
Social Justice Conference Planning for Writing Studies: Frameworks, Triumphs, and Challenges

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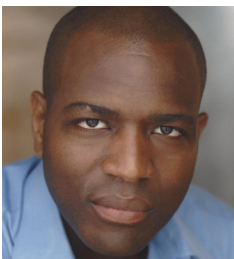
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Dr. Michael A. Pemberton is a professor of Writing and Linguistics at Georgia Southern University and director of the University Writing Center. A past president of the International Writing Centers Association, he edited the journal *Across the Disciplines* (2005 – 2020), and is Series Editor of *Across the Disciplines Books*. Currently, he is a co-director of the WPA Consultant-Evaluator Service, the Associate Publisher for Scholarly Journals at the WAC Clearinghouse, and was Co-Chair of the CCCC Social Justice at the Convention (SJAC) Committee from 2018-2021. Much of the scholarly work he has produced and published during his 30-year career has been focused on ethical issues in writing instruction, including, most recently, *Labored: The State(ment) and Future of Work in Composition* (Parlor Press, 2017) and “Writing Center Ethics and the Problem of ‘The Good’” (Utah State UP, 2020).



Dr. Vershawn Ashanti Young, a.k.a dr. vay, is a professor of Communication Arts and English Language and Literature at the University of Waterloo, where he also is a founding member of the Black Faculty Collective and the Black Studies Implementation Team--efforts that developed after the anti-Black racism protests over the murder of George Floyd. dr. vay brings expertise in the form of organizational experience and knowledge as current Immediate Past Chair of CCCC, 2020 CCCC Chair and 2019 Convention Chair. Under dr. vay's CCCC leadership, the organization issued three social justice position statements for faculty and students: (1) “Statement on Effective Institutional Responses to Threats of Violence and Violent Acts Against Minoritized and Marginalized Faculty and Graduate Students”; (2) “This Ain't Another Statement! This Is A Demand for Black Linguistic Justice”; and (3) “Statement on Black Technical and Professional Communication.”

INTRODUCTION

Rising social and political unrest coupled with public protests demanding radical change have ushered in a wave of “social justice initiatives” in businesses and organizations. For example, days after the murder of George Floyd (1973–2020), Walmart publicly announced its decision to build a Center on Racial Equity, and in the summer of 2020, the NFL announced a series of social justice initiatives, such as allowing players to display social/racial justice messages such as “It Takes All of Us” and “End Racism” on their helmets. However, neither of these publicly touted initiatives did much to address systemic racism in their own organizations. Critics quickly noted that Walmart could have immediately improved diversity in its corporate ranks and increased hourly employee wages rather than exploiting Black lives for a public-relations piece. And though NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell acknowledged the value of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in a press release following George Floyd’s and Breonna Taylor’s murders, he nevertheless continued to stand idle as former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick remained unemployed.

Mr. George Floyd’s death also served as a tipping point that inspired educational institutions to release statements about the #BlackLivesMatter movement, racism, the killing of Black people at the hands of the police, and the ongoing protests. Within many of these statements is a now commonplace rhetorical structure that begins with an acknowledgement that oppressed people, in this case Black people, continue to be oppressed in insidious and often dysconscious ways. The acknowledgement often leads to a confession that neither people in power positions nor everyday citizens have done enough to intervene in these oppressions, to stop them. Then there is a description of what social justice means, what it might look like, and a renewed commitment, a promise if you will, to continue to pursue equality, diversity, and inclusion. Within these commitments are definitions of social justice that we also advance. Thus, we want to quote at length from three of these to orient you to what is influencing our thinking, our efforts, and our promotion of social justice within our conferences.

We begin with an excerpt from Scott Kurashige, then president of the American Studies Association. Kurashige (2020) writes:

Over the past days and weeks, the public has learned the names that opened this statement because they are the most recent victims of a nation built on white supremacy, genocide, and colonialism. . . . And, still, the list keeps growing. Italia Kelly. James Scurlock. David McAttee. Dorian Murrell. Sean Monterrosa. . . . When armed white men stormed a state capital, they were held up as a model of protest by the same president [Donald Trump] who condemned Colin Kaepernick and others for taking a knee. . . . However, transforming structures cannot occur without simultaneously decolonizing our collective mind and transforming our ways of thinking. In this regard, those based in academia have

Abstract

In this series of personal reflections, authors from the Social Justice at the Convention Committee and the Local Arrangements Committee discuss their efforts to do social justice conference planning for the Conference on College Composition and Communication from 2018 to 2021. The challenges of doing social justice programming in a shifting convention landscape have been tremendous but, the authors have found, they are not insurmountable. The authors use their experiences to offer a conceptual framework and guiding questions for enacting social justice events at academic conventions. The lessons the authors have learned in the process about funding, labor, sustainability, and ethics of incorporating community voices will be important and useful to readers who want to highlight such programming in national, regional, local, and online venues.

Keywords

Social Justice, George Floyd, #BlackLivesMatter, Academic Conferences, Breonna Taylor, Community Engagement, Ahmaud Arbery, Community Partnerships, Tony McDade, Research as Care, Sandra Bland, Reciprocity, Manuel Ellis

particular lessons to learn from organizers on the ground creating grassroots models of community solidarity rooted in de-escalation, nonviolent conflict resolution, and transformative justice. We must especially pay attention to the women, queer, trans*, disabled, and formerly incarcerated persons of color at the cutting-edge of these struggles. Every person who says the phrase, “Black Lives Matter,” should be sure to read [the policy platform and call to action from the Movement for Black Lives](#).

At this point, it is customary in academic writing to restate the essence of a block quote in a sentence or two in the present authors’ own words. But we are not going to do that here. If you take the time to read the words, we hope they land on your mind and heart and, further, are shown in your actions. So we quickly segue then to our second excerpt, “A Statement on George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery” (2020), penned by Trena L. Wilkerson, then president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and Robert Q. Berry III, the immediate past president of NCTM. They write:

As president and past president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), we are committed to a position of social justice that challenges the roles of power, privilege, and oppression. We extend our heartfelt sympathies to the loved ones of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. As a mathematics education community, we must not tolerate acts of racism, hate, bias, or violence. . . . As mathematics educators, we must engage in anti-racist

and trauma-informed education in our daily practices as processes of learning and adjustments.

Anti-racist and trauma-informed education not only raises our awareness of racism and trauma experienced by Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and all marginalized peoples, but it also recognizes that we must be purposeful in addressing racism and trauma.

And last, for our purposes here, we point to the “ELATE Statement on State-Sanctioned Anti-Black Racism and Violence: A Commitment to Antiracist Instruction in English Language Arts” by the ELATE Executive Committee of National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). ELATE writes:

English Language Arts Teacher Educators (ELATE), a conference of the National Council of Teachers of English, is comprised of compassionate university teacher educators, graduate students, and middle and high school English teachers who are collectively outraged by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Tony McDade, all victims of the policing of Black bodies.

We, members of the ELATE Executive Committee, write to demand justice and commit to taking action to create immediate and lasting change. We recognize that the white supremacist foundation upon which the United States of America, and its education system, was built over the past 400 years continues to inflict murder and violence on Black people and act in oppressive ways toward anyone representing differences. Our passion is centered on words and ideas and languages, the seemingly innocuous elements of ordinary life that nonetheless can and do kill people through othering, oppression, and covert/overt racist acts.

In an effort to counter anti-Blackness, we demand that antiracist instruction be integrated into ELA courses and into ELA teacher preparation in schools throughout the country. The policing, silencing, shaming, erasure, and physical violence that youth, Black youth in particular, experience in America’s schools have been and continue to be unacceptable; our schools must change now. (National 2020)

Following ELATE, not only must schools change now, but our conferences where we gather to develop, promote, and advance our principles and values must also change. Our conferences are sites where we co-construct and imbibe our professional ideologies that inform our professional and even personal worldviews—and, yes, influence our daily actions.

