

# **Rhetorical Criticism, History and Theory and the Institutionalization of Community Service Learning in Higher Education**

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“[R]eason itself especially induces me to think that wisdom without eloquence is but of little advantage to states, but that eloquence without wisdom is often most mischievous, and is never advantageous to them.” (Cicero, *De Inventione* I. i.)

Rhetoricians have continually reminded the public that eloquence is a necessary and powerful instrument and that therefore practitioners of rhetoric should use their eloquence with a strong sense of social responsibility. But what about those who study rhetoric? Are they also responsible for using their eloquence and knowledge of rhetoric in a way that provides “advantage” to states or institutions? How can they—and should they—participate in, critique, theorize and guide their university’s responsible service to communities?

The theme of the 13<sup>th</sup> biennial conference of the Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) in 2008 was *The Responsibilities of Rhetoric*. Their call for papers asked the general question “How can the study and practice of rhetoric contribute to social progress?” and specifically asked “can rhetorical pedagogies . . . protect civil liberties, sustain civic cooperation, and promote understanding and identification?” (“Conference Bulletin”). These questions ask about the study of rhetoric, the practice of rhetoric, and rhetorical pedagogy, respectively, as modes of enacting social responsibility in our field of study and in society. Taking up the third mode, rhetorical pedagogy, an increasing number of academics answer the question of how rhetoric could accomplish these aims by saying “service-learning.” In this article, I explore what service-

learning is, the challenges it presents to rhetoricians and institutions, and how rhetorical criticism, history and theory can responsibly engage with the movement.

Community service-learning (CSL), or “service-learning,”<sup>1</sup> is a movement in community-university engagement (and K-12 education as well) that aims to integrate academic learning goals with the aims articulated by the RSA conference call. Community service-learning is defined on the home page of the website of the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning (CACSL) as “an educational approach that integrates service in the community with intentional learning activities. Within effective CSL efforts, members of both educational institutions and community organizations work together toward outcomes that are mutually beneficial” (CACSL). Community service-learning is a vision of civic cooperation in which teachers become active partners with the community, a vision of “students, educators and communities building partnerships to learn from each other while working together in innovative ways to strengthen individuals, communities, and society” (CACSL). Understanding and identification among these three partners (students, educators and communities) is forged through the process of forming and enacting community service-learning partnerships. Service-learning participates in a larger movement toward “civic engagement,” which is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as “individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern” (APA)

Service-learning may also be beneficial to rhetorical studies. In her essay “The Public Intellectual, Outreach, and Rhetoric Education,” Ellen Cushman suggests that we can enact our discipline’s sense of social responsibility through service-learning—through developing or teaching outreach courses: “As rhetoric educators, public intellectuals can craft outreach courses

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<sup>1</sup> The longer term “community service-learning” is more often used in Canada to emphasize the importance of active community partnership and community benefit. I will use the shorter term when discussing American publications, and use the longer term when I am emphasizing community or discussing the Canadian context.

as one way to engage multiple perspectives in knowledge making, as one way to enact Big Rhetoric” (181). Cushman explains what “Big Rhetoric” is and how it relates to service-learning: “As a metatheory, Big Rhetoric uncovers the rhetorical (theoretical) and literate (techne) activities in knowledge production, seeking to ethically account for the social implications of academic thinking” (181). In other words, service-learning can be a route for demonstrating just how “Big,” and how ethical and socially responsible, rhetorical studies can be. I have integrated community service learning in some of my courses (not all) because I desire to provide students with direct contact with nonacademic audiences for their rhetoric, community-based rhetorical advisors, and an opportunity to use rhetorical theory to investigate complex social issues. These benefits balance the extra effort necessary to plan and execute a class collaboratively with community partners. Thomas Deans has authored a scholarly book (2000) that cites prior research articles as well as a textbook (2003) supporting service-learning pedagogy in rhetoric and composition.

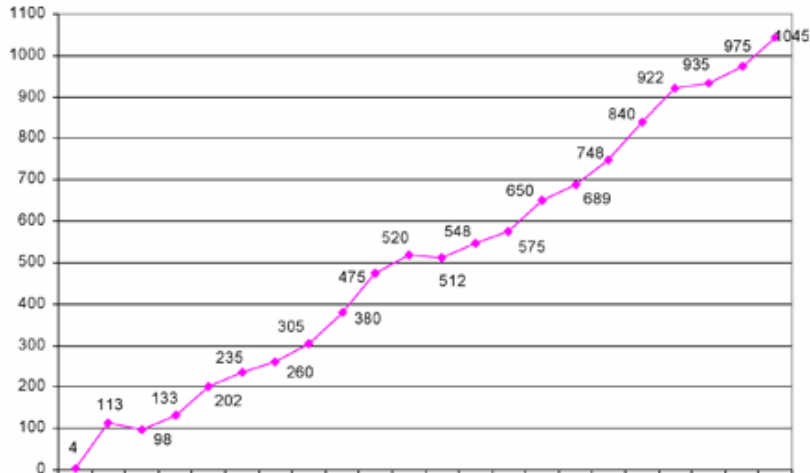
To briefly offer skeptics some support to the value of service-learning practice across disciplines, a significant body of research does demonstrate positive academic and social effects of service-learning pedagogy—when it is integrated well with the intellectual content of a course. Organizations like the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, established in 1994, and the International Association for Research on Service-learning and Community Engagement, established in 2005, have increased the rigor of social and educational research in the field through conferences and publications. Clayton A. Hurd’s recent (2006) review article cites numerous studies attesting to its enhancement of various aspects of academic learning, student retention, teaching effectiveness, as well as its enhancement of students’ sense of civic

responsibility and active engagement with the community through subsequent volunteerism and activism.

