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Embracing Civility, Community, and Citizenship: A Qualitative Study of Multimodal College Composition Classrooms

Sarah Zoe Pike
Iowa State University

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Embracing civility, community, and citizenship: 
A qualitative study of multimodal college composition classrooms 

by 
Sarah Zoe Pike 

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty 
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of 
MASTER OF ARTS 

Major: Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication 

Program of Study Committee: 
Barbara Blakely, Major Professor 
Margaret LaWare 
Michelle Tremmel 

Iowa State University 
Ames, Iowa 

2012 

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Acknowledgments

Words can lead us into new worlds. Words can provide us richer places to live. In her essay, “The Story of a Woman Writing/Teaching: ‘The Shining Elusive Spirit,’” Jan Zlotnik Schmidt writes:

I listen and imagine there are other voices to be heard, other voices to be desired. And then I turn to my students, for teaching is, as Willa Cather suggests in *The Song of the Lark*, about the broken pottery that the ancient women have fashioned, an “art ... an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to capture for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself—life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose.” (73)

The voices of my students—their words—are waiting to being heard. These “shining, elusive” spirits hold words worth sharing and capturing. As a teacher, researcher, and as their advocate, I want to help bring these rich words to light. I am forever grateful to those teachers in my life whose own shining spirits and guidance helped lead me to where I am today:

To Leslie Lords Robbins, my first college writing teacher and forever friend, who taught me to love words, embrace civility and community, seek to live presently, and follow light and goodness—always.

To Christy Seifert, my undergraduate advisor and dear friend, who led me to fall in love with the field of rhetoric and chase after my dreams.

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To my committee members, Maggie LaWare and Michelle Tremmel, whose insights on “growing writers” and embracing civil dialogue in the classroom helped shift my internal teaching philosophy into what it is today.

To my students, who teach me daily the value of active listening and seeking to become more empathetic, engaged, informed cosmopolitan citizens—citizens of the world.

And finally, to my parents—Tom and Mary Pike—who have been my two greatest “life teachers.” Their support in all of my life’s pursuits has helped me become the woman and teacher I am today.
Abstract

This thesis will examine ways of teaching college composition through a lens where civility, citizenship, and community are the focus of the composition classroom. By drawing from critical composition pedagogy scholars and rich examples of civil/civic dialogue from the media, I will construct a series of actionable strategies to foster civil dialogue in the multimodal college composition classroom. Using scholarship in the field of rhetoric and composition, this classroom-based research project will seek to answer questions such as: “How can a first-year college composition class teach civil dialogue and promote understanding in a society where the loudest, shrillest voices win?” and “How can a university implement and assess civility awareness?” This study adds to the conversation regarding the need to work toward a more civil society and explores ways to work toward this by way of the first-year college composition classroom.
Chapter One: Introduction


During the fall of 2011, I taught two sections of first-year composition at Iowa State University from a lens where civility, community, and citizenship were the focus of how we—my students and I—viewed and approached the semester. My intention for embedding these themes into a foundational writing course stemmed from a number of things—listening to stories of empathy and community on NPR’s *This I Believe* radio show, reading Terry Tempest Williams’ insights on the ecological term, *ecotone*, watching showcased acts of incivility highlighted within the media, and from reading the work of those like Sonja Foss, Sally Miller Gearhart, Cindy Griffin, and Jack Mezirow, who bring about ideas of teaching students to become critical, empathetic citizens of the world through “invitational rhetoric” and “transformational learning” approaches.

Furthermore, after learning of a plethora of universities around the United States who have implemented civility campaigns and pledges, I wondered why I wasn’t hearing of or reading about similar themes being discussed in the classroom setting. For example, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and the American University both have their own campaigns to encourage civility and responsible citizenship within and around their campus communities; and Harvard University and the University of Memphis both have their own university
Civility Pledges. While these beginning attempts to foster respect and civil
dialogue on campus are a good start, I wondered how universities might take
these campaigns further. Using critical composition pedagogy approaches, the
purpose of my study was to understand the ways in which my students might
best learn to understand and appreciate others’ various perspectives, and how—as
their instructor—I might best facilitate this process. Specifically, the goal for
students was to become critically observant, empathetic citizens of the world.
Prior to my research study, I had a few key questions that drove my research:

• How can a university implement and assess civility awareness throughout
  all of campus?
• How might a liberal arts college and humanities courses promote critical
  thinking about civility?
• How can I, as a writing instructor, teach civil dialogue and promote
  understanding in a society where the loudest, shrillest voices win?
• Finally, how do I envision my students’ processes of engaging with these
civility themes after the course has ended?

To begin, I must elaborate on these course themes of civility, community,
and citizenship. Students may initially think civility equates to niceness,
community is simply a neighborhood or family, and citizenship might just refer to
one’s nationality. Of course, these words go so much deeper than these
simplistic one-word synonyms. We need to break these words—these ways of
being—apart and first explore a definitional framework of these core themes that
guided both my teaching and my students’ learning for a whole semester.
Civility, Community, and Citizenship

In Nicole Billante and Peter Saunders’ article, “Why Civility Matters,” they note three elements of civility: “respect, relations with strangers, and self-regulation” (33). Billante and Saunders describe civility as a public virtue, “behaviour in public which demonstrates respect for others and which entails curtailing one’s own immediate self-interest when appropriate” (33). In sum, they view civility as respecting “the Other,” which assumes some level of selflessness. Ohio State University’s Pauline Yu describes civility as “a precondition not just of academic freedom but of civic discourse itself” (9). She adds, “It’s far too easy for us to customize our cultural consumption to fit with and reinforce—and never to challenge—our intellectual commitments and political views” (9). For Yu, civility is connected to civic life and is embedded in the responsibilities of a citizen.

In his book, In Search of Civility: Confronting Incivility on the College Campus, Kent Weeks describes civility as “a combination of considerate conduct toward others embodied in the Golden Rule and a notion of civic duty and responsibility to the community” (6); he, like Yu, connects the concept of civility with civic duty. Weeks makes it clear that civility includes a personal responsibility to a community and points out how civility is “usually demonstrated through manners, courtesy, politeness, and a general awareness of the rights, wishes, concerns, and feelings of others” (6). This basic definition focused on politeness is how students tend to view the word when they first engage with it. Weeks moves beyond this limited view of civility and says:

Civility can also be seen when a person is willing to embrace diversity and
respect individuals with differing backgrounds, values, and beliefs. Making a point to listen to others and respond to the actual meanings they are trying to communicate—whether or not they are expressly articulated in words—is another example of civility. Being mindful of the sensitivities of those with whom you speak and adjusting your own speech and conduct accordingly also demonstrates civility. (6)

In addition to involving civic life, Weeks’ definition includes the notion of embracing diversity and a certain level of mindfulness of one’s surrounding communities.

Stephen L. Carter devotes all 17 chapters of his book, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy*, to illustrating exactly why civility matters. Carter gets to the root of the word and explains how Erasmus popularized the concept of *civilité*, from which our word civility is most directly descended. He says, “*Civilité* is often translated as *politeness*, but it means something more. It suggests an approach to life, a way of carrying one’s self and of relating to others—in short, living in a way that is civilized” (15). This “approach to life” is what I really hoped to explore with my students through individual and collaborative composing processes, as civility provides us with guidelines that focus on respect and provide us with ways to “journey with others,” out of love and regard “for the very idea that there are others” (Carter 23).

Philip Vincent, David Wangaard, and Paul Weimer provide us with yet another elaborate view of the notion of civility in their book, *Restoring School Civility*:

So our understanding of civility—which goes well beyond the dictionary definition—must involve 1) the development of good manners and habits that promote good behavior; 2) an intellectual focus on the moral and social obligations to create a civil society; and 3) actions of love and caring
that are developed through service directed toward the needs of others. These three practices testify to an understanding of the requirements of the civil school, the civil student, and the civil educator. (14)

Here, the authors make it clear that civility is too complex of a concept to be defined as just another word in the dictionary. It seems to be both an attitude and a virtue. Steven Elliott Grosby and Edward Shils emphasize that this is the case in *The Virtue of Civility: Selected Essays on Liberalism, Tradition, and Civil Society*. Grosby and Shils assert, “Civility is an attitude in individuals which recommends that consensus about the maintenance of the order of society should exist alongside the conflicts of interests and ideals” (4).

In terms of grappling with this complex term in the writing classroom, as an instructor, I tended to embrace Carter and Weeks’ views on civility as an *approach* rather than the simplistic notion of civility as politeness—how my students initially defined the word. Weeks’ notion of civility as *embracing* and *respecting* the Other, along with their “backgrounds, values, and beliefs” (6), *actively* listening to, and “respond[ing] to the actual meanings they are trying to communicate” (6) served as vital approaches as to how I entered the conversation of civility with my students. In sum, I wanted to help facilitate students’ open, honest, respectful “journey[s] with others” (Carter 23).

Yu connects the notion of civility to the concept of community well. She argues that civil discourse “implies respect for our interlocutors as fellows in our own community,” (5); further, Yu suggests the practice of academic civil discourse, then, “acknowledges and instantiates a community with a common purpose” (5). This idea of practicing and working toward civil dialogue as a way
to unite communities—both within and outside of academic communities—serves as a fitting way to transition to the discussion of community—what it is, what it looks like, and why exploring such a word is vital as we strive to embrace a more civil, dialogic classroom.

In *Exploring Leadership: for College Students Who Want to Make a Difference*, Susan Komives, Nance Lucas, and Timothy McMahon explain that while a community is most often described as “a social group that not only shares an identity and structured pattern of interaction, but also a common geographical territory” (229), it is not just a place where interaction occurs, “but a spirit of connection and commitment that sustains relationships and purpose” (229). Here they so importantly express the elements of connection, commitment, relationships, and purpose that move us beyond the surface definition of community as merely a group of people gathering together.

Like Komives and her colleagues, Michael J. Meyer, too, adds to this notion of community as “spirit of connection” (Komives et al. 229) that emphasizes relationships. Meyer explores the concept of a “close-knit community” in his article, “Liberal Civility and the Civility of Etiquette: Public Ideals and Personal Lives.” He refers to the “close-knit community” as an “association which is bound together, in part, by a central communitarian premise: the well-being of each member of a close-knit community is a constitutive component of the well-being of the other members of the group” (70). This, he says, is of course an ideal concept. Within a close-knit community, Meyer says, “the distinctively mutual point of view will temper and sometimes
transform narrow self-interest (roughly, a purely instrumental appreciation of the well-being of others) by a concern for the common good (roughly, the essentially intertwined well-being of all members of the community)” (70). Meyer’s notion of an ideal community is one that is concerned with relationships as well as each member of the group—a group of people who are “bound together” by way of focusing less attention on the self and more on the other.

Seeking to help students embrace this “spirit of connection” (Komives et al. 229) with each member of the various communities in which they inhabit may seem too idealistic, and Meyer does note that his description is the ideal, but such a “close-knit community” does serve as an excellent illustration of something to strive for. His idealistic goal of seeking individual and community well being serves as an excellent beginning discussion for students to engage in as they consider the number of communities they are part of. It is also important to have students consider what makes a community strong and/or weak, as well as to examine what is and is not working well in the communities in which they are part of as they begin to think about “community” in more complex ways.

Finally, the concept of citizenship is the third major theme of the course. In Virginia Crisco’s “Activating Activist Literacy: Discovering Dispositions for Civic Identity Development,” she states, “[C]itizens form their identities by learning about unfair and unequal situations that face others who are not like them” (39). Thus, the ideal citizen is one who can civilly listen, understand, and interact with those in his or her communities. Perhaps a fitting concept that both expands on the concept of citizenship and also encompasses each of these course themes is
that of the cosmopolitanism philosophy. The word “cosmopolitan” derives from the Greek word “kosmopolitēs” (“citizen of the world”); specifically, it is the idea that “all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, do (or at least can) belong to a single community, and that this community should be cultivated” (Brown and Kleingeld). Kwame Anthony Appiah, Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University and a follower of the cosmopolitan philosophical tradition, appeared in the 2008 documentary, *The Examined Life*, where he discusses his views on cosmopolitanism and the term, "Cosmopolitan Citizen." Appiah suggests that not only are we responsible for our friends and family, but we should also be responsible for trying to support our fellow citizens of the world. Appiah’s concern for the Other certainly links well with Meyer’s idea of the tight-knit community, with its focus on the “concern for the common good” (Meyer 70).

If we work to connect these three major course themes, the ultimate goal would be to have a civil society—a civil community, campus, and classroom. Grosby and Shils illustrate what this looks like:

Civility as a feature of civil society considers others as members of civil society; it means regarding other persons, including one’s adversaries, as members of the same inclusive collectivity, i.e., as members of the same society, even thought they belong to different parties or to different religious communities or to different ethnic groups [...] Therein lies the difference between civility understood as good manners or courtesy and civility as the virtue of civil society. (338-339)

Grosby and Shils’ focused illustration of the civil society is extremely worthy of exploring with students, as the authors decipher between “civility understood as good manners or courtesy” and civility as “the virtue of civil society” (338-339). Their sophisticated view of a civil society helps students to build upon their
existing ideas of what it means to be a civil, “good citizen” of a community.

Along with Grtosby and Shils, in “Rogue Cops and Health Care: What Do We Want from Public Writing?” Susan Wells, too, visualizes just exactly what a civil society might look like. Specifically, though, Wells focuses on the classroom, as the classroom is its own version of public sphere. Wells says, “A classroom that saw itself as a version of the public might value such skills as focusing discussion, organizing work, tolerating and enjoying difficulty, and renunciation of safety and comfort” (338). This notion of not only dealing with, but also embracing uncomfortable conversations in one’s community is key to creating a civil campus and classroom society.

**A Culture of Incivility**

It behooves me also to explore the root of *incivility*, because just as I want my students to become more sophisticated in their understanding of embracing a culture of civility, we must also seek to understand where and how things “go wrong.” Clark asserts that to successfully deal with incivility, “it must be named and publicly discussed” (196). Students must be able to define and identify incivility and its societal and educational consequences. However, in order for students to be able to identify and name acts of incivility, they must engage in conversation about these acts. Clark argues, “Incivility and its damaging consequences must be revealed; otherwise, we are powerless to effect meaningful change” (196). Stephen Carter suggests that a big part of our incivility crisis “stems from the sad fact that we do not know each other or even want to
try; and, not knowing each other, we seem to think that how we treat each other does not matter” (56). Based on our earlier discussion on the concept of civility, it seems clear, then, that whereas civility involves the notions of understanding, listening, and respect, incivility lacks these concepts.

Incivility, simply defined, is “speech or action that is disrespectful or rude” (Flak and Tiberius 3). Kristen Frey offers a more sophisticated definition in her article “Understanding Incivility in the College Classroom,” where she asserts that incivility indicates “disregard and insolence for others, causing an atmosphere of disrespect, conflict, and stress” (3). Roughly put, incivility is a kind of rudeness; it involves an “unwillingness to meet other citizens on reciprocal terms” (Meyer 77). This concept of rudeness is likely how most college students might define incivility, but it is important that the idea of “unwillingness” is examined, too.

