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Outreach Statement
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As a scholar & teacher of public writing, community literacy, & working-class identity, I continually seek to expand my outreach impact by pursuing work that aligns with my values & passions. In what follows, I describe three projects focused on community literacy efforts, & I summarize the outcomes & status of each project. Working outside of traditional classrooms has taught me so much about my community, my students, and myself as a teacher-scholar and an Alabamian.

Project I: Lee County Literacy Coalition

In spring 2015, I undertook training to volunteer as a tutor with the Lee County Literacy Coalition. This organization serves adult learners in Lee County & several surrounding communities. LCLC offers clients one-on-one tutoring tailored to the learner's needs; GED and ASVAB exam prep classes; & workshops to build financial, health, & computer literacies. Due to some staffing changes in the organization, I was not placed with a learner until July 2017. My learner is a sixty-year-old Valley, Alabama native named Jimmy. Since the day we met—a muggy Saturday morning at the Chambers County Library—Jimmy & I have worked steadily on the fundamentals of reading & writing. Although I have been an educator for twenty years, I had never taught someone (other than my own children) how to read & write from a pre-literate state. Jimmy has taught me a great deal in our time together—as much, if not more, than I have taught him.

Jimmy has improved a great deal, reading at a second-grade level (by my rough estimate), & writing with intermediate accuracy & fluency. He struggles with some learning disabilities, but his determination & positive attitude are inspiring & contagious. LCLC Tutors not only help learners with literacy skills, but they also assist them with specific literacy-related tasks. Jimmy & I are working on paperwork to obtain, at last, his US Veterans' Administration medical benefits (despite not being able to read or write anything but his name, he served for a time in the Alabama National Guard); helping him study for the written exam to obtain a driver's license; & reading the Bible for himself rather than depending on his pastor to interpret it in sermons. Initially, I had hoped to find a way to incorporate my experiences with Jimmy & LCLC into a published research study. However, I did not apply for Institutional Review Board approval beforehand; furthermore, I do not wish to jeopardize the trust I have built with Jimmy by using him as a research subject. That being said, I wish to use the tutoring experience to write about the value of community literacy tutoring: not only for educators, but also for anyone in the community (a project I describe below). Working with Jimmy has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional life, & I hope to see him achieve all of his goals.

In addition to working as a tutor with LCLC, I have guided my ENGL 4040: Public Writing students at Auburn University in working with community organizations such as LCLC. For example, two students in my spring 2016 class collaborated with (now retired) LCLC Executive Director Sue Edge on two projects that addressed organizational needs & goals. Students in the class produced 1) audio public service announcements for WEGL & other local radio stations, designed to inform potential clients about LCLC's free services; & 2) a direct mail kit to solicit donations. According to LCLC, the rate of "functional illiteracy" in Lee County, Alabama is approximately 13 percent. The need for services is dire, but the organization needs both resources & clients in order to see positive program outcomes.

The experiences of tutoring & of facilitating student work with LCLC have led me to an idea for a research project. I want to perform ethnographic research on LCLC & the adult clients the coalition serves in order to establish what is being done to address the literacy crisis in our community, as well as what impact LCLC has had on the problem. This primary research would involve a longitudinal, IRB-approved study consisting of observations, interviews, grounded research (coding data for patterns), & analysis of documents. This project could provide a deeper understanding of the intractable problem of insufficient literacy achievement in our information age—a crisis affecting people in every area of their lives. Furthermore, this study would provide useful program outcome data not only for LCLC, but also for other community literacy programs that serve a similar demographic. Both outcomes potentially have significant impact on efforts to improve literacy & numeracy among target populations.

