



image by Katie Abney, Alexis Burnley, Emily Eaton, and Ash McCartney, with Molly Burns



Miami University Center for Community Engagement 1300 Vine Street Over-the-Rhine Cincinnati

The 13th edition of the Miami University Center for Community Engagement *Residency Program* is complete, and we find that the Residency remains a palpable and transformative experience for students despite changes around us. With faculty as facilitators and collaborators, the program connects students' dogged inquiry to the lived experiences of Over-the-Rhine residents and community advocates. It's never clear who is teaching whom. We still don't know of any program just like it.

As a prelude to our *American Cities* course, the summer reading was *Becoming Ms. Burton: From Prison to Recovery to Leading the Fight for Incarcerated Women*. Looking at the experiences of people elsewhere (California, in this instance) they often bear similarities to those of Over-the-Rhine. What students see and experience here becomes transferable—indicative of larger forces, systemic issues, and entrenched policies at play. Thanks to Raquel Radina and Bonnie for leading that course, which remains a keystone of our curriculum.

To further this discourse around equitable development, our *Storefronts* social practice art series continued with artist Mary Clare Rietz directing *Wonderland*. This Final Friday performance piece at the Center was set

around a figurative table designed and built by Residency Program students, with an elaborate light show. It included the perspectives of a resident, community council president, developer, and city council member, with an extemporaneous postlude by city councilperson Greg Landsman. More here on Mary Clare's website:

<http://maryclarerietz.com/work/socially-engaged/storefronts/>

In *Designing/Writing for Social Change*, led by Alice Skirtz and Chris Wilkey, Miami and NKU students participated in community activities in partnership with Over-the-Rhine People's Movement organizations and activists. Students built on work from prior cohorts by adding content to the *Over-the-Rhine Tour Guide: Places Old, New, and Removed*, a published book documenting and showcasing the history of community organizations in the neighborhood. In addition, students contributed content to the long-standing *Over-the-Rhine People's Movement Timeline*, a public display document highlighting significant historical people and events associated with the community activism in the neighborhood over the last fifty years.

As they developed their skills in rhetoric pertaining to community issues, *Designing/Writing* students participated in discussions regarding formulation of written opinions and

positions for publication meeting in class with local newspaper editors Kevin Aldridge, Opinion Editor, the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, and Dan Yount, Editor-in-Chief, *The Cincinnati Herald*.

In partnership with the Peaslee Neighborhood Center and the Over-the-Rhine Community Writing Collaborative, students participated in a series of community writing workshops where they provided extensive in-person and written feedback on writings generated by neighborhood people. These community-writing workshops were part of an ongoing effort to gather writings for a community writing book project sponsored by Over-the-Rhine community activists. Writings generated from these writing workshops were also presented to the community at an Open-Mic event. Finally, at the end of the semester, students displayed various activist projects at the Center, showcasing their interventions in ongoing community issues.

Community activist Pat Youngblood joined Peaslee Executive Director Jennifer Summers to coordinate *Theory and Practice in Service Learning*. In this course students analyzed and reflected on their service learning experiences and engaged with community and civic issues in a variety of ways. Students delved into issues ranging from labor, housing,

education, healthcare, women's leadership, mass incarceration, and caregiving with community residents and resources as their primary "texts". They also completed a semester long "Dialogue and a Public Policy Project" where they attended several public meetings to experience, study and analyze how public policy is implemented at multiple levels and the role of citizens in those processes. These curricular experiences accompanied by small group dialogue and analytical and reflective writing provided an alternative yet critical personal lens that complemented readings and coursework in other classes in the program.

In the *Design Build Studio*, architecture and interior design students started the renovation of 1324 Race, Apartment 2. This included an extensive group-design process, getting buy-in from partners and building owners Over-the-Rhine Community Housing, investigating and soliciting bids for mechanical, electrical and plumbing, and creating a permit drawing set for submittal to the City of Cincinnati—all of this on top of coordinating the *Storefronts* event. A good precedent was set for future studios that will complete the project.

As always, we're grateful to have Residency alum and interior designer Kinsey Harman as our on-site resident

coordinator and social media expert. So much work is done before the semester and behind the scenes to ensure that the “residency” portion of the Residency Program goes well.

Of course, this program would not work without our many neighbors in buddy’s place, on Race Street, and near Rothenberg. Community partners Over-the-Rhine Community Housing and Jimmy Heath House, Peaslee Neighborhood Center, and Cincinnati Interfaith Workers Center provided Miami Residency Program students with profound placement experiences this semester, and we’re grateful for all of those who take them in.

A special thanks to Sinclair Community College student Razvan Ruxanda for his many contributions to the *Storefronts* show (and our design-build work), and several attempts to get our studio truck started again despite frigid temperatures.

Student teachers, led by Kim Wachenheim, were the well-traveled ones this semester. They had teaching duties in Lower Price Hill and Walnut Hills neighborhoods. As always, Residency Program students coming from Miami Education, Health, and Society and the *Urban Cohort*, led by Tammy Schwartz, have a sound curriculum as a basis for their work here. They also have the heart and resilience to keep

teaching in conditions that can be daunting, as they will convey in the reflections to follow.

Despite all the varied disciplines in the cohort—from architecture to poly sci to student teaching to social work to social justice studies—written reflection is still the common denominator. It is the process by which students come to a better understanding of the urban condition and how they might contribute to it, alter it, comprehend it. At the same time, it is a product resulting from the experience. It is their testament. So, without additional fanfare, the student experiences:

John Blake, AIA, NCARB

Miami University Cincinnati Professor of Engagement;

Interim Director, Miami University Center for Community Engagement

ELLIOTT JONES BOYLE (ARC)

This is the first time I've been part of a community where I'm just Elliott. In Evansville Indiana, my hometown, I am Harry Lukens grandchild. I am Tom and Lisa's firstborn. In Oxford, I am a Miami student. While these aren't bad things to be, and my identity does go beyond those labels, I haven't known what it means to exist outside of these identities while also being part of a neighborhood community. Here, my name is what people know about me before anything else.