Thus, we begin our piece with this longish survey of examples to illustrate how social justice initiatives often fall short of enacting

actual social change and rather work as lip service, that is, as empty commitments, as is the case with Walmart and the NFL. We must NOT be like Walmart or the NFL. The other examples espouse admirable, even inspiring, commitments to social justice. But we ask: Have you heard about these educational organizations’ social justice successes, the results of the implementations of change envisioned by our colleagues in ASA, ELATE or NCTM? What are they doing now? What’s working? What still needs to happen? Our questions are not intended to condemn but instead to encourage them, as we hope to encourage you, and make recommitments ourselves to this work, as we try to answer questions about what’s working, what we are doing, and what still must happen.

As teacher-scholars of writing and rhetoric who believe in social justice practices, we are well equipped with the tools to critique public displays that merely enforce social justice tropes without producing meaningful social change. We recognize successful social justice work requires that we “amplify the agency of oppressed people—those who are materially, socially, politically, and/or economically under-resourced” using “a collaborative, respectful approach that moves past description and exploration of social justice issues to taking action to redress inequities” (Jones & Walton, 2018, p. 242). We further take an informed cue from Joyce E. King (1991) who frames social justice efforts as the opposite of what she calls “dysconscious racism.” She writes, “Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race.” King argues that “[d]ysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind . . . that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (p. 135). Please, don’t miss the point: Even those of us who work against racism daily are still subject to perpetuating the racisms closest to us: the status quo. We therefore must effortfully resist our own and others’ dysconscious participation in and perpetuation of the “... isms.” Wringing [y]our hands, shaking [y]our heads, saying, “I’m only doing what I’m/we’re told,” or any other “going-with-the-flow,” status quo BS ain’t gone cut it no mo! Point. Blank. Period.

For us then, this multivocal article begins at that moment, confronting the challenges of planning, implementing, and integrating social justice practices¹ into our collective, disciplinary identity. The work we describe in this article is not new, but we are renewing it. We see ourselves both within and without the context of longer histories of equity-oriented change in the National Council of Teachers of English and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Within this context, for example, in 1964 the NCTE Board of Directors required all affiliates of the organization to be open to historically marginalized people (Hook 1979), and NCTE later established the Task Force on Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English in 1969. In 1971 that task force

1 The social justice practices represented in this article include antiracist conference planning and community engagement and community organizing.

encouraged publishers to produce teaching materials that represented racially marginalized people more favorably. They released an updated statement called *Non-White Minorities in English and Language Arts Materials* in 1978, which acknowledged some progress in publishing inclusive teaching materials while still addressing ongoing problems. Yes, we can locate ourselves in these noble efforts toward social justice.

However, despite these efforts, racism and discrimination continued within the NCTE affiliate CCCC, with Black scholars and teachers forming the Black Caucus in 1970. Fifteen Black conference attendees of the Seattle CCCC convention wrote a resolution that critiqued the “academic colonization of Black topics” at conferences and poor “working conditions in historically Black colleges and universities” and that called for publishers to “increase the quality of their Black-oriented products” (Gilyard, 1999, p. 636). Just two years later CCCC would adopt the Students’ Right to Their Own Language resolution, known by its short name, SRTOL. SRTOL challenged the status quo racisms of academic discourse and the teaching of standardized English, stating this: “Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. *Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans*” (quoted in *Conference on College Composition and Communication*, 1974, p. 2–3, emphasis added). The point to be made here is that despite the fact that this statement was first affirmed in April 1974, reaffirmed November 2003, with an annotated bibliography added August 2006, and reaffirmed November 2014, how many of you, of us, are still espousing, perpetuating, perpetrating and straight up pimpin the dysconscious “false advice for speakers and writers” in our classrooms? How are NCTE and CCCC still pimpin “immoral advice for humans” at our conferences and in our scholarly publications? It’s not a hard question to answer. You see. And you know!

These equity-oriented efforts during and soon after the Civil Rights Movement have continued through the subsequent decades and into the age of #BlackLivesMatter, where we see remarkable struggles to bring equity and inclusion to our professional community and the students we serve. We also witness blatant contradictions between (NCTE’s and CCCC’s) words and (our beloved organizations’) deeds. So, what are we/you to do?

The reflections we offer here emerged from our panel presentation at the 2021 Thomas R. Watson Conference, held virtually April 14–16. Our intent was to share our experiences doing social justice programming with attendees of the conference while also considering how the Watson conference could address its own complicity in enabling anti-Black practices. Joined by Vershawn Ashanti Young, program chair for the 2019 Conference on College Composition and Communication annual convention in Pittsburgh, we spoke to our efforts to make social justice a central focus for

the convention and shared lessons learned that our audience should take into account in their own social justice conference planning. In this series of revised reflections, we discuss what it means to move beyond “social justice tourism” from our own perspectives. While we note challenges that can often make enduring commitments to a conference’s host city difficult, we end with a call for others committed to social justice in the discipline at large to help us tackle these challenges in order to create a more sustained model for fulfilling the aims of social justice.

We would like to begin by asking readers to read the appended transcript of or view the video of Vershawn Ashanti Young’s opening presentation for our panel (included with permission), in which he outlines his perspectives on social justice programming. Young spits several issues to us that are important to consider when weaving such programming into a professional conference, including explicit attention to equity, diversity, and inclusion; a constant awareness of the pervasive influence of White supremacy; a focus on cultivating cultural inclusiveness and awareness; the importance of listening to different groups; and the need for us all to offer Black body acknowledgements.



The video is can be viewed on the Watson [website](#).
[Access the transcript here.](#)

THE CCCC SOCIAL JUSTICE AT THE CONVENTION (SJAC) COMMITTEE

Michael’s Story (SJAC cochair, 2018–2021)

As a way of beginning our shared reflections about “doing” social justice work at a national conference, I’d like to begin with a little bit of history, explaining how the SJAC came to be, what its mission is, and how we approached our work for each year’s convention. Though I will out of necessity abbreviate most of the work and discussions that took place behind the scenes, I think it’s important to understand the contexts in which we operated, particularly as

they impacted our sense of how to engage in social justice work at national conventions sited in host cities with social justice issues unique to their local communities.

In 2017, as the CCCC was preparing to host its annual convention in Kansas City, Missouri, the Missouri legislature passed Senate Bill 43, a discriminatory bill that, in the words of the NAACP, “would prevent individuals from protecting themselves from discrimination, harassment and retaliation in Missouri” (Missouri, 2017). In response, the NAACP issued its first-ever travel advisory for the state, which caused many members of CCCC to demand the convention be canceled in protest. The Executive Committee decided, over the objections of many BIPOC committee members, not to cancel the convention and referenced only the financial consequences of cancellation in their public-facing documents. Convention planners, led by Asao Inoue, then reshaped the program theme to focus strongly on social justice issues in research, in the classroom, in our nation’s infrastructure, and in our home communities.

A central component of this new direction was the formation of the Task Force on Social Justice and Activism at the Conference (SJAC), chaired by Akua Duku Anokye, which planned, organized, and participated in a number of social justice initiatives including two free preconvention workshops, a system of volunteer travel companions, access to sessions via streaming media, and collaborations with local activist groups (see figure 1). The CCCC Executive Committee voted soon after to extend SJAC’s work into future conventions, forming the Social Justice at the Convention Committee for a three-year (potentially renewable) term. The committee created a set of charges for SJAC and recruited members that included representatives from each of the CCCC caucuses.

In June of 2018, after having been recommended by Asao, I was contacted by CCCC President, Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt, and invited to serve as cochair of this newly formed committee. I would continue in this position for SJAC’s initial three-year term, and my cochair would be each year’s Local Arrangements Chair for the upcoming convention, cycling in and out annually. Those chairs, in succession, were Brenda Whitney, 2019; Maria Novotny, 2020; and Bradley Bleck, 2021. The number of committee members ranged from 11 to 14 during that time.

