



Reflections

Spring Semester 2023



*Fatumo Hussien and Lucy Smith
at 2023 Engaged Learning Celebration*

Engaged Learning Celebration by Lucy Smith

Once again, a community-engaged learning (CEL) English class student earned a scholarship for their service efforts! Fatumo Hussien enrolled in Jason Roberts' ENGL 1010 and 2010 classes and participated in excellent CEL projects. Fatumo is from Somalia, Africa, and speaks native Somali. Fatumo spent approximately 20 years in a refugee camp before she came to the United States. Because of her multilingual abilities, she played a crucial role in supporting her community through interpreting services. Fatumo spoke with parents and translated important information about their children's progress in school and successfully navigating parent/teacher conferences. Fatumo felt that being an interpreter helped her understand concepts in her English classes. Interpreting helped her with her English skills, including speaking, comprehension, and presenting. Fatumo enjoyed participating in service as a part of her coursework and felt it enhanced her academic career. The service also helped her community and provided positive role modeling for her daughters.

Fatumo spoke about her experiences at the Engaged Learning Celebration and the Development Department's scholarship luncheon. She is excited to work toward her degree in Nursing. You can learn more about her from her ePortfolio: https://slcc.digication.com/fatumos-portfolio/about_me. Congratulation Fatumo!



About Reflections

Reflections is a newsletter for and about community engaged learning published twice a year by the SLCC ELWS Department. We welcome submissions on student experiences, faculty perspectives, pedagogical insights, community partner engagement, civic involvement, staff profiles, and upcoming events. Send photos, events, posters, or articles to: elisa.stone@slcc.edu

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Volunteering at Under the Umbrella Bookstore by Meghan Harding

I didn't 'come out of the closet' until I was comfortably into my adult life and surrounded by supportive and loving friends who could give less of a crap about my sexual orientation (particularly compared to the environments of my teenage years). Coming out, especially to myself, took the addressing of a lot of internalized homophobia, sexism, etc. etc. etc. This was a loaded process, made all the more ironic by my self proclaimed "allyship" throughout my childhood. Due to that delayed timeline, one thing I've been severely lacking in is community. Taking Intro to Queer Studies introduced me to a lot, but the most important thing it provided me was a tantalizing taste of that community.

Looking forward to the safe space to express and explore myself, to chatting with the acquaintances who know and appreciate my authentic self, it was, in the time-old words of Aladdin, 'a whole new world'. For the first project, I was able to explore my bisexuality and collaborate with a fellow bi-identified classmate to produce a presentation on bi erasure. It was amazing to be able to work through the concept with someone else who was just excited about it as I was. As soon as I heard the possibility of doing a volunteer based project for the final, though, I knew it was exactly what I wanted to do.

The community that I developed within the class was eye opening and amazing, but sadly, temporary. I will be graduating at the end of summer semester, and I'm loathe to admit it, but I probably will not see much of the classmates I've grown to love after the class is over. For me, doing this service learning option had very personal and very important causes—this was a chance to find and establish a more permanent community support



Meghan Harding at Under the Umbrella Bookstore

system within my life. There are so many options to volunteer within the queer community in the Salt Lake Valley, but one that called to me most directly was the Under the Umbrella Bookstore. I've always been an avid bookworm (I'm also a writing studies major), and libraries have long been one of the places I've felt safest and most comfortable. With that in mind, I signed up for one of Under the Umbrella's volunteer orientations.

To be frank, I was terrified. My sister had told me about the shop in the past, and I've followed them on social media for months, but I really had little to no idea what I was getting myself into. Just kind of went for it! The

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book store that does a lot of community outreach—for the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as other communities in the Salt Lake Valley. One thing I really appreciated about the establishment was something I've seen reflected in a quotation by Lilla Watson displayed in the GSSRC: "If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." The philosophy that community is intersectional, that liberation is for everyone or for no one. One of the things that excited me the most was Under the Umbrella's outreach cart, full of supplies and such for anyone that needs it, always out front of the store. The store is right next to the Old Greektown trax station, and the outreach cart had been so successful that another group I hope to volunteer with in the future, Coconut Hut SLC, has started collabing with UTU to make sure the cart is always full up on supplies and such.

