

**IECE Grant
Final Report
SASC Writing Program
May 24, 2006**

Project Description

The SASC Writing Program received a grant to strengthen the civic engagement components of our lower-division writing course, ARSC 1080. Funds were used for a week-long retreat with the instructors and instructor assistants (IAs) to create a more solid framework for thinking about connections between writing, research, and civic engagement. The retreat was held June 27-July 1, 2005.

The result of the retreat was to integrate the idea of civic engagement throughout ARSC 1080 and throughout our upper-division course, ARSC 3100, as well. This integration takes three forms:

- We have a list of key skills our courses teach (see attached) and to that list we added, “understand texts as forms of civic engagement.” In short, civic engagement is now one of the central ways we read all texts in our classes.
- Our IAs created an in-class workshop on civic engagement which they conduct early in the semester. We found it useful to show students what “civic engagement” looks like through the eyes of other students. (see attached PowerPoint presentation)
- Students conduct lengthy research projects and give in-class presentations about their research. As part of their presentations, students are required to talk about the degree of civic engagement embodied in their work. Some students choose to make direct civic action part of their project where others elect to frame their research more narrowly.

In addition to the changes in our writing curricula, our IECE grant also has shaped one of our department’s largest programs, the McNeill Academic Program. Helping students be more civically engaged has been added to the program’s mission statement.

Impact

The project had direct impact on 223 people: 6 instructors; 16 instructor assistants; and 201 students (132 in ARSC 1080 and 69 in ARSC 3100). The project had indirect impact on the staff (10) and students (~140 per year) of the McNeill Academic Program, as a result of the revision of the program’s mission.

Assessment

The project was implemented nearly exactly as originally proposed. We did alter the distribution of funds somewhat, directing more money to the instructors rather than the instructor assistants, when all of our long-time lecturers became available to participate. (We did receive prior IECE approval for this shift.) The retreat was held early last summer and we generated the materials and outcome we originally envisioned.

Three developments were unexpected. First, rather than requiring every student to put her/his research into “action,” as originally envisioned, we now require that students articulate the kind and degree of civic engagement in their research. The faculty felt that students would be more thoughtful about civic engagement if the choice were left to each of them, rather than imposed by the program. Second, the instructor assistants now conduct the workshop described above, and they created a PowerPoint presentation which has generated thoughtful discussion from the students. This IA role was not part of our original proposal but has been a useful outcome. Finally, we did not anticipate the interest from the other staff in the McNeill Academic Program. We invited the non-writing staff to attend the first day of our retreat, and they did so enthusiastically. They helped the writing faculty see our work in the context of the overall development of students in McNeill, and in turn, the writing staff has helped to reshape the mission of the program as a whole. Civic engagement is now integrated more fully not only in our writing classes but into our overall model of student development.

The grant from the IECE has produced a significant shift which should be sustained over a number of years. Civic engagement is now a central part of our courses, and will remain an important part of our work for the foreseeable future. Students in SASC’s Writing Program should be well prepared to take up “civic engagement” when they encounter the idea in other classes. Our inquiry into what “counts” as “civic” and “engagement” opens space for further thinking about how they will engage in their own lives and communities.