"Voice, Activism, Democracy": A Website Uniting Greensboro Residents

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Abstract

The lack of effective communication and accessibility between social justice community groups and the residents of Greensboro, North Carolina, initiated a burgeoning need for a website to act as a directory for grassroots organizations and nonprofits in the city. This paper delineates a year-long project creating a website, entitled "Voice, Activism, Democracy," that features such organizations who have agreed to take part in the directory. This is only the inception of the project before it is sustained and expanded by the Communication Studies department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The project highlights online activism as a pertinent, yet a nuanced form of social justice activism that is justified in today's technological age. The paper will specifically detail the importance of mediated activism for Greensboro residents, a description of the website, deeming the website social justice activism, the importance of Communication Activism Pedagogy (CAP), a reflection on critical aspects of the project, and recommendations for the future expansion of "Voice, Activism, Democracy."

Keywords: "Voice, Activism, Democracy," Communication Activism Pedagogy (CAP)

Lawrence R. Frey, in his essay published in *Social Justice & Communication Scholarship*, (2006), he states, "A social justice sensibility entails a moral imperative to act as effectively as we can to do something about structurally sustained inequalities" (p. 41). The increasing use of technology in the political arena forces activists to question newer and more effective ways to create collective action with more sustainable outcomes.

The commonplace of technology in citizen's everyday lives, especially in the lives of youths, provides another outlet for social justice activism. In Collin's book, *Young Citizens and Political Participation in a Digital Society: Addressing the Democratic Disconnect,* she states, "the dilemmas of how to define, measure or explain contemporary youth participation in democracy have been brought into stark relief as the internet and related technologies have come to play an increasingly significant role in the social and political lives of citizens" (2014, p. 10-11). In comparison to the realm of traditional activism, as Collin notes in her book, youths are taking the lead in this new form of activism found online (2014). My year-long undergraduate honors project to create a website with collated information on social justice organizations in Greensboro, North Carolina, is just one example of fighting social injustices effectively online.

This paper tackles atypical definitions of activism by delineating the need for online activism in today's world. To do this, I start by explaining the past and present activism in Greensboro, North Carolina. Then, I detail my project, outline mediated activism's connections to archetypical activism, connect my work to Communication Activism Pedagogy and its importance in moving towards a more democratic world, and provide a reflection on critical and challenging aspects while creating the website. Lastly, also through reflecting on observations during my project, I detail ways to move forward with "Voice, Activism, Democracy."

The Past and Present of Activism in Greensboro, North Carolina

The communication studies department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro places emphasis in three spheres of communication: personal, professional, and public. One of the mandatory classes for students in the major, that directly fits the public communication sphere, is "Communication and Community," which students, such as myself, work directly with local nonprofits and activist organizations for the entire semester. The overarching learning outcome for the class is for students to understand their civic responsibility towards each other, by being accountable citizens. This class, and another class I took – "Reclaiming Democracy" – taught students about ways to critically analyze institutions and strategize collective action to change inequalities through yet another selected local organization. Both classes fed into my project idea: collating information on social justice groups in Greensboro and placing the information on one website to form an online community for organizations to use in reaching new volunteers.

Immediately after beginning the project, there were noticeable reasons why creating a website featuring social justice organizations, was crucial for Greensboro residents. First, Greensboro's history permeates a desire and pride in many community members who perform present social justice activism. Second, the number of social justice groups in Greensboro is nearly boundless. Lastly, an undertaking such as mine had already been in the works prior to starting my project and a similar, yet less complex format of my project currently exists.

Greensboro, North Carolina has a rich history of originating social movements. In 1960, during the Civil Rights Movement, four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University sat at a whites-only lunch counter at Woolworth Department Store in downtown Greensboro. The nonviolent protest grew to more than 20 students by the second day. Eventually, it became known as the Greensboro Sit-Ins, which lasted five months and 24 days.

This moment of resistance eventually brought about a national sit-in movement, spreading across the south in states such as Tennessee, Georgia, and Virginia. In addition to this, the protest initiated the formation of the most crucial organization during the Civil Rights Movement – the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (Momodu, n.d.).

