

**CSL300: Theory and Practice of Community Service-Learning  
Narrative, Community, and Social Justice**

Winter 2009

Wednesdays, 1-3:50pm

HC 2-41

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

Community Service-Learning 300 provides an opportunity for students with previous CSL experience or substantial volunteer experience to contemplate Community Service-Learning as a pedagogy and to examine some of the issues that arise when the Arts curriculum is combined with community engagement. The concepts of community, narrative, service, and social justice will serve as a focus for the course.

Community Service-Learning integrates community-based activities with classroom learning. In other words, students volunteer with a non-profit community organization as part of the course curriculum. As central tenet of CSL is that it teaches students “what it means to be citizens in democratic society” (Trigg and Balliet 87). As Mary Trigg and Barbara Balliet remark in their article, “Learning Across Boundaries: Women’s Studies, Praxis and Community Service,” “Advocates of service-learning hope it will contribute to creating new generations of citizens who understand the way government [and I would add, institutions and power] work, and who will feel and act on their sense of responsibility to their communities” (87). I share these aspirations of CSL; I see it as a political and potentially socially transformative pedagogy, which is not to say that social change is invariably an outcome of CSL. One of the main goals of this course is to think about some of the philosophical, ethical, and practical issues that arise when conventional academic learning is combined with community engagement and social action. The course aims to examine CSL as a pedagogy and to think about the role and responsibility of the university in the broader community. What are our social responsibilities as learners? Is learning itself a part of social responsibility? How can learning be enhanced by practical and specific community engagement?

Narrative is one of the organizing concepts of this course for a number of reasons:

- First, CSL students often become witnesses to the life stories of the marginalized people with whom they work in the community. *(Please note: it is not the intention of the course to have students solicit clients’ personal stories. We will be concerned with stories that arise organically, either as part of a specific community project or during routine interactions.)*
- Second, life narratives have a prominent position in the non-profit sector as a kind of commodity, used to promote the work and worth of the sector.
  - In both of these contexts, life narratives represent an ambiguous path to social transformation; the empathetic reader, so the story goes, is moved to action by personal stories of suffering and survival.
- The third, and most broad reason to use narrative as an organizing concept for the course is because, as Jerome Bruner states in *Making Stories*, “stories are a culture’s

coin and currency” (15), or, in Thomas King’s words, “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (2).

Thus, we will explore multiple meanings of the concept of narrative, particularly as it relates to the work of non-profit agencies, and to how we understand social issues and personal stories of experiences such as poverty, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, and domestic violence.

### **Guiding Course Questions and Objectives**

#### *The Cultural Currency and Exchange Value of Autobiography*

As an instructor in CSL courses, I frequently read and hear students recount the life stories of the disenfranchised people they encounter in community organizations. Students describe very memorable moments where someone approaches them and discloses intimate and often painful details of his or her life. These unsolicited life stories then come to circulate in the academic classroom as a kind of academic text, a story that we can both respond to emotionally, and contextualize and analyze (if they in fact arise). *But what kind of pedagogical tool are such narratives? Why are many marginalized people compelled to tell their life stories generally and to CSL students specifically? What do they get in exchange? In other words, what kind of power relations are implicit in this exchange? Can empathetic identification with the storyteller become a means to social change and humanitarian betterment? Do these personal narratives facilitate connection across differences in class, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, ability etc.? Or do we recuperate these stories into more familiar frameworks of meaning, dispelling the fear of otherness by containing it?* We’ll attempt to answer these questions by reading literary theory on autobiographical practices and life narratives as well as published memoirs and biographical texts as we reflect on any life narratives that we may witness or gather during our work in the community. Again, students are *not* encouraged or required to solicit or discover clients’ life stories. We will discuss the ethics of narrativizing and analyzing any personal narratives that we might encounter.

#### *Life Narratives in Non-Profit Sector Literature*

Many non-profit organizations embed life narratives in reports, grant applications, websites, handbooks, and other promotional material. Often these stories are encoded as “success stories” – proof of the efficacy and value of the organization and a reason to contribute (usually financially) to the organization. Activist organizations similarly use “victims’ stories” as way of educating or alerting the public to human rights violations or health crises. Life narratives in these instances are a kind of commodity, designed and packaged to capture the reader’s interest, empathy, and political responsiveness. We will explore the implications of this commodification of life narrative by reading some local and global non-profit sector promotional materials and reports as well as representations of non-profits in the news media.

### **COURSE ENVIRONMENT AND ACTIVITIES**

The course is interdisciplinary in its approach. You can expect to read material from a variety of disciplines, including sociology, literary theory, educational theory, geography, and political studies.

