

2021-2022 Loser-Savkar Fellowship
Final Report

Nonviolent Communication in College Composition

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Original Proposal

Abstract

I plan to study how Non-Violent Communication might be integrated into the College Composition curriculum, particularly English 112. In light of recent events, I have found myself returning to Mary Rose O'Reilley's 1993 question: "is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?" I believe some progress on this subject might be possible by re-seeing argument and persuasion through the lens of Nonviolent Communication, which I have not yet formally studied. I would like to use the fellowship to do so and then determine how to synthesize these practices with the English 111 and 112 course outcomes.

Project

Effective teaching sometimes requires noticing where your field's traditions and your students' and society's needs diverge. I have reached one of those moments in my teaching career and would like to use the resources of this fellowship to attend to this disconnect.

Traditionally, the composition sequence has been intimately tied to rhetorical strategies for teaching argument. Textbooks in the field of writing studies emphasize the concept of "argument" so much so that titles like *Everything's an Argument* have become commonplace. However, it is time we ask: is a class that is driven by traditional notions of argument the most culturally responsive way to teach writing in 2021?

Scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have pointed out that too often our language for argument is steeped in metaphors of war. Indeed, my own dissertation research explored the ways that guerrilla warfare principles might be removed from the battlefield and used as a foundation for theorizing about how disenfranchised groups might use guerrilla communication tactics to address the needs of their communities. The field of writing studies has long approached communication from a place of assumed antagonism – where there are causes to fight for and wars to wage.

The prevalence of war and conflict-oriented lenses in first-year writing contexts prompted Mary Rose O'Reilley to ask, in 1993: "is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?" Outside the first-year writing classroom, war and violence are understood to be a last resort – as strategies to be taken when civil communication falls short. Yet inside our classrooms, these metaphors still drive discussion and course design. Indeed, the events of January 6, 2021, reminded me that we in English studies have yet to fully answer O'Reilley's question. What would a college composition classroom built on the priority of community good, equity, and inclusion really look like?

While I do not yet have the answer to this question, I believe the answers lie in the domain of Nonviolent Communication (NVC). As such, I will use the resources of this fellowship to formally study the teaching of NVC, the principles of what O'Reilley coined "the peaceable classroom" and peacebuilding theory more generally. I will then examine my syllabi, course materials, and class activities with an openness to better understand how metaphors of war manifest and how Nonviolent Communication principles might be used to re-see

argument instruction and my approach to the learning outcomes of NOVA's College Composition sequence.

This formal inquiry will require multiple phases. First, I will participate in NVC training offered by The Center for Nonviolent Communication. I will supplement this training with micro-courses from the National Institute for Peace, which emphasize conflict negotiation, community dialogue, and peacebuilding. Additionally, I will conduct a self-study of peace-oriented pedagogy. I will then bring those materials into dialogue with my own expertise and training in writing, rhetoric, discourse, and pedagogy to re-imagine my courses to emphasize values of non-violence and peace-building, while still addressing the rhetorical tools necessary to support strong, effective academic writers.

Schedule

I intend to attend three training sessions from the Center for Nonviolent Communication. I will enroll in a six-week introductory course in March 2021, followed by supplementary sessions in April and May. I will then participate in (free) self-study micro-courses from the Institute of Peace during June. In July and August of 2021, I will focus on self-study from the library of resources I'll curate as a result of this fellowship. I will then use Fall 2021 to re-envision my courses for implementation during 2022.

Training Phase

I began this fellowship with a simple goal: I wanted to know how I might use the principles of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to re-see my college composition courses at NOVA. The time, space, and resources from this fellowship have certainly afforded me that. What I did not anticipate, however, was that the study of Nonviolent Communication would wholly transform my classroom, my service to the college, and my life both within and beyond the walls of our college.

In the space of this final report, I'll share the phases of research I undertook and some course revisions I made and am continuing to implement. While this is the final report of my fellowship, I see myself now only at the beginning stages of sharing what I have learned as a result of this opportunity.