Yu and Weeks both grapple with this further, and offer tangible examples where this “rudeness” can be explored. Yu says that “out there” we have ever more discourse, and, it seems, “ever less civility.” She adds, “Talk shows have become shouting matches” (2), noting an example of CNN’s Crossfire. Weeks agrees and says, “shocking uncivil conduct among performing artists, athletes, and the occasional member of Congress seems to capture the attention of both the media and the public” (3). The kinds of uncivil acts seen in the media that Yu and Weeks refer to here are relatable examples that students likely witness every day—perhaps not even realizing it, which is all the more reason to attempt to isolate and explore such moments with students.
While seeking to isolate and understand instances of incivility, we should narrow our focus on what this looks like in the realm of education—on university campuses. In “Faculty Field Guide for Promoting Student Civility in the Classroom,” Cynthia Clark defines academic incivility as “discourteous speech or behavior that violates the norms of mutual respect in the learning environment” (194). In the context of higher education, Frey’s findings are similar; she claims that an uncivil environment will hinder a student’s learning (3). Thomas Benton comes to a similar conclusion; in his article, “Remedial Civility Training,” he says, “the student culture of incivility is a larger impediment to their success than anything they might fail to learn about Western civilization or whatever it is I am teaching.” There’s an urgency here to fight academic incivility that is not being dealt with. Incivility is not just found within the media, but within our everyday lives—including university campuses. Further, its effects even reach students’ ability to receive a quality education, which I would argue is reason alone to study it. Specifically, some sort of civility education or curriculum is needed on college campuses.

Author of “Teaching and Learning Civility,” Peter Levine argues for universities to do more than prepare its students with the necessary skill sets needed for their careers, but also to teach students to become functioning, useful citizens in the various communities they inhabit. And given the nature of humanities courses, such critical thinking intensive courses seem like a fitting environment to practice “civility education” and assist students in learning to think critically about their habits and choices (Levine 15). Mary Hunter and Blaire
Moody, authors of “Civic Engagement in the First College Year,” both see the need to focus on creating a culture of classroom civility; however, they call for specifically working toward such a climate within the first-year college experience. They declare the need “for the first-year [college] experience to introduce new students to the important of civic engagement, help them understand why civic engagement is a critical element of a college education, and provide opportunities to learn about and practice civic engagement” (69), as the first college year “is an opportunity for unprecedented growth, development, and change for new students” (69). Ultimately, higher education must address the issue of civility directly if it wishes to foster a nurturing educational space conducive to learning.

Teaching to Change the World

In *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Stephen Brookfield begins by saying, “We teach to change the world. The hope that undergirds our efforts to help students learn is that doing this will help them act toward each other, and toward their environment, with compassion, understanding, and fairness” (1). Brookfield’s words seeped into me during my first semester of teaching; I wasn’t certain of what teaching to change the world looked like, but I knew I wanted to try, and I knew themes of compassion and understanding were already part of my internal teaching philosophy.

In fall 2011, I attempted to put Brookfield’s words into action in my own classroom. This thesis will examine ways of teaching college composition
through a lens where civility, citizenship, and community are the focus of the composition classroom. By drawing from critical composition pedagogy scholars and rich examples of civil/civic dialogue from the media, this thesis will construct a series of actionable strategies to foster civil dialogue in the multimodal college composition classroom.

Chapter Three will outline the semester as a whole in which this research study took place, as well as illustrate the specific assignments used to promote critical thinking about the course themes. Chapter Four will explore the ecological term, *ecotone*, as a metaphor for civil dialogue. In Chapter Five, we will review the results of the study by looking at students’ own perspectives regarding the course themes as well as the course as a whole; student perspectives are used in this project to support recommended educational strategies. Finally, Chapter Six will serve as a conclusion and discuss possibilities for future research.

Institutional Review Board approval has been obtained for all such data included in this thesis.
Chapter Two: Embracing Civility, Community, and Citizenship in the College Composition Classroom

This idea of addressing civility in the university setting is not a new one. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, piloted “Project Civility,” a two-year, university-wide dialogue at Rutgers. Project Civility focuses on grappling with questions such as the following: “Who are we, the members of the [university] community? How are we getting along with one another? How might we improve the quality of our day-to-day interactions?” Project Civility is an ongoing inquiry about the nature of true respect for others—an inquiry that demands the university community’s openness “to hear, to learn, to teach, and to change.” The goal? “To cultivate small acts of courtesy and compassion in our daily lives,” which will result, over time, in a “more charitable campus culture—one marked by an increase in thoughtful communication and a decrease in hostile encounters” (Rutgers).

Rutgers isn’t alone, however, in working toward civility on university campuses. In Marilyn Gilroy’s *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* article, “Colleges Grappling With Incivility,” Gilroy informs us that “campus civility statements” are often introduced throughout the U.S. “as a means of preventing intolerance by reducing bias and prejudice” (37). She says the goal of these civility standards is to “curb hate speech” (37). University-sponsored civility programs are sprinkled throughout the U.S. At the University of Chicago, the code “connects diversity, civility, and equity” where the policy asks everyone to
“foster an environment of acceptance, respect openness, and strive for understanding” (Gilroy 37-38). American University in Washington D.C. launched its campaign to “heighten awareness of the relationship between personal conduct and campus life” and “offers the three principles of ‘choose, act, and behave,’ meaning that to increase civility, individuals should make conscious choices about how to behave, act thoughtfully as if they were in the other person's shoes, and reflect on how the way they behave might make others feel” (Gilroy 38). Ocean County College in Toms River, New Jersey defines civility as “respect for others, basic courtesy, and behaviors that create a positive environment in which to learn and to work” (Gilroy 39). California State University, a system with 28 campuses, has also worked toward embracing a civility standard” (Gilroy 38). Further, the University of Miami in Florida and many other institutions tie civility statements to policies about sexual and verbal harassment (Gilroy 38).

Robert J. Connelly’s Journal of General Education article, “Introducing a Culture of Civility in First-Year College Classes,” revisits the historic meaning of civility, argues for the need for academic civility education in the first-year college classroom, and proposes that “a published Code of Academic Civility for the classroom be used to stimulate an initial discussion in some first-year classes” (55). If universities are working on campaigns advocating for civility on campuses throughout the U.S., then it is certainly possible—and needed—to work toward this goal of embracing civil practices and building community at the classroom level as well—specifically, the writing classroom, a place where we
work to provide students with “an education that prepares them to be critical citizens” (Berlin 54), and where, as James Berlin writes, “We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of making sense of it” (qtd. in Qualley 3).

Krista Tippett, host of the public radio program On Being, distributed and produced by American Public Media, says, “The word compassion is hollowed out in our culture . . . Words matter. They shape the way we understand ourselves, the way we interpret the world, and the way we treat others.” Like Tippett, Rochelle Harris emphasizes the power and depth that language plays in our lives in her article, “Encouraging Emergent Moments: The Personal, Critical, and Rhetorical in the Writing Classroom.” Harris suggests, “the texts we choose to write are important sites to understand the self, the world, and culture” (402). Words, language, texts . . . how we, as writing instructors, choose to frame what we invite into the classroom allows for a larger, more meaningful, lasting conversation outside of the classroom.

**Dialogue as a Way of Experiencing the World**

In James Berlin’s *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies*, he states, “In teaching people to read and write, we are thus teaching them a way of experiencing the world. This realization requires that the writing classroom be dialogic” (110), meaning a space where citizens can exchange their views freely and engage in a more meaningful conversation because of such exchanges. Berlin says we must encourage students “to become reflective agents actively involved in shaping their own consciousness
as well as the democratic society of which they are an integral part” (132). If universities are working on campaigns advocating for civility on campuses throughout the U.S., then it is certainly possible—and needed—to work toward this goal of embracing civil practices and building community at the classroom level as well—specifically, the writing classroom, a place where we work to provide students with “an education that prepares them to be critical citizens” (Berlin 54).
Chapter Three: Putting Theory into Practice—

Data Collection and Methods

My fall 2011 study included two sections of English 250 at Iowa State University. English 250: Written, Oral, Visual, and Electronic Composition traditionally focuses on “analyzing, composing, and reflecting on written, oral, visual, and electronic (WOVE) discourse within academic, civic, and cultural contexts.” (ISUComm). My experimental pilot version of English 250 placed an emphasis on the themes of civility, community, and citizenship in the composition classroom. Students performed rhetorical visual analyses of documentary shorts from PangeaDay.org and DocChallenge.org, as well as rhetorically analyzed TED Talk speeches and static visual advertisements. The research component of the course asked students to research a current issue within their academic discipline and create a mediated argument essay in the form of a magazine article. Further, students presented their mediated arguments as panels at our week-long class conference, “Exploring Ecotones: Composing to Mediate.” Students also held two “Project Civility” forum discussions, inspired by Rutgers’ “Project Civility” campaign, where they discussed civil and civic issues in the U.S. and beyond. All of these student documents became data for this study.

Using critical composition pedagogy approaches, the focus of this study was to understand the ways in which university students might strive for understanding and appreciation of various perspectives through use of the ecological term, the ecotone, as metaphor. Specifically, the goal was for students
to become critically observant, empathetic citizens of the world. Methods of inquiry included data collection from students’ own work—both in written and oral formats. Analyzing students’ written and verbal understanding of the theme of civility, in particular, I attempted to understand the extent to which students grasped the course themes, and further, could provide examples of them in action. The following research questions guided my study:

- How can a first-year composition class teach civil dialogue and promote understanding in a society where the loudest, shrillest voices win?
- How can a humanities class promote critical thinking about civility?
- How can a university implement and assess civility awareness?
- How do I envision my students’ processes of engaging with these civility themes after the course has ended?

Due to my position as a graduate teaching assistant, having already taught three ISUComm Foundation courses, I was ideally situated to teach a themed version of English 250. After gaining IRB approval, at the end of the 2011 spring semester, I had the IRB-certified Assistant Director of ISUComm distribute informed consent documents to my two ENGL 250 sections of 26 students each. 29 students consented to participate in the study—15 in one section and 14 in the other.

**Design and Methods**

I’ve based the design on the approaches discussed by John W. Creswell in
Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches.

Specifically, I’ve designed my study approach to focus on the “multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information” (13). Both during the study, as well as after, I engaged in constant comparison of data from students’ compositions to find emerging categories and thematic patterns regarding the course themes. In addition to analyzing students’ written work, I also paid close attention to students’ in-class conversations that I recorded with their consent.

Additionally, it’s important to note that I adopted the roles of both teacher and researcher/observer throughout my study. Interestingly, I was in some ways part of the communities in which I, the researcher, was studying as I served as instructor/facilitator for both class sections.

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

To ensure the ethical treatment of research participants, I’ve successfully completed the training course on human subjects research as required by the Intuitional Review Board at Iowa State University. Participants were briefed on the voluntary nature of the study and given clear instructions of their ability to withdraw from the study at any point. Those who agreed to the terms of the study signed consent forms distributed by a co-researcher in the classroom research site. Signed forms were kept in a locked file and remained unavailable to me, the primary researcher, until end of semester grades had been submitted to the university registrar.
**ISUComm at Iowa State University**

The basic principle of Iowa State University's communication (ISUComm) curriculum is to teach students to “communicate effectively in a variety of settings and media” (ISUComm). Further, Iowa State University’s communication curriculum “seeks to enrich the student’s understanding of the various subjects studied as well as prepare the student to communicate successfully in professional, civic, and private life” [emphasis mine] (ISUComm). The major themes of my pilot study course were already embedded within the ISUComm curriculum, so it seemed like a fitting space for researching these core themes of civility, community, and citizenship.

**Student Demographics**

In 1864, Iowa State University (ISU) became the nation’s first land-grant institution (ISU Office of University Relations). Iowa State University had 29,887 students enrolled in Fall 2011 (ISU Registrar). Today, Iowa State is a recognized leader in many areas including agriculture, engineering, meteorology, animal science, and architecture. In Fall 2011, ISU students came from every county in Iowa, every state in the country, and from more than 100 foreign countries (ISU Registrar).

The students in my two sections, sections A and B, were primarily sophomores and juniors. 29 of my 42 students consented to participate in the
study. The majority of students grew up in Iowa communities, with a minority coming from urban areas such as Des Moines, Minneapolis, and Chicago.

 Semester Outline

This course included five units, with unit two being the largest, as it encompassed the most components for the unit assignment—the mediated argument essay. The course units and major assignments for each are as follows:

- **Unit One: Inviting Civil Discourse**  
  - Insights on (In)civility blog (see Appendix B)  
  - “This I Believe” credo/essay
- **Unit Two: Composing to Mediate**  
  - Mediated argument essay (see Appendix D)  
    - Proposal  
    - Annotated bibliography  
    - Outline  
    - Panel presentation  
    - Civility forum (see Appendix H)
- **Unit Three: Investigating the Media**  
  - Documentary analysis (see Appendix M)
- **Unit Four: Building Community**  
  - TED Talk speech analysis (see Appendix N)
- **Unit Five: Embracing Civil Discourse**  
  - ePortfolios  
  - Final civility forum

Throughout this semester-long study I used these listed assignments and activities to compare and analyze student data in order to find emerging thematic patterns regarding the course themes.

 Course Management System

I chose to use a free online website called Edmodo for my course
management system. Edmodo is a social learning network for teachers and students. Its user interface is similar to Facebook (see Fig. 1), so it is extremely user-friendly for students.

![Edmodo homepage](image)

**Figure 1. My Edmodo homepage, Fall 2011.**

The Edmodo homepage features class groups (my two teaching sections), my library folders, and the class “wall” (think Facebook) where I post homework and they upload assignments. The interactive interface also allows students to post questions and comments right on the homepage (rather than me being the only one to feed them comments).

*“Insights on (In)Civility” Blog*

Students wrote weekly in their in-class journals and on their Weebly.com blog pages. This kind of personal writing “gives students the feeling that their experiences as learners count and that their voices are being attended to.”
(Brookfield 99), particularly when they are receiving weekly feedback from both their peers and me.

“

“This I Believe” Essay

In Composing Critical Pedagogies: Teaching Writing As Revision, Amy Lee says,

“In traditional process pedagogy, developing writers are encouraged to mine their personal histories so they might feel a sense of authority and expertise in relation to the subject of their texts” (58). She adds, “Writing about one’s history is thus a means to understanding how we have come to be positioned and composed in the here-and-now, to recognize that experience itself in inscribed by systematic social and material conditions” (58). With emphasis on exploring self and community through writing, NPR’s This I Believe seemed like a fitting approach to Lee’s suggestion of helping developing writers “feel a sense of authority” in the writing classroom—particularly during this first unit of the semester. Further, having students write their own This I Believe essays served as a helpful way to introduce the course focus on civility.

Lee says, “Inquiring into our experiences in order to study how our values,
identities, and relationships have come to be constructed and shaped allows us to think about the possibility of making deliberate choices about the ‘selves’ we want to become and the relations we aim to foster” (58). Having students investigate their values, identities, and relationships right away through writing and sharing their credos—and listening to their classmates’ credos—served to help them to better understand the meaning and value of community.

Additionally, students’ final This I Believe essays were formatted in a way similar to how they are displayed on NPR’s own This I Believe website (see Fig. 2).

