

**Professional Assessment Statement
For Tenure and Promotion**

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The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead describes the fundamental structure of reality as *relational*. For Whitehead, nothing can be understood outside of its contexts and interactions with other things.¹ To exist, then, is to be implicated into *relational accountability*. At least within the scope of my life as a scholar, teacher, and member of the Rollins community this rings profoundly true and increasingly shapes how I understand these roles.

From this perspective of relational accountability, I see course structures and teaching strategies as ever evolving and centered on the work of *learners* as we together encounter theories and skills oriented to a world filled with both pain and promise.

Research and creative work also take place for me within this field of relational accountability. I study and make documentary because at its best it can reveal the most overlooked or discounted stories from our shared world. As with teaching, my filmmaking and other scholarship search for ways that media can structure meaningful encounters with aspects of our world that open space for generosity, peace, compassion and change.

And while my teaching, research, and service are constituted in relationships with students, colleagues, and contexts on the Rollins campus, they are also formed in relationship to a *global* context filled with injustice and need. From this perspective and in solidarity with the commitments of CMC as a department, I actively address issues of social injustice and structural inequality in the content and approach of my teaching, in the themes and methods of my scholarship and filmmaking, and in the perspectives and commitments that I bring to my service at Rollins and within the larger community.

Teaching

The CMC guidelines for tenure and promotion ask candidates to “demonstrate a record of excellent teaching at Rollins and a commitment to continuous improvement of courses and pedagogy.”

Quantitative responses on my course evaluations are generally strong, consistently 4 or higher with frequent scores at or near 5. Course observations by CMC colleagues and from my midcourse evaluation also describe effective teaching. I wholeheartedly embrace opportunities to teach in the Rollins general education program, and I actively seek out opportunities to think critically about pedagogy and improve my teaching skills. For example, I attended the June 2018 ACS Summer Teaching & Learning Workshop, and I am currently working on an rFLA Inclusivity Lesson Study Project with Rollins colleagues Drs. Nancy Chick, Emily Russell, Nolan Kline, and Amy McClure, which we hope to publish.

¹ Whitehead, A. N. (1929). *Process and reality*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

CIEs

When my teaching succeeds, students have a sense of their own role in learning and experience a relational connection to course topics and their own everyday experiences. This can be found in representative CIE comments: “What made this course a positive learning experience was everyone actively contributing to the discussions” (CMC 270, Spring 2018). Students comment that classes “taught me to be even more open minded and aware of the people around me” (CMC 270, Spring 2016). They also find there to be “interactive and thought provoking discussion on topics that are incredibly relevant to the world we currently live in” (CMC 250, Fall 2016). Said another student, “This course drew attention to pressing social issues and changed my entire perspective on media. The content was very relevant and highly interesting” (CMC 100, Fall 2017). Students in that Fall 2017 section of CMC 100 also note:

I was learning about real-world problems and being exposed to issues that I knew nothing about. That meant that almost every single thing was interesting and even empowering at times. Also, there was a lot of class collaboration and discussion, so I got to feel connected with my classmates and learn a lot from each and every one of them.

Dr. Schoen's strengths were that he is accepting of everyone and eager to hear every student's opinion. He is grateful for hard work and participation in class. He also challenges us and is always planning innovative class activities so we are always engaged.

While not every moment in every class – or every student comment – reflects these ideals, they are consistent themes across course evaluations from the broad range of courses I teach.

Course Adaptation

As *relationship* increasingly becomes a frame for the teaching I do, I am shifting from the idea of teaching as something I strive to *perfect* and toward thinking of teaching excellence as a never-finished, always-ongoing *process*. Even when courses succeed I am committed to systematic pedagogical reflection and an ongoing search for strategies to address shifting student needs and contexts. With each version of every class I incorporate new lessons, pedagogical strategies, course readings and media texts. I often adjust the roster of course topics, and sometimes course structure. (See the annotated course calendars for CMC 100 and RFLA 100H5 Digital Storytelling). I find that regular, thoughtful adaptation generally leads to better teaching and learning, but also involves challenges.

Course Adaptation – A Difficult Example

Last Fall (2018) I taught the third iteration of a documentary production course. After two runs as a topics course the class was approved in the Spring of 2018 as CMC 240.

I was excited to work with the Center for Leadership and Community Engagement and integrate a Community Engagement component for the first time and hoped that shifting

some course time from developing production skills to community engagement could help highlight important dimensions of documentary, especially collaboration, storytelling and work for justice. I was thrilled with the Fall 2018 documentaries (an example of this student work is included with my materials).

When I shared links for the films with the team at the CLCE and thanked them for their hugely important contribution to the films, they forwarded the links to Rollins president Grant Cornwell. Dr. Cornwell wrote, “This is impressive evidence of very good teaching and learning, completely aligned with our mission.”