The service-learning movement in higher education has strong roots in national and state-level American institutions that fund service-learning practice. Although the roots of civic-experiential education are ancient, in recent history the movement identified as “service-learning” goes back to at least the mid-1980s in the United States. In contrast, the community service-learning movement in Canadian higher education became instituted as recently as the early 2000s, when the CACSL alliance and ten universities were funded with millions of dollars by the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation. Campus Compact, a national United States organization committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education through service-learning and other forms of civic engagement in higher education, reported in their 2006 statistics that “Campus Compact membership has increased dramatically over the past two decades, originating with 4 member institutions in 1985 and increasing to 1045 in October 2006” (“Institutional Culture 2006”). Members pledge to fulfill the mandate of Campus Compact and pay annual dues. On participating campuses, there was “an average of 35 [service-learning] courses per campus” (“2006 Service Statistics”). The rhetoric of this movement often persuades by statistical data demonstrating the momentum of institutions adopting service-learning, which it charts through yearly research on its member institutions in visual charts and figures such as those in Figure 1 below (“Institutional Culture 2006”).

As shown in Figure 1, Campus Compact membership has increased dramatically over the past two decades, originating with 4 member institutions in 1985 and increasing to 1045 in October 2006.

**Figure 1. Growth of Campus Compact (1985–2006)**



In March and April 2009, United States president Barack Obama signed two bills which together increased higher education service-learning funding from 10 million to 12.3 million and invested seven million dollars into a “Campuses of Service” program and (Service-Learning United). Given the increased momentum and transformational aims of the movement, it is becoming more difficult to dismiss as an educational fad. The influence of these laws is likely to increase the quantity as well as shape the form of service-learning during Obama’s tenure, and other countries may follow this example. A better understanding of the relevance of rhetorical studies to the service-learning movement may enable rhetoricians to begin to play a guiding and informative role in integrating and sustaining service-learning in higher education in a way that will be advantageous to society and the university, as well as demonstrate the social responsibility of rhetorical studies.

## The Challenges Presented by Service-Learning Institutionalization

The first two aspects of rhetoric named by the RSA's call to responsibility—rhetorical scholarship and practice, largely function outside of our classrooms. This is where service-learning institutionalization rhetoric occurs, as instructors are persuaded by colleagues, administrators, students, and community organizations, or persuade them in turn. In 1996, Ellen Cushman made a call to rhetoricians in her article "The Rhetorician as Agent of Social Change," where she suggests that "we can empower people in our communities, establish networks of reciprocity with them, and create solidarity with them" through participating in scholarly activism as rhetoricians and rhetors (7). Cushman calls for rhetoricians to consider and to value "community engaged" scholarship and action. She explains that we can take action as rhetoricians: the "rhetorician as agent of change" (7) is not a missionary who imposes her knowledge as an expert, but one who brings to bear rhetorical theory, criticism, and practice on "the literate activities that *already* take place in the community" (13).

But indeed, how can we, and how should we, play the role of agent of change, if many of us work at universities where we feel socially mandated to take an objective, critical stance? Many academics, even rhetoricians who study the rhetoric of politics and of social movements, often feel a social responsibility to avoid political or social action within their roles. Stanley Fish, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Chicago, articulates this objectivist stance in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article in 2003. He critiques the philosophy of education underlying a book titled *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility*, a book which participates in the service-learning and civic engagement movement. Fish claims that any campaign of moral or civic education distracts academics from their primary function: disciplinary education. He states

that “the emphasis on broader goals and especially on the therapeutic goal of ‘personal development’ can make it difficult to interest students in the disciplinary training it is our job to provide,” and he adds that “this has spectacularly been the case in the teaching of writing” where an emphasis on culture and personal development has meant that “few students have actually been taught to write.”

Indeed, some rhetoricians may agree with Fish and say that that service-learning is not always necessary or well-integrated with a teacher’s proper role. To a great degree, instructors must continue to teach rhetorical history, theory and coach people in the necessary skills of written and oral eloquence from a disinterested position because their cultural authority on one side of an issue may shut down inquiry and debate. However, scholarly action provides a way to engage with the movement less directly. There are suitable academic roles for those who wish to avoid the practical and political complexities of practicing service-learning in the classroom and community engagement in our service. The service-learning movement is knocking on our office doors. Colleagues and students and administrators are engaging in persuasive rhetoric that encourages some of us to admire or become a little more like Ellen Cushman. There is a need for some of us (perhaps not all of us) to become active as engaged scholars of the service-learning and civic engagement movement. If rhetoricians are not responsible for guiding and analyzing how they as scholars, and their students, administrators, and local communities, engage responsibly in community service-learning, then who is?

Universities and colleges and their local communities are experiencing major institutional transformations, and one of the most powerful opportunities for positive change, as well as for dangerous mismanagement of the university system, is found in the community service-learning movement. The rhetorical processes that lead to the institutionalization of service-learning

within universities are complex and tied up with national, local, and institutional politics, as the following questions and observations demonstrate. Why is service-learning directed and managed in some institutions by academics in partnership with the community (University of Alberta), and in others by nonacademic staff (University of Calgary), and in others by an entirely community-based institution (Trent University)? How does a service-learning office's location and administrative leadership shape educational processes and community partnerships? Why does institutionalization occur more slowly at some places? For instance, not having received McConnell funding in the early 2000s, my own institution, the University of Calgary, a research university in a large urban center, developed service-learning in a local, ad-hoc manner and has only recently (2008) hired a "manager of community service-learning and civic engagement." On the one hand, when service learning is funded externally, it brings status, coherence, intentionality and measurement to the movement and can strengthen the ethics and effectiveness of the practice, but on the other hand, it also creates additional ties to funders that must be maintained. At the level of curriculum and teaching, service-learning implementation may also be non-standardized, as one teacher will teach a given course through service-learning while another will not. The pedagogy is an ideological and professional approach that does not suit every teacher, and it is not appropriate for every course, and therefore, like research, it requires a degree of academic freedom balanced by appropriate peer review. From the community perspective, if service-learning is not integrated wisely and ethically on the community side, it can overload a community partner with work that is possibly going to yield sub-standard results from some students. There are also reasons to be cautious about the implications of the institutionalization of service learning. While some aspects of community service learning may



be better supported (such as the aspects that support partnerships and linkages to research), other aspects could become more inefficient, regulated and bureaucratized.