Formal Training

In April 2021, I participated in a four-week Introduction to Nonviolent Communication Course with Mair Alight, an empathy specialist who is a certified trainer through the Center for Nonviolent Communication. Through this introductory course, I was introduced to basic tools and values relied upon by the NVC community. This foundation introduced me to common language features in compassionate communication and guiding principles that I would come to see as hallmarks of a new way of listening and expressing. I also noticed ways the course leader and her support team modeled NVC in Zoom meeting facilitation and consensus-building.

I followed this synchronous workshop up with a four-week self-paced course through the NVC Academy. This course, "Get Started with Nonviolent Communication" reinforced concepts offered in my first course with an added emphasis on reflection and self-assessment. This course allowed space for me to reflect, journal, and practice. I found the online platform tools and the primary teachers within the community engaging and relatable.

Next, I completed the Fearless Heart Course titled "Making Life Work," which is an NVC-based course created by Miki Kashtan, the creator of Convergent Facilitation. This course offered a deeper examination of judgments, habits of thought, and the ways that choices and perceptions of self and others shape our experiences with connection.

The work of the NVC Academy introduced me to Mary MacKenzie, another certified NVC trainer, whose teaching resonated greatly with me. I then discovered that the NVC Academy (which she co-founded) offered additional courses based upon her teaching and provided offerings on Convergent Facilitation, a topic I was intrigued by after completing Kashtan's course. As a result, I continued my formal study largely with the NVC Academy rather than pursuing micro-courses through the National Institute of Peace as I had originally planned. To do so, I subscribed to the NVC Academy library, which provided me with a seemingly endless supply of courses, resources, and audio/video to study more deeply on a wide variety of NVC topics.

I completed two additional live courses through the NVC Academy. First, I enrolled in a course titled “Too Many Words! Interrupting to Increase Connection” with MacKenzie. I was intrigued by the course because it offered a close examination of a concept I had long perceived as rude and problematic - interruption. This course allowed me to engage further with MacKenzie’s work and to begin questioning the way languaging norms (like rudeness) are constructed within our society.

Next, I completed the NVC Academy’s Convergent Facilitation Intensive with Magda Barańska and Roni Wiener. This two-day intensive provided an introduction to the principles of convergent facilitation (CF), which is a consensus-building framework. CF is built on the notion that all parties stand to lose something when compromise is the aim of a collaboration. The theory instead offers strategies for developing an integrated response to emergent conflicts or even group decisions. In this model dissent and controversy are perceived as tools for building understanding and expanding consideration, not as liabilities. Here again, I was able to learn valuable tools from the content of the workshop as well as from observing the facilitation approach and strategies for navigating the training environment.

Self Study

In addition to the completion of structured courses related to NVC, I engaged with a variety of materials to support my own learning. I read several books that offer overviews and ways of approaching Nonviolent Communication. First, I read Marshall B. Rosenberg’s *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. Rosenberg was the original creator of the NVC framework and Center for Nonviolent Communication. His work and his teachings were referenced in all the training courses I completed. This text continues to be the guidebook I reference when I discuss the NVC framework and when I need to review or seek examples related to its theory.

To Rosenberg’s original work, I added Oren Jay Sofer’s *Say What You Mean: A Mindful Approach to Nonviolent Communication*. This text synthesizes Rosenberg’s teaching with the practice of mindfulness meditation. In this way, I came to see Nonviolent Communication as best served when united with contemplative practice. Mary MacKenzie’s *Peaceful Living: Daily Meditations for Living with Love, Healing, and Compassion*. This volume is organized by day and has grown to serve as a daily grounding tool to offer wisdom and reminders related to living an NVC consciousness.

Given the continued impact of MacKenzie’s work on my own NVC development, I reached out to her and inquired about one-on-one NVC mentoring. Since November 2021, I have been meeting with her for NVC and empathy coaching. In this setting, I have been able to ask direct questions about using and tailoring NVC principles within my work setting, practiced empathy and self-empathy tools, and sought feedback on the best courses for deepening my own training and expertise. This one-on-one work has modeled for me the importance of true, deep empathetic listening and given me space to explore my own needs as a teacher, facilitator, and fellow human on this earth. I have come to a deeper sense of self-awareness and discovered tools to offer myself compassion, which has been vital to then being able to lead a life driven by NVC principles.

