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# PLACE AS TEXT: Approaches To Active Learning (Second Edition)


Bernice Braid

*Long Island University - Brooklyn Campus, braid@liu.edu*

Ada Long

*University of Alabama - Birmingham, adalong@uab.edu*

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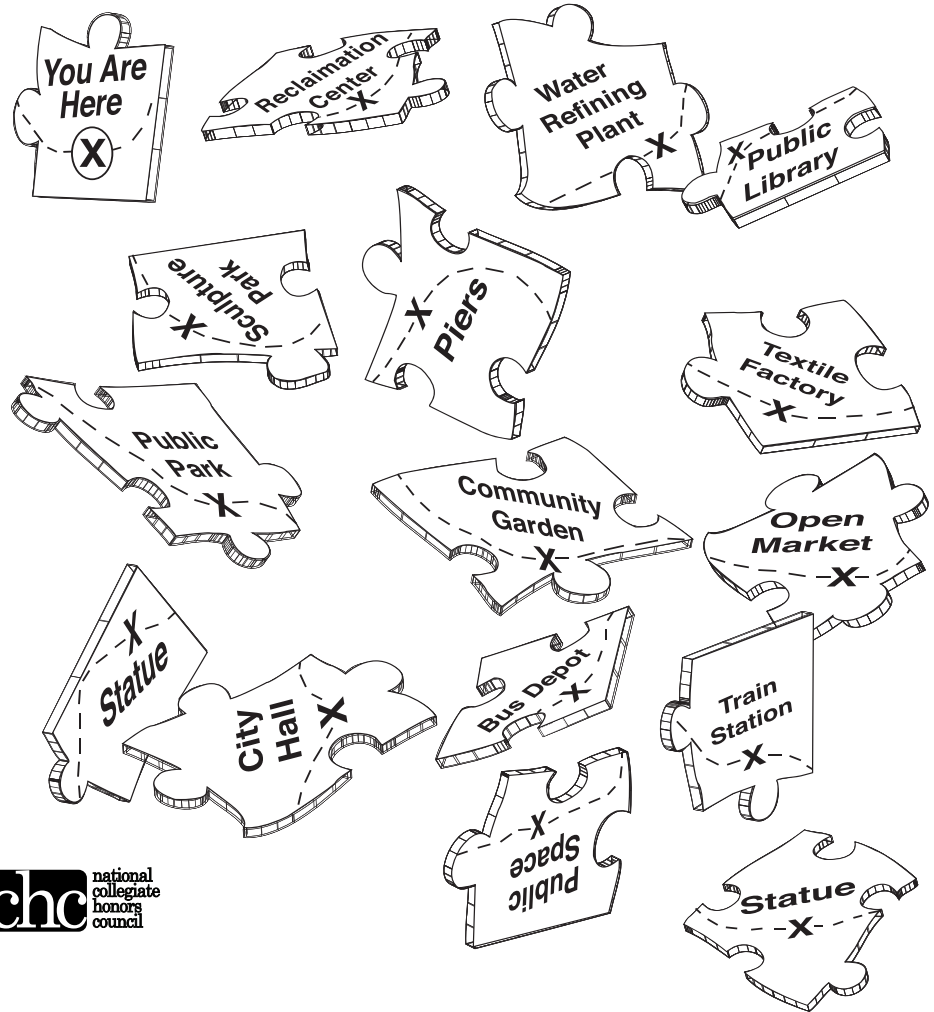
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# NCHC Monograph Series

## Place As Text: Approaches To Active Learning Second Edition

Bernice Braid and Ada Long, Editors



**PLACE AS TEXT:**  
**Approaches To Active Learning**

**Editors**

**Bernice Braid and Ada Long**

Jeffrey A. Portnoy

Georgia Perimeter College

[jeffrey.portnoy@gpc.edu](mailto:jeffrey.portnoy@gpc.edu)

General Editor, NCHC Monograph Series

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(402) 472-9150  
FAX: (402) 472-9152  
Email: [nchc@unlserve.unl.edu](mailto:nchc@unlserve.unl.edu)  
<http://www.NCHChonors.org>



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## DEDICATION



To John and Edythe Portz,  
godparents of NCHC's active-learning projects

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# PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

ADA LONG AND BERNICE BRAID

The decade since publication of *Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning* has seen an explosion of interest and productivity in the field of experiential education. The substance and terminology of “experiential education” and “active learning,” which have been mainstays of the National Collegiate Honors Council since the 1970s, have moved out into higher education and become a national movement in theory and in practice. Numerous books and articles are now available on the topic, and active learning has become the focus not just of classes or special projects or honors programs but of entire self-sufficient programs within the academy. With this expanded interest, the first edition of *Place as Text* has been out of print for over a year, so we present a second edition that expands, restructures, and clarifies information provided in the first. Happily, however, we have found that the first edition remains up to date in most ways. The pedagogies described in *Place as Text* have stood the test of time remarkably well.

One structural change in the second edition requires some explanation. All the materials focusing exclusively on Honors Semesters have been grouped together in the first half of the monograph. Most readers will not be planning to propose an Honors Semester, but all should be aware that this material is the basis and background for all the other forms of active learning, including City as Text™, that are extrapolations from it. The principles of active learning described in the chapters on Honors Semesters are thus crucial to all the other models of active learning included in the monograph.

The decade since the first edition of this monograph has been a busy one for the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee, which has continued its mission of offering active-learning options such as Honors Semesters for honors students throughout the country, Faculty Institutes for administrators and teachers interested in incorporating active learning in their courses and programs, and City as Text™ experiences for participants at annual conferences. A new spinoff of the City as Text™ approach called “Partners in the Parks” has been developed within the past three years and is described in this second edition and in fuller detail in a monograph entitled *Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks*. The committee has also produced a companion monograph to *Place as Text* titled *Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*, edited by Peter A. Machonis (2008), which focuses on recent, innovative

## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies; it features chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy. Finally, another monograph in this series—*Writing on Your Feet: Experiential Learning, Reflective Practices, and Communities of Discourse*—is well along in the planning stage.

The editors and authors of this second edition would like to thank Mary Middlemas for her help with the typescript, Jeffrey A. Portnoy for his invaluable help as General Editor of the NCHC Monograph Series, and Mitch Pruitt, our excellent Managing Editor at Wake Up Graphics.

# INTRODUCTION

**BERNICE BRAID**

National Honors Semesters began as an experiment. Drawing from a broad national base—the membership of the National Collegiate Honors Council—they assembled students from varying academic disciplines, widely divergent geographies, and diverse cultural backgrounds. From their inception, national Honors Semesters have been viewed by the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee, which is charged with their design and oversight, as a living laboratory in forging connections. From social links essential to communal life, to intellectual links fundamental to integrated thought, Honors Semesters have been designed not only to enable but also to provoke these linkages.

Planning for the first program, offered in 1976, began in 1973 and aimed to incorporate the heightened awareness of a national bicentennial celebration into a richly textured, direct, and unmediated experience of “Americana.” Participants came from all corners of the United States to Washington, D.C., for NCHC’s Washington Bicentennial Honors Semester. They sought to discover patterns and construct a composite personal portrait of American culture as they themselves witnessed it in its showplace capital city.

Students grappled with the notion of “America” through seminars on constitutional issues, public policy, and urban segregation. They tested their perceptions through field research in the inner city and creative expression of local children’s games, in folk art, and in music. In the end, they constructed a personal profile of America that was rich and quite particular to this group. The intentionality of site-specific inquiry, multi-disciplinary readings, self-initiated explorations, and discovery was not lost on these pioneers. Elements of their life that bound them together ran from group projects for course credit to group dinners they hosted, from house meetings and self-governance to public presentations of their project results.

This conjunction of a national pool of students, relatively prepared to take risks, and a blueprint for experiential learning, anchored in curriculum but focused on the local setting, was central to the experiment. Since this first semester, there have been twenty-eight others, including seven at overseas sites. In structure, they have remained the same. Themes chosen to reveal local truths and historic challenges have varied, but all have embodied a particular pertinence to the selected site. The immediacy, power, and permanence of affective impact resulting from the Honors Semester have persisted.

## INTRODUCTION

Institutionally, NCHC's Honors Semesters Committee went from Ad Hoc to Standing Committee status. It continues to design, implement, and oversee specific programs, but with the help of a Lilly Fund Grant in 1984, it began a systematic effort to introduce aspects of the integrative structure—especially the field explorations and self-reflective writing of City as Text™ and the pedagogical approaches—to colleagues able to attend Faculty Institutes; twenty-five of these institutes have been offered so far and, along with all the Honors Semesters, are listed in the chapter called “Honors Milestones.” The committee has offered miniature City as Text™ experiences at conference sites (also listed in “Milestones”) as a means of helping faculty and students appropriate, in modest measure, those sites.\* Some four hundred campus locations are now venues for application of City as Text™ laboratories to a variety of programs, within honors and outside it, on campus and off.

Honors Semesters, in their elemental architecture and replicability, remain a paradigm of connected learning and organic structure. Although connected and organic education is a hallmark of many campus-based honors programs, the full impact of national Honors Semesters is hard to reproduce without the full panoply of structural elements in each of NCHC's projects. With students who know one another but rarely take the same courses, which is the case on most campuses, the cohesiveness-in-multiplicity and intellectuality-in-social-interaction remain elusive.

This monograph presents a story of an experiment and a blueprint of sorts for anyone interested in enriching an existing program or willing to experiment with pedagogy and modes of inquiry. Examples of successful extrapolations illustrate how adaptations can work in different locales and with several age groups. Contributions to this monograph attempt to describe and recount, to explain, and to invite collaborators into a team effort of unusual complexity and singular success.

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\* City as Text™ was designed by Bernice Braid for the National Honors Semesters and has been adapted extensively to other uses. The trademark is held by the National Collegiate Honors Council, which should be acknowledged by all who use the title and design concept.

# HONORS SEMESTERS: AN ANATOMY OF ACTIVE LEARNING

WILLIAM W. DANIEL

Having spent the better part of my life in teaching, I am still amazed at the widely variant beliefs and attitudes expressed in any discussion of the qualities that define an educated person. Any faculty discussion that deals with what it means to be educated or what should be expected or required of all university graduates or—more politically—what specific skills/disciplines/courses should be included in a required general education curriculum is headed for serious intellectual debate and conflict.

In the wider non-academic society, comments on education normally take the form of critiques of the educational system itself—at all levels. The public bemoans the failures and problems and shortcomings and imperfections of our elementary schools, high schools, and colleges, be they public or private. Both in and out of the academy, we hear of the deleterious effects of expanded vocationalism, of excessive specialization, of education conceived as a collection of courses without a coherent integrative dimension, of a need for more accountability and outcomes assessment, of the benefits of a more businesslike approach to educational delivery systems. Often such misgivings have merit, but they reveal a lack of consensus on what we educators *qua* educators are about.

Similar dissatisfaction played a significant role in the historical development of the honors movement in the 1950s and 1960s. In perusing the literature of that time, one reads again and again of a need to break the “lockstep” curriculum found in most institutions. Common practice required a standard list of courses for all students designed to ensure the basics of a “general education” without regard to individual differences or capabilities. The situation was similar to that of a doctor who, in the early days of the “wonder drug” penicillin, responded to any physical ailment by prescribing a penicillin shot in addition to any other treatment offered. Honors programs and courses responded by developing structures that individualized both content and pedagogy for academically talented students, students who found the standard curriculum more repetitive and confining than challenging and liberating. Many honors programs were revised to involve students more directly and responsibly in designing and implementing their own educational program, a practice that is still absent from many proposed

## HONORS SEMESTERS: AN ANATOMY OF ACTIVE LEARNING

educational reforms today. Students often have no involvement in and responsibility for determining their own educational experience. Education is designed for and applied to students rather than a process of joining with students to involve all participants at every level; honors, on the other hand, is usually a joint undertaking of faculty and students.

One product of the honors form of education has been the Honors Semesters initiative of the National Collegiate Honors Council. These theme-based undergraduate semesters were conceived to be model honors experiences exemplifying the basic principles and values of honors education. Among these principles are four basic commitments that have guided these semesters over the past thirty-five years. Their implementation has evolved and been refined over time, but they remain central to an experiment that has proved to be uniquely successful.

The first of these principles is the concept of active learning as both a process and product in which the student, not the faculty member, is the primary agent. Second is an expanded concept of text, of the material for study and analysis. Third is an integrated and collaborative approach to learning that reflects the complexity and varying dimensions of an adequate understanding of any given subject. Fourth are the complementary values of autonomy and community that determine the ultimate success of the educational process itself regardless of any specific content or methodology. This chapter is an attempt to briefly characterize each of these principles as they apply to Honors Semesters.

In order to explain what is meant by the first principle, active learning, I would borrow the concept of charting or mapping that is used by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. In one sense, understanding any subject or area of interest involves using a conceptual pattern or context within which the particular elements are organized into a coherent relational structure. The paradigm is a common geographical map, a symbolic image of a physical place that locates streets or structures or political divisions or geological variations in relationship to each other. Maps vary in purpose, accuracy, usefulness, and symbolization, but to have a map is to have a way of providing a coherent structural representation of what is taken to be important. Such a device provides a symbolic representation that both interprets and defines the elements that compose the referent subject of the map.

Maps, of course, differ in their purpose or function and in the nature of the subject matter they represent. For example, Aristotle thought that we could discern the fundamental logical “map” of our

rationality and thus of the external world. To become aware of the basic logical categories of the mind that organize and interpret our perceptions is to become aware of the structure of objective reality itself. Plato had suggested that perhaps being and thinking were one and the same, going on to believe in a realist sense that mathematical structures form the essential “map” of our universe. A historian might well describe a historical “map” that includes the dimension of time. And anthropologists and sociologists map the primary features of human institutional behavior. Thus almost every discipline has a methodology for conceptualizing or “mapping” its universe of discourse. To learn the jargon of a discipline is to learn the symbolic notation used in that field; to comprehend a paradigm shift is to understand a different way of relating the elements or an essentially different set of elements altogether.

Although one can push the analogy too far, one can conceive of education as learning different ways of mapping and thus of conceiving reality. To study a discipline is to learn how that particular perspective organizes and understands its subject matter. Philosophers have even claimed that their subject is the process itself devoid of any particular subject matter. The point is that students are expected to learn how the various disciplines “map” and order their portion of the world. They learn how to understand and apply the maps that are provided for them and to extend them into various dimensions of a given discipline.

The mapping experiences of active learning always have an experimental quality. Much like those maps with clear acetate or plastic overlays that add political boundaries or population centers or military engagements, students’ maps represent an attempt to synthesize ways of organizing and conceptualizing a field. The experiential-learning theory of David Kolb is a useful way of conceptualizing the process. One can begin at any point in a spiral learning process that moves from (a) direct experience to (b) reflection upon one’s observations to (c) the formation of abstract concepts and generalizations (the overlays) to (d) an empirical testing of those concepts in the context of new experience and contact with the subject matter, which puts us back at (a) (Kolb, “Learning Styles” 235). The process is dynamic, with no absolute, uninterpreted givens to be learned; it produces ongoing levels of understanding that involve the student as both subject and object.