How does rhetoric play a role in shaping service-learning institutionalization into all these complex and varied forms within a single country? This question leads naturally into a discussion of what other rhetorical scholars have recently had to say about the rhetoric of the community service-learning movement.

### **Rhetoricians' Analysis of Service-Learning Rhetoric**

Rhetorical scholars who have already begun to engage with service learning discourse have sometimes taken a celebratory, and sometimes a critical, stance. In 2000 and 2002, Thomas Deans produced an overview of service learning in rhetoric and composition, followed by a textbook supplying a rhetoric and readings. Some of the following rhetoricians provide a counterpoint to Deans' ideal vision for service-learning in writing and rhetoric by pointing out the competing philosophies that service-learning can be used to heighten.

H. Brooke Hessler (2000) in her analysis of service-learning rhetoric in the United States, applied the rhetorical theories of Richard Weaver by pointing out which words in the movement's rhetoric function as "god terms" and "devil terms." Richard Weaver, who wrote in the 1950s in the wake of the Second World War, cautioned rhetoricians to be careful about using "god terms" and "devil terms" because of their vague definition and propagandistic tendencies. Hessler points out that the key terms in American service-learning rhetoric are "citizenship" and "democracy," which are rarely defined or challenged. The devil terms used by service-learning advocates in their manifestos tend to be "customer" and "efficiency," words that evoke a contrasting vision of the university as a corporation. The term "accountability," Hessler

explains, is used to negotiate between the democratic vision and the corporate vision. These valuable critiques of service-learning discourse have been taken up by other rhetorical scholars such as J. Blake Scott, Cesar Ornatowski, Linn Bekins, and Brenton Faber.

Cesar Ornatowski and Linn Bekins have called scholars in the field of technical communication (a field largely overlapping with rhetorical studies) to critically examine the rhetoric of service-learning. Similar to Hessler, they argue that the term “community” in community service-learning, as well as in the technical communication discipline, is in danger of becoming a “‘god-term’ in the sense coined by Kenneth Burke, reified, ubiquitous, always positive, and ultimately unexamined” (253).<sup>2</sup> In place of this simple, unexamined promotion of community, Ornatowski and Bekins propose “a symbolic/rhetorical perspective on community that offers a more realistic and useful framework for teaching one important civic aspect of technical communication: the role discourse plays in constructing communities” (253).

Although Ornatowski and Bekins’ article is aimed at theorizing service-learning pedagogical communication, its discussion of the term “community” is equally applicable to public and administrative communication about service-learning. Drawing on the work of Anthony Cohen, the authors portray a notion of community as a symbolic construct: the boundaries between members and non-members are constructed through people’s words and actions; community membership is symbolized by the habitual patterns of thought and speech in which members engage. Based on Ornatowski and Bekins’ analysis, the public perception of the academic institution as a community, and the internal sense of belonging among service-learning practitioners, is also constructed and changed through discourse around specific issues. Any

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Weaver, whom Hessler cites as the source of “god terms” and “devil terms,” was directly influenced by rhetorician Kenneth Burke’s theory of “god terms” through a seminar of Kenneth Burke’s that he attended in 1949. See Johannesen’s investigation of Weaver’s use of Burke.

community-defining issue (such as employment preparation, research funding, and civic engagement) will result in different boundaries between who belongs and who does not.

Ornatowski and Bekins demonstrate how a rhetorical artifact that bridges communities (such as professionals and the public) serves the needs of many communities but not all the needs of any single one of them. Through an ethical process of collaborative composition and revision that submits itself to this productive tension, it becomes civic rhetoric that effectively serves the public interest.

In a 2004 article, J. Blake Scott, who co-authored with Melody Bowdon the textbook *Service-learning in Professional and Technical Communication*, also examines how service-learning and a “cultural studies” approach (including rhetorical studies) can counterbalance the unhealthy elements of “hyperpragmatism” in technical communication education.

Hyperpragmatism focuses on developing practical skill development for the workforce. If service-learning is integrated without a critical, cultural-studies (rhetorical) approach, it can easily slide into the same sort of emphasis on career development and practical outcomes for the community partner. But when students are encouraged to think critically about their service through readings and reflection, they can learn to “produce effective and ethical discourse and ... create more inclusive forms of power” (289). Once again we see the importance of a rhetorical meta-analysis of the service-learning movement in enhancing the “responsibility of rhetoric” to society.

These scholars demonstrate the usefulness of engaging as critics of service learning institutionalization. Yet our discipline is also deeply rooted in rhetorical history, and indeed the history of educational philosophy. How can rhetorical historians assist by providing further insight into the institutionalization of service-learning and civic engagement?

## **Rhetorical History and Community Service-Learning**

Rhetorical historians are needed to investigate the similarity between the contemporary debates about ethics and goals of service learning in higher education and the ancient debates about the ethics and goals of rhetorical education and practice. James M. Dubinsky has already pointed out in a brief section of an admirable article “Service-Learning as a Path to Virtue: The Ideal Orator in Professional Communication” many of the ways in which Classical rhetoricians promoted civic education. Yet Dubinsky overlooks the various disagreements and differences among the rhetoricians and philosophers in relation to civic engagement. The roots of the debate about civic education within rhetoric and philosophy have been explored in a recent book edited by Takis Poulakos and David Depew, *Isocrates and Civic Education*, that demonstrates how Plato and Isocrates “set forth rival but comparable programs for civic education” (11).

