Memo

To: Dr. Derek Ross
From: Emma Harris
Date: 30 April 2020
Re: Portfolio Project Selections and Justifications

The purpose of this memo is to describe my reasoning behind including each of the five pieces of my work portfolio. In the following sections, I will detail my overall goals in combining theory and practice of rhetoric and professional communication, what each portfolio piece speaks to in my professional experience, and how they relate to my larger goals.

Overview of Experience and Career Trajectory

Throughout my college career, I have sought connection in all of my experiences. Being a student of communication and rhetorical contexts, I have found points of connection across my work in the classroom and beyond—studying Professional and Public Writing, Psychology, and Spanish, tutoring with the Miller Writing Center and the Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project, teaching and taking swing dancing lessons, and studying abroad in London. This practice has kept my perspective open to new challenges and experiences, while also keeping me engaged in work that I am passionate about across disciplines. Exploring these points of connection and recognizing the uniqueness of these experiences has helped me become a better-informed technical and professional communicator, educator, and engaged human being.

My goal in every encounter is to promote agency and empowerment. I see these as the common threads among my portfolio projects, as well as the guiding principle of the work that I wish to continue throughout my career as an educator, writing center administrator, and advocate. The following descriptions will show the basis for each piece I included in my portfolio and my justifications for doing so in relation to principles of professional and public writing and my larger career goals.

SAMLA Conference Presentation—"A Student-Centered Approach to Prison Reform"

One project in particular that sprung from making these connections was my research into developing writing centers as key components of prison education programs. While taking a course in Rhetorical Theory based in texts about the system of mass incarceration in the United States in Spring of 2018, I was introduced to the work of the Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project (APAEP). After looking deeper into their work, I decided to volunteer tutor with their college degree program the following summer. That same spring, I was also doing my first semester of tutoring with the Miller Writing Center (MWC).

I presented this paper at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association conference in November of 2018 with the guidance of my professor, Dr. Diana Eidson. After taking her Rhetorical Theory course centered on texts about the system of mass incarceration in the United States, I was struck by the possibility of connection between the work that I was doing at the Miller Writing Center at Auburn and the tutoring needs of students in the Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project. In my

research, I establish how the goals of student empowerment in writing center pedagogy and in prison education programs align and begin the framework for instituting writing centers as key components of these programs. This project combines my interest in writing studies, student empowerment, and rhetorical theory and practice in pursuit of social justice.

To make a practicum that was well-suited to my intended users, I did a classification-driven model of audience analysis (Ceraso, 2013), looking to my experience as a tutor with the APAEP and the MWC, as well as writing center pedagogy to inform my research.

Document Design—"How to Give Effective Peer Feedback" Poster

I created this poster for my Document Design course in the spring of 2020, using my experience and training from the Miller Writing Center and the Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was tutoring weekly with the APAEP's college degree program and doing a writing-focused session. One of my upcoming lessons was going to be "How to Give Effective Peer Feedback," because I feel like that's a skill that the students could use in all their college courses to come, as well as sharing it with other people in prison who weren't in the degree program. I sought design strategies of contrast, repetition, alignment, proximity, and enclosure to make this poster both visually-appealing and easily navigable for my intended audience (Williams, 2015; Kimball & Hawkins, 2008). I wanted to work with the genre expectations of an educational poster so students and teachers would be drawn to the familiarity of that, but also pay more attention to making it professional yet still exciting so people would *want* to use it (Kimball & Hawkins, 2008).

With this poster design, I referred heavily to Robin Williams' *Non-Designer's Design Book* (2015) and Kimball and Hawkins' *Document Design: A Guide for Technical Communicators* (2008) to inform my design choices in typography, color, and design principles. I wanted to make the information applicable to my intended users, as well, so I used a classification-driven model for my audience analysis as I did for the SAMLA conference presentation (Ceraso, 2013). With experience both as a writing tutor in multiple settings and someone who has sought writing tutoring, I felt well-equipped to design this resource. I would like to continue my work with this resource by conducting usability testing with students in APAEP's degree program when the situation allows so that I ensure I'm not just assuming what I have meets students' needs, but staying informed about the rhetorical situation (Shapiro, 1987; Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987).

