Author: Michael Burns

Title: The Identification of "Studenthood" and the Odyssey Project

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:: Biographical Statement
A Fort Smith, AR native and Hendrix College dropout, Michael earned his bachelor's degree in 1995 from Temple University in Philadelphia. In 1996, he moved to New York City as a corps member of Teach for America where he taught 7th and 8th grade math and science at IS 90 in Washington Heights. After three years as a junior high teacher, he left the field of education altogether and followed his dream of working as a bicycle messenger in Manhattan. That lasted six months. Since 1999, Michael has worked as an instructor in various non-profit adult education programs. The mind-expanding experiences he gained through working with non-traditional students prompted him to return to academia. In 2007 he earned his master's in Language and Literacy from The City College of New York.

His research interests include the relationships between standard English and AAVE, sociolinguistics, identity, hegemony, student/teacher discourse, embodiment and space, orality and literacy, modern American literatures.

Keywords: studenthood, Odyssey Project, non-traditional students, the North End

Abstract: The Odyssey Project is an adult eduction program partly funded by UIUC. Most of the Odyssey Project students are returning to educational situations after some time away from formal academia. In this proposed study, I intend to investigate ideas of "studenthood" as defined by the participants (and instructors) in The Odyssey Project. By conducting classroom observations, I will examine students' interactions in classroom settings as they engage with environments, instructors, texts, ideas, and each other to develop a semiotic understanding of what "studenthood" means to them. As a teacher/researcher, my goal will be to engage students with situated pedagogical approaches that take into consideration a progression

from "reading the word to reading the world" (Paulo Freire). This research will contribute to an understanding of how non-traditional students develop a student identity as they come to a more critical engagement in educational settings.

Initial Exercises:

Reading Response

Initial Exercises:

Observation

Initial Exercises:

Analysis of a Text

After searching for texts that might provide some insight into the University's investment in minority recruitment, I came across a document titled "Chancellor's Diversity Initiatives Committee Final Report." While I find the whole document interesting as a text, I tried to focus on a few of its rhetorical features.

The actual title of the committee's final report is "Project 2012-Transforming Illinois:Re-envisioning Diversity and Inclusion." This document includes the Committee Charge, Membership, and an Executive Summary. Not included, but listed in the table of contents are sections titled Committee Activities and Process Recommendations or Findings, and Attachments. The committee's title suggests a subordinate relationship to the chancellor. If this is the case, I wonder where the group's charge emanates from, what affect (if any) its direction has on the effectiveness of the group in fulfilling their charge, and if the direction of the mandate might affect the manner in which the chancellor follows through on the group's recommendations. The title of the report itself is filled with language suggestive of change in the very foundation and definition of the University. Though this committee and the report it generated comprise a relatively small part of the university-wide "Campus Strategic Plan," the title alone suggests that the group is about serious change.

The document states "[t]he purpose of the report is to provide recommendations to assist Illinois during the course of the report's five-year timetable in reaching the next level of *excellence in education, scholarship, and public engagement by creating and sustaining an academic environment of diversity and inclusion*, ultimately achieving national recognition as an exemplar of these values." Here, the group's time-frame is revealed the implementation if its recommendations. There is also an implication that the University is already on a "level of excellence" from which it should

extend to the "next."

In line with these values, the group "propose(s) four broad thrusts" that address "examining and transforming existing institutional practices and beliefs that maintain structures of power and privilege based on race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexuality, economic class religion, and disability." These thrusts are:

I. Enhance Education and Workplace Environment Thrust;
II. Increase Representation Thrust;
III. Enhance Scholarship Thrust; and
IV. Expand Community and Public Engagement Thrust.

"Thrust" is forceful language. It is phallic language. Given the inclusiveness of the recommendations, the rhetoric is pointed, direct, exclusive. I wonder if the committee had that intention with this word choice.

The committee's charge states that "Transforming Illinois is consistent with the broader mission of Illinois as evident in the current strategic plan." Here, the group establishes its alignment with broader goals set by the University. A list of thirty-five committee members and contributors is included, including co-chairs Helen Neville, PhD (Educational Psychology and African-American Studies and Research Program) and Feniosky Peña-Mora, ScD (Civil and Environmental Engineering and Office of the Provost). This extensive list, I think, also serves to relate the identity of the the Committee to the identity of the University at large. Is this an attempt to blur the distinction between those making the recommendations and those accepting and acting on them?

The Executive Summary at the end of the report expands on the "proposed four thrusts," and relates to those thrusts to the list of "12 recommended goals and a series of corresponding initiatives, which are directly related to the five main goals articulated in the campus strategic plan." Goal 4: "Increase Representation of Diverse Students" does not specify any underrepresented group. This phrasing was possibly chosen to avoid exclusion of any group (of those listed elsewhere in the document), but "Goal 6: Increase Representation of American Indians" specifically mentions a historically under-represented group. The rhetorical strategy is interesting here, and I wonder what affects the wording might have on when and how these goals get addressed.

This document is an example of progressive rhetoric used in a safe way. After all, these are recommendations, not mandates. What happens as a result, though? Surely some of these suggestions get picked up, supported, and (if need be) funded. I am interested in somehow relating this rhetoric to the experience of undergraduate African-Americans at the University of Illinois. How (if at all) does this

rhetoric of University relate to the experiences of actual students? What are the tangible results of these rhetorical recommendations with regard to undergraduate African-Americans at the University of Illinois? And what are the experiences of students who are here at the University?

"Chancellor's Diversity Initiatives Committee Final Report." http://www.provost.uiuc.edu/committees/diversity.html

Initial Exercises:

A Practice Interview

Interview transcription 9/21/07

Following my interest in minority recruitment, I interviewed V, an African-American male student here at Illinois. He is a first-year student from Saint Louis in Computer Science. The interview session lasted a little over two hours. My first mistake was to use the English graduate student lounge as the setting for the interview. When we started, V and I were alone in the lounge, and quickly gained a rapport with each other. At one point, though, two other students in the program entered the lounge. I noticed that V became distracted (eye contact was less consistent) and more reserved in his comments. The informal audience too affected me. The phrasing of my questions became less fluid, and when I detected leads suggestive of a deeper discussion of race (a main point of inquiry), I was hesitant (V and I are both African-American, the two students were white). After about five minutes, the two students left, and V and I quickly regained rapport. Though for the most part this venue was acceptable, I think the flow of the interview was negatively affected by the presence of the two individuals, not to mention a possible violation of the confidentiality agreement. Given a second opportunity, I would secure space to prevent this from happening again.

