

SPRING 2021

COMMUNITY WRITING NEWSLETTER

Official Newsletter of English 3020, Community & Writing,
Wayne State University



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**COMMUNITY
WRITING@WSU**

RYAN FLAHERTY, LECTURER, DEPT. OF ENGLISH

Welcome to the return edition of Wayne State University's Community Writing Program Newsletter! Community Writing-- or ENG 3020-- is part of the Composition and Rhetoric Program within WSU's English Department.

English 3020 pairs academic research practices with community engagement and service. Inside this issue, you'll find short profiles of the work our students and instructors completed, even amid the constant challenges of the Covid-19 global pandemic. In this edition (and going forward), you'll also find images from the field and perspectives from the minds of some of our most committed English 3020 students. We invite your feedback. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to email me at fn0268@wayne.edu. Thanks for reading!

COMMUNITY WRITING @ WSU

Our Courses & Our Work

ENG 3020: Community and Writing: Writing Abolition

A partnership with Hamtramck Free School

Walter Lucken IV, Graduate Teaching Assistant

In partnership with Hamtramck Free School, this course connected undergraduates with prison abolition organizations and community members affected by the carceral state, collaborating on documents intended to inform other undergraduate students about prison abolition-related issues, particularly how these issues relate to students' future careers in the professions, sciences, and public policy. We read Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* together, along with selections from abolitionist thinkers and activists, and collaborated on drafting and user testing throughout the entire semester, ending with another round of edits and a now-finished first draft of an introductory guide to prison abolition. Best of all, a few students plan to continue working with Hamtramck Free School over the summer to create the final version of the document. All in all, the course was a resounding success.

ENG 3020: Community and Writing: Service IRL and URL

D-Town Farms, Freedom House Detroit, Michigan Urban Farming Institute, Racquet Up! Detroit, Auntie Na's Harvesting Unity

Ryan Flaherty, Lecturer

This semester, students in Ryan Flaherty's English 3020 course worked together to both locate community-based organizations and serve these organizations in either a face to face or virtual capacity. We re-started a partnership with Freedom House Detroit, with students serving on committees to plan the Asylum-Seeker housing organization's annual fundraiser. Other students continued our work with D-Town Farms, Auntie Na's Harvesting Unity, Racquet Up Detroit, Michigan Urban Farming Initiative, and Forgotten Harvest. Interrupted by the resurgence of Covid-19 mid-February to the present, students got creative and sought online service opportunities. Our biggest contribution this semester was probably to Open Minds Book Club-- a nonprofit based out of Washington D.C. which publishes the work of incarcerated youth. English 3020 students in this section left more than 100 replies to the vast collection of poems produced by these talented young individuals. You can see some of our comments [here](#). Of course, we did some traditional work, as well: students examined the role of neo-liberal ideology in creating the many community problems that organizations like the ones we serve are left to address.

Students wrote essays profiling the work of community-based organizations and ended the semester with a research-based essay on topics like environmental (in)justice, educational inequality, housing discrimination, poverty, and healthcare disparities in Detroit and our surrounding communities. The dedicated students in this section rose to the challenge of serving in the midst of extraordinary times, and most of all, did the important work of maintaining relationships between English 3020 at Wayne State and the many different partners who are trying to persevere through these unprecedented times.

COMMUNITY WRITING @ WSU

Our Courses & Our Work

ENG 3020 Online: Writing and Working For/About The Community

Partnership with St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center

Dr. Nicole Varty, Senior Lecturer

As a part of the Composition Learning Community, this course paired WSU Honors students with a CLC peer mentor as well as our community partner, St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center. Together, we worked to support the SVSF Center's mission of providing, "educational programs, basic skill building and academic enhancement for at-risk children and adults, designed to build self-sufficiency skills for academic and employment success, personal achievement and dignity." We accomplished this by volunteering in:

- The After-school tutoring program for 1st-3rd graders
- The Afternoon Homework Help for 4th-5th graders
- GED tutoring for adults
- Taking Oral Histories & writing profiles of former/graduated GED students

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SVSF center's work was moved online for safety from the Fall '20 semester, through Winter '21. Nevertheless, the adaptable Wayne State students worked with Beth Kraft, the volunteer coordinator to train and work as virtual tutors in the after-school tutoring program and as remote GED tutors. This pivot provided no small amount of discussion around the affordances and constraints of online learning platforms, the intricacies of creating rapport and tutoring-ethos online, and just the general struggle for connection in a mediated learning environment.