Coming to Over-the-Rhine, I knew that my time here would be temporary. I entered this space knowing that I was meant to listen and learn from those who have been here longer than I. For four months, my goal was not to spearhead a movement, but to be humble, gracious, and receptive. Despite this outlook, from the first day here, I felt welcomed into a history that isn't mine. Through the connections I've built in the community, while this history still isn't mine to claim, it has become a part of me.

I speak this history anytime someone asks me about Over-the-Rhine. When my mom asks, "Do you feel safe there?" My answer is "Yes. I am always safe. I have been uncomfortable, but always safe." When my friends say "That

park is beautiful!" I respond with "It is! The way it got here, however, is far from beautiful." When people ask me if I enjoy the bar scene, I respond with "first of all, I'm 20, so no. Second of all, I don't enjoy the fact that this place has more bars than businesses that a community truly needs to survive." Through being here, I have learned the history of the people and share that wherever I go.

When community members share their pain with me, I can't always fully understand it from my young, white, and somewhat financially stable perspective. Yet, when they choose to share these stories with me, we can hold that experience between us. I believe stories of experience are one of the strongest tools to make change. The stories I have heard have molded me to empathize more deeply and act more intentionally.

I have found joy in being vulnerable, too. Being open with others has helped me form strong relationships. To do this, I have had to hold up the proverbial mirror and look into myself to understand how my many identities overlap to influence the way I see the world and the way the world sees me. When I hold up that mirror myself, I see the color of my skin. I see my decreased ability to form memories, as a result

of my depression. I see my middle class, suburban upbringing. I see my queerness. I see my ties to the Christian religion.

It is harder when that mirror is held up by others and the reality of these aspects of my identity set in. The time when some cohort members and I went to Findlay Park to meet people there before it closed, we started talking with a man about our frustrations over the park closing. “I’ve never seen you at the park before. How can you say you care about something you don’t even know?” Nick had a point. I had the ability to choose to care about Findlay Playground. The time when my housemates and I walked to Findlay Market in the rain, a man stopped us to tell us his story. While listening to his story, I kept saying “I hear you! I understand!” He held up a finger, and kindly yet sternly said, “I’m speaking now.” He had a point, too. It wasn’t my place to speak.

Outside of church, I would describe this semester, for me, as sacred. Getting to know others by name, particularly those often overlooked, is a holy thing. I think of Paul, our friend experiencing homelessness, who often sits outside of buddy’s place. At this point, when we see him, he has stopped asking us for money, though he hasn’t stopped needing it. I think of a conversation with Key Beck about the name of Over The Rhine. New people coming into the neighborhood call this

place OTR. Naming something involves power, and the power of Over The Rhine should not be taken away. Sharing our names with others means we trust them enough to hold a piece of us in their being. Calling this place Over The Rhine is a sacred thing. I am beyond grateful to have been welcomed into this community as Elliott Jones Boyle.

MADISON BRITT (SJS)

I’ve been struggling to write this piece - struggling to figure out the right way to put a four-month immersive, life-changing experience into 800 short words. Brevity has never been my strong suit, and neither has finality. I want to do this time justice. I want to write something that will reflect how this experience has affected me deeply. I want to tell the people that I met along the way how much all of this has meant to me. But, I don’t think that experiences have bookends. I don’t think that you can close the door on places, people, and events that moved you the way that Over-the-Rhine has moved me. I want to reflect on the growth I’ve done since I planted myself in this neighborhood. But I also want to say that I’m not done growing, that I’m putting down roots and stretching toward the

sunlight like the sunflowers painted on the side of buddy's place.

When I think back to the beginning, I remember anxiety and insecurity. This was my first time away from my parents' home, my first time in the so-called real world. In my first journal entry, I wrote "I still feel on the outside of things in many ways here...I feel overwhelmed, yet, simultaneously like I should be doing more...I'm not sure yet where I fit in at the Worker Center, yet I feel that I do,". I've always been an idealist; I wanted to save the world in the beginning, and I was overwhelmed with not knowing where to start.

I learned that you start with the people. I started with my roommates, listening and learning, sharing stories, ideas, and knitting needles in the Intern House living room. I branched out, and found my place in this beautiful, vibrant, and welcoming community. One of the best moments of the semester was an art show, hosted by the Worker Center in Peaslee's lobby, the opening night of "Colores, Voces, y Expresiones", a showcase of works by local immigrant artists. There was food and laughter and, best of all, an amazing turnout - the perfect payoff for the hard work of putting the show together. To see people come together in such a central neighborhood place in support of art and the artists was

healing after a difficult week. The artists gave moving speeches about their work, identity, and inspiration. There was beautiful music that transformed the space into something sacred. People came together, dancing, talking, eating, watching. It was incredible and inspiring, and I find myself thinking back on that evening to be reminded of the radical power of community and human connection.

I learned that you start by just showing up. I learned how to show up for people, for causes, regardless of my insecurity and imposter syndrome, and eventually my confidence there grew. I learned the power of simply being present every week, passing the candle during journaling, setting our intentions. I found the value in my daily routine, seeing how reliability and intentional participation can lead to acceptance, as I became a regular and expected presence in Peaslee and around the neighborhood.

Weekly games of Lotería (Mexican Bingo) with Pat Youngblood and others in Peaslee's lobby helped us to grow closer, and hearing her tell me how much she valued my presence in Over-the-Rhine was incredibly moving. I looked forward every day to our conversations when I go to Peaslee about our days, our classes, and anything else, and I learned so much in the shortest of conversations. I went into the

Worker Center expecting to chat with David, who was there almost every day, about his life and job, and hopefully get some Holtmann's donuts that he managed to score for free. Once I found my footing in Over-the-Rhine, once my anxiety had subsided, I threw myself into my work, and my involvement in the fight for justice in the neighborhood. I learned to listen more to community voices, but those very voices uplifted my, and told me that my voice was powerful and worthy, too.

In an early journal entry, I wrote "Above all things, I want to create communities of love. I want spaces where everyone is equal, where we are not defined by work we do, or what we produce, but rather we are valued as unique, wonderful, messy, chaotic human beings,". I am inspired every day by the community of love that exists in Over-the-Rhine. The people in this neighborhood welcomed me with open arms, invited me to walk with them, and allowed me to understand their struggles. Neighbors look out for each other and work hard to shape their lives and their communities, truly valuing every person's skills, abilities, and perspectives. I feel so privileged to have been, and to continue to be a part of this beloved and vibrant community that has, in four short months, given me more than I could hope to return.

