

Writing for Activism and Social Justice

Friday, February 28, 2025

9:30am – 11:00am

Conference Link: <https://tinyurl.com/5thCompSummit>

We the People Write On: Writing for Justice

Dr. Rajni Shankar-Brown - will illuminate the transformative power of writing in shaping and advancing social justice movements. Through various forms of written expression—including poetry, essays, letters, blogs, speeches, personal narratives, guides, and social media—writing serves as a powerful tool to challenge oppressive systems, amplify diverse voices, and inspire collective action toward a more equitable and just world. This presentation will explore how writing—whether in the form of poetry, stories, calls to action, or reflective practice—can serve as a catalyst for meaningful and needed social change. By using our voices and our pens, we can challenge the status quo, promote awareness, build energy, sustain momentum, and foster solidarity in the march for justice. In these turbulent times, Dr. Shankar-Brown believes the written word remains a vital and revolutionary tool in our collective journey, especially as we work to honor our shared humanity and advance justice!

Rajni Shankar-Brown, PhD, MBA, M-MA, MA, (pronouns: she/aval/they), is a distinguished Professor, Writer, Artist (Artist and Activist), and the JBD Chair of Social Justice Education at Stetson University. She is the Founder and Executive Director of the Institute for Catalyzing Equity, Justice, and Social Change. Dr. Shankar-Brown has been honored with Stetson University's most prestigious awards including the Outstanding Faculty Advisor Award, the McEnery Award for Excellence in Teaching, and the Hand Award for Distinguished Faculty Achievement. A prolific author of influential educational articles, books, and creative works, she is a community engaged educator-scholar, intersectional equity consultant, wellbeing coach specializing in restorative practices, community organizer, cultural strategist, accomplished artist, and internationally ranked poet, also known by her stage name, "Rising Lotus." Her expertise lies in transformative systems change and sustainable educational practices that advance justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.



Writing for Activists: Practicing What We Teach

In Writing for Activists, students practice communicating through words—and sometimes images, graphics, or audio/video—in many of the ways that are useful and common in activist, organizing, community and justice work. We read, assess, and write manifestos, grant applications, interpersonal and inter-organizational communication, budget narratives, mission and strategy statements, press releases, op-eds, and more. Some readings also help us consider how and why we might use a particular method or medium, and/or equip us to recognize and communicate intentionally through our own biases, fears and desires.

We host guest speakers involved in local organizing, nonprofit, or community work; these speakers also share ways for students to join them in that work. When the class was remote or hybrid, I invited community residents to join for free. In Spring 2023, student organizers enrolled in the class used it to workshop materials and messaging, and to explore ways of improving organizing culture, intra-group communication, and peer support. My presentation will discuss how we did these things and how others might adapt them for their own courses and institutions.

Kate Schapira has been listening to people about climate change for over a decade, at the Climate Anxiety Counseling booth and elsewhere. She lives in Providence, Rhode Island, where she teaches nonfiction writing at Brown University and is involved with local efforts toward environmental justice, climate justice and peer mental health support. The exercises in her first work of nonfiction, Lessons from the Climate Anxiety Counseling Booth, offer actionable steps for connecting with others, identifying and activating community abundance, matching your skills with organized climate activism, and imagining a radically more livable future in order to bring it into being. She partners with community health initiatives, museums, schools and universities, and community organizations to implement and adapt these exercises to further and deepen their missions and visions.