I also explored the NVC Dance Floors during this time. These “floors” are large cards designed by Bridget Belgrave and Gina Lawrie (also certified NVC trainers) to help participants physically move through the steps of different NVC processes. They were one of several tools designed to help individuals and groups have a kinesthetic experience with the NVC framework. The second of these tools was the GROK Games Relationship and Empathy Cards. The GROK materials are simple. They contain two decks of cards. Each card contains one word or phrase. On each card in one deck is a feeling; the other deck contains words representing universal human needs. I purchased two sets of these cards for my exploration -one set contains cards that are sized and shaped like typical playing cards. The other set is much larger and designed for use within groups and classrooms. In addition to exploring the suggested activities shipped with the boxes, I began creating my own exercises synthesizing my learning with different occasions within my own work (within my classroom, in workshops, and one-on-one with students and colleagues).

Synthesis Phase

Building on this period of study, I was then prepared to return to the College Composition sequence (English 111 and English 112) to re-see the work of the courses through the lens of an NVC consciousness. In the space here, I will first explain the way my NVC training has evolved my understanding of the learning outcomes of the courses and then discuss concrete adjustments I made to my courses in Spring 2022 and those I intend to offer in Fall 2022 as a result of this synthesis. To frame this discussion, I will first present the course outcomes, then foundational concepts of Nonviolent Communication and the compassion practices I have studied. Then, I will offer a synthesis.

Composition Outcomes

My discussion of the learning outcomes here is based upon the 2022 update to the course sequence which was brought about through the TransferVA initiative. English 112 was designed during this revision process as a course wherein students apply and deepen their understanding of core principles introduced in English 111. As a result, I focused my discussion on the six core topics that are shared between English 111 and 112 first (I collapsed the topic of Inquiry from the English 111 course content and the topic of Research from the 112 document as a result of the parallel definitions of these two processes presented by the outcomes statement); I also explored the implications for the distinct outcome named in the English 111 (Active Reading), and that named only within the English 112 course content (Argumentation). The outcomes are presented in an order here that is most conducive to my synthesis goals and thus not parallel with the course summaries. Descriptions of each outcome are provided below for those readers not yet familiar with the College Composition sequence. With the exception of the definition of argumentation, which is my own, all definitions are verbatim from the Virginia Community College course content summaries.