Some multi-disciplinary overlays are familiar: economic history, psychological novels, performance art. The task, however, is to create one’s own map, identifying both the symbolic elements and their connections. For example, how would one organize a collection of variant oral histories into a coherent historical description of a particular event

or time? What interpretive categories might be used to account for the varying descriptions of the American depression? How might one come to understand the experience of immigrants coming into New York from Europe? From the Caribbean? From Asia? What locales, what people, what literature, what art, what ethnic elements would provide the structure of an adequate map of that experience? In the final analysis, mapping is a continuing process with products that are always subject to revisions. The analogy with education is obvious.

Honors Semesters enable students to construct their own maps in the broadest sense. Honors Semesters take them out of the ordinary, away from the familiar, and ask them to create maps of strange and sometimes uncomfortable contexts. Students are given only very sketchy outlines or tasks, sent out not to see what we have seen, not told what they will find. Provided with a specific theme and place, students have the task of learning how to find or construct a meaningful map as well as understand how the field has been mapped in the past from a variety of perspectives and for multiple purposes. Some sample directives and questions to get students started might include:

- Go to the border and find out what issues and concerns define and permeate national and cultural borders.
- What happens when cultures collide?
- What are the features that define and express regionalism?
- What perspectives and elements are essential as one develops a sense of place?
- To develop a map, go to the site, identify significant features and their relationships, and then display them in a coherent and meaningful way.

Obviously one comes to any such field of study with existing maps—or conceptual systems—well in hand. An essential process is to seek not only to become self-consciously aware of the existing maps we bring to any given territory but to find ways of assessing the validity and assumptions implicit in those existing maps and, where necessary, to find meaningful revisions. In other words, Honors Semesters encourage students to become cartographers in the most inclusive sense, to find ways of interpreting and understanding the site and theme of a selected area of study.

The natural tendency of faculty members is to provide our maps for students to learn. We tell them what they will observe when they enter our territory and how to negotiate a path through its environs. Too



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often what students are rewarded for seeing is exactly what we tell them is to be seen. Active learning on NCHC's alternative model is enabling students to draw their own maps, to tell us what they have discovered. Only then do we compare what has been found with what others have found before them. Learning becomes discovery and not just recapitulation.

A second principle is that of extended text. The text to be studied includes, but is not limited to, what can be housed in a library. While the collected experience of others is essential, firsthand contact with what a written text is about constitutes the primary material to be encountered and analyzed. Honors Semesters require reading and written analysis, but if we are to come to know the topic, then we must encounter it in its primal state. This kind of direct field experience is, of course, not unique to Honors Semesters; it is a central component in the sciences. The only caveat is that such experience not be used simply to confirm or replicate existing claims.

The determination of an appropriate site requires that Honors Semesters address topics that cannot be equally encountered in any other locale. If one is to learn about national border issues or Appalachian culture or economic development in Eastern Europe, then one must go on location. New York as a city of immigrants must be experienced and explored directly if it is to become real—if one's interpretive map is to be validated. So the concept of text is expanded with the essential ingredients of direct experience and encounter. City as Text™ and Region as Text have become familiar terms to those in experiential education.

The third principle is collaborative and integrated learning. To appreciate the complex dimensions of any field requires the combined perspectives of a variety of disciplinary approaches. Can one understand a given place apart from its art, literature, institutions, ethnic communities, environmental concerns, cultural and political history, and religious and ethical perspectives? Can one separate environmental science from its political, cultural, ethical, and even religious dimensions? There is, of course, never enough time or resources for everything, but the power and insights of the various disciplines when they focus on a common subject or issue are enhanced. When those perspectives are integrated into a complex and coherent mosaic, it becomes clear that understanding and knowledge cannot be limited to a single dimension or academic perspective.

Every Honors Semester includes an intentional integrative component in which the primary task is to bring together the various

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disciplinary approaches, insights, perspectives, and experiences that form the elements of the semester. The task is to seek a coherent and integrated comprehension of the topic under investigation. This is not the antithesis of specialized areas of study; it only underscores the fact that human experience in any context is multi-dimensional. Also, one quickly finds that the quest is never complete. Exploration always reveals more questions and the need for more, not less, knowledge from those specialized areas of study. But a coherent understanding is more than a collection of separate insights. A map is not just a collection of symbols but an integrated interpretation of what is there. For example, environmental studies require the combination of relevant biology, chemistry, climatology, political science, history, ethics, and so on. No one approach alone will be sufficient. Somehow all must be integrated into a unified approach if our aim is an adequate environmental policy. So it is with the themes of Honors Semesters, which must have a self-conscious mechanism to provide for collaboration and integration.

The last principle that guides our efforts recognizes the twin goals of autonomy and community. The first has its roots in the notion that a true education is liberating. Ideally, we are freed from the domination of the external authorities that tell us what is true in the way of belief and practice. We replace the unexamined life that accepts what we have been told with a confidence in our own powers to determine what is true. To gain confidence in seeking our own truth, a truth that is open to critical examination and rational review, is a traditional goal of liberal education. Reaching, or at least approaching, this goal is what is meant by autonomy.

Respect for personal autonomy is a principle with a strong tradition in Western thought. It is linked to individual freedom and choice and refers classically to self-governance. Our sense of the autonomous individual is one who is not only free from external constraint but also from personal limitations that prevent responsible choice. Autonomy requires that we become aware of our own subjective attitudes and emotions and how these affect our perspectives. To be autonomous is to have the capacity to be rational, to understand the logical and causal relations that exist among the various elements in one's personal context, and to understand what probable consequences follow from particular actions and decisions. It includes the willingness to comprehend alternative interpretations and explanations and to respect the principles of coherence and consistency. Implementing this goal requires that students be given the support and means to develop their

own interpretive capacity. They must be given the opportunity to develop their own voice and perspective and the confidence to express their views.

In short, autonomy is that ideal of perfect self-understanding and openness that enables one to make informed analyses and responsible evaluations and then to base action and decision upon these analyses.

Respect for autonomy in oneself and also in others is a guiding principle for Honors Semesters. As we develop the ability to organize and structure a realistic, objective, and open map of the context within which we find ourselves, we do so as a means of expressing our own autonomy and also appreciating it in others. This latter dimension recognizes a learning community as a collaborative effort. Students in Honors Semesters realize that the educational experience is not essentially a competitive process producing winners and losers; rather it becomes a community of support in which discoveries are shared and ideas are mutually explored and critiqued. One of the marked strengths of past semesters has been this community of students working together and contributing to each other's research efforts in a mutually appreciative atmosphere. The degree to which students become autonomous learners participating in a supportive community is the degree to which Honors Semesters achieve their objectives.

These standards thus provide definitive and evaluative criteria for our efforts: active and autonomous learners working experientially and communally in a multi-disciplinary context to develop coherent understanding and analysis of a given theme.

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# HONORS SEMESTERS: AN ARCHITECTURE OF ACTIVE LEARNING

BERNICE BRAID

*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but  
in having new eyes.*

—Marcel Proust

One of the comments art historians make about the enormous steel sculptures of Richard Serra is that observers cannot understand them from one point of view only but need to move through them to have a sense of them, and that doing so is a complex activity. This perception might be an analogue for the entire structure of Honors Semesters. Indeed, it provides a way to shape comprehension of the power of a typical Honors Semester assembly, which is always an exploration of a built environment. The architecture of the project is itself an orchestration of movable parts—hence the concept of assemblage.

The component parts exist in time-space. Organizing them presupposes pace, rhythm, and movement through them. Unlike the presuppositions of campus organization, which (however inaccurately) assumes static structures and immovable objects, every Honors Semester has begun with the concept of motion and the dynamic of movement through space over time. Honors Semesters construct unique calendars, juxtapose field explorations and classroom discussion, and create arenas in which differing voices lead discussion throughout a term with variable blocks of time allocated to these activities. Further, participants are invited to see themselves as explorers—that is, to move and simultaneously watch themselves moving through uncharted territory. The mapping they undertake is, therefore, of a space, of themselves moving through that space, of themselves transforming that space into a place that has taken on the tangible familiarity of what they, the mappers, have measured by their alert movement through it.

Perhaps the component of site-specific learning most emblematic of these principles of orchestration and assemblage is City as Text™, a series of street laboratories embedded in a seminar during which students integrate their experiences of place, time, theory, practice, and self.

## I. City As Text™

In a project by now famous among urban planners, William H. Whyte applied the principle of close, careful, and continuous observation—what the Honors Semesters Committee calls “mapping”—to unravel the mystery of how people use urban spaces when left utterly to their own devices. With a small army of Columbia University graduate students painstakingly making what he called “cumulative sighting maps,” working for more than a decade on photo-documentaries and drafts, Whyte produced the film *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* in the early 1980s, eventually publishing the full-length book *City: Rediscovering the Center* (1988). As part of the integrative seminar City as Text™ in 1984, Whyte conducted New York Honors Semester students on an exploration of vest-pocket parks in Manhattan.

What NCHC explorers noticed, apart from their surprise at the number and styles of these oases in the vast concrete acreage surrounding them, was that Whyte saw more when he looked than did anyone else. Disposed to look for patterns of use, patterns that welcome, patterns that dissuade, he illustrated how all senses work as antennae to relay potentially useful bits of observation. Assembled into relationships in context, these bits became, even as students shared impressions over damp sandwiches on a rainy day, information about the uses of public space in a large city. Developing the eyes, ears, noses, and tastebuds that serve as collecting tools for systematic observation is central to integrative fieldwork in City as Text™. This approach to examining the surrounding area—a site serving as the context within which students construct meaningful readings of disparate kinds of information collected over time—was tested in 1978, in the first New York Honors Semester. Not until 1981 did it become an architectural feature of the Honors Semester. When the exercise began to exemplify “city as laboratory,” it took on the characteristics it has to this day: a semester-long immersion into local life that attempts to answer the questions “How do people who live here transform the space they occupy into the place in which they live?” and, equally important, “What is it about how I myself observe them that shapes my conclusions?”

Answering these questions requires sensitivity to many aspects of social organization and behavior: how people play, decorate their surroundings, earn a living, and interact with schools, religious institutions, and political structures; how they move around; what they eat and where they shop—the entire panorama of whole lifetimes spent in one place. Equally, though, other questions float to the surface: Whom

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do I watch? Why? What do I expect? Why? Am I ever surprised? By what? Mapping public behavior is where the exercise begins. Understanding attitudes, including one's own, is often where it ends.

The design of mapping forays follows certain principles. Explorers look for detail but must be conscious of context. They go in small teams initially and learn to navigate local transportation. They engage in focused observations: Who plays what games at school? on the street? in parks? What are the private uses of public spaces in train stations, in parks, in front of museums, in subways? How do other observers feel while watching others? Why do they have these feelings?

Selecting destinations is a challenge. Some spots yield more information and less discomfort than others. But students are asked to move around and to visit multiple sites several times so that, over a period of observations repeated and documented, they may begin to see repetitions—patterns of usage. Always they are asked: What did you see? What did you think was happening? What made you think so (what was your evidence)? How did you feel about witnessing that scene?

Between forays, explorers are reading essays about neighborhoods and local political conflicts, discussing the fiction produced by people living in compacted neighborhoods, and reading current news reports of tensions and triumphs in the city. Coordination between these readings and seminar discussion, and between classroom conversation and laboratory explorations, is built into the syllabus. Observation records, in the form of written accounts of each foray, and some commentary about how the writer actually accomplished the exercise, along with thoughts about being an “observer” in public situations, are used as texts in seminar discussion.

Comparisons between the literature and their own accounts of neighborhood life are provoked by the interweaving of reading assignments with their own written texts. Selections by ethnographers enhance their sense that method yields different results than happenstance and also raise questions to be tested about kinds of methods, assumptions, and points of view. Reading Clifford Geertz's arguments about “thick description” and “blurred genres” sharpens students' sense of the many dimensions in ordinary social interaction and about how un-singular even a glance can be. Further, with the admonition to consider all facets of the Honors Semester fair subject matter for observations, students commonly introduce arguments from other courses, tensions in their residential life, or hot topics of local debate into the analytical framework of City as Text™ seminars.

Inescapably, the impulse to view the significance of aesthetics of ordinary life on a par with power relations at town meetings raises questions about how it is that the viewer actually sees. This aspect of the integrative seminar, which takes seriously the matter of “lens,” quickly permeates the way students see their entire thematic enterprise. This aspect of immersion learning gives rise, before the term is over, to continual self-reflection, to a sense of agency, and to a consciousness of the process of mediation in converting raw experience to knowledge and comprehension.

## II. Calendar And Events

The field explorations start during orientation and continue almost to the end of the term, with Turning Point essays (also called “critical incidents”) timed to coincide with the termination of discrete units of the academic calendar. Here are the typical divisions: Orientation, which lasts up to ten days and includes a carefully calibrated exposure to field methodologies; Module I (5–6 weeks), in which up to two courses begin and end; Module II (5–6 weeks), in which another course begins and ends; and the Integrative Seminar and Directed Research courses, which span the entire semester. In all, students earn sixteen upper-division honors credits to apply toward undergraduate diploma requirements at their home institution.

The City as Text™ assignments of these Turning Point essays generate retrospective assessment of what happened and through what means. The assignments ask students to consider what they understand better or differently as a result of particular events or activities at the moment of their writing. For the final essay they must consider these same issues but think about the site, the theme, and themselves as learners, using prior writing in all cases as evidence for their interpretations and arguments.

These essays function to distance students from their immersed selves, briefly, while they analyze their own behavior. Timed to coincide with definitive calendar breaks that in themselves increase a sense of urgency and experimental intensity, the coterminous factors of essays and the course endings catalyze reflection even as they provide real-time sensation in the wonderland of Semesters Elsewhere.

The architectural components are therefore deceptively simple. Beneath and behind them lie multiple complexities of pace, acquisition of information, and alternation of private performance and productivity with a heavily public dimension of social and intellectual encounters.



### III. Schedule

A typical Honors Semester schedule looks like this:

#### Orientation

Up to ten days: introduction to site, cohort, instructional staff, and setting, including organizing the governance structure of the residential arrangements.

- initial exploration of off-campus site;
- initial formal observations and recording of them;
- discussion of semester theme with instructional staff;
- exploration of campus life;
- determination of where to shop to run communal kitchen and to host preliminary social events;
- planning for formal Opening Event (local officials, outside resource people, NCHC representative, faculty, student participants);
- organization of extended field explorations: How is this place ‘organized’? Who lives where? How? How do we get there?;
- development of City as Text™ seminars on observation methodology and reading of student observations as “texts”;
- set-up of house meeting.

#### Module I

Five–six weeks: City as Text™, Directed Research, plus two other courses.

- field trips that are extensions of courses (every week);
- beginning of internships or local interviews;
- one weekday left open for reading and exploring.

#### Inter-Module Break

Three–six days—short non-academic break to areas quite unlike the Honors Semester site, usually three days.