Additionally, WSU students produced written profiles of SVSF graduates, rhetorical analyses of online content for the center, and videos providing tutoring experiences that SVSF will use on their website. All of these experiences were framed by our extensive reading within service-learning and tutoring literature, to help us examine internal bias, think through moments that could be exhilarating and also frustrating and interrogate the motivations for our own actions, as students and as volunteers. Our weekly reflective writing helped process interactions with both community members and the staff at the SVSF Center, to help make those much-needed connections and promote metacognition. At the end of the semester, we participated in the Writing Showcase with the rest of the Composition Learning Community, sharing videos that highlighted significant interactions: with tutees, peer mentors, and each other. Though connections were difficult to forge under pandemic-induced circumstances, the students, peer mentors and staff of SVSF Center worked hard to hammer them out. In the process, they created memories and relationships that will last.

COMMUNITY WRITING @ WSU

Students-in-Service



Above and Right: 3020 student Sailor Mayes, in the midst of the pandemic, rolling up her sleeves to aid the Michigan Humane Society. In Sailor's words: "Although times are difficult, it was very heartwarming to be able to get back to volunteering within the community. Helping people, animals, and the environment makes me enjoy the time I have on this earth."



Above: Pictures of Michigan Urban Farming Institute (MUFI) taken by Kyle Darancou, a WSU senior. Kyle volunteered for more than 20 hours at MUFI in the Fall 2020 semester. He added, "MUFI was a great way to help others while connecting with them face to face. There's never a dull moment and everyone there is nothing but kind."

COMMUNITY WRITING @ WSU

Students-in-Service

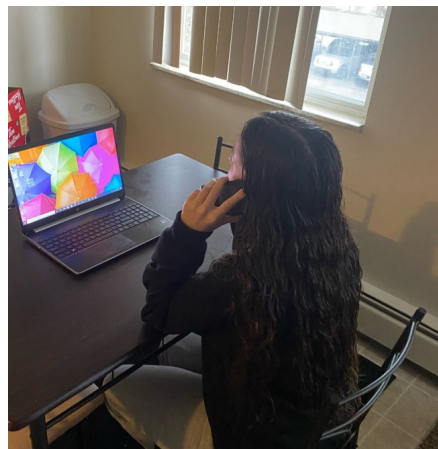


Left: English 3020 student Citlali Espino reminds us of the importance of wearing boots when going to get your "feet dirty" at D-Town Farms.



Center: Welcome sign at D-Town Farms urban farm, located at 14027 W. Outer Drive, Detroit, MI 48239 (Between Plymouth and W. Chicago). English 3020 is proud to have been partnering with Malik Yakini, DBCFSN and D-Town Farms since 2018.

Right: English 3020 students Daniela Peredo and Citlali Espino enjoying the experience of volunteering to help D-Town Farms thrive. Both Citlali and Daniela dedicated multiple weekend mornings in Fall 2020 to working at D-Town!



Left: English 3020 student Ally Lockhart phonebanks as part of the pandemic-modified service learning experience in Fall 2020. Students like Ally participated in phone and text-banking campaigns, as well as social media monitoring, for ballot issues, campaigns, and even (for our non-profit community partners like Freedom House Detroit). Ally captures the spirit of so many of our English 3020 students in Fall 2020 in stating: "In times of need, acts of service are necessary to sustain our communities. There is always a way to serve these communities, even if it means at-home service during a pandemic."