All that being said, I really had very little background knowledge and expectations for this experience. I've worked as a secretary and a custodian in the past, so all I knew was that I was willing to do whatever I could to be helpful and contribute, from scrubbing toilets to scrubbing excel files. Showing up for the initial volunteer orientation was extremely intimidating. I was surrounded by strangers, but thank the lord, they were so kind and welcoming. The environment was amazing. I worked with the volunteer coordinators to identify possible areas that I could help with, and set up a recurring shift for Saturday mornings.

My first few shifts were spent doing what I would call secretarial work. I assisted with sending out thank you cards and free books to regular Patreon store supporters. It was very awkward. I am extremely shy, and have some serious social anxiety—so I really just kept my head down and worked as hard as I could. It was so exciting to be in a space surrounded by the books and authors I'd spent all semester learning about in this class. Seeing Ann Bannon's pulp fiction novels on display, June Jordan's poetry, Foucault's novels. I was over the moon. For my third shift, there was a pop up queer market—it was amazing. Local creators peddling home made goods. I got some earrings and banana bread and did not shut up about it for the rest of the weekend. This shift really threw me headlong into the socialization side of things—I couldn't hide behind the front desk the whole time. I spent this shift keeping the store clean and asking if anyone needed assistance. Chatting with patrons and booth owners. I was starting to feel a sense of home within this space, and it was euphoric.

I had been a bit on the fence about the validity of my volunteer work in the beginning, as this is technically not a non profit. Is this volunteer experience truly valid if it's just for a store? After working a few shifts and listening, observing, etc, here is my final opinion. Yes, it's a little weird that the store is not technically a nonprofit, sure. But I absolutely do not care. This shop provides me, and I assume many many others, with a physical space of community, safety, and joy. A space that, importantly, allows and welcomes youth, too, as so many queer spaces are bars or are more adult in theme. Also, a sober space. Not one shift went by where someone (if not several someones) would come into the store from out of state, or from Southern Utah, and bee-line straight to the front desk to unleash profuse thank you's upon the staff. "Thank you for providing this space, thank you for the educational materials, thank you for starting this company, there is nothing like this where I'm from, I wish I could live in this place, I've never felt so validated, welcome, safe, anywhere else." Most touching to eavesdrop in on was a father & young daughter who came from a small town in Idaho. The father came in, bombastically announcing that his daughter was autistic and is pretty sure that she is asexual—but she wanted to read up on the subject and explore it further. Obviously, the daughter seemed a bit uncomfortable in the new space (and having her father enthusiastically broadcast her personal informations), but Kaitlyn, the store owner, made them comfortable and at home at once. "Oh boy," they exclaimed, "I'm a fully grown adult and still figuring out my identity—pretty sure we all are here." Sharing a warm smile, they walked the father and daughter over to the Asexual section of the store, sharing recommendations for books and authors that might be helpful. At one point, I heard the father say to the daughter, "Now, we can't get everything today—we have to have a reason to come back later!" And of course, on their way out—something you hear all too often in the store, "What I wouldn't give to have a place like this in our town. Thank you so much."

I can't begin to say how grateful I am for the opportunity to have this experience as part of this class. I've found my community. I hope to volunteer at this book store for years to come. There are so many things I have yet to explore, connections I have yet to make. I am the sole queer-identified person in my friend group, and I can't begin to say how wonderful it is to occupy a space where that is the norm, instead of a shining beacon of difference. A place where I can have my ideologies challenged and get

educated, instead of constantly bearing the weight of challenging and educating others—especially when I don't necessarily feel qualified to do so. I'm extremely excited to finish up my schooling at the end of summer and get even more involved—they have ARCs (advanced reader copies) of books that volunteers can read and review to earn the store some extra money. Once I'm not spending all my time reading textbooks, I will be able to lose myself in some queer made books—for free. I hope to get more involved with the outreach side of the store—tabling, event coordination. There are just so many possibilities.

Taking this class showed me the true joy and validation of becoming active in and part of a community. For someone that never went to church, never felt as though they 'fit in' in school, this was more addictive than a hard drug. I knew one thing for certain—I was completely unwilling to give this newfound community up. I am so grateful that my time volunteering for Under the Umbrella has given me a chance to continue that community curation after ending my degree. This was my first time volunteering somewhere that I actually wanted to be. A place that I felt at home. I feel that this is the beginning of a life journey for me, a different path than I would have been on otherwise. I want to continue volunteering, becoming more active in different communities, as this experience has helped me to solidify the knowledge and give meaning to the statement that my liberation is, in fact, tied up in everyone else's.

