

Essay 3: Profile and Reflective Research Essay

There may be no better way of dramatizing the impact of a problem, the importance of a question, or the significance of an idea than showing how it presents itself in the life of one person.

---Bruce Ballenger

What's the assignment?

As part of a community-engagement project in Fort Worth, Essay 3 requires you to write an essay where you profile a Tarrant County community partner using details you get from interviews and observations to examine some aspect of the local culture or place. With assistance from TCU's [Center for Community Involvement and Service-Learning](#), we've matched with a community partner, Cassata High School, and you'll visit and observe the workings of the school and talk with guests, volunteers, or employees. There are two components of this assignment: 1) a short, descriptive piece of writing **for the community partner** on a topic of your choice (in which you will be interviewing someone affiliated with Cassata); and 2) a reflective piece of writing **about the community** that frames your experiences in a local context and includes research (2-3 sources).

Overview

With a partner from our class, you'll become familiar with Cassata through knowledge you gain from research, class discussion, a visit from a representative of Cassata, observations, outside research, and your interview(s). Together as a class, we'll talk about preparing to interview your participant and doing research on the socioeconomic, educational, or other contexts in which many of Cassata's students live and in which Cassata provides a service for its students. Then, with a partner, you will 1) conduct an observation and interview during one of the designated times that they have provided, and 2) draft your entire paper, both parts, with a partner from class (more on that below). Much of your "Writing For the Community" piece should be a starting point in thinking about your "Writing About the Community" piece, but the "Writing For" will go on the Cassata website and the "Writing About" will be read by me. Thus, the audience between both pieces will change, and we will talk more about these issues in class. Also, in keeping a balanced perspective, look for personal strengths and external factors that may have contributed to the need for services.

With essay 3 you will build upon skills you gained from Essay 1 by incorporating narrative and details that convey meaning. You will also build upon the skills you learned from Essay 2 by incorporating research on the functions of Cassata and interviewing someone who uses their services, volunteers, or works for them in addition to locating sources that frame the local context. In the end, you and your partner will work together to draft an essay that may be shared with your interviewee and will be given to the community partner to go on their website. We'll work with Cassata on possibilities about how we can best help support their goals.

Purpose

This assignment serves dual purposes: One, you will be practicing writing *for* the community, in which you will (collaboratively with a partner) interview either a teacher or student at Cassata and compose a short piece that they will use to help bolster the content of their website. Second, you will write a reflective essay *about* the community that incorporates outside research. The project itself consists of two separate essays compiled together in one document. Please label each one with an original title when you turn it in. One requires you to compose a descriptive and concise piece of professional writing that takes into account the mission, service, and contributions of Cassata for a general, public audience. The other requires you to reflect on the whole process using outside research to frame your experience in a local context. In other words, while the two components of the essay are different, you cannot do one without the other. **The goal here is 1) to incorporate writing tasks that take you out of the classroom and into the community 2) to produce a profile that creates a connection between your interviewee with a specific website tool (a Student Success Story, Teacher Profile, or Cassata Service) and 3) to take that field-work and weave it into a reflective and contextualized narrative that demonstrates your understanding of the historical, social, and/or economic context in which your interviewee lives, studies, and/or works (reflective research).** The professional writing will be sent to Cassata, and I will read and assess the reflective research component.

A successful Community Engagement Project does the following:

- ↯ **Focus/Purpose/Genre:** Provides a profile for a teacher, student, or service that successfully demonstrates an understanding of the individual or subject; reflects on the experience with the community partner and one's own experience with education; demonstrates a research topic that connects and relates to the profile and the student reflection; provides a complex rather than too obvious or too cliché theme
- ↯ **Audience:** The profile reflects a public audience for Cassata; the reflective research demonstrates an understanding of an informal, yet scholarly audience that is not public
- ↯ **Support:** Includes primary research that is smoothly integrated as a part of the profile itself; includes secondary research in the reflective piece that demonstrates a controlling idea and understanding of the socioeconomic context
- ↯ **Style and conventions:** Primary and secondary research correctly cited in MLA format; the writing uses rich details to bring the narrative to life on paper, uses sentence variety, and has a sense of the writer's "voice" as appropriate to the writing situation; follows conventions of grammar, spelling, and punctuation, and is appropriate for a public audience for the profile and an informal, scholarly audience for the reflective research.

Course outcomes met:

- ↯ *Write in a range of genres, using appropriate rhetorical conventions*
- ↯ *Demonstrate the ability to employ flexible strategies for generating and revising your writing (such as: invention, drafting, revising, recording, and editing)*
- ↯ *Demonstrate competency in reading, quoting, and citing sources, as well as competency*

in balancing your own voices with secondary [and primary] sources

How do I approach the assignment?

1) Writing for the community: (300-500 words)

a) Options: 1) teacher profile, 2) student success story, 3) profile a service Cassata provides

b) Need to choose **before** interviewing at Cassata

2) Reflective Research about the Community (1000 words max):

a) Frame your experience in a local context (poverty, education, race, or other economic and social issues) with 2-3 sources:

Here are some guiding questions: 1) How do some of the socioeconomic factors in DFW/TX (minority dropout rates, graduation rates, poverty, etc) impact students' success? 2) How have these issues impacted your perspective on this assignment? 3) How does the educational model for Cassata help their students gain a unique high school education and how does it help their students look forward to the future?

b) reflect on your experience researching and writing the reflective research using outside research:

Here are some guiding questions: 1) what are the major differences between writing for and writing about the community? 2) How has this experience impacted how you think about education in America? 3) What sorts of differences did you notice between education/educational services at Cassata in comparison with your own high school experience? 4) What sort of assumptions did you have going into this project, and how were they challenged, affirmed, or reconfigured through the writing process?

Drafting with a partner:

For this piece, you'll conduct your observations and interview with a partner from the class, *and* you'll draft your piece together as well. We'll talk more in class about writing with someone else, but you'll work with your partner to negotiate how you'll best collaborate (each working on parts and putting them together, drafting it all together, etc.), then you'll write one essay together and submit just one portfolio. When you submit your portfolio, you'll write a collaborative author's note detailing who did what work for the assignment and what you learned about writing collaboratively as well as what you learned in working within the community. (Of course, if there are troubles along the way, come see me early so we can get you back on track.) Unless there are serious issues with collaboration and you've informed me before the assignment is due and/or your collaborative and individual notes state otherwise, both partners will receive the same grade for the portfolio; you'll only be eligible to revise this essay if both partners agree and create and submit the revision plan together and revise the portfolio together (meaning: one person can't decide to revise and resubmit it individually).

Final Draft: 1,500 words (approx. 5 pages), plus author's notes, MLA citation.

First Draft Due: 3/19/13

Pencil Grade Due: 3/26/13

[note] We'll go over the process of conducting interviews, but you want everyone you speak with to know who you are and why you are talking to them. You'll need to get permission to use their words in your paper, and you'll need to have a works cited page where you cite a personal interview. For confidentiality reasons, you'll want to use a pseudonym in your essay unless the participant prefers her/his real name to be used, as indicated on the consent form. You'll also, of course, want to be as professional and safe as possible, following the community partner and TCU's guidelines as a representative of TCU out in the community.

[note] You'll fill out the proper forms to conduct this assignment: a [TCU Informed Consent](#)/Assumption of Risk form.