The students’ culminating reflections about their documentary projects also indicated significant learning (reflection examples are also included with my materials). Yet course evaluations for this class are the lowest quantitative teaching scores I have ever received. For all categories, 3 of 5 answers were rated at 4 (very good) or 5 (excellent), but student comments show a great deal of frustration—at a level that I have never received before.

The timing of course evaluations meant that students had just received rigorous feedback (and, in some cases, quite low scores) on preliminary video drafts. CIEs also were completed in the midst of the most challenging and stress-filled phase of production: just prior to intensive one-on-one, in-person feedback sessions with me to go over films scene-by-scene. And CIEs were filled out before the final summative and integrative work of the course.

Nonetheless it is clear that some of the students experienced an unacceptable level of anxiety. Documentary production is stressful for new producers. With production class time given over to community engagement work the students needed more, better-timed interaction with me to build confidence. Built-in course feedback invited students to think through and seek help for problems with production and community partners, but I did not build in room for students to seek help managing their own anxiety about their production skills. I learned that I must think more multi-dimensionally about the impact of curricular changes and build in more venues for students to express frustration.

Teaching CMC Courses

To teach courses about media and culture is to teach about topics that students already know well. Students come to my courses with a vast array of prior experience and casual knowledge. And they will continue to engage media and culture the rest of their lives. My approach to learning design is based on these assumptions, and the focus of my teaching is to help students bring analytical (and in some cases production) skills to their own media experiences in ways they will also be able to apply in the future. I approach assigned readings and other learning resources as sets of tools: ideas and strategies that students begin to apply to their experience in reading notes and reflections and then use in classroom activities and discussions.

Where possible, I avoid textbooks and take an “open source” approach to readings, drawing on new resources from both academic and popular sources. Class activities are designed to

show students the complexity of media texts and systems, the analytical value and versatility of critical cultural theories and strategies, and the diversity of approaches and perspectives that are valuable for media studies. Further, class activities help students experience how media and culture can be challenged and reimagined as more just and humane.

I approach learning as fundamentally collaborative. Students bring their own media texts and experiences to my courses, and they see the course reading calendar change in response to our constantly evolving media environment. By adding materials from long-form journalism and other examples of intellectual media engagement I try to model for students a life-long-learning vision of media studies that is highly relevant to their own experiences.

This also means I work very hard to create a supportive environment where students feel safe to experiment with new ideas and share their experiences of media and culture. Because media and culture are so thoroughly enmeshed with identity formation students' experiences with media are often very personal.

I approach assessment (reading notes, reflections, projects, papers, presentations, class discussions, tests, etc.) as opportunities to engage and reinforce key concepts and skills. Assessment also enables me to gauge students' mastery of those concepts and skills, as well as the connections students make with their own personal interests. I am able to adapt course readings, activities, and discussions in response to interests and needs.

I seek to share with students a sense of learning as a shared engagement with the world that centers thoughtful, careful, open inquiry enmeshed with a humble hope that self-critical watching, listening, thinking and doing can make a positive difference in our own lives, in others' lives, and in the world. I want students to see the media they consume, the cultural forms they experience, the ideas and values they encounter, and the stories and contexts of their own lives as opportunities to foster peace and justice.

Research

A frame of relational accountability applies no less to my approach to scholarship than to teaching. My published work on documentary analyzes various ways documentary texts structure experiences for viewers that can open or foreclose the shared world of experience as an arena for social change. I see my scholarship in relationship to the scholarly disciplines I engage, but also to the values of the college and my department.

The CMC guidelines for tenure and promotion ask candidates for evidence of "consistent scholarly activity." The guidelines require a single-authored book or "three peer-reviewed academic works... OR two peer-reviewed academic works and one publicly-reviewed creative work."

Since coming to Rollins I have had three peer-reviewed academic articles published or accepted for publication, and one publicly reviewed creative work formally exhibited.

Peer Reviewed Publications

My scholarly publications seek ways to theorize the special capacities of documentary to function as a resource for social change. “*Blackfish-ing for Buzz: The Rhetoric of the Real in Theme Parks and Documentary*,” 2016, explores how the 2013 documentary *Blackfish* rhetorically incorporates a sense of its depictions as “real” in a way powerful enough to bring changes to SeaWorld. “Identity and Scene: Alterity and Authenticity in *Taxicab Confessions*,” 2017, continues to develop and theorize the sometimes problematic results of the particular rhetorical functions of documentary. My next article (in print), “*Into Great Silence: Presence, Absence and the Edge of Documentary*” examines the capacity of documentary to also convey extra-semantic, affective meanings that shape the particular rhetorical possibilities of documentary.

Academically Reviewed Creative Work (Documentary)

I have also directed, edited, and co-produced, with Dr. Carolyn Ellis, a 2016 documentary short, *Groaning From the Soul*. The film was an official selection of the National Communication Association Social Justice Film Festival, the Global Peace Film Festival (Orlando), the Miami Independent Film Festival, the Tampa Bay Underground Film Festival, and the Flagler Film Festival. *Groaning from the Soul* was also the subject of a special Ethnography Division panel at the November 2016 National Communication Association meeting in Philadelphia: “Ethics and Method in using Documentary to Represent Ethnographic Research: The Case of ‘Groaning from the Soul.’”