Another prominent historical moment for Greensboro, was when the city became the first in the south to agree to implement desegregation in schools after the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Though the school board announced they wanted to begin desegregation after the 1954 decision, the rate of integration was agonizingly slow because of the decentralization of public schools to local districts that decided which students were assigned to certain schools. Districts would then use guidelines, known as the Pupil Assignment Plan, to decide whether a student could transfer from one school to another (Chafe, 1980). Though the guidelines were described as racially-neutral, yet, when enacted, it kept blacks from transferring to white schools. This legislative measure was later used to create the Pearsall Plan by the Governors Special Advisory Committee, which was a 7-member group that consisted of no African-Americans. The plan allowed white students that were forced to attend integrated schools the option to excuse themselves and it also gave white students that went to integrated schools free private school tuition and grants (Chafe, 1980). The plan was essentially an underhanded scheme to deceive the Supreme Court and their decision to integrate schools by appeasing whites. However, the plan was advertised as a middle ground and a gradual form of integration, when it was a devious plan, preventing any form of integration in public schools for a decade longer than other states that resisted segregation. By 1966, the Pearsall Plan was deemed unconstitutional, and integration was officially complete by 1972 (Chafe, 1980).

Greensboro's history consequentially led to organized activism presently found in the city. Throughout the interview process for my project, a common theme struck me: every social justice organization I met with indicated other organizations in the city that were not part of my list. There are three reasons I have found for this: 1) Organizations are formed and folded frequently, 2) All social justice organizations network with others that have compatible goals, and 3) With the amount of activity, it was difficult to track every community group. However, after fully comprehending that all social justice organizations cannot be tracked and displayed on the website, it became more obvious that the need for a resource that could attempt to unite residents and social justice work was crucial to make more progress in the city. Moreover, it solidified a more attainable goal for my part in the project, that could then be expanded later.

Lastly, after pitching my project idea, I learned about former online resources in Greensboro and current online resources that have a similar goal. After reaching out to people with experience in making such resources, much of my project was modeled by their successes and failures. Learning about these previous and current attempts to list all the social justice organizations in Greensboro added more urgency in creating a successful website, primarily because there was an established need and desire to have such a resource for better communication throughout the city.

One of two people I reached out to for guidance was Kathe Latham, currently one of three co-directors of Green Drinks Greensboro, and a former website assistant for the now defunct Peace and Justice Network. The website was a virtual organization, with only online volunteers who created a resource for the Greensboro community. The Peace and Justice Network folded because updating the website became overwhelming for the volunteers, who were mostly part of an older generation. Which, for the purpose of easier sustainability, it is

crucial to have a younger generation that is more technologically inclined to work on updating the website. Latham gave me the list of groups last updated on the website and informed me of the social justice categories used. She also informed me about which community groups were still working and those that folded. Such information was crucial for starting my project.

Another resource comparable to mine, but more recently created was that by Anna Fesmire and Claire Hunter from the Social Justice Roundtable of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad. When I began the project, Fesmire and Hunter had already collated their own list of social justice community groups. Though their list was only a PDF with short descriptions of Greensboro's organizations, it was helpful to learn the amount of time it took them to create it because it solidified an achievable timeline and goal for myself.

The Website: How It Was Created, Its Setup, & Those That Will Use It

The website, entitled "Voice, Activism, Democracy," features grassroots and other well-established organizations working in Greensboro, North Carolina, with the mission to improve the lives of everyone in the city and strive for social justice. "Voice, Activism, Democracy" has a dual purpose, 1) Giving community members a single resource if they desire to get involved, and 2) Broadcasting the work other organizations are accomplishing, thus providing potential network opportunities among groups.

Time was devoted to determining which organizations were suitable for including on the website. At first, it seemed appropriate to only add local organizations based in Greensboro; however, many groups and nonprofits affiliated with national and international organizations as well. This would have excluded many organizations, limiting the information available on the website. Initially, a criterion was considered to exclude organizations based on budget size, yet this would have been difficult to ascertain. In the end, the choice was made to add groups that

fell under select subgroups of social justice, which became a total of nine, including: 1) Arts, Culture, & Sports, 2) Education Equality, 3) Climate Justice & Sustainability, 4) Housing Equality, 5) Civic Organizations, 6) LGBT+ & Gender Justice, 7) Conflict Resolution, 8) Racial/Ethnicity Justice, and 9) Social & Economic Justice. The categories chosen were based on two criteria: some categories were previously used by the Peace and Justice Network and some I identified expanded beyond categories already identified. Also noted, is that some organizations in other categories did not return my repeated request to add their organization to the website, such as Horsepower and HandyCapable from the Disability Justice category and the Gay-Straight Advocates for Education (GSAFE) and Queer People of Color Collective from the LGBT+ & Gender Justice category. However, it is notable to mention, that with social justice being an umbrella term, additional categories or subgroups may become part of the website as it is sustained.

