write - Pair- Share to review and analyze public syllabus examples  12-12:15pm  Break  12:15-1pm  Gallery walk creation and review about rhetorical moves of public syllabi to determine what we must include in our public syllabus |

1:00 p.m. EST: Lunch with your group

2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. EST: Work (includes breaks)

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| 2-3pm  Goal-setting and planning for the rest of the conference around our own public syllabus to determine the scope and goals of each 5-week unit  3-3:15pm  Break  3:15-4pm  Small and large group brainstorm discussion to determine what might be reasonable deliverables for each unit by the end of the day on Friday  4-4:15pm  Break  4:15-5pm  Set groups around each unit; begin small group work |

Optional social activity: TBD

#### DAY 2: FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2023

9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. EST: Breakfast & work session (includes breaks)

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| *\*\*These are suggested ways for small groups to use this time*.  9-10:30am  Compile open access texts and multimedia for unit’s theme  10:30-10:45am  Break  10:45am-12pm  Organize texts and multimedia into an intentional, scaffolded order |

12:00 p.m. EST: Lunch break

1:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m. EST: Work session (includes breaks)

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| *\*\*These are suggested ways for small groups to use this time*.  1-2:30pm  Develop discussion questions and/or lesson plans and/or activities to accompany the unit and its texts/ media  2:30-2:45pm  Break  2:45-4pm  Complete compilation and organization of units’ texts, media, questions, plans, and activities and begin transferring draft into polished Canva document |

Optional social activity: TBD

#### DAY 3: SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 2023

9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m. EST: Breakfast & work session (includes breaks)

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| 9-9:40am  Finish work in small groups and combining and sharing of Canva documents with the whole group  9:40-9:50am  Break  9:50-10:30am  Familiarization with all units and preparation for showcase |

10:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m. EST: Showcase of deliverables interspersed with lunch; debriefing on the collaborative process and conference (Note: Zoom participants will give asynchronous feedback via Slack on the deliverables of their in-person "project buddies.")

### 6. Modality:

Please indicate one preference.

1. Zoom (Feb 28-Mar 1)
2. **In-person (Mar 7-9)** [Note: [Question 15](#_heading=h.1ksv4uv) asks if you are interested in a hybrid option]

### 7. Number of participants:

Please estimate the minimum and maximum numbers of participants that would make sense for your group. (For budgeting purposes, we are estimating 20 people per group for a total of around 240 participants, but your project might require more or fewer people, which is perfectly fine.)

The minimum number of participants for our project would be 12 people while the maximum number of participants to create our deliverable would be 20 people.

### 8. Participant background:

Are you looking for participants with certain kinds of skills (e.g., language, artistic, technical skills), roles, backgrounds, interests, or identities?

Public syllabi are collections of materials organized to spark conversation, facilitate learning, and unpack complex themes and issues with and for intergenerational and diverse learners. Therefore, we are looking to collaborate on our project with dedicated activist-educators and lifelong learners from various backgrounds and communities, of various abilities, and with different experiences and expertise. For example, public syllabi can be presented in a variety of forms, but they must be accessible; therefore, our project would benefit from participants with artistic skills, expertise in (digital) accessibility and design, and/or website design skills. Furthermore, because our public syllabus will strive to address issues of intersectional social justice, we’d also welcome participants with experience community organizing and participating in activism. Finally, for our public syllabus to truly be usable by a diverse audience from various communities, we will prioritize featuring open access materials. As such, folks who have experience in finding, developing, and utilizing open educational resources (OER) would be of great benefit to this particular project.

### 9. Preparation:

Would participants need to read, do, and/or bring anything in advance? (As the [Timeline for Facilitators](#_heading=h.2jxsxqh) indicates, they would be informed of their group a little over a month in advance of the conference’s start.)

Since we will spend some time reviewing and analyzing sample public syllabi, we’re requesting that participants bring an example of a public syllabus that they like to Day One of the workshop. The syllabus can be in any format or modality, and participants are not required to have read the syllabus before day one.