Bibliography: Bookstore, Under the Umbrella. <https://www.undertheumbrellabookstore.com/>. n.d. 24 March 2023.

Civically Engaged Community by Jason Roberts

I saw a new benefit for my civically engaged students this semester that I hadn't noticed before.

I always knew that community engagement has many benefits to students. Up until now I had always just focused on the individual benefits to each student. Those who engaged thoughtfully in their community gained experience, personal insights, a better understanding of others among other things. It was a benefit to the students individually, but as I watched my Civically Engaged English 2010 students give their final presentations, I was struck by the added benefit of their own community they had developed.

Since they had been working together on their writing and final projects, they all knew the work and effort that was spent and wanted them to succeed. There was such a sense of respect between all of the students. They listened attentively nodding encouragingly and applauded with genuine respect. There was even some lighthearted banter between students, but it was friendly and good natured. I have been in many classes where presentations were not engaging, and students weren't listening; they were just worried about doing their own. I was struck by how much my students actually wanted to share their experiences and triumphs, and how much the other students wanted to hear about them.

Secondly, I was pleasantly surprised to notice how their new sense of class community had made them more open minded. I always knew that engagement helped a person to broaden their perspective, but I realized now that it also extended to others engaged in different communities. My students were involved in a diverse range of experiences from international education, to abortion, from environmental impacts, to religion and that doesn't cover a small part of it. They also took stances that I knew contrasted the beliefs, lifestyles and perspectives of others in the class. However, when they presented they were not ridiculed, ignored, or dismissed. In an era of tribal cancelation where nobody wants to listen let alone tolerate a viewpoint in opposition to their own, it was inspiring to see students appreciate and accept their differences without hate or bigotry and simply allow for diverse opinions.

Finally, I noticed that this newfound community allowed them a safe space where they could risk without the inhibitions that they usually had. Students were willing to share deeply held and sensitive beliefs. Others spoke when they struggled with language and speech impediments. I had one shy student actually get up and give a controversial speech that she had prepared for a school board. Instead of the awkwardness usually associated with such activities, the students smiled even through mistakes knowing that the class was rooting for them.

I had always seen that civic engagement was good for the student. Now I see how wonderful it is for the class.

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It's Okay to Not be Okay by Taia Welch

This semester I decided to align myself with the National Alliance on Mental Illness in Utah. In my experience aligning with NAMI Utah, I learned many valuable resources to help people struggling with mental illnesses. I also learned from them that help is a lot more available than one might think and that there are many different kinds of help for someone to seek depending on what they want or what they're suffering from.

My experience with NAMI revealed a lot about my opinions on mental health. I hold many of the same values that my organization does, such as it being okay to ask for help even if things aren't "that bad." I also realized that I am very biased when it comes to the topic of mental health. Since I am a psychology major, mental health is something that I really value and prioritize and I believe that everyone should do the same. NAMI holds similar beliefs. I would say my opinions on the issue only grew stronger the more I worked throughout this semester, and the more I aligned myself with NAMI. As I continued to work and learn about this issue, I gained a greater understanding of how pressing and exigent this problem is in our everyday lives.

Working as a civically engaged student this semester has greatly impacted my writing. I have learned to be very critical when looking for resources or statistical information surrounding the topic to be sure that what I am reading isn't being clouded by biases or judgment. I would also say that my writing was impacted because I chose an issue that I could see in the community around me. Having this motivation helped me want to put my best work out and really try to make a difference on this issue through my works in various mediums.

Now, as a community, we need to be more open about our mental health and know when we need to ask for help. I think it would also be beneficial to have more information on where or how to get help more publicly accessible for people who don't know where to start. The last thing that I think we need to do is to work on destigmatizing mental illnesses because everyone struggles, and it's okay to not be okay, as long as you work on becoming okay again.

An Evening of Service By Elisa Stone

How can we help SLCC faculty become more involved in engaged learning? As an engaged department, English, Linguistics, & Writing Studies (ELWS) endorses community service as integral to learning at SLCC. Our Engaged Learning Committee decided to invite colleagues to participate in a semesterly community service project with us.