An examination of the debate within ancient rhetoric will help to correct a widespread misunderstanding about the historical origins of the service-learning philosophy in higher education. James Muir’s 2005 article, building on the work of rhetorical historians like Poulakos, has shown that much of our contemporary history of experiential learning (which service-learning scholarship continually draws upon) stops at John Dewey. Not only do most of these histories ignore the centuries before Dewey, but Dewey himself falsely gave Plato credit for “educational ideas and practices that were actually originated and developed by Isocrates and his followers” (176). This is more than a technical error of historical fact. It is dangerous because it disconnects an educational practice from its roots in an appropriate educational philosophy, leading to confusion and contradiction about how ideas shape pedagogy and institutions.

I provide this section to roughly outline how an understanding of service-learning-like philosophies and activities in rhetorical history may offer rich insight into the analysis of contemporary service-learning discourse. Through this outline, rhetorical historians may be inspired to investigate further the similarities and differences between classical and contemporary rhetorical culture that shape civic education. Scholarship in this area can demonstrate the responsibility of rhetorical history to generate deeper cultural and philosophical understanding of this educational movement and its debates.

Contemporary service-learning theory can open our discussion of its relevance to ancient debates about civic education. Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne have acknowledged that underlying beliefs differ widely among those who promote civic education and service-learning, and delineate three images of the “good citizen”: the “personally responsible citizen,” the “participatory citizen,” and “justice-oriented citizen.” Although the analogy is not exact, there are some general parallels between these three types of citizens and the types of characters that ancient schools of philosophy and rhetoric sought to form. The “personally responsible citizen” described by Westheimer and Kahne, is one who “acts responsibly in his or her community by, for example, picking up litter, giving blood, recycling, obeying laws, and staying out of debt” (241). Similarly, Plato’s school of philosophy predicated the innate, stable identity of the self and one’s connection to universal principles of goodness and truth as a precondition of wise action and good rhetoric. The students of Plato led a morally responsible but largely academic, contemplative life and were not orators, lawyers, or senators, but rather philosophers, like Aristotle. Isocrates, on the other hand, taught that a virtuous civic identity need not be stable and is not merely personal, but was continually projected and constructed through one’s public speech and action. An ideal student of Isocrates would behave much like the second type, the

“participatory citizen” described by Westheimer and Kahne, engaging in active “participation in collective endeavours” through government and community-based organizations (242). While Plato’s method of civic education favored a monarchic state in which a philosopher would be king, Isocrates favored no particular political system (democracy, oligarchy, or monarchy) yet taught a life joining philosophical reflection and active devotion to the public good, according to rhetorical historians Poulakos and Depew.

For Isocrates, a rhetorical education could only proceed by simultaneous civic service and academic learning—a familiar refrain in service-learning discourse. Good teachers, according to the works of Isocrates, follow through from theory to application: First, they impart all the forms of discourse in which the mind expresses itself. Then, when they have made [students] familiar and thoroughly conversant with these lessons, they set them at exercises, habituate them to work, and require them to combine in practice the particular things which they have learned, in order that they may grasp them more firmly and bring their theories into closer touch with the occasions for applying them.

*(Antidosis 183-184)*

The educator may begin with theory and then go to “exercises” and realistic case studies, but the city of Athens itself provided the ultimate occasions for the completion of rhetorical education; for in Athens, Isocrates reasoned, “everyone obtains here that practical experience which more than any other thing imparts ability to speak” (*Antidosis 296*). Application to real civic occasions, therefore, was not subsequent to graduation, but part of the educational strategy that “imparts” rhetorical skills under the guidance of the instructor.

Isocrates explained why civic rhetorical practice was so powerful but its teaching so difficult: rhetoric is not “an art with hard and fast rules” but rather “a creative process” (*Against*

*the Sophists* 12). The theory being taught in such a school of civic rhetoric needed to be continually adapted to the situations of practical use, and this was only possible through the continuous dialogue between rhetorical theory and practice among students and teachers active in both realms. “In this process,” he reasons, “master and pupil each has his place ... both have a part in the exercises of practical application” in which “the master must painstakingly direct his pupil” (*Antidosis* 188). Humbly learning from the community was an important principle for Isocrates, for there one learns the arguments that empower a community to achieve its own highest ideals, rather than ideals imposed from above.

In his Socratic self-defense, *Antidosis*, Isocrates called true philosophers those who “pursue and practice those studies which will enable us to govern wisely both our own households and the commonwealth,” and contrasted his school with teachers who “ignore our practical needs and delight in the mental juggling of the ancient sophists” (285). Isocrates called his system “philosophy” in order to distinguish it from the merely technical training in public speech offered by many Sophists. He also distinguished training in rhetoric from purely academic knowledge like “astronomy and geometry” (264) that are merely a “gymnastic of the mind and a preparation for philosophy” (266).

While the Sophistic rhetorical teachers, itinerant lecturers and speechwriters, were criticized by many for making the unjust appear just, Isocrates had a strong community-based ethical perspective. However, Isocrates would not commit himself so far as to inculcate a specific political orientation for a “justice-oriented citizen” described by Westheimer and Kahne. Isocrates repeatedly claimed that civic virtue could not be implanted through education and they were charlatans who claimed to do so. Although Isocrates himself held political commitments, he did not teach his students a particular approach to politics or to private virtue. Nevertheless,

he believed personal virtue and the public good could be enhanced by “an ambition to speak well” and a good rhetorical education grounded in the *doxa* (virtues and norms) of the local political community, because civic virtue was based on maintaining consistency between one’s public words and private character as one sought to defend the noblest causes for the advantage of the community (Poulakos & Depew 52). An ideal Isocratic rhetor learned to discover for himself the good and true by devoting himself to civic service in speech and action.