I opened the questioning with the prompt, "How did you get to U of I?" V responded that he applied for the College of Engineering at Illinois his senior year of high school. Following an already established interest in the field, he took a major in Computer Science. He became aware of the program at U of I through independent research into top colleges with computing. Also, is sister was a graduate student here, so he was familiar with the campus and the area.

He stated that considering college as an option was a "home-based" thing. It was never explicitly stated that he had to go, but given his

sister's academic career, he came to understand very early that he would go.

V submitted a partial application to the Milwaukee School of Engineering and applied in full to U of I and DePaul University (the latter because the application was free). MSOE later requested that he complete the application, but by that time he had been accepted to U of I, and so did not pursue it. He was denied admission DePaul. V reasons that his interests did not match the school's liberal arts focus.

V credits his acceptance to the university at least in part involvement in an extracurricular program with U of I affiliations. He attended a church-based program that took in and revamped computers, then sold them at a reduced cost to people and organizations that need them. V was a member of the tech-team within the program. He got involved in the church program thought his family (mother, aunts, grandmother), who do outreach. His sister also worked within the tech department of the outreach program and talked to her boss at Prairie Net about getting V involved in the "Teen Tech" program. His interest right now is in the correlation between writing computer programs and software development and the products that are a result of these processes. V says, "All that's just revolving around technology."

Regarding financial aid for school, V said he got one grant, and covers the rest of his tuition in loans. He said there was no mention of minority support through the university-funded sources. He also conveyed that both his parents got raises around the time he was applying college. V attributes the change in family income to the absence of need-based offers by the University of Illinois.

V is very active socially. He is a member of the National Society of Black Engineers (NESBIE), The U of I chapter of the NAACP, the Minority Leadership Group (MLG), and the National Organization of Black Chemists and Chemical Engineers (NOBCChE). He shared his plans to give up membership in some of these organizations, as he moves to establish his own registered student organization (RSO) with friends. The organization will be centered on the production a sci-fi television series. V shared his understanding that RSO status would help the group access video and editing equipment for producing the program.

He found out at an Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) meeting that RSOs can get funding through the Student Organization Resource Fee (SORF) to buy their own equipment. He went to the

uiuc.edu website and got information on starting his own RSO. He is very interested in taking advantage of the SORF funding to support his endeavors.

V says he is really not into seeking support, as he considers himself an independent and "action/goal-oriented person." He will ask for help though the organizations, but does not actively seek emotional support in those venues. He sees his independent attitude originating from home, especially his mother and father, in that he was taught that he needed to do things for himself. He feels that he should not burden his parents with the extra cost of his hobbies, so he does various things to support his habits. These activities include web page design, building computers, virus removal, and cutting hair. The issue of independence was a recurring theme throughout the interview.

V expressed that he is also very interested in collaboration with people of different interests. He shared plans to give an acquaintance some software she needs for her music production in exchange for her work on soundtrack production of his video project.

Following a lead from earlier, I asked V about the role his sister played in shaping his attitude toward education. He said she was very supportive and helped him get acclimated to the college environment while he was still in high school, taking him around the campus and to events. Since he has been on campus, she has let him have space to get his "own personal experience." Also, since his sister was not an undergrad here, he recognized that their experiences would be drastically different. Though she works on campus and they have a good relationship, he does not feel the need to see her everyday.

V conveyed that was no push at all in his high school for college readiness. Beyond some general announcements regarding representative visits and some independent efforts on the part of guidance counselors, he had to search out college-related information on his own.

V referred to his high school experience and the lack of administrative energy placed in college readiness. The administration would initially express support for college prep and test readiness, but there was no apparent follow-through (via meetings, flyers, emails) that mirrored the school's rhetoric. V stated that he experienced a lack of effort on the part of, and misinformation and from, his high school counselor on testing and programs that related to his field of interest. At one point, he wanted to pursue, INROADS,

a college-prep program his sister had been involved with. Without offering an alternative or explanation, the counselor said the program did not exist anymore. "I came into his office and I asked about like a certain topic. I can't remember what it is right now. He ain't even look at his computer, he was like, 'Nah, it's not going on.' So I went to my parents about it, I was like, 'my counselor don't do nothin'.' He doesn't seem like he's tryin' to work for me. I don't understand. Like that's his job. It's not like he's a security officer."

After this negative experience, "not saying that race had anything to do with it," V had his counselor changed to a black female counselor who expressed more of an interest in supporting his pursuit in academia. Here, he felt supported. She followed through and got V some information on the program. She also got him enrolled in a program sponsored by Lt. Gov. Clayborne that took students on tour to HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and offered early admissions. He switched to a white female counselor, and felt she also did a good job. This seemed to be offered in support of his earlier comment that the first counselor's behavior was not racially motivated. This white counselor would give him information on workshops at the local community college and give him informational brochures regularly. V reiterated, "It's a matter of who like, takes their job seriously enough to act upon like, the betterment of people, just as a whole."

He continued, "Because like obviously, like, it's real easy to say things. That's why I'm like real action-oriented. Like all this stuff I do, I make sure I'm on it everyday. It's like tiring, but it's like cool at the same time. Because like it's really easy to say that you wanna do something. Like the film group, it's real easy to come up with an idea, like 'that's real cool,' and talk about it all big and get excited one day, and then like nobody want to do anything about it. I'm about still trying to step up." Here again V emphasized the issues of independence and collaboration. He seemed consistent with regard to wanting to do his part in support of others, and seems to view collaboration as a "check system" that can be used to push members of a community to a higher standard.

V was open and very accepting of his role as interviewee. In particular, he went into great detail about his feelings as a minority in advanced-level classes. He made thoughtful attempts to empathize with various perspectives relating to the issues of access and belonging. It was at these points in the interview that I felt most connected to him. While I guided the session in a direction more along my original path, I was drawn to his critical (nearly emotional) articulation about his classroom experiences. His insights, while

beyond the initial scope of my inquiry, are so salient that I am considering changing the focus of my project.