After some debate, which will be covered later in this paper, the content for "Voice, Activism, Democracy" is on the website hosting platform Weebly. Every organization that agreed to take part in the project received a single web page displaying information about itself. Every web page has the organization's location, website or Facebook link, contact information, mission statement, and a short journalistically-styled story. For the stories, I asked to interview a higher up or a longstanding member of the organization. During interviews, I asked the same five questions: 1) What is the history or reasoning for the inception of this group? 2) What are some day-to-day activities the group performs? 3) What standout achievements has the group made? 4) Why do you personally believe it is important to have this organization, especially in relation to the city of Greensboro? and 5) What ways can community members get involved? A total of 26 organizations agreed to take part in the project.

In addition to the community groups' web pages, there are other essential tabs included on the website. The "Get Involved" tab allows website users to easily click a group's name for direct access to their volunteer page or contact information. The "Quote & Photo Wall" provides quick updates for community events occurring in Greensboro. Another tab tells the history of the website and thanks specific people who have assisted in making it possible. Lastly, there is a contact tab for anyone that visits the website and believes the organization they belong to fits with the others listed. The contact tab will help future communication studies interns to easily research and accept the organization's request to upload information.

After deliberating with my project's mentor, Dr. Jovanovic, a communication studies professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, we decided for sustainability purposes to have future departmental interns work on updating and expanding the platform. Sustaining the website is crucial for the Greensboro community. As stated, many organizations have created a similar resource, but a common issue is sustaining the resource after it is complete. Essentially, several projects were started and left untouched afterwards. To make an impact, or collective change in a community, there must be constant sustainability of a project over time. Currently, there are higher outputs of resources and worse outcomes with the resources available in Greensboro, North Carolina. As Stoecker states, outputs are number-based results, or quantity over quality, while outcomes are results with long-term change and improvement, or quality over quantity (2016). Moreover, impact, or collective change, can only come from outcomes (Stoecker, 2016). Subsequently, having a higher output of resources does not make an impact, but one well designed resource that is sustained through continuous updates, will make the desired impact.

Deeming "Voice, Activism, Democracy" A Form of Social Justice Activism

To make sense between service and activism, Phillip Tompkins places emphasis on differentiating charity and justice (Tompkins, 2006). Essentially, Tompkins places charity and justice on opposite ends of a spectrum. Charity is an individualistic act that limits long-term social change, by recognizing there are systemic issues, but only providing services that skim the surface. By referring to charity as this, it becomes simply volunteer work that fails to address the root causes of the injustice. For example, going to a soup kitchen every Thanksgiving to serve food to the hungry is a form of charity. The same people will go hungry again. Subsequently, charity acts as a patch – it solves nothing, but serves as a bandage for continuous issues (Tompkins, 2006).

Tompkins adds that justice is the opposite, it is collective work, in which people choose long-term solutions over simple fixes. Performing justice means asking transformative questions to locate the root issue, and then working strategically to solve it. For example, referring to the same case of feeding hungry people, a justice approach might include researching the number of grocery stores in the area and working towards a way to solve a potential food desert crisis. Subsequently, justice is results-driven by pushing boundaries, critically looking at institutions, and asking pointed questions (Tompkins, 2006). However, finding solutions to injustices is not the answer to a socially just world; instead, it is just the start. A socially just world requires equal attention to the sustainability of those solutions over time through constant questioning and reform.

Tompkins' differentiation between charity and justice is a commonly held belief in CAP. Relating his concept to my project, it becomes clear that my website is situated at the justice end of the spectrum. The rationale for this, is based on five points: 1) "Voice, Activism, Democracy" was collective work because social justice organizations participated in the effort, 2) The website

is a long-term project because it will be sustained by communication studies departmental

interns, 4) It uses strategic action to garner more civic participation, and 5) The website includes

political organizations that answer transformative questions.

Though "Voice, Activism, Democracy" does not fit the standard ideal for activism, it fits

Tompkins' guidelines for justice work. The unordinary form of this activism affords more

organized work in general. By having local social justice groups on one website, community

members are relieved from doing extensive research on their own. Therefore, more people can

easily discover new organizations that stand for the outcomes they want to see in their city,

allowing them to take part in the work themselves. More activists means a larger support for

organizations, which potentially means faster outcomes for the city.