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Each semester, English 3020 students in Professor Ryan Flaherty's sections are tasked with writing a Community Organization Profile Essays (COPE) on an organization that does work in the Detroit community. The essay featured in this edition is by former 3020 student, Armen Jacobs, and profiles Covenant House Michigan.

COVENANT HOUSE MICHIGAN: PROVIDING HELP AND HOPE TO YOUTH IN NEED

By Armen Jacobs

According to the Michigan League for Public Policy, nearly one in ten young adults from the age of 18-24 will experience homelessness in a given year. With no place to call home, these young people struggle to find work and the professional skills needed to succeed in the world. In 1997, a needs assessment study was done in Detroit and found that the city was vastly unprepared to help young adults that found themselves in this type of situation. Given that many issues tend to go hand in hand with being homeless, what would these young adults do to live and work towards success?

Founded in 1997, Covenant House Michigan (CHM) was established to address the ever prevalent problem of homeless youth in the city of Detroit. CHM is part of the nationwide Covenant House, and provides homeless youth from the age of 18-24 with both basic needs, and different skills and services that help them become more successful in adult life. CHM is a faith-based organization who works to "serve suffering children of the street, and to protect and safeguard all children." CHM not only works to serve and protect youth who are homeless, but they also work to guide them. CHM's home page states that they "redirect them onto a path toward meaningful and successful adulthood." Without a place to call home, young adults will often fall victim to a system that works for those at the top, and with the help and resources from CHM, these people are able to turn their lives around and find success in the complex and changing world that we live in.

While Covenant House Michigan has no sole founder, the person who has worked harder than anyone to give homeless youth in the Detroit area a better chance at a successful life is the current CEO, Gerry Piro. Piro has been the CEO of CHM since 2014 and has furthered the organization's work through countless means, most notably in opening the branch of CHM located in Grand Rapids, MI to assist more youth. Piro has not only been working to expand CHM's work throughout the state of Michigan, but has also worked to better the programs that CHM offers to its residents in its currently established campus. Piro emphasizes that the most difficult hurdle that CHM helps these youth overcome "is mental health issues. You have these young people who are often victims of trauma; their families have broken up. And most of these young people are coming out of foster care." Being able to help young people who are struggling is the mission of CHM, and without better services to help with traumatic events, there would be significant issues in these young people's lives that go unaddressed. Without the work that CHM does, more than 60,000 youth would have gone without help and services they needed to get back on their feet since opening their doors in 1997.

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COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PROFILE

"Covenant House Michigan: Providing Health and Hope to Youth in Need" (Continued from pg. 6)

Issues, Actions, and Collaborations

In a world that is ever-changing, the only constant is that there will always be homelessness until someone cares enough to help. Covenant House Michigan focuses its work on making sure that homeless youth are not left to fend for themselves. Displayed prominently in their home page, CHM's goal is to "provide shelter, educational and vocational programs, as well as other support services, to help overcome hurdles such as homelessness, unemployment, inadequate education, violence, drugs and gangs." For nearly 23 years, Covenant House Michigan has stood by its promise to help shelter those who need it. A former resident states, "I lived at Covenant House thirteen years ago when I had nowhere to go after I aged out of the foster care system. Covenant House gave me a place to stay, a warm bed, clean clothes, hot food, and taught me how to get a job, make a resume, and helped me with any mental issues that I had. The staff cares about people who come there to get help."

Covenant House Michigan has clearly shown its devotion to bettering the lives of homeless youth. With lots of young adults homeless in the city of Detroit, there is a need for food and shelter. Nearly 90% of all the residents at CHM are high school dropouts, which drives CHM to educate these young people. When one is uneducated, there lacks a preparation for employment in the future, and CHM works to help these youth to have the necessary skills to get hired before they leave CHM.