Question: 11/14/07
I am interested in investigating the experiences (enactments,performances) of participants in the UIUC-sponsored Odyssey Project as a window to how these students self-define "studenthood." As a contextualization of these students' experiences, I want to explore how the Douglass Center, the site of the Odyssey Project, has functioned historically in the relationship between UIUC and the North End community. How, if at all, do these groups constitute a (mediated?) academic community?

10/30/07
revised hypothesis
How does the Odyssey Project, a college-prep program based out of the Douglas Center in Champaign's North End, serve as a place of exchange between that neighborhood's African American community and the U of I?
a revised question, 10/9

For my pilot question, I am interested in the meaning of studenthood for participants in the Odyssey Project, a community-based educational program for low-income students funded by the U of I. How does the student's position outside of, but related to, the university inform the self-perception of the role as student? I hypothesize that other factors and motivations play a significant role in the identity formation of students in the Odyssey Project. For the long term project, I want to look at students who have participated in both the Odyssey Project and the U of I as an undergraduate. Given the different educational contexts, how has the student's self-perception changed?

A tentative hypothesis: The notion of self is complicated by the awareness of a racialized identity within the merit-based environment of the university.

I am concerned with exploring the experiences of African American undergraduates at the U of I. More specifically, I am interested in the identity formation of students in the context of the university. What

does student-hood mean to the student? In what ways do the self-conceptions bear influence on the ways in which African American students navigate the university landscape? What role do the parameters such as gender, social class, and family's level of education play in the formulation of this identity? What do students from this demographic perceive is their role in the university? What is the perception that black students have of themselves here? Has this perception changed since arriving here at U of I? In what way? How much of their identity is connected to affiliations with other students of color? In what capacities do black students connect/ from community within the university? To What extent does meritocracy play a role in self-perception? How much or what aspects of their experience here at U of I is racialized? What is the perceived source of this racialization? To what extent does race inhibit or enhance the university experience?

Plan: 10/30/07
revised plan

1. Historicize the North End as an African American neighborhood in Champaign.
2. Present a history (via archives and interviews) of the Douglass Community Center in the North End as an important cite for African Americans in this area.
3. Situate the Odyssey Project as a place of exchange between the North End community and U of I.
4. Observe the class at Odyssey as a place for the enactment of studenthood.
5. Interview students (past and present) in the program to ascertain their experiences in the Odyssey Project.

A revised plan, 10/9

I ideally want to interview a student who graduated from the Odyssey Project and now attends the U of I. I am interested in how she reflects on her experience in the two educational settings. I would also want to include some participant observation of classes in OP with an eye to the discourse of the classroom. How does the rhetoric in this educational setting emulate that of the university's?

A tentative plan

I could start to address some of these questions by backgrounding past experiences of other black students in academia. Given the

scope of the project, I might best be served by starting the university's archives. What are the historical trends in terms of enrollment, retention, and graduation for black students? Comparing the historical data with the present might give support to "softer" analytic methods. I could also look at type and extent of recruitment efforts by the university to attract minority students and the success rates of those efforts.

There is surely some research on the experience of minority students on white majority campuses. I need to familiarize myself with this literature; there might possibly be some noteworthy comparisons and distinctions (a la Becker) between previous work and my line of inquiry.

I am interested in interviewing as a tool to unearth some responses to the above questions. Ideally I'd have several sessions, taking into account (at least) the year of undergraduate study. I could also do some observation of students in-class and in social settings. Also, given the personal nature of the topic, I might want to use some autobiographical writing to compare the memories (and present perceptions) of my experiences as an African American in academia to those views that I gather from my inquiry.

A caveat

I'll stay focused on the students who make it here and what they share as their experiences. I can see a turn, though, to compare the experiences of U of I students and the experiences of non-traditional students from the same ethnic background. For example, how do the attitudes and beliefs of a U of I student compare to a student in the U of I-sponsored Project Odyssey, a community-based program designed to help poor people return to academia?

Data:

A Project Interview

In the interest of time, I had to go with a secondary, though relevant, choice for the interview. Professor Kale is an associate professor in the English department and the coordinator of a community-based educational program that is partly funded by the U of I. I was interested in his perspective on the workings of the program and the community/university relationship. The interview is conducted in his office, which is tucked away on the backside of one of the older buildings on campus. I arrive early and wait outside, reviewing my notes and possible questions. Upon entering the office, I am amazed at how young he is. I say, "You're probably younger than me!" We laugh. He says, "That's almost to a one what my students say." His office is bare, the shelves empty except for a few books strewn across the shelves. The dearth of materials gives the space an echo.

The room is stuffy. He turns off the air conditioner so that we can hear each other.

I open the interview, "What, in your own words is [this program]?

It is an intro course in the humanities offered to low-income people in the Champaign-Urbana community.

The Humanities part is five disciplines Lit, Philosophy, History, Art History, Rhetoric/critical thinking and writing. Taught by U of I professors. Equivalent to what a student would get in a 100-level course.

Students who complete the course earn 6 hours of university credit. It is "a bridge to or back to the university."

Participation requirements: Students need to be within 150% of the poverty level. He offers, "I don't check." Also, they must be at least 18 years old and able to read a newspaper (8th grade reading level).

The local TV news did a story on the program. This coverage provided the majority of referrals the first two years.

In the program's first year, the majority of students were referred by the public library. The program does recruitment presentations at churches, community centers, libraries.

Classes run from 6pm to 8pm, two nights a week (Tues. and Thurs.) Last week of Aug to first week of May, and are held at a local community center that is easily accessed from Champaign's north side.

It is designed to be a kind of seminar. Ideally, students do the reading beforehand, and in Socratic-fashion sit around and discuss the readings. There is an emphasis on the Basic principles of how to construct an argument. There are also regular writing workshops.

In terms of attendance, "There is always attrition. I think last year we lost...maybe 30, 35%....If we graduate half, we've reached our goal." The program typically starts with 25 students.

No formal tracking of attrition. Sometimes it's illness, some people need to get jobs and have to work at night, some people realize that it's not for them.