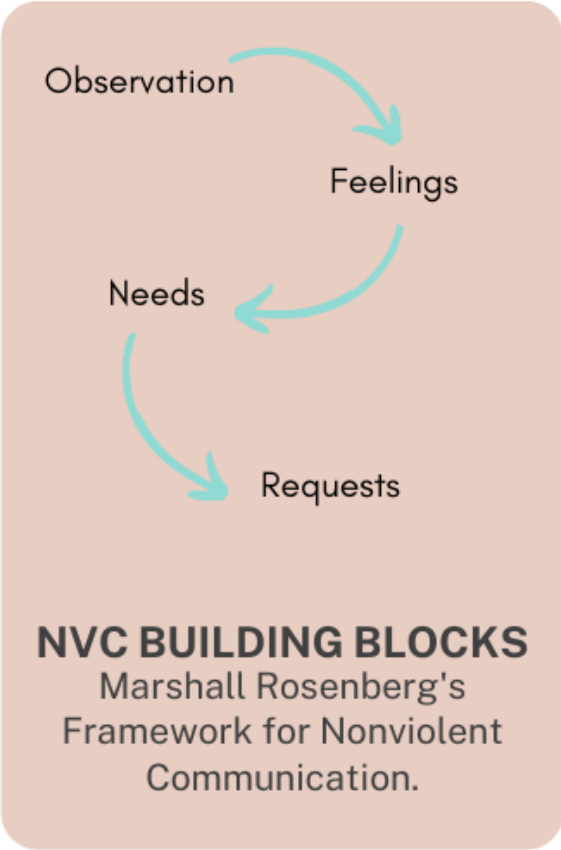
Outcome	Definition	Course
Active Reading	“Active reading is the process of engaging texts to identify main ideas and supporting evidence, to discern surface-level meaning, and to make logical inferences.”	111
Rhetorical Knowledge	“Rhetorical knowledge is the ability to analyze writing, reading, and speaking occasions and then make strategic choices to negotiate the rhetorical situation. Rhetorical knowledge includes the ability to demonstrate command of purpose, audience, and context.”	Both
Information Literacy	“Information literacy encompasses the know-how to use print and digital media to find, select, evaluate, and incorporate sources relevant to personal, scholarly, and professional pursuits.”	Both
Inquiry	“Inquiry refers to asking questions, developing an understanding of documentation, composing texts grounded in evidence, using a variety of print and digital resources, and producing print and/or digital texts.”	Both
Critical Thinking	“Critical thinking refers to the ability to investigate ideas and solve problems through analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating information, situations, and texts.”	Both
Writing Processes	“Writers use multiple composing processes to conceptualize, develop, and finalize projects. Composing processes are seldom linear and are also flexible. Successful writers can adapt their composing processes to different genres, contexts, and occasions.”	Both
Knowledge of Discourse Conventions	“Conventions are the formal rules and informal guidelines that define genres; they govern such things as mechanics, usage, spelling, and citation practices. College-level writing often demands adherence to conventions of academic discourse communities. These communities shape readers’ and writers’ perceptions of correctness or appropriateness.”	Both
Argumentation	Argument is a formal process by which evidence and reasoning for a point of view are presented. Traditional argumentation approaches emphasize inductive and deductive reasoning, and the avoidance of logical fallacies. Models of argumentation often emphasize genre conventions such as warrants, concession, counter-argument/refutation, and confirmation.	112

NVC Concepts

There are several NVC concepts that are pivotal to understanding the synthesis I will next offer. First, there are two parts to the NVC framework introduced by Marshall B. Rosenberg. Within these two parts, there are four steps. The two parts of NVC are empathetic listening and honest expression. As we navigate communication occasions, with ourselves and with others, we move between periods of empathetic listening and honest expression. Whether the communicator is engaged in a period of listening or a period of expression, the steps are the same.

The communicator begins by making observations. The aim of the period of observation is to bring awareness to the situation at hand without judgment or evaluation. Next, the communicator identifies feelings that are alive within the situation. This step includes identifying one’s own feelings as well as seeking to identify the feelings of others involved. With feelings identified, the practitioner is then able to examine needs that are alive within

the occasion. A core understanding within the NVC framework is the notion that feelings necessarily point toward needs. Thus, identifying feelings helps individuals to better understand and name the needs of individuals and groups within the context. What’s unique about this phase of the NVC framework is that universal human needs are emphasized over specific or even preferred strategies for meeting individual needs. With the needs of the involved parties identified, then the communicator is able to consider requests that will help address the needs of the occasion.



Marshall B. Rosenberg also introduced two kinds of “mascots” that help communicators consider the guiding attitude that they bring with them into any given context: the judging jackal and the guessing giraffe. The jackal persona, alive within all of us, is driven by judgment. The jackal aims to protect individuals from harm and thus approaches situations with a critical lens. This persona can interrupt the communicator’s ability to stay with the empathic nature of listening or

to sidestep honesty when offering an expression. The giraffe, on the other hand, is said to be driven by a large heart and a curious nature. The giraffe is interested and open during times of listening and expression. This persona guesses the feelings and needs of the self and others within a context and stays curious about whether the guesses offered resonate with those within the situation.

The NVC consciousness resists common dualistic notions such as right/wrong and good/bad. Instead, it asks: what is life-enriching for those present? It reduces an emphasis on personal preference and makes space to emphasize mutual desire.