SJAC had five specific charges, two related to reporting duties and the other three focused on overall goals:

Task Force on Social Justice and Activism at the Convention

The Task Force on Social Justice and Activism at the Convention (SJAC) was formed by the 2018 Program Chair, Asao B. Inoue, from a recommendation offered by the Executive Committee after discussions in the EC during the summer months of 2017. This task force was designed to help the chair augment the convention and pilot structural changes to the convention to better address issues of equity and safety at our convention site. The task force had the following charges:

- Provide the Program Chair with a prioritized list of ways to make this year’s annual convention safer and more accessible for members and provide events and experiences for members to do appropriate social justice and activist work at the convention site.
- Help coordinate, design, and put into action the ideas, events, and experiences that the program chair approves from the prioritized list.
- Work with the local planning committee on safety, accessibility, social justice, and activist ideas, events, and experiences.

2018 Program Chair Asao B. Inoue wishes to thank the members of this hard-working committee and their chair for the good, needed work they performed in the service of CCCC and its members.

SJAC Task Force Members

Akua Duku Anokye (Chair)	Brenda Brueggeman (Standing Group for Disability Studies)
Jessie Moore (Transparency Officer)	Ruth Osorio (Standing Group for Disability Studies)
Jane Greer (Local Arrangements Chair)	Chad Iwertz
Bump Halbritter (EC)	Kristen Ruccio
Holly Hassel (EC)	Brent Chappelow
Stephanie Kerschbaum (EC)	Dana Driscoll
Aja Martinez (EC)	Brian Hendrickson
Michael Pemberton (at large)	Amy Meckenburg-Faenger
Casie Moreland (at large, grad rep)	Alisa Russell
Romeo Garcia (Latinx Caucus)	Mary Stewart
Victor Del Hierro (Latinx Caucus)	Matthew Vetter
Cindy Tekobbe (American Indian Caucus)	Kayla Bruce
Gail MacKay (American Indian Caucus)	Jess Boykin
Al Harahap (Asian/Asian American Caucus)	Hillary Coenen
Jolivette Mecenas (Asian/Asian American Caucus)	Dev Bose
David Green (Black Caucus)	Thomas Ferrel
Ersula Ore (Black Caucus)	Daniel Mahala
Zan Gonçalves (Queer Caucus)	

Figure 1: SJAC Description in 2018 CCCC Conference Program

1. Work with the program chair to understand their vision for the program and collaboratively outline a scope for SJAC's efforts at the convention within this vision.
2. Within the program chair's vision, collaborate with the local committee chair to develop social justice and local engagement activities that complement the convention theme.
3. Promote a culture of accessibility at the convention through member education and by organizing sustainable methods of increasing member access and engagement, onsite and online, during the convention and postconvention.

I want to highlight the significance of the first two charges, which emphasize the importance of the program chair's vision to SJAC's work. For the 2019 convention in Pittsburgh, the convention chair was Vershawn Ashanti Young, and we worked closely with him throughout our planning process, inviting his feedback and suggestions for possible initiatives. Our committee "met" officially for the first time via email in August 2018. We proposed 16 social justice initiatives, solicited Vershawn's opinion about which of our ideas best fit with his vision for the convention, and then encouraged SJAC members to volunteer for the ten resulting subcommittees that would put our selected plans in action.

The following is a list of our initiatives at that convention:

- A book drive for Book 'Em, a books-to-prisoners nonprofit. A dropbox and signage were placed next to the convention's registration tables, and attendees were invited to donate books there. (See figure 2)
- An ACLU table in the convention Action Hub. Members of the local branch of the American Civil Liberties Union were available to answer questions and distribute literature.



Figure 2: Book Drop at 2019 CCCC Conference

- A Write-In table in the Action Hub. Attendees were encouraged to reflect on their conference experiences, compose brief messages that could be shared and read by others, and comment on recent events.



Figure 3: Flyer for 2019 CCCC Poetry Slam

- An educational case study of Pittsburgh social justice activism. Because we thought it was important to bring local social justice issues into writing classrooms after the convention ended, a subcommittee developed a case study that could be used for discussion and as a set of writing prompts.
- A cross-caucus pre-convention event. We planned and scheduled a time for members of CCCC caucuses (Latinx, Black, Asian/American, American Indian, Queer, Jewish, etc.) to meet informally and network about common concerns and goals.
- Qigong/tai chi workshops. Time and space was reserved for certified qigong/tai chi instructors to lead convention attendees in exercises and relaxation activities to ease stress and contribute to mental health.
- A roundtable of local social justice organizations: Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR); Book 'Em; and Gay for Good. Representatives from local activist groups discussed both the challenges they faced and the successes they had achieved promoting social justice causes in Pittsburgh. The speakers were compensated with donations made to their organizations.
- A poetry slam featuring featuring local poets Jesse Welch and Kimberly Jackson. (See figure 3.) In addition to the featured presenters, convention attendees were invited to read some of their own works in an open area of the convention center.
- A celebration of scholars of color and underrepresented groups. As Vershawn mentioned in his talk, we worked with him to place a variety of banners throughout the convention area celebrating CCCC scholars of color and SIGs/caucuses of underrepresented groups.
- The Tree of Life Memorial installation. Shortly before the convention took place in Pittsburgh, on October 27, 2018, 11 people were shot and killed at the Tree of Life Synagogue. Members of SJAC arranged to bring a memorial installation to the convention where attendees could sit quietly at a table and write brief messages that could be placed on the installation's walls for others to read.

After the convention, the committee met to discuss which of the initiatives were successful, which were less so, and which ones we wanted to include at the following year's convention in Milwaukee.

We planned to continue most of the activities we had performed in Pittsburgh—including the book drive, poetry slam (both on-site and off-site), panel of local activists, cross-caucus dessert reception, and yoga/tai chi sessions. There was also to be a guided bus tour of parts of Milwaukee that would illustrate the city's long history of racist redlining and racial conflict.

By January, we had plans in place, people lined up, funds allocated by the program chair, arrangements made with NCTE. On March 3rd, the CDC reported 60 COVID-19 cases across twelve states (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). That same day, CCCC sent an email to its membership saying the convention was still scheduled to continue as planned.

And then, nine days later, two weeks before the convention was scheduled to begin, we were told the convention was canceled.

At the time, I remember feeling this was the right and responsible thing to do. I also remember feeling stunned, realizing everything SJAC had done over the last year, the countless hours committee members had spent making plans and working closely with community members to build the convention's social justice programming, was just . . . gone.

I think the term *deflated* probably best characterizes the committee's reaction—a mixture of sadness and resignation that, unfortunately, brought with it a lingering aftermath of ennui. At a time when we would normally be gearing up excitedly for new social justice events in a new city, we were still grieving, still in the midst of a pandemic, and still living in a world where QAnon and the Proud Boys walked hand in hand with the GOP and took selfies with the president. That, coupled with a similar uncertainty about the following year's scheduled convention in Spokane, led many of us to wonder—even if we didn't say so out loud—whether our efforts would once again be for naught, just another exercise in futility that was bound to lead to disappointment.

But upon reflection, we understood social justice work is not easy, and we shouldn't expect it to be. Though a few people opted to leave the committee, and though we got off to a bit of a slow start, we persevered in 2020. Convention chair Holly Hassel, who had been on SJAC for its first two years, suggested we scale back our initiatives for 2021 and focus on those that could be easily adapted to an online format should convention planners decide to move in that direction. Eventually we opted to limit our offerings to a roundtable about the consequences of Milwaukee's cancellation, a poetry slam in the virtual networking lounge, an online yoga session, a booth in the virtual Action Hub, and a panel of social justice activists in Spokane (arranged by LAC Chair Bradley Bleck). Though virtual attendance at the 2021 convention was smaller

than it had been in previous on-site in-person meetings, we felt we had contributed meaningfully to the program and enhanced awareness of social justice issues in the host city and in our professional teaching lives as well.

