

ACE RADIO PROJECT: LIVING AS CITIZENS
AmCon 202 Final Civic Engagement Project
Spring 2013 / Rohn and Fure-Slocum

Overview

Now that you are in your last semester of American Conversations and have considerable experience with academic civic engagement (ACE) projects, you are well-prepared to examine the practices, impact, and prospect of civic engagement from the perspective of your current home. For your ACE project this semester, you will tell the story of St. Olaf students' lives as citizens.

In order to find a story for your radio project, think broadly at first. Consider especially the many ways in which St. Olaf students engage with the surrounding community or with one another in the public or civic realms. ACE classes, organized groups pitching in locally (ongoing programs or one-time events), or collections of individuals finding their way as volunteers to various Northfield institutions are just some of the venues for civic and public engagement. Pay attention to various initiatives stemming from the Piper Center, the Volunteer Network, or interest houses. But others civic and public activities might be organized informally or come from unexpected places. In order to expand your thinking about the St. Olaf community, you might use Robert Putnam as a guide. Just as he takes an expansive view of American society to chart a history of engagement and "social capital" in the post-World War II America, be creative in your exploration of the St. Olaf landscape and the varieties of public and civic engagement.

A few quick caveats as you begin. First, we encourage you to pay attention to your fellow students in this endeavor. But a few of you might decide to focus on staff or faculty on campus. Or you might look at the campus across town. Second, you might also be drawn to the challenge of focusing on the lack or absence of citizenship, in some respect. These other options are open and hold some promise, but let's talk about the potential challenges involved before you make a commitment. Finally, this is not intended as a cheerleader exercise for the college. For the most part, you should be telling interesting and significant stories. Note and celebrate what is good. But do not shy away from reporting on what falls short, offering your criticisms, or suggesting what might be made better.

Citizenship and Civic Engagement

Here, as in previous discussions, we are thinking not just about the legal and bureaucratic boundaries of citizenship, although those are important. We are contemplating a more capacious idea of citizenship that focuses on people's speech, actions, and lives in a larger public or civic arena. Robert Putnam and Tocqueville are guides for this more expansive notion of citizenship. You might be a citizen of the U.S. or of another country, but you also probably consider yourself to be a citizen of a particular community (or set of communities). You might tie this sense of citizenship to your membership or participation in particular institutions or associations (e.g. a particular school district; a church, synagogue, or mosque; a college or vocational school; a bowling team, motorcycle gang, or the St. Olaf band—or maybe all three). While some of the examples mentioned might point to issues pertinent to legal citizenship, many of them indicate how people position themselves relative to a sense of citizenship (inclusion, rights, duties, etc.) in specific communities, associations, and institutions. This project asks us to look closely at a

particular setting and see the many ways in which students or others live as citizens. Think creatively and complexly about the many ways in which people act or encounter one another civic and public arenas as you search out a story.

As we launch this project, let's return to the quote from Michael Schudson that kicked off our civic engagement work back in the fall of 2011. In *The Good Citizen*, Schudson asks: "What kind of citizenship, of the kinds that may be possible, do we want to strive for?" This is a question that calls us to understand and be engaged with the world in which we live. At the same time, this question requires that we both imagine "the world as it ought to be" and start figuring out how we can get there. In this project, then, you will be descriptive and analytic in your stories about the ways in which your fellow students are engaged and creating (or not) lives as citizens. You also can be prescriptive, if you would like. What should students and this institution keep doing or do differently? What should they strive for in either the near or distant future?

Radio Journalism

You will tell your stories about living as citizens in a way that can engage a wider audience. You will present your stories, analysis, and/or commentary as a radio segment. In their final form, the radio segments could be presented in a few different ways. At the very least, they will be played at the ACE Showcase and the collected together on "AmCon Radio," courtesy of the Piper Center's web site (we also should make a link to the AmCon web site). In our conversations about this during the semester, let's think of other possibilities for all or the strongest of the radio pieces. Could they be offered up for airing on the college radio station, or the Northfield radio station (KYMN), or online radio? For those who are especially ambitious and produce an exceptionally high-quality segment, you might pitch the piece to a national outlet such as Transom (see below) or Minnesota Public Radio. Yes, anything accepted for statewide or national airing gets an "A."