The Mediated Argument Essay

The largest assignment, the mediated argument essay, required students to select a topic that involved a current issue/conflict related to their discipline. I advised students to think of a way they could add to the existing conversation about the issue by looking at what dialogue has been going on (past and present) and create a mediated argument by striving to offer new insights. This mediated argument essay was a chance for them to explore and inhabit an unfamiliar ecotone, where he or she, as a writer, could illustrate a new transition area or terrain for the audience. They looked for areas of agreement within various “opposing sides” and then added their own mediated voice as part of the conversation.

In “Civic Participation and Undergraduate Curriculum,” Wendy Sharer writes:
Many times, students do not feel empowered when it comes to communicating in the civic arena. Their ideas, and their rhetoric, they sense will not be heard. To a certain extent, their perceptions are accurate—it is indeed very difficult to have one’s voice heard without money and the access to corporated media channels that money can buy. However, there are pedagogical practices that can help students develop a sense of agency in the civic arena. One such practice involves ensuring that students write for a real audience about a real concern in their immediate lives rather than asking them to focus on enormous, far-reaching problems. (385)

The fact that students choose a topic within their own field of study is crucial to both the success of the assignment and the themes of the course. Giving students the agency to choose a topic of their interest within a field of their study not only ensures students’ interest in the assignment, but it empowers them to become an “expert” on the subject matter within the class community.

Throughout the unit, students practiced writing mediated arguments using selected readings from our class text, Current Issues and Enduring Questions—ranging from debatable topics such as the traditional family, the environment, and gender. Students searched for various perspectives on the issue, areas of agreement, and then brainstormed possible solutions that sought an ecotone, or middle ground, that strived for some degree of consensus. They practiced doing so both individually (through journal responses and blog posts), as well as with small groups in class.
In addition to writing an essay proposal, an annotated bibliography, an essay outline, and the actual mediated argument essay itself (in the format of a designed magazine article)—students also presented their mediated arguments on a panel with classmates of a similar field of study. We held their panel presentations in a large conference room and passed out programs for our "Exploring Ecotones: Composing to Mediate" mini-conference (see Fig. 3). Additionally, the fact that students' peer response groups remain the same throughout the mediated argument unit is important for their success. In *Turns of Thought: Teaching Composition as Reflexive Inquiry*, Donna Qualley says, “Collaborative inquiry often makes manifest the largely invisible and unconscious processes of thinking and inquiry. By working closely with others for an extended period of time, students can actually see how their ideas develop and change” (95). This constant dialogue between student peer response groups allows students to share information with other “experts” of similar fields and helps to develop a level of reciprocity between students.

Finally, each class concluded the unit with their own class forum—a civil dialogue. Modeled after civil dialogues we had witnessed from various Rutgers
“Project Civility” clips, we held our own event: “The Battle of Incivility: English 250 Project Civility Forum” (see Fig. 4).

Each class sat in a large circle and every student chose a slip of paper with a quote or concept and related question from a paper bag—each somehow dealing with at least one of the course themes.

There were more than enough questions for each student. Stephen Carter reminds us, “Civility does not require consensus on everything” (132); rather, civility and disagreement “can both derive at the same time” (132). It’s key that students understand this—that they know it’s possible to engage in dialogue where various parties disagree, but do so in a respectful manner. Additionally, in Elizabeth Ervin’s article, “Encouraging Civic Participation among First-Year Writing Students: Or, Why Composition Class Should Be More Like a Bowling Team,” Ervin emphasizes that “[I]nvolve­ment doesn’t just happen; it requires models of such behavior and structured opportunities for participating in it” (385). She adds, “The classroom should be a means to the kind of civic engagement that I'm talking about here, not the end” (398). This is why my classes’ civility forums were vital to a communication course focused on civil dialogue and critical thinking. Students modeled respectful dialogue in the “structured opportunity” their instructor created for them. Furthermore, Clark suggests for the
need to conduct open forums that model “respectful discourse and disagreement,” but also “demonstrates how discussion of varying opinions, diverse viewpoints, and differing beliefs can help build a respectful environment” (196). This exchange of ideas helps, she says, is what helps to foster “a civil campus community” (197).

In general, during this first of two forums, students commented on how shows like *Jersey Shore* are entertaining because of the fact that the show’s events and “characters” seem so unreal and unfamiliar to that of their own lives. However, they were concerned with the fact that the American media and society seem to be so fascinated with conflict. Many students shared their own experiences grappling with incivility as employees in the customer service industry; they shared their frustrations dealing with uncivil, “entitled” customers, and their struggles communicating respect in return. While much of the forum time was spent by students expressing their frustrations and concerns with incivility in society, most also expressed the importance that something must be done to work toward civility and community. However, as this civility forum was held at the end of the second unit, at that point of the semester, students seemed unsure about what realistic actions could be done to combat incivility. We will examine students’ voices during the forums in Chapter Five: Analysis of Student Voices—Results.

**Analysis of a Documentary Short**

The main assignment for Unit Three was the visual analysis paper.
Students chose from a selection of PangeaDay.org (see Fig. 5) and DocChallenge.org documentary shorts (each no longer than 10 minutes). We practiced visual analysis by looking at magazine ads, PSAs, and short documentaries—specifically looking at how ideas about gender, race, and class were portrayed.

“Pangea Day” (May 10, 2008) served as a reminder of the “connectedness” or unitary nature of all people on Planet Earth. The program was broadcasted live to the world with the goal of tapping the power of film to strengthen tolerance and compassion while uniting millions of people to build a better future. Pangea Day offered a view into other lives—a way to join discussions that might move the world just a little bit further toward understanding. In a world where people are often divided by borders, difference, and conflict, Pangea Day sought to overcome that—to help people see themselves in others.

Figure 5. Selection of Pangea Day films.
**Analysis of a TED Talk**

Unit Four’s main assignment is the textual analysis paper. To keep in line with the course themes, students were asked to choose a TED Talk (which usually range from 15-20 minutes) to analyze, as the interactive transcript (the text) is available on the right side of the video. TED (Technology Entertainment and Design) is a global set of conferences, formed to disseminate “ideas worth spreading,” which fit nicely with the course themes. Students could choose from a list of 20+ options (all dealing with the course themes in some way).

![Figure 6. Screenshot of TED Talk with Interactive Transcript.](image)

Some examples of TED Talk options for the paper included:

- **Chimamanda Adichie**: The danger of a single story, where novelist Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice -- and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

- **Krista Tippett**: Reconnecting with compassion, where Tippett deconstructs the meaning of compassion through several moving stories, and proposes a new, more attainable definition for the word.

- **Elizabeth Lesser**: Take "the Other" to lunch, where Lesser explores the two sides of human nature within us (call them "the mystic" and "the
warrior”) that can be harnessed to elevate the way we treat each other. She shares a simple way to begin real dialogue -- by going to lunch with someone who doesn't agree with you, and asking them three questions to find out what's really in their hearts.

- William Ury: The walk from "no" to "yes," where Ury offers an elegant, simple (but not easy) way to create agreement in even the most difficult situations -- from family conflict to, perhaps, the Middle East.
- Kathryn Schulz: On being wrong, where Schulz makes a compelling case for not just admitting but embracing our fallibility.

Semester ePortfolio

The final assignment of the semester was for students to finalize their ePortfolios—online portfolios. Students created Weebly.com accounts the first week of the semester and "published" content weekly. The required portfolio components included a number of process revisions of their papers and various reflections. Each student’s Weebly homepage features his or her picture along with a brief “About Me” welcome statement (see Fig. 7). Students wrote weekly blog posts dealing with some sort of civil/civic/community theme. I provided them with some sort of prompt/question to consider each week and they responded weekly with text, video, and/or images to support their responses.

Part of their final course reflection was to explore an on-campus sculpture at Iowa State. On the south side of the Memorial Union there is an elongated...
cyclone piece of bronze artwork titled, “Whirlwind” (see Fig. 8). At the base of Whirlwind is an inscription from the artists, Andrea Myklebust and Stanton Sears. It reads: “Going to college should pick a person up and set him or her down in a new place with new ideas and a deeper understanding of the world.” At the closing of the semester, I wanted to explore with students what these “new ideas” might be that Myklebust and Sears suggest we should be engaging with, and how they might help us gain a “deeper understanding of the world.” My hope was that after a semester of grappling with the course themes, students might see the connection of the inscription of the “Whirlwind” sculpture and our course themes of community, civility, and citizenship.

The Teacher’s Role

While I went into fall 2011 feeling confident in the course plan I had created, I was apprehensive about the level of involvement I should play during course discussions where I wanted students to practice elements of civil dialogue. I knew as their instructor, I needed to serve as a facilitator in some way, but I also wanted to be more of an observer during student-focused discussion time. In “Teachers as Civic Agents: Toward a Critical Democratic Theory of Urban Teacher Development,” Nicole Mirra and Ernest Morrell explore
the notion of “Teacher as Civic Agent,” which is “an alternative vision of teaching” that “marks an important theoretical shift from viewing quality teaching and learning as that which prepares students to succeed economically to that which prepares students to become self-actualized and critically empowered civic agents” (409). It also redefines teachers as “active civic role models and public intellectuals engaged in collective, critical work” (Mirra and Morrell 409).

Additionally, Kerrie Farkas claims that composition faculty have “a unique opportunity to foster student learning of civic discourse and to prepare students for informed and engaged participation in the public sphere” (44). Farkas adds, “If students understand what civic discourse is and how it works, they can understand the most and least effective ways to participate and the primary ways to make their voices heard as informed students and as responsible citizens in their communities” (44). This turned into my own personal teaching goal during the semester—to foster student learning during these open forum dialogues by acting as “Teacher as Civic Agent.”
Chapter Four:

Ecotone as a Metaphor for Civil Dialogue

Figure 9. Desert foothills meet forested mountains. (photo: David McNew/Getty Images).

In order to help my students think more critically about conflict and the themes of the course, during “Unit Two: Composing to Mediate,” I introduced my students to the ecological term, ecotone—both through text and imagery. My hope was that by incorporating the idea and imagery of ecotone, my students might better grasp the concept of seeking middle ground as they wrote and critically thought about our course themes in action.
Terry Tempest Williams, author and naturalist, was part of American Public Radio’s *On Being* 2011 series, “The Civil Conversations Project,” and during her conversation with Krista Tippett, host of *On Being*, Williams introduces the word ecotone as an analogy from nature to describe a clash of cultures:

As a naturalist, my favorite places to be are along the ecotone. It’s where it’s most alive, usually the edge of a forest and meadow, the ocean and the sand. It’s that interface between peace and chaos. It’s that creative edge that we find most instructive. It’s also the most frightening, because it’s completely uncertain and unpredictable and that’s again where I choose to live.

Tippett’s description of ecotone as an “interface between peace and chaos” is particularly helpful, in that when students compose their mediated argument essays, there is certainly a sense of chaos as they grapple with a handful of contrasting voices, while at the same time seeking a level of peaceful resolution.

Merriam-Webster defines ecotone as “a transition area between two adjacent ecological communities.” It comes from the Greek root *tonos*, meaning “tension.” Dr. Lucinda Johnson, director of the Center for Water and the Environment at the University of Minnesota Duluth explains “ecotone” in this way:

The word ecotone derives from the landscape ecology literature, and refers to the transition area between “patches” or areas of the landscape that exhibit different characteristics... it is generally applied to the transition zones between two different vegetation types (e.g., grassland and forest), but can be both more subtle (e.g., edges of
wetlands, which have subtle transitions from submergent to emergent vegetation, one of which dominates depending on water levels) or more extreme (the area adjacent to a stream, called the riparian zone).

The ecotone shares characteristics of both of the adjoining patches (hence the transition).

This transition area could also be a new terrain that “shares characteristics of both of the adjoining patches” (Leem). Perhaps thinking about the ecotone as what Johnson and Leem refer to a “transition area” is most helpful for students, as the goal of the mediated argument essay is not to solve the issue at hand, but rather sift through a sea of voices on the topic, stride for new insights, and to seek ways of transitioning to a less hostile conversation. This idea of ecotone as a transition area also serves students well when thinking about the course as a whole; students are asked to seek to understand the Other and engage in active listening for almost one-third of the year. They are living in a sort of transition realm. And as Paul Carr reminds us in “‘But What Can I Do?’ Fifteen Things Education Students Can Do to Transform Themselves In/Through/With Education,” being able to critique divergent viewpoints “is an integral part of teaching and learning, and, therefore, conscientious listening and dialogue are important skills to acquire” (83). With such focus on conscientious listening and dialogue, there is likely even more than a transition happening in a semester that works with such civil/civic themes, but perhaps even a sort of transformation.

Florence R. Krall gives her own personal perceptions on the ecotone as metaphor in her book, Ecotone: Wayfaring on the Margins, are particularly
insightful. Krall describes the ecotone area as “the place of crossing over” and as a space that “provides sanctuary, solitude, and peace, growth and transformation” (6); she adds, “In the natural world, edges where differences come together [ecotones] are the richest of habitats” (4). This idea of different landscapes meeting together in one space is key. Just like various landscapes meeting at an ecotone, the various perspectives/opinions/voices within the mediated argument paper also merge together at a point when students seek to blend the voices in a way that invites understanding and bits of new conversation about the debated issue at hand. The concept of ecotone, then, represents “the place of meeting and tension between diverse and sometimes conflicting aspects of our lives” (Krall 6). So, the goal is not simply to become more polite citizens, but to learn how to embrace the concept of ecotone as we grapple daily in what Mary Louise Pratt calls, “contact zones,” or places where different opinions meet and clash.

Pratt’s concept of the “contact zone” certainly does connect well to this ecotone metaphor. The contact zone is intended in part “to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy” (37). Essentially, contact zones can be viewed as spaces where hostile voices and combating ideas clash—until they merge and mix together in a realm of peace and chaos—the ecotone.
Chapter Five: Analysis of Student Voices—Results

In order to track students’ progression of understanding of the course themes, over the course of the semester, I collected data by using a video camera to record the students’ mediated argument panel presentations, a digital audio recorder to document our civility forums, and our course management system, Edmodo, to collect students’ written documents.

Defining Civility, August to December 2011

In order to assess students’ progression of understanding civility, I asked each of them to define civility in their own words during both the first (see Appendix A) and last weeks of the semester (see Appendix O). Typically, students’ ending definitions dealt with notions of listening to, respecting, and seeking to understand others through civil dialogue, whereas their beginning definitions are simplistic and matter-of-fact.

Section A:

In August 2011, Nolan defined civility simply as “acting in a proper manner in any given situation.” In December 2011, Nolan’s thought process about civility shifted from his original focus on manners to a more sophisticated focus on respect and civil dialogue; he writes, “I would define civility as being respectful towards others. You really do not have to agree with others, but if you can respect them and their message, civility is there.” Another student in section A,
Tommy, showed a clear progression in his ideas about civility. At the beginning of the semester, Tommy defined civility as “the act of being nice to others based solely on the fact that they are other human beings,” and then in the last week of the semester, he writes, “Compared to the beginning of the semester, I would describe civility differently. Now, I define the word as anything which involves you reaching out and helping and understanding others; this could include something as simple for holding the door open for someone or taking the time to listen to someone with an opposing opinion to see how they feel.” Tommy’s ending definition embeds the notion of understanding the “Other” and active listening. Further, he clearly identifies the change in his understanding of the concept, which is important to note as he says that he was aware of the transition of thinking throughout the semester.