This snowball effect can occur because of the omnipotence of technology. Amardo

Rodriguez states, "In a world where our spaces and distances are increasingly collapsing, what

soon becomes obvious is that we are inextricably and irreversibly interconnected to each other"

(Rodriguez, 2006, p. 31). The main reasoning for this is the internet's ability to connect everyone

from local to national and even international levels. Websites, articles, social media, and more

create interconnectedness, or as the media activist, Tony Palmeri says, it grants opportunities for

dialogue and community without physically being there (Palmeri, 2006). However, technology

can be wasted when people do not use its interconnectedness to their advantage. Rodriguez

makes this point evident when he says continuing as if we are all separate entities will not allow

us to move forward, instead, we become stagnant regarding politics, relationships, and systemic

injustices (Rodriguez, 2006). Essentially, having a resource, such as the one I developed, cannot

be considered useful social justice work without people being aware that it exists. Subsequently,

in addition to my website, I publicized it by speaking about the website at the 2018 "Voice,

Activism, and Democracy Symposium" at UNCG, was interviewed for coverage in the university and local newspapers, sent out mass emails to some of the organizations on the website, spoke at a meeting for organizations on the website, and embedded a link to the communication studies web page found on UNCG's main website.

With many universities and colleges across the United States following a neoliberalist agenda, it is crucial for this project to be considered justice work, not charity work. Moreover, it is important because the communication studies field places emphasis on Communication Activism Pedagogy. According to Simpson and Adelman, they state, "A significant amount of scholarship in the discipline of communication has focused on the academy as a site of struggle around matters of difference where participation and voice are at issue" (2006, p. 79). My outwardly political website highlights these struggles and one of the core requirements for communication scholarship – unearthing the roots of social injustices and preparing solutions or a means to solutions.

The Importance of CAP and Working Towards a More Democratic World

One of the major themes of disagreement surrounding the academic sphere is the push and pull of scholarly political agendas. Those on the right tend to believe higher education has become a breeding ground for liberalism, while those on the left feel the contrary with disaffection for what they see as a neoliberal takeover of the university. With both sides in mind, it is crucial to look at specific historical moments that show more evidence toward the latter argument. However, a brief literature review of liberalism and neoliberalism is pertinent.

In *John Locke's Liberalism*, by Grant, she states Liberalism "takes its bearing from the thought that all men have an equal right to govern their actions as they see fit. No man has an intrinsic or natural right to govern another. In other words, men are equal in the sense that they

are by nature free" (2010, p. 1). In the political arena this looks like larger government that focuses on protecting civil liberties and human rights, as well as minimizing community issues. Higher education that supports these ideals is known as liberal arts universities or colleges. Such education places emphasis on a well-rounded education, with an array of options in the humanities, including literature, anthropology, gender studies, and more. However, a liberal arts education is under fire by conservatives, such as Florida Governor Rick Scott and former North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory (Mitchell & Seiler, 2015). Both Governors disparage liberal arts education because they think it does not provide as easy of an entrance into the job market as other more empirical-based degrees including mathematics, technology, and science (Mitchell & Seiler, 2015). However, according to studies, current employers desire employees with a skill set similar to what a liberal arts education is designed to provide quality communication skills, ability to problem solve, works well in a team environment, and more (Mello, 2017, August 25).

On the opposing side, liberals believe higher education is being gutted and replaced with the neoliberalist agenda. According to Stoecker, "Neoliberalism promotes the responsibility of the individual entrepreneur (whether for profit or nonprofit) and the primacy of the autonomous individual against collective accountability" (2016, p. 24). Essentially, neoliberalism elevates the individual – their work and sole responsibility – while dismissing the collective responsibility for our communities (Stoecker, 2016). The neoliberalist ideal found in universities and colleges refers to students taking more job-specific courses, or a vocational-oriented education to seemingly direct students into the capitalist society. This form of education is referred to by Paulo Freire as the banking concept of education, which will be defined more thoroughly later.