The course will be run as a seminar. We will combine in-class seminar style theoretical learning and practice, including voluntary work experiences with community organizations and service groups in the non-profit sector. The course will be thematically structured through seminar readings, discussions, and presentations. Ideally, your practical work in your community placement will complement the theoretical readings and seminar discussions.

The practical work experience will be facilitated through the rubric of Community Service-Learning. You will be required to work as volunteers for 30-35 hours in a chosen community service organization. Pre-arranged volunteer placements and projects have been selected whose mandates correspond to the course's focal themes. You will be required to develop your thinking and research on community, social responsibility, service, and learning through the interrelationship and juxtapositions of theoretical reading and participatory practice.

### **COURSE THEMES AND CONCEPTS**

Several themes will be addressed in the course. These themes will act as lenses for focusing our analysis on the interplay between "community," "service," "learning," "narrative," and "social justice":

- CSL and its negotiation within the context of the university
- The meaning of community
- Citizenship
- Public life
- Privilege and power
- The character, roles, and responsibilities of the non-profit sector
- Empathy
- Ethics
- Social justice
- Uses of stories/narratives
- Life Narratives
- Autobiographical practices
- Homelessness in Edmonton
- Violence and trauma

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

CSL300 Custom Courseware, available at the U of A Bookstore

Yvonne Johnson and Rudy Wiebe, *A Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*

### **EVALUATION**

CSL Participation	20%
Seminar Preparation and Participation	20%
Blog and Blog Response	20%
Mid-term Exam	20%
Classroom-Community Colloquium	20%

## GRADING SYSTEM

Percentage	Letter Grade	Point Value	Description
95-100%	A+	4.0	Excellent
90-94%	A	4.0	Excellent
85-89%	A-	3.7	Excellent
80-84%	B+	3.3	Very Good
76-79%	B	3.0	Good
71-75%	B-	2.7	Good
66-70%	C+	2.3	Satisfactory
62-65%	C	2.0	Satisfactory
58-61%	C-	1.7	Satisfactory
54-57%	D+	1.3	Poor
50-53%	D	1.0	Minimal Pass
0-49%	F	0.0	Fail

For further details, see section 23.4(4) of the University Calendar (online at [www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/Regulations-and-Information/Academic-Regulation/23/4.html#23.4](http://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/Regulations-and-Information/Academic-Regulation/23/4.html#23.4)).

Unless otherwise discussed with the instructor, failure to complete a component of the course requirements can result in a failing grade. Violations of the Code of Student Behaviour can also result in failing grades.

**LATE POLICY:** Late papers, blog entries, and assignments, without valid and documented reasons for lateness, will not be accepted. Without valid and documented reasons, late submissions will incur 10% deductions for every day late, including weekends. Valid reasons for lateness include documented illness, bereavement, etc..

## ASSIGNMENTS

### 1. CSL Participation (20%)

CSL participation is a required facet of the course. Students are required to work between 30 and 35 hours with a chosen service organization. These hours can be fulfilled over the entire winter term, or they can be concentrated over a short duration; how you fulfill your hours will depend on the project you choose, its requirements and flexibility, as well as your own responsibilities and flexibility. Before you meet with your community organization, take some time to think about how you work best and what kind of volunteer schedule will work best for you. Many students find that having a fixed day and time for CSL work is an effective time management strategy.

Grades will be awarded for completion of the requisite 30-35 hours as well as for completing the following administrative assignments:

- i. Note of Placement Preference
  - Due: on or before January 14
  - In a brief email (1-2 paragraphs), indicate your placement preferences. Explain which two organizations you would most like to work with and why. *Include a brief explanation of what you expect to learn from your preferred placement.*
- ii. CSL Student Agreement Form
  - Refer to CSL Guidebook
  - Due in class: January 21
- iii. CSL Log
  - A record of dates, hours worked, activities/tasks performed; total hours

- Must be signed by your community supervisor to verify completion
  - Due: April 1
- iv. CSL Survey (Tentative date: April 1)

I also expect that you will use your experiences in your service organization to reflect and write critically about the practices and theories discussed in class. You will be expected to bring your CSL experiences and insights to the class. Be prepared to share your CSL experiences with your peers via discussion and written assignments. (See below, Seminar Preparation and Participation).

## 2. Seminar Preparation and Participation (20%)

This course will be run as a seminar. I will not lecture. I expect that you will come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings as well as your CSL experiences. I hope to have lively and respectful class discussion and I expect all students to participate in the discussions.