The Synthesis

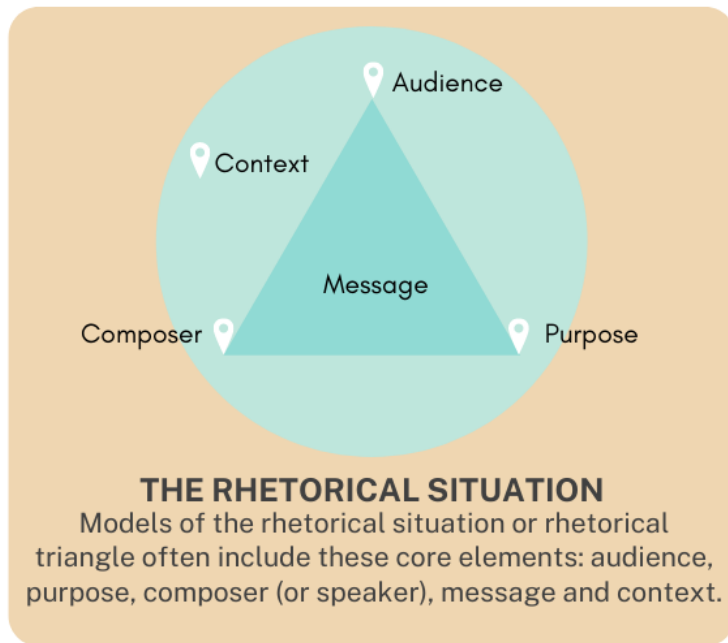
My first move in bringing these concepts together was to frame the course outcomes in light of the two parts of NVC: empathetic listening and honest expression. While a number of these outcomes might connect to both listening and expression, the categorizing presented below allows an equal division of emphasis between the two parts.

Empathetic Listening	Honest Expression
Active Reading	Critical Thinking
Rhetorical Knowledge	Writing Processes
Information Literacy	Discourse Conventions
Inquiry	Argumentation

A full examination of the synthesis of these outcomes with NVC concepts is beyond the scope of this report. However, for the purposes of demonstration, I will briefly trace my experience re-seeing elements of the first two outcomes, Active Reading and Rhetorical Knowledge.

In this conception of English 111 and 112, students would do well to be invited to examine a wide variety of texts with the express purpose of practicing the strategies of an empathetic listener. Most active reading strategies encourage students to go deeply into a text and consider elements with great care. What these strategies do not always do, however, is encourage students to humanize the speaker of the text. As a result, students often read to find something to say in response or a way to use text within their own work, instead of reading for the express purpose of connecting with another. Studies of internet culture have revealed that the distance between readers and creators of text often encourages a dehumanizing approach to others. An NVC approach to active listening, I might insist, would place the shared humanity of the creator and the reader back into the equation.

Empathetic listening strategies can naturally be framed to offer opportunities to bring together active reading approaches with rhetorical knowledge. The rhetorical situation, for example, is a primary concept within the scope of rhetorical knowledge. Typically the rhetorical situation is framed as a triangle that brings the audience, the purpose, and the composer (or speaker) together within their occasion, or context, for expression. The message to be communicated lies, most commonly within the center of the occasion. While rhetorical concepts will be focused on more directly later, the rhetorical situation is a useful framing tool for active reading exercises.



The concept of the rhetorical situation is integrated into the active reading phases described above. However, there are additional rhetorical concepts that might do well to be brought into the classroom using an NVC lens. Prior to this synthesis, it is important to frame how rhetorical strategy has been characterized since Ancient Greek times. Historically, rhetoric has been framed as using the “available means” (to borrow Aristotle’s phrasing) to reach one’s aims using signs and symbols. Rhetoric, even in those early days, was perceived as a dangerous craft because persuasive rhetors could shape notions of truth and influence the behavior of others. As

a result, rhetoric might easily become a tool for coercion and manipulation. Its origins (see early scholars such as Isocrates for example), were focused on the tools necessary for humans to live together in close proximity without violence. Over time, language became a tool for intellectual and emotional violence. With the intention of connection over dominance, however, rhetorical concepts can be consensus-building, relationship-strengthening, and, ultimately, rehumanizing. To frame this possibility, it is useful to discuss several rhetorical concepts further: the rhetorical situation, the rhetorical appeals, and rhetorical timing. In the space of this report, however, I will examine only the rhetorical situation.