Project II: The Alabama Prison Arts & Education Project

During my first semester at Auburn back in 2014, I reached out to Kyes Stevens, Founder & Director of the Alabama Arts & Education Project, which is part of Auburn's College of Architecture, Design, & Construction. APAEP is a nationally-recognized program whose work I had heard about before I was hired. After undergoing training workshops, in spring 2016 I taught a creative nonfiction writing class at Julia Tutwiler Prison for Women in Wetumpka, Alabama. As part of an IRB-approved study, Ms. Stevens asked me to collect data on students' skills & needs as part of the program's bid to become a site for the Federal Pell Grant Second Chance initiative. In fall of that year, Auburn was selected as one of only 67 pilot sites for the US Department of Education's Pell Grant Second Chance Initiative. This program funds one-third of tuition costs for students who qualify academically (the remainder of educational costs are paid for through grants & philanthropic donations). Second Chance degree students now have the opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Science with a dual focus in Business & Human Development & Family Studies (HDFS).

Again, I worked under the auspices of APAEP's IRB-approved program. Thus, if I were to publish my work, I would need to collaborate with Ms. Stevens. Of course, data collection has been extensive & time-consuming. The scholarly output from this data collection will likely include at least one of the following possibilities:

- 1) a collaborative journal article with Ms. Stevens about the Second Chance Pell program & APAEP's role in the Fair Chance Education Pledge. a scholarly monograph or edited collection about prison literacy programs founded and/or staffed by teacher-scholars in rhetoric & composition;
- 2) an IRB-approved ethnographic study of learners at Tutwiler Prison for Women, focusing on program outcomes in the areas of literacy acquisition & reduction of recidivism.

Ms. Stevens has asked me to teach with the program again. My experience with the students was, on the whole, extremely positive. I look forward to working with APAEP staff & the students again in the near future.

Project III: Programs for Rural Youth in East Alabama

The third area in which I have worked also has to do with community literacy—in this case, underserved young adults in the Alabama Black Belt. As we Alabamians know all too well, rural Black Belt youth, particularly young people of color, face serious obstacles to success: high poverty rates; poor educational outcomes; increasing incidence of preventable diseases (including tropical parasites); high unemployment rate; lack of access to public resources such as social programs; poor water quality, inadequate healthful food, & proper sanitation; & high rates of incarceration. A few years ago, I heard about a successful grant-funded program that had been located on the campus of Tuskegee University in the 1970s. A friend shared the Department of Justice report touting two pilots, including the Tuskegee (“Moton Hall”) program, & we talked about the possibilities of putting together an interdisciplinary team of investigators from Auburn & Tuskegee Universities.

Although I have not finalized the team, I have shared ideas & built relationships at Auburn University with professors from the Departments of Psychology; Educational Foundations, Leadership, & Technology; Rural Sociology & Agricultural Economics; & the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service. I am seeking a collaborator at Tuskegee; I have made some headway on this goal through meeting a retired professor who started a community gardening non-profit. I have networked to find several other professionals in the Macon County area who are willing to help me find ways to perform needs assessment research with & obtain buy-in from local residents using a community development model of research & organizing.

By meeting with grant experts & taking several grant writing workshops, I have located several Federal grants to pursue: 1) the US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs in partnership with the National Institute of Justice offers the “W.E.B. DuBois Program of Research on Race & Crime”; 2) the US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) offers “Smart on Juvenile Justice: Systemwide Reform & Reinvestment Initiative”; and 3) the US Department of Agriculture funds a “Rural Cooperative Development Grant.” These grants are designed to fund either the research that goes into program design or the programs themselves. Based on the results of our research, we could offer programs to build skills & confidence—such as mentoring, literacy instruction, after-school tutoring, book discussion groups, art classes, wellness resources, cultural outings, outdoor recreational activities, primary research projects, oral presentation practice, entrepreneurial practice, & sustainable farming techniques.

Of course, this youth project requires many resources: people, time, money, space—that is why heretofore other research projects have been prioritized in my workflow. Once I obtain tenure, I hope to pursue this project, which encapsulates the nature of my teaching, research, outreach, & service passions.

I am excited about the prospects all these opportunities hold for my development as a teacher-researcher.