Covenant House Michigan has all of the programs and resources they need in order to help young adults with the issues that they face. The first step in helping these youth is done by CHM's outreach team, which drives a van around Metro Detroit looking for homeless youth to transport to the shelter. The residents at CHM are then provided with basic necessities, and are also offered education through Covenant House Academy, which is a sub group of CHM that works to educate those who need it. CHM also offers an employment center which teaches "job expectations, workplace ethics, communication skills and teamwork." With CHM providing shelter, education, and employability skills, they are making sure that the youth who came to CHM with low chances of success are able to seize every opportunity that they can to be successful in the world.

Even during the pandemic, Covenant House is still working to fund the variety of programs that it offers its youth in a virtual setting. CHM has an annual fundraiser that they refer to as a "sleep out" where different executives from various companies sleep outdoors in cardboard boxes with nothing but a sleeping bag to raise money to help end youth homelessness. Since the COVID-19 pandemic does not allow for large social gatherings, CHM has adapted to doing their annual sleep out fundraiser online this November. Because of the pandemic requiring a lot of people to stay at home, it makes it very hard for youth to do that if they don't have a home. The efforts that CHM has made to continue the fundraising effort to continue their youth programs during such unprecedented times just goes to show their dedication to helping young adults in need.

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COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION PROFILE

"Covenant House Michigan: Providing Health and Hope to Youth in Need" (Continued from pg. 7)

While more than 87% of Covenant House Michigan Donors are individuals, CHM has other donors who are part of large corporations. The most significant donor for Covenant House is Delta Airlines. Delta Airlines participates in CHM's annual Sleep Out fundraiser each November, which helps to raise most of the corporate funds for the year. In 2017, Delta helped to raise over \$133,000 for Covenant House, which will help to provide food, shelter, and fund the various programs offered at Covenant House. Most of CHM's donors are anonymous, so there is not a very extensive list of corporate partners. Due to this, individual support is very important so that CHM can continue to serve those who need help the most.

Armen Jacobs is an accounting major going into his senior year at Wayne State University. He currently serves as the co-president of CWEND, a community organization at Wayne. He is very passionate about helping others and working hard to make a difference in the world.

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Closing Thoughts

CWEND Student Organization: Community Writing & Engagement in Detroit

This semester, three past English 3020 students decided to take their commitment to community engagement and writing to the next level. Armen Jacobs, Kayla Guillen, and Christopher Ramus are the initiating members of the newly-formed student organization CWEND, or "Community Writing & Engagement (i)N Detroit." Armen (whose article is featured in this newsletter) and Kayla played integral roles in the content and design of our newsletter, while Chris is working on recruitment of interested students. While the newsletter is the central task of CWEND's work this semester, CWEND members are also currently involved in volunteering with Freedom House Detroit as part of the event planning committee for the refugee house's annual fundraiser.

Please read more about CWEND, our goals, our vision, and how you can become involved by visiting our Dean of Student's Office webpage:
<https://getinvolved.wayne.edu/organization/cwend>.

If you have any trouble with the page, please feel free to e-mail one of us directly:
 Kayla Guillen: gy3885@wayne.edu
 Armen Jacobs: gw2437@wayne.edu
 Christopher Ramus: go8975@wayne.edu
 Ryan Flaherty: fn0268@wayne.edu

Want to get involved??

Below is a short list of some of the community organizations mentioned in the different sections of this letter. Many of these organizations would gladly accept dedicated volunteers!!

D-Town Farms: contact [Nayomi ncawthorne@dbcfsn.org](mailto:Nayomi.ncawthorne@dbcfsn.org)
 Website: <https://www.dbcfsn.org/educational-youth-programs>

Michigan Urban Farming Initiative (MUFI): contact Kaitlyn support@miufi.org
 Website: <https://www.miufi.org/>

Forgotten Harvest: <https://www.forgottenharvest.org/volunteer/>

St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center (Volunteer Registration Page):
<https://www.svsfcenter.org/how-to-help/volunteer/>

Auntie Na's Village: contact Sonia Brown (Auntie Na) auntienashouse@gmail.com
 Volunteer Registration Page: <https://www.auntienashouse.org/volunteer.html>