As mentioned above, typical models of the rhetorical situation include audience, purpose, composer (or speaker/communicator), context and message. All of these elements exist within the context the composer and audience find themselves within. As a result of many factors (including culture, privilege, power, prior experiences, and physiological states), the audience and composer may see the context in very different ways.

Within this context, the audience and composer are both, in distinct ways connected to the rhetorical purpose, although here again their perception of the purpose is constructed as a result of their own positionality. At the heart of the matter is what is actually communicated using signs and symbols, which might be referenced simply as “the message.”

Before identifying the main points or supporting details, an NVC framework would encourage students to engage in a period of observation to frame their understanding of the context within which the text exists, and how the composer might perceive that context as a result of their experiences and position. To prepare students to engage the

text as an open giraffe-like listener, they might then be invited to seek clues that might point toward the feelings alive within the creator of the text in question. To support this work, students might be given the feelings inventory offered by the NVC community, which might be particularly useful for students who have more difficulty identifying feelings. Building on a feeling-identification phase, students might then be able to consider needs that might be alive within the creators within the situation. Here again, the NVC tools (specifically the needs inventor) might help assist students in identifying those needs. Finally, the students will then be situated to examine what requests the speakers might be making (either directly or indirectly) of those they are addressing.

The students might first be encouraged to move through a period as the “guessing giraffe” looking for clues that might help them frame the rhetorical situation. As they are invited to read actively, they might shift into the role of “curious giraffe,” looking with openness for new clues or ways they might have made assumptions that might not align with the evidence given by the creator.

Below are questions that might guide students in three phases of this process. One might notice that these questions are designed to focus on the communicator’s feelings and needs and not on judging or evaluating what is observed within the text. It is important to remind students in this phase that the aim is deep listening and the time for honest expression will come separately.

	Guessing Giraffe	Curious Giraffe	Reflective Giraffe
Observations	What can you tell about the context this piece was created within and the method that was used for delivering it to the audience? What can you tell about the communicator and their position within the context? Based on the title, what might the purpose of the piece be?	What additional details about the context do you see the communicator articulate or imply? What additional understanding of the communicator have you gained?	What have you come to understand about this communicator and their perception of the context from hearing the ideas presented?
Feelings	Based upon the context and purpose, what feelings do you think might be alive in the communicator?	What feelings do you see the communicator name or imply? What might be the source of those feelings?	How have you come to better understand the feelings of this communicator from engaging their text?

Needs	Based upon the context, purpose, and feelings you identified what needs do you think might be alive in the communicator?	What needs do you see the communicator name or imply? Why might those needs be alive?	How have you come to better understand the feelings of this communicator from engaging their text?
Requests	Based upon the needs you think might be alive in the communicator, what do you think they might want the audience to do, think, or feel as a result of their work?	What request do you see the communicator articulate or imply? How might that request meet a particular need?	How have you come to better understand what strategies might help this communicator meet their needs?

Implementation Phase

While fully integrating an NVC Consciousness into the College Composition curriculum will be an on-going pursuit, I have, at the time of this writing, completed several course revisions that I already find promising toward building empathy and compassion into my courses. I will report just a representative few below.

Syllabi Revisions

As I re-examine the rhetorical situation of my own course handouts, especially the syllabus, I have made several purposeful revisions. First, I re-read my syllabus asking:

- In what ways does my language fail to account for the context, feelings, and/or needs of the students reading the document?
 - How do I want students to feel when they read this document?
 - What needs are students bringing with them into this reading experience?
- What kinds of requests does my syllabus make of my students? Whose needs are met by those requests?
- What requests regarding the syllabus have my students made previously that I was not responsive to as a result of my own positionality?
- Where might I use language or strategies for persuasion that are typical of syllabi discourse conventions but not reflective of my personal values?

