

RCAH 292A: Engagement Pro-Seminar

Section 001 Spring 2014 Stephen L. Esquith Office hours: by appointment	Tues, 10:20 AM – 12:10 PM Snyder C202 esquith@msu.edu 355-0212
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Big Ideas for All Ages

Many people and institutions have inspired the work of the RCAH. Among them are educational programs in which civic engagement has played a central role and also community programs whose goals included educating citizens for democracy. In this pro-seminar we will begin with two examples of the latter: Hull-House in Chicago founded by Jane Addams at the turn of the 20th century and The Highlander Folk School in rural Tennessee founded by Myles Horton three decades later. We will discuss how the RCAH commitment to civic engagement builds upon them.

We will also move out of the classroom and learn something of what it is like to do civic engagement with local RCAH community partners. This can be an inspiring and at times somewhat frightening journey. The American poet and educator William Stafford refers to this kind of experience in his poem “For My Young Friends Who Are Afraid.”

There is a country to cross you will
find in the corner of your eye, in
the quick slip of your foot--air far
down, a snap that might have caught.
And maybe for you, for me, a high, passing
voice that finds its way by being
afraid. That country is there, for us,
carried as it is crossed. What you fear
will not go away: it will take you into
yourself and bless you and keep you.
That's the world, and we all live there.

In addition to Addams and Horton, we will read from Stafford's collection of poems and essays, *You Must Revise your Life*. In that collection he provides valuable advice for us as we explore the kind of work that we will be doing with our community partners this semester: listening carefully, revising, and learning about the "big ideas" that are so important to our common lives.

We will use these texts and other selected writings to help us think about the role of civic engagement in higher education in general and in the RCAH in particular. We will also use them as guides as we venture forth into "the world we all live in."

Books Required for Purchase

We will read Jane Addams' famous memoir, *Twenty Years at Hull House* detailing her efforts to create a distinctive settlement house program in a working class, immigrant neighborhood in Chicago that would educate and empower the local residents. We will also read several essays by Addams on the most perplexing problems she faced in her lifetime as a democratic social reformer. We will read selections from *The Long Haul* by Myles Horton, which chronicles the creation of the Highlander Folk School as an educational center for union organizers and civil rights activists in the early and middle part of the 20th century.

Because reading and writing poetry and prose will be such an important part of our "Big Ideas" engagement projects with our community partners, we will read Stafford's poems and essays in *You Must Revise Your Life* with special care. All students should purchase these four books for the course. Other shorter readings will be assigned and made available on the ANGEL site for the course. These readings can be found under the "Lessons" heading in the horizontal menu bar.

- Jane Addams, *Twenty years at Hull-House*, Signet, #9780451518439
- Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics*, University of Illinois Press, #0252070232
- William Stafford, *You Must Revise Your Life*, University of Michigan Press, #9780472093717
- Myles Horton, *The long haul: an autobiography*, Teachers College Press, #9780807737002

Big Ideas for All Ages

To make this introduction to civic engagement more concrete, we will be working with several groups of young people and adults at the Edgewood Village Community Center in East Lansing, The Advent House in Lansing, and possibly other community centers. The "Big Ideas" we will be discussing will include:

- What is justice?
- What is art?
- What makes life meaningful?
- What is happiness?
- What is courage?
- What is friendship?
- What makes something beautiful?
- And even what makes you the same person today that you were yesterday or will be tomorrow!?

Learning goals

RCAH students will learn several related skills during the semester. You will learn

- to elicit and clarify questions about "big ideas"
- to lead respectful and enjoyable discussions about "big ideas"
- to encourage students and adults to be self-reflective about their assumptions and opinions on "big ideas"
- to think and write reflectively about this experience
- to work collaboratively to design exercises and performances that embody "big ideas"

Classroom Format

Our section of RCAH 292A will meet once each week in the classroom on Tuesday, 10:20 AM - 12:10 PM. The format will be a learning circle (a term first coined by Myles Horton) in which students will be presented with several organizing questions or issues for discussion, sometimes in small groups but usually in one large circle.