#### Module II

Five–six weeks: City as Text™, Directed Research, plus one other course (final course extends a bit longer than first two).

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### **Writing Time**

Three–five days.

- preparation of program for symposium;
- preparation of panel groupings for symposium;
- student completion and submission of written projects.

### **Symposium**

Three days: public invited.

- formal printed program on hand;
- abstracts available to audience;
- one or more Honors Semesters Committee members in attendance;
- production of keepsake book or other project.

### **Closing Event**

Last day before departure: Party. Sometimes a formal component to thank local resource people and officials.

The entire calendar does not exceed 104 days. Scattered throughout are four or five colloquia in which outsiders challenge the thrust of courses or open up discussion to a broad range of local/expert voices; workshops on interviewing techniques; meetings with resources and consultants; and debriefings after internship experiences or expert testimony. Parallel to the formal and informal Opening Event is the Closing Event: the Symposium, which provides intellectual closure, and a party, which provides emotional closure for what is, by now, a close-knit group.

Keeping participants focused on completion is a challenge, given both the high excitement and deep anxiety among students. One source of nervousness is the cognitive dissonance that results from being in a new place with strangers; another is the rather radical departure from traditional teaching styles and learning modes, which for high achievers presents a test of sorts.

To address the anticipated malaise, staff create café-like moments for casual chats whenever they think students will feel most at ease. In addition, the Honors Semesters Committee schedules a Faculty Institute or team visit to coincide with the end of Module I. This visit permits an occasion when students publically present a progress summary of their projects, invite comments and suggestions, and, most importantly, get an idea from one another of what the entire group is up to. Some students change topics after this session, of course. But hearing each other report and receiving positive comments, even advice, from strangers in a public forum provide relief and help.

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Visits from one or two assessors who are designated members of the Honors Semesters Committee can also help. Students will vent to outsiders without fear of rocking their fragile, and profoundly important, community boat. The need to sort through the maze of perception, feeling, anxiety, and acquisition of information actually helps students to pinpoint the importance to themselves of this kind of learning.

Finally, the Symposium is public. A printed program, with abstracts, guides the audience and serves as a permanent record for presenters. Producing the Symposium program and designing the mid-module break are tasks orchestrated by the academic director and the residential director. The former lives apart from communal housing but sees students often to coordinate research projects and to co-teach the integrative seminar with the resident director, an alum of a previous Honors Semester who lives with the community and helps to shape it.

As liaison between students and faculty, as trouble-shooter and village elder, the position of Resident Director is crucial. Having experienced the pressures, elation, frustration, and personal exhilaration of a past Honors Semester, this person becomes a source of communal stability.

### IV. Courses

Participants register for five courses: three drawn from different disciplines plus the Directed Research, akin to independent study, and City as Text™, the integrative seminar. Students select three courses from a possible four or five, thus creating an opportunity to reconfigure working groups within the larger whole. No one can return home without some advanced credit in humanities, social science, and, sometimes, science (geology, say, at the Grand Canyon).

All courses include significant field trips as formal class sessions. Often a single trip becomes a laboratory for two courses, such as public policy/local culture or local history/environmental concerns. Students often hold internships or attach themselves as volunteers to local institutions, such as Mexican elementary schools dedicated to the permanently poor, and use these placements for primary research sites as they develop their directed research projects.

The modular calendar creates a pressurized atmosphere. Readings must be done and papers submitted on schedule; time disappears rapidly during these Honors Semesters. The experience overall is heady. Days are long; energy runs high. Alternating classroom discourse, interviews with locals, small team explorations, and extended

field trips varies the pace and conveys a sense of urgency, given due dates and public events. Students do considerable writing and reading of many kinds: essays, journals, research protocols, response papers, applications of theory, surveys. Some participants, especially those from highly technical fields, are unaccustomed to this range of writing. This means that the program itself must provide pedagogical tools to support them.

That support may come in the form of workshops. Students help one another, but faculty must be sensitive to the needs of non-specialists facing deadlines and high standards and to the insecurity of being a novice in new territory. The workshop format assists specialists daring to write about disciplines new to them.

The directed research course hosts the closing Symposium, where student panelists engage the entire group in discussion of their findings, a process that expands the general discourse about theme and site. Local resource persons who have helped participants develop their projects are invited. Once home, participants commonly use their project as the nucleus of a senior thesis or jumping-off point into a new field for graduate study.

### **V. Participants**

A glance through these architectural elements suggests that, throughout site-specific experiential-learning projects, attention is paid to the intellectual, ethical, and emotional dimensions of the whole person engaged in such learning. Indeed, it is the wholeness of both the project and the persons in it that stands out. Exploration feels risky. Integrative thinking requires thinking at the edge and outside familiar boundaries. Events, faculty, local resources, and staff members who live with or near students: all are marshalled to provide underpinning that supports students as they reach for connection.

Above all, and this may be the final architectural element, participants themselves must embody diversity. They must be selected from a variety of regions and schools, have a mixture of academic and creative interests, and bring varieties of cultural history with them. The range of student profiles—within the contexts of a residential community, social structure, small-team assignments, and emphasis on exploration—produces what alums consistently report as their “transformation.”

Diverse though these programs have been in location and in age and preparation levels of participants, they have been constructed on a similar model regarding the crux of the matter: active learning and

connected knowing. Mixing students who are strangers to one another into a single cohort is essential. Getting them to see that both their own lived histories and their present learning are pertinent to their achievements is a way of inviting them to heed Parker Palmer's admonition "to intersect their autobiographies with the life story of the world" (22).

The topics they concentrate on while in residence open them to the culture immediately around them. Students must therefore pierce the protective wall of campus in order to pursue their topic in that world and bring back what they have discovered. Cognitively, they adopt multiple perspectives and grow to see the difference between inference and impression. Affectively they take stock of themselves and see how much of themselves they infuse into their projects. Overall this combination of wilderness training and socialization gives Honors Semester participants a strength of character and purpose—even in only a single academic term—that faculty members confirm results in life-changes.

The process turns on making maps: newcomers need to chart a passage. When, however, explorers see themselves charting their own routes, they come to see themselves as natives in a new land. They come, in fact, to feel that they have developed new eyes.

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# INTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF HONORS SEMESTERS

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## The Committee

Internal assessment has been an integral part of the planning process in the Honors Semesters Committee since its inception. Not long after its formation, the committee asked: “What should the Honors Semester be?” After the first Honors Semester was offered, the new questions were: “What did the Honors Semester do?” “How do we know?” and “Can it be done again?” Its goal from the start was to produce active learners rather than effect any specific content mastery. The committee’s goal in regard to assessment has been to learn more about active learning, to share what it has learned, and to test what it thinks it knows.

From these motivations has evolved an assessment practice that is appropriate to this unusual model of education and that parallels its philosophy of active learning through observation, research, thesis testing, and self-examination. By undertaking a variety of collaborative Honors Semesters projects through the years, the committee has learned a great deal about assessing active learning in general, some of which it has shared in articles, workshops, institutes, and monographs.

From long experience in designing and overseeing Honors Semesters, the committee has observed that each semester is a unique project, with outcomes that are variable and unpredictable even in the case of semesters that are repeated in the same place with similar themes. Therefore, each Honors Semester is treated as a new experiment in active learning—for the committee as much as for the Honors Semester faculty and students. The committee has also noted an underlying pattern in all Honors Semesters that arises from the special nature of active learning.

Reviews of projects use both summative and formative types of assessment to clarify aspects of this pattern. Internal assessments and external evaluations are summative in that they seek to establish what, in fact, are the achievements of a particular Honors Semester at a fixed point in time—at its conclusion or shortly thereafter. It is important both for the Honors Semester participants and for the committee that each Honors Semester assessment be formative as well: the interpretation of data should be used in planning future Honors Semesters. Hosts and students should also take away with them tools for self-reflection

that they can use for new projects and personal development. Follow-up surveys, reunions, and publications of student writings serve an important function in the assessment process. Multiple instruments over time allow participants to continue their participation in discovery, exploration, and independent learning long after a particular semester has ended.

Because of the complexity, brevity, and high level of coordination of the Honors Semesters, they require constant testing and fine-tuning as they unroll. Planners see themselves as interdependent actors and co-learners with participants and respond promptly to feedback to modify projects in progress. The dynamic is less one of delivery and return than one of assay and redirection. This behavior is almost counterintuitive and certainly not the way most in academia are accustomed to looking at learning, where instructors are locked into discrete curricula in semester-long time blocks.

Continuous internal assessment is a sound practice in any active-learning project, a moving image rather than a snapshot. Components of Honors Semester assessment can profitably be borrowed as well for use in smaller settings, building into the learning environment continuous feedback based on the experiences, voices, and perceptions of all participants.

### **The Honors Semester**

Internal assessment begins as a collaborative interaction between the Honors Semesters Committee and the host institution, but it becomes a dynamic of the Honors Semester itself once the marketing is over and student applications are processed. From the outset, internal assessment is an activity significant and integral to the curriculum, an activity in which all members engage and by which all are affected.

The prospective Honors Semester director enters the process of internal assessment at the moment of presenting an Honors Semester proposal to the Semesters Committee. While a proposal may take place initially by phone or letter, review of the proposal takes place during a meeting of the full Honors Semesters Committee, where questions of goals, thematic coherence, appropriateness to site, and principles of active learning are raised.

Honors Semester proposers are invited to attend the annual four-day planning meeting of the Honors Semesters Committee. Consideration of new proposals usually occurs at the end of an agenda that begins with review of a recently concluded Honors Semester. Thus, the wisdom



gained from a previous Honors Semester informs the proposal process even as the prospective director is introduced to systematic planning based on self-assessment.

The committee encourages each Honors Semester director to develop a method and instruments of internal assessment appropriate to the semester's goals and content. Individual Honors Semesters have experimented with and contributed to the following repertoire of practices:

- planning sessions at the host institution;
- student application essays;
- pre-semester on-site meetings of host team and Honors Semesters Committee members;
- meetings of Honors Semester faculty and director;
- participant town meetings;
- midpoint informal assessments by students and faculty;
- student reflective writing in the integrative seminar (e.g., Turning Point essays);
- presentation by students of directed study topics to NCHC representatives;
- symposium presentations, open to the public;
- closing student and faculty evaluations;
- written course evaluations; and
- director's report to the Honors Semester Committee.

Each of these practices is described below.

## **Planning Sessions at the Host Institution**

The Honors Semesters Committee's close reading of the proposal and interview with the proposer determine the agenda for meetings at the host institution. In response to committee questions and observations and through comparison with prior Honors Semesters, the faculty and members of the host institution engage in a series of planning sessions in which semester goals are clarified, reframed, and embedded in the activities, living arrangements, courses, teaching styles, and assignments.

The outcome of such meetings is an Honors Semester brochure, a detailed schedule, and course syllabi with coordinated assignments. Meetings are collaborative and task-oriented, differing greatly from the usual way in which a curriculum is constructed. The nature of the Honors Semester pushes faculty to articulate and connect goals,

objectives, requirements, and desired outcomes. Thus, faculty become creators and assessors of the Honors Semester in which they will teach—an empowering experience.

### **Student Application Essays**

After the students have been selected, their application essays are sent to the director. The application asks students to express their understanding of the Honors Semester, present their credentials, set forth their learning goals, and describe the contributions they are likely to make to their prospective community.

These essays are valuable texts that have been used to incorporate student goals into pre-semester planning. Through them, faculty and directors are introduced in advance to their cohort at a point in the planning when final arrangements are still to be made for semester components such as accommodations, field experiences, special options, and assignments.

Application essays have been used at the midpoint or close of the Honors Semester to assess student change. Rereading an application essay some six to nine months after having written it inspires students to reflect on their original intentions and comment on changes that have taken place as a result of their participation in the Honors Semester—or not, as the case may be.

### **Pre-Semester On-Site Meeting of Honors Semester Team and Honors Semesters Committee Members**

When the schedule of an Honors Semester permits, it has been productive for Honors Semester faculty and directors to hold workshops with the Honors Semesters Committee on site prior to the opening of a semester. The resident director and the external evaluator are also present, introducing them to each other and adding voices to the final planning.

At this meeting, Honors Semester faculty members are divided into smaller groups to work with committee members, addressing issues of coherence and goals. Faculty members present their syllabi and their rationales for assignments and activities to committee members, whose questions and suggestions clarify both the structure and content of the project.

In a site visit, the committee explores and assesses facilities set aside for the Honors Semester, meets with members of the host administration, and generally anticipates difficulties or troubleshoots. The

presence of NCHC representatives adds visibility and stature to the project and lends greater weight to requests for support from the administration.

## **Meetings of Faculty and Directors**

Honors Semester faculty and directors meet on at least a twice-monthly basis. These meetings are an important part of the internal formative assessment. Faculty and directors share their sometimes divergent perceptions of student attitudes toward courses, living arrangements, and overall experience. Faculty members discuss students, courses, successes, and difficulties. This information, whether gained through informal exchange, advisement and consultation, class discussion, writing assignments, or formal assessment, provides a good basis for collaborative action.

Faculty members help each other flag problems that need to be addressed or successes that might be replicated. These meetings are significant in that they enable faculty and directors to work together to alter the semester in mid-course and turn obstacles into opportunities.

The academic director and resident director, a college graduate who is also an alum of an Honors Semester, meet on a daily basis to communicate, assess, and plan. A valuable participant-observer of community life in the residence halls, the resident director identifies problems early and engages students in solving them.

## **Participant Town Meetings**

Students organize themselves as a community that meets with the academic and resident directors (sometimes faculty also) on a twice-monthly basis. Depending on the Honors Semester, business is conducted informally or as a political forum run by elected students or one of the directors. Students and directors exchange information, plan future events, air issues that threaten community, and discuss matters of mutual concern. Some agenda items have been the (mis)use of kitchen facilities, interpersonal difficulties, negotiations over requirements, difficulties with faculty or the host institution, and misconceptions about the nature of the Honors Semester.

In these meetings, students and directors share perceptions of the Honors Semester and solve problems. They contribute to the formation of a bonded community. These meetings play a major role in formative assessment in that they provide a safe venue for reflection, expressions of dissatisfaction, group problem-solving, and consensus formation.

## **Midpoint Informal Assessments by Students and Faculty**

The conclusion of the first module and the inter-module break provide a natural pause for reflection, particularly since the external evaluator usually visits at this point.

Midpoint assessments are sometimes written, sometimes verbal. They can be conducted by faculty, directors, or the evaluator. They are formative in that they remind participants of goals, call for reflection on what has been achieved thus far, and seek suggestions for the remainder of the Honors Semester.

## **Student Reflective Writing in the Integrative Seminar**

Writing assignments associated with the Integrative Seminar encourage student self-awareness and self-assessment, requiring students to confront and document changes that have taken place in their understanding of the larger issues of the Honors Semester. Observation assignments and Turning Point essays are good indicators of the impact that the Honors Semester site, themes, and pedagogy have had on students.

## **Presentation by Students of Directed Study Topics to NCHC Representatives**

Immediately after the inter-module break, students make a public presentation of their directed study topic to faculty, directors, and representatives of the National Collegiate Honors Council.