He is less anxious about people leaving the program than he was a

few years ago. Now Kale takes it as an opportunity for people to discover if college study is for them. If they leave the program, at least it does not cost them anything, they don't have to accrue a lot of debt to find out.

What happens to the students that do make it?

"A couple of students graduated and went on to college." One student is at the U of I. (I want to follow-up on this student. What has her experience been like?)

He wants to help people more in terms of getting back to college, in terms of helping with applications and entrance essay writing.

"It's especially frightening, I think, people have said as much, to suddenly take on... big loans to go back to school. And this causes some anxiety on their part. it's...there's not too much I can help with that except to help them find scholarships and things like that. And trying to persuade them that it might be worth the investment." He was surprised to find that not everyone takes the course because they want to go back to college. Some are just interested and want to discuss the material for the sake of itself. "Some people taking it to model a commitment to education to their children. Like to show, 'I'm coming to class every night.'" he has seen this later scenario play out on multiple occasions. This is interesting, that parents model educational participation for their children. I wonder what the success of this modeling is, what effect it has on the parent/child relationship and the familial valuing of formal education.

Families attend graduation. Participation can be an intrusion on family life.

You don't have to have a GED to attend the program, but people who attend the program without a GED do struggle, and they ultimately would need to get a GED to continue on to college. And there are other programs that do focus on GED-readiness. He does not turn anyone away, but does counsel students who might be better served in more basic level programs.

What are some of the pedagogical assumptions?

The course content is determined by the instructors, not by the program director.

"You can't take anything for granted or assume any kind of background knowledge. It's always slightly surprising how much

people assume other people know about these things...You can't start too basic. Even U of I students have been through decent public high schools and they have some...knowledge"

Even I benefit when reading Plato to say, 'When did this happen? Who are these people?'"

It might run the risk of being patronizing, but it's never seemed that way to him. Students seem thankful to start at a more introductory level.

What do the students thing of the relevance of the materials?

"Philosophy is an especially hard sell because it's so alien and seemingly strange, but actually it's working out well this year, and it worked out well last year." He has found that the more abstract the idea (like What is courage? or What is friendship?) The more personal experience students can bring to the discussion.

Demographics: single mothers in their 30s with older children who decided to go back to school. There are a few men in the program, but the program is consistently majority women. I offered that the availability of working class jobs might give men more opportunity for work than women.

You personal interest in the program?

His original interest in the program comes from a historical interest in union-based schools and public education efforts. "I regretted that those things are not around as much as the used to be, mostly because unions have gone away." Union-funded community education

He offered that the public university is no longer serving it's function. it is harder for people to access..There was some need for this sort of thing.

The original premise of the course was that involvement in the humanities might lead to community participation. His view is much more pragmatic. He thinks everyone should read these things, but there are no "grand claims" about what the humanities can do in terms of making people more active in their communities.

The model for this program is borrowed from another the course that existed in Chicago.

Critical literacy is the pedagogic basis for the program. And teachers who volunteer have a commitment to the development of critical literacy.

We make arrangements for my sitting visiting the class one evening.

funding sources

The chancellor's office provides funds to buy faculty out of courses so they can teach in the program. This gives a financial motivation that keeps interest high, as opposed to relying on volunteers to teach. The other funding is covered by IL Council of Humanities, which covers the cost of the books, childcare, and transportation costs.

He asks me about my affiliations and motivations for the project. He also recommends that I talk to other faculty in the program.

Does the university support efforts on the part of students to navigate into academia? Occluded discourses.

We chat while the tape is still running.

He gives some more suggestions for contacting professors.

Data: SLC Archives Part Two, 10/30/07

The Archive   I returned to the SCL Archives to see if any of the materials I located in my previous search might be relavant to my research. My search was quickly narrowed: two of the boxes that I identified earlier (SLC File 4/5/824 and SLC File 5/2/810) were not at the SCL Archives, but instead are housed at the University Archives. Additionally, the "Our Gang Day Care Papers, 1973-93" (SLC File 15/19/80), because of the personal nature of the data, require prior approval by the psychology department for access. I am due to contact the university archivist, Bill Maher, for information on how to go about gaining permission to see these papers.

That left me with the "Graduate Student Association Subject File, 1967-71" (SLC File 41/62/15). Within box 4 of that file is a folder, "Race Tension in Champaign-Urbana, August 1967-September 1969." The majority of documents in the folder were newspaper articles from the Daily Illini and the Champaign-Urbana Courier. While I looked over all the articles, I was mostly concerned with those that informed a picture of university/community relations during that

time.

One article within that purview, "Johnson Warns MIA" (Daily Illini, December 5, 1967), gives a picture of a university organization, the Men's Independent Association, "in favor of adopting a proposal limiting the use of the Illini Union facilities to members of the university community." One local black leader, John Lee Johnson, was quoted in the paper as being opposed to the move, and "warned of increased violence if the University refuses to accept outsiders in its facilities." He instead called for "a 'more workable relationship between yourselves and those who will never go to college.'"

This proposal came at a time when the Civil Rights movement and Viet Nam anti-war protests were in full swing, and community involvement with these issues would have been at a high point. That only one neighborhood, the "North End," is mentioned in the article suggests that the proposed ban had as much to do with race as it does with space. And given that Johnson is identified as a "North End Negro representative," the article establishes that race has a particular place relative to the university.

While particular article does not relate to "studenthood," it does address the issue of place for non-student members of the African American community relative to the university. In 1967 there was a line that was recognized by each community that shared the North End border. Johnson "proposed the University enter into a program to improve the situation in the North End," and stated, "The ghetto is what it is today because the University has turned its back on it all these years." Whether Johnson's opinions are reflective of the African American neighborhood is another issue. His rhetoric, though, further supports the notion the the North End has been more than willing to enter into an exchange with the University. It could be that the Douglass Center and the Odyssey Project are tangible examples of efforts on the part of the university to enter into a spacial dialogue with its neighbors to the north.
SLC Archives Part One, 10/22/07

I started my exploration of the SLC Archives with a keyword search: "Odyssey Project." This yielded no results, so I broadened my search to look for any materials that might relate to university/community relations, especially with regard to African American communities in Champaign-Urbana. I looked with some detail into all the subject categories with "community" in the title: Community Advocacy Depot (Champaign, IL); Community Controversy; Community Development; Community Groups; Community Planning; Community Psychology; Community Relations; Community Service. I came across four record files that possibly relate to

my line of inquiry.