The distinctive feature of a learning circle is that it is open to the ideas of all the members of the circle and encourages participation. Participants are always respectful of the views of others, no matter how much they may disagree with them. The learning circle is not a debating contest or a series of monologues. Its purpose is to explore difficult questions in a mutually respectful dialogue.

The Civic Engagement Projects

In addition to our regularly scheduled classroom meeting, each student will also spend 2-4 hours each week with one of our community partners. Some students will work with youngsters (3rd and 4th graders), and others will work with adults, including senior citizens. We will use picture books where they are appropriate (e.g., Shel Silverstein’s *The Giving Tree*), videos, poems, and artwork, depending upon the interests and abilities of the partners. The goal is to use these texts and the activities prompted by them to better understand the “big ideas” that interest these participants most.

Organizing your time with these community members will require some careful planning which we will address in the first two weeks of the semester. The civic engagement work will begin at the beginning of February and extend, once a week, until the end of the semester. The Final Project for the course will include an exhibit of the work done by the community partners.

Assessment of Student Learning

The first short in-class writing assignment is designed to help you assess where you are with regard to the main ideas in the course. Then, there will be three major writing assignments in addition to the Engagement Final Project. They all involve student brainstorming in class on the topic choices for each essay, peer commenting, and extensive revision. They require that students find their own voice, develop their own arguments, and defend those arguments using material from the course.

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| • In-class Writing Assignment | 10% |
| • First Essay | 25% |
| • Second Essay | 25% |
| • Final Project | 20% |
| • Final Reflection Essay | 20% |

More specific directions and topics for each writing assignment will be handed out in advance of its due date.

Assessing student learning in a civic engagement course such as this also includes input from community partners. We will use forms developed by the MSU Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement to collect information from the community partners regarding student promptness, attendance, and several measures of the quality of student work. In addition, students themselves will have an opportunity to fill out a questionnaire on their civic engagement project halfway through the semester so that mid-course corrections can be made, if necessary.

Policy on Academic Freedom and Integrity

Article 2.3.3 of the *Academic Freedom Report* states that "the student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the University's *General Student Regulations* 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades, and the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades, which are included in *Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide*, apply to student conduct in all RCAH courses.

Policy on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor, call 353-9642 (voice) or 355-1293 (TTY).

Policy on religious observance

Please inform me within the first two weeks of the semester if you will need to miss class for religious observance so that we can work out alternative arrangements.

Calendar of Topics, Common Readings, and Assignments

Introduction: The RCAH Civic Engagement Model and "Big Ideas"

During these first three weeks we will talk about the meaning of civic engagement and how we will be approaching it in our “Big Ideas” course. This will include distinguishing several senses of civic engagement from volunteer charitable activity to more political empowerment. We will discuss why we meet in small circles (“learning circles”), and what we can learn from the story of arguably the first civically engaged teacher, Socrates. Then, we will look at another form of engagement (poetry) that Socrates thought he was rebelling against. It will be instructive to compare Socrates’ engagement with his fellow citizens and William Stafford’s account of how he has engaged the world through poetry.

Required Common Readings:

- Caryn McTighe Musil, "Educating for Citizenship," *Peer Review*, Vol.5, no.3, Spring 2003, ANGEL
- Myles Horton, "A Circle of Learners" in *The Myles Horton Reader*, ed. Dale Jacobs, University of Tennessee Press, 2003, ANGEL
- Michael Katz, “The Lost Dialogues: Mr. Socrates,” *Philosophy Now*, May/June 2009, ANGEL
- William Stafford, *You Must Revise Your Life*

Date	Topic/Activity	Common Reading Assignments	Other Assignments And Events
Tues, Jan 7	Civic Engagement and Learning Circles	Musil, Horton	
Tues, Jan 14	The Socratic Method	Katz	
Tues, Jan 21	Writing Poetry and Prose	Stafford, pp.3-22, 30, 41-44, 58-66	In Class Writing Assignment

Part I: Hull-House and Democratic Civic Engagement

Jane Addams lived an extraordinary life in which both her theories and practices of civic engagement developed in complex ways. Like Socrates and Stafford, she never lost her respect for the people she worked with and what she could learn from her collaborative work with them. She devoted her life to make their “acquaintance” along a common road where they could observe and share each other’s burdens. “Perplexity” was the word she coined for the unavoidable challenges that she faced on this road.