While we look forward with a fair amount of optimism to the 2022 convention in Chicago, we do so with some caveats. In the wake of CCCC's decision to hold its 2018 annual convention in Kansas City, the organization also updated its 2013 document "CCCC Convention Siting and Hostile Legislation: Guiding Principles." I'd like to call attention to one passage from the 2019 version, which states,

In principle, CCCC will work to change state or local policies in host convention cities that diverge from established CCCC positions or otherwise threaten the safety or well-being of our membership. We will do so by consulting closely with local groups who share our principles and arranging activities and opportunities for members to support those who are disadvantaged by offensive policies or otherwise to use their presence in the offending state as a vehicle for nonviolent protest. (Conference, 2019)

I suspect SJAC was established, in part, as a way to demonstrate the CCCC's commitment to this principle. One of our formal charges is to work with local groups and provide opportunities for our members to demonstrate their support.

But what, exactly, do we mean by support?

Over the years, SJAC has discussed, albeit briefly, how to sustain and preserve the work we do as a part of each year's convention activities. Even early on, I think, we were developing an uneasy sense of how ethically problematic some of our convention initiatives were and are. While it's laudable to reach out to local activist groups and invite them to participate in our convention programs, highlighting the importance of local contexts to social justice issues and educating our members about the universality of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and white privilege in our country, we often do so in ways that feel like we're merely interested in a Cook's tour. We come in, we express our support for antiracist movements in the local community, and then we leave, not bothering to look back but instead quickly turning our attention to next year's convention in a new host city. Our impact is focused but brief, intense but not enduring. There is no denouement, only a story that ends abruptly without a satisfactory resolution.

Perhaps this is just the nature of the beast, an unavoidable consequence of annual convention planning, time constraints, and the sheer amount of volunteer labor and commitment necessary to sustain initiatives in host cities. Our committee charge requires us to develop new programming for each year's convention, and it's hard to look back when we're being told to constantly look ahead.

Antonio's Story (SJAC member 2018–2021; SJAC cochair 2021–Present)

Since 2018 I've collaborated with wonderful colleagues from across the country and from different institutions as a member of the Social Justice at the Conference Committee to make the CCCC Annual Conference a space for sharing resources, tools, and practices for social justice. I came to this work through my own conference attendance for the last 13 years. Three conferences stand out for their impact on my role as a tourist to different host cities and my thinking about the place of conferences in social justice and community-engaged work.

In 2010, Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society, held its annual convention in St. Louis, Missouri. I had the pleasure to fly with friends to present a science-fiction short story. This was the first time I had ever left the South. I was nervous about meeting new people, sharing a hotel room with my friends, and navigating a new city. However, the adventures in St. Louis as a tourist led to my realization that I didn't have to live in Alabama after finishing my undergraduate career. During my stay, I had many firsts: I ate frog legs for the first time; I visited an Irish bar for the first time; I made friends with a student from Massachusetts, bonding over video games, anime, and writing fiction; I delivered a reasonably funny poem during an open-mic event. By the end of my time in St. Louis, I remember telling a friend the city seemed pretty great. To which my friend replied, "Well, Antonio, you only visited the nicer part of town."

In 2013, I returned to Sigma Tau Delta's annual convention in Portland, Oregon, as a master's student. My friends and I had never been to Portland, let alone the Northwestern region of the United States. We were excited to be tourists again and, in fact, for some of my friends the convention was an excuse to see Portland and visit staples like Powell's Books, the largest independent new and used bookstore in the world, and Voodoo Donuts, known for its unconventional donut designs. However, during one of our many excursions on the streets of Portland, we ran into an interruption: we seemed to have strayed too far off the beaten path into a section of downtown where we saw homeless people living on the sidewalks. We discussed the disconnect between us as visitors, seemingly living a fantasy experience thanks to the generous support and privileges of our university, and the realities of Portland's racial and class inequality.

The 2018 CCCC Annual Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, further tore down this wall between conference attendance and the realities of the cities that hosted me. While many scholars and teachers canceled their attendance in response to the passage of Missouri's Senate Bill 43 and the resulting NAACP travel advisory, I took a car ride with friends to Kansas City from Madison, Wisconsin. I made this decision for two reasons. First, Black people have consistently fought the fires of racism because no one else would. Second, I remember the point my parents made after I

told them Madison, Wisconsin, was a majority white city: "Racism is everywhere." There is no safe haven from racism in this country.

The all-attendee event "Literacy, Language, and Labor for Social Justice: Outward and Inward Reflection" revised my years-long excitement about being a tourist in a new city. The poetry of Glenn North, Poet Laureate at the 18th and Vine Historic Jazz District, and the tales of Alvin Brooks with AdHoc Group Against Crime showed me the realities the local community must address, and I left with phone numbers, new Twitter followers, and a sense of belonging in composition and rhetoric. After their presentations, I volunteered to facilitate small roundtable discussions with conference attendees about what social justice and community engagement looked like for the field. During these conversations, I began to understand how activism is intellectual work and requires causing "necessary trouble" (Lewis 2018).

While I understand the reason many colleagues decided to not attend the 2018 CCCC Annual Conference either in protest or out of concerns for their personal safety, I'm glad to have used that moment for action. Since then, I have returned to Kansas City as an assistant professor and found ways to contribute to the vision North and Brooks testified about in 2018. I know what I'm doing isn't unique. We can all attest to volunteering or know someone who does this community-engaged work as scholarship. But I tell this story to highlight the influence conference-going can have on one graduate student turning into early-career faculty, and how the social justice work that happens in one conference can lead to action. My own lived experience, which is a case study at best, gives me hope in what's possible at a conference.

To this end, I share one signature effort that echoes my own trajectory as a scholar and conference attendee, one that embodies hope for social change through social justice events at conferences but also one that addresses challenges that can derail such efforts. Working with Don Unger, from the University of Mississippi, and Liz Lane, from the University of Memphis, I helped organize and facilitate an event called "Exploring Local Activism: A Roundtable Workshop with Local Pittsburgh Activist Organizations." We wanted the event to be more than attendees sitting in a room listening to the local knowledge of Pittsburgh followed by a question-and-answer session. This approach would amount to conference attendees simply taking what they could without giving back or reciprocating the sharing of knowledge (Maria says more about reciprocity in her story). Instead, we wanted attendees to actively share ideas on how we as teachers and scholars can be better partners with community organizers and activists back home. Months in advance of the conference, we worked with the Local Arrangements Committee to identify potential activists. Liz and Don came with a background in community-engaged work, so I was learning from them as much as I was learning from the entire process. Key was communicating alignment between the conference and the activists' work, clearly stating we wanted the conference to be a space for thoughtful

reflection on our relationships between academics and activists. It was a time to honor their knowledge and teachings while encouraging attendees to act. We also ensured each panelist received an honorarium for their labor and time.

We brought together three divergent yet critical perspectives for the event. Julie Evans, MSW director of Prevention Services of Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR); Jodi Lincoln, a representative from Book 'Em, an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization that sends free educational books and quality reading material to prisoners and prison libraries in Pennsylvania and across the country; and Lindsay Onufer, chapter leader of Gay For Good: Pittsburgh, teaching consultant with the University of Pittsburgh Center for Teaching and Learning, and part-time faculty member for the Department of Community Engagement and the Composition Program at Point Park University. Bringing these voices together enacted one of the principles Vershawn discusses in his video above: listening to different groups. Conference attendees could listen to what activists did on the ground in Pittsburgh and learn about their relationships with universities as partners. Most germane was listening to how universities could partner with community activists for mutual aid, respect, and information sharing. This event would model how teacher- and scholar-activists may engage with community organizations in their home cities.

To this end, we posed a series of questions for panelists and then had breakout sessions where attendees and activists met to share ideas and practices. For the panelists, we asked,

- How do we define activism in or through our work?
- In what ways does our work reflect and support local Pittsburgh communities?
- What advice might you share for those looking to bridge partnerships with local organizations in their home communities?