Oliver initially expressed civility as “how people conduct themselves within the community, or situations in which they interact with people. For one to be civil,” he says, “they should work together with others so that they can come to reasonable conclusions/actions that benefit not only themselves, but others.” While Oliver addresses the notion of togetherness and selflessness, not until the end of the semester does he consider themes beyond tolerance and understanding. In December, he writes, “Civility involves more than just attempting to tolerate those within one’s society. Instead, one must reach out to learn and understand those around them. As a result, one will develop respect for those around them for both the commonalities and their differences.” Here he
seems to relate to Weeks’ notion of civility as *embracing* and *respecting* the
Other, along with their “backgrounds, values, and beliefs” (6).

Camie, another student from section A, defined civility initially as
“Basically just kindness to other people in any setting. It can look like a lot of
different things from simply opening a door for someone or being kind to a
stranger.” Camie’s beginning definition seemed to be a common one—describing
civility as kind, such as “opening a door for someone.” Just a few months later,
her focus on the word relays a message of understanding and respectfully
dialoging with people she may disagree with. In December 2011, Camie says:

> I would define the word civility as being courteous and polite towards
> others in any and all situations. Civility to me doesn’t only mean that
> though it also means understand that people have different opinions about
> things and even though you don’t have embrace every view point of
> someone’s opinion you do need to be polite when their opinion is being
> expressed and not just shoot down the way they feel. It is important to
> understand why someone feels the way they do and not just that they feel
> a certain way. Civility can look like a lot of things it can be as simple as
> opening a door for someone or smiling at someone. It can be as complex
> as sitting down and listening to someone with a different opinion and
> actually getting to know them and how they view the world with judgment.

She illustrates both the simplicity and complexity of the idea of civility. Camie’s
December definition of civility seemed to be the most sophisticated, in that she
was able to articulate the need not only to attempt to understand others, but the
need to understand “*why* someone feels the way they do and not just that they
feel a certain way” [emphasis mine]. During week one, students focused on
themes of being nice and respectful, but they couldn’t seem to articulate
specifically what that looked like; at the end of the semester, every student’s
definition became more sophisticated in at least some way.
**Section B:**

Marcella’s shift in her own definition of civility focused on relationships. She first defines civility as “the action of providing for the people,” and used the example of a nation having civility “when it provides education, health, and a source of income to its people.” She viewed the idea as an action of giving in some way. At the end of the semester, she says, “Throughout this course I have learned that civility is the way we should treat the people around us. People deserve to be treated politely and their views have as much value to them as do our own. In a civil environment people are united and have better relationships with each other.” Her new definition brings about ideas of valuing and uniting people—seeking relationships. Mandy also shifts from a simple definition focused on action to a later definition focused more on the process of understanding and interacting with others. She begins, “I would define the word civility as politeness or the act of being civil,” and ends with a fuller grasp of the idea as “actively seeking to understand another through polite behavior, no matter what the difference in race, age, gender or values. For me, this means participating in discussions with refined mannerisms, comments and overall courteous handling of interactions with others. Civility, in every day life, looks like the act of treating one another with respect and not letting differences between people change that.” Her use of the phrase “actively seeking” in her later definition indicates that civility is more than a simple set of actions, but rather a *process.*
Something I didn’t expect was that in students’ examples of what civility looked like, most all of them expressed that an example of civility would be opening doors for people on campus. While students’ definitions still grew more sophisticated in their interpretation of the idea, I hoped they could articulate more sophisticated specific examples of what civility looked like by the end of the semester. However, this lack of examples could be in part that they were asked to redefine civility during finals week, along with finishing revisions for their ePortfolios.

**Civility Forums, October and December 2011**

While students’ didn’t seem to provide in-depth examples of what civility might look like in their final written definitions, they did in fact seem to articulate their enhanced level of understanding during our final class civility forum.

In addition to Rutgers’ own Project Civility program, Hunter and Moody’s call for first-year college students to be introduced to the importance of civic engagement and help them understand “why civic engagement is a critical element of a college education, and provide opportunities to learn about and practice civic engagement” (69) was part of my rationale behind the idea of these classroom open forums. Ultimately, if higher education wishes to foster a nurturing educational space conducive to learning, we need to do more than talk about what this might look like with students; we need to model it with students. So, that’s exactly what we did. Students participated in two civility forums—one in October, after presenting on their mediated argument papers—and one on our
last day of class in December, after watching “Creating Civility: A Public Conversation” with Krista Tippett, host of American Public Media’s show On Being, where Tippett led an interactive conversation about how we build a common life, even while holding deep disagreements on difficult issues.

October 2011 Civility Forum, Section A:

Clark asserts that to successfully deal with incivility, “it must be named and publicly discussed” (196). Students must be able to define and identify incivility and its societal and educational consequences. However, in order for students to be able to identify and name acts of incivility, they must engage in conversation about these acts. When asked, “Where have you seen cases of incivility on TV?” students in Section A responded:

**Wade:** MTV Music awards when Kanye took the microphone from Taylor Swift.

**Cole:** I remember something like that too, but it was Eminem, and they literally had to bleep out his whole song. You didn’t hear any of his song because they had to beep out every other word.

**Camie:** 50 Cent did it too at the Grammys.

In October 2011, their answers were simplistic and focused on incivility meaning rudeness. During this same forum, I asked them “Do you hear conversations of what civility looks like in the university setting? Have you heard the word used on campus before now?” All of them answered “No” in unison. Cole added, “Not until this class.” Hannah mentioned talking about right and wrong in an ethics course, and Cole added, “Yeah, but that wasn’t really based on civility, though.” I was a
bit surprised to hear that they had never heard talk of civility on campus, as I assumed there might be talk of the word during freshman/student housing orientation.

While students were discussing how they felt they learned civil practices from home, I interrupted and asked where they felt people might relearn or shift their views on civil practices. All of them immediately responded “College” in unison.

**Kendall:** If your parents taught it to you, for the most part when you’re going to unlearn it is when you’re out, away from the people who taught it to you.

**Luke:** It’s going to be way harder to get rid of it if you’re around [family] everyday, but once you do go to college, you’re away from [family] and you can learn from other people—your roommates, your teachers, your classmates—how you’re supposed to act when you’re around [family] every day.

**Holly:** I think you think a lot about who you are and what you believe in while you’re in college. It’s a time where there’s not a whole lot of influence on you.

**Kendall:** I think until you get to college there’s a lot more pressure from other people to have a specific view, whereas when you’re in college you’re exposed to all those other views.

They all expressed that college is the time to “unlearn” old habits and opinions, and transform their preexisting opinions in some way. As students live out these transitions while in the university sphere, Berlin’s call for the writing classroom to be “dialogic” (110) is vital. This type of classroom space where student citizens can exchange their views freely and engage in a more meaningful conversation, I believe, can be achieved through utilizing open forums in the classroom. Students are essentially practicing how to take part in a civil democracy.
After students discussed how college was a time for transitions and learning about new civil practices, they then responded to the question of whether or not civility has really declined, or if people concerned with civility are just making a big deal out of nothing:

**Bennett:** I think civility is still there, but the media doesn’t show it because it’s not as entertaining to watch shows like *Jersey Shore* where they’re all getting along.

**Me:** Why is that? Why do we like those shows?

**Holly:** Because people like drama.

**Tommy:** It makes us feel better about ourselves.

**Bennett:** It gives people a chance to live vicariously through someone else. Everyone likes seeing a good fight, but no one likes getting hit in the face.

**Holly:** Our society is just fascinated with conflict. It’s so dumb that it’s funny. It seems so unrealistic. You can’t even fathom someone actually acting like that, so it can be funny.

Holly, in particular, focused on how Americans love drama and conflict, but made it clear that there was a line between those engaging in the drama versus those like her who were merely getting entertainment from it. This led me to wonder about how students perceive incivility. When asked to describe a moment of *uncivil* action that they had experienced, they focused on simplistic examples that they had experienced on campus:

**Sadie:** One of my biggest pet peeves is the people who ride their bikes, speed up, and they don’t slow down. They don’t stop at stop signs either! (Others agreed and said, “yeah!”)

**Holly:** They don’t watch the crosswalks either. I’ve almost been hit multiple times. And the groups of people who block sidewalks.
Sadie: Or the people who don't walk in straight lines!

It’s interesting to note that I did not ask them about moments of uncivil examples they had experienced on campus, but rather moments in general—anywhere. Students focused on campus, possibly, because the university setting is where they spend a majority of their time during the week.

The conversation then shifted to talk of sacrifices. Stephen Carter, Yale law professor and author of Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy, says, civility is “the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together.” Therefore, students responded to the question, “What are these sacrifices?”

Christy: Sacrifices like putting others before you—even just a person opening the door for you. They could’ve been selfish and just not cared.

Tommy: Sacrificing not always getting your way.

That class’ conversation concluded talking about civil discourse in politics. I asked them, “Do you think politicians today are known for being civil leaders? If not, do you think it will ever change? Why or why not? Can you think of any civil leaders today?”

Cole: No. They just rip on each other to try and bring each other down. It’s ridiculous. They’re constantly going at each other. Some of them even have the same views, but they’ll argue with the other person just because they’re the other side. Did you guys watch the Republican debate in Las Vegas? All sense of civility, when it comes to debates, has gone out the window. They’re always interrupting each other. It’s pathetic.

Me: We could spend hours complaining about politics, but realistically, do you think there’s a way to improve it? It’s discouraging at times, especially if we have a goal of becoming informed citizens.
**Cole:** To be a good citizen, you need to be civil, but politicians today are just focused on competition.

**Luke:** Yeah. It’s about who can stay in power the most amount of time. They’re just going to do whatever can get them votes over what is actually beneficial.

**Nolan:** None of them realize that we’re all in this together.

**Cole:** Raise your hand if you honestly watched the debate. Or heard part of it. THREE people in the room!? I mean like that’s college aged kids and they’re the worst turnout to vote. In general, we’re not showing up to vote.

I was grateful that Cole voiced his response so strongly. While he did some venting about politicians, he ended in a way that got his classmates’ attention by pointing out that a majority of college students are not participating in their civic duty to become informed, active citizens.

**December 2011 Civility Forum, Section A:**

During our final meeting time, we watched some of Krista Tippett’s “Creating Civility: A Public Conversation” talk. Tippett notes at the beginning of her talk that she knows she and the audience are not going to accomplish world peace or reach any major conclusions, but that that’s fine. At that point, I shared with students how I hoped they wouldn’t leave the class and think that we should all be friends, skip around, holding hands and that will solve world issues—that that wasn’t the point of the course themes. I left the remainder of the final meeting time up to them, to respond to some of Tippett’s words and ideas, as well as the course as a whole.
Camie: I liked what she said about honoring others. I think that’s important because we get stuck thinking we know it all when we should be more open to other viewpoints.

Cole: I think it’s important she brought up the need to be vulnerable—to let others penetrate your barriers. It’s easy to do that with people you agree with, but it feels impossible to do that with someone you disagree with. It’s hard.

I was pleased to hear Cole mention “the need to be vulnerable,” as the concept of being vulnerable regarding our opinions and while conversing with the Other is something our class had discussed since week one.

At one point Tippett says, “Are we not of interest to each other?” Initially, students responded to Tippett’s question through a lens focused on a superficial interest, but then one student reels the class back to Tippett’s main focus on the importance of taking interest in the people in our communities.

Holly: Most people do, but in a superficial way. We always want that drama. We want to know what’s going on.

Camie: I think it’s because we’re so used to living in our own little bubble. Part of the reason we might talk to people on a superficial level is maybe subconsciously we’re comparing ourselves to one another.

Oliver: We need to focus on coming together and getting to know each other first. The documentary I looked at for the analysis paper was about that, too. We can recognize our differences, but we can also see the commonalities between us so we can at least learn to accept others for who they are. We can learn to accept who they are and the fact that they might just think differently than us. We need to get to know each other as people before.

Oliver’s reflection on getting to know each other is nice, but I was especially glad to see his mention of his documentary analysis paper, which told me he was still thinking about the embedded themes of the course within the assignments.

Oliver wrote about the documentary short, *Combatants for Peace*, directed by
Jehane Noujaim, which is about the bloodshed in the Middle East from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In his paper, Oliver writes, “The disputed issues are extremely diverse, but the struggle comes down to the fact that each side considers the other entirely different than themselves” [emphasis mine]. Oliver adds, “The world would be a much better place if everyone lived by the message of acceptance and tolerance because it would develop understanding and a greater feeling of citizenship.” Within his paper, Oliver does more than tell what happens within the short film and analyze the rhetorical strategies that the filmmaker uses; Oliver spends time examining themes of acceptance and tolerance and the need to understand the Other.

And at the end of our time together, students shared some of their main takeaways from the semester:

**Sadie:** I think I’ve learned how to interact more with lots of different people who have different personalities than me. I’ve been learning how to openly accept people regardless of different societal stratifications.

**Nolan:** Going to college is really the first time you’re away from family and people you’ve been in school with for 12 years, so you definitely see different ways of life. Once you see other people, you learn ‘it’s not just this way.’

**Cole:** I grew up in Northwest Iowa. The town where I went to school had 1,000 people, so everyone seemed to share the same viewpoints. When I came to college, Ames is obviously a lot bigger of a town from where I’m from, and there are so many different viewpoints from both extremes, politically. For me it’s interesting. I’m definitely getting new ideas and views about what’s going on.

**Camie:** I think it’s so cool that we’re able to start challenging our own thoughts.
**Luke:** You definitely learn more about yourself living on your own, away from your parents. Spending time away on my own is definitely making me learn some new things about myself.

**Wade:** When you talked about worrying we’d think you just wanted us to focus on world peace, I think I’m learning to acknowledge the bigger problems in the world and going about understanding them and solving them in a smaller context like this class and dealing with them one piece at a time. Also, keeping that in mind, subconsciously, going about trying to solve big world problems face to face is too exhausting, but being aware is good.

**Camie:** Next semester I’m taking a lot of religion, sociology, and debatable issue kind of humanity classes. I feel like taking from this class if I disagree might help me understand them or calm down the situation in the classroom.

**Sadie:** I think it’s important that you have those kinds of heated, awkward conversations, though. I think it’s important to at least address those issues, even if they’re uncomfortable.

**Holly:** At least you can become more educated about it and the multiple viewpoints involved.

Democratic discourse, or the ability “to talk and listen respectively to those who hold views different from our own” (Brookfield 5), is really what’s happening here, a practice that Brookfield says “is rarely learned or practiced in daily life” (5). Students illustrated that the goal isn’t necessarily to “fix” all the world’s problems and be friends with everyone they meet, but to become more informed citizens and seek to understand and accept others in the communities in which they inhabit.
October 2011 Civility Forum, Section B:

The first question of Section B’s first forum asks, “Has civility really declined, or are people concerned with civility just making a big deal out of nothing?, to which Hillary responded:

I think it has, but I think we have such a bigger scale to compare it to because we are fortunate in our country not to have really, really severe conflict like we see in the Middle East. I think we have this scale and we consider them as the worst, so we’re not the worst, so it’s not so bad here. But there are several examples of where we could all still be improving. Why aren’t we taking the small measures to change our course of civility so that maybe we can have a better impact?