However, Isocratic pedagogy had one weakness that undermined its ease of transmission: it lacked a *techne* or coherent set of principles that would apply to the crafting of persuasion across contexts. “It is not in the nature of man,” reasoned Isocrates, “to attain a science by the possession of which we can know positively what we should do or what we should say” (*Antidosis* 271). Isocrates’ rhetorical principles were so closely tied to the situations in which he and his students acted that he was very cautious about recommending one meta-theory that would transcend local contexts. It was his conscious decision to invest rhetoric in people’s character and actions, not in an abstract technique, and to make it impossible for his form of rhetorical education to be separated from a practical apprenticeship. According to Haskins’ careful reading of Isocrates in comparison with Plato and Aristotle, Isocrates “argues for an inclusive and politically responsible discursive training (*logon paideia*) over and against the disembodied mastery of a *techne*,” “promotes discursive education as training in social action” and expects his students to “grow into public persons whose actions are worthy of poetic and political praise” (199, 204).

In contrast with Isocrates, Plato’s school of rhetoric offered a more systematic and scientific approach to rhetoric. However, some elements of Plato’s approach are inconsistent with theories of community service and engagement that work toward the mutual exchange of



learning and collaboration between academy and community. Platonic public rhetoric (not Socratic dialectic, which was the mode of dialogic investigation used between teachers and students in the Academy) assumes that the good speaker has direct access to virtue and the knowledge of the truth, and that he removes his audience's impediments to true perception through speech composed according to technical rules. A good Platonic rhetor will "classify the speeches and the souls and will adapt each to the other, showing the causes of the effects produced and why one kind of soul is necessarily persuaded by certain classes of speeches, and another is not" (Plato, *Phaedrus* 271b). Plato's theories are attractive because of their scientific approach, but better suit a traditional academic-community relationship of a largely one-way flow of service, knowledge and public relations communication from the enlightened academic rhetor to the receptive and beloved (or resistant and ungrateful) audience. Platonic rhetorical theory requires some adaptation to suit an academy-community engagement program collaboratively and creatively led by students, faculty members, and community partners.

Isocrates' and Plato's approaches were later elaborated by Aristotle and Cicero. Ciceronian rhetoric, largely based on the ideas of Isocrates, is an important perspective for service-learning institutionalization because it fortifies Isocrates' educational intentions and processes with Aristotelian technical rhetoric. Aristotle's rhetorical theory, the most coherently theorized of all ancient rhetorics, arose out of Plato's school of philosophy in Athens. Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* offers an excellent understanding of public leadership rhetoric adapted to the cultural and political context of ancient Athens. Aristotelian rhetoric has been fruitfully adapted to contemporary rhetorical situations, especially in modernist twentieth-century North America. In contrast, Cicero's integrative, sustainable and holistic approach was useful for Renaissance humanists when they discovered in Cicero a theory and practice that helped them to unite their

academic pursuits with various forms of oral and literate civic engagement. The Ciceronian approach to rhetoric was founded on the pedagogy and practice of Isocrates' civically-engaged rhetor while it acknowledged the limited usefulness of explicit theories developed through scientific analysis of current civic rhetorical practice. Cicero also added his own teachings on civility, virtue, humor, and decorum and expanded the province of rhetoric to include literary, philosophical and conversational forms and topics, thereby acculturating Greek rhetoric to his Roman contemporaries' image of the ideal citizen-orator. Cicero acknowledged the limitations of past rhetorical traditions and theories, but saw the power of combining and adapting them to serve the needs of his own political and cultural situation, including his personally difficult situations of political exile and subservience to the Caesars and Triumvirs after the fall of the democratic republic.

Therefore, service-learning and some historical rhetoricians are strongly allied because they share a strong emphasis on forming responsible, ethical citizens who have the ability to discover how to use persuasion for good ends. Civic engagement and community service-learning are forms of scholarship and pedagogy that are more consistent with Isocratic rhetorical education than with Platonic rhetorical education in terms of their theory, as well as their practice.

As James Muir explains, the lesson we learn from educational and rhetorical history is that Isocrates' approach, and not Plato's, was sustained for more than twenty centuries. Through Cicero and Quintilian's works, Isocrates' ideas influenced medieval universities and the European humanists and sustained the liberal arts as the core of higher education until the twentieth century. In contrast, Plato's and Aristotle's works were not prominent for most of educational history in Western Europe, and when they were recovered in the fifteenth century,

they stirred up debate. Platonic and Aristotelian thinking about truth, identity, communication fosters an abstract disciplinary purism and a technical approach to educational ends and means and can either produce resistance to service-learning in education (seen in Stanley Fish), or promote a version of service-learning that, while ethical in its intentions, is based on a hierarchical and technical philosophy, as discussed below.

### **Rhetorical Theory and Service-learning Institutionalization**

It should be no surprise that as higher education has become such a powerful means of influence in our own culture, rhetorical theories should arise naturally within the realm of higher education policy and administration to explain how people persuade one another about service-learning. In the past decade, service-learning leaders have increasingly discussed the methods by which they can promote further institutionalization of service-learning within colleges and universities. At the same time that they provide “organizational” theories for higher education, they also theorize the “rhetoric” of civic engagement institutional change in higher education, often without naming it as such.

Our role as rhetoricians can include not merely pointing out the “rhetorical” elements of service-learning institutionalization theories, but also putting them in dialogue with other rhetorical theories, such as the historical theories of civic education contributed by Plato, Isocrates, Aristotle, and Cicero, and then offering a productive recommendation or evaluation of a theory as a result. This process may reveal important philosophical inconsistencies within, or ethical differences among, certain types of rhetorical approaches to community service-learning institutionalization.