And for the breakout sessions, we asked the following questions:

- What does global and local (“glocal”) action mean to you?
- How can we enact glocal activism in cities we visit and in our home communities?
- What are three to five actionable items each participant might develop to begin steps toward action in these ways?
- How can we support one another in these goals? What resources are available that we might share and amplify?

After the breakout sessions, we called everyone back together for a whole-group discussion. We recorded key ideas each table suggested in a Google Doc. This would be a living document for documenting ideas from future activist panels. The activists and conference attendees had offered practical suggestions for establishing relationships with community partners, such as writing memos of understanding to set up parameters and consider what value a course and its students would add to the community

partner. I want to highlight three ideas that stand out for social justice conference planning. First, conferences can be a conduit for bringing together different organizations to educate the attendees and beginning conversations for long-term goal setting and practices beyond the event. Second, intentionally seeking to build a coalition helps avoid “national volunteer tourism,” which, as Michael alludes to above, are one-off events that don’t lead to real systemic change in the community. Coalitions also ensure attendees simply don’t take from the local knowledge of community collaborators but use their own experiences to be a connector for other people. Third, local community organizations break out of their own silos and find future collaboration. This last point references an idea Jodi Lincoln, representative from Book 'Em, made during the event: Often community organizers stay in their own corners, competing for the same resources to do similar work, but an event like this made them aware of each other’s existence and that they may work together.

The 2020 CCCC in Milwaukee would have continued the work established at Pittsburgh. Working again with Liz and Don, and guided by Maria, we had gathered Milwaukee-based activists who would explore new topics about social action: how you can use film or art and culture to convene conversations, create community-dialogue and grassroots coalition-building, and develop public pedagogy for civic action and racial justice. We would use questions similar to those used in Pittsburgh for panelists and breakout sessions to create new ideas and definitions of activism and community engagement. And the event would occur after the general opening sessions for greater participation. We planned to post these actions and practices online after the conference as a resource and an archive of our efforts. We would later plan to invite activist organizations that challenge housing discrimination inspired by Matthew Desmond’s *Evicted*.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic canceled these plans, and planning for the 2021 Annual Conference in Spokane, Washington, presented a new challenge to SJAC: how to shift in-person social justice events to an online format. I did not fully come to understand these challenges, however, until I accepted an invitation to become cochair of SJAC for the Chicago 2022 conference. The committee was animated to plan social justice events in a hybrid format. The Executive Committee’s (EC) announcement at the end of December 2021 that the conference would be fully virtual left us to quickly reconsider what events we could plan just three months before the convention. While a virtual book-donation and poetry-slam event went forward, we did not arrange an Indigenous activist panel in collaboration with the American Indian Caucus. Given that SJAC had paused its work until the EC announcement in December, Maria suggested combining the local-activist-panel subcommittee and the Indigenous-community-event subcommittee to streamline labor and time and strengthen attention on Indigenous activism in Chicago. However, this event required relationship building with the Chi Youth Nation, and that crucial relationality needed more than two months of conversation on

SJAC's intentions and its alignments with the mission and goals of the Chi Youth Nation. In addition to having little time to plan events or build relationships with Chicago community members, the switch to an online format added to the exhaustion of SJAC committee members. The pandemic had either exacerbated existing or created new challenges to members' professional and personal lives, so another virtual conference reduced our morale a little. The lesson here is that suddenly switching modalities in the middle of planning can add to volunteers' labor and time. The possibilities of returning to an in-person conference next year will hopefully animate our energy and commitment to social justice planning.

THE LOCAL ROLE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE PLANNING

Maria's Story (2020 CCCC annual convention local arrangements Committee chair)

In the spring of 2019, I received an email from Julie Lindquist asking if I would be willing to serve as the Local Arrangements Committee (LAC) chair for the 2020 Milwaukee convention. As a past graduate student of Julie's and a "born and raised" Milwaukeean who was about to take a new job at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, I was honored to be thought of but admittedly knew very little about the responsibilities and expectations of the position. In need of more clarity before I could agree to such a heavy service commitment, especially as a pretenure faculty member, I turned to the *Local Arrangements Guide*, which serves as the handbook documenting the expectations of the LAC.² The guide stated that the primary responsibility of serving as the LAC chair would be "to see that the Local Committee operates smoothly." A bit vague, I thought to myself, but all in all doable. In fact, I thought the role might even allow me the opportunity to connect with others in my department and at other local universities, as I would be partially responsible for recruiting convention volunteers. With that rationale, I presented the service opportunity to my future department chair, and with his go-ahead, accepted the position.

Soon, I found myself with a slew of email updates and Zoom meeting requests. The work ranged in topic and in duration of time/labor required. For instance, there was an all-day accessibility audit of the convention site, the two adjacent hotels, and auditorium to more minor work researching local musical acts to perform at Julie's Friday-night food-truck event. These two examples illustrate the scope and range of conversations I suddenly found myself navigating. What made these experiences significant, and why I share them in this piece, is that the *LAC Guide* indicated that this work, while demanding, would be largely administrative. Yet, in the actual engagement with this work, there were moments for invention and reimaging the potential impact this convention

could cultivate. In other words, I found myself—a relatively newly minted PhD faculty member—with a lot of responsibility but also a lot of power to rethink the CCCC convention experience. With that realization, I came to believe that the LAC chair, while responsible for day-of-convention support, is also a unique national service opportunity whereby one can reshape a convention experience to amplify the assets of the host city while also grappling with the real social injustices the city endures. It is that balance I believe respectfully speaks back to the Kansas City decision and the need to always understand and be responsive to where and how CCCC members gather.

Much of this belief about how LAC should function as a support network for facilitating more community-engaged and social justice experiences at the convention emerged through my work with SJAC as the LAC chair. Prior to accepting the LAC position, I had minimal working knowledge about SJAC as a committee. This changed, however, when I received an email in the summer of 2019 from Michael Pemberton welcoming me as his adjacent SJAC cochair. A bit confused, I emailed Julie and Kristen at NCTE to inquire more about Michael's email, and they explained to me how the LAC chairperson automatically serves as the co-chair supporting SJAC. With that context established, I replied to Michael, and our working relationship ensued. Following our initial meeting, Michael and I met several times both individually and with the greater SJAC membership to support the role and local needs of SJAC for the Milwaukee convention. As the LAC chair, I found myself in a position in which my local knowledge of Milwaukee could become an asset to other SJAC committee members looking to develop conference programming opportunities to highlight social justice issues pertinent to Milwaukee. Additionally, as someone who already had a close relationship with Julie, I often became a metaphorical translator between SJAC planning and broader conference planning. My position soon evolved from the vague description of ensuring the conference *runs smoothly* to a more *concrete, purposeful, justice-oriented* role ensuring the 2020 CCCC convention embraced a teacher-scholar approach to conference planning.

A teacher-scholar approach to antiracist conference planning embraces the four principles outlined in Vershawn's video. These four principles are (1) listening to different groups; (2) cultivating cultural awareness and inclusivity; (3) being attuned to the continual threats of white supremacy; and (4) a need for explicit attention to intersectional diversity, equity, and inclusion work as a collective set of principles to inform conference planning that embraces a more radically welcoming and culturally responsive experience at conferences (see Vershawn Ashanti Young's video performance embedded in this article). It is by adopting the four principles of Vershawn's framework that the labor of the Local Arrangements Committee chair shifts from a local coordinator

² We would like to note that after making transparent some of the challenges and disconnects related to LAC work, CCCCs created an LAC Task Force, which has since revised the handbook to better address these concerns.

tasked with conference planning to a broader justice-oriented role whereby antiracist beliefs are enacted in the practices that guide the organizing, planning, and ultimately the experiences of conference attendees.