EMILY EATON (MFSW)

This semester was a whirlwind. On one hand it seemed never-ending and on another I can't believe that I'm writing this. 2018 has been a journey and I'm glad that Over-the-Rhine was a step along the way.

I came into this program after a summer of working 40-hour weeks and a full load of classes, leaving little time to form any expectations for the fall semester. Sure, I was excited, but didn't have too many other thoughts about what would happen. All that I knew is that I was moving in with a person I had lived with before and another I didn't know, which definitely made me more than a bit nervous. About half of the cohort members I had been in class with in previous semesters and the other half I had met only briefly in the spring at our orientation. Little did I know that this is where I would learn that community can be built anywhere if one is intentional about it. Slowly but surely, through weekly dinners, walks around the neighborhood, and late night talks this group of strangers became friends. Each week we shared in one another's hopes, dreams, and frustrations at Wednesday night journaling. Through our writing we bared our souls with laughter and occasional tears. Our cohort met Sunday

evenings for community dinner. Budgeting for meals, learning to cook for a crowd, and sharing food definitely encouraged quick bonding. It wasn't long before we truly became a unit.

Alongside the community building is another narrative where I was challenged in my own personal beliefs. When asked, I had always said that I had gone into social work because I believed that everyone was worth helping and no one deserved to go through life alone. Growing up in a Christian household, I had ingrained in me the notion that all people have value despite any decisions they have made or the circumstance that they may find themselves in. This belief was met with reality in my service placement. The Jimmy Heath House is a home for people on the fringes of society-- people without homes, people who use drugs, and people with mental health diagnoses. This is a place where the core belief is that all humans deserve to be treated with dignity--no strings attached. I can truly say that this mission is lived out on a daily basis. People who have been forgotten, ignored, or kicked out of society can find housing, community, and a genuine concern for their well-being--not something that is found in many places throughout the city. After a semester of working with and talking to many of the residents, my empathy for people who use drugs has increased tremendously. I learned

about the incredible trauma that people have experienced throughout their life and how it impacts them on a daily basis. The unimaginable pain, hurt, and betrayal that most of the residents have experienced undoubtedly impacts their life in every way possible-- in friends, family, and the way they view themselves in the world. Looking through the lens of social work, the story of these residents becomes less about their "addiction" and more about the ways that the system has failed them. Many of the residents at the Jimmy Heath House and people who use drugs deeply internalize the stigma of drug use that are put out in society. These are messages that imply that people who use drugs are not worth putting resources toward, not worth housing, and not worth anything at all. To put it simply, this narrative has to change if we want people to stay alive. This experience has encouraged and challenged me to make sure the ways I treat people are equitable, just, and put people before anything else. This semester was difficult-- I'm not going to lie--but I know that I'm better for it.

To anyone coming into Over-the-Rhine, I challenge you to open your mind to people and their stories. Meet locals and listen to what they have to say. Open your heart to the feelings that they are sharing with you. They are real, their stories and experiences are valid--just as yours are. Make yourself

vulnerable and lose yourself in the process. You'll gain something richer in the end.

KATIE ABNEY (EDT)

There are never going to be enough words or stories to be able to articulate what this semester was for me and what it was like to live in Over the Rhine, to student teach in Walnut Hills, and to experience the things that we got to experience.

I ended up in the Residency Program through a series of unexpected events and people that came in at the right time and helped me get here. In Block 3 for Early Childhood Education majors, we have field placements in Cincinnati Public Schools. That was my first experience being in Cincinnati schools and being in an urban school. I immediately fell in love with the school, the students, and the district. When it was nearing towards the end of my semester of Block 3, I knew I needed to do something to be involved with Cincinnati and to student teach in CPS for the following semester. I was not in the Urban Cohort, but I knew that if I talked to Tammy Schwartz, she would be able to help me out somehow. When I met with her she told me about the Over-the-Rhine Residency Program (which I somehow had never

heard of) and got me in contact with John Blake. I applied to be in the program two months past the deadline. Luckily, I was accepted and got placed to student teach at Frederick Douglass. Out of the four student teachers in our cohort, I was the only one who was not in the Urban Cohort, so besides my field placement in Block 3, I had no previous experience of being in Cincinnati and never really had any classes at Miami that brought up social justice issues or any of the topics that we discussed in our ARC 427 course in the Residency Program.

While I am very thankful for my time at Miami and the education I received, it has been a challenge to truly understand the world and all of its different aspects when the vast majority of the population of our university is white and come from very similar social-economic backgrounds. In order to truly understand diversity, diversity must be present. Which is why I am beyond thankful for the Residency Program and the importance and necessity that it is for students. This has been one of the greatest semesters that I have ever had, but it was also one of the hardest. Student teaching in itself is very emotionally and physically draining, but there was another aspect of very difficult things that I was being exposed to that I had to wrestle with. To struggle with my place and

“positionality” in a place like Over-the-Rhine, and to be aware of oppression that people had to deal with—people I didn’t know as well as people that I loved a lot. To wrestle with what kind of solutions there can be when the whole system is broken and systematically oppresses certain people. The conversations, topics, and readings that we had to do for class brought up a lot of things that I never had to truly think about before now, because of my background. I am beyond thankful that this program allowed an opportunity for me to become educated in such important topics, and that I can process these topics in a space with a community of people.

My student teaching experience at Frederick Douglass would not be the same had I not been able to live in Over-the-Rhine and get to experience and learn with the cohort. To live so close to the school gives you more of an understanding of your students, the neighborhood that they live in, and the community that you don’t necessarily get to see firsthand during school hours. I spent so much of my time outside of school in the community and in the city that I learned things that enriched my experience and gave me understanding of my students and depth to the lessons I wanted to teach them. The greatest gift of this program was to have the students that I did. In 18 weeks, I fell in love with 17 first grade kiddos. No

matter how bad of a day it was, they always put a smile on my face and made me feel loved. My students and all the kids at my school were the ones who were in my mind when we would learn the things that we did. They were ones that I thought of and how they were going to be impacted by decisions made by people in power—people who don’t think of them the way that I do. I will always deeply cherish the relationships that I made with them. I learned more from them than they learned from me as their teacher.