This activity opens the second module and serves as an incentive to students to commit to their chosen directed study topic. The choice of topics is an excellent measure of how effective the first half of the Honors Semester has been in promoting its goals of creative thinking linked to the site. For students, the presentation is yet another impetus to reflect on the content and theme of the Honors Semester.

## **Closing Symposium**

The Symposium panels and presentations are a formal opportunity for summative assessment. Students share their ideas in conversation with their colleagues, teachers, local experts, representatives from NCHC, and members of the host institution.

Selection of issues, modes of presentation, integration of course material, and depth of commitment measures the achievement of the learning goals of an Honors Semester.

## **Written Course Evaluations**

Students complete course evaluations and submit them anonymously at the end of the Honors Semester. These documents are included in the summative assessment. Course evaluations give students an opportunity to grade the course, the professor, and the role of a single course in the larger context of the Honors Semester. The responses are shared at the end of the semester with faculty engaged in reflecting on their own experience of their courses.

## **Closing Student Evaluations**

After the symposium is over, the evaluator meets with the students in small groups, and the students complete an Honors Semester evaluation form. (A sample is included in the final section of this monograph.) The form is a checklist of the semester's components followed by several questions. Students review the list, assess whether the Honors Semester has achieved its goals, and finally make recommendations for the future.

Student evaluations are read by the director and the external evaluator, both of whom incorporate responses into their individual reports.

## **Closing Faculty Evaluations**

After the Honors Semester is over, faculty typically submit a written evaluation for the director's report, attend an evaluation meeting at which a composite faculty evaluation is put together, or complete an evaluation form similar to that of the students.

The goal is to discover to what extent faculty have had an experience different from their normal teaching experience, what they have learned, whether they were satisfied with their participation in the Honors Semester, and whether they might alter their teaching in any way as a result of their participation.

## **Director's Report**

The academic director and the resident director write separate summative assessments of the Honors Semester and make presentations to

## INTERNAL ASSESSMENT OF HONORS SEMESTERS

the Honors Semesters Committee. Reports are descriptive and reflective, incorporating Honors Semester voices and assessments.

Based on their understanding of the successes and shortcomings of an Honors Semester, directors also make recommendations to the committee for future Honors Semesters.

# EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF HONORS SEMESTERS

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In the historical context of the National Collegiate Honors Council's Honors Semesters Program, external evaluation has played a crucial role both in each individual semester and in the continuity of the program. The ambition, complexity, and intensity of an Honors Semester produce commensurate demands on an external evaluator. Immediate responses of the participants—or traditional data such as student evaluations at the end of the project—are far less reliable and effective than in conventional educational settings. In order to be effective, the evaluator needs to be a participant as well as observer, sharing in the active-learning experience along with the students and not just judging it from the outside. The evaluator should be involved in the project not just at the end but at stages throughout the planning, implementation, and completion of the project.

Active learning has a different effect on students than conventional education. Initially it is usually disorienting, and almost always it requires development of a new verbal and emotional vocabulary. Sometimes this vocabulary does not take shape until late in the experience or even long afterward. Thus, in addition to being actively involved in the project, the external evaluator needs to be sensitive to the developing stages of students' reactions rather than taking a single snapshot approach as is done in traditional course evaluations.

External evaluation cannot and should not be objective in the same way as traditional evaluations. The external evaluator needs to be personally involved, to experience the project directly as an active participant, to risk something personally just as the students do, and to follow the project over time. Just as active learning encourages students to examine their preconceptions, it similarly challenges an evaluator to question the foundations of evaluation and to experience some of the ambiguity and discomfort that are the hallmarks of this kind of learning.

Here is a checklist of the steps that occur in an external evaluation of an Honors Semester:

- initial approval and planning of an Honors Semester in conjunction with the Honors Semesters Committee;
- designation of an Honors Semesters Committee member as the formal evaluator (and consultant);

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF HONORS SEMESTERS

- pre-semester visit to the Honors Semester site by the evaluator and other committee representatives to meet with the local director and faculty in a two- or three-day workshop;
- mid-semester two-day evaluation and consultation by the evaluator, concluding with an oral report and brief written suggestions or comments;
- end-of-semester three-day visit and gathering of responses, data, and suggestions by the Honors Semesters evaluator;
- evaluator's written report to the local Honors Semester Director and the Honors Semester Committee;
- concluding discussion by the Honors Semesters Committee at its regular meeting, with suggestions for future Semesters.

Each of these steps is described below.

### **The Approval and Planning Role of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee**

The Honors Semesters Committee fulfills the overarching role of providing wisdom, expertise, help, encouragement, oversight, quality control, and other resources for each Honors Semester. The process of evaluation begins and ends with the committee.

When a faculty member or administrator wishes to propose an Honors Semester, she or he first needs to designate an academic director (quite possibly him- or herself) as the responsible on-site leader of the Honors Semester. The academic director then needs to develop a general plan for curriculum, faculty, housing, field trips, local resources allocation, and other Honors Semester components before making a formal presentation to the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee at one of its semi-annual meetings in October or June.

Based on the presentation and substantial conversation with the director, the Honors Semesters Committee decides whether to approve the Honors Semester. If it approves, it designates a committee member as the evaluator of the proposed Honors Semester. It also elucidates requirements and guidelines for the Honors Semester to ensure that it is a genuine active-learning opportunity in line with the principles and practices of the Honors Semesters Program. The role of the external evaluator from that point on is to work with the director to help provide appropriate goals and effective means to achieve these goals.



## **The Designated Evaluator**

The Honors Semester Committee member who is designated as the external evaluator is someone who can work cooperatively and pleasurably with the director. The evaluator is not a judge or a cop but a colleague, preferably with substantial experience on the Honors Semesters Committee and/or personal experience in directing an Honors Semester. In order to be effective, the evaluator must establish a collaborative and congenial relationship with the director and with the faculty and students participating in the Honors Semester. In addition, the role of evaluator requires a significant commitment of time and expertise to the Honors Semester, so the person selected needs to be intellectually and pedagogically engaged in the goals of the particular Honors Semester and of active learning in general.

Funding for all the travel and expenses of the evaluator is built into the Honors Semester budget. Typically the evaluator does not receive an honorarium but simply reimbursement for expenses, evaluation being part of an Honors Semesters Committee member's responsibility on and to the committee.

## **Pre-Semester Workshop on the Honors Semester Site**

Ideally, regular communication between the evaluator and the director takes place after the Honors Semester has been approved. Then the next formal step of the external evaluation process is an on-site visit and workshop two or three weeks before the beginning of the semester. Frequently other members of the Honors Semesters Committee also attend this workshop, where the objective is to do last-minute planning, troubleshooting, and pep-talking with all the faculty and other support personnel who will participate in the Honors Semester. Typically this meeting lasts two days and involves opportunities for social interaction as well as work. It is the responsibility of the director to arrange housing accommodations and to set up the schedule for the workshop in cooperation with the external evaluator.

## **Mid-Semester Site Visit and Report**

This visit is an opportunity for the evaluator to meet students, visit classes, and experience the Honors Semester as much as possible as the students are experiencing it. Ideal arrangements for the evaluator include sleeping in the dorm, taking meals with the students, and accompanying them on any scheduled activities. Whatever arrangements are made should include ample opportunities to speak both

## EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF HONORS SEMESTERS

formally and informally with the students, faculty, and resident director so that the evaluator can discover from them what is going well and what may need improvement in both this and future Honors Semesters. Above all, the visit should include an open meeting, at least an hour in duration, with all the students; the format of the meeting should invite each student to offer his or her opinions and feelings about the semester.

The mid-semester visit should begin and end with a meeting between the director and the evaluator so that any problems can be identified and explored. It may also be helpful in some instances for the evaluator to provide a brief written report on the visit, especially if this report can assist a director needing to intervene with administrators, faculty, or students who may be the source of particular problems.

### **End-of-Semester Visit**

At the end of an Honors Semester, the students present their term research projects in a public symposium that lasts one or more days. The external evaluator should be present for this conference, and other members of the Honors Semesters Committee are also encouraged to attend. The final site visit also includes another formal opportunity to meet with all the students as well as informal and/or formal visits with the resident director, faculty, and—certainly—academic director. The final visit is also an ideal time for the evaluator to meet with key administrators on the local campus to express appreciation for hosting the Honors Semester, to highlight its successes, and to point out the contributions of local faculty and staff to the exceptional effort of sponsoring an Honors Semester.

During this final visit, the external evaluator gathers data, evaluations, and other materials that can support the final evaluation and be helpful in planning future Honors Semesters.

### **Final Report**

Within three weeks of the final site visit, the external evaluator submits a formal report to the director of the Honors Semester. In most cases, the report should be such that the director will wish to share it with the central administrators on the host campus.

Typically the report will include the following components:

- a summary of the basis for evaluation (course materials; components, dates, and times of site visits; etc.);

- description of the Honors Semester, including theme, structure, curriculum, living arrangements, field trips, and other extracurricular activities;
- qualitative assessment of the courses and activities;
- qualitative assessment of the instruction and administration of the Honors Semester;
- qualitative assessment of the host campus and facilities;
- summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the Honors Semester, with particular emphasis on the active-learning components; and
- advice for future Honors Semesters.

### **Presentation of Report to the Honors Semesters Committee**

The evaluator distributes the final report not only to the director but also to the Honors Semesters Committee, and the report is the basis of a presentation and discussion at the next Honors Semesters Committee meeting. This final presentation to the committee should ideally include not only the final report submitted earlier but also the results of a survey—typically conducted by the director rather than the evaluator—submitted by the students several months after the Honors Semester. The report, including the survey results, then becomes a permanent part of the committee’s archives and serves as a basis for planning future Honors Semesters. The Honors Semester director is welcome but not required to attend this committee meeting.



# STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON HONORS SEMESTERS

ELIZABETH BECK

All of the theory and intellectual foundations that go into the making of an Honors Semester have a long list of citations standing behind them, but the proof of whether it succeeds in practice comes, according to Bernice Braid, from listening to the student participants after they have finished their specific Honors Semester. The students' assessments are crucial to all the examinations the Honors Semesters Committee performs each semester. After thirty-five years of Honors Semesters, a pattern has emerged of what students have to say about the value of these semesters. This chapter is a collection of the reflections written by a number of the participants in the series of Honors Semesters that so far have ranged from the Washington Bicentennial Semester in 1976 to the London Honors Semester in 2004.

The responses quoted below are from students who responded to an email inquiry sent to Honors Semesters alums. They allow us to assess, in the broad contexts of time and distance, the effect of the semesters individually and collectively. The participants' reflections speak in powerful ways about the meaning and impact the Honors Semester had on their lives. Students' initial expectations shift and change into quite different final impressions, creating a kaleidoscope effect: the differing perceptions and experiences of the students, from beginning to end, keep the pattern changing in an integrated but holistic way. Every student is always a part of the pattern even though all stand at different places throughout the semester.

The Honors Semester's fundamental intellectual focus is on learning. Students' reflections about what they learned during the semester fall into three primary categories: (1) expanding the intellectual side of their life; (2) understanding the power of community; and (3) developing a concept of self, both in relation to the community they are in and as unique individuals.

The Honors Semesters' methods support the type of learning advocated by John Abbott, head of the 21st-Century Learning Initiative, who contends that today's world requires people to know more than the basics taught in a traditional curriculum. Students need to learn how to conceptualize and understand abstract problems, relate their abstractions to real issues and problems, employ interrelated thinking strategies to search for solutions to the problems, and understand the

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value of experimentation and collaboration in working through the process.

A student who attended two Honors Semesters, the very first Honors Semester in Washington, D.C., in 1976 and the first Grand Canyon Honors Semester in 1978, writes about what he gained from the Honors Semester experiences:

*I would say there were two significant changes I had—both ones of awareness. First, I became aware of a strong connection between what I was learning and the real world through the semester's use of field trips, immersion housing, class meetings in various places in the city/region, internships, guest speakers, and research projects that tapped into resources available in the locale. Secondly, I came to realize the power of community. Students lived together in the same building and also took the same classes. Teachers were around for more than just their time in class. Cooking and buying food together (absence of food service) helped with the community bonding. These changes in awareness were important to me as a preparation for finding my place and functioning in the world outside of the college campus.*

—Jeff Strang

The Honors Semesters begin by taking students away from their home campuses and the people who know them, thus creating a clean slate for the students that signals not only the beginning of a new approach to learning but also the opportunity to change themselves. As the Honors Semesters progress and the students accumulate classroom and field-based experiences, the intensity of the experiences increases, and most students find themselves in an uncomfortable situation: they are forced to listen to and account for others' interpretations; they live in extended periods of ambiguity; and they become overwhelmed by what they believe they need to do to succeed academically in their specific Honors Semester. Their reflections on their Honors Semester acknowledge all of these as giant steps in their intellectual development in general and understanding of themselves in particular.

*Participation in the Semester opened up a larger horizon for me; spending a semester away from familiar territory made me understand concretely that my education should not be limited by geography or academic discipline.*

—Laurie Long Lockman  
United Nations Honors Semester, 1987

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*The tight interaction and new location seemed to exaggerate each individual's personality. We were constantly discussing topics generated by the reality of life in New York City. . . . The discussions were different from previous ones I had. . . . [They] encouraged me to understand how I thought differently from these other students. And so I began to develop a better picture of myself.*

—Greg Wolk

United Nations Honors Semester, 1991

Resident Director, New York Honors Semester, 1994

*It's true you learn about yourself as an individual and as an extension of a group and what meaning that new knowledge has. . . . More than anything, I think the semester ignited my passion for learning as a virtue rather than a marketable asset.*

—Julie A. Fonseca

New York Honors Semester, 1997

*We were free to craft ourselves however we wanted ourselves to be, independent of any preconceived notions with which people in more familiar environments constrained us. The students, the City as Text exercises, and even the philosophy of the Honors Semester encouraged us in this endeavor, and the resulting transformations were astounding.*

—James Krapfl

Czech Honors Semester, 1992

*I believe I attended the most historical Honors Semesters because I was there during 9/11. The best lesson I learned: understanding how to live in a close community so far away from home. I discovered how to live peaceably with people—especially my two roommates! Because I had to adapt to a plethora of personalities in the Honors Semester and in New York City itself, it prepared me for life, especially my life today. I wouldn't change one moment.*

—Angela Miller

New York City Honors Semester, 2001

The experiential or field-based curriculum is the centerpiece of the Honors Semester and is the application of this learning theory. Learning how to incorporate their experiences, whether structured by the Honors Semester faculty or just a part of their individual daily existence, tends to be a traumatic experience for the students. They struggle with putting all the pieces of their field experiences together with the knowledge they have gained or are gaining from classes or books. At first, they do not have faith in their ability to figure it out, and while immersed in the Honors Semester, they frequently voice their

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frustrations. Nevertheless, they leave the Honors Semester understanding not only how to make connections and meanings but the value of knowing how to accomplish these tasks.

