

Research Philosophy and Agenda | Allen Brizee, PhD, Loyola University Maryland

My research philosophy is guided by Boyer's concept of engaged scholarship so that my inquiry overlaps with, and is informed by, my teaching and my service. Specifically, my philosophy combines rhetorical theory, empirical research, and applied practice related to composition, technical writing, usability, and civic engagement. My goal, therefore, is to conduct theoretically- and empirically-based research in these areas to contribute positively to the writing disciplines, to local communities, and to my students. Ultimately, I am investigating how universities can work to build knowledge collaboratively *with* community partners, an extension of the *logos dunamis* concept outlined in my Teaching Philosophy.

My lines of inquiry investigate how rhetorical theory and writing can help students, universities, and local communities collaborate more effectively and work together as equal partners in knowledge creation. To carry out this inquiry, I investigate how a next step in college-community partnerships might work. Most college-community relationships fall into the traditional categories of extension, outreach, or service-learning that can form hierarchies between universities and the local citizens. For example, in extension and outreach models, the university is perceived as "expert" and knowledge creation (inquiry and discovery) is controlled by the school. Even certain models of service-learning can work at odds with their collaborative goals. For instance, some charity models can perceive community partners as unequal counterparts. These approaches lead to "town-gown" tension and separate organizations that should be working together.

My research looks at a more collaborative methodology, what I call participatory civic engagement, where universities and local communities work together to create knowledge and where all stakeholders are considered experts in their areas of experience. To enact this inquiry and cooperation, I use classical and contemporary rhetorical theory and empirical research methods in my service-learning courses to show students how they might collaborate as equal partners with local communities rather than following charity models of civic engagement. Further, I use empirical research methods, such as usability testing, to systematically gather feedback from local residents. A specific example of this work is the ongoing service-learning project with Richnor Springs to develop and refine their community website.

Building on my three-year relationship with Richnor Springs, I will begin a community-based research project in spring 2014 where service-learning students will work with RSNA to develop literacy and technology materials and post them on the Richnor Springs website. Then over the summer, a research assistant and I will use these resources to conduct a technology workshop and a job search document workshop (cover letters and résumés). We will use mixed-methods research (usability testing) to collect qualitative and quantitative data on the website resources and on the workshops themselves so that we can revise the literacy resources and refine the workshops and more effectively meet the needs of our community partners.

This methodology enacts Boyer's engaged scholarship model by including teaching (the spring 2014 service-learning project), research (the empirical study), and service (the ongoing relationship with Richnor Springs). I plan to write two scholarly articles based on this project: one pedagogical piece that discusses the spring 2014 service-learning project and its role in the Technical Writing course, and one research article that explains the findings from the summer usability testing and workshop feedback. This approach was successful for me in the past as this was the model I used to conduct research for my dissertation. My dissertation generated two scholarly articles and numerous presentations at regional, national, and international conferences.