First, we need to be clear what “rhetorical theory” is and what it does in order to distinguish when non-rhetoricians participate in it, and when card-carrying rhetoricians are in fact choosing to do something else. “Rhetorical theory,” as defined by Gerard Hauser and thirteen other rhetorical scholars in 2003, “provides occasion for reflection about how language is used, particularly and universally, to constitute individuals and groups” and “can articulate and redemocratize practices and conditions for deliberation, pedagogy, and public work” (314). These theories need not be crafted by rhetoricians or rely on a set canon of rhetorical terminology such as *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, *invention*, *arrangement*, etc. Like Isocrates’ rhetorical theory, it need not include detailed technical instructions or discussions of style and arrangement for the production of rhetoric. Rather, by theorizing how service learning persuasion by instructors, presidents, and community organizations impact policies, choices, course outlines, they are doing what Carlita P. Greene calls for: “rhetorical theorists need to shift our focus to examining the *structural effects of texts*<sup>3</sup> instead of primarily focusing on the functional, localized effects of texts” (Hauser et. al. 321). Service-learning discourse aims for a structural transformation of higher education institutions. Theorists examine the underlying philosophies behind service-learning rhetoric and examine their impacts on service-learning programs; based on this analysis, they may promote or recommend enhanced modes of engaging in service-learning rhetoric.

Brenton Faber, an interdisciplinary scholar of discourse and change with a background in rhetorical studies, has deployed his rhetorical expertise beyond merely critiquing the terms and power of the service-learning movement—he has theorized a rhetorical rationale and an organizational plan for the institutionalization of service-learning and community engagement in higher education. In the final chapter of his book *Community Action and Organizational*

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<sup>3</sup> Emphasis added.

*Change: Image, Narrative, Identity*, Faber helps readers understand how a rhetorical perspective, combined with theories from cultural studies, can enable action that promotes positive organizational and social change. He builds an argument that culminates in recommendations for the public and academic promotion of service-learning and community-based action research. Faber cautions that the broad public benefits of community-based research in a higher education institution may go unnoticed while other discourses construct the public image of the institution, working against its own internal narratives of identity and social value. In his final chapter, he addresses the forces of change in higher education and academic research. He argues that by making the community relevance of academic research more clear to a wide public readership, the institution constructs a community-centered public image consistent with its actual practices and internal identity.

Faber contributes his rhetorical expertise to the progress of service-learning institutionalization by concluding with twelve specific recommendations that transform the roles of academics and administrators and the traditional uses of university finance. They include: reduced teaching loads and paid sabbaticals for faculty who engage in service-learning and community based research, grants to help service-learning courses with their community projects, community leaders who plan meetings with faculty to discuss service learning curricula and service opportunities, and the appointment of civic workers and grassroots community leaders to university boards of directors. In these innovations, Faber highlights the key role of faculty members and nonacademic organizational leaders as public communicators and does not even mention the external relations departments of academic institutions.

Unlike recommendations of some institutionalization theorists discussed below, this promotion of direct dialogue partly circumvents some of the bureaucracy, and has a

democratizing effect on higher education public relations communication. It takes some of the control of the university's public image out of the management's hands and places it in the hands of scholars, community partners, and students who establish partnerships directly. It is through the direct communication between academics and nonacademic communities, the public voice and public ethos of researchers and by extension their institutions, that he hopes to promote through supportive institutional policies, creative rhetorical strategies, and joint publication venues.

Service-learning institutionalization theorists who do not self-identify as rhetoricians have also contributed rhetorical theories for service-learning institutionalization that rhetoricians should acknowledge and analyze. This process has often been treated primarily as a matter of creating institutional structures and mechanisms such as tenure criteria and incentives for course development and faculty development, as in publications by Andrew Furco and Barbara Holland. It may seem controversial to consider the insights of a number of scholars across the disciplines to be contributions to service-learning rhetoric when they did not apparently intend their ideas to be considered as such a contribution. However, it is beneficial to acknowledge every contributor to rhetorical tradition regardless of their disciplinary perspective or the authors' vocabulary. (After all, Isocrates is considered a rhetorician although he named his field "philosophy" and criticized the sophists). Bizzell and Herzberg include in their anthology of readings *The Rhetorical Tradition* selections from Mikhail Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, explaining that although these thinkers "do not work in the rhetorical tradition, [they] nonetheless contribute to modern rhetorical theory through their important studies of language and its relation to knowledge" (14).

In discussions of institutionalization of service-learning, the measurement of the degree of institutional commitment to civic engagement is predicated largely on a content analysis of rhetorical artifacts and presumptions about their guiding influence: faculty testimonies, institutional policies, vision statements, and descriptions of programs and courses. In their rubrics for diagnosis, institutionalization analysts have developed implicit theories about how language is involved in the spread of service-learning or can create obstacles to its spread. Such theories of effective and ethical institutional service-learning communication and its effects, as well as ineffective or unethical communication (or lack of communication) and its effects, have immediate implications for service-learning rhetorical practice. Rhetoricians with a broad theoretical expertise in the connection between language and power can sharpen the focus of these theories.