*I would say that the internship and some of the classes I took forced me to look at the world in a different light and analyze common and normal things to a greater extent.*

—Megan B. Stone  
New York Honors Semester, 1997

*The Honors Semester was a favorite part of my undergraduate experience. We explored NYC neighborhoods from an urban planning standpoint; read great books; reflected on our experiences daily; and had just the perfect balance of classroom versus field learning. Personally, this semester also fit into my art interests and helped develop my interests in photojournalism. I don't think I will ever be able to travel to a new city and not look at my environment from cultural, architectural, demographic, and many other viewpoints. My time in Brooklyn also proved to be a great foundation for my recent work in understanding the health disparities behind various Baltimore City neighborhoods, and I met great people from around the country with whom I still keep in touch.*

—Pooja Aggarwal,  
New York Honors Semester, 2003

During the City as Text™ course, Honors Semesters start to move the students beyond the system of simply memorizing the information and demand that they create maps that they can use for further learning and interpretation. The maps relate to their physical, social, cultural, or intellectual experiences. By the end of the Honors Semester, the students have become practiced in creating and integrating various maps to make their understanding more complex and their experiences richer and fuller.

Honors students remark how much more they can now see, experience, and understand. The comments from two students, one who went to the first Appalachian Honors Semester and one who went to the fifth New York Honors Semester, reveal how their experiences taught them to see the physical and social environment of their community back home much differently.

*I was one of those kids who was bored by my small town and wanted to escape to a bigger and more exciting world. . . . At the Appalachian Culture Semester, we spent a lot of time visiting places that were even smaller and more isolated than my hometown. We explored Appalachia from many angles: politics, music, botany, religion, economics. We read*



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*some academic essays, but we also attended tent revivals, joined musical jam sessions, hiked and canoed in the mountains, conducted oral histories, toured strip mines, and listened to storytellers. Though we never used the phrase, I was now gaining “a sense of place.” The more I learned about Appalachia, the more I realized how little I knew about the boring small town where I’d spent my entire childhood—and now I really wanted to know.*

—Cathy Chamberlin Engstrom  
Appalachian Honors Semester, 1979

*I left with a heightened sense of curiosity and, since then, have visited many places in and near my small college town that I might not have been interested in before. During the semester, I learned that people often ignore the opportunities, sites, and flavors available in their home community and often think how nice it would be to visit another place. Yet, they have not even seen what’s in a nearby gallery, market, ethnic restaurant, or small shop.*

—Stephanie Murphy  
New York Honors Semester, 1997

Renate and Geoffrey Caine’s work recognizes that two processes are operating as learning principles: the conscious and the unconscious. The synthesis of both processes may not happen until hours, weeks, or months later. The Caines argue that curricula should be organized in order to facilitate this synthesis and should include the incorporation of reflection and activities that force students to think about thinking. Honors Semester students talk about how their understanding of this principle continues to operate in their lives years later.

*I did not feel profound effects from the semester until at least five years later, when I was in a completely unfamiliar school environment and then working in an unfamiliar industry. I feel some “flashbacks” from the experience now too as I and my wife embark on a new entrepreneurial adventure. The effects of the Honors Semester will last a lifetime.*

—Kane Brolin  
Mexican Honors Semester, 1987

*Then and now I consider my Honors Semester to be one of the most, if not THE most, significant educational experiences in my life. . . . One year ago I got my “dream job” as the communications coordinator for a nonprofit organization that protects Iowa’s remaining natural lands. Though Iowa’s environment and environmental issues are very different from those I saw in Appalachia, I recognize many common themes. I am very proud of the work my organization and I are doing. And I*

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*would not be doing that work today if it weren't for the honors semester I attended [many] years ago.*

—Cathy Chamberlain Engstrom  
Appalachian Culture Honors Semester, 1979

A second important long-term lesson embedded in Honors Semesters is the power of community. Only in the past few decades have universities commonly started asking students to work in teams and to understand the power of collaborative work groups. The reality of our lives is that collaboration and community are essential to accomplishing our goals. Honors Semesters have always created community by virtue of an unfamiliar location as well as the design of the living arrangements and the curriculum. Students not only become a community but think about what it means to be a part of a community. Student reflections consistently refer to the power of community and the understanding of that power as they have negotiated their lives since returning from the Honors Semester.

*Most importantly, the structure of the semester was extremely conducive to fostering a vibrant, close-knit community. Thirty students from various parts of the United States were divided in Czechoslovakia into two groups of fourteen or sixteen each; separated from the world around us by the language barrier and united by our common work, we were forced to depend on one another. The place of the "living laboratory," as Czechoslovakia was dubbed in the title of the Honors Semester, was intensely stimulating, and our City as Text™ exercises trained us to respond to this stimulus as fully as possible on a variety of levels: emotional, sensual, and, of course, intellectual.*

—James Krapfl  
Czech Honors Semester, 1992

*After spending three months living in a foreign city, interacting with persons I had never dreamed of, and teaching in a school without the benefit of an Elementary Education degree or teaching certificate, I learned a very valuable lesson: that many of the most fulfilling moments in life come after struggle and through complete spontaneity, and that many of the most fulfilling lessons are learned from participating in a group dynamic with individuals I never would have chosen to take part in my pre-set program.*

—Kane Brolin  
Mexican Honors Semester, 1987

## PLACE AS TEXT

*Ultimately, the days following 9/11 shaped the lives of all of us that semester. Many of my classmates moved back to New York to become teachers or artists. Others went on to become city planners, urban historians, or national and world travelers. Thanks to Facebook we all still keep up. I ended up changing my major to Anthropology because I liked the courses so much. The courses and my professors and classmates impacted not only my career path, but also the way I see my life and the world. Now, I can read each new place I go to as if it were a text, learning from those experiences and creating new chapters in my life. I am never without a camera because I love the act of documenting. I have produced one short film and am working on two more that will be completed in May. I am currently working on my Masters in Public Health and also plan to complete my Bachelors in Nursing. I hope that my education will equip me with the skills necessary to be a responder to national and global health issues that arise, such as the events of 9/11.*

—Brittney Pietrzak

New York City Honors Semester, 2001

Honors Semesters are designed to teach students how to think in integrative, holistic, and collaborative ways. Students learn as much about how to manage what they do not know as what they do know, and this step is a significant intellectual and social one for them. An even more profound and lasting transformation involves the personal and moral fiber of the individual student, a transformation that makes the Honors Semester experiences different from other types of off-campus national or international study. Honors Semesters are somewhat like an Outward Bound survival experience, where individuals return with not only a new set of skills and abilities but also a deeper fundamental knowledge of themselves and the world around them. The change is perceptible to those who regularly interact with the students; most importantly, it is perceptible to the students, and they are quick to acknowledge it.

The unfamiliar approach to the curriculum, the new setting and instructors, the new set of peers, and the bracketed time frame of the Honors Semesters present the students with a range of choices about how they are going to respond to it all. They all experience a certain level of fear at the beginning of the Honors Semester, much of which focuses on how well they will compare with the other students. They quickly learn that others have the same fear, and thus they calm down and forge ahead. As the Honors Semester progresses, pressures to do it all, see it all, get it all done, and meet the deadlines continue to build, and students are channeled into the third learning element of the

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Honors Semesters: the identification and understanding of self. They gain a belief in themselves.

*The most profound change in my character produced by that semester was that it made me a more flexible, fluid person, increasingly able to deal with change and able to rely on my basic intuition to guide me through life's trials.*

—Kane Brolin

Mexican Honors Semester, 1987

*I became more confident and comfortable with myself and the decisions I make concerning my life.*

—Olu Arowolo

Greek Honors Semester, 1998

*Essentially, [Reverend Youngblood's] message was this: 'The fear of making mistakes is worse than not making mistakes. Life is a one-shot deal and if you don't grab it and run, then you are setting yourself up for regret.' I remember how this simple message really hit at that time after all the sweat and worry I had racked up over the last month. It was only at that point that I could see the future open up for me. . . . I learned that the best way to survive and succeed is to attempt whatever is before you with fearlessness (and . . . a high degree of competence).*

—Greg Wolk

United Nations Honors Semester, 1991

Resident Director, New York Honors Semester, 1994

The success of the Honors Semesters is remarkable. In a system of changing educational trends, the philosophy and structure of Honors Semesters have not changed. The outcomes have not changed either. The change is in the individual student, and it is personal. In an ideal world, this kind of change would happen to every student who comes through the doors of an institution of higher education.

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# OTHER STRUCTURAL MODELS OF ACTIVE LEARNING

## City as Text™

**Bernice Braid**

*The world is a book that demands to be read like a book.*

—Umberto Eco

City as Text™ “walkabouts”—four- or five-hour structured explorations—are among the most compelling adaptations of structural elements in NCHC’s Honors Semesters and have become a regular feature of the organization’s national conferences. They are infinitely applicable to differing sites and equally seductive to students and faculty. They have proven to be catalysts for involvement in conference events and have provoked long-term sensitivity to and reflection about the human experience in built environments.

The content of walkabouts emerges from some combination of site-specific elements (local economics, culture, and geography) and the conference theme (neighborhoods, honors learning, the uses of imagination). Shaping the precise assignments and linking them to the destinations proposed is much like drafting a syllabus. A clear sense of objectives, materials, and time is essential so that small exploratory teams can probe organizational patterns in goods and services observable on the surface and in public places.

To accomplish so much in so little time is a challenge, to be sure. The organizer needs to assign pre-readings, always of a highly general nature meant to frame the activity with an overall sense of context. In addition, participants need to receive a sheet of questions to consider while out on the streets. Then the larger group needs to be divided into working teams, preferably of no more than four or five. These teams must set out on a journey—whether walking or going by bus, subway, or el—that will take them into uncharted territory. In locations where a van or bus is required because of distances, the ride should be exceptionally short, and then the teams must leave the bus to do their detective work for the bulk of the time, only returning to their vehicle for the ride back to the hotel.

Included in the probe should be the purchase of a lunch (though not at a sit-down restaurant, which limits mobility), the purchase of local papers to scan hot news items and real estate ads, a visit to a real estate office to see what a newcomer deals with, and conversations with

local people about jobs, food, recreation, directions—all the information that anyone who lives in a place knows or would need to learn to survive. Often comparing what people say in these casual encounters with what the newspaper and real estate office assert is revelatory.

Underlying the entire activity is a desire to convey not only how much is normally missed in an ordinary day of one's life but also how much might be seen and heard. The announced intent to "hone observational skills," to become aware of "how one's own lens works," is predicated on an understanding of how mutable even buildings can seem depending on the angle of vision, angle of inquiry, kinds of questions, and the context created by one's own presence in the scene.

Participants are invited to mull over questions of impression and of fact. A photography exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, *PASSAGES* (1999), provided some stimulus to consider the issue of just how fixed are the givens a team assumes it is examining. "Photos often lend themselves more readily to conflicting interpretation than conclusive explanation" (Matthew S. Witkovsky, Curator). What participants in the NCHC walkabouts are undertaking is nothing less than an inquiry into not just the arrangement of streets or the behavior of people but the whole matter of how it is one sees.

Explorers who enter their walkabout open-minded and curious inevitably are startled to find themselves lost on familiar ground and anchored on foreign ground. They return with vivid impressions of how ample an activity interpretation really is; the shifting ground of solid stone outside a hotel, for instance, becomes a stage set for human drama, suggesting that all solidity is less to be explained than questioned. The necessary element of being in strange surroundings produces a bonus: those who return with a perception of themselves as freshly "sighted" then enter conference sessions with a newly assertive curiosity, a more frankly interactive posture.

One way to initiate an exploration is to set out consciously to record. The dominant figure of speech in NCHC's *City as Text*<sup>TM</sup> projects has always been "mapping." Three small teams who visit the identical intersection usually return with at least three maps to show for their observations of the site. Not surprisingly, travelers astute enough to experience themselves as mappers, even while they are scanning the horizon for "fixed points of reference," in the end feel themselves to be discoverers.

*A good map lays bare the history and hence the soul of a place, like an x-ray.*

—Cees Nooteboom

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In his travel book *Roads to Santiago*, Cees Nooteboom provides a perfect illustration of how far a good mapper can go with a field observation methodology. The central activity—walking or driving on roads well traveled in the past—suggests how the activity works over time. Books read, images acquired, sounds heard, tastes and smells ingested, all become materials that over time allow a redrawing of the maps. One short afternoon at a conference, or one orientation day on campus, is a modest start. But as conference participants move out into the local environment, away from the seclusion of their hotel rooms and into the maelstrom of new impressions, they are entering on a journey that need not end. Armed with a schematic drawing of intersections and streets and with instructions on how to take public transportation, they fan out to ask questions (‘the interview’), to compile answers, to shop and bring back artifacts and anecdotes, and to take notes on what they see, when, how, and maybe even why.

Returning with their notes, they attempt a rough deconstruction of what they have read as the text of this city, refracted through the lens that each team uses to construct its report on explorations of this new world. They have, in this process, created an idiosyncratic map of a public place and have begun to muse about just how it might function as a place in which others live their lives.

If this exercise occurs at the beginning of a conference, it brings strangers together to work and become temporary partners. When participants feel attached to others who are strangers in this strange place, the entire conference changes dimension and dynamic for them. In acquiring a capacity to explore in a somewhat systematic way but certainly in a conscious way, they have acquired as well an ability to engage with new or unfamiliar ideas as they appear throughout the meetings. It does seem, judging from conference behavior, that City as Text™ has broken through the kind of isolation and awkwardness that is so common a phenomenon at professional meetings, which are often an alienating experience despite their disciplinary excitement.

Panelists discussing City as Text™ walkabout designs commonly suggest the multiple applications of this approach to helping students regard the world as a book to be read and to see their journey through it as a mapper’s task of charting the personal paths they take to uncover and discover what is out there. The discoveries students make by virtue of looking and seeing some slightly surprising thing are the ones they will never forget. Brilliant guides, whether on buses or in classrooms, flash brightly in their minds for a while but tend to fade. Enthusiasm about pursuing research projects, trying out new fields, and thinking



odd thoughts derives far more reliably from discoveries than from the occasionally flashing lights academics provide to lead their students through dense woods.

## **Faculty Institutes**

**William W. Daniel**

The first National Honors Semester in 1976 initiated a series of undergraduate educational programs that were unique in bringing together students from diverse academic disciplines to explore a specific issue central to a given site. One major objective of this experiment was to provide a paradigmatic honors experience that would serve as a model from which others might extrapolate. The Bicentennial and Washington, D.C., were an obvious union of topic and site. Combining an interdisciplinary, integrated series of classes and field experiences within a living-learning community produced a learning experience that profoundly affected those students and faculty who were selected to participate.

As each of the succeeding semesters with varying themes and sites was developed and implemented, effective program structures and pedagogical techniques were discovered, identified, and refined. These elements came to be understood as expressions of basic principles of learning that could find manifold incarnations relative to a given place and specific educational objective.