The roots of liberal arts education go back to Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. During this time, education performed the primary function of creating responsible and

accountable citizens. According to Socrates, arete, or moral virtue, is our primary goal in life, or our telos; subsequently, people must answer this moral obligation or call (Polous, Hamilton, Jovanovic, & Moretto, 2016). Even one of the earliest works, *The Republic*, by Plato connects citizenship, education, and ethical responsibility. This book inspired other philosophers, such as Aristotle, Cicero, Dewey, and more currently, Freire and Giroux to write about the importance of learning civic duty in school (Poulos et al., 2016). However, in the United States, the height of liberal arts education took place in the 1820s, which was before cultural and political changes such as the Industrial Revolution (Mitchell & Seiler, 2015). Over time, the liberal arts have expanded from grammar, logic, and rhetoric to the fields of study that are currently found in colleges and universities today.

As mentioned, conservative stakeholders in higher education promote cutting government support for liberal arts-related degrees because they think there is a liberal agenda at colleges and universities that detracts students from ever thinking conservatively. However, history shows us that a supposed liberal agenda in higher education, if there is or was one, has died. This is evident through the lack of activism found on and off campuses.

In the 1950s and '60s, universities and colleges were training grounds for protesting, such as the Civil Rights Movement. Greensboro college students were at the center of that, taking a formative stride by starting the sit-in movement. Then, in 1964, the Freedom Summer campaign launched in Mississippi, a volunteer-based campaign to register as many black voters in the state. Next came the Vietnam War Protests, another movement primarily consisting of young people and college students (Stoecker, 2016). Today, there is less frequency in protests and movements originating from college campuses – essentially, pointing to a decline in democratic engagement found in the university.

A replacement for such education in the university is institutionalized service-learning (ISL), or a university-approved form of forced responsibility towards the community, which follows the neoliberalist agenda (Stoecker, 2016). According to Stoecker, ISL originates from the privatization of colleges and universities that support individual success over the community's success. Jovanovic (2004), concurs, stating, "to be part of a community that values mutuality and care runs counter to the ideology of individualism, competition, and the self-congratulatory success that can trump the human impulse to aid people in need" (p. 2). Essentially, Jovanovic is claiming an education that teaches individualism and competition can never produce accountable citizens.

The move towards a more neoliberalist education can be explained by Paulo Freire's Banking Concept of Education written in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire states that all levels of education are treated as a commodity, in which educators are selling students the goods, or knowledge, and students are the customers of those goods (Freire, 1968). The outcome of the concept is a limited education for both professors and students. While professors must mute some of their ideas and fit their pedagogy into a narrow and approved view, students risk missing crucial learning experiences. For example, ISL promotes short-term service, countable hours of work, and limited community partnerships – all of which restrict long-term social change (Stoecker, 2016). Another outcome from this form of education is less critical analysis and more adherence toward the institution's ideal pedagogy. This adherence comes from the vetting of information and selection of reading material, forcing students to accept what is given to them (Stoecker, 2016). James Baldwin eloquently explains this in his essay, "A Talk to Teachers," when he states, "What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply

obey the rules of society" (Baldwin, 1963/1985, p. 679). The more restricted education becomes, the more students passively follow societal ideals, due to their lack of critical analysis.

Neoliberalist education subsequently, renders education as a supposed apolitical state. However, scholars, such as Stoecker, Mills, and Jovanovic, oppose the possibility for an apolitical education – for them, everything is political. Speaking on partisan education, Jovanovic writes, "noninvolvement, for all intents and purposes, is illusory and serves to maintain the status quo" (p. 4). Yet, as aforementioned, with the weight of institutions on professors to continue teaching apolitically, many do not challenge authority. Many professors, especially pre-tenured professors, regard a university or college's partisan rule with strict attention because of a three-point rationale: 1) many professors fear being called biased by fellow professors or students, 2) keeping a "neutral" classroom to receive tenure, and 3) the internal feeling of rebelling or dissenting from the university or college (Jovanovic, 2004). These fears prevent courses with service-learning from using CAP; consequently, professors promote a charity-based ideal for service learning, not a justice-based ideal.

Besides continuously normalizing society for students through apolitical teaching methods, neoliberal education approves of ISL and other service organizations on campus because of the monetary gain and awards they receive (Stoecker, 2016, Poulos et al., 2016). The appeal of keeping such organizations and pedagogies in higher education is to benefit from the work students do in the community for their partnering nonprofits. However, the benefits of ISL stop at those received by colleges or universities; consequently, students and nonprofits do not garner quality learning experiences and sustainable outcomes, respectively.