Hillary’s opening comment suggests that perhaps students are too focused on the “us versus them” mentality, living in a world of comparisons. Holly from Section A references this same idea in Section A’s October Civility Forum when she says, “Our society is just fascinated with conflict. It’s so dumb that it’s funny. It seems so unrealistic. You can’t even fathom someone actually acting like that, so it can be funny.” Holly, like Hillary, hints at the idea of when “we consider them as the worst, […] we’re not the worst.” Conflict—large or small—doesn’t seem to feel real to students when it’s taking place outside of their own communities; they can’t relate. At this point, I was eager to hear students’ thoughts later in the semester about our future documentary analysis assignment, with each documentary short dealing with themes of the course within a global context.

The discussion transitioned to Hillary’s thoughts on whether or not it is hard to make decisions and form new opinions when new college students are exposed to different backgrounds and a myriad of new ideas for one of the first times. Hillary says:
I always try and go into things with an open mind. I really think that’s overlooked because whenever I’m listening to things like that, at first I brush it off, but then I tell myself this is the last time I’m every going to be around this many people my age in my life. This [college] is a very unique time in our lives.

Hillary echoes Hunter and Moody’s findings that there is a need to focus on creating a culture of classroom civility particularly in students’ first year of college.

As Hillary says, “This [college] is a very unique time in our [students’] lives.” I should note that Hillary was a bit of a conversation leader in Section B. She regularly offered insightful comments throughout the semester; her comments generally served our class discussions well, in that she was able to invite others into the conversation after she spoke.

December 2011 Civility Forum, Section B:

At the end of our time together, students shared some of their main takeaways from the semester:

**Brad:** When she said we’ve become allergic and toxic to each other—I guess in that sense where we always have to come to some sort of resolution, and someone’s always not going to be happy in the end. We always try and please everybody.

**Mandy:** Going off of that—the discussion of better understanding why someone holds the beliefs that they do—I was just thinking back to when we all did our writing to mediate presentations and how seeing not necessarily both sides because there aren’t just two—but seeing the reasons behind the sides. Even just me personally, I could better understand all of the arguments that were presented just from that versus just going at it and arguing about the discussion itself instead of opening it up and seeing all the reasons.

**Dave:** One of the quotes that resonated with me was near the end when she was talking about Kissling’s words: “when people who disagree with each other come together with a goal of gaining a better understanding of
why the other believes what they do, good things come of that.” Throughout this semester I’ve been trying to look at both sides of the argument more and one example is my roommate who I’ve known since I was five who I argue a lot with—not about serious things—now I just don’t get into it. I don’t get too caught up on my side of the argument, but I look at both sides more.

Zac: I like how she said instead of looking at how you disagree with somebody, try to realize why you’re afraid to agree. How is this going to affect you in the long run? You can’t just look at the points of disagreement, but WHY you’re scared to agree with the other.

Brad and Mandy, like Hillary, were regular contributors to class discussion. I was particularly happy to see Mandy refer back to the class’ mediated argument panel presentations and her specific mention that there are not only two sides, but further that a big goal is to look for “the reasons behind the sides.” This showed me that the conversation about polarized thinking that began in September was still resonating in some students’ minds three months later. Additionally, I was pleased to see Dave not only offer a comment, something he shied away from most of the semester, but that he offered an example of looking to understand the Other—his roommate.

At the beginning of fall 2011, I knew I wanted my students to have a greater understanding of what it means to be a civil citizen in each community that they inhabit. However, I couldn’t fully articulate what that might look like until I reflected on their words. Both of my sections’ participation in our class civility forums helped me process the course themes, due to their experiences, in more sophisticated ways. Like them, I was learning from my fellow citizens of the world.
More Student Voices

While I was particularly interested in looking at how students’ progression in defining our course themes, as well as how they conversed about them during our class forums, I was also eager to read their individual blogs. I often gave students’ a prompt before writing their blog posts to help facilitate their discussion, but the prompts were loose enough to allow students to use their posts as somewhat of a journal to document their learning processes and reflections throughout the semester. I’ve included a handful of quotes from students’ blogs that seem to illustrate their grasp of various themes of the course:

I think that we forget that we share at some deep level the same dreams and focus on winning because most of the time people don't really care what the other people around them have to say, they only focus on the fact that they think they are right and how to prove that they are 100% right. I think we get too caught up in our goals and how we get to the finish line that we don’t stop to think about everyone else around us and how our actions might effect them. To think less polarized I think we need to start thinking more about ways to mesh the two sides together and possible try to think in the shoes of the other side of the argument. I think if people could sit down and try to get into the mind set of the opposing side that they might realize where that side is coming from and try to find a way to bring both sides together in a way that will make both sides happy in some way. —Heather

While she uses two-sided language, Heather does do well at focusing on trying to understand the Other and invokes the concept of what Booth and Elbow call “the ability to experience” (395). Elbow insists that we must “make an active effort to believe various positions, enter into them, dwell in them” (Booth and Elbow 392). This seems to be what Heather is calling for.

Camie’s post gets at the concept of win-rhetoric and the common goal to prove the Other as wrong.
It is important to be able to see both sides of an issue and understand them both completely before you may run your mouth about how one side is wrong. If you can listen to both sides and take in everything they have to offer and maybe not voice your opinion so loud then you are already smarter then half of the country. We need to stop focusing on being the winner of the argument it is ok to lose or be wrong, in my opinion it is more important to learn about issues than to have an opinion on everything. You learn so much more by taking a back seat then you do by being loud and obnoxious with an opinion that may offend others. I think that if we can learn to see everything as kind of in the middle as opposed to extreme sides then we might really get somewhere. —Camie

Win-rhetoric, like traditional rhetoric, can be described as aggressive and competitive, a popular way of teaching students how to critically think. Booth compares Win-rhetoric to war; “victory is essential, regardless of what must be sacrificed” (43). Similar to traditional, masculinized rhetoric, “the intent is to win at all costs, whether honorable or dishonorable” (Booth 43). Win-rhetoric is a dangerous way of engaging in conversation due to its goal of persuasion at all costs, which Camie acknowledges here.

We are all human beings, and we all the same inside. Just because you are an official of some sort, doesn’t mean that you shall act differently. Whenever you do anything, your actions will affect someone somehow. If we don’t live this message and unite as one society, then we will never be connected to each other. —Evan

Evan focuses here on themes of unity and community, and invokes a feel of global mindedness, which is really what cosmopolitanism is all about.

Often, we are so shortsighted and narrow-minded that we are unable to truly see the world around us for what it is. We must value each other for our strengths and accept our weaknesses if we are to remain a unified, independent nation. We must learn to open our minds, hearts, and beliefs so that we can learn to understand others with hope that they will do the same. Polarized thinking is an easy trap to fall for and should be avoided at all costs. Independent development is crucial so that our nation can grow and adapt. If we were to stay forever the same, then opportunities would be wasted. —Oliver
Oliver acknowledges polarized thinking as a “trap” and the need to seek to understand others as a means for personal growth.

I come from a country full of history and tradition. I fully understand know how difficult to challenge the “tradition”. When everyone follow the roles and no one question why we doing this, it is hard to make a difference. I strongly believe people need to show some tolerance when change comes. Change doesn’t mean disrespect. It may be related to freedom, and can tell a social development or civilized. —Zoe

Zoe’s reflection here through the lens of an International student was exciting for me to read, as she references the shift from her traditional approaches from her home country to a new idea: “Change doesn’t mean disrespect.”

Overall the goals of society are focused in the same direction. Consider the political parties in our country, Democrats and Republicans. Overall they both want the same thing, what is best for our country but there is disagreement between the two because they believe on going about it in different ways. When we are too concrete in our beliefs, we sometimes hurt the underlying things we wish to accomplish […] In order for us to reach these goals we need to establish what the broad things are that we wish to accomplish and determine aspects that are similar between all groups. We must determine the things that we all wish to become a reality rather than the means of making it happen. If we can focus on the overall goal rather than the method of reaching that, I believe that there is a very real possibility of working in conjunction with all members of society rather through polarized thinking. —Wade

Wade’s ending lines of this post offer a way to reach certain goals; he says, “If we can focus on the overall goal rather than the method of reaching that [goal], I believe that there is a very real possibility of working in conjunction with all members of society. It’s almost as if Wade attempts to answer Os Guinness’ question in Guinness’ article, "A Cosmopolitan and Civil Public Square."

Guinness asks, “Is there a way that fosters the interests of liberty, diversity, equality, and harmony at the same time?” (135) to which Guinness responds,
“[T]he way forward lies in a vision of a cosmopolitan society and a civil public square” (135). Like Wade’s reflection, students’ writings all invoke themes of civility, community, and citizenship in ways that illustrate some levels of critical thinking. They may not all attempt to provide examples or solutions, but they do all offer more sophisticated ways of discussion that involve looking at each of the course themes as approaches to life rather than one-way, matter-of-fact definitions.

Finally, in students’ written course reflections, they were candid in the ways they grew in certain ways throughout the semester:

From the in class discussions, I learned it is important to voice your opinions even though other people may not agree with you or completely disagree. Even though I may have not voiced my opinion often during the discussions, I learned however that it is important to listen to others and have your own personal thoughts swayed. One of the most important things I can take away from this course is the understanding that it is perfectly OK to change your mind and be influenced by others. —Derek

This class helped me to understand other ways of thinking that can benefit me a lot other than academic skills. Beyond the skills, we talked so much about civility. This is what helped me the most in this class. It’s a new gate for us college students. It reminds us we should touch the world and feel the world by heart. Civility is a quality what we should have and make the society run like an engine. It is in everywhere in our daily life. We can’t live without it. —Noah

I was especially interested in Derek and Noah’s end-of-semester reflections, as these two students were the quietest of all my students during the semester.

Derek’s reflection that it is okay “to change your mind and be influenced by others” was exciting because he was only one of a few to write about this, connecting with an earlier podcast we listed to in class called "Listening Beyond Life and Choice" with Frances Kissling. In an interview with Krista Tippett,
Kissling asks, “How can you never change your mind at all?” and adds, “I have changed my views on some aspects of abortion over the last ten years based upon having a deeper understanding of the values and concerns of people who disagree with me. And I have an interest in trying to find a way that I can honor some of their values without giving up mine.” Derek, although quiet, seemed to keep thinking through this previous class conversation, despite not seeming to participate.

Noah’s words are interesting to me, as he, too, was a more reserved student in class, and I was never quite sure of his interest level during daily activities. His words, though, speak volumes: “It’s a new gate for us college students. It reminds us we should touch the world and feel the world by heart.” Noah not only had been grappling with the course themes, but he had also been thinking of these approaches as gateways of sorts.

At the end of the semester when I asked how students might embrace some of what they experienced and learned in our class, each of them responded in ways that suggested they wanted to be a part of more meaningful and constructive dialogue, particularly within their future humanities courses such as philosophy and world religions, which regularly grapple with a plethora of clashing views. They acknowledged yet again that such dialogue, in the words of Roger Baldwin, “requires a certain degree of mutual respect, willingness to listen, and tolerance for opposing points of view.”
Chapter Six: Conclusion

Ultimately, while we spent time exploring each of the listed course themes, we spoke of the concept of civility the most. Being a civil, community-minded, global citizen is what we were getting it. My findings seem to reinforce the arguments of those like Richie Hao, who says that critical pedagogy deals with “human possibility” (92).

While not all students were necessarily consistently engaged with the themed assignments and activities, based on their written and spoken reflections throughout the course, it seems that all students were able to grasp the triangulation of meanings for each of the course themes in that they were able to look at the course themes of civility, community, and citizenship as more than words to define, but rather approaches to life—ways of being—with many facets.

By the end of the semester, I was nodding in agreement with Thomas Benton who says, “the student culture of incivility is a larger impediment to their [students’] success than anything they might fail to learn about […] whatever it is I am teaching.” After listening to the experiences of my students who regularly witness and sometimes even engage in acts of incivility, I was even more persuaded by them and the voices of scholars such as Appiah, Baldwin, Berlin, Brookfield, and Levine of the crucial need to invoke themes of civility, community, and citizenship in some way within every course I teach. We are not only teaching students the skills they need to graduate college and become marketable employees, but we are also teaching students—like it or not—how to engage in dialogue, how to act within a community and how to communicate with
fellow citizens of the world. Whether intentional or not, we, as instructors, are modeling some type of discourse within our classrooms.

In future semesters, I would like to begin teaching with Carter’s idea of civility as an approach that seeks to “journey with others,” out of love and regard for “the very idea that there are others” (23), as his concept of civility is not limited to kindness and understanding. Instead, Carter seems to encompass all of students’ definitions with the notion of journeying. Further, in the future I want to spend more time grappling with what it means to be a citizen of the world, as well as engaging in more civic discourse outside of the classroom space. I want to explore with students the notion of what it means to be engaged in civic dialogue and action.

Farkas makes it clear that the composition classroom “is an important site in which to prepare students, as citizens, to enter civic discourse” (37). Additionally, in Connecting Civic Education & Language Education, Sandra Stotsky says, “The attention given by the media in recent years to the lack of personal ethics in public figures who should otherwise command respect, if not emulation, has also left young Americans with few clear models of moral behavior in contemporary public life” (14). Stotsky makes it clear that our students lack models of proper civil/civic engagement—a call to action for teachers to take this on within classroom walls. And in “Civic Engagement in Today's Higher Education,” Barbara Jacoby says that through civic engagement, “individuals—as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world—are empowered as agents of positive social change for a more democratic world.”
This idea of seeking to empower citizens to work toward positive change within the communities they inhabit is already a regular theme within university mission statements, so it’s fitting that we might also work toward facilitating positive civic engagement experiences on campus—starting in the classroom.

We must recognize that we’re responsible collectively for each other, as we all share the same world; we live in the same campus community. In the words of Noah, embracing themes of civility and community in the classroom opens “a new gate for us college students. It reminds us we should touch the world and feel the world by heart. Civility is a quality what we should have and make the society run like an engine. It is in everywhere in our daily life. We can’t live without it.” So although the course ended up not drawing as heavily upon the theme of citizenship as I had originally planned, the explicit focus on becoming a respectful, civil, active listening citizen and communicator have remained strong throughout.
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Appendix A: Course Themes Writing Prompt

The purpose of this writing prompt reflection is to get a sense of your understanding of the words “civility,” “incivility,” “community,” and “citizenship.”

• In a few sentences, please describe how you understand the following term: civility.
  o Questions to consider as you write: How would you define this word? What does civility mean to you? What does it look like? Where have you witnessed civility, and how?

• In a few sentences, please describe how you understand the following term: incivility.
  o Questions to consider as you write: How would you define this word? What does incivility mean to you? What does it look like? Where have you witnessed incivility, and how?

• In a few sentences, please describe how you understand the following term: community.
  o Questions to consider as you write: How would you define this word? What does community mean to you? What does it look like? Where have you witnessed community, and how? What’s an example of a strong community? What’s an example of a weak community?—and what makes them weak or strong?

• In a few sentences, please describe how you understand the following term: citizenship.
  o Questions to consider as you write: How would you define this word? What does citizenship mean to you? What does it mean to be a citizen of a place/environment? Can you be a citizen of more than one place? How so?