One of the most impactful parts about this program was being with a group of people that are so, so, so different, but had the same passion and a desire to do the kind of work that we were doing here. If I was in Oxford, walking around campus, I would have never noticed or probably been friends with the people that were in our cohort because in Oxford, our paths didn’t cross. But, here, in Over-the-Rhine, our paths met and became one during this semester. I came into this program not knowing anyone, but I am leaving it with ten new, close friends that I can lean on, talk to, and wrestle with the issues that we face as we continue with the good fight in our varied areas of work.

ALEXIS BURNLEY (FSW)

I moved to Over-the-Rhine in June and began working at Over the Rhine Community Housing. Since then I have met many members of the community and have had the chance to foster meaningful relationships with a few of them. Before living in Over-the-Rhine, I had only ever lived in the suburbs. I had visited a few large cities such as New York and Berlin, but I had never stayed there longer than a week and my experiences there were nothing compared to what I experienced this summer and fall.

I had little prior knowledge about Over-the-Rhine before moving here. When I began talking to friends that I had made in the Cincinnati area I heard the rumors and stereotypes: That it was once a very dangerous place to be and that no one in their right mind would drive—yet alone walk—through the city if they didn't have to. That it was riddled with drugs and crime that not even the police could handle. But that was not what I saw while I lived here. There was crime, but it was nothing more than I had seen in other large cities. I never once felt unsafe while walking the streets, even by myself. Over-the-Rhine is a community unlike any other that I have been apart of before. People greet you and

ask how you are as you pass them in the street. The people here are truly invested in those in their community. Once I got a job at Graeter's, I began to see a lot of community members regularly. They also began to recognize me and call me by my name, and I began to learn about their lives and their families. I began to see people I knew at block parties and at community council meetings. I saw people at Kroger or while I walked to and from work and class. Soon this place began to feel like home, maybe even a bit more so than my home in Cleveland. I began to feel for the people here, their issues became my issues. I wanted to do something to help, to contribute to the effort that has already been going on for over 30 years. This neighborhood has a rich history that I wanted to know more about. I wanted to share it with others who were either new or unfamiliar with neighborhood, so they could understand as well. While "OTR" may look "pretty" now, that is not what defines the city. The people that have lived here for generations tell a story of a much more beautiful Over-the-Rhine. One that has faced and overcome hardships time and time again, one that is threatened to be wiped out by gentrification. I had never really experienced gentrification until I moved here, it had always been just a word—a terrible thing but still just a theory. But after moving here, I can see the

devastating effects it has had on this community. Rates of homelessness are at their highest and continue to rise as people continue to be displaced from their homes. While working at OTRCH, I have seen so many people whose lives have been derailed due to homelessness and how, by simply having a home, they begin to rebuild again. Before I started this summer, I was not really sure what I wanted to do in social work. I had a vague idea of what social workers did from my classes, but through this experience, I learned about the true impact social workers can make in their clients lives. I found that I wanted to do that too. My biggest takeaway from this experience would be that community takes effort, it can't just be implanted or forced.

I have had the wonderful opportunity of getting to know not only the community members, but my lovely cohort as well. It has been such a blessing to go through this experience with people who are also new and learning along with me.

I have learned a lot from their experiences and backgrounds and they have helped me grow as a person this semester. When I leave Over-the-Rhine, I will truly miss my lovely cohort, the wonderful friends I have made in this community and my placement at OTRCH. Nonprofits like OTRCH are hard to come by, but I hope to work at one like it

some day. I plan to take with me all that I have learned these past 6 months while working at OTRCH and from my classes this semester. We have a lot of challenges to face, both as a community and as a country, but I believe we can overcome them together.

ASH McCARTNEY (EDT)

"Over-the-Rhine is where people go to shop or get drugs, there is no in-between."

"Never go above Liberty, that's where all the shootings happen."

"Make sure you're walking with someone all the time."

"If the homeless just stopped doing drugs, they could get themselves together."

"Be smart, Ashley. Just promise me you'll be smart."

The seams rip apart, threads fall to the floor in clumps.
A seemingly perfect tapestry torn to shreds, a story
forced to begin again

Three times in Over-the-Rhine, three separate yet
combined units of time in apt. 1

Three sets of cohort members, three vastly different experiences

(John Blake himself was hesitant about my return, unsure of whether or not I would

Get anything out of a second, a third time in this Beloved Community).

Time #1, Summer 2017

Peaslee camp is the spot

Broken air conditioners

Brazilian drum circles

Community journeys and trips above Liberty

Meeting community members who somehow remember me after all this time

Building friendships that have kept on this long

A new patch in the quilt,

Not yet entirely filled in until now

Coming full circle means including each minute

Each insignificant experience

And finding something to represent them all

Time #2, Summer 2018

Free time? I don't know her

Part-timing at the Center and Peaslee,

Half-days with files of Dutton

Half-days with summer camp children

The almost-monotony of mornings broken by laughter and playful shouts

Chats with neighbors about whether or not individuals and families

Impacted by homelessness

Should be forced out of the city

May to August felt brief at best

Future uncertain, the idea of teaching children

Spiking my anxiety in heavy bursts

Time #3, Fall 2018

What could someone possibly get out of being here for

A culmination of 2 semesters?

My future's path has been erased,

Crossed out, burned in a bonfire,

Choose the metaphor you like,

And is slowly being sketched out again

Sure, teaching is one thing,

And I was told not to talk about what I did,

But I taught! It just took eight weeks to get to.

Not only did I teach,
But I was reaffirmed in wanting to teach,
A struggle I've had for nearly a year
The thought of which still scares the life out of me

I found my placements often took me outside of
Over-the-Rhine,
Walnut Hills, Lower Price Hill,
I tried to keep connected here
Long walks to the riverfront,
Going to Tucker's on 13th for goetta and egg
sandwiches in the morning,
Stopping into Peaslee,
Hanging out in the center after hours
And chatting with those that come in.