Unlike the demands of CAP, many colleges and universities are not interested in the quality of the work a student has provided a nonprofit; instead, they place emphasis on the

number of hours a student serves (Stoecker, 2016). Though when Stoecker states, "In institutionalized service-learning, what service best serves is learning and who it most serves is students," it becomes apparent that he is denying his own claims in the book. If the institution does not place weight on the quality of work students provide in the community, students will passively do their work; essentially, they, like the organizations they work with, do not gain anything substantial. This can harm students' learning outcomes because they will not make connections between their work and the importance of it being done in the community. In addition to this, service learning classes typically do not leave a sufficient allocation of time towards reflecting on the service; subsequently, the learning portion of service-learning is absent. Not placing emphasis on the work also harms the organization because as Stoecker states, many nonprofits view students as "glorified volunteers" who want a high grade in the service learning class. Moreover, nonprofits understand that student's assistance expires when the class does (Stoecker, 2016). These partnerships in ISL continue to provide inadequate work that does not result in social change nor sustainable work. Essentially, everyone is using each other, but no one is receiving anything substantial except for the institution's grant money and awards.

Stoecker disapproves of the way ISL is performed and the organizations partnering with universities (2016). He suggests that students may feel they are making an impact, but in most instances, it is only volunteer work. One of the most common examples is tutoring at an underresourced or underfunded primary and secondary school. This ISL work plays more on the charity paradigm because it is short-term help for an individual – acting as though the adolescent student needs help based on their situation. More specifically, Stoecker states, "[the] most common form of institutionalized service learning offers depoliticized and individualized treatments to "fix" individuals rather than to change systems" (Stoecker, 2016, p. 57). Though

the tutoring may make an impact on the student's grades, it begs the question: why is the student underperforming? Is it because the whole school, in general, is underperforming? If so, why is the school doing poorly? Could it be there is less funding because the students are from an underprivileged area? These are the questions that should be broached, but instead, the reflection stops for the college student at, "I have done good work; therefore, I have served my community the best I could." Subsequently, ISL becomes a cyclic game, showing the student, in this case, that they are dependent on the person offering assistance.

As Stoecker, and other CAP professors agree, there needs to be a shift in ISL that can promote the justice paradigm over the charity paradigm. Before students can attempt to perform activism, they must know what kind of citizen they embody by learning Westheimer and Kahne's three types of citizens' the personally responsible citizen; the participatory citizen; or the justice-oriented citizen (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Each type of citizen is theoretically separated from the others. The first citizen is the personally responsible citizen, who places good character at the forefront. In this case, community work only reaches the extent of volunteering at a local soup kitchen or donating money to a nonprofit (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Essentially, the personally responsible citizen believes if everyone shares good character and is nice to each other, then society will morph into a socially just place. The second type of citizen, the participatory citizen, is one who acts as a community leader for philanthropic events (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Though this type of citizen is typically more active and knowledgeable about government and its processes, the work does not lead to social change. The last type of citizen is the justice-oriented citizen, or an individual who asks questions and critically assesses systemic issues (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). This work goes beyond helping local community members; instead, it speaks to changing policies and systems. By

laying out Westheimer and Kahne's three kinds of citizens, students can defend their own work as one versus another, and it gives them a clear goal if they want to become more than the personally responsible or participatory citizen.

In addition to understanding Westheimer and Kahne's three types of citizens, it is crucial for students to learn critical and liberating rhetoric. According to Burke, there has become a "bureaucratization of the imaginative," or a one-size-fits-all view of society, in which no one dissents (Swartz, 2005). Swartz believes "bureaucratization" of thought can be confronted using social justice criticism because it "helps to bring the systemic manipulations of culture into focus so that they can be judged by the standards of social justice" (Swartz, 2005, p. 4). Social justice criticism highlights "moral exclusion," or the systemically applied treatment of certain people as undeserving. Moreover, teaching students about liberating rhetoric, or words of emancipation to "speak truth to power," shows them they can, not only critique institutions that advocate poverty and social inequity, but they can change it (Swartz, 2004).