In the case of Milwaukee, approaching the planning of the conference through a social justice and antiracist framework³ was made possible due to my prior relationship with Julie. Having worked with Julie before as a graduate student, I had a more nuanced understanding of her vision and approach to the conference. Additionally, the lines of communication were more available between us, which allowed for more collaborative and innovative planning to foster opportunities for diversity, inclusivity, and equity. Further, Julie's convention theme that year offered a useful thread for weaving each seemingly separate identity closer together. The conference theme, common place, allowed for the conference planners—Julie, SJAC, and LAC—to consider where, when, and why we come together, the moments of overlap and shared interest. Such a theme resonated for a city like Milwaukee where racial, socioeconomic, and ideological divides are rather visible when one moves through the city. Aptly, Julie recognized the complex history of Milwaukee and its relationship with its citizens, writing in the 2020 CCCC program:

That we come together this year to work toward social justice and inclusivity here, in Milwaukee, gives the work a very special, situated meaning. Our common place for 2020 has its own set of commonplaces: Milwaukee is known as a place of distinctive neighborhoods, fierce community, and summer festivals. . . . But Milwaukeeans also know what lives beyond these commonplaces: they know that Milwaukee is also a place of segregation, poverty, and precarity. Its poverty rate is 29 percent, almost three times the rate for the state of Wisconsin, and almost double the national average. Over forty percent of its children live in poverty. . . . It is a place with a history of colonial displacement of Indigenous peoples: the land now known as Milwaukee County has, at one time or another, belonged to a great number of diverse tribal nations. . . . For the purposes of thinking about how our work as educators is, at heart, about access and inclusivity, Milwaukee is a meaningful location.

Her reflections served as an invitation for conference attendees to consider how their work aligns with the many social justice issues present in a host city like Milwaukee. To help foster these connections, Michael and I worked closely with other SJAC members to strategically centralize social justice as a core experience at the conference rather than an experience that could be described as "in addition to" or even "optional." Centralizing social justice throughout the conference, the two of us believed, was vital to

avoid any practices that might tokenize marginalized community experiences and is anchored in the concept of reciprocity.

My use of *reciprocity* is informed by Dawn Opel and Donnie Sackey's definition, which can be found in their 2019 guest editorship of the *Community Literacy Journal*. They explain that reciprocity informs (1) "how we define and categorize oppression before we enter communities;" (2) "how we gain access to the lives of people outside of universities;" (3) how we represent "community partners in the interpretation of data and in how we tell stories that are not our own;" and (4) "an emphasis on scholarly activism, or commitment to effectuating change" (1). I find their definition valuable, as it can guide how conference organizers incorporate local community knowledge and centralize social justice within conferences. Further, Opel and Sackey's definition of reciprocity suggests it is a practice that requires time, trust, and reflection. Additionally, I would add that reciprocity is a practice that often occurs as a result of much invisible labor.

In this vein, I pivot to recount my attempts to develop reciprocal relationships with community partners so conferencegoers might experience a greater understanding of the complex social justice issues plaguing Milwaukee (and ultimately join in solidarity with them to take action). My labor in practicing reciprocity while conference planning asked me to engage in the following actions:

1. I acknowledged and continually reflected on my own privileged positionality as a white, cisgender tenure-track academic doing this labor.
2. I networked with my colleagues and other community-engaged scholars in the area to identify community activists working on issues of literacy, equity, and storytelling in Milwaukee.
3. Such networking allowed me to slowly develop relationships with community leaders by inviting them out to coffee to get to know them and their work first, NOT to tell them what I wanted them to do for me or for CCCC. Often this required a series of coffee meetings to slowly introduce the idea of conference participation.
4. If at those coffee meetings, community leaders seemed interested in participating in the conference, I listened to see what they expected and wanted from their participation. This meant getting feedback about compensation, access to resources, access to the conference itself, promotion on the LAC website, and the ability to network with other community organizations participating at the conference.
5. I circulated the knowledge I was receiving from the community leaders back to other conference-planning networks (the convention program chair, SJAC, LAC,

³ We want to acknowledge that a social justice and antiracist framework is one that actively engages with and seeks to dismantle settler-colonialist practices by engaging with Indigenous theory and knowledges. This work has already been eloquently written about by Andrea Riley-Mukavetz and Cindy Tekobbe (2022).

NCTE/CCCC, caucuses) to see how we could have the conference meet/support community-organization needs. In many ways, my job was to serve as a liaison between community organizations and CCCC.

6. I had more coffee with community organizations to report back on what CCCC could or could not do. This often led to decision making on whether a community organization would be participating or not.

Engaging with community partners in this way resulted in the planning of a series of community-centered events for CCCC in Milwaukee. These events included:

- Indigenous vendors local to the Milwaukee area in addition to an exhibit featuring the violent history of Indigenous erasure in Milwaukee;
- An SJAC roundtable discussion about Matthew Desmond's book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in an American City*, which centers on Milwaukee, with the participation of several Milwaukee-based activists addressing the issue of housing (Donte McFadden, co-programmer, Black Lens at the Milwaukee Film Festival; Katherine Wilson, executive director, Frank Zeidler Center for Public Discussion; and Keith Stanley, executive director, Near West Side Partners). The session was aimed at attendees who have used or will use Desmond's text in university common-reading programs, as well as at *all* attendees committed to community-engaged teaching and learning;
- The opportunity to see Milwaukee beyond the convention site and engage with social justice in a more hands-on format. This event was touted as the "Locally-Operated Bus Tours of Milwaukee Neighborhoods," arranged with the help of Adam Carr, deputy editor for Community Engagement at Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service. The tours offered a more local experience about the history and institutions of Milwaukee's Black and Latinx communities and neighborhoods. The \$35 fee for the tour was intended to compensate the community organizations and activists featured on the tour;
- A Friday-night social event featuring Milwaukee food, music, and poetry. Billed by Julie as the "Big Truckin' Food Fair," the intention was to provide convention goers a flavor of Milwaukee's celebration of cultural festivals and compensate many of those leaders, including local Black sister music duo Sista Strings, former Milwaukee Poet Laureate Dasha Kelly Hamilton, and a series of minority-owned food-truck vendors.

Shortly after these events had been confirmed and many contracts were signed, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, forcing a series of difficult decisions. Should CCCC 2020 in Milwaukee continue to take place? Should it be canceled? At this time, there were multiple unknowns about the real threat of the virus, which made decision making difficult. Fortunately, for the health of many, the conference

was canceled. Nonetheless, its cancellation also ushered in a series of challenges concerning social justice conference planning—many of which CCCC leadership continues to grapple with today.

ENDURING CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAMMING

Our collective stories, woven together in this piece, emphasize the necessity of centering social justice and community engagement at annual academic conferences, and we show how we, on behalf of SJAC and LAC, have attempted to make social justice programming a meaningful contribution to the experiences of scholars and teachers and community activists at the CCCC annual convention. Although we have noted the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted our labor and time and brought on new challenges for doing similar work in hybrid and online-only modalities, we recognize the last two years have been unprecedented, a once-in-a-hundred-year event that may not happen again. In other words, we do not wish to let the COVID-19 pandemic cloud challenges that are ongoing and central and that do not happen once every hundred years, but rather happen every year when we gather to lead social justice programming. In this section, we describe four challenges that can disrupt social justice programming at academic conferences—funding, unaccounted/underappreciated/invisible labor, sustainability, and the ethics of incorporating community voices—and the ways we have tried to meet those challenges directly. We realize there are other challenges that limit the integration of social justice initiatives at conferences, but we focus on these four specifically as each was present in the various roles we occupied while conference planning.