- i. Article Summary Presentation: To help facilitate this participation, each student will be expected to present two (2) articles to the class throughout the semester. These articles will be chosen by students on a first-come-first-served basis. Please confirm your choices by January 14.

Preparation of the readings means that you will summarize the author's argument and the main points of the article and present your summary to the class. You may make formal presentations if you wish, but you are not required to do so. Those who choose to make formal (but short, 10-15-minute) presentations to the class will not necessarily be assessed higher markers than those who use a more informal approach. Your main tasks here are

- to summarize the key points of the articles,
- to explain the arguments or claims raised, and
- to formulate at least 2 questions about the articles that we can use as a basis of our discussion.

The questions may aim to clarify a key concept or a line of argument; they should not aim to provoke "personal opinion," but should strive for critical engagement. Please note, websites listed under "Readings" are considered supplementary texts; students are not responsible for summarizing their content unless specified.

- ii. Article Abstract: Before your presentation, post a short (250 words maximum) abstract of your chosen article to the class blog. Abstracts must be posted by *noon on the Tuesday before* your presentation. Include key words in your post. Several of the articles contain their own abstracts; be careful not to inadvertently plagiarize these abstracts. Make sure to put key concepts and arguments into your own words, and do not be afraid to highlight concepts that you think are central to article but may not be highlighted in the author's original abstract. These abstracts will be assessed as part of your reading preparations.
- iii. Class Participation: All students will be assessed on the degree to which you come prepared to discuss the assigned readings and materials, listen to others' viewpoints, engage in critical debate, and further the productive and respectful discourse of the class.

All students will also be expected to participate in online discussion by responding to each other's blog entries. (See below)

### 3. Blog and Blog Response (20%)

#### Goals and Expectations:

Blogging in an academic context encourages you to reflect on what you're doing as part of your community service, what's going well and not so well, and what you're having difficulty doing. The class blog, in other words, allows you to create an ongoing record of meaningful aspects of your own learning process and to get response from your colleagues. Blogs also encourage us to connect the private and the public and, ideally, to bridge theory and practice. Hopefully, you'll find that blogging helps you transfer academic concepts to service situations, or vice versa, that experiences with your community placement help you understand or reinterpret academic concepts. The blog is intended to be a candid, but reflective account of your work, thinking, and experiences over the course. You should also aim to make connections here between course materials and your CSL experiences; the blog is intended to be a reflective and reflexive account of your thoughts and impression on the intersections between theoretical and academic reading and practical, community activity. I also hope that the blog will create a lively dialogue with colleagues, allow us to learn about each others' CSL experiences, and further in-class discussions.

Blog entries not intended to be "finished products." I'd like us to use the blog as a place to work out our ideas, so I am not looking for grammatical perfection or total coherence. Nonetheless, quality, engagement, and effort will be more easily (and favourably) assessed if your postings are clearly written. I encourage you to be creative with the blog. Feel free to incorporate visual materials, including photos, links to relevant media stories or other material, video work, etc., and feel free to write poetry or short fiction. Note that I expect relevant work and a sustained, engaged, reflexive, critical practice. To encourage response and discussion, include one or two questions with each post.

#### The Specifics:

- You will contribute to the class blog by writing a post and responding to a colleague's post on *alternating weeks*. (I will divide the class up so that we have a close to equal number of writers and respondents each week). ***Postings will be due on Mondays by 4pm, and responses will be due by Tuesdays at 4pm.*** Each post should be approximately 2-3 paragraphs and responses should be 1-2 paragraphs.

Blog entries will be evaluated on the following:

- the degree of innovative critical reflection, and
- the degree to which the author critically integrates his/her experiences with the more theoretical material, including readings and class discussions

Responses will be evaluated on the following:

- the degree to which the response expands the conversation by linking the blogger's ideas to course concepts and/or CSL experiences

**Please note:** These postings *must* maintain high degrees of confidentiality and anonymity when referring to people with whom you are interacting at your placement. Similarly, as a class we must commit to respecting each others' intimacies with confidentiality.

#### 4. Mid-term Exam (20%)

There will be a take-home mid-term exam due upon return from Reading Week on February 25. We will work together, either online or in-class (time-permitting), to devise 3-5 short essay questions that will link the course material with our experiences in our community placements, and then you'll answer 2 or 3 of those questions at home. Your responses should be 2-3 double-spaced, typed pages each.