With success came a desire among honors faculty to learn exactly what gave these semesters their peculiar power. In turn, the Honors Semesters Committee sought ways to communicate both the pedagogical insights and structures that had proved so effective. Thus was born a series of Directors Workshops held in the middle of Honors Semesters. Honors directors were invited to visit an operating Honors Semester to review how they worked and to consider the possibility of developing such a semester at their own university. While this objective was retained, we soon realized that a more formal program structure was desirable for interested faculty, one that would include not just pedagogical theory but practice as well. If experiential education was the centerpiece of Honors Semesters, then it should also be the central element for faculty learning.

The product of this evolution has been a series of Faculty Institutes. These institutes are sometimes—though not always—held within the context of an operating Honors Semester and involve participants in the same type of experiential learning embodied in the Honors



Semesters. Institute formats include both local field explorations and a self-conscious examination of the learning process itself. A second objective is developing the necessary tools that will enable teachers to translate this methodology into their local environment, to find ways of incorporating the techniques of Honors Semesters into local sites and honors programs.

To date, twenty-five Faculty Institutes have been held at sites from San Francisco, California, to Charleston, South Carolina; from Mexico to the Czech Republic to Crete; from New York to El Paso. Each site has provided a different flavor, but each has centered on the methods and techniques for adapting the principles of experiential, integrated, field-based learning to a given physical place. (For a detailed discussion of Faculty Institutes, including sample themes and schedules, see the 2008 NCHC monograph *Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*, edited by Peter Machonis.)

## Summer High School Field Experiences

### Bernice Braid

One of the oldest uses of Honors Semesters as a model for non-honors students is a program for marginal achievers in the New York metropolitan area high schools. Recommended for consideration by college counselors in the schools, candidates are judged to have promise for college but to be at high risk of failure to complete diploma requirements. The program, called the BASIS project, has since 1985 been designed to build motivation in problem students to increase the likelihood that they will complete high school and even apply to college.

As a project run out of Long Island University's Brooklyn Campus Honors Program, BASIS intentionally replicates the elements of NCHC Honors Semesters: their site-specific, thematically organized, multi-disciplinary, and heavily experiential architecture. From sixteen or more schools each year, registrants work for the month of July in production teams to prepare a project—whether slide show, video, publication, or dance/performance piece—which is presented to the public at the end of this intense month of explorations, library research, interviewing, writing, and reading.

The group splits into two or more cohorts: dancer/performer and other (publication), but everyone produces at least some writing both for the publication and the scenario of the performance. Everyone collaborates to mount an exhibit of the original photos, sketches, collages, and poems that are included in the group's photocopied publication

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(“xerography” the art instructor calls it), which is produced in a run of about 150 copies. Also, everyone explores the urban area within two miles or so of campus, keeping street-lab books and writing up their impressions.

Invariably groups select their own themes from the waterfront and downtown Brooklyn sites they have explored. Rich with history, architecture, and folklore as well as complex in politics, social relations, and economics, these neighborhoods include icons like the Brooklyn Bridge and Navy Yard as well as entire renovated areas such as the warehouse district along the waterfront.

Appropriate readings from history, sociology, literature, architecture, and design are not hard to find and are collected into an anthology for the summer project each year.

Here, as in Honors Semesters, strangers forge bonds and achieve community from the rhythm and pace of alternating classroom time with field explorations, recording observations and turning points, and creating retrospective views through writing, always with the intensity that results from firm deadlines for public performances. Also, as in Honors Semesters, the interdependence and independence of individuals produce a real community that comes directly from having had to work together on mysterious materials and from having had to find a vocabulary—words, images, movements—through which to express their discoveries.

Teenagers normally eschew small group work, decidedly so with strangers. In the twenty-five years of this project, the always positive and delightful results include the following facts:

- every participant has earned a high school diploma;
- every participant has applied to college;
- every participant has gone to college;
- every participant has remarked on a perceived growth in self-confidence; and
- every participant has been astonished by the city itself and by how much a part of the communal whole he or she feels after spending only one month together.

Given that these youngsters were deemed to be at risk of dropping out of high school, such results are impressive. These students, like the collegians they emulate, report “new ways of seeing old neighborhoods” and a change in perception evidenced yearly by efforts they make to return to downtown Brooklyn with friends and family in order

to show them their newly acquired secret city spots for summer picnics and walkabouts.

## Sleeping Bag Seminars

### Joan Digby

Sleeping Bag Seminars are thematic, site-specific, active-learning experiences that started in the Northeast Region of the NCHC and have occurred in various other regions through the years. They function as mini-versions of Honors Semesters or as shorter student equivalents of Faculty Institutes, typically planned for Friday afternoon/evening to Sunday morning/afternoon. The weekend activities emphasize active-learning experiences and opportunities for students to socialize. Sleeping Bag Seminars reflect the essence of collaborative learning experiences. Students at the host institution play a major role in organizing and executing the Sleeping Bag Seminar activities.

Each Sleeping Bag Seminar reflects a theme, perhaps an issue about which the institution and its faculty have particular expertise, a feature unique to the geographical location of the institution, or a topic about which students of the host institution are excited and energized. Themes of Sleeping Bag Seminars have included “Eastern Shore Life: Assateague and Chincoteague Islands” (Salisbury State University, MD), “Rhythm: The Back Beat of Our Lives” (Montclair State University, NJ), “Reflected Images: The Illustration of Poetry” (Long Island University—C.W. Post Campus, NY), and “Tracking the Black Bear” (Frostburg State University, MD).

Sleeping Bag Seminars have addressed their themes in a variety of ways. Often excursions are planned. In “Rhythm: The Back Beat of Our Lives,” participants went to New York City for sightseeing and a performance of *Stomp*. “Tracking the Black Bear” took participants into the woods of Western Maryland to learn triangulation of a collared bear population and other tracking techniques. “Eastern Shore Life” featured travel to the Assateague and Chincoteague Islands, including a visit to Misty Museum. Lectures and attendance at campus cultural events often supplement the excursions. Coordinating the Sleeping Bag Seminar with other campus or honors program events has been effective. “Reflected Images: The Illustration of Poetry,” for example, linked the Sleeping Bag Seminar weekend to a Hillwood Museum exhibition of illustrated poetry. Often seminars have featured artistic and other forms of performance by the participants.

Students who have engaged in exciting seminars frequently bring their energy back to their home programs. In some cases, networking among participating institutions continues long after the weekend and inspires further collaborations at regional and national meetings.

Although the Sleeping Bag Seminar originated in the northeast, honors programs in various regions have successfully run seminars of this type adapted to their geography, local history, and culture. The Sleeping Bag Seminar is a focused and extremely productive model of active learning that can solidify the local honors community.

### **College Recruitment Exercises**

#### **Bernadette Low**

The City as Text™ model has been adapted to introduce high school students to college life. For instance, suburban high school students were invited to a community college honors program that involved them in an overnight experience focusing on exploration of their city. Girls met at the college after their high school classes were over on a Friday night. They explored one of the unique neighborhoods of Baltimore near the campus, where they were able to observe old homes reflecting Baltimore as an early seaport; they also observed new and remodeled homes reflecting urban gentrification. They shared their observations of people and places—a debriefing over high tea at perhaps the only restaurant in the city offering high tea. The girls then attended a poetry reading by young women poets held at another college nearby in a different neighborhood. They enjoyed a late-night swim in the college pool that evening before camping out for the night on the school gym floor. The next day their city explorations continued. They visited repositories of history and culture and walked around other neighborhoods where they saw examples of early city architecture, a thriving city market, recycled buildings, and ordinary yet colorful people tending businesses on a typical fall Saturday. Over lunch and a wrap-up session at the end of the day, they compared their observations and related their impressions of each neighborhood and its distinctive characteristics.

### **Orientation Exercises**

#### **Bernadette Low**

Many honors directors use the City as Text™ model to orient new students to their campus. Students become members of small teams that

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explore various areas of the college. Walking around the campus, they gather information through observation, interviews with college officials, and conversations with students. In debriefing sessions, they share information and impressions. They discover details about the areas they explore with teammates and learn of areas they did not see through the reports by other groups. This exploration develops a sense of the place for all participants. The reports include impressions that are both insightful and idiosyncratic, helping the students learn both about the college and about each other. This orientation, unlike most orientations led by a group leader who does all the talking, is active, participatory, and fun. Students look more closely as they explore, knowing that they will be sharing impressions with others. They also work with other students so that, by the end of the activity, they have met a few people they can call on again.

### **Professional Development Exercises**

#### **Bernadette Low**

The City as Text™ model has been adapted for faculty development in an abbreviated version of a Faculty Institute. The University of Baltimore, Coppin State University, and Bowie State University engaged NCHC consultants to provide the theory and a model activity for active learning. An NCHC consultant described the pedagogy of field-based learning during one session with faculty participants from the three universities. In the second session, another NCHC consultant facilitated explorations of a neighborhood. Small teams of faculty members explored a neighborhood with the particular goal of identifying social values reflected in the architecture, the renovations, the businesses, and the activities of the people living in the neighborhood. As in field-based experiences at regional and national honors conferences, participants conjectured about what they saw based on observations and interviews with local residents and shop owners. Participants then discussed ways of integrating such field-based learning into their own classes.

### **Other Courses**

#### **Bernadette Low**

Honors faculty members have adapted the City as Text™ model to various disciplines. One adaptation has occurred in freshman writing classes. In one course offered at a two-year college, scheduled once a

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week in three-hour blocks, students spent one class meeting on a field exploration, taking notes on observations about the area, and spent the next meeting talking about their observations and casting their discoveries into essays. Some of the essays focused on rhetorical modes like definition, description, comparison/contrast, and argument. The city explorations provided excellent content for these types of writing. Other essays organized observations around topics such as the evolution of the row house or newly gentrified neighborhoods based on interviews with local residents.

The model has also been adapted to an honors seminar. In a seminar focused on a multi-disciplinary look at a city, various consultants visited the class, scheduled in three-hour blocks of time, and provided different perspectives on a neighborhood. Sometimes students looked at the architecture of a neighborhood; other times they focused on the history or the preservation of culture. Students used their explorations and observations as starting points for research on their seminar papers.

This approach has also been adapted to include service learning. Students not only explore a neighborhood but also perform some service there. The service might include such activities as tutoring recent Hispanic immigrants, planting trees in a neighborhood, or cleaning up a lot for a community garden. These service activities give the students additional insights into their field experiences, enabling them to see firsthand some of the problems and attempted solutions in the communities. The service-learning component, which includes personal reflection as well as action, motivates students to think about what makes up a community; they experience community by moving beyond simple observation and conjecture into personal commitment.

### Partners in the Parks

#### Joan Digby

Partners in the Parks is the newest species of honors adventures in experiential learning. Its weeklong immersion seminars are predicated on a three-fold purpose: **to educate** students about the national parks, **to engage** them in recreational activities that are the essence of park experiences, and ultimately **to urge stewardship** of these treasured spaces through a lifetime of involvement. Partners in the Parks is a program designed to inspire commitment to America's national parks among honors students, who will become professionals, parents, and leaders with a conscience.

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PITP began as a core idea presented in 2006 to the National Collegiate Honors Council membership. It was launched in 2007 with a pilot program in Bryce Canyon National Park. Since then it has expanded to eleven national park sites and has more than 150 program alumni. Although most of the sites are vast expanses of awesome natural landscape, the National Park Service also oversees urban parks, monuments, and historic houses. Theodore Roosevelt's summer home, Sagamore Hill, and also the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island are venues for one of our programs, and we are eager to take students on the Freedom Trail in Boston. These urban sites put the greater American landscape into an historic frame of reference that is important to cultivate. Partners in the Parks is, in essence, keyed to the purpose and meaning of the parks themselves.

From their inception, the national parks were intended to serve the general population as places of affordable recreation. Initially, Partners in the Parks was planned in the same spirit as an inexpensive immersion of five to seven days based on the "Sleeping Bag Seminar" model developed in the Northeast Region Honors Council. In these programs students essentially camp out, usually as dorm guests, for a few days in order to explore an issue related to the geographic or historic setting of the host campus. For PITP, host colleges or universities, typically situated reasonably near the park, use their faculty and students as local experts and guides. During the weeklong adventure, participants get to know honors students from other regions as they explore the park together. Camping, cooking, hiking, photography, and storytelling are all part of the experience of being out in nature—for honors students just as for all the other visitors in campsites and lodges around the parks.

At the core of all experiential models is the opening of a door that leads students out of a classroom bounded by walls into open space. The sense of awe intensifies when that space is a vast canyon, a misty harbor, or a seemingly endless desert. In PITP nature is the classroom without walls. Using *Nature as Text* is the first principle of PITP, and it owes much to NCHC's groundbreaking program *City as Text*<sup>TM</sup>. During the course of a week, participants learn to observe and interpret the landscape they encounter during land and water voyages.

For anyone from a frenetic culture—namely, contemporary American culture—slowing down to meet nature is a difficult first step. Henry David Thoreau provides some useful instruction when he writes in his essay "Walking" that "you must walk like a camel, which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when walking." With three stomachs, camels naturally chew their cud with greater deliberation than any



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human being digesting a meal! Of course, Thoreau is not speaking literally about rumination although chewing our food slowly rather than gulping down handfuls of trail mix and moving on would help us all. Walking daily around his local environs was for Thoreau a mode of cultivating reflection, and this is the meaning of his injunction to ruminate.

During the first walk or hike on a PITP excursion, students are still wrapped up in meeting and comparing their school lives, families, pets, and friends. They hardly notice the trail or the woods. They are excited by the newness of the landscape but focused on each other. They are eager to see everything and are therefore moving too quickly from place to place. They are not yet still enough within themselves to ruminate on nature around them. Over the next few days, the excitement of simply being there cools, and as the group engages with park rangers and faculty on specific topics, their eyes focus on their surroundings. Then they walk slowly and ruminate.

Walking with a botanist who is training volunteers for a forthcoming tourist season at Bryce, students learn to distinguish among pine, spruce, and fir. Later, when they see the decimation caused by white pine rust, they sigh in anxiety for the forest. Walking along an estuary beach in Maine with an environmental artist, students stop to gather driftwood, seaweed, shells, and pebbles to create their own organic sculptures that the tide will soon carry out and bring back to shore in altered forms. Walking with a park ranger along the dunes at Fire Island, they discover and delicately handle the carapace of a horseshoe crab, as mysterious and ancient as a dinosaur. They stop at enclosures to observe nesting piping plovers and consider the dangers these birds must face among predators and human communities. Learning to walk with eyes fully focused on the environment is one of the most meaningful acquisitions of the journey, possibly the beginning of a lifelong habit.

In talking about his walks, Thoreau raises a provocative question: “When we walk, we naturally go to the fields and woods; what would become of us if we walked only in a garden or a mall?” Needless to say his “mall” is a tree-lined promenade—like the Mall in Washington, D. C., where we also held a Partners in the Parks mini-session—not the shopping centers that blight our landscape. He is asking about the difference between walking in planned spaces and walking in the wild. Today we have no option but to consider what “would become of us” if there were no national parks, no wild landscape—only private gardens, designed spaces, and shopping malls.