In "Community Development" there are files from the All University Committee on Community Problems (changed to Council on Community Development in 1960), 1953-62 (SLC File 4/5/824). Therein is a collection of information on community research and development. It might be interesting to look at what types of research was conducted by this organization and what rhetoric was employed in the discourses related to the community. These documents could also provide a historical backdrop for U of I's relationship with the African American community.

In "Community Relations" there is a collection of "Research Publications" (SLC File 5/2/810). One particular study in this collection is titled "Poverty in Champaign County: A Case Study of a Minority Group (June 1965)," which "deals with the poverty conditions of the Champaign County Negro in regard to income, housing, education and occupations and contends that the Negro's situation is worse in Champaign-Urbana than many placed elsewhere in Illinois… (Description,http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/archon/index.php?p=collection s/controlcard&id=3205&q=5%2F2%2F810, accessed Oct 23 2007).

Given my interest in the university's involvement in the community with regard to its support of a particular adult education program, it might be worthwhile to investigate whether that commitment is connected to a precedent established during the Civil Rights era. There might also be potential for a comparison between findings in this study and another that is more contemporary. How, if at all, have socioeconomic conditions for African Americans in Champaign-Urbana changed since 1965?

Under the "Community Controversy" is the "Graduate Student Association Subject File, 1967-71" (SLC File 41/62/15). In Box 4 of that file is a collection of documents under the heading of race. While most of the titles in this section suggest that the focus is on race-related issues within the university, there is one holding labeled "Race Tension in Champaign-Urbana, August 1967-September 1969." Again, while an investigation of racial tensions is not the focus of my study, it might be helpful to look at some of the previous encounters between the U of I and the African American community that have participated in establishing the present climate.

In "Community Psychology" is the collection "Our Gang Day Care Papers, 1973-93" (SLC File 15/19/80), which was "a center for children under three years old whose parents were under 21 and continuing their education" and "operated by the Community Psychology Action Center of the University of Illinois" (Description, http://web.library.uiuc.edu/ahx/archon/index.php?p=collections/controlcard

&id=2312&q=15%2F19%2F80, accessed October 23 2007). Our Gang" is an example of a university-sponsored, community-based program. These files could contain some information on the administrative considerations of the program that potentially correspond to the Odyssey Project. I would also be interested to see some documents authored by parents of children who attended the day care center. What are the ways that parents retuning to school define the role of family?

Data:

Data Continued

What follows is a first draft/rough transcription of a participant observation I conducted at the Odyssey Project.

Oct 4, 2007
Observation
Project Odyssey

Program's classes are held Douglass Library on Champaign's "north side"
Predominantly black
Library is on same lot as community center
Kids play basketball on the hard court, one man dressed all in black, sits on a pic nic table and watches the game.
Library is small compared to the main branch. Dominated by children's literature
I wait in line for assistance/directions behind two other patrons. The first is trying to clear up some overdue fines. The second needs a photocopier. I state my purpose, ask for AP. The woman walks me to a conference room off the back of the main room.
Class is in a different room tonight, a conference room. There are already students present as I enter. AP and JK are there, talk with students informally.

At 6PM AP gets class started. I wonder about my role, how much I should participate in the class discussions, esp given that I did not do the readings. I am familiar with some of the texts in the course reader, though. It is a red covered bound book. All texts are photocopies, double-sided. I am excited with anticipation.

One of the overhead lights flickers, initially distracts me.

As class begins, AP revises the syllabus. Tonight the class will cover Eldridge Cleaver and Gwendolyn Brooks, and will start with oral presentations by three students.

Next week's agenda is amended: Baraka's Dutchman, a biography from the Norton (I think Af Am lit version), and selected poems. AP

repeats the poems to be read three times as students write it down. I notice note taking for the first time. It is laborious. AP is aware of this, repeats the list for individuals as needed.

What about a syllabus for this class? An occluded genre? Is this a first encounter with the genre?

At 6:07 there are 8 students in the class. One student has an English/Persian dictionary. One student has as MD recorder. I wonder if I should tape, decide to focus on note taking.

AP hands out instructions for the first paper, a 2-3 page "analytical essay." Reads through the whole text of the document, asks for questions. One student asks for definitions of tone, vocabulary. AP refers to a Larry Neal essay the class recently read, and unpacks the terms: "Is it academic? Vernacular?" She connects tone and vocab with descriptives : stark, absolute. "Tone of voice" and "the effects produced by those choices" AP offers office hours for conferences. Students are to sign up for times. Conferences will be held instead of a class meeting the week before the paper is due.

Re: the essay assignment, what are the motivations, both on part of teacher and student? What are the requirements for credit in this program? Are these requirements stated up front? Do students know this?

Next are the oral reports. Two students come in lat, negotiate seating at the now crowded table. Previously, one other student came in and sat in a chair on the wall. He as invited to the table, but he said he could not stay for class tonight. Before the oral presentations, he an JM go outside the room. JM returns in about 3 min., the student is not with him.

AP says the class is one week behind on the syllabus.

First oral report is on CORE. This student reads from a Word document. Reads the paper word for word. The pages are mixed up (fresh out of the printer?), she shuffles them and continues to a small smattering of empathetic laughter. Other students listen, take notes. The presentation takes about 5 min. The student seems slightly nervous, but determined, overcomes the nervousness with organization. The class applauds at the end.

The second student presents on Harold Cruz, founder of Af Am studies at U of Michigan. She reads from hand-written note cards.

Her head is down the whole time, but she is determined to get through. She also reads verbatim from the cards during the presentation proper. When she finishes, the class applauds in support. "I was nervous," she says with release. Did she dress up for this? She wears a nice off-white blouse and black skirt, looks like church clothes. What of her choice of technology? Why note cards? Was the format of the presentation discussed? Where did she get her idea to use note cards?

Now, she speaks more relaxed, answers a question about some part of the presentation. Cruz did not have a PhD but was allowed to teach at university. Presenter #2 notes that sometimes "talent does not come out on paper."