Public Writing—Community Partners Project

I have included my Public Writing project, because I am passionate about connecting the skills that I have in technical and professional writing, such as being considerate of rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, medium of distribution), document design, and technical editing, with community engagement projects. In Public Writing, we worked in a team of two to collaborate with a community partner and assist in a project that required public writing expertise. My partner and I teamed up with a community garden in nearby Opelika, AL that needed help making their website friendly, inviting, and easy for the community to engage with. I worked alongside the community garden's student communications intern and traveled to the site for regular meetings with the program directors and community members who used the resources that the community garden provided. The most important aspect of this project, to me, was that I understand the needs of community stakeholders, organization directors, and potential investors so that I could most

effectively craft community engagement materials to draw these groups together to help them meet and understand each other's needs. In order to do this, I conducted an ethnography using web research, meetings with program directors, and observations and interviews with community stakeholders (MacNealy, 1999; Geertz, 1973).

We collaborated to redesign their website. I used my knowledge of audience and purpose from conducting an introductory ethnography for the organization to edit their existing webpage descriptions so that they were more inviting and accessible for a larger community (Shapiro, 1987; Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987). This community included everyone from school-age children and adults in the community, as well as investors. I used a combination of intuition-driven and classification-driven models for my audience analysis, because I did conduct hands-on testing of these resources and familiarize myself with the site and community stakeholders, but I could not meet with everyone, so I had to infer some of the needs my ideal audience (Ceraso, 2013). I maintained awareness of my need to ethically participate in the discourse that would represent this organization and community as I was writing, and made sure the process was collaborative among various stakeholders to responsibly edit and create these materials (Shapiro, 1987).

Document Design—Group Design Package Explaining COVID-19 to Kids

I worked on this design package with four other students in a Document Design course in the final weeks of our spring 2020 semester, when we had transitioned to online classes in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. We decided that we could use our design training from the semester's projects to create a package of designs that could be accessible to kids ages 5-11 and their caretakers who now had to stay home and might be wanting help with an explanation of what was going on as well as looking for fun things to do while at home. Our ultimate goal was to create a collection of designs that explained the pandemic and ways to stay safe and well to elementary-school-age children that were approachable and felt like they were created for them. To do this, we made sure, first of all, that the language we used was plain and easily understandable for our target audience (Mazur, 2000). For our usability testing and audience analysis, we used classification-driven and intuition-driven models (Ceraso, 2013). We had to imagine and check through online research the reading level and effective color, type, and graphics choices for elementary-school-age children as we were prototyping our designs, but we also got to usability test with a parent of an 8-year-old who is also an elementary school art teacher after we had drafts of our designs.

In this package, we have a social media graphic that children with the technology and caretakers can share, a "design your own mask" coloring book page, a mirror cling sticker with a song that kids can sing to make sure they wash their hands long enough, and an informational poster explaining the pandemic. After this usability testing, we adapted our designs to their responses and built on what we'd learned throughout the semester about effective design principles to ensure the success of these documents (Ceraso, 2013; Kimball & Hawkins, 2008; Williams, 2015; Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987). There was also a high level of responsibility with the development of these documents, because we are dealing with relaying information that could affect the health and safety of our users, so we remained conscious of that throughout our design process (Shapiro, 1987).

My personal contributions to this project were in drawing up design prototypes and collaboratively editing the social media graphic and mirror cling sticker and song. I also conducted the usability testing and ensured that our design team was aware of our responsibilities collectively and

individually throughout the design process. We all provided each other with feedback in regular Zoom meetings.

American Authors—"William Faulkner: Going Down South to the Root of Hierarchy"

This paper was the final essay for my American Authors class, where we focused entirely on William Faulkner's novels. Our goal was to analyze Faulkner's work, showcasing that we had a deep familiarity with the work we chose and could extend our analysis to themes either across his works or in different sections of the same work, as I did with his novel (or collection of short stories, as considered by many), *Go Down, Moses*. In this essay, I analyze how Faulkner portrays central characters in *Go Down, Moses* and their relationship with nature and other characters to critique many white Southern Christians' use of the Bible at the time to justify ownership of land and people. I saw this character and situational analysis as a means to recognize how Faulkner enacted his novels' lessons, rather than just showing readers.

To conduct this analysis, I considered the rhetorical context that Faulkner was writing from, the people he was writing *to* and *about* and what that might mean for his specific choices in framing, organization, and work choice (Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987). I also maintained an awareness of my personal rhetorical position in doing this analysis (Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987) and adhered to the conventions of MLA style and citation that are typical of writing in the English field (Bazerman, 1987). Both of these choices affected my organization and presentation of my analysis in a way that I felt would be most effective for getting the point across to my intended audience (Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987; Ceraso, 2013).

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