• In a few sentences, please discuss to what extent you think the media shapes or reflects reality? Provide examples to support your answer.
Appendix B: Insights on (In) Civility Blog

The Basics:

- Add a new blog post by noon on Tuesdays. I will provide you with artifacts and prompts to respond to relating to the course themes.
- Remember, as stated on page three of the syllabus, your posts should be around 200-300 words.
- Respond to one or more of your classmates’ posts by noon on Thursdays. Check the "class blogs" folder in the Edmodo library for links to your classmates' blogs.
- Over the weekend, read your blog comments and respond back if you’re able to.

General questions to consider as you write:

- What was the author’s point/message?
- What was your initial response after watching/reading?
- How does the artifact deal with the ideas of civility, incivility, community, and/or citizenship?
- After watching/reading, what resonated with you most about the artifact?
- Do you have any personal examples that relate to your artifact that may help us better understand your ideas?

Responding to blog posts:

- Your posts must do more than offer opinion. Rather, they must offer both your insights and rationale (or “the why”) behind your response.
- Further, your responses must also offer more than “I agree/disagree” statements. Make attempts to offer a different perspective and why you think that.
Appendix C: Pangea Day Blog Post

Pangea Day: “Strengthening Tolerance and Compassion”
Film Reflection Blog Post (Due Tuesday, 9/6/11)

“The real quest for today is living our individual authenticity in community, where we’re powerful as individuals—and together, as individuals in our authenticity, we are much more.”
—Michael Toms

Pangea Day was a 4-hour program of short films, live music, and visionary speakers.

Coordinated live from 6 locations worldwide, Pangea Day was broadcast — in 7 languages — to millions of people via the internet, television, and mobile phones.

Source: www.pangeaday.org

The Pangea Day Mission & Purpose:
In a world where people are often divided by borders, difference, and conflict, it's easy to lose sight of what we all have in common. Pangea Day sought to overcome that—to help people see themselves in others—through the power of film.

What is Pangea Day?
“Pangea” refers to the supercontinent from which all current continents eventually separated. It serves as a reminder of the “connectedness” or unitary nature of all people on Planet Earth.

On May 10, 2008—Pangea Day—sites in Cairo, Kigali, London, Los Angeles, Mumbai, and Rio de Janeiro were linked live to produce a program of powerful films, visionary speakers, and uplifting music. The program was broadcasted live to the world through the Internet, television, digital cinemas, and mobile phones.

Pangea Day taps the power of film to strengthen tolerance and compassion while uniting millions of people to build a better future. Pangea Day was a celebration of the power of film; it featured films that were funny, sad, gorgeous, stark—and powerful. Voices that had never been heard before. Things many had never seen. Scenes from worlds few had visited. A
cross-section of our amazing, complicated, noisy, beautiful world.

Besides four hours of pure entertainment, Pangea Day offered a view into other lives. A way to join discussions that might move the world just a little bit further toward understanding. In a world where people are often divided by borders, difference, and conflict, it's easy to lose sight of what we all have in common. Pangea Day sought to overcome that—to help people see themselves in others—through the power of film.

For more context on Pangea Day, watch “Pangea Day Trailer” (www.pangeaday.org/?vid=1) and then watch “Global Storytellers” (www.pangeaday.org/index.php?vid=3).

The Assignment
Watch a few of the Pangea Day films (they're short—around 3-5 minutes each) from www.pangeaday.org/pangeadayFilms.php. Choose one and respond to the following prompt in a 200-300 word blog post:

• How does the film work to “strengthen tolerance and compassion”?
• How does the film unite people, in hope “to build a better future”?
• How does the film offer a view into another’s life and “help people see themselves in others”?
• How does the film invite discussion “that might move the world just a little bit further toward understanding”?
• What personal connections did you make with the film?

After you’ve posted, read through some of your classmates’ posts and choose one to respond to. Watch the film he or she wrote about (choose one different from yours), and provide your own response regarding the connections you made with the film. Think of your response post as an invitation for conversation with your classmates. Did you make any similar connections as the original poster did? How so? How did your connections differ, perhaps because of your own personal experiences? Feel free to add any other comments or questions for him or her.

If you’re interested in watching the “Pangea Day: One-Hour Highlight Reel,” go here: www.pangeaday.org/filmDetail.php?id=101

For the full program (in segments), go here: www.pangeaday.org/program.php
Appendix D: The Mediated Argument Essay

Writing to Mediate Within Your Field of Study

“I don’t think civil discourse is enough—because it sits on the surface. How do we really find a more meaningful conversation? It’s not enough to simply get a smile from your enemy. That leaves me no solace. What I want to know is what are you really thinking, what are you really feeling, and how did you come to that knowledge. Someone asked me once, ‘When did you change? When have you ever opened your mind and changed your opinion? You’re asking me to change mine, so tell me a time when you were going one direction and because of something, you shifted.’ It’s the small conversations that loom large—that are so crucial that we cannot just offer opinions, but ideas. I think that’s what we’re hungry for—and I think that’s where leadership lies.”

—Terry Tempest Williams, “Vitality of Hope” on American Public Media’s Being radio show

Desert foothills meet forested mountains. (photo: David McNew/Getty Images)

Terry Tempest Williams is part of American Public Radio’s onBeing series, “The Civil Conversations Project.” During her interview, Williams introduces the term “ecotone” as an analogy from nature to describe a clash of cultures:

“As a naturalist, my favorite places to be are along the ecotone. It’s where it’s most alive, usually the edge of a forest and meadow, the ocean and the sand. It’s that interface between peace and chaos. It’s that creative edge that we find most instructive. It’s also the most frightening, because it’s completely uncertain and unpredictable and that’s again where I choose to live.”

1 Adapted from Casey White, Iowa State University
2 From “Ecotone: A Definition for Nature and Civility” by Susan Leem
3 Note that resolving conflict does not mean you necessarily have to solve the issue at hand.
Merriam-Webster defines “ecotone” as “a transition area between two adjacent ecological communities.” It comes from the Greek root tonos, meaning “tension.” Dr. Lucinda Johnson, director of the Center for Water and the Environment at the University of Minnesota Duluth, explains ecotone in this way:

“The word ecotone derives from the landscape ecology literature, and refers to the transition area between “patches” or areas of the landscape that exhibit different characteristics ... it is generally applied to the transition zones between two different vegetation types (e.g., grassland and forest), but can be both more subtle (e.g., edges of wetlands, which have subtle transitions from submergent to emergent vegetation, one of which dominates depending on water levels) or more extreme (the area adjacent to a stream, called the riparian zone). The ecotone shares characteristics of both of the adjoining patches (hence the transition).”

When two disparate, even opposing viewpoints meet they create a new kind of landscape by the meeting itself. One that doesn’t draw a fixed line or a wall of opposing viewpoints but rather a kind of “transition area.” This transition area could be a new terrain that “shares characteristics of both of the adjoining patches.”

**Assignment Purpose:**

Consider this “writing to mediate” essay a chance to explore and inhabit an unfamiliar “ecotone,” where you, as a writer, can illustrate a new transition area or terrain for your audience.

Throughout this semester, we will explore ideas of *civility, community, citizenship, and writing for change* both in and out of the classroom. This assignment is your chance to really explore and inhabit these ideas as you practice writing to mediate. **You will be writing for an audience larger than simply you, your classmates, or me, but rather for those involved in your discipline (likely other students and faculty within your field of study—both in and out of the ISU community).** This is your chance to get to really know an aspect within your discipline, to be able to “talk the talk,” work toward becoming a more informed citizen, and strive for mediation and effective change based on your new insights through research.

**Some Building Block Definitions Relating to Mediation:**

**mediate** | mëdēˌät|  
verb  
intervene between people in a dispute in order to bring about an agreement or *reconciliation*

**reconcile** | rekənˌstil|  
verb  
restore friendly relations between; cause to coexist in harmony; make or show to be *compatible*

**compatible** | kəmˈpætəbəl|  
adjective  
(of two things) able to exist or occur together without conflict

**Major Objectives**

- Formulate a focused claim and compose an appropriate document that presents it.
- Support a claim by integrating researched evidence from a variety of sources.
- Examine the credibility of source material and select the strongest evidence to support claims.
- Develop a balanced sense of various sides of an issue.
- Organize the piece in a logical manner, using headings and transitions appropriately.
- Utilize visuals to support text and add clarity to your claims.
- Compose an effective abstract that encapsulates the major claims in the document.
- Apply document design and development techniques to make the project more engaging and attractive for readers.
- Cite multiple sources according to MLA formatting.
harmony  | ˈhärmanə|  
noun  
agreement or concord  

concord  | ˈkä ng ,kɔrd; 'kän-|  
noun  
formal agreement or harmony between people or groups: a pact of peace and concord.

Characters of Mediation:

1. **Aims to resolve conflict**\(^3\) between opposing and usually hardened positions, often because action of some kind must be taken.
2. **Aims to reduce hostility** and **promote understanding** between or among conflicting parties, preserving human relationships and promoting communication and paramount.\(^5\)
3. Like inquiry, mediation involves dialogue and requires that one **understand all positions** and **strive for an open mind**.
4. Like convincing, mediation involves making a case that appeals to all parties\(^5\) in the controversy.
5. Like persuasion, **mediation depends on the good character of the negotiator** and on **sharing values and feelings**\(^6\).
6. Mediation depends on conflicting parties’ **desire to find solutions**\(^7\) to overcome counterproductive stalemates.

The *Aims of Argument* chapter, “Resolving Conflict: Arguing to Mediate,” (271) presents mediation as an argument\(^8\) whose aim is to resolve conflict by thinking more critically about it. As you read various arguments on the issue within your field, you will explore them “to uncover exactly how and why their authors disagree … you will write a mediatory essay proposing a view designed to appeal to [all parties]” (273-274).

Mediation uses three other aims of argument:

- **Inquiry**
  - Mediation examines the **range of positions** on an issue.
- **Convincing**
  - The mediator scrutinizes the arguments offered by all sides. A mediatory essay must also provide a **well-reasoned case** of its own.

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\(^3\) Note that resolving conflict does not mean you necessarily have to solve the issue at hand.

\(^4\) AKA: Remember that we’re all people; human relationships with one another are worth preserving—even with your opposition!

\(^5\) While this isn’t always possible, we should aim toward making a reasonable case that considers the values/opinions/goals of all parties involved.

\(^6\) Consider the ethos rhetorical appeal as you write; and remember, this isn’t a “how-to” paper on solving the world’s problems. You’re allowed to and encouraged to share your insights on the issue.

\(^7\) Note that this is a common goal for all parties involved.

\(^8\) Note that the AA is using the word argument here as to mean a non-aggressive way to present your proposed idea/solution/goal.
• **Persuading**
  - Mediation considers the values, beliefs, and assumptions of the people who hold the conflicting positions. Mediators must appeal to all sides and project a character\(^9\) all sides will trust and find attractive\(^10\).

“In short, mediation requires the mediator to **rise above a dispute, including his or her own preferences, to see what is reasonable and right in conflicting positions**. The mediator’s best asset is wisdom” (272).

**Mediation and Rogerian Argument:**

This total approach “reduces misunderstanding and helps clarify what the genuine points of difference are, thus opening up the potential to resolve conflict” (273).

1. When in conflict, listen carefully and with empathy *(capability to share another being’s emotions and feelings)* to each other as a first step toward resolving differences.
2. Go beyond listening in an effort to understand one another’s background.
3. State opponents’ positions in a way the opponents agree is accurate and fair.

**Selecting a Topic:**

The topic you choose should involve a current issue/conflict related to your discipline. For example, if your major is Agricultural Business, you could explore the implications of “big-business” farming through the pressures and hardships it places upon traditional farmers and their families. If your major is Journalism, you might explore censorship within the media. Do some preliminary research before choosing your topic, and I will help you narrow it down to a manageable project if needed.

Then, think of a way you can add to the existing conversation about the issue by looking at what dialogue has been going on (past and present) and create a mediated argument. Strive to offer new insights—*new terrain*. Look for areas of agreement within various “opposing sides” and then add your own mediated voice as part of the conversation. Avoid focusing on what the possible pros and cons are related to your topic, but rather focus on the *multiple perspectives* related to your topic.

**Proposing Your Topic:**

Please type a thorough research proposal\(^{11}\) that discusses your plans for your mediated essay. Along with introducing your topic, please discuss the tentative claim or thesis you wish to put forth. Moreover, you’ll want to cover the following areas in your proposal:

- **Background:** What do I already know about my topic? What do I need to find out more about? Who is my intended audience?
- **Methods:** How am I going to research this topic? What research questions are driving my inquiry?

\(^9\) ethos

\(^{10}\) While you won’t please *everyone*, your goal is to attempt to persuade your audience by addressing and considering their *values, beliefs, and assumptions.*

\(^{11}\) Use the “WTM proposal format” Word document available on Edmodo for your template.
• **Sources:** What specific texts will I consult? What additional scholarly sources can I research to help build my knowledge and my argument? Where might I look to find those sources? What is my plan if I struggle finding sources?
• **Timeline:** What are my goals for the different stages of research, and how can I schedule my work to most effectively meet these milestones?
• **Significance:** What do I hope to accomplish in my research? What are the broader issues or implications of my research? Why do these matter to me and to my readers?

**Researching Your Topic:**

Make sure to conduct thorough research on your selected topic. You should also research all sides of the issue, so it will be clear to your readers that you're knowledgeable about the conversation. Your research should come from credible sources, which we will discuss further in class. You will integrate, discuss, and cite at least five sources of information for this assignment (three of which must be academic peer-reviewed journals). These sources can come from anywhere, but you should avoid generic sites like Wikipedia, About.com, or Dictionary.com. While these are great sources for generating ideas for your essay, they are not worthy of citation and should not be used or cited in your paper. Instead, you should locate journal articles, magazine articles, books, weblogs and listervs, university-sponsored sites, and other more established sources. You should even consider searching through video and radio archives online, as these can often be just as credible as print sources.

Submit an annotated bibliography listing five of the best potential sources you’ve discovered for your essay. An annotated bibliography is simply an alphabetical list of references (formatted according to MLA style—refer to your Everyday Writer book) that includes a concise description of each source’s contents, credibility, and usefulness to your project. A very important aspect of your annotation will be your articulation of how the source will be of specific benefit to your project.

**Annotated Bibliography Example Entry**

Almost single-handedly, *Silent Spring* ignited the gradually budding environmental movement in the United States. In the book, distinguished marine biologist and nature writer Rachel Carson exposes the gruesome effects of pesticides, notably DTD, on the environment and the creatures within it. By shedding light on the harm of pesticides, Carson exposes truths that would eventually lead to the governmental ban of DTD. This book will serve as a helpful source when I trace the origins and historical context of the environmental movement in the US, and I will be able to use testimony from Carson to support my own claims about the importance of the movement as a whole. Because this book has been featured on numerous lists of the best non-fiction books of the twentieth century, Carson’s claims carry lots of weight and are widely known among the general public.
Outlining Your Paper:

You will submit to me a tentative outline of your project’s contents and structure soon after you submit your annotated bibliographies. You can use the figure to the left as an example, but feel free to structure it any way you like, as long as you include the necessary content. Seeing this outline will allow me to make comments and suggestions about your project plans to help guide you through the drafting process. The more detailed the outline, the more comments I can provide.