AP notes that the Black Arts Movement was about art "for the people, by the people." Theater and poetry are artistic forms that are easily accessible for little or no cost.

3rd presenter admits, "I got this on my break from work." The class laughs. She holds several pages printed out directly from web pages. She reads from them directly. Her topic is Stokley Carmichael. Her reading is choppy. She encounters words she is not familiar with: "What's this word?" She asks as shows a neighboring student the page. Her neighbor responds, "Activism." She labors through. After her presentation, she recalls a personal connection to Miriam Makeba, a former wife of Carmichael and a West African musician. JM asks a follow-up question, and student presenter, after she is applauded for her efforts, slides the papers the length of the table to him. The class laughs loudly. This student is older, seems to have the respect of the group because of her age (Later, while reporting a personal story about her relationships with black Muslims in Champaign, reveals that she was a small business owner).

AP gives some follow-up information on a previous (last week?) class discussion on the Nation of Islam. As she begins, a car outside blasts its stereo, booming bass and setting of the alarms of neighboring cars. This disrupts the class for a brief moment, as if despite the efforts of the students to engage in academic discourse, the neighborhood environment will intrude at will. This occurs all within a minute, then the class is back on track, AP continues her presentation. It is generally historical. At the end, she focuses on a few of the NOI platforms from "Message to the Blackman." AP emphasizes the separatist leanings of the platform. Spends a small amount of time on Yakub, who NOI belives created the white race in a laboratory "thousands of years ago."

This catches the class attention. One student accounts her personal observations of the conflict caused by the Fard/Farakahn split in NOI after E. Muhammad's death: "I saw people get divorced." Another student offers that she is Muslim. She apologizes for her lack of fluency in English as she attempts to offer Al Islam's take in polygamy. From her personal perspective, she says, I'll kill him!" The class resounds in laughter. Refers the Koran, says that nowhere does the text state that polygamy is acceptable. For her, leaders for their own ends interpret the text. The group is attentive to her. She is an authority via her membership to the religion. She says, "They call me bad Muslim" because she does not cover her head or attend mosque regularly. "What about my feeling as a female? I don't believe that," referring to polygamy. The class offers verbal confirmations: "Mmm Hmm." "Yeah." A student offers that it's an "interpretation" of the text. Now the class tangents on polygamy, straying from the original focus.

AP brings the class back to a previous focus, Malcolm X and MLK. Students offer traditional (simple?) interpretations of the two figures. AP tries to complicate this view. I raise my hand and also try to make a point, but one student (presenter #1, possible interviewee?) cut me off. Other students join in the discussion. AP calls on me again. I make the point that toward the end of their lives X and MLK both began to broaden their ideas of beyond black America. There was a search for commonality with other groups, Malcolm with Africa, King with working class and poor Americans. Also, the latter speeches of each might be confused for the other.

At this point, AP calls for a break. The student to my left (French? Definitely first-generation immigrant) asks me for examples of speeches. I give her "Speeches at Harvard" and the Sanitation workers strike speech, the latter of which the class read. JM conferences with presenter #3 on her paper, which is hand written. He offers some organizational and rhetorical suggestions. The student nods in agreement, but does not say much. A few other students gather in 2s and 3s, converse with familiarity.

Break lasts about 10 minutes. AP relates that E. Cleaver and G. Brooks will be covered. One student shares that she was present at Brooks' last public reading. Student went to an elementary school named for Brooks. "I didn't know who she was. She looked like somebody's grandma." The class laughs. She offers that it was not until HS that she know who Brooks was.

The class then focuses on E. Cleaver. Above student reads aloud the brief biography from the course reader. She is fluid and confident.

This is the most fluid sight-reading tonight.

AP then asks for comments/responses to Cleaver's "To All Black Women, From All Black Men." A male student, an older black American offers, "His manhood was stripped." He goes on at length, seems personally connected to the reading. Instead of contextualizing what Cleaver is saying in the reading, this is a personal response. This is a consistent approach to the text by all students. There is no separation between a description or interpretation of what the author is saying and the reader/student's personal attachment to the subject matter. "He felt this from other women." "It pains him to acknowledge it, as if it's a quiet secret." The class agrees.

AP refers to the text, tries to get some attention on what Cleaver is saying in the reading. She is trying to problematize the text, drawing on sexual and objectifying imagery, but there is a consistent return to redemption, forgiveness, the relationships between black women and men. AP comments on the assumed heterosexual voice of the text. She writes on the board "What is means to be a man." The class goes back to love, the relationship. I comment on the assumptions made in woman- and manhood. "Where do the ideas come from." I suggest that Cleaver's representations of both are simplistic. One student, a Latino man, responds. He compares the experience of black Americans to those of Mexicans, and then goes into an explanation of how indigenous peoples were demeaned by Spanish colonization and are now ashamed of their identity. He is on a roll, talking directly to me. He defends Cleaver, "He's just using metaphor." This student does not take the reading to be demeaning.

The security guard quickly opens the door to the room, "Oh, you're still going?" This is the cue to end the class (This branch closes at 8 PM). AP wraps it up, says the class will pick up there next week. AP approaches me as I am gathering myself. She thanks me for coming. I thank her for having me. JM also thanks me. JM walks ahead of us, conversing with a student. AP and I (though mostly me} talk about the class dynamics. The pedagogy of teaching adults is different. I offer that it is easy to mold younger students, as they are still developing an identity. Older students have no imperative to change the way they thing, as "it's been working for them this far." AP and I make tentative plans for my returning for another session.

This is really an ideal situation for further study. There is the non-traditional adult student in a continuing education environment. There is a university-sponsored program in a community context. The course context is centered on Af Am literature. There are issues of

access, discourse, rhetoric, identity, studenthood.

Data: Video/plan

Video/Plan 5-10 sec montage of footage showing Springfield Ave, esp. the north side of the Beckman Center (fenced off, no entrances on that side of the building). Across Springfield Ave, toward the "North End."

5-10 sec of Douglass Community Center and Library exterior. Include playground, basketball court. Shoot approach into library.