Partners in the Parks is a program designed to generate discussion by leading students to hands-on learning with a variety of experts in the



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quintessential landscapes that define America. As Matt Nickerson, Chair of the NCHC Partners in the Parks Committee, has expressed it:

*On a PITP project you cannot escape the curriculum. There is no zoning out, no daydreaming away, no watching-YouTube-when-you-should-be-listening-to-the-lecture. Eight miles up the trail gets you into “the learning” in a special and important way. The park is everything. It’s the course, it’s the text book, it’s the curriculum. It’s the classroom, the library, the laboratory. It’s the department head, the instructor, the TA. The park is you and you are the park.*

*Waking in a tent, hours from the nearest road, and thrusting your head from the zippered door into frosty air filled with snow. That is experiential learning that teaches and inspires. Smelling the pine, feeling the cold, catching a snowflake on your tongue. Directly observing trees, and cliffs, and sky. Communicating with each other from mouth-to-ear and back again. Experiencing. Being. Learning.*

From among our NCHC colleagues, the Partners in the Parks Committee is searching for leaders and participants to expand the programming by including an even greater number and variety of national parks across the country. How to choose a site and shape and plan a program are subjects addressed in another NCHC monograph, *Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks*. (For further information or to propose or become engaged in a PITP project, NCHC members should email [jdigby@liu.edu](mailto:jdigby@liu.edu) or [Nickerson@SUU.edu](mailto:Nickerson@SUU.edu).)

**Partners in the Parks Projects to Date:**

<b>Park</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Director(s)</b>
Acadia	2008, 2009	Kathleen King, University of Maine-Augusta
Black Canyon of the Gunnison	2009, 2010	Heather Thiessen-Reily, Western State College of Colorado
Bryce Canyon	2008, 2009	Matt Nickerson and Todd Petersen, Southern Utah University
Cape Hatteras	2010	Bill Atwill, University of North Carolina Wilmington
Cedar Breaks	2009, 2010	Matt Nickerson and Todd Petersen, Southern Utah University
Denali	2010	Channon Price, University of Alaska-Fairbanks
Fire Island to Ellis Island	2008, 2010	Joan Digby, Cris Gleicher, and James Clarke, Long Island University–Brooklyn and C. W. Post Campuses
Grand Canyon/ Parashant	2008, 2009, 2010	Matt Nickerson and Todd Petersen, Southern Utah University
Joshua Tree	2009	Matt Nickerson, hosted by Arizona State University
Zion	2008, 2009, 2010	Joy Ochs, Mt. Mercy College

Mini-PITP Excursions at NCHC Annual Conferences:

- San Antonio Missions (2008)
- Washington, D.C., Mall (2009)

# PUBLIC PRODUCTS OF PERSONAL DISCOVERIES

ADA LONG

While active learning stresses the fundamental process of discovery, it needs also to lead to public products in the form of oral presentations, performances, photographic displays, videos, and—in most instances—written texts. These products combine autonomy with community, growing out of shared experiences that inspire and inform individual creativity, finally blending together in a collective expression of unique voices.

In short exercises, such as a day-long City as Text™ experience at a national conference or an orientation event, participants explore in groups, compose their individual thoughts, share their insights and interpretations, and then collaborate on a public presentation, usually a narrative in which one person represents the collective ideas of the group but sometimes a photomontage, slide show, or performance event. This concluding segment, when each small team of explorers presents its findings to the entire group, is a necessary final step in moving from private thoughts to public space, and all participants know at the outset of their experience that they will have this individual and collaborative responsibility at the end of the day.

In longer experiences such as the Faculty Institutes, three or four writing assignments are incorporated within the typically five-day institute. The first assignment is a “First Impressions” piece: notes (mental or written) taken while walking and then shaped into informal writing that captures in an immediate and unmediated way the sights, sounds, smells, patterns, characters, and events that provide the original feel of a place. This piece is the most unfiltered and uncorrected writing of the institute experience, taking place before participants have compared notes with others or developed a broader, more informed, and typically more consensus-oriented perspective. It may well turn out that these first impressions are at least as informative about both the observer and the site as later, more analytical writing. Participants are asked to look, hear, and smell in their accustomed ways and then to take written note of their impressions, which typically are not the same as what others are observing. A debriefing session after the walkabout and individual writing is crucial because, in not only giving voice and shape to their own impressions but also learning what others have

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noticed, participants gain a new perspective on what they have seen, how they see, and how they are like and unlike everybody else.

The second writing assignment is typically similar to the first, but what generally happens is that participants have picked up cues from other members of the group and start to be more conscious of their public voice. Having already written one assignment, they often become more reflective and move away from their initial biases. In the first assignment, for instance, most people compare the new place they are discovering to places with which they are already familiar. In the second assignment, people generally wean themselves from their old associations and start to experience the new site on its own terms.

The final writing assignment, often completed after the institute, is a public text—typically an essay although sometimes a narrative or a poem or a collage of different forms—that people contribute to a small book that is then produced and shared with the whole group. This final piece of writing is typically a Turning Point essay, in which the author identifies the moment or inspiration of a shift in perspective that yielded a deeper understanding of the site. A collection of these texts tends to have coherence because of the close collaboration among participants that has taken place during the institute, but it also expresses the unique perspective of each author. The collection of final texts is more than a keepsake: it is a public expression of the autonomy and community within this specific group of investigators.

The same kinds of writings that emerge from a Faculty Institute occur in Honors Semesters, but, given the greater length and ambition of the semesters, the writing eventually yields more formal and informed texts. The Turning Point essay, which is the end product of a Faculty Institute, is a recurring feature of an Honors Semester, punctuating the different sections of the semester towards the beginning, at the middle, and then at the end. Throughout the semester, students are also doing in-depth reading, research, and writing to complement their explorations. A primary focus of the second half of the semester is a formal research project, and in the concluding Symposium, the capstone event of the semester, each student creates a poster presentation (or the equivalent) and gives a formal talk not only to other students and faculty but also to local experts and national evaluators. Quite often the research projects are first steps toward graduate study or a career. In addition, after the semester is over, students collaborate in putting together a book of some kind as both a memento and a collective expression of their shared experience, much like the books produced after Faculty Institutes but typically more ambitious.

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The public products of City as Text™ experiences, Faculty Institutes, and Honors Semesters are a key component of this kind of active learning. While self-discovery and personal experience of a place provide the fundamental dynamics of learning, the evolution of an individual voice takes place within a collaborative context and moves finally into a public domain. Many of these public texts are archived in the national office of the NCHC, where, like all texts, they serve as records of the past and foundations for the future.



# AN EXAMPLE OF ACTIVE LEARNING IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

SHIRLEY FORBES THOMAS

My area of specialization is Renaissance English literature, and I have never had a course in cultural anthropology or any remotely related field. Helping structure and evaluate Honors Semesters during several years' tenure on the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee, however, has taught me the value of site-specific education, or "place as text," not only as it relates to learning about a given culture but also as it influences the development of critical thinking and writing skills. Consequently, beginning in the fall of 1994, I decided to use John Brown University's honors composition as the pilot course in adding site-specific experiential elements to the JBU Honors Program.

Since JBU, a private liberal arts institution in the Ozark Mountains of Northwest Arkansas, is located just a few yards from the Oklahoma border and a few miles from the capital of the Cherokee Nation, I decided to focus half the class on Cherokee culture and half on Ozark culture. The philosophy, structure, and methods of the class are as important as the content. I have sought to create what Bernice Braid describes as a "consciously orchestrated learning environment in which students are encouraged to learn as much about their preconceptions as they are about the culture they study" (18). In addition to using place as text, the class is like the NCHC Honors Semesters: experiential, collaborative, analytical, self-reflective, and integrative. In designing the course, I found David Kolb's *Experiential Learning* and several articles in the Winter/Spring 1991 issue of *Forum for Honors* particularly helpful.

Although assigned readings include works by both Cherokee and Ozark writers, the writing assignments in both halves of the class are modeled on N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Momaday, an Oklahoma-born Kiowa with a Ph.D. in English, uses a tri-part integrative structure in which each of the twelve sections of the book is divided into three subsections: (1) an imaginative, or mythological, episode narrated by a Kiowa grandmother figure; (2) a thematically connected historical account of a place or event narrated by an impersonal, almost absent historian; and (3) an autobiographical passage featuring events that tie Momaday's individual life to the larger Kiowa culture. Kenneth Roemer's collection of essays titled *Approaches to Teaching Momaday's The Way to Rainy Mountain* indicates that I am not the first to discover that Momaday's work provides a model for writing in at least

three different voices and styles and for looking at places and cultures from differing points of view.

Most of the assignments in my honors composition class are, in one way or another, designed to have students gather data that include the imaginative and mythological, the oral and written tales about the area, as well as historical and contemporary facets of the culture; the students then integrate these aspects with personal experiences described by those interviewed during field experiences and with the students' own responses to interviews and published materials. Student writing from the fall of 1994 demonstrated that this type of assignment results not only in an examination of the places and cultures studied, but in the self-reflection that is necessary to identify one's own presuppositions before genuine critical thinking can take place.

### **Field Experiences and Debriefing**

Two all-group field experiences and other individual and small-group explorations provide immediate, vivid subject matter for class discussion and writing assignments. In 1994, the first of these—a trip in vans to the Cherokee Heritage Center (built on the ruins of a nineteenth-century Cherokee Female Seminary just outside Tahlequah, Oklahoma)—served as an opening exercise, occurring on the Saturday of orientation before classes began. Because the experience was an introduction to site-specific learning, it was formally structured but emphasized impressions based on observations more than the data gathering of subsequent assignments.

Before students came on campus, I sent them a letter introducing the concept of place as text and explaining that they would be expected to interview people, observe events, and write brief responses to the Tahlequah excursion. The responses were to include details of what made this place unique and how it differed from what they had expected. The trip included tours of the Heritage Center and Murrell Home museums; interviews with several Cherokee visitors and employees; and attendance at *The Trail of Tears*, an outdoor drama covering the Cherokee experience from before the time of the relocation from the east until Oklahoma received statehood.

A bonus came with the Murrell Home. The curator was Bruce Ross, great-great-grandson of John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokees in the nineteenth century for almost forty years. Bruce Ross graciously talked to the students for over an hour about the Ross Family connections with the Murrells, Cherokee history, and current Native American



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concerns. He also introduced the Cherokee syllabary to interested students.

One of the immediate results of the meeting with Ross and attendance at *The Trail of Tears* was that stereotypes and presuppositions crumbled. This particular group of students included no Native American students although some from non-U.S. cultures; JBU's 1,300 plus students come from forty-four states and thirty-seven countries. Almost across the board, the responses reflected surprise that nineteenth-century Cherokees had lived in houses, not tepees, and had worn clothing much like that of their white neighbors, not feathers and loincloths. More thought-provoking and startling, however, to these students (mostly from religious homes) was the revelation that the Cherokees who were forced to relocate from the southeast to Indian Territory in the nineteenth century had been largely Christianized for some time before they were herded along the Trail of Tears. Students were somewhat confounded by how ignorant of Cherokee history and culture they had been, as reflected in the following excerpt from an essay titled "What Did I Learn?":

*To be perfectly honest, almost everything I learned on Saturday was new. . . . What impressed me most is how civilized and structured the Cherokee Nation was and is. . . . I had no idea that the Cherokees had a written language unique to their tribe . . . that the Cherokees had their own government . . . that they had a judicial and legislative branch, or that the Cherokees had an educational system.*

*I did not know that the Cherokee Nation had tried so desperately to comply with the wishes of our leaders.*

I did not have to have a formal debriefing on this particular field experience. The students, who had not yet come together as a class and were for the most part unacquainted with one another, formed collaborative learning communities right away in the forced intimacy of the vans. Conversations that began at 11:00 p.m. in the vans continued in class, in the coffee shop, in the dorms, and on paper for days to come.

The second all-group field experience involved a Saturday bus trip to several locations in the Ozarks of Northwest Arkansas. The first, a small town that contains the headquarters of the giant Wal-Mart Corporation, offered the contrasts that work well with this kind of exercise. Students interviewed farmers, crafts people, and booksigning authors at a farmers' market in the square and then went across the street to interview others in the Wal-Mart Visitors' Center. The contrast between the farmers' market and the mega-corporation was dramatic, to say the least.

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The group then traveled a few miles to Eureka Springs, Arkansas. A tiny town when tourists are absent, Eureka Springs features at least two predominant and distinct cultures. One is the older culture, which includes original Victorian architecture, fine art, grand opera, and the Thorncrown Chapel, a soaring glass edifice designed by Arkansas architect Fay Jones, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright. The other predominant culture, spread out along a state highway, features the looming Christ of the Ozarks statue, an outdoor passion play, a multitude of craft shops, and numerous country music theaters.

Students spent about six hours roaming the town and conducting interviews. The day ended with the passion play. (A generous benefactor had bought tickets for the group of thirty.) A variety of excellent writing resulted from this day's experience. Subjects ranged from millionaires of the area to attitudes toward tourists to ghost stories collected from obliging shopkeepers.

Although the large-group expeditions were successful in most objectives, site-specific education involves more, of course: at its best, it features small-group and individual activities with students talking to a cross-section of people in less formal situations. Therefore, in addition to the large-group experiences, students were required to plan and participate in at least two individual or small-group experiences. Those who had cars provided rides (with shared gas money) for those who did not so that even arranging transportation became a group endeavor.

One group of four interviewed people at a powwow and attended a stomp dance led by Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller. The result was writing more vivid and immediate than any I had received from freshmen before. Since I, their primary reader, had at that time never been to a stomp dance, the students turned to analogy to describe the experience. After a fine description of costumes and dances in an essay titled "An Encounter with a Stomp Dance," one student, himself a Baptist, wrote rather astutely that interviews had revealed to him that "the stomp dance is somewhat to the Cherokee what the potluck is to the Baptist."

The ceremony, however, raised questions, a prerequisite for critical thinking. An interview with a Cherokee man from Wichita, Kansas, illustrated that religious beliefs are intermingled and assimilated. The interviewer was startled when the man described his use of the peyote mushroom and certain practices of sun worship and then said very firmly that he was a Christian believer.

Another student made a meticulous record of the costumes, which to his surprise turned out to be predominantly Kiowa rather than

Cherokee. He was fascinated by the combination of traditional dress and seeming anachronisms, such as baseball caps, U.S. military medals, and decorations made of laser discs. He concluded that, judging by this group,

*the ceremonial outfit of the Native American represents all of his societal heritage, including both ancient and modern historical events. The costumes also seem to reflect individual personalities and . . . experiences of the wearers.*

Other small-group and individual field experiences included visits to Cherokee churches; interviews with Cherokee Nation officials; conversations with Ozark balladeers, such as the legendary Jimmy Driftwood; trips to various historical sites and museums; interviews with Native Americans and Ozark natives in grocery stores, parks, and flea markets; and viewing of professional dramatic productions in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Augmenting the field experiences and assigned readings were in-class guest appearances by Native American and Ozark speakers, people with varying degrees of education. For example, an Ozark folklorist with a Ph.D. made a presentation; members of a local Jewish congregation worked with the students in hosting the novelist Rabbi Chaim Potok; and a quartet of Cherokee gospel singers who work for a factory and a janitorial service but who have performed at the Smithsonian gave an in-class concert.