Throughout the semester we will listen to and examine examples of radio journalism and short documentaries (including segments from the NPR show "This American Life"). Although these examples will differ widely in topic and length, they will help you to think about effective technique and presentation. We will talk later about the recording and editing equipment you need for this project, as well as seek out people who can provide technical assistance. We also will try to invite a working radio journalist/documentarian to visit and provide instruction.

The Process and Final Radio Piece

The development of your radio piece will involve a number of steps:

- Form groups (self-formed, groups of about 3)
- Keep a running log of your ideas, worries, and actions taken on this project
(*Consider how best to share this among the members of your group, while also having a document you can hand in to Matt and Eric*)
- Pitch a proposal by March 20
- Draft script—due April 12
- Begin recording radio piece; interviews

- Final script—due May 3
- Continue recording & editing radio piece
- Hand in and present radio pieces at ACE Showcase—May 9

Your final radio stories should be substantial journalistic pieces that are engaging and well organized. Although the length of the segments will vary, depending on your material and size of your group, your final radio piece should be in the neighborhood of seven to ten minutes long. In addition to the recorded radio essay, you are encouraged to include one or two visuals (e.g. photographs, drawings, or maps) that can be used to accompany your story of a web site. But you will of course need to rely on words alone for your radio piece. During this process, consider the blend of narration, interviews, music, and other sounds that will help you to best convey your story and make for an engaging radio presentation. We will talk about the sticky issue of releases and permissions as you are working on these pieces.

The overall ACE project is worth **20 percent** of your final grade. The grading is broken down as follows: draft script (5 percent); final script (5 percent); final radio piece (10 percent). Your pitch is not formally graded, but you will receive ample feedback during this crucial step.

Initial Resources

This American Life, Chicago Public Radio:

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/>

You will find many examples of creative radio essays on this site.

Ira Glass (This American Life host) on story-telling:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loxJ3FtCJJA>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KW6x7IOIsPE&feature=relmfu>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BI23U7U2aUY&feature=relmfu>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baCJFAGEuJM&feature=relmfu>

Four segments in which Glass talks about the building blocks of broadcast story-telling.

Transom.org, “A Showcase and Workshop for New Public Radio”

<http://transom.org/>

“Transom.org is an experiment in channeling new work and voices to public radio through the Internet, for discussing that work, and encouraging more.” See this site for examples and advice about how to put together a radio segment. See the “Tools” link and click on “Beginnings . . .”

Minnesota Public Radio

<http://minnesota.publicradio.org/>

American Radio Works, American Public Media

<http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/index.html>

A source for first-rate radio documentaries

Sample pitches to “The American Life”

<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/about/submissions/sample-pitches>

Pitches that Work – discussion and samples

<http://www.airmedia.org/PageInfo.php?PageID=236>

10 Steps to Pitching Radio (see especially points 2 and 3):

<http://blog.waxmarketing.com/2009/06/01/10-steps-to-pitching-radio/>

Editing: “Cultivating the Editor in Your Brain”

<http://transom.org/?p=15918>

Other resources will be placed on reserve in the library.

Timeline

- **Feb. 18** – Introduce the ACE radio project
- **March 1** – Let us know if you have formed a group or would like to be placed in a group.
- **March 4** – Short in-class session on pitching a story.
- **March 20** – Radio piece pitches due
 - What do you intend to tell us? What question does your story address? Why does it matter? What are the main elements of your story? Who do you need to talk to and/or interview? What other exploration or research will this entail?
- **After spring break**, begin putting together the draft of your story. Conduct preliminary discussions with interviewees and tentatively schedule your interviews.
- **April 5** – Brief in-class session on interviewing
- **April 8** – Work day for ACE Projects
- **April 12** – Drafts of scripts due
- **May 3** – Final scripts due; Radio Project workday
- **May 9, 11:30am-12:30pm** – ACE Showcase: radio pieces due and ready for presentation
- **May 20, 9:00-11:00am** – Final exam period at Eric's house; listen to radio pieces