This examination helped me to see that while I had aimed toward a friendly tone in my syllabus, I had not made use of writing strategies that would prioritize fostering warm, encouraged feelings within my students. While I wanted my students to begin the semester feeling supported, seen, and valued, my syllabus was written in a way to privilege my own personal preference and, often, my need for efficiency and security.

Seeing that there are other ways to meet my needs and to specify my preferences within the classroom, I began revising my syllabus with my students' feelings and needs at the forefront. I'll offer two simple revisions as examples. First, I realized that students were commonly using a term that I have come to see as unproductive as a result of my NVC and compassion training. The word is "should." So often the "should" reflects the needs or preferences of others or society that an individual may or may not relate to personally. I have tried to avoid using this term in exploring my own obligations and ways of being in the world. I would like my students to also consider the limiting nature of this phrasing. However, the word "should" is a common discourse convention in syllabi. It is common for these documents to be riddled with statements of what students should and should not do. Often this language is framed as a litany of demands with little explanation or discussion. Using the find feature within my word processor, I sought out each instance wherein I used the word "should" and revised my document to remove this simple term. For example, an earlier syllabus contained this sentence: "You should be prepared to actively participate in all class activities and discussions and to take responsibility for your learning." The latest version of this statement offers this instead: "You're invited to actively participate in all class activities and discussions and to embrace the agency you have over your own learning. Note that class time cannot be made up. Once class ends, the moment is gone. As such, do remember that missing class will impact your community contribution, which is part of your grade!" Rather than making a blanket statement of what's expected, I instead offer an invitation and attempt to provide some context for why this participation is important.

Another example pertains to my name within the course documentation. In the past I have included this phrase under my name on the syllabus: "Please call me either Dr. Spiegel or Professor Spiegel." Since I earned my doctorate, I have longed to be referred to using the related honorific and I find it unsettling to hear Ms, Mrs, or worse Miss as a means of address. This phrasing stated my preference without considering the context my students are coming from or helping them to understand how important this particular issue is to me. My revision attempted to address both:

"What we call one another matters. I'll invite you to instruct me on how you'd like me to address you and I hope you'll note my preferences as well. I'd prefer for you to call me Cheri, Dr. Spiegel, or Professor Spiegel. Please note that I do not use Miss, Ms, or Mrs. You may refer to me using either doctor (Dr.) or professor (Prof.) because both are accurate. You may call me by my first name if you feel comfortable doing so."

This language allowed me to open up spaces within my classroom to discuss the importance of considering preferred terms in addressing those in our community, how conventions for reference are culturally defined (high school and college have different practices, for example) and to invite a mutual consideration of names and pronouns that would help us engage with one another in a way that meets all of our needs. In this way, a simple revision helped me to consider our context more effectively and helped set the tone for discussions of discourse conventions, which is a course outcome in both English 111 and English 112.

Community Contribution

The grading category mentioned in the section above, “Community Contribution,” reflects another change in my pedagogy. Previously I replaced the typical “class participation” grade with something I called “professionalism.” The idea was that students would work throughout the semester to develop a case that argued they had maintained a professional persona throughout the term. What I discovered, however, was that this grade discouraged authenticity in the classroom and caused students to try to approximate my expectations for what was “professional” based upon their own experiences and perceptions of me. Students aimed at being impressive, over connecting with their classmates and me. The professionalism grade also failed to account for their humanity in a way I would prefer.

As a result, I shifted away from the notion of professionalism and instead invited students to actively pursue community contribution. I wanted students to see the context of our classroom as a shared endeavor that they had individual agency over influencing. After each class session, I asked students to complete a two question “quiz” to self assess their community contribution for the day. This quiz was designed to encourage self reflection and help me understand the feelings and needs that impacted how they were showing up within our classroom space. I encourage students who do not attend class to complete it and tell me what they will do to continue instruction and/or ensure they show up well next time. This allows me to acknowledge the ways that students can stay engaged while away from class. The questions I pose are as follows:

1. Did you attend this class session?
2. How satisfied are you with your contributions to today's class? Reflect upon how you showed up for class and what you offered to the community during this session. If you're satisfied with your contributions, what can you do to sustain this contribution level? If you're unsatisfied, what might you do to help improve your satisfaction moving forward?