Besides already named solutions, there are a few crucial changes needed to shift ISL from charity to a social justice paradigm, and for CAP to be fulfilled in the classroom. Stoecker suggests students need extended projects or partnerships with organizations to not only create better relationships with people in the community, but also for the students to see more fruitful results (Stoecker, 2016). For example, creating "Voice, Activism, Democracy" spanned two semesters, allowing more time for me to add organizations to the website, participate in events for several of the listed organizations, and promote the website. Without the additional time, most of the website would have been complete, but promotion and the addition of a few organizations would have been wait-listed. Such is the same for students taking traditional ISL in one semester – they only have time to put in limited hours, unable to have a more augmented

experience. Another necessary change, according to Stoecker, is the interactions and people working with the students. He states in his book, "When we get right down to it, the people 'in the community' we are working with are typically not 'in the community,' and that is exactly why we are working with them" (Stoecker, 2016, p. 73). Students work with nonprofits, which are middlemen, and not the marginalized people who are supposed to benefit from the work. By supporting work done through a nonprofit and not directly with marginalized people, it normalizes the process of working with a middleman and not the stigmatized group. The shift towards the inclusion of marginalized people takes away the dependence on the students and long-established nonprofits, and instead, it builds equity, allied work, and grassroots groups. Lastly, students must learn they are accountable for the city they live in and urge others, such as communities, institutions, and residents, to see they are also responsible (Bloch-Shulman & Jovanovic, 2010). As Baldwin states, "It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person" (Baldwin, 1963, p. 685).

Reflecting on the Project: Critical Issues Examined

The project was divided into three phases: 1) Website design and researching, interviewing, and writing content, 2) Editing and securing the organizations' approval of the website design and content, and lastly, 3) Promoting the website. Though issues can be identified throughout the project – two major challenges were introduced in the first and second phases. In the first section of the project, organization and reaching out to organizations became the main struggles, while in the second section of the project, a sudden piece of information was brought to my attention, forcing me to question the validity of using my prior website hosting platform, WIX.

Undergraduate research (UR) has its benefits for both professors and their students, such as better preparing students for their profession or graduate school, improving relationships between faculty and students, applied learning of research methods, and a dual learning experience for the professor and students (Russell, Jovanovic, Bozovich, Clifford, and Johnson, 2017). However, UR generates a multitude of debatable questions for interested students as how to most efficiently procced with a project to fulfill the project's goals within a given timeline. Organizing the project, from the broad to the more trivial details can serve as a source of autonomy, while also becoming a hindrance to an undergraduate researcher. In my project, organization became hazier as the first phase proceeded. For example, frequent interviews sometimes affected the quality of my interviews. The main issue was forgetting to ask the same questions across every interview. For example, to name a few, I might forget to ask for photographs of people in the organization and an organization's achievements. Subsequently, the website appears to have less cohesion because of missing photographs and more or less content on each webpage.

The process of interviewing 26 local organizations over six months revealed a common theme among most organizations – they have strong communication with other local groups, but not as much with individual community members. This became an interesting, yet understandable problem because the organizations networked to accomplish their individual group's goals by culling everyone's resources and making change together. However, not having the same effective communication with community members harms initiating and sustaining social change. For example, I reached out to many of the groups at least three times or more until I received an email or phone call in return, while other groups never responded to me. As someone working on a project, I had goals to meet, while a regular community member does not,

making them have less initiative to continue contacting an organization that does not want to

return messages. This challenge made me question what organizations can do to improve their

communication with community members, so it is relatively equivalent to their communication

with other social justice organizations.

      While emailing the contacts from the organizations again for final approval of the content

and website design, I was informed by one organizer from the Greensboro Mural Project, that

my original website hosting platform, WIX, was on the Boycott, Divestment, Sanction (BDS)

List. BDS is a campaign to boycott Israeli-made or supported products until Israel stops

occupying Palestinian land and this is a concern for many social justice-based groups. In

response to the email, I shared this information with my project mentor, who suggested I first

research the Palestinian and Israeli conflict before replying to the Greensboro Mural Project

organizer. Within a few hours, I replied to the organizer, stating I would transfer the website

content over to another website hosting platform. By the following afternoon, I sent out a letter

via email that I was switching the content because, as stated:

      The conflict between Israel and Palestine has continued for nearly 70 years, with the

      Israeli regime denying the rights of Palestinians and resisting international laws. I do not

      support Israel's occupation of Palestine and their acts of injustice. With that said, I am

      opting out of using WIX as my website hosting platform (Personal communication,

      February 7, 2018).

This response was sent without my mentor reading and approving of its content.