10 sec of classroom footage. Contextualize, humanize, individualize (as much as possible)

Student Interview. Straightforward set up. Nothing Fancy. In the library, before/after class OR in the student's favorite study area if possible. (Two preferences for interview: 1. The student who graduated from OP and went on to UIUC, or 2. A student currently enrolled in the program).

Possible interview questions

What is Odyssey Project to you? Why are you in the program?
What do you get out of it?
What do you bring to it?
How do you prepare for classes?
What is your routine?
Where do you study? For how long? Do you use a computer? What other "tools" do you use to help you study?
What was your last educational experience?
How does your experience in OP compare to your last formal educational experience?
How do you know when you are learning?
What are your goals for yourself?

If possible, get footage of Interviewee's study spaces, and other accoutrement (books, backpacks, writing tools, etc as tools of "studenthood").

Discuss: Michael Burns
ANTH 411
Discussion
November 26, 2007

As a designated institution of learning, the university provides a stage, as it were, for the enactment of performed behaviors by members of the student body. Whether these behaviors are complicit with (or deviant from) particular idealized notions is of less concern here than is the conception that an assumed "ideal student" serves as a litmus. While the identity of an individual actor who assumes a role as student may be problematic, what it means to be a student in the university context is clearly demarcated by the environment; the campus, quad, library, dormitories, classrooms, coursework, grading systems, sororities and fraternities, and other required and recreational "structures" all provide tangible signs that serve to inform student performances. So too are there rewards for "successful" performances (good grades, degreed diplomas) as there are "punishments" (academic probation, failing grades, expulsion) for poor ones.

Pilot data collected in personal interviews show that the formation of a university-student identity begins before arrival to campus. In one interview conducted at UIUC in the fall of 2007, the respondent indicated that her consideration of college as an option before graduating from high school was a "home-based thing," and that there was an implicit assumption of college attendance. In this instance, what it means to be a "good student" and enact a performance in accordance with perceived expectations is an extension of a localized "culture of higher learning" (Interview with V). While the above statements may not initially be problematic when applied to a consideration of students who attend "high-performing" secondary schools in middle-class areas and then go on to post-secondary study, the performance of "studenthood" becomes more complex when student-actors in non-traditional educational contexts perform the role. Pursuing this line of inquiry, I looked into what performances of studenthood would look like among participants in the UIUC/Illinois Humanities Council-sponsored Odyssey Project, "a yearlong, college-accredited course in the humanities offered at no cost to adults in the Champaign-Urbana community living below or slightly above the federal poverty level" (IPRH).

The Odyssey Project, which is in its second full year (IPRH), is housed at the Douglass Branch Library in the area of Champaign historically referred to as "the North End." Preliminary research conducted at the Student Life and Culture Archives at UIUC evidenced a string historical connection between that area's African American community and the university (Urbana Courier, 1967). Taking into account that most of the Odyssey Project students are returning to educational situations after some time away from formal academia, the program's director noted that they might also have different motivations than traditional university students. It was conveyed, to his surprise, that some students did not sign up for the

program because they want to go back to college. Some convey that they are "just interested and want to discuss the material for the sake of itself," while others want to show "I'm coming to class every night." (Interview with Kale). In this instance, parents attempt to enact what they perceive as a student-performance for their school-aged children. Familial relationships typically viewed as external are extended to the educational site and motivate a particular enactment. This is one example of how the performance of studenthood takes on new meanings when considered beyond traditional educational contexts.

Preliminary observation also provided some insight into what the performance of studenthood looks like within the Odyssey Project classroom. In this instance, three students presented oral reports that, while sincere enactments of studenthood, were all distinct. The technologies employed in these presentations (a self-produced typed report, hand-written note cards, printed web-captures) suggested some variation among the class with regard to how to do an oral presentation. I also observed how, during a class discussion of a reading that was chosen to be "problematic," the instructor had some difficulty in engaging the students in critical discourse (Participant observation). It was not for lack of trying, or systemic of a lack of overall class discussion. Instead the problem emanated from a lack of critical discourse and inquiry on the part of the students. I say this not to suggest that the development of lines of critical inquiry is only an issue in this particular setting. Any educator concerned with fostering critical discussion among her students has had this problem. Instead, I want to suggest that this too is a place where the performance of studenthood might be investigated relative to participants' perceptions of what being a student means.

This initial round of research, while liminal, suggests that with more data there is a possibility identifying performances of "studenthood" as they relate to this particular context. This investigation might be facilitated by historical research as it relates to: (UIUC and other) University-sponsored educational programs that have been run "off-campus"; the Douglass center and its role as a place within the "North End"; and a survey of University-"North End" relations as they relate to class, gender, and race. Individual and group interviews with Project Odyssey students will also greatly inform this study. Also, longitudinal close reads and rhetorical analyses of works produced by Project Odyssey students might inform some sense of a development of critical thought and expression, to an end of better facilitating this progression.

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**Research
Proposal:**

The Identification of "Studenthood" and the Odyssey Project

Statement of Research Problem

More and varied research needs to be conducted that focuses on better
understanding factors relational to non-tradition students' successful
engagement with educational opportunities. Especially in contexts where
these educational opportunities are offered as an extension of the
meritocratic power of education, there needs to be more a situated attention
on the experiences of students from historically marginalized populations. If
educational programs implemented to serve students from lower
socioeconomic backgrounds are more sensitive to the ways broader
contextual issues affect student learning, the better these programs can serve
their target populations.

Pilot data suggests a strong positive correlation between the level of student
success in the university context and the level of expectation for school

success in the student's prior social networks. By contrast, non-traditional students' social networks are distinct from those of traditional students, and contribute in different ways to experiences within educational contexts. Initial evaluations based on interviews indicate that non-traditional students often take on different sets of considerations when choosing to engage in educational programs. How these considerations inform understandings of their roles as students, or "studenthood," might provide valuable information toward a more effective implementation of pedagogy and support systems that positively contribute to helping students attain their educational and intellectual goals.

Statement of Proposed Research

In this proposed study, I intend to investigate ideas of "studenthood" as defined by the participants (and instructors) in an adult educational program. By conducting classroom observations, I will examine students' interactions in classroom settings as they engage with environments, instructors, texts, ideas, and each other to develop a semiotic understanding of what "studenthood" means to them. As a teacher/researcher, my goal will be to engage students with situated pedagogical approaches that take into consideration a progression from "reading the word to reading the world" (Freire). This research will contribute to an understanding of how non-traditional students develop a student identity as they come to a more critical engagement in educational settings. To this end, research will take an approach that maps people's lives in search of affects on educational successes and shortcomings, with an eye for differentiation within the class.