#### 5. Classroom-Community Colloquium (20%)

The last week of class, we will host a colloquium where we exchange final reflections on our CSL experiences with our community partners. I'd like us, as a class, to formulate our goals and expectations of such an event. As the course progresses, we'll arrange time to discuss this final event. Right now, I'm envisioning the following 2 components:

- Final Critical Analysis Paper (5-7 pgs., double-spaced, typed, 12-pt. font, due April 8)
- Colloquium Presentation (7-10 minutes, to group, including community partners, April 8)

The final critical analysis paper will involve some research, but will focus on an aspect of your placement that you found most valuable or insightful. The colloquium presentation will be a rendition of your critical analysis paper. It is your chance to share what you see as the most important aspects of your experiences with your peers and your community supervisors. Don't feel like you have to censor yourself. Your community supervisors are as eager to learn from you as you are to learn from them.

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### COURSE SCHEDULE

Readings are from the course pack unless otherwise specified.

This schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Any and all changes will be announced and discussed in class. Students are responsible for any changes to the schedule given in class.

Week 1: 7 January	Introductions
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Activities:

- Course overview and assignment discussion
- Definition of CSL
- Choosing CSL placements
- CSL partners classroom visits
- Expectations and goals
- Overview of different "service" models

Readings:

- Keith Morton, “The Irony of Service: Charity, Project and Social Change in Service-Learning”

#### Week 2: 14 January                      Community Service-Learning and The University

##### Readings:

- Stanley Fish, “Aim Low”
- Stanley Fish, “Why We Built the Ivory Tower”
- Dan Butin, “Service-Learning as Postmodern Pedagogy”

##### Recommended Reading:

- Len Findlay, “Realizing Community: The University of Community”

#### Week 3: 21 January                      Privilege and Power

##### Readings:

- Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege”
- Michelle Dunlap et al., “White Students’ Experiences of Privilege and Socioeconomic Disparities: Toward a Theoretical Model”
- Margaret Himley, “Facing (Up To) ‘The Stranger’ in Community Service-Learning”
- Donna Bickford and Nedra Reynolds, “Activism and Service-Learning: Reframing Volunteerism as Acts of Dissent”

#### Week 4: 28 January                      Understanding the Non-Profit Sector

##### Readings:

- Jennifer Wolsh, “The Shadow State: Transformations in the Voluntary Sector”
- Nicholas Fyfe and Christine Milligan, “Out of the Shadows: Exploring Contemporary Geographies of Voluntarism”
- Susan Phillips, “More than Stakeholders: Reforming State-Voluntary Sector Relations”

##### Recommended Readings:

- CSL U of Alberta, “A Primer on the Non-Profit Sector” ([www.arts.ualberta.ca/csl](http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/csl))
- CBC, “Alberta’s Social Services in Crisis” ([www.cbc.ca/edmonton/features/socialservices/](http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/features/socialservices/))

##### Guest speaker:

Shannon Butters, CSL Partnership Coordinator

#### Week 5: 4 February                      Citizenship and Public Life

##### Readings:

- Jordy Rocheleau, “Theoretical Roots of Service-Learning: Progressive Education and the Development of Citizenship”
- Nancy Jurik, “Imagining Justice: Challenging the Privatization of Public Life”

- Chris Armstrong, “Global Civil Society and the Question of Global Citizenship”

Week 6: 11 February                      Uses of Stories

Readings:

- Gary Harper et al., “Community Narratives: The Use of Narrative Ethnography in Participatory Community Research”
- Tony Glover, “Narrative Inquiry and the Study of Grassroots Associations”
- Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, “Conjunctions: Life Narratives in the Field of Human Rights”

In-Class Activity:

→ Bring to this class an example of a narrative used either in your community organization (in promotional literature) or in the context of a social movement.

18 February                                      Reading Week

Week 7: 25 February                      Responding to Stories: Empathy and Social Action

Readings:

- Megan Boler, “The Risks of Empathy: Interrogating Multiculturalism’s Gaze”
- Stephanie Nolen, *28: Stories of AIDS in Africa* (excerpts)
- Dave Eggers, *What is the What* (excerpts) (tentative)

Supplementary Reading:

UNAIDS, <http://www.unaids.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/Resources/Publications/>  
TBA: Sudanese Civil Wars (tentative)

Week 8: 4 March                              Stories of Homelessness in Edmonton

Readings:

- Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening”
- Andrew Paul, “The Last Mayor of Tent City,” *See Magazine*
- Various articles on “Tent City” in *Edmonton Street News*
- Shaungnessy Bishop-Stall, *Down to This: Squalor and Splendor in a Big-City Shantytown* (excerpts)
- Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness, “Who Is Homeless?” (videos, <http://www.endedmontonhomelessness.com/about-homelessness/who-is-homeless.aspx>)