I made friends, both in and out of this wonderful group
of humans
Shared meals, joys, tears and laughter with all of them
I spoke out and spoke often
I dropped bombs in journaling that maybe one person
expected

Some that earned me concerned looks from my fellow
writers

I realized that, for the first time,
Nothing that I'm angry about in this place actually
affects me.

While my brother's struggles are intertwined with my
own,
I will leave this place in ten days
And live a mostly unchanged life

This place has me attached,
Like, superglue attached
Leaving is one of the hardest things I will ever do
How can anyone just expect me not to come back?
How can anyone expect me to go back to Oxford
And pretend this wasn't real?

This is real.

This place,
No, this community,
The humans that inhabit it,
The hardships and joys they encounter,
The system that has every weapon aimed at them

And how these people still find a reason to celebrate
something
It's all real.
The minute we ignore their existence,
We, in turn, ignore our own
Ignore our own hardships,
Our own joys
There is no "we" and "them"
The human experience encircles all
Leaving only an "us".

Us. The combined experiences we share
And choose to share with one another
When Miami kids come down here to party on
weekends,
They are removing themselves from "us"
When the right people take this experience and abuse
it,
They remove themselves from "us"
How can anyone not see the connectedness of our
struggles?

My children are seeds
Planting themselves wherever they end up
My fellow students are seeds
Taking this time to reflect and somehow move on with
our lives after so much has changed
Each person in this room is a seed
Able to take this information wherever they roam,
Putting their voices and bodies in the struggle if they so
choose,
Given the opportunity to align themselves with the
good,
All they have to do is take it

The stitches that fell apart at the beginning of this
summer
Have now found new patches on this quilt to sew in
Restoring something lost,
Setting me up for the next few years,
Perhaps beyond
Over-the-Rhine has so much to offer,
And I don't mean through bars and expensive clothing
When one challenges themselves to look at a picture,
No, REALLY look at it,

They may just find hidden treasures within that they'd never noticed before.

I did,

As many have before,

Now I ask you to do the same.

ALANNA KUETHER (ARC)

To know me, it is important to know where I come from. Born and raised in Coldwater, Ohio, population 5,000. Not only are we a small town, but we are over 100 miles from the nearest city. Living within the Coldwater “bubble”, you will quickly realize that everybody knows everybody... or at least they know your parents. As you walk down the streets, you'll always receive a smile and wave from everyone you pass. When it came time to leave for college, I chose Miami University, another small town. There were many reasons I chose to go here, but a big factor in choosing Miami over UC and the DAAP program was safety. I had never truly worried about my safety while living in Coldwater but was always told about the dangers of the city. There are too many people to really have a community where you get to know

anyone, and you always have to be careful because cities are unsafe. I have been to cities, but coming to Cincinnati for this program is the first time I have ever lived outside of a small town, and as it turns out, they are not as different as one might initially think.

I chose to do the Residency Program because of my interest in design/build work, getting my hands dirty and actually making something, and for my passion to serve others. I had always heard what a great experience this program is, but I could not truly understand it until the first day I was placed into this community. I would go on to learn much about the many issues that people in cities face every day. Through this knowledge, I was able to learn much about myself and have more empathy for everyone. Next I was taught the importance of and how to think critically. We must question everything we are told or read and to be conscious of the consequences of the actions we take. Lastly, I was taught the power of my individual self. Each person has a different story and journey that they will take through life. Through both my academic and experiential learning, the sharing of this knowledge, and the listening of others' knowledge, we can all work together to make this world a better place for our children and future generations.

In my placement, I was able to pull together knowledge I have gained throughout my life through jobs, hobbies, and classes into a project that we could bring into fruition. The project we were able to work on stayed a bit close to home with it being student housing for those in this program and future affordable housing, but I am still grateful for the confidence it has given me to stand my ground and use my voice to speak what I know. I am also thankful for the technical knowledge of working with what you have and creating solutions to problems you come across.

What we lacked in community engagement with this project, we gained in our socially engaged art performance, the “equity table”. In order to design a table that represents equity surrounding community development, we had to interview stakeholders from all groups involved including residents, city council, developers, and lenders. We then designed a “curated discussion” surrounding the table we created with colored lights, music, and a videographer. This process allowed us to understand many ins and outs of community development and to see it from each person’s perspective. I have gained a respect for all of those involved and will use this knowledge to be better than what has come before.

De’VANTE MONTGOMERY (POL)

My time spent in this program has been a unique one. Not just because I’m one of a handful of black males who have completed this program or the fact that I have called Cincinnati home for the last 21 years of my life, but indeed it is because I have been able to forge new relationships; be a part of new experiences; and learn hands on about the effects of gentrification on the people that have become my neighbors and friends over the past 5 months.

You see, I was born to a 19 year-old single mother who had to rely on public assistance and housing for us to survive. She took care of everyone’s kids including her own and had the help of my father’s parents my grandparents, Joseph and Emma Montgomery, when she didn’t have anyone else to lean on. We moved around a lot when I was younger. I’ve lived in neighborhoods where my neighbors were middle class whites and blacks, poor blacks and poor whites, and I have seen both sides of the fence of color nihilism and I sympathize with what it is like to be on the lower-end to poor of the class system regardless of your color.

There have been many times where my siblings, cousins, and me wondered when my mom was going to come

home. You see, she worked back-to-back night shifts as a nurse. 11/7-kind of shifts. She would work all night and slept during the day. So even though she was home it was still like she wasn't. There have been times where going to bed meant dreaming on a empty stomach and waking up with that same empty feeling that next morning. There have been times when my mother was pregnant with my now 7 year old sister, when we went to the grocery store, we didn't go to Walmart or Kroger, we went to the food bank. The only way we could afford it wasn't with cash or coins, but generosity of the organization who opened their pantry so we wouldn't starve. There even was a time where we mom picked us up from school with the car full of boxes. We all knew what that meant. It was time to move again, but this time we moved in with our grandparents while my mom temporarily stayed in a shelter because we lost our home in the 2008 financial crisis.

Throughout everything I can say that my mom made major sacrifices. Some I have yet to fully understand. She did these things because wanted her children to have a better life than she did. She worked hard, lost sleep, went to bed exhausted and hungry, and she did these things because she knew it wasn't a matter of your current state, but what mattered was if you made it to where you wanted to be at the

end of the day. She took the bruit force of the wave so that we didn't have to feel the ripple effects as much.