Funding

Leading social justice programming at academic conferences requires funding. In addition to purchasing necessary items and reserving food for events, funding ensures local artists, poets, and activists are compensated for their labor and time. Too often local community members are underpaid or exploited for their labor, even though conference attendees benefit significantly from these collaborators' contributions. A funding model that requires an application request each year can undermine efforts of equity and fairness for these community members. Compensation is contingent on approval of funding and properly processing paperwork so local collaborators are paid on time. When requesting assistance from local collaborators, the subcommittee should give as much information as possible during the early planning stages, which includes the exact amount of compensation the subcommittee can offer. Conference leadership should account early and often for necessary funding requests to support social justice initiatives. Additionally, appropriate forms of funding should be regularly discussed and reflected upon. For instance, some conferences may compensate community members for their time/knowledge/labor by "comping" their conference registration. However, not all

community members feel welcomed or have an interest in attending the full conference, especially an academic conference, so such compensation has little value to them. Collectively, there is a need for more transparency around appropriate forms and approval processes, as well as an appropriate amount of funding for each community member's service to the program.

Unaccounted/Underappreciated/Invisible Labor

Funding is often an attempt to address the unaccounted, underappreciated, and invisible labor necessary to facilitate a community-engaged, social justice set of experiences at local conferences. Maria's list of formal and informal meetings and other liaison activities makes visible the often *invisible* moments not accounted for on CVs or compensated with an appropriate stipend. For her, this work is simply compiled under the litany of responsibilities in her role as the Local Arrangements Committee chair for CCCC. This year, Antonio has stepped into the new role of cochair for SJAC, and although Antonio has been a member of SJAC since the beginning, the role poses familiar and new challenges, such as recruiting new members to join the committee to ensure SJAC remains a sustainable and permanent part of CCCC and conveying the many needs of subcommittee members to the executive committee and program chairs.

Volunteer labor to support and sustain conferences extends well beyond appointed service positions like LAC and SJAC. To enact social justice experiences that reflect issues relevant to the conference's host city, local community members must be engaged, active participants throughout the planning process. The need to build trust between community members and academic spaces is an imperative in this work. A danger in this work, however, is failure to address the precarious positions these bodies occupy. There are far too many examples of academic misuse of community knowledge: Community partnerships can exacerbate existing problems rather than benefit community members, taking their knowledge without reciprocating similar knowledge sharing and treating community members as "having problems" that only White savior academics can fix (Cushman, 1996; Flower, 2008). How we ensure community members not only feel safe but also appreciated for their time, knowledge, and labor are true challenges for social justice organizers at academic conferences. Funding community members through honorariums and stipends only goes so far. How do we move beyond paying for community knowledge to *investing* in community issues?

One potential answer to this question is to develop a standing committee locally based near or in the host city, which can offer labor, support, and resources (at no charge) for community organizations

that align with the greater vision of conference organization.⁴ Take CCCC as an example. During the planning of a CCCC convention, the Social Justice at the Convention (SJAC) liaison chair⁵ could be tasked with developing a standing committee composed of local scholar-teacher-activists who could meet regularly with the selected community organizations to collaboratively listen, reflect, and identify a literacy and/or writing challenge each organization faces. After the convention takes place in that host city, this standing committee could continue to meet with each organization and compose a report to CCCC leadership outlining the challenges each community organization currently faces. This report could then be used to strategize other resources CCCC members could provide as potential solutions to the community's challenges. The following year, CCCC could highlight the community leaders and members of the standing committee by featuring these participants on a panel, whereby conference attendees could learn of the successes and limitations of this year-long investment, as well as identify future action and resources needed. Ultimately, a goal for this work would be for the standing committee to retain its relationships with the community organizations and continue to serve as a resource supporting their work. Over the years, then, and as the convention travels, CCCC could feature panels that discuss the ebbs, flows, and lessons learned in sustaining local community investments, with participants sharing how these relationships have evolved over years and how these lessons can inform other community-building work within other host cities. Such a plan would nonetheless encounter challenges; however, this offers one response that is relatively cost free and reasserts a convention's commitment to community work by allocating resources and time—even when conference attendees are no longer physically gathered in that community.

Sustainability

Successfully sustaining initiatives that promote and support social justice work remains a challenge when conference planning. Building conference infrastructures that sustain social justice work requires time, money, and on-the-ground community engagement/labor. This is often well beyond the scope of a three- or four-day academic conference, as Michael and Antonio note earlier. Further complicating this work is conference-planning turnover. Personnel and locations change from year to year, and documentation of prior conference planning that could be useful to subsequent conference organizers is a rare commodity. Building a social justice conference infrastructure should avoid reinventing the wheel and should incorporate mentorship between former and current social justice conference organizers. By doing so, precedents could be set regarding standard funding protocols and the ability to share lessons learned, assessing what works well and what does not

4 Standings committees could be formed in each host city in order to increase the local commitments of a CCCC conference. In this way, as the conference moves locations, local support and infrastructure from CCCC becomes established. Ideally, the conference could return to the host city after a few years and report on the successes and limitations of sustaining local support through the standing committee.

5 This chair is a part of the Local Arrangements Committee and works as a liaison supporting local arrangements work and SJAC.

work well as conferences shift locations and highlight new community issues. (We note in this regard that the International Writing Across the Curriculum (IWAC) conference has developed and regularly updates a conference planning manual that is passed to each new conference chair in succession.)

The Ethics of Incorporating Community Voices

The cancellation of the Milwaukee convention meant there were no opportunities to compensate many of the community organizers who had already given much of their time, labor, and knowledge to preconference preparations. Nor was there an opportunity to showcase any of the community voices nor provide ways for convention goers to further sponsor their work. For those who worked to develop relationships and trust with community organizers, particularly those who served on SJAC and other LAC volunteers, the abrupt cancellation of the conference left a real sense of uneasiness given the time, energy, and labor community members had already provided in advance of the convention. Such a reality invites critical questioning into the ethics of incorporating community voices when planning/designing conferences to have a social justice, community-based experience. While we still believe in the importance of valuing and incorporating community voices, to engage in this work without critical inquiry and without considering “the need to listen to community members—especially about the potential *problems* with community engagement” (Shah, 2020, p. 7) is risky and could further perpetuate harm on community members.

Therefore, in conference planning work, we suggest all those involved critically reflect and discuss this question: What is the intention of including community voices and perspectives? This question includes considering why community members would even share their knowledge and/or resources with conference attendees. By listening to community members and why they are willing to share their time and knowledge with us, we may deepen our understanding of that community and realize ways by which we collectively support each other. When we listen, we may realize some of the hesitation community members have in sharing their knowledge. For example, some may be hesitant to give away their knowledge and experience for free. Much of their ability to engage in social justice work may depend upon monetary resources. Conferences committed to social justice must build in budgets that adequately and fairly compensate community members for their contributions.

Additionally, if and when a community member/organization agrees to participate, their knowledge and perspectives should be invited into the planning and decision making of conference organizing *early* in the process. Their knowledge and networks of care may enrich or provide new perspectives on how academics view the purpose of the conference. Additionally, conference attendees should engage in ethical citation practices, citing not just the *scholar* referencing the community organization but the

community member as well. Recognizing how the presence of community members at conferences shapes knowledge must be acknowledged in a social justice conference framework.

MOVING FORWARD IN SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK

In her 2021 CCCC address, Julie Lindquist asked us to reflect on the following question: “*If we are living in a time characterized primarily by loss, how might the experience of that, and the lessons we can’t help but discover, deliver something like gains for the future? And: what is to be gained by understanding learning in terms of loss?*” To name our gains, we must first consider what was lost over the last three years: In Milwaukee (CCCC 2020), there was a loss of recognition for the labor we had put forward in conference planning, a loss amplified by the inability to carry out the spirit of reciprocity our conference planning had embraced. In Spokane (CCCC 2021), we lost the ability yet again to come together and gather as people drastically changed by the COVID-19 pandemic and year of racial unrest. And, in Chicago (CCCC 2022), we lost some sense of hope that we will be able to return to past conference experiences we considered “normal.” As we look forward to future gatherings, we see opportunities for reimagining what could be possible and how amplifying social justice can renew our disciplinary need for conferences.