      Reflecting on my response to the organizer questioning the contradiction between the

symbolism of using WIX as my website hosting platform and the content of my website, I now

view my response as hasty for a few reasons. Originally, my decision to reply quickly came from

an anxious desire to complete the transition without hiccups and before revealing the website at

the Voice, Activism, and Democracy Symposium. However, my hurried decision did not entail

the input of my mentor, which was a vulnerable response that opened my letter for ridicule by

other social justice organizations that disagree with the BDS Campaign. Moreover, if social

justice organizations disagreed with my decision or how I wrote my letter, then my response

could have potentially severed partnerships with, not only my website, but the Communication

Studies department or the university altogether. In addition to this, my letter was direct and

succinct, which some organizations could take as an attack on their political view if they did not

align with my views. Though, in the end, no social justice organizations dissented from the

project, this decision left me vulnerable to opposing, and potentially confrontational responses.

Potential Changes Moving Forward with "Voice, Activism, Democracy" & Local Social

Justice Organizations

As aforementioned, "Voice, Activism, Democracy" will continue after my part of the

project is complete and it will be supervised by communication studies departmental interns at

UNCG. In addition to updating the website with service opportunities on the "Quote & Photo

Wall," the intern will be responsible for adding future organizations that want to be featured on

the website, deleting organizations that have folded, and continuously promoting the website.

"Voice, Activism, Democracy" can only provide its role as a resource if future supervisors for

the website perform these sustainable acts. Also, the expansion of the website will allow for a

broader range of opportunities and a larger scope of the social justice work being done in

Greensboro. Moving forward, there are several suggestions for improving the website and

communication between the community groups and community members. Recommendations for

the website include suggestions for adding more organizations in the future and enhancing the

use and reach of the website through local colleges.

As the project progressed, many organizations referred me to local organizations who fit

the website's goal of highlighting groups working toward a more just and progressive city. Time

required for securing interviews and writing stories for the 26 featured groups was considerable

and these new groups will need to be added in the future. After finishing the first phase, the

second phase did not leave much room for anything other than looking forward. Subsequently, a

future interview list was collated for interns taking over the ownership and editing role for the

website. Some of the community groups included in the list are the Interactive Resource Center

(IRC), Servant Center, Out of the Garden Project, Greensboro Radio Project, and the Beloved

Community Center.

Another potential opportunity for expanding the website is forming alliances between the

seven universities and colleges in Greensboro. Though the website was originally created only

for community groups separate from local universities and colleges, a growing theme became

obvious: local higher education institutions define much of Greensboro residents' livelihood and

they hold reputations that allow for more website accessibility and networking. Nearing the end

of the project, one UNCG-specific group, listed as UNCG Sustainability, was added prior to the

recommendation of networking between the schools. Though I had some hesitations adding the

group, it essentially started the networking process. Featuring university-based social justice

groups on the website will garner more acceptance of "Voice, Activism, Democracy" by the

surrounding colleges and universities, potentially having them agree to link the website to theirs.

As mentioned, the website can only be as useful as the number of people who know it exists;

therefore, having "Voice, Activism, Democracy" listed on other schools' website will become an additional form of promotion.

Conclusion

"It is the word 'with' that creates capacity for communication students to intervene in radical and productive activism in their communities, and it ultimately distinguishes CAP from charity-based service learning" (Badger, 2017, p. 37). "Voice, Activism, Democracy" was initially formed with the community in mind, to work "with" residents, to do "productive activism," and go beyond "charity-based service learning." In this paper, I tackled the atypical definitions of activism by delineating the need for mediated activism in today's world, detailed the project's importance to the city of Greensboro, outlined mediated activism's connections to archetypical activism, connected my work to Communication Activism Pedagogy (CAP) and its importance in moving towards a more democratic world, reflected on critical moments of struggle during the project, and lastly, recommended ways in which social justice organizations in Greensboro, North Carolina, can improve their effectiveness to benefit everyone and reach their goals.

Though "Voice, Activism, Democracy" is currently live online, the work is not complete on the part of those supervising the website, but more importantly, the work is not complete in the community. With mediated activism, such as "Voice, Activism, Democracy," the result is not the website itself, but the effective work that comes from its creation. As Frey and Palmer state, CAP is not just about critiquing social inequalities, but it is also about producing something that is useful for activist groups (2017). This project emphasized the community's need for a single accessible resource by actively listening and writing about individual organization's achievements and goals as well as integrating past and present advice from residents with

experience in creating a similar resource. Overall, "Voice, Activism, Democracy" was made by the community, for the community, and hopefully, to grow with the community.

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