You see, over the past 5 months this program has allowed me to understand that my personal story, and the story of my mother, are being echoed in the lives of my neighbors and the kids who live in this community. Whether it be in the new waves of homes and apartments, glass and steel, or boutique shops and fancy restaurants, the ripple effects of the wave of gentrification are being felt throughout generations of families that have grown to this community home.

There are mothers who work day and night, there are kids who go to bed hungry wondering when mommy and daddy are going to get home from a long shift at work. There are grandparents out there who send constant prayers up for the children and grandchildren so that they might be saved from bruit force of the wave. There are teachers who worry about the state of their children outside of the classroom, and there are kids who minds are bright, intellect far beyond their years, but whose voices are being drowned out by the chaos that surrounds them.

One of the talents this program has helped me to perfect was my gift of perception. This is a gift of understand

that the physical things around you may change, but the people, the energy that is put forth within a community will still be there. So while there may be new waves of homes and apartments, glass and steel, and boutique shops and fancy restaurants, we must still have a perception that is one for which we can see these changes from the vantage part of the anchors of this community. These are the families that hold down the culture, the heritage, the core values that make Over-the-Rhine great. We must climb from our high horses and see the world from their point of view. In our community today, we must work to act as barriers between the coming waves and the people who are most vulnerable to them, for if we don't they may be swept away by the forthcoming changes. We must be gems hidden in the heart of the city, like Peaslee, a place where all can call home and find shelter amidst this chaos. We must be like the Agents of Change who are fierce, smart, and cunning, band of 11-15 year old warriors who are ready to set out on the world and conquer it. We must be the caretakers of our brothers and sisters.

While so much has happened still so much is happening. Now more than ever we must be unified in our action, set in the right direction, and mindful of our unique

stories that intertwine in this knotted place. Our stories are far too similar for us not to be united.

AUDRI JOHNSON (EDT)

“What have you learned this semester?” It seems to be the first question off everybody's lips. As if I could pack everything I've learned into a small concise statement, but that couldn't be further from the truth. I never have walked into a place expecting to learn so much—so much about myself, building and maintaining relationships, and my career. It's amazing to come into the semester as one person and feel like you're walking out a whole new person. The relationships I've made, the conversations I've had, the memories I've made both in Over-the-Rhine and Lower Price Hill will always have a firm grasp on my heart and my mind.

I was given the opportunity to pour into two neighborhoods while living here. I lived in Over-the-Rhine and I worked in Lower Price Hill. The difference between the two is strikingly different, yet similar all at the same time. When I come home back to my apartment I am reminded of the short term, right-now investment in a “failing” community. But when

I'm at school, I am in the midst of extreme disinvestment and what some call "The most dangerous neighborhood in Cincinnati". The differences I see are cosmetic, Lower Price Hill could look the same as Over-the-Rhine, but the root problems of the neighborhoods remain the same. By living and working in these neighborhoods I was also able to develop relationships and community ties to both. These relationships outside of the school setting helped me understand the problems and concerns in the neighborhood, not just what the news wants to tell us. This aided me in supporting and comforting my students in their academics, physically and emotionally - being able to be a part of their community in a small way gave me the knowledge I needed to reach them and stand beside them in their fight to make it. In Lower Price Hill I was able to be extremely involved with Oyler through student teaching, the after-school program, Community Matters and the Washing Well.

To talk about the impact this semester has had on me, of course, would be incomplete without talking about the 18 little ones I get to hang out with every day. They have been my biggest teachers, a point of inspiration and a source of laughter. They have changed me first, as a person and second, as an educator. When I walked into the first day of

teaching I was a bundle of nerves, worried the kids might not like me or I won't be able to teach them or they'll be too crazy. Honestly, leaving the first day I was a little disappointed. They seemed too normal, too good, which I come to find out is exactly the opposite of who they really are. Flash forward two weeks later and I was left alone in the room as their lead teacher, the first day my teacher was absent. That day I had lost a kid at dismissal, two kids got in a fight at recess and another threw up all over another girl after lunch. I can say I've come quite a long way with my kids. They have taught me how to listen, love, dance, spell (quite literally), question, dream and so many other things. They reminded me what it was like to wonder and to see the world from a new perspective.

Student teaching was an interesting experience and I would say my experience is not that of the norm. Most student teachers start the year observing and getting to know the classroom, school, teacher and students before slowly, piece-by-piece taking over the classroom before giving the classroom back to the teacher piece-by-piece at the end of the year. That is not how mine went. From the first day of school, I was teaching small parts of the day, including morning meetings, our weekly theme, and calendar. By the end of the first three weeks, I was teaching all day every day. From that

point on all eyes have been on me and continue to be on me as the semester comes to an end. My teacher is a frequent flyer on the absence list and has recently taken the Family Medical Leave Act to take care of her mother. Bringing us to now, week three and a half without her coming to school at all. It has been a lot to handle balancing working, student teaching, taking my own classes as well as finding time for myself, but it has taught me a lot about myself that I don't think I would've known without this trial. I am compassionate - I take my kids and their worries home with me every night, I think about what they're doing, where they are and if they are being taken care of. I am strong - I have remained a rock for my students through horrible things, the loss of a parent, getting through the holidays without their parents coming home from rehab, the loss of housing and abandonment. I am constant - I was afraid that I wouldn't be consistent for my kids, that the closer I was to them the more I would let them walk all over me but I wasn't I remained a mentor and support system for them because that's what most of them truly need.

This place and the memories I have made here will forever hold a special place in my heart. What I have learned in these past 5 months would beyond surpass 800 words. I chose Miami University for this exact program and I could not

be more proud of myself for following my dreams and teaching for Cincinnati Public Schools. I am a better person because I have lived here and learned from the most passionate and hard-working people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing.

NICK SABET (EDT)

This experience has been one for the books. My time in Over-the-Rhine was one of both solitude and community, of victories and losses, of joys and frustrations. The end result was a sense of personal growth and a new zest for my calling, which is teaching.