Drafting and Revising Your Paper:

Make sure to get started on this assignment as soon as possible.

Designing Your Paper:

Think about your paper as a designed magazine/newsletter article. We’ll discuss how to format this later, but keep this delivery format in mind as you work. You should also include at least three visuals in your assignment. You can use images, graphics, tables, and charts to help support your argument, but make sure to use them wisely (no clipart!). Your visuals must communicate something; they must serve some purpose and relay a specific message to your readers that you cannot achieve through words. Make sure to wrap your text around them appropriately. Also, caption and cite your visuals according to MLA guidelines.
Basic Evaluation Criteria:

The following criteria will be applied to your final submission:

- Word count: Minimum of 2,500 words.
- The chosen topic is a current issue/conflict related to your discipline and has been explored thoroughly.
- The paper but adds to the conversation at large and serves to mediate in some way. It is not simply a “pro/con” paper.
- The introduction is creative, hooking the reader in and effectively setting up the context and purpose of the essay.
- The thesis is focused, clear, and powerful.
- The supporting evidence for the thesis is compelling and persuasive, and the writer has chosen the most credible sources possible.
- The assignment integrates at least five credible sources (three of which must be academic peer reviewed journals) to back up its claims.
- The composer has used effective document design techniques such as headers, sidebars, etc.
- Various rhetorical appeals are used to enhance the persuasive elements of the essay.
- The selected visuals are significantly persuasive, are placed and captioned appropriately, and strongly support the overall claim or argument.
- The citations adhere strictly to MLA guidelines.
- There are very few distracting errors in grammar, spelling, or mechanics.

Paper Components and Timeline:

- Proposal due ___________
- Annotated bibliographies due ___________
- Outline due ___________
- Mediated Essay: “Opening chunk” (3 pages) due ___________
  6 pages total due ___________
  Complete draft due ___________
  Final draft due ___________
- Conference Dates ________________________________
- Panel Presentations ______________________________
- Post-assignment reflection due ___________

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You will receive a rubric chart for your essay during peer response later in the unit. We will review it thoroughly together. The contents of the rubric are the same as listed here in the evaluation criteria list.
Appendix E: Ecotone Blog Post

“Insights on (In)Civility” blog post (re: ecotone)
Due: Tuesday, September 13, 2011

Refer back to your ecotone journal notes. Think of the ecotone as a transition area or blending of terrain/spaces/ideas. Can you think of an issue/hot topic on campus or within your home town/city/community (past or present) with multiple perspectives/opinions/views? What are those different terrains (positions) and what do you see as a possible ecotone (areas of agreement/common goals, concerns)?
Appendix F: Understanding Ecotones

I’ve included here some various definitions and metaphorical interpretations of the ecological term, “ecotone” that we’ve discussed in class. Refer to this handout throughout the “Composing to Mediate” unit.

“As a naturalist, my favorite places to be are along the ecotone. It’s where it’s most alive, usually the edge of a forest and meadow, the ocean and the sand. It’s that interface between peace and chaos. It’s that creative edge that we find most instructive. It’s also the most frightening, because it’s completely uncertain and unpredictable and that’s again where I choose to live.”
—From Being: “The Vitality of the Struggle” with Terry Tempest Williams

Merriam-Webster defines “ecotone” as “a transition area between two adjacent ecological communities.” It comes from the Greek root tonos, meaning “tension.”

“The word ecotone derives from the landscape ecology literature, and refers to the transition area between ‘patches’ or areas of the landscape that exhibit different characteristics ... it is generally applied to the transition zones between two different vegetation types (e.g., grassland and forest), but can be both more subtle (e.g., edges of wetlands, which have subtle transitions from submergent to emergent vegetation, one of which dominates depending on water levels) or more extreme (the area adjacent to a stream, called the riparian zone). The ecotone shares characteristics of both of the adjoining patches (hence the transition).”
—Dr. Lucinda Johnson, University of Minnesota Duluth

When two disparate, even opposing viewpoints meet they create a new kind of landscape by the meeting itself. One that doesn’t draw a fixed line or a wall of opposing viewpoints but rather a kind of “transition area.” This transition area could be a new terrain that “shares characteristics of both of the adjoining patches.”
— Susan Leem, Associate Producer for Krista Tippett on Being at American Public Media

“In the natural world, edges where differences come together [ecotones] are the richest of habitats” (Krall 4).
— From Ecotone: Wayfaring on the Margins by Florence R. Krall

“[A]t the ecotone change is most evident and inevitable. To an ecologist, the “edge effect” carries the connotation of the complex interplay of life forces where
plant communities, and the creatures they support, intermingle in mosaics or change abruptly” (Krall 4).

“Although they [margins] can become boundaries that separate—chasms that block our movement toward fulfillment and joy in living, or frontiers where we wage power battles—they may also be dwelling places that connect rather than separate. Much like the ecotones in biotic communities, they may be rich and dynamic transitional zones and may provide great learning as well as suffering” (Krall 4).

“We ‘live on the border.’ We are ‘crossroad beings.’ Cultural ecotones are the pluralistic contexts out of which conflict and change emerge” (Krall 4-5).

The ecotone “provides a dynamic interchange” (Krall 5).

The concept of ecotone, then, represents “the place of meeting and tension between diverse and sometimes conflicting aspects of our lives” (Krall 6).

“Ecotone, that place of crossing over, provides sanctuary, solitude, and peace, growth and transformation, as well as isolation and inner or outer conflict. It is all of these as well as a psychological space of tension where we transcend our present limitations and move to new possibilities, a time when individuation brings with it a deeper sense of interrelatedness, or a region where we ‘escape role and status, a crossing of boundaries or margins into an opposite role or perhaps rolelessness’” (Krall 6).

“An Ecotone is a biologically rich transition zone between one or more dissimilar ecosystems. Defined in the dictionary as a habitat with a large degree of diversity and health.”
Appendix G: Mediated Argument Reflection

Post-Meditated Argument Paper/Presentation Reflection
Due on Edmodo by noon on Tuesday, November 1st

In a letter addressed to me (minimum of two full pages, double-spaced with one-inch margins), respond thoughtfully and thoroughly to the questions below (do not respond in a simple Q&A format). Organize your letter so that you focus on reflecting on the written assignment portion first, then transition into your presentation reflection, and finally, respond to the ecotone-based reflection questions (dealing with the course as a whole thus far).

Reflecting on your research/writing process:
- How did you choose your paper topic? Why does it interest you?
- How did you come up with your mediated argument and develop support for it?
- Refer to the “Understanding Ecotone” handout on Edmodo and explain how you worked to seek an “ecotone,” a “transition area,” or as Terry Tempest Williams puts it, “the interface between peace and chaos,” as you wrote?
- What rhetorical appeals did you use, and how effective were you at using them? Explain your rationale.
- Tell me about your research process. Where did you go? What did you find? How did you overcome your research challenges?
- What do you think are the strengths of your paper? Explain your rationale.
- What might be areas of weakness that still need work for your final ePortfolio submission? How will you go about those revisions?

After reviewing your presentation from the Edmodo video files, respond to the following questions dealing with your presentation:
- What was the main point you wanted the audience to takeaway from your presentation? How effectively do you think you were you at addressing that main point? Explain your rationale.
- What rhetorical appeals did you plan to use, and how effective were you at using them? Explain your rationale.
- What do you think were the strengths of your presentation (visually, verbally, and non-verbally), and what areas do you think could have been better? Explain your rationale.
- How might you work to improve the areas that could have been better in future presentations (not just in this class)?
Read and reflect on the following quotes—all of them dealing with seeking civil-minded exchanges. Then, respond to the questions below them.

“Respecting others’ opinions doesn’t mean being untrue to our own.” —P.M. Forni (Director of The Civility Initiative at Johns Hopkins University and author of Choosing Civility)

“Ecotone, that place of crossing over, provides sanctuary, solitude, and peace, growth and transformation, as well as isolation and inner or outer conflict. It is all of these as well as a psychological space of tension where we transcend our present limitations and move to new possibilities, a time when individuation brings with it a deeper sense of interrelatedness, or a region where we ‘escape role and status, a crossing of boundaries or margins into an opposite role or perhaps rolelessness.’” —From Ecotone: Wayfaring on the Margins by Florence R. Krall

“When two disparate, even opposing viewpoints meet they create a new kind of landscape by the meeting itself. One that doesn’t draw a fixed line or a wall of opposing viewpoints but rather a kind of ‘transition area.’ This transition area could be a new terrain that ‘shares characteristics of both of the adjoining patches.’” —Susan Leem, Associate Producer for Krista Tippett on Being at American Public Media

• After reflecting again on these ideas of civil-mindedness, in your experience thus far in the course, do you feel as though you’re able to better understand/appreciate differing perspectives? Why or why not?
• Why do you think we as a society often get wrapped up in hostile arguments? How might seeking the “ecotone” (or a mediated argument) help direct these hostile arguments toward a more civil (ongoing) conversation?
• Do you think civil dialogue in society is possible/realistic? Why or why not?
• What does it mean to appreciate perspectives different from our own?
• As of today, how would you define civility?
Appendix H: October 2011 Civility Forum

“The Battle of Incivility”
English 250 Civility Forum
Tuesday, 10/25/11

1. So, how can we make the world more civil? How can you make the world more civil?

2. Give an example of each type of civility from your own life that you’ve witnessed or been a participant in.
   • Political civility
   • Social civility
   • Civility as respect for others
   • Civility as public behavior
   • Civility as self-regulation

3. Should civility be a requirement for being a good citizen? What does being a “good citizen” look like?

4. Is civility always a good thing? Give an example when incivility might be justified.

5. What should be done? Can civility be legislated and enforced, or, how can it be discovered through consensus?

6. Describe a moment of civil action that you’ve experienced. (Ask your peers about their own experiences, too.)

7. Describe a moment of uncivil action that you’ve experienced. (Ask your peers about their own experiences, too.)

8. “We should remember that decency and civility are values too … Poisonous language doesn’t advance our cause. It’s never softened a single heart nor changed a single mind.” —Mitt Romney, in response to anti-Mormon and anti-Muslim remarks of Bryan Fischer (the Director of Issue Analysis for Government and Public Policy at the American Family Association)
   • Why do we get so caught up with “poisonous language”? Why do our politicians use such “poisonous language” during political debates and in political TV commercials?

9. Stephen Brookfield, author of Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, says democratic discourse is “the ability to talk and listen respectively to those who hold views different from or own,” and a habit “that is rarely learned or
practiced in daily life.” Do you agree with Brookfield? Is democratic discourse (aka civil dialogue) “rarely learned or practiced in daily life”? Explain your reasoning.

10. Has civility really declined, or are people concerned with civility just making a big deal out of nothing?

11. Stephen Carter, Yale law professor and author of *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy*, says, “Civility is a universally-acknowledged virtue across different public philosophies and ethical priorities which means there are certain rules and values of public behavior on which we should all be able to agree.”
   - What are these “rules and values of public behavior on which we should all be able to agree”? Are these really “universally-acknowledged” codes/ideas? Where do we learn civil-practices?

12. “Conversation is not about principles and coming to complicated agreements; it’s just about hearing all the mess. If more of that mess had been represented, we’d have a much messier legislative situation, but we might have more consensus about the rights that we had arrived at in that way.” — Kwame Anthony Appiah
   - Explain this quote. Why do we often avoid “hearing all the mess”?

13. If peace starts with the coming together of people—with community, then what does this look like in action? Can you think of some examples?

14. “We’re always talking about peace, but you have to actually do something.” (From the Peace Café video clip) What is *that something*?

15. “Peace doesn’t sell. Dialogue doesn’t sell.” (From the Peace Café video clip)
   - Is this true? Can you think of some examples? Explain your answer?

16. Where have you seen cases of incivility on TV?

17. Do you see more stories of civility or incivility shown on the news? Why might that be?

18. What role, if any, does the media play in the rise of incivility today?

19. Why do you think shows like *Jersey Shore*, *The Real World*, and *The Real Housewives* series have been so successful? Might their often-uncivil nature have something to do with it? Why do we find these shows entertaining, and funny even?
20. Do you think politicians today are known for being “civil leaders”? If not, do you think it will ever change? Why or why not? Can you think of any “civil leaders” today?

21. Stephen Carter, Yale law professor and author of *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy*, says, civility is “the sum of the many sacrifices we are called to make for the sake of living together.” What are these sacrifices?

22. What’s the most difficult (and sometimes frustrating thing) about civil dialogue?

23. Civil dialogue is time-consuming, *difficult*, and often *exhausting*. Arguing is easier. Why?

24. Read the quote below from the Institute for Civility in Government, and then respond to the following Qs.

   “Civility is about more than merely being polite, although being polite is an excellent start. Civility fosters a *deep self-awareness*, even as it is characterized by *true respect for others*. Civility requires the extremely hard work of *staying present* even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and perhaps fierce disagreements. It is about *constantly being open to hear, to learn, to teach and to change*. It seeks *common ground* as a beginning point for dialogue when differences occur, while at the same time recognizes that differences are enriching. It is *patience, grace, and strength of character*.

   • What is “deep self-awareness”?
   • What does “true respect for others” look like?
   • What does “staying present” mean?
   • Is common ground even real? If so, how do we find it with those we disagree? Why does it even matter to look for?
Appendix I: October 2011 Civility Forum Reflection

Hello,

In a reply to this email *(by noon on Tuesday, 11/1)*, please respond to the following questions in complete sentences:

- Overall, how do you think the class forum discussion went? Explain your reasoning.
- What was the highlight/best part of the forum discussion for you? Explain your answer.
- What things stayed with you from this forum experience? (i.e. What did you learn?, What impacted you most?, What comment(s) from a peer stayed with you?, etc.) Explain why those moments/thoughts/ideas/comments were so memorable.
- What do you feel you added to the conversation?

Thanks,
Sarah
Appendix J: Informed Citizen Prompt

Informed Citizen Opening Writing Prompt
Thursday, 11/3/11

1. In your opinion, what does it mean to be an “informed citizen”? Do you think being an “informed citizen” is important? Further, do you think being an informed citizen is easy? Difficult?

2. Would you consider yourself to be an “informed citizen”? Why or why not? Further, what practical measures can you take to work toward being a more informed citizen? Explain your answer. Relate this to your own personal experience.
Appendix K: *Iowa State Daily* Op-Ed Response

Read “Long: Our opinions as valid as any others” (http://www.iowastatedaily.com/opinion/article_9e2de366-04b7-11e1-8ccb-001cc4c03286.html?cbst=23) and post a comment on the op-ed. Here are some questions to consider if you’re not sure how to respond:

- Columnist Long urges young people to express their opinions in an informed, responsible manner. Do you believe college students are taken seriously when they voice their opinions? Explain your rationale.
- Long says, “Ultimately, we must help ourselves. We’re a group of people who are (fairly or not) branded as being more concerned with ‘Jersey Shore’ and drinking and that taints elders’ views of us and our knowledge.” Do you agree? Why is this view problematic? What might ISU students do, and what might YOU do, to reject this view?
Appendix L: Thich Nhat Hanh Prompt

After reading the comments of Steve Gregg from the Iowa State Daily article we read, I thought of a quote by Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, teacher, author, poet, and peace activist.