Other Scholarly Activity

My scholarship since coming to Rollins also includes manuscript review for academic journals and conferences, leadership for a division of the National Communication Association (the Kenneth Burke Society), and 7 completed academic conference presentations. I will present another paper at an international conference this fall in Ghent, Belgium, and I have several manuscript drafts, which I will continue to develop toward submission for publication during summers and hopefully over a sabbatical.

I have three notable collaborative scholarly projects in development with Rollins colleagues.

I am working with Drs. Lisa Tillmann and Kathryn Norsworthy on a book project preliminarily entitled: *Academic Activists: Transformations in the Classroom, on Campus, and in the Community*. My contributions to the book include chapters focusing on the incorporation of social justice perspectives and strategies in the classroom and strategies for activist community engagement on college campuses and within local communities.

I am working with Drs. Nancy Chick, Emily Russell, Nolan Kline, and Amy McClure on a Lesson Study Project focusing on student experiences of an rFLA inclusivity lesson in the contexts of different courses.

Finally, in 2021 I hope to Collaborate with Dr. Stacey Dunn on a documentary project that brings together scholarly research about compassion and shows the practical application of that research in the lives of diverse people. Dr. Dunn and I have proposed this film as a joint project during overlapping sabbaticals, and this sabbatical project has been approved contingent on my tenure and promotion.

Research Beyond Current Projects

My recent scholarly work has concentrated on bringing longstanding projects to publication. As my research and filmmaking progress, I see it beginning to narrow focus on one of the threads already running implicitly through much of my work. This thread is deeply implicated in contemporary documentary and news formats: the (often subtle) ways media rhetoric structures discourse about what is “real” and “true” in ways that are closely aligned with the rhetorical patterns of belief. My article about *Into Great Silence* contributes to scholarship theorizing how documentary conveys affective dimensions of belief, and my paper for a conference this fall will examine the way the 2017 documentary *Chasing Coral* mixes rhetorics of science and belief to advocate for environmental stewardship. These rhetorical patterns structure both problems and opportunities in using documentary as a resource for imagining and working toward peace and justice across diverse identities and cultures.

Service

Service too is rooted for me in a context of relational accountability. My role as part of the faculty of Rollins College brings with it a responsibility to work with my colleagues to structure an environment of mutual support rooted in the learning mission we facilitate with our students. But the context for my service extends beyond the college to our local community and the broad concerns of the world in which we live. In both my service to Rollins and to the wider circles of relationship and responsibility that extend beyond our campus, I strive to align my service commitments with the commitments of CMC to support projects that 1) help Rollins students and local community members with the hands-on use of electronic media for community improvement and justice, and 2) enhance and develop avenues for scholarly and theoretical work fostering the possibilities for justice and peace.

The CMC guidelines for tenure and promotion ask candidates to “show reliable and consistent commitment to service.” At the departmental level I remain fully engaged in the work of the department, including advising CMC majors, participating in honors project reviews, and ad hoc participation in the development of departmental materials. Examples of specific projects include participation in an external review, the development of a CMC minor and the revision of the CMC Major curriculum. Since coming to Rollins I have taken the lead in researching and purchasing CMC production equipment.

At the college level, my work as humanities division representative to the Curriculum Committee and membership on the New Course Subcommittee have given me a much deeper appreciation for the work of the college across departments and disciplines. I will be chair of the New Course Subcommittee for 2019-2020. My membership on the SWAG

Steering Committee keeps me focused on the work of the college to engage issues of justice around gender, sexuality and diversity. I remain engaged across campus with various media-related service (Student Media Advisory Board, Mills Renovation Media Team, and until recently I was faculty advisor for *The Independent*). And I seek opportunities to teach RCC, rFLA and Community Engagement courses.

My disciplinary service includes peer review for academic journals and several divisions of the National Communication Association, a 2014 presentation to an ASC conference on undergraduate research, and participation with the National Communication Association in various contexts such as reviewing for divisional awards, serving as panel respondent, and as secretary of the Kenneth Burke Society (2014-2018).

In terms of community involvement I participate actively in the Rollins Action Network, including serving as co-chairing a committee responding to efforts by the Florida State Legislature to pass legislation allowing the carrying of guns on campus. Since coming to Orlando I have been involved with the Global Peace Film Festival in various capacities, including spearheading a successful \$10,000 Thomas P. Johnson Grant in 2018. I support organizations involved in LGBTQ+ issues, women's health and mental health, and I hope to become more involved in these organizations as I integrate more fully into the Orlando community.

Conclusion

"Passion" and "enthusiasm" are among the most recurring themes in my CIE comments, and this truly reflects the deep enjoyment and fulfillment of my experience here. I hope I can continue to bring to Rollins my enthusiasm and commitment to excellent teaching, scholarship and service.