The greatest personal impact that I experienced did not come from my time in Over-the-Rhine; it came from my experience student teaching at Oyler School, in the Lower Price Hill neighborhood, just west of downtown. I came thinking I'd know what to expect from a disadvantaged school: violence issues, drug issues, low-performing academic abilities. I was right about everything. These things did exist, but there was so much more to Oyler that earned my loyalty to it. The supportive staff always seemed to be on the same page, and worked for the students' benefit. There were no

egos abound. Everyone had the common goal of student success.

I feel that my empathy developed in a major way as I learned the ropes of being a high school teacher. As a new teacher, students are bound to test you, whether they mean to or not. I learned that the practice of extreme patience would be a key to success later on in my career. I also learned to view my students' "attitudes" differently. I realized that a negative attitude wasn't always my fault, so I couldn't take it personally. I learned to look past the attitude itself, and to try understand the underlying personal problem that the student may be having, and that they may not have developed the coping skills to deal with it adequately. I also had a rejuvenated sense of justice. As I heard my students' stories, I couldn't help but feel bad for them. Feeling bad is one thing, but doing something about it is a step forward. Oyster's many services are concrete combatants to the issues that plague my students. One might say it's charity or a band aid, but at least something palpable is happening, and students are better because of it.

I recall boarding the metro bus my first day of teaching, and being taken aback by the variety of people I noticed. Some donned professional dress, some appeared dirty, some were tweaking on some kind of drug. I noticed a great variety

of people while just walking around the city as well. I was used to a cushy life. I knew that there were people who struggled, but it never quite registered how much they might have struggled until I lived and commuted alongside them. I will be honest, I did not enjoy living in the city. I did not like how loud it could be. I did not like how people would approach me, asking for money. I didn't like how it smelled. Despite all of these things, it was one of the most humbling experiences that I've ever had. That experience was learning that not everything is posh and clean, that not everyone is financially stable, that not everything is perfect. I knew these things before living here, but they registered in my mind in a very personal way once I lived here. You think you know things because you've heard about them, and then you really come to know them through experience, and you are humbled for the better.

My biggest takeaway from this experience was the affirmation that teaching is what I want to do with my life. Through the trials, tribulations, and successes of student teaching, I went home with too many silver linings to count each day. I turned adversity into opportunity. Again, I have been humbled by this experience. I had learned about the concepts of gentrification and poverty in the Urban Cohort. Watching these things happen right in front of me made me

totally conscious of it, rather than merely knowing of it. I felt a stronger sense than ever to advocate for my students because of these issues occurring near my residence, and because of these issues making their way into my school and classroom.

There are a few things that I want people to know about Over-the-Rhine. It is an ever-changing place, and not necessarily for the better. Crime rates might be lower, but crime and its roots have not been “solved”, only moved. For those original inhabitants of Over-the-Rhine, a strong sense of community still exists. The money, clout, and power of the opposing side makes the fight an uphill one, with a losing edge. Despite this, the freedom fighters of Over-the-Rhine are kind and resilient. I will miss my bonds with my peers in Over-the-Rhine. I will also miss the challenge that living here gave; that was a sort of re-realization of the issues that were happening in this place because I was seeing them up close and personal. As I leave this place that has challenged and shaped me, I will take the new editions of pride and perseverance that I had to develop as a resident of Over-the-Rhine, and as a teacher at Oyler School.

MOLLY BURNS (ARC)

The following goes back and forth between pieces of a journal entry written on November 5th 2018 and my final thoughts on the semester as of December 2018:

“Monday: In the course of 48 hours, I am visited by various old friends from Oxford. They have missed me and are excited to hear about what I’ve been up to. They are more excited for me to come back in the spring. Spring? This is the first time all semester I have entertained the thought of picking classes for the spring. The first time I have thought about life moving past this fall in Over-the-Rhine.”

In the final weeks of this semester, I find myself struggling to “wake up.” Waking up to the fact that I’m still a student at Miami University with three semesters left to finish my degree. In reality, I never fell asleep- I was always a student here. If anything, my time here woke me up to so many different realities in this world that I had previously been asleep to. So perhaps what I’m really struggling with is going back to the world of the asleep.

“Tuesday: A member of the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority is disheartened at a board meeting to hear the concerns of Mellville residents who will be relocated due to a hill slide... he promises that CMHA would never put anyone out on the street... not questioning how these concerns originate from past truths.

Wednesday: Paul sits on the stoop of MUCCE or the steps beside Holtman’s. He holds a sign that reads, “Down and Out. Anything Helps.” As he came to recognize us from the design/build studio, he stopped asking us for money and we now acknowledge each other with nods and hellos. On a cold, rainy Halloween, he offers us his leftover pizza.”

I came into this program with an academic foundation of awareness and passion toward many systemic issues but it wasn’t until I lived here that my heart was set on fire. Until you meet the people affected by classism and racism and hear their stories, you can never fully humanize their circumstances when reading about the big impersonal terms “gentrification” and “displacement.”

“Thursday-Friday: After attending Over-the-Rhine Community Church for only two months, Elliott and I are asked to join a selected group from the congregation and attend a Christian Community Development Conference in Chicago. Speakers here say powerful things, intertwining faith and social justice...”

Given my identities from the white middle-class, it was an expectation that I go to college after high school. It was imperative that I leave home and go out into “the real world” to gain more perspectives and experiences. While I agree with this notion to an extent, I realize that this notion also made me invalidate my experiences in my community from home. In the course Designing/Writing for Social Change, we discussed the concept of traditional and organic intellectuals. “Traditional” referring to the intelligence found in academic communities versus “organic” wisdom found through lived experiences. Since living in Over-the-Rhine, I’ve grown to value the organic community that raised me for the first 18 years of my life. While I am beyond grateful for my academic community and education at Miami, it is safe to say the controlled environment at the University is further removed from the “real world” than

my rural hometown of 2,400. At Miami, most everything I am involved in is connected to school- I am not concerned with the local issues of Oxford. However, it is true that in my hometown experiences outside of school were often defined by my family instead of myself. People knew me as “Lynn and Bob’s daughter” or “that Burns Kid.” While I may have been a student Over-the-Rhine, there were so many opportunities for me to be engaged with the community as just myself. Just Molly Burns. The connections I made through attending Over-the-Rhine Community Church, or other events I was genuinely interested in, were not defined by my school or parents. The people I met were not defined by these backgrounds either. Everyone was involved as part of their day-to-day life and the organizations weren’t temporary extra-curriculars to go on a resume.