To reimagine new possibilities of coming together, we must seriously take up questions that ask us to grapple with the continued precarity of in-person events. This includes asking, How do we sustain social justice work when facing such precarity? For instance, collectively, we noticed at the Spokane convention smaller attendance at events SJAC coordinated, and as a result, an even smaller list of people interested in joining SJAC to help organize events for the convention in Chicago (four people visited the virtual Action Hub; two of them agreed to join SJAC in fall 2021). Collectively, these losses invite new considerations about the infusion of social justice commitments at national conferences—whether they be in person, virtual, or hybrid.

Reflecting on these collective years of loss, we have no doubt gained new perspectives. In turn, they ask us to grapple with new, complicated questions, such as, How do we move towards a disciplinary commitment to incorporating, learning, and amplifying community voices? In doing so, how can we build infrastructures that promote ongoing engagement and reduce conference-planning approaches that integrate community struggles through a “Cook’s tour” point of view? Additionally, if we address these questions, what labor and talent is required of conference organizers to sustain our commitments to working in alliance with community members, even when we are no longer congregating in their city? Further, if we want to change conference identities to be more radically inclusive and welcoming to social justice initiatives, then we must rethink how we plan and invite participation at conferences. This may lead to larger, more fundamental questions, such as:

- How might we collectively evolve our disciplinary identity to integrate and support social justice work that sustains itself?
- How might we move beyond statements offered by disciplinary organizations, like the ELATE example, and move collectively towards knowledge-making practices that denounce racist ideologies and perpetuate social injustices?
- How might we remove power from senior scholars who perpetuate harm and use critique as violence against marginalized scholars in more precarious positions?
- How might we create a conference culture that holds each attendee accountable to antiracist and social justice commitments?

We understand the challenges posed to cultivating a social justice conference experience require time, labor, and commitments that aren't often visibly appreciated in tenure and promotion materials. This work, while slowly developing as a point of conversation (as evident with this special issue), remains largely invisible and often underappreciated. Our intention in sharing and reflecting on these experiences is to emphasize how social justice work—whether it relates to conference planning or community/disciplinary building—is never effectively performed in solitude. It requires ethical collaboration and reflective listening, which can lead to a realization that some practices will need to be revised or rethought. This is our call to you, readers who are committed to fulfilling the aims of social justice at our disciplinary conferences but more broadly as well in our teaching, research, and service: Be engaged. Be ethical. Be reflective. Be collaborative. Be listening.

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Appendix

This is a transcript for Vershawn Ashanti Young's videorecorded remarks. The video can be accessed on page 31.

VERSHAWN ASHANTI YOUNG: I want to begin by acknowledging the victory from yesterday's jury verdict that was rendered in the George Floyd murder trial of Derek Chauvin, who was convicted on all three charges. And as Black Lives Matter protesters and organizers have said, this is a reformation on the police reform, or on police brutality, and a reformation so that policing in America can be changed. It's not the end. It's just part of dismantling white supremacist ways of brutality and policing.

Now, my remarks will be centered on three big ideas about antiracist conference planning. The first organizing idea is my beliefs—or, you could say, my combined personal and professional beliefs—about antiracism in conference planning. And then, second, what I did as CCCC program chair, and following from that or folding in some of the things I did as the chair of CCCC, which I was last year and program chair the year before. And lastly, I want to reintroduce something that I introduced in my CCCC keynote about a week or two weeks ago, and that is Black Body acknowledgements, and how those can be used similarly to Native American and Indigenous land acknowledgments to be in the forefront of public speaking events.

So, first, my beliefs about antiracism and conference planning. I believe in some principles—I would say at least four principles—that a conference planner or programmer or committee can think about, at least four:

That there must be explicit attention given to equity, diversity, and inclusion. And I want to say what I mean by that—equity, diversity, and inclusion—because often, they are used as stock terms to sort of mean that diverse people are present.

I just think that diversity means not only that racial diversity is present, but intersectional diversity. So, and not just a white queer woman but a Black trans man, for instance. We have to have a wide spread of diversity and intersectional racialized diversity. But that's only one part. That's not really inclusion, and is not yet equity.

Equity means that those people are involved in decision-making practices and decision-making elements that are important to the conference. And that's what it means to sort of look at that through an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens. And those voices must be included. And those identities. So, that's one of the first principles.

The second principle is you gotta not only give attention to equity, diversity, and inclusion, but to its nemesis, I should say, to white supremacy. There's going to come a time when, hopefully, hopefully, at some point, we won't have to give attention to white

supremacy, because diversity will be the norm. But...but both are necessary: the equity, diversity, and inclusion framework and attention to the ways in which white supremacy continues to assert itself and to sometimes undergird, I'm sorry, not undergird, undercut, undercut those efforts. For instance, by appealing to the status quo on some decisions where something new needs to happen in order to be inclusive, but what gets in the way is the rules that allow for it, right, and appeal to the status quo instead of changing it when the status quo was developed and decided by under many times white supremacist ideologies.

And then, I believe you have to cultivate cultural inclusiveness and awareness. Like it has to be, you know, explicitly gestured towards, and created. And, to me, that means listening to different groups. So, those are the four principles: listening to different groups, cultivating cultural awareness and inclusiveness, being aware of white supremacy, and organizing the conference on equity, diversity, and an inclusive framework.

So briefly how I did that at the CCCC conference, I tried to model some of this by having frequent conversations with antiracist allies about the conference and how it needed to pursue antiracist means. So, listening to those voices and always promoting or placing diversity and people of color at the center. So in the iconography, the images, everything about the conference was situated in Blackness and also in cultural awareness, so I created signage throughout the conference to show what the values were telling the different caucuses, the Latinx caucus, the Asian American caucus, the Native American caucus, these different caucuses that we see them and that we hear them, and making sure that other people knew that that was a value as well. So that's why that signage was throughout the conference setting and also in the program in order to promote that, at least, on that level of cultural awareness.

Then as- further as my role as chair, one of the responsibilities is to create a taskforce or committees and give them charges. And so, I continued that work in antiracist understanding by creating a taskforce to assess NCTE and CCCC for whiteness and white supremacy, white privilege, created a committee to assess NCTE and CCCC on its involvement on people of color and particularly in leadership roles and struck other committees, also led the, I'm sorry, struck committees that produced those statements in relation to the Black Lives protests from last summer.

So, in summary, or in lieu of a summary, I want to offer my commitment, which is in the form of what I call Black Body Acknowledgements, which are modeled after the territory acknowledgements, otherwise known as Indigenous and Native People Land Acknowledgments. And of course we know these are often delivered before public events happening in an institutional structure built on land originally belonging to Native peoples in Canada and the U.S., at the least, and that people would violently seize. But these land acknowledgments don't often go far enough when

people make them, in my opinion. Because they acknowledge the land but not the rights of the people who owned the land or there's no common sense commitment for, to intervene into the longstanding consequences, for instance at the University of Waterloo we have a land acknowledgment on our web page, but we don't have an Indigenous Studies major or offer Indigenous Studies scholarships or anything that intervenes into the consequences. So, I think that it's almost words without action. But my commitment is to offer the Black Body Acknowledgement, particularly so that we don't forget the victory that we got yesterday in the conviction of Derek Chauvin in the murder of George Floyd and other Black bodies that have ensued after that. And so, I was born and raised in the U.S., but I currently live and teach in Ontario, Canada. My spirit and breath activate a Black male body that is part of a race that is disproportionately maligned, surveilled, policed and jailed.

I often can't breathe as Black men Eric Garner and George Floyd said respectively on July 17th, 2014, and May 25th, 2020, before their lives were snuffed out by excessive police brutality. I make a commitment here today within the scope of this presentation to make white supremacist capitalist patriarchy subordinate to anti-racist aims and to pursue that through love as Black feminist bell hooks puts it. That ideology of love is to oppose oppression in all its forms.

I do this first and foremost today, or have done this, by sharing personal beliefs about antiracism and conference planning, identifying the ways in which I have pursued those aims and goals in making a commitment here to support others as they do so as well. Ashe.