In his book, Peace is Every Step, he says: “Every morning, when we wake up, we have twenty-four brand-new hours to live. What a precious gift! We have the capacity to live in a way that these twenty-four hours will bring peace, joy, and happiness to ourselves and others” (5).

What does this look like? As a current campus/Ames/Iowa/American/global citizen, how might you work toward this when you wake up tomorrow? How have you worked toward this today? If you are going home for Thanksgiving Break, how might you work toward this during that week at home with your friends and family?

How is this “capacity to live in a way that these twenty-four hours will bring peace, joy, and happiness to ourselves and others” a “precious gift”? 
Appendix M: Documentary Analysis

Analyzing the Visual Argument of a Documentary Short

Final draft due on Edmodo by noon on Thursday, November 10th

Assignment Overview
In his article “The Voice of Documentary,” Bill Nichols writes:

Documentary displays a tension arising from the attempt to make statements about life that are quite general, while necessarily using sounds and images that bear the inescapable trace of their particular historical origin. These sounds and images come to function as signs; they bear meaning, though the meaning is not really inherent in them but rather conferred upon them by their function within the text as a whole. We may think we hear history or reality speaking to us through a film, but what we really hear is the voice of the text, even when the voice tries to efface itself (Nichols in Rosenthal, 1998, p. 52).  

Just as an essay tries to persuade us toward a certain viewpoint, a documentary also provides facts and uses persuasion techniques. Because the purpose of documentaries is to inform and persuade viewers, it is crucial that today’s informed citizen carefully analyze the strategies used in film. Through the critical analysis of all kinds of commercial communication, the informed citizen can address fundamental questions such as these:

• What is the goal of the documentary short? What is it trying to achieve?
• What visual and verbal strategies are used to convey the documentary short’s message?
• Is the documentary short ultimately informative and persuasive?

The audience for this paper will be your classmates and me, and the purpose will be to explain how the documentary achieves its purpose. The final analysis paper must be a minimum of 1,000 words and include at least two relevant screenshot images.

Completing the Assignment
Part of this assignment will require a brief description of the documentary short; its overall premise and major

“characters” will need to be described. **The main goals of your analysis should be to look critically at the main argument of the documentary short, identify how that argument is achieved, and then to evaluate the effectiveness of the argument based on your analysis.** It will also be necessary for you to do some investigating on the creator(s) behind the documentary short for contextual purposes.

**Planning/Prewriting**

Jot down notes about your chosen documentary short, using the starter questions below, along with the documentary analysis questions I’ve provided for you on Edmodo. You'll find that you'll have more to say to some questions than others; this should help you with your content focus within your paper.

To begin, write a concise summary and purpose of the film. Consider the following:
- use of visuals (people, places, objects, etc.)
- use of audio in the documentary (narration, quotes, music, etc.)
- pace and tone of the documentary
- types of emotional appeals meant to persuade the viewer
- overall impact of the documentary

**Drafting**

After these prewriting activities, you can judiciously decide which types of information you will use to support the claim/thesis within your paper. Be sure to orient your reader (aka provide context!) by identifying the documentary, its purpose, and creators (writer, director, producer, etc.). **Provide a thesis sentence about the claim you are making about the documentary. Remember to support your statements with specific details.** For instance, if you state that the documentary relies on fast-paced action, provide examples from the film.

**Using Sources**

After you have composed your visual analysis, you might consult online film reviews for supporting evidence. Find quotes from film reviews that agree with your statements and others that show opposing viewpoints that you could then refute. However, be sure that your thesis and main points are *original.*
Visual Design of Your Paper

- MLA format. Refer to your EW book for formatting help.
- Use relevant headings within your paper.
- Include at least two relevant screenshot images with captions and a black 1.5 pt. border within your paper. Be sure to have your text flow around the visual and cite the image sources in your Works Cited.

Choosing a Documentary Short for Analysis

Refer to the list of choices on Edmodo under the “Documentary Shorts (options for paper)” library folder. There are close to 20 options to choose from.

Evaluation Criteria

In addition to meeting the basic requirements listed on this assignment sheet, your essay should:

**Context**
- Include information on the intended audience.
- Include information on the filmmaker(s).
- Include some historical contextual information, if relevant.

**Substance**
- Contain specific, detailed descriptions of the documentary “characters” and situations that are relevant to your analysis.
- Support your main claim with visual/auditory details.
- Contain a thesis focused on an analysis of the documentary short.
- Contain a conclusion that discusses the effectiveness of the documentary short, based on your analysis findings. *(Based on your analysis, how well does the filmmaker get across his/her message/argument?)*
- Address the rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos, pathos) used in the documentary short, and how they enhance or hinder the filmmaker’s message.
- Address how the story—and the way it is told—helps us understand our fellow citizens of the world (likely found somewhere in your concluding paragraphs).
- Address how the film’s message helps to foster global awareness and citizenship.

**Organization**
- Be organized into appropriate paragraphs with appropriate headers.
- Follow a logical order that includes your descriptions, analyses, and conclusions.
- Use transition words and phrases to effectively communicate your ideas.

**Style**
- Use appropriate vocabulary and expression.
- Be free of spelling, grammar, and mechanical errors.
- Use appropriate MLA citations (double-spaced with proper header, 1” margins, Works Cited, etc.).

**Delivery**
- Consider design and layout decisions with regard to medium.
- Appropriately integrate visual elements.
Due Dates to Remember

- **Thursday, November 3**: “Documentary Analysis Questions” completed handout due in class (printed copy) and on Edmodo by noon; introductory paragraphs, *including your thesis*, (double-spaced with 1” margins) due on Edmodo by noon (paper PR in class this day)
- **Tuesday, November 8**: Complete draft (min. 1,000 words, double-spaced with 1” margins) due in class (printed copy) and on Edmodo by noon (paper PR in class this day)
- **Thursday, November 10**: Final draft due on Edmodo by noon; upload PPT draft slides to your Edmodo forum group by noon (PPT PR in class this day)
- **Tuesday, November 15**: 3-minute presentations in class; email me your final PPT slides by 10am
- **Thursday, November 17**: Post-assignment reflection due on Edmodo by noon.
Appendix N: TED Talk Analysis

Rhetorical Analysis of a Speech: Analyzing the Argument of a TED Talk

Assignment Overview
A rhetorical analysis examines how a “text” (essay, film, speech, etc.) works—how its words, its structure, its ideas connect—or don’t connect—with a given audience. Your analysis is to show how your chosen TED Talk fulfills its purpose for its particular audience. The final analysis paper must be a minimum of 1,000 words and include at least three relevant screenshot images.

Introductory paragraphs:
• Who is the speaker? What is the speaker’s background?—establish his/her credentials!
• Provide contextual info (historical background, original audience, etc.) and its connection to the essay.
  o Who is the audience for this talk? Where does the talk take place? Hint: You can usually find out some contextual info within the description above the video, as well as within the first minute of the video (see Figure 1). Google can also be helpful in providing more contextual info.
• Identify the message/argument of the TED Talk. (What is the speaker trying to achieve? How is the speaker trying to persuade you?)
• What is YOUR claim/thesis about the organization/delivery/strategies the speaker uses to present that argument AND how was the speaker effective/ineffective?

Body paragraphs:
• This is where you elaborate on YOUR claim about the organization/delivery/strategies the speaker uses to present his/her argument AND how they were effective/ineffective. In sum, here is where you're deconstructing the "text" by looking at HOW and WHY the strategies were used.
• Which rhetorical appeals are used, and in what way are they used?
• How does the speaker’s message deal with themes of civility, community, and/or citizenship?
• Be sure to use quotes or paraphrase portions of the speech.

Concluding paragraphs:
• Wrap things up and link back to your claim/thesis about effectiveness of strategies.
• Remember to AVOID your personal opinion! (Don't conclude with "I really liked/didn't like" sort of talk.)
Visual Design of Your Paper
- MLA format. Refer to your EW book for formatting help.
- Use relevant headings within your paper.
- Include at least three relevant screenshot images with captions and a black 1.5 pt. border within your paper.

Choosing a TED Talk for Analysis
Refer to the list of choices on Edmodo under the “TED Talks (options for textual analysis paper)” library folder.
**Evaluation Criteria**

In addition to meeting the basic requirements listed on this assignment sheet, your essay should:

**Context**
- Include information on the intended audience.
- Include information on the speaker.
- Include some historical contextual information, if relevant.

**Substance**
- Support your main claim with specific details from the TED Talk.
- Contain a thesis focused on an analysis of the TED Talk.
- Contain a conclusion that discusses the effectiveness of the TED Talk, based on your analysis findings.
- Address the rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos, pathos) used, and how they enhance or hinder the speaker’s message.
- Address how the speaker’s message deals with themes of civility, community, and/or citizenship.

**Organization**
- Be organized into appropriate paragraphs with appropriate headers.
- Follow a logical order that includes your descriptions, analyses, and conclusions.
- Use transition words and phrases to effectively communicate your ideas.

**Style**
- Use appropriate vocabulary and expression.
- Be free of spelling, grammar, and mechanical errors.
✓ Use appropriate MLA citations (double-spaced with proper header, 1” margins, Works Cited, etc.).

**Delivery**
✓ Consider design and layout decisions with regard to medium.
✓ Appropriately integrate visual elements.

**Due Dates to Remember**
✓ **Thursday, November 17:** TED Talk must be chosen and viewed by this day; copy/paste the “interactive transcript” into a Word document, make annotations, and bring to class (print or electronic copy is fine)
✓ **Tuesday, November 29:** Introductory paragraphs, *including your thesis*, (double-spaced with 1” margins) due in class (printed copy) and on Edmodo by noon (PR in class this day)
✓ **Thursday, December 1:** Complete draft (min. 1,000 words, double-spaced with 1” margins and relevant visuals) due on Edmodo by noon (PR in class this day)
✓ **Tuesday, December 6:** Final draft due on Edmodo by noon
✓ **Thursday, December 8:** Post-assignment reflection due on Edmodo by noon
Appendix O: December 2011 Civility Forum

English 250 (Sections LC & LE) Final
Instructor Sarah Zoe Pike
Fall 2011, Iowa State University

After a semester of critically thinking and writing about ourselves and our fellow citizens of the world through themes of civility, community, and citizenship, it’s time to zoom out and holistically think about these course themes we’ve spent so much time talking and writing about.

For this final/course themes reflection, please respond directly beneath each prompt.

1. In a few sentences, please describe how you understand the following term: civility. Questions to consider as you write: How would you define this word? What does civility mean to you? What does it look like?

2. In a few sentences, please describe how you understand the following term: incivility. Questions to consider as you write: How would you define this word? What does incivility mean to you? What does it look like?

3. In a few sentences, please describe how you understand the following term: community. Questions to consider as you write: How would you define this word? What does community mean to you? What does it look like?

4. In a few sentences, please describe how you understand the following term: citizenship. Questions to consider as you write: How would you define this word? What does citizenship mean to you? What does it mean to be a citizen of a place/environment? Can you be a citizen of more than one place? How so?

5. The video, “Creating Civility: A Public Conversation with Krista Tippett,” is a fitting way to end the semester. Tippett spoke on January 19, 2011 at a Minnesota Public Radio forum in Saint Paul, where she led an interactive conversation with a live audience—in person and online—a new approach to asking how we build a common life, even while holding deep disagreements on difficult issues. People brought their questions and intentions to create new ways of being, new ways of living together even while holding passionate disagreement. Please respond to the following questions:
   - Tippett notes at the beginning of her talk that she knows that she and the audience are not going to accomplish world peace or reach any major conclusions, but that that’s fine. Such a remark might be relatable to our course. We’ve grappled with various issues and ideas throughout the semester, but we may not have reached any major conclusions on how to solve all the world’s problems. What do you think about this? Is there good in beginning such dialogue and grappling with these ideas, while knowing we may not come to a resolution?
Tippett suggests we need new practical models, virtues, and vocabulary to help work toward progress/goodness/resolution. How might you respond? What models, virtues, and/or vocabulary might help? Additionally, she seems to focus on words as one productive route; how might words/language help advance productive, positive ideas/actions?

Tippett says that we are “revisiting basic questions of what it means to be human, who we are for each other, how we want to live” and that we’re doing this on a global scale for the first time. How would you respond the questions she poses here?

Tippett insists that we should be concerned with words—how we speak to each other and how we listen to each other. Can words really have that big of an impact on how we live? How so?

Tippett argues that the point of learning to have new conversations is “learning to live together differently.” She says this has to be the “power and the purpose of new kinds of conversations.” What does she mean by this, and how/why is this important?

Tippett spends time breaking apart the word tolerance, and suggests we must go beyond tolerance. She notes, “Tolerance tells us we have to endure each other, but doesn’t really invite us to know each other—much less to care for each other.” Can you think of a more fitting word/concept?

Just after the 9-minute marker, Tippett recalls her conversation with a former guest, Frances Kissling (a podcast we listened to during the Composing to Mediate unit). Tippett notes that Kissling looks beyond the abortion debate of the pro and the con and who’s right and who’s wrong and instead, focuses on creating relationship with people on the other side. Tippett says we’ve “collapsed and narrowed” issues (like abortion) to debate, as if there are only two sides. She adds, “we are all losing if we don’t walk this territory together—on this, and all kinds of other big issues—if we don’t walk that together toward some kind of shared understanding, which is not going to come quickly. She notes that patience is not an American virtue (and suggests this is part of the problem). What is your response to such remarks?

Tippett repeats Richard Mouw’s (former Being guest) question, “How are we going to be able to live together in this pluralistic society with at least some better understanding of what motivate us beneath the angry denunciations?” How might you answer his question?

Tippett says, “the notion of finding common ground may be part of our problem.” She refers back to Kissling’s words (who also disagrees with the possibility of common ground): “I do think that when people who disagree with each other come together with a goal of gaining a better understanding of why the other believes what they do, good things come of that. But the pressure of coming to agreement works against really understanding each other, and we don’t understand each other.” So, how might we work toward gaining a better understanding of why the other believes what they do?

Tippett concludes her talk asking, “How can we find new ways to live together while holding passionate disagreement?” Answer her question.

What resonated most with you regarding Tippett’s talk?

6. On the south side of the Memorial Union there is an elongated cyclone piece of bronze artwork titled, “Whirlwind.” At the base of Whirlwind is an inscription from the artists, Andrea Myklebust and Stanton Sears. It reads: “Going to college should
pick a person up and set him or her down in a new place with new ideas and a deeper understanding of the world.”

- How has your time at ISU thus far helped you gain a deeper understanding of the various communities in which you inhabit, and the world?
- Flash forward to spring semester 2012. How might you work to consider the conversations/ideas we’ve had/shared in your life (post ENGL 250) regarding the themes of civility, community, and citizenship? Is there something that resonated with you this semester that might remain with you? Is there something you want to continue to reflect back on? What are those ideas/concepts? Explain your response.
- On your college graduation day, what new insights do you hope to have gained from your undergraduate experience, besides a comprehensive knowledge about your field(s) of study?