After a semester of collecting these responses, I'm quite encouraged. They helped me to better understand the feelings and needs alive within my students. They also helped provide an avenue for students to make requests from me to help them better thrive within the community. In some cases I could encourage students to try small strategies to make themselves more seen within the classroom space, and in others I could comment on how students might make more space for others.

Feelings and Needs Inventory Work

In both my college composition classes, I have students work through activities wherein they analyze their own rhetorical situations. These need not be formal academic occasions; in fact, they often are more effective if they are informal, personal exchanges. As we discuss these rhetorical situations, I encourage them to make use of the Center for Nonviolent Communication's feelings and needs lists and to articulate the feelings and needs alive in their situations where applicable. The following is an example exercise I give students for homework. Their task is to identify a rhetorical situation and to examine it in detail. I encourage them to select an occasion wherein things did *not* go the way they hoped.

1. **Situation:** Paint the scene for me before we break down the rhetoric. What might an outside observer say about the occasion - focus on observing the scene without judgment (positive or negative).
2. **Communicator (i.e. you):** Reflect on who you are and how you're positioned as you communicate:
 - a. **Pathos:** How were you feeling when you communicated? What was alive in you at the time the situation emerged? To support your exploration, consider the [Feelings Inventory](#).
 - b. **Context:** Where were you? What time of day was it? What was going on in the world? What was going on in *your* world? What were the stakes for the communication?
 - c. **Ethos:** Who do you want to be seen as in this situation? How do you believe the others in the situation already see you? What type of person do you want to be at this moment?
3. **Audience:** Describe who you are communicating with and near. What do you know about them? What is your relationship with them? Are there any indirect audiences to be concerned about (i.e. are you aware that this person might share your correspondence with someone else? Do you know someone else is observing or listening in on the communication in some way?)
 - a. **Pathos:** how do you think the audience is feeling? How do you want them to be feeling after you communicate? What feelings do you think are important to consider in the situation? To support your exploration, consider the [Feelings Inventory](#).
 - b. **Context:** Where are they? What time of day was it for them? What was going on in *their* world? What were the stakes for the communication for them?
 - c. **Ethos:** Who do they want to be seen as in this situation? How do they believe the others in the situation already see them? What type of person do they want to be in this moment?
4. **Purpose:** Tell me about what you wanted to happen. Why are you communicating? Are you trying to get the other person to act? Are you trying to get something for yourself? Are you hoping for a particular response? What are you aiming for that causes you to reach out in some way?
 - a. **Exigence / Need:** What do you actually need that is inspiring you to communicate? Use the [Needs Inventory](#) to help you identify your own needs and other needs present in the situation. Your own feelings might point toward particular needs in your situation.
5. **Message:** What is actually said or communicated?
 - a. **Logos:** What is the relationship between what has been communicated and the feelings and needs that's been identified? Is there a reasonable connection between the message and the need?
6. **Kairos:** Given all the conditions above, was this communication act well timed? Was it the right time to address the concern?

GROK Card Activities

During in-class activities, I have begun to use the larger decks of GROK cards to help facilitate active reading and reflection exercises. When we read a new text, I'll distribute the feeling and need cards at random throughout the classroom. I'll then ask questions about the communicator's feelings and needs. Students are then encouraged to raise the cards they have in their personal supply that reflect answers to my questions. For example, I might ask, "what feelings do you see alive in this speaker" and then call out the answers students reveal. Individual students will then be invited to walk us through their choices and how they see that feeling within the text.

I will encourage students to reflect upon their own feelings and needs using these cards. For example, I'll have students take a set of five or six "needs" cards and rank them from most important (to them personally) to least important. The students will then share their ordering with one another and discuss the ways that personal experiences, culture, and/or preferences shape their perception of these universal needs. This exercise allows students to practice both empathetic listening and honest expression in turns.