For example, Andrew Furco, a leading theorist of service-learning institutionalization, is one of the most well-known advisors of general communication strategies for the institutionalization of service-learning programs. He asserts that “a critical mass of faculty who support and promote the use of service-learning” is the most important factor for institutionalization. For this critical mass to develop, “faculty members at research institutions must be convinced that service-learning can enhance and advance their roles as researchers and scholars” (69). For this persuasion to happen at research universities where research is often valued more than teaching, “campus administrators need to promote service-learning as a philosophy rather than as a pedagogy” (70). By following the chain of desired effects to their causes in persuasive acts, Furco constructs a rhetorical theory about how institutional persuasion works by symbolically “tying” service-learning with institutional and scholarly norms and incentives. The reasoning process and narrative examples he uses can be taken up by

practitioners to persuade faculty members and administrators. In the drive to institutionalize service learning, the ultimate good end, many rhetorical means are recommended that adapt to each stakeholder type's motivations, bringing them along a Platonic path to enlightenment and the ideal republic. However, Furco's rhetorical advice does not set limits on persuasion or institutionalization, does not establish the importance of listening to resistance and alternative points of view about service-learning, and does not invest the persuader with alternative paths to sustaining service-learning other than an organization-wide program of institutionalization involving central offices and policies within the academic structure.

A theoretical analysis of a 2006 article in the *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning* further brings to light the differences between Isocratic and Platonic theories of persuasion and the challenges and pitfalls of contemporary efforts to blend them. Kevin Kecskes intelligently brings cultural theories of Thompson *et. al.* to bear on community service-learning partnership management. In general, Kecskes is providing a good contribution by offering a theoretical perspective on the varied psychological characteristics and cultural assumptions of one's audiences (not necessarily flawed) that may be helpful by providing rhetors with the practical wisdom they need for rhetorical success: "Understanding the inherent strengths and weaknesses of each cultural frame can help campus and/or community leaders determine how to most effectively approach a given public or private, personal, or professional partnership building endeavour" (14). Kecskes, despite the implicit denigration of rhetoric in his title, "Beyond the Rhetoric: Applying a Cultural Theory Lens to Community-Campus Partnership Development," in actual practice recommends a more comprehensive rhetorical perspective in contrast to four partial rhetorical perspectives, three of which I characterize as vaguely neo-Sophistic (Individualist), neo-Platonic (Hierarchist), and neo-Isocratic (Egalitarian). Borrowing



from cultural studies, the article applies the theory to a rhetorical problem and constructs a meta-rhetorical theory similar to Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Book II, which goes into great detail about the psychology of audiences. However, although Kecskes recommends a hybrid egalitarian-hierarchist view, many elements of his taxonomy lean toward the neo-Platonic. The contradictory neo-Platonic tendencies include an audience-stereotyping taxonomy that may convince its users they have an idealized objective knowledge of audiences, and reinforcement of hierarchical communication models of rhetorical success. He correctly characterizes most service-learning practitioners as egalitarian, but because the egalitarian view is merely one cultural frame among many, he says we need to "unlearn [this] belief system and work to build a new system in its place" (5, 14).

Although Kecskes is right to criticize naïve egalitarian perspectives which "expect to find" audiences willing to engage in mutuality (9), a rhetoric that aims to construct egalitarian partnership forums need not be naïve, procedurally inefficient, nor impatient with dissent. Kecskes offers a helpful corrective to idealistic egalitarianism, but the correction leans too far in the direction of the hierarchical model than is necessary, and this leaning may be a result of addressing higher educational administrators who will likely favor the "technological transfer of expertise," objectivity, and control as features of his taxonomy (10).

Furco's and Kecskes' recommendations for institutionalization, as well as those of other scholars, have contributed to an oft-cited *Self-Assessment Tool for Service-Learning Sustainability* developed by Community-Campus Partnerships for Health with the support of other major service-learning organizations. The instrument elicits information about the prominence of service-learning in institutional policy documents, clear definitions, the involvement of faculty and students, the quality of community partnerships, the existence of

coordinating offices, and measurement of numbers of staff, students and courses involved. While Furco and Kevin Kecskes take the approach of recommending rhetorical strategies to advance institutionalization that can then be measured qualitatively, quantitatively and by organizational structures, Dan W. Butin has recommended a closer look at the ethics and implications of the theories and philosophies of service-learning institutionalization.

Dan W. Butin cautions that “there may be a fundamental and unbridgeable gap between the rhetoric and reality of the aspirations of the present-day service-learning movement” (“Limits” 474). In particular, Butin asks service-learning practitioners to be cautious about their rhetoric, which he sees as “nothing less than a grand narrative for higher-education-as-service-learning, for it positions service-learning *as a politics* to transform higher education and society” (“Limits” 478). Such a vision, he says, is unrealistic and is based on unfounded assumptions about the ability and willingness of the primary audience (institutions of higher education) to be persuaded and transformed. Like Kecskes, Butin engages in a critical analysis of service-learning institutionalization, but his approach generates a more rhetorically viable theory of how it ought to be more effectively and ethically conducted. He offers a humble sense of the limits of persuasion. Obstacles include the difficulty of integrating service-learning into traditional science programs; the fact that the majority of people involved in service-learning have low institutional status; and the fact that there is no consequence for institutions who do not fully integrate service-learning. He also questions whether institutionalization is likely to achieve social justice, since larger factors than pedagogical methods may have more influence on the future of students’ civic engagement. Finally, if the service-learning movement desires, as Butin says, to “prevent itself from being questioned and critiqued once it has become part of the

academy,” such a future would be at the cost of shutting down the very sort of rhetorical discourse and debate which sustains academic communities (492).

Most recently, Butin has critiqued the philosophy of the 2009 “Campuses of Service” initiative for being “deeply and distinctly campus-centric,” focusing on quantity of hours served and courses taught rather than quality and transformational change in the community, and privileging hierarchical concepts about who serves whom:

In the end, it all too often becomes all about the faculty teaching, the privileged college students volunteering, and the colleges which get the attention from all this activity. ...

What we are basically seeing is the institutionalization of service-learning exactly in the wrong way as envisioned by the founders of the movement. (Butin, “Who Serves Whom?”)

Instead of a vision that would see service-learning as a means to institutional prestige and an imperialistic model of service to the community, Butin’s works recommend a rhetorical future for service-learning—as an academic discipline that operates through perpetual self-critique and persuasion.