Site Selection

Of particular interest are the experiences of students in the Odyssey Project. This program is partially funded by UIUC, and is directed and staffed by University professors and graduate students on course-release. As such, there is a direct relation to UIUC, and given the Socratic tone of the program's mandate (Illinois Humanities Council), at least rhetorically, there is an attempt to recreate the university setting in an off-campus environment. The OP is housed at Douglass Library in Champaign's "North End," a predominantly black neighborhood. Preliminary historical research has indicated that the site of the Douglass Library has played a significant role in the relationship between that neighborhood and UIUC (SLC Archives). Attention to the role of the neighborhood in the constitution of both broader identities and a more situated idea of "studenthood," then, is an important consideration within the scope of the research (Reynolds).

Methodology

As a participant observer, I am interested in conducting research for a

school year (September to June). The goal here is to be as descriptive as possible, by employing a meticulous "straight description" in note taking (Becker 76). Discourse analysis of classroom interactions will also draw attention to the role of language in identity formation (Gee). Especially with regards to the investigation of an informed idea such as "studenthood," some insight into "shared cultural assumptions" about students' roles in the classroom may be revealed through discourse (Strauss 204).

As a teacher/researcher, is it essential that I am constantly aware of my rhetoric as an extension of my pedagogy. While experience dictates that I cannot remove myself from all facets of classroom interactions, I can still measure student responses and interactions in reflection writings after course meetings. Also, I plan to do textual analyses of student writings as they attempt to model academic discourse and reflect on their own intellectual processes (Fairclough , Richardson).

As a measure for self-reported progress over time in the program, structured interviews or surveys may best give an indication of to what extent consultants' views toward themselves, the educational process, and indeed "studenthood" change with time (Bernard). Time allocation (Gross) and social mapping (Nelson) are two other methods that can lend temporal and spatial strokes to the picture of how, when, and where participants incorporate education related behaviors into their everyday lives. These methodological considerations are essential in gathering data that that can inform a problematized view of who a student is, in turn informing pedagogical and programmatic decisions within educational environments.

Ethics

As this project is nothing without the students, it will be important to be respectful of people as individuals. In my role as teacher/researcher, I must also be cognizant of the understanding that students' education comes before research and proceed accordingly. As we engage with each other over time, I must not let familiarity cloud my perspective as a researcher, nor let my inner-researcher take over to the detriment of my teaching. That my goals may not be the students' goals should be of constant concern.

Significance

Educational attainment beyond the post-secondary level has been correlated with many demographic measures, from higher levels of income to increased life expectancy, to the likelihood of children in families with higher levels of education to continue on to post-secondary education themselves (U.S. Census Bureau 2006). As such, who is served in educational settings, that is, the picture that educators and administrators have of who students are, needs to be re-evaluated. Especially in the case of

nontraditional students, a more informed idea of who students are can inform their educational success toward a positive sociopolitical transformation.

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This study takes into account the "location" of a racialized identity "through the study of social spaces at UIUC." In a sense, the physical space (in this case, the Korean grocery store) serves as a figurative and metaphorical context for group members to project and reflect on what that membership means. Given that "identity" can be difficult to operationalize, it makes good sense both analytically and methodologically to look at actual locations (in space and time) where that identity is shared.

While I am interested in "studenthood" as a particular facet of identity, I have yet to clearly define what that term means. Borrowing from Worrasangasilpa's approach, I might more carefully consider the placement of that identity. Where does one act like a student? Is this a conscious choice on the part of the actor? Approaching this particular aspect of identity in terms of where it happens might make it more recognizable and lead to questions that relate to study space, habits related to academic/intellectual behaviors. Taking a more literal look into "contexts" for behaviors and allowing "studenthood" to first exist in a place may facilitate a better look at what it is.

Once locations for an identity are defined, looking into the "ways of being" in those spaces is a logical next step. *How* studenthood is displayed becomes observable in the actions and interactions of group members, and further supports an association between location and action.

Reflect: As I have begun the process of working toward the PhD, my head is swimming with questions. Each seminar conversation and class meeting, each book and journal reading, every discussion group, presents me with questions I did not have prior to the encounter. Asking is not an issue. What I was more concerned with, and what drew me to the course initially, was the issue of method. How do I go about asking good, interesting, and answerable questions? This EUI course has given me some insight into how to aproach this latter issue. And I think, as a consequence, the questions that I pose in the

future will be more salient. I feel like I have a "how" that will heretofore inform my "what."

In line with this, I feel like the course's stress on method is valuable, in that understanding method, regardless of discipline, is crucial to academic success. Whether it is overtly stated or not, students have to know how to go about research in order to perform here. EUI, in its own way, lifts that veil, and starts to reveal the careful consideration that goes into the academic works that we read. And as we are made aware of this process, we engage in it as well. It is at times frustrating, knowing how to ask, being able to see what is there. I think, though, that my future career as an academic has been enhaced by my particpation on this course.

The stress on process, and the level of student interaction as we see each other in process has been a boon. EUI allows students to respond to students. In this way, we are enacting an engagement that imitates "real world academia." The only shortcoming here is that group projects were not encouraged. I would like to have seen that. Or maybe "borrowing" each other as reseachers for one of the assignments might help to foster a more critcal engagement with another's project. Still, the ability to give and get comments on our research was fruitful. And it did provide a small, yet usable, window into what others were thinking as they were doing.

All in all, I had a great experience with the project. I hope to continue with it in some capacity. In a broad sense, I know my experience here as been positively informed, and my academic enagement has been made more critical.

Recommendations: Recommendations

Office of the Chancellor, as a sponsor of the Odyssey Project, should set up follow-up interviews for students who preemptively leave the program.

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, as a sponsor of the Odyssey Project, should institute mechanisms to facilitate OP graduates who want to apply for college.

Office of the Chancellor and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences should offer need-based financial aid for OP graduates who attend UIUC.