Required Common Readings:

- Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, Signet, #9780451518439
- Jane Addams, *Democracy and Society Ethics*, ANGEL
- Jane Addams, "A Modern Lear" ANGEL
- Jane Addams, "The Devil Baby" (parts 1 and 2), ANGEL

Date	Topic/Activity	Reading Assignments	Other Assignments and Events
Tues, Jan 28	"The Snare of Preparation," Settlements, Poverty, and Labor	<i>TYHH</i> , Preface, Chapters 1-10 pp.vii-168	
Tues, Feb 4	Immigration and Politics	<i>TYHH</i> , Chapters 11-14 pp.169-238	
Tues, Feb 11	Social Clubs, Art, and Education	<i>TYHH</i> , Chapters 15-18. pp.239-310	
Tues, Feb 18	Charity and Empowerment	<i>DSE</i> , Intro, Chapter 1 pp.5-34; "The Devil Baby" "A Modern Lear"	
Tues, Feb 25	The Family and the Household	<i>DSE</i> , Chapters 2-3 pp.35-62	
Fri, Feb 28		First Essay Due	

Further reading:

- Jane Addams, *The Long Road of Women's Memory*
- Jane Addams, *A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil*
- Maurice Hamington, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Jane Addams*
- Nicholas V. Longo, *Why Community Matters: Connecting Education with Civic Life*
- Louise W. Knight, *Jane Addams: Spirit in Action*

Part II: The Highlander School and Democratic Civic Engagement

Myles Horton was disarmingly honest when he couldn't understand something and relentlessly committed to listening to the experiences of working class people who he believed best understood the challenges they faced. He acknowledged as inspirations for his own work the writings of Karl Marx, the poet Percy Shelley, and the Bible. In his autobiography *The Long Haul* he tells the story of his own political education as well as the story of the major social movements of the 20th century in the U.S.

Required Common Readings:

- Myles Horton, *The Long Haul: an autobiography*, Teachers College Press,
- John Wallace, "The Use of a Philosopher: Socrates and Myles Horton" *Beyond the Ivory Tower*, eds. C. David Lisman and Irene E. Harvey, ANGEL
- Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Chapter 2, ANGEL

Date	Topic/Activity	Reading Assignments	Other Assignments And Events
Tues, Mar 11		Wallace; <i>LH</i> , 1-87	
Tues, Mar 18		<i>LH</i> , 88-160	
Tues, Mar 25		<i>LH</i> , 161-228; Freire	
Fri, Mar 28			Second Essay Due

Part III: Poetry and Civic Engagement

In this section we return to our poet/educator William Stafford to read more of his poetry and prose. Specifically, we will compare how he recommends that we read and teach poetry in a non-directive way as a performance with what has worked best for us with our community partners this semester.

Required Common Readings:

- William Stafford, *You Must Revise Your Life*

Date	Topic/Activity	Reading Assignment	Other Assignments and Events
Tues, April 1	Poetry and Ethics	Stafford, 25-38, 67-86	
Tues, April 8	Teaching, Learning, and Performing	Stafford, 45-53, 89-118	

Part IV: Final Project

During the last two weeks of class students will be working with their community partners to polish up and prepare their final public presentations. In addition to the presentation of the work itself, students will write individual reflection essays on the civic engagement project in light of the other readings and discussions in the course.

Dates	Topic/Activity	Reading Assignment	Other Assignments and Events
Tues, April 15			Final Projects Due
Tues, April 22			Final Projects Due
Tues, April 29 7:45-9:45 AM			Final Reflection Essay Due