### 10. Final-day deliverable:

What deliverable would your group share with the whole conference on the last day? It can be very rough—we recognize that these collaborations are only just beginning—but there should be at least something that your group could present.

This project will provide community members, students, and teachers ways into studying, teaching, and enacting writing for movement-building, activism, and social justice via a living public syllabus. The syllabus would feature texts, media, and activities that seek to highlight writing’s vital role in movement-building. On the final day of the conference, we would plan to have a draft syllabus prepared to share with other attendees. We would welcome feedback from other groups as well as submissions for other open access materials to feature on the syllabus via a survey link housed on the syllabus.

### 11. How will participants get credit?

Will participants be coauthors who could list a publication on their CV? Will they be credited in some other way? Please explain their role in the project and how credit will work.

Participants will be coauthors who can list the publication of the public-facing syllabus on their CV. Furthermore, participants’ names will be featured as original authors on the syllabus whereas contributors to the living syllabus after publication would have the option of including their name next to their submission on the document.

### 12. What happens after the conference?

How will the project develop after the conference? What opportunities for further collaboration will participants have?

After the conference, our public syllabus will remain available for people to view and offer recommendations. We plan to use Google Forms or Qualtrics as a way for people to submit suggestions for new OERs for the syllabus. When contributors submit their recommendations, they will have the option to be recognized on the public syllabus by name. Conference participants will share the responsibility to periodically review and update the public-facing document with the submitted suggestions twice a year. We plan to discuss this responsibility and revise this plan as necessary with participants during the conference in alignment with various Watson Conference Commitments. Finally, workshop participants will have the opportunity to explore publishing the syllabus in an open-access journal together or making it available in an online space with more traffic.

### 13. Working and learning environment:

What strategies might you use to foster an inclusive, accessible, “post-White” (Croom, 2022) environment founded in collective accountability and radical care (Johnston et al., 2022)? Feel free to make use of the [2021 Watson Conference Commitments](https://louisville.edu/conference/watson/history-and-conference-archive/conference-archive/past-conferences/2021-watson-conference/2021-watson-conference-commitments) in your planning. (We will revise them slightly for 2024.)

We will strive to use a variety of strategies to foster a positive, actively anti-racist and accessible environment within our group and at the Watson Conference. These strategies will include being thoughtful in our interactions, being participant-driven, practicing collective accountability, and pursuing mutually-beneficial outcomes for the project. First, we hope to practice being thoughtful in our interactions with people and their work by centering open access, community-derived, and community-informed resources that represent alternative, inclusive sources of knowledge in our public syllabus. Another strategy we will employ to foster an inclusive, accessible, “post-White” (Croom, 2022) environment is being participant-driven (Robinson, 2023). For example, we will remain open to reorganizing and reframing the structure of our deliverable with input from participants as well as remain open to determining opportunities for future collaboration with (rather than for) the group. We will also practice collective accountability and radical care via calling in and calling out when necessary (Johnston, Amorao, and Kim, 2022). For instance, our topics of discussion and project could engender the use of coded language around (sources of) knowledge, constructions of what a syllabus should or should not include, and tendencies to evaluate materials and contributors that are rooted in white supremacy, neoliberalism, racial capitalism, powerblindness, ableism, and diversity and inclusion rather than justice and equity. One of the ways we would seek to maintain our group, project, and collaboration as a space for learning and growth would be by practicing methods of calling out/in such as OTFD and ACTION (Cheung, Ganote, and Souza, 2021). Finally, the ethos of our project is collaborative, mutually-beneficial, and public-facing (Sano-Franchini, Sackey, and Moore, 2022). Grounding our project in these strategies enhances its potential to improve the resources of Writing Studies as a field and our commitments to study, enact, and uplift (writing for) social justice with our deliverable.

### 14. (IN-PERSON PROPOSALS ONLY) Space and material needs:

Are there any particular requirements you have for space or materials that the conference planning team might be able to help you with?

N/A