“Saturday: A few of us from the cohort are determined to find nature. Us hooligans come together to see the trees. We explore the colors of fall, swing, slide, and laugh.”

This fall, I bonded tightly with those in my cohort and built a strong trust with those I collaborated with in studio- many of whom I met for the first time this semester. In the design/build studio, both of our projects resulted in solutions

that would never happen without a purely collaborative process. The brilliance in this was that at the beginning of the semester, no one could have predicted the final product. The results were so dependent on other factors and input from those outside of our studio. Sometimes when I get bogged down by the many issues facing our society and wonder, “How can we fix this broken system?” I think about the design process. We can’t see all the answers yet because we are in the thick of the process. We won’t arrive at big solutions without all the trials, errors, and smaller steps in between.

“Sunday: After an eventful week, I missed my initial window to schedule for classes next semester. Whoops.”

*If you’d like to collaborate with, participate in, or lend support to the Miami University Center for Community Engagement and its Fall Residency Program, please contact Interim Director John Blake.
blakeja@miamioh.edu*

ADDENDUM:

MIAMI UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT • 2018 ACTIVITIES

We've been avoiding the term *impact* around here as of late. It implies a one-way exertion of force. This doesn't match our modus. Programming at the Miami University Center for Community is predicated upon mutuality, reciprocity. So this is not as much an *impact report* as it is a list of the tangibles (beyond those mentioned in the reflections and introduction above) that we consider to be emblematic of the of the Center's efficacy as it brings together the best elements of community and university:

1512 Elm Street – Contact Center

We recently completed a design-build architecture and interior design project at 1512 Elm Street. The *Contact Center* advocacy group moved from its former home on Vine Street to this 650 square foot storefront, which has been vacant for years. This project started in summer 2016 and involved Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (the property owner), Turner Construction (contractor), and our student

design-build team. Students in 2016 designed the space with Contact Center board members and staff, and fabricated many of the interior elements for later installation. Students also designed and painted a mural onto the exterior courtyard wall. After this, Turner Construction's young professionals group performed structural reinforcement and repair to the space, installed plumbing, electrical, and heating/cooling improvements, and "white boxed" the space.

In the fall of 2017, students from the design build studio met with window providers and then generated and submitted drawings to the City of Cincinnati for historic district approval for a new window system for the building's façade, installed by professionals early in 2018.

The final phase of this project in summer 2018 included making the rear courtyard more accessible with raised cedar planters, new ramps and hardscape. It also included the installation of furnishings, cabinetry, and sliding door systems fabricated by prior students. Students from the Residency Program performed "punch list" items and helped Contact Center staff and friends move into the new space in October, 2018.

STOREFRONTS socially engaged arts series

Wonderland was presented October 26, 2018 with the direction of artist Mary Clare Rietz. The event drew about 45 people to the Center, and was captured in a short film that was later displayed through our storefront windows.

In June 2018, *Vigil*, our inaugural event, was presented at the Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed Annual Conference. Community artist and participant DeeDee Flowers, Residency Program student DeAngela Weakley, Mary Clare Rietz and John Blake presented the impact of *Vigil* to the conference in a performed piece.

Miami University Altman Scholar independent study

Undergraduate Phoebe Myers worked with the Center to compose *Smitty's Mens' and Boys' Wear: Reflections on Progress in Over-the-Rhine, Cincinnati*, presented at the Altman research symposium in March, 2018.

Community meetings at the Center

In the summer of 2018, many experiencing homelessness were evicted from their camps in downtown Cincinnati and took residence in a community park a block from our Center. This, too, was prohibited by the city, and there was a series of meetings between the citizens camping

in the park and city officials held at the Center and mediated by Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (OTRCH), which operates the park.

OTRCH also held several meetings at the Center throughout the year with our neighbors, residents of *buddy's place*, the 20 units of affordable housing units above our storefront space.

The Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless hosted several events at the Center, including alternative spring break education events for multiple universities, as well as high school education events. The annual holiday dinner for the *Streetvibes* newspaper distributors was held at the Center in December 2018, with about 50 in attendance. *Streetvibes* is an alternative newspaper published by the Homeless Coalition. Their distributors sell the papers to generate crucial income.

University events at the Center

We hosted several Miami University retreats at the Center:

- Education, Health and Society Dean's Office.
- Interactive Media Studies.
- College of Creative Arts.

Cincinnati Summer Immersion Program (CSIP)

We continued our work with the Cincinnati Summer Immersion Program (CSIP), teaming with Dr. Tammy Schwartz and Kim Wachenheim from Education, Health, and Society and our community partners at Peaslee Neighborhood Center in Over-the-Rhine. Miami students worked directly with kids and community members in Peaslee's innovative *Agents of Change* (ages 11-15) and *Peaslee Kids* (ages 6-11) Programs during the summer sessions.

Miami University Honors Urban Leadership Internship Program

In summer 2018, we hosted Honors Student Ash McCartney, who helped to locate and archive the works of the Center as well as the files of our program's founder, Tom Dutton.

Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH)

In fall 2018, we hosted a series of training and "share out" events for Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), a non-profit housing provider with a significant national presence that recently took over a large portfolio of affordable housing in Cincinnati. The Center worked with POAH, its resident representatives, and facilitator *Design Impact* to host a series

of workshops aimed at identifying appropriate support services for Cincinnati affordable housing residents.

Also, academics from Georgia State University and University of Minnesota, and economic consultants relied upon the Center's infrastructure to connect with community resources as they coordinate an intensive, interdisciplinary three-year survey of residents to ascertain the effectiveness of support services provided by POAH. A launch event was held in December, with additional training sessions anticipated for March 2019.

1324 Race Street – Apartment 2

In the Fall 2018 design build studio, students worked with Over-the-Rhine Community Housing (building owner) to re-imagine one of the student apartments on Race Street. Students generated and submitted drawings for permit, identified new heating/cooling system for the space and solicited professional support for that design, and got bids for electrical and plumbing upgrades for the space. This project will continue into 2019.