Some of my colleagues who lead service-learning in Canada have confessed frustration with Dan Butin’s objections and his heretical agreement with some of Stanley Fish’s criticisms of service-learning as a partisan intrusion on higher education. However, Butin has done service-learning a good service by being a voice of rhetorical prudence. Robert Hariman explores the “close relationship between prudence and rhetorical consciousness” (290): Although “in the modern era prudence has lost its close connection to rhetoric,” “[p]rudence, like the art of rhetoric, has a portability that allows application to groups, subcultures, institutions, and publics” (305). “Prudential thinking,” found in Dan Butin’s cautions about the idealistic vision of service-

learning institutionalization, “is a mode of reflection on practical affairs that emphasizes attention to the limits of action . . . one has to be aware of obstacles without, contradictions within, and unintended consequences across the board” (295). Hariman distinguishes prudence from “instrumental rationality” often espoused by corporate administrators. Instead of focusing on optimizing the effectiveness of a particular campaign, prudence focuses on how “natural limits might have been ignored, how seemingly natural limits might be artificial, and how some artificial limits ought to be imposed” (295). By recommending that service-learning “discipline” itself by giving birth to the discipline of Community Studies, Butin imposes artificial limits on the endeavour of institutionalization in order to preserve its revolutionary potential within the academic forum: “If service-learning cannot discipline itself, and if it cannot gain the professional and social legitimacy to control its own knowledge production, develop its own disciplinary boundaries and norms, and critique and further its own practices, it will be unsustainable as a transformative agent within higher education” (“Disciplining” 59). According to Hariman, prudence occasionally makes apparent political compromises, “diminished commitments and often embarrassing maneuvers” in order to safeguard “the sustainability of the political system” (295).

## **Conclusion**

The study of service-learning institutionalization discourse is more than a navel-gazing study of our own methods of teaching and learning. It engages in “responsible” rhetoric that takes academic scholars beyond the classroom and breaks the academic bubble by considering the whole community as the setting for this rhetoric and transformation, and not just the academy. It wrestles with the very question of the ethical responsibility of the campus to the

community, and conversely the community's responsibility to influence campus life in an ethical manner. The larger public contexts of service-learning rhetoric are extremely important to forge a more "socially responsible" rhetoric that looks beyond the interests of a program, department, discipline or institution.

As Wayne Booth has recently argued in his manifesto *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication*, "rhetorical training [is] essential in learning not only how to protect against deception" (which Booth dubs "rhetrickery"), "but also how to conduct argument that achieves trustworthy agreement and thus avoids the disasters of violence" (x). All academic institutions and their communities are in need of less "rhetrickery," better rhetoric and more sensitive rhetorical understanding. "Knowledge and belief are products of persuasion, which seeks to make the arguable seem natural, to turn positions into premises—and it is rhetoric's responsibility to reveal these ideological operations" (Bizzell & Herzberg 15). In our developed nations, higher education policy and administration is a high-stakes area of public policy, and service-learning practitioners are among many voices who seek to "make the arguable seem natural, [and] to turn positions into premises" (15) by embedding them into institutional policies and everyday institutional life.

In this article, I have suggested some ways that service-learning rhetoricians may engage as scholars to promote effective and ethical service-learning rhetoric. Ellen Cushman has recommended joining with community rhetors in their persuasive acts, as well as practicing community service-learning in the classroom. However, rhetoricians are not limited to these modes of engagement: they may also apply their knowledge of rhetorical criticism, history, and theory to community service-learning institutionalization. I have demonstrated the benefits of rhetorical perspectives on service-learning by discussing contemporary rhetoricians' principled

criticism and praise of the movement. I have demonstrated how rhetorical historians can engage with service-learning discourse by inquiring into the debates and ideologies that structure civic engagement in historical and contemporary higher education. Finally, I have revealed how recent publications about service-learning institutionalization theory and philosophy can be used to engage insightfully with the connection between power and language, providing cautions and recommendations for the overall conduct of institutionalization rhetoric.

A rhetorical understanding of “community” in service-learning institutionalization, in the vein of Ornatowski and Bekins, Butin and Kecskes, should enable practitioners to live more comfortably in a space where continual persuasion and negotiation is necessary to maintain or transform community boundaries, and prevent them from idealizing a state of institutionalization in which no internal divisions or external resistance exist. Given that institutionalization may move resources and attention away from other valuable activities or shift the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, service-learning rhetoric should aim to do the least harm to academics and citizens who resist service-learning or those who will suffer from redirected resources.

In the tradition of Isocrates and Cicero, contemporary rhetoricians can recommend not only immediate and local rhetorical guidance, but construct a sustainable, humble, gradual, collaborative vision for a democratic forum in higher education and society. In this idealized rhetorical forum, service-learning advocates would be only persuasive one voice among many, but would not abandon their ideals. Instructors, students, community partners, or administrators may alternately or jointly play the role of the informer/persuader, and every participant would be more conscious of their need for rhetorical education and rhetorical ethics. Participation of the historically marginalized would be improved by the spread of rhetorical education beyond administrators and academics to students and community partners. Civic rhetorical education

would empower “students, communities, legislators” and members of the public to engage in adapting community service learning to their city and educational institutions, and to more confidently articulate their ideas to people with more financial, institutional, and cultural capital than themselves. Conflicts between Platonic and Isocratic perspectives on education would be developed and explored, enabling leaders to create spaces for both types of pedagogy.

Expanding the rhetorical forum and increasing rhetorical expertise would be a way of re-drawing the boundaries of the academic community. Service-learning would thereby submit to disciplining itself into epistemic humility while training its voice to perform wise eloquence that articulates the relevance of higher education within public and academic forums.

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