Writing for
Community Advocacy
and Activism

ENGL 389
Professor Karen Leick

Fall 2025

# Writing for Community Advocacy and Activism

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, students learn about writing strategies and a variety of genres relevant to nonprofit organizations, advocacy, and activism. Assignments include an Op-Ed, a newsletter for nonprofit organizations, a fundraising letter, a grant proposal, and a service-learning project related to food insecurity.

During the Hull House unit (weeks 3 and 4 of the course), students are working on an Op-Ed assignment (which may be about any subject they choose). In this unit, students analyze writing by Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells, a memoir about Hull House, as well as recent text on the Hull-House Museum website and on display in the museum.

## LEARNING GOAL

The goal is to examine examples of public-facing writing, with attention to audience, persuasion, and social change.

# Integration with Hull-House Materials

*(Content adapted from original course syllabus by Hull-House educators to reflect how materials were used for in-class instruction and assignments)*

## TOPIC 1: INTRO TO JANE ADDAMS

Students are introduced to the work of Jane Addams and Hull-House through exploration and discussion of the museum website.

In-class discussion topics/questions include:

- Describe the intended audience for the website.
- Discuss the potential educational uses of the material on the website.
- What is the relationship between UIC as an institution and the history of Hull House?
- Discuss the “History, Mission, and Values” page and the FAQ page.

### READINGS

- "About Jane Addams and Hull-House Settlement"
- Frequently Asked Questions about Jane Addams and Hull-House

## TOPIC 2: WRITING FOR A PUBLIC AUDIENCE

Students are introduced to selected writings by Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells.

In-class discussion topics/questions include:

- Analyze the rhetorical strategies used in Wells and Addams in small groups.
- Who is the audience?
- What is the intended outcome?
- What was most effective?

Find examples to share with the class

### READINGS

- "Battling a Ward Boss," Jane Addams
- "Lynching and the Excuse for It," Ida B. Wells (1901)
- "A Modern Lear," Jane Addams (1912)

## TOPIC 3: MEMOIR AS ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY

Students are introduced to Hilda Satt Polacheck and consider the timing of its completion in contrast to the timing of its publication.

In-class discussion questions include:

- How do personal narratives and lived experiences create an emotional connection with readers?
- What were the most memorable moments?
- Does this autobiography have the potential to bring about social change?
- What are the most important issues that are raised, and are they still relevant?
- Why was there greater interest in Polacheck's memoir after her death?
- How does the history and activism that we value change over time?

### READINGS

- "Growing Up with Hull-House" in *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl* (Polacheck, 1989)

### CLASS PROJECTS

Students are assigned two projects related to their work with Hull-House materials: a short op-ed essay about a topic of interest from class and a discussion board post that details their experience of the Hull-House Museum and its exhibits.

# Sample Assignments

## OP-ED ESSAY

For this Op-Ed, you will write a short essay (600-800 words) about an issue that is important to you that we have discussed in class. Clearly explain the problem and then, using real-world or personal examples, talk about why you think this particular issue is urgent and should be addressed. Give examples of what efforts are already being made that relate to the issue. Offer solutions: describe what you think could be done better. Include a call to action, if you have a recommendation for your reader.

## DISCUSSION BOARD REFLECTION

Take some pictures during the Hull-House Museum tour of text, writing, or other informative messages that you see around the museum. Please share one of the photos you took and analyze the text:

- What was the purpose of this message? For example, it is primarily educational or informative? Is it meant to entertain or engage the reader in other ways? Did you learn something?
- What are some specific words or phrases that indicate the goal or strategy of this message?
- How does this piece of writing (or the exhibit where it is posted) contribute to the overall messaging and community outreach that the museum promotes? You can find the museum's mission and values here.

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