Guest Speakers:

Kelly, former homeless Edmontonian

TBA, member of the Edmonton Committee to End Homelessness

TBA, Bissell Centre

Recommended Reading:

- TBA re: Edmonton’s 10-year Plan to End Homelessness

## Supplementary Information:

- [www.homewardtrust.ca](http://www.homewardtrust.ca)
- “Out in the Cold: A Count of Homeless Persons in Edmonton” (2006)
- [www.ecohh.ca](http://www.ecohh.ca)

Week 9: 11 March	Women’s Stories of Trauma
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## Readings:

- Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, “Unbearable Witness: Toward a Politics of Listening”
- Linda Goyette, ed., *Standing Together: Women Speak Out About Violence and Abuse* (excerpts)

## Guest speaker:

Linda Goyette, TBC and/or Jan Reimer, ED Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters

Week 10: 18 March	Institutions and Autobiographical Practices
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## Readings:

- Liz Stanley, “From ‘Self-Made Woman’ to ‘Women’s Made-Selves’”
- Lauren Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics”
- Colleen Biondi and Sherrie Stevens, “Telling the Story: Exploring your Clients’ Lives”

## In-class Activity:

→ Revisiting narratives from community organizations’ promotional material or social movements, plus any new encounters with auto/biography

Week 11: 25 March	Memoir and Social Justice
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## Reading:

Yvonne Johnson and Rudy Wiebe, *A Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman* (tentative)

Week 12: 1 April	Colloquium Preparation
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## Assignment:

→ Draft of final paper due for peer editing and class discussion of colloquium material

Week 13: 8 April	Classroom-Community Colloquium
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Community partners will join us for presentations of final projects and discussion.

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## OTHER IMPORTANT CSL-RELATED NOTES

### *Community Supervisor*

Think of your community supervisor as a co-educator and mentor in the course. You can learn a lot from them, perhaps more than from the classroom or the instructor. Accord your supervisor due respect and courtesy. Remember, they also want to learn from you, just as I do, so be open to discussing any relevant issues that come up for you.

### *Ethics, Confidentiality, and Respect*

Familiarize yourself with the “Safety and Ethical Guidelines for CSL Participants” in the CSL Guidebook, pgs. 6 and 7.

### *Student Confidentiality and Anonymity*

Your blog postings and responses may include anecdotal information drawn from your personal experiences and experiences at your CSL placement, **but you must take steps to avoid any identifying information.** Do not use real names; do not include details that would allow a reader to deduce anyone’s identity. .

### *Confidentiality and Respect*

You may be privy to sensitive parts of people’s personal and social lives. Consider how often you are privy to intimate details of those around you. As we draw on our experiences outside of the classroom in class, please maintain high degrees of confidentiality. Respect peoples’ intimacies with confidentiality.

### *Research Ethics*

Should any student choose to represent any other person or his/her experiences, they must obtain permission from the subject. People subject to representation must be able to provide **informed consent**. If people are not able to provide informed consent, then they must NOT be represented. Subjects must be informed that they are able to withdraw consent at any time, before or after being represented, and that they are not obliged to provide reasons for the withdrawal of consent. If you choose, for example, to interview someone or to photograph them, you must document their consent; consent forms are available from the instructor.

## OTHER REGULATIONS

- \* Please note that students cannot receive credit for both CSL 300 and AUCSL 300.
- \* Policy about course outlines can be found in §23.4(2) of the University Calendar.

*The Code of Student Behaviour* outlines the rights and responsibilities of all students. Please be aware of the regulations under the Code regarding behaviour in the classroom and discrimination. Disruptive classroom behaviour will not be tolerated, nor will discrimination as defined by the U of Alberta’s Code of Student Behaviour (consult Section 30.3.4). <<http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec30.html>>. Inappropriate behaviour and the disrespectful treatment of others includes, but is not limited to, personal attacks inside or outside of class and the harassment of others in any form. A number of penalties can be imposed, such as lowering a grade or expulsion from the University (as outlined in Section 30.4(2) of the Code). I will report and act on any violations of the Code of Student Behaviour.

*Plagiarism is a serious academic offense*

Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are punishable under the Code. All written work must be your own. Others' ideas and words must be meticulously documented. Ignorance is not considered an acceptable defense in cases of academic offences.

"The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behavior (online at [www.ualberta.ca/secretariat/appeals.htm](http://www.ualberta.ca/secretariat/appeals.htm)) and avoid any behavior which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offense. Academic dishonesty is a serious offense and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University."