That is how a group of ELWS professors and students ended up at Catholic Community Services' St. Vincent de Paul Dining Hall on a Monday afternoon in mid-April. We'd signed up to serve an evening meal to people experiencing houselessness or food insecurity. I had always been drawn to this form of service, having spent several years volunteering with Legacy Initiative Homeless Pets Outreach, but I had never served a meal at a shelter. Donning mandatory hair nets immediately put most of us in a state of humility, where we remained throughout a transformative evening.

A long-standing community partner of our department, Catholic Community Services has been empowering people in need along the Wasatch Front to reach self-sufficiency since 1945. They offer an impressive range of programs and services, including a homeless resource center, a food bank, a 12-week culinary arts training program, assistance for new mothers, a mobile food pantry for students in Weber and Davis counties,

immigration assistance, refugee services, and the dining hall where we helped serve dinner.

Our shift commenced with cleaning duties as we swept, mopped, and sanitized the large, well-organized dining hall kitchen, transporting me back to my Dairy Queen job as a teenager, taking comfort in the old-familiar as I got acquainted with my fellow volunteers. We were on-shift with Desire Ramazani, an inspiring high school student completing 60 hours of volunteer service in preparation for a YouthLinc service trip to Thailand this coming June. Encouraging colleagues to donate to Ramazani's fundraising page was a benefit of our shared experience; my daughter had been a YouthLinc volunteer, too.

Serving the meal involved an assembly-line of volunteers coordinating each dish, along with one person to pass out meals (Lisa Packer), and one person on trash duty (yours truly). At first I felt a bit anxious about my trash duty situation—not because of the trash, but because I was assigned to stand alone in the dining room, apart from the other volunteers, who were behind a wall of tile and glass, and wait for diners to finish their meals so I could

take, empty, and stack their trays, cups, and utensils for them. I kept imagining that if I were in their shoes, I wouldn't want some volunteer standing there awkwardly while I ate. However, trash duty turned out to be the finest assignment of all, because not only did I get to help distribute meals with Lisa, but I also had the opportunity to look each person in the eye, smile, and



Preparing food at St. Vincent de Paul Dining Hall

tell them "Thank you" as they handed me their cups and trays. This simple exchange made me feel that our shared humanity was far more important than anything otherwise dividing us; I caught a glimpse of each individual's personality. Many were worried about wasting food; some insisted on helping me with my duties, and several were there with their dogs, whom I was overjoyed to meet—my beloved dog passed away six months ago. Something as simple as "thank you" can be a bridge between a person who lives in relative privilege, as I do, and a person who is probably weary of being invisible, ignored, feared, maligned, or seen solely as an object of pity. At the risk of sounding cliché, by the end of my shift I felt far more uplifted than I had in weeks. Reciprocity is a cornerstone of meaningful service; it's important to co-create camaraderie. Driving home to a house devoid of my dog, which had been depressing me, suddenly shifted—the privilege of driving at all, owning a car, having a house to return to, and food in my fridge to prepare my healthy dinner—gave me perspective. And now that I've seen my colleagues in hairnets, we've chipped away at some of the barriers academic culture imposes on us.

Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.

—Desmond Tutu



Tiffany Rousculp, Kati Lewis, Lisa Packer, Beatriz Ortiz, Jackson Burnett, Jason Roberts, Desire Ramazani, Elisa Stone, Ann Fillmore

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Volunteering with the English, Linguistics, & Writing Studies Department

Engaged ELWS faculty believe in cultivating strong reciprocal relationships with local community partner organizations, inviting them into our classrooms and course design processes just as they invite faculty and students into their community spaces. Meaningful service tied to learning balances the needs of students, faculty, and community partners, responding to the needs of both groups.

Many service-learning classes invite students to select their own community partner using SLCCGroups, which profiles hundreds of college-approved community partners and a wide array of service opportunities, both short- and long-term.

<https://slcc.campusgroups.com/>

Current faculty work closely with a number of local and international community partners including United Way of Salt Lake, Catholic Community Services, Junior Achievement, Volunteers of America, International Rescue Committee, Bruin Pantry, Tree Utah, Utah Pride Center, The Inn Between and more.