## **Autobiography Setting the Student in the Subculture of Family**

An intensely self-reflective element of the course was a paper in which students attempted to set themselves in the context of their own families. The reading of Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and the exploration of local cultures opened a door for students to their own particular cultural backgrounds and the subcultures of their families. One of the most successful of these papers was written by a native of Kenya. Titled "Beating Stories," it replicated Momaday's structural technique, even to the extent of the narration of folk tales by the student's grandmother.

After having heard Cherokees discuss the systematic destruction of their language in boarding schools, at least one student decided that language is almost as central to the concept of family as it is to the culture of a given tribe. In "Words Are Everything," the student said that he now firmly believes that

*one sign of a healthy and loving family is its ability to originate words and phrases that have a unique meaning to that family alone. These words and phrases promote a sense of unity among a family and enable its members to communicate on a more intimate level.*

One member of the Cherokee quartet had movingly described the effect that being punished in boarding school for speaking his own language had had on his thinking processes and ability to speak. The singer's almost unconscious revelations caused an Ozark student to analyze how his own language and thought processes had been influenced by his upbringing: what words were forbidden, what words were accepted, and what resulted. He said of his family's use of graphic barnyard scatology and expressions such as "slicker'n snot on a glass door knob":

*A very frightening thought is that even the way I think is directly related to the way these people talked. . . . Recently it occurred to me that such expressions could be considered analogies, very crude analogies, but analogies nonetheless. I frequently use analogies when I think.*

## **The Major Project**

In addition to informal oral and written debriefing on reading assignments and field experiences and three short formal papers, students were required to write a fifteen-to-twenty-page, fully documented, scholarly paper. The paper represented semester-long research on some aspect of either Ozark or Native American culture, or both. It had to contain in some form the three sections modeled on Momaday's technique: the imaginative/mythological, the objective/historical, and the personal. The shorter papers and projects could contribute to the major project. The premises of the major project were presented and defended in a final symposium.

Although the projects addressed a broad range of subjects, most focused on an aspect of one of the two primary cultures; a few were on local minority cultures, such as Mennonite or Jewish; some were inclusive, combining a study of some facet of both the local Native American culture and the Ozark culture. The latter studies were particularly interesting since the two cultures are almost inextricably intertwined by location, place names, and folklore, if nothing else.

Several of the major projects were collaborative, with students dividing up the research, writing, and presentation into sections. For example, in a project on music of the area, one student took mountain

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music, another rock and blues, and another classical music performed locally. One such collaborative project covered famous murders of the area, past and present, and included prison interviews with convicted murderers.

I might add that this class was collaborative in another way: the professor studied along with the students. I found that I really knew almost nothing about my Cherokee neighbors or even the culture of this place I call home, the Ozark Mountains. I also rediscovered a simple pedagogical principle: students think more critically and write papers worth reading if they have something immediate, significant, and interesting about which to think and write.

I am convinced that the Honors Semesters sponsored by the National Collegiate Honors Council provide a useful model that is adaptable to individual honors programs. Site-specific, integrative, collaborative, and experiential elements work well in many courses—from economics to biology to humanities. Given the detached, fragmentary nature of much of contemporary education, this philosophy and methodology add depth and relevance.

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# ACTIVE LEARNING IN A NATIONAL CONTEXT

## Honors Semesters Milestones

**Ann Raia, Rosalie Saltzman, and Ada Long**

- 1976 **Washington Bicentennial Semester**  
Fall Location: Washington, D.C.  
Co-Directors: Roger Irle, James Herbert  
Host Institution: Northern Illinois University
- 1977 *Pre-City as Text Explorations* designed by Bernice Braid  
For the NCHC conference in Washington, D.C.
- 1978 **Grand Canyon Semester**  
Spring Location: Flagstaff, AZ  
Director: Joyce Griffen  
Host Institution: Northern Arizona University
- 1978 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: New York City, NY
- 1978 **Maine Coastal Semester**  
Summer Location: Orono, ME  
Director: Samuel Schuman  
Host Institution: University of Maine at Orono
- 1978 **United Nations Semester**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Bernice Braid  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus  
External Evaluator: Morris Keeton, Council for the  
Advancement of Experiential Learning
- 1979 **Appalachian Culture Semester**  
Spring Location: Boone, NC  
Director: Pat Beaver  
Host Institution: Appalachian State University
- 1980 **Washington Election Semester**  
Spring Location: Washington, D.C.  
Director: James Herbert  
Host Institution: University of Maryland, College Park

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- 1981 **United Nations Semester**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Bernice Braid  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus
- 1981 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: New York City, NY
- 1983 **Puerto Rico Semester**  
Spring Location: San Juan, PR  
Director: Marshall Morris  
Host Institution: University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras
- 1983 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: San Juan, PR
- 1983 City as Text™ introduced at the NCHC conference  
Location: Philadelphia, PA
- 1984 **United Nations Semester: From Urban to Global Community**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Ann Raia  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus  
Introduction of the first Honors Semester Symposium  
External Evaluators:  
    Peri A. Chickering, The Fielding Institute;  
    Steven M. Ross, Memphis State;  
    Arthur W. Chickering, Memphis State
- 1984 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Memphis, TN
- 1985 **Appalachian Culture Semester**  
Spring Location: Boone, NC  
Director: Thomas McLaughlin  
Host Institution: Appalachian State University
- 1985 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Salt Lake City, UT
- 1986 **El Paso Semester: Borderlands**  
Spring Location: El Paso, TX  
Director: Cheryl Martin  
Host Institution: University of Texas, El Paso
- 1986 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: El Paso, TX
- 1986 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Miami, FL



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- 1987 **Mexican Semester: Mapping Cultures**  
Spring Location: Puebla, Mexico  
Director: Irene Vasquez  
Host Institution: University of the Americas  
Sponsoring Institution: Western Michigan University
- 1987 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: Puebla, Mexico
- 1987 **United Nations Semester: From Urban to Global Community**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Bernice Braid  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus  
First publication of student papers  
External Evaluator: Marilyn Stocker, Northwestern University
- 1987 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Dallas, TX
- 1988 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Las Vegas, NV
- 1989 **United Nations Semester**  
Spring Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Bernice Braid  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus
- 1989 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: New Orleans, LA
- 1990 **Iowa Semester: Who Goes Hungry? The Politics of Food**  
Fall Location: Ames, IA  
Director: Elizabeth Beck  
Host Institution: Iowa State University
- 1990 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: San Francisco, CA
- 1990 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Baltimore, MD
- 1991 **Morocco Semester: Mapping Cultures through Time  
and Space** (cancelled because of the Gulf War)  
Spring Director: Ron Messier  
Sponsoring Institution: Middle Tennessee State University
- 1991 **New York City/United Nations Semester:  
From Urban to Global Community**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Bernice Braid  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus

## ACTIVE LEARNING IN A NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 1991 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Chicago, IL
- 1992 **Czechoslovakia Semester: Living Laboratory in European**  
Fall **Economics, Politics, and Culture**  
Locations: Prague and Olomouc, Czechoslovakia  
Directors: Rosalie Saltzman, Richard Wykoff  
Host Institutions: Charles University and Palacky University  
Sponsoring Institution: University of Nebraska at Omaha
- 1992 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: Charleston, SC
- 1992 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Los Angeles, CA
- 1993 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: St. Louis, MO
- 1994 **Mexico/U.S. Semester: Crossing Borders**  
Spring Location: El Paso, TX  
Director: Lillian Mayberry  
Host Institution: University of Texas, El Paso
- 1994 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: El Paso, TX
- 1994 **New York Semester**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Bernice Braid  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus
- 1994 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: San Antonio, TX
- 1995 **Appalachian Culture in Transition Semester**  
Location: Cullowhee, NC  
Director: Newt Smith  
Host Institution: Western Carolina University
- 1995 **Czech Republic Semester**  
Fall Location: Olomouc, Czech Republic  
Directors: Rosalie Saltzman, Bruce Garver  
Host Institution: Palacky University  
Sponsoring Institution: University of Nebraska at Omaha
- 1995 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: Prague, Czech Republic
- 1995 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Pittsburgh, PA

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- 1996 **New York Semester: Media & Image:**  
Fall **Issues of Gender and Work**  
Location: New Rochelle, NY  
Director: Ann Raia  
Host Institution: The College of New Rochelle
- 1996 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: San Francisco, CA
- 1997 **New York Semester: Globalization and Communication**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Directors: Bernice Braid, Ross Wheeler  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus
- 1997 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: Washington, D.C.
- 1998 **Thessaloniki Semester:**  
Fall **Crossroads of Continents and Civilizations**  
Location: Thessaloniki, Greece  
Directors: Rosalie Saltzman, James Czarnecki  
Host Institution: Aristotle University  
Sponsoring Institution: University of Nebraska at Omaha
- 1998 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: Crete, Greece
- 1998 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Chicago, IL
- 1999 **Grand Canyon Semester: The West as Image and Reality**  
Fall Location: Flagstaff, AZ  
Director: Charles Barnes  
Host Institution: Northern Arizona University
- 1999 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: Flagstaff, AZ
- 1999 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Orlando, FL
- 2000 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: Alcalá de Henares, Spain
- 2000 **Spain Semester: Cultures that Clash and Cleave**  
Fall Location: Alcalá de Henares, Spain  
Directors: Ada Long, Sheri Long  
Host Institution: Alcalá University  
Sponsoring Institution: University of Alabama at Birmingham
- 2000 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Washington, D.C.

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- 2001 **New York Semester: Reinventing Urban Culture**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Bernice Braid  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus
- 2001 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Chicago, IL
- 2001 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: New York City, NY
- 2002 **Korean Semester: Asian Heritage and Global Vision**  
Spring (cancelled because of 9/11)  
Location: Teagu, Korea  
Director: Joan Digby  
Host Institution: Keimyung University  
Sponsoring Institution: Long Island University–  
C.W. Post Campus
- 2002 *NCHC Faculty Institute*  
Location: Seattle, WA
- 2002 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Salt Lake City, UT
- 2003 **New York Semester: Building and Rebuilding the City**  
Fall Location: New York City, NY  
Director: Bernice Braid  
Host Institution: Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus
- 2003 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Coastal Ecology and Culture*  
Location: Skidaway and Tybee Islands, GA
- 2003 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Chicago, IL
- 2004 **Coastal Semester:**  
Spring **Science and Society in Coastal Environments**  
Location: Eastern Seaboard from Florida to Maryland  
Director: Ronald Albaugh  
Host Institution: Hood College
- 2004 **London Semester: London Undercover**  
Summer Location: London, England  
Director: John Emert  
Host Institution: Ball State University
- 2004 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: New Orleans, LA
- 2005 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Rome Unearthed*  
Location: Rome, Italy
- 2005 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: St. Louis, MO

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- 2006 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Built and Endangered Environments*  
Location: Miami and the Everglades, FL
- 2006 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Exploring Blues Terrains*  
Location: Memphis, TN, and the Mississippi Delta
- 2006 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Philadelphia, PA
- 2007 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Recovery/Discovery*  
Location: New Orleans, LA
- 2007 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Denver, CO
- 2008 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Borders, Barriers, and Barrios*  
Location: Arizona and Mexico
- 2008 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Metropolis*  
Location: Berlin, Germany
- 2008 *NCHC Faculty Institute: A Tale of Two Cities*  
Location: Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN
- 2008 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: San Antonio, TX
- 2009 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Washington, D.C.
- 2010 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Death and Desire in the American West*  
Location: Las Vegas, NV, and Death Valley, CA
- 2010 *NCHC Faculty Institute: Community (Re)Organizing*  
Location: Chicago, IL
- 2010 City as Text™ at the NCHC conference  
Location: Kansas City, MO

## Future Directions

### Ada Long

What started as a modest innovation in higher education has developed in the past thirty-five years into an ambitious and established series of National Honors Semesters, Faculty Institutes, City as Text™ explorations, sleeping bag seminars, course components, and other kinds of educational initiatives. We expect that the educational models described in this monograph will continue not only to flourish but also to spin off new contexts and new strategies for active education such as the NCHC Partners in the Parks initiative. Active education, like the culture in which it has evolved, is redefining the role of experts. Citizens now take responsibility for seeking information about health care, for instance, rather than just trusting the doctor; experts play a

crucial but not exclusive role in helping individuals make medical decisions. Active education shows students how to take responsibility for themselves in a similar way, introducing expert opinions as an aid but not as a replacement for personal discovery. Active learning helps these students become better scholars and thinkers; it also helps them lead more satisfying and responsible lives.

Particular constituencies can use and develop strategies of active learning.

**Students** today know some of the basic principles of active learning from navigating the Internet. In surfing the web, they plunge in—maybe with some initial help from their friends—and explore until they find their bearings and develop a feel for the terrain. Then they recognize how sites are connected to each other, what the neighborhoods are like. Finally, if they are interested enough, they might take courses or seek specialized training to help them expand their theoretical and factual knowledge to supplement what they have observed and experienced on their own.

The process of active learning is, therefore, not new to students, but few have experienced it off the computer screen. In school, they typically are programmed to heed the teacher—the expert—before or instead of exploring on their own. Once they get a feel for exploration in real—rather than virtual—neighborhoods, they can and do use it effectively.

Educational environments where students have the greatest opportunities to implement and organize explorations on their own are often extracurricular and social service activities. For instance, many students do volunteer work during their undergraduate years. In the past, too often they were told to go to an agency, where they did what they were told to do, and they finished up their hours and left the experience behind. They may have had deep and complicated feelings about what they observed and what they did, but they did not know how to examine or develop these feelings in a larger context. Within a model of active learning, students might instead explore different service programs on their own, find out what is out there, choose to learn and contribute within one setting, and then come together with other students to compare experiences and discover connections between different kinds of service projects. In the final stage of exploration, experts play a crucial role, helping students see their activities in a larger context than they can experience for themselves.

Once students have seen this process of learning modeled in a classroom setting, they can initiate it themselves not just in their out-of-class

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time as undergraduates but in the rest of their lives, perhaps helping to improve the energy and quality of not only their volunteer service but their work environments. Most professions contain within their daily routines untapped opportunities to draw on the imaginations and observational powers of individual workers in ways that our students can discover in the future if they are shown the model for doing it now.

**Faculty** can use active learning to structure entire classes or to complement traditional classroom activities. The faculty member thus becomes a resource for students, answering questions that arise from their experiences and drawing on the energy they bring to the class from the individual explorations. City as Text™ can be incorporated into courses within virtually any academic discipline. A literature class, for instance, might send students out into the school's neighborhood and then compare what they learn from negotiating streets to how they interpret a poem. Similarly, an exploration of a residence hall or a classroom building might produce insights about social organization that can give insight into basic skills of sociology and anthropology. Faculty members thus redefine themselves as experts, becoming resources rather than sources.

The work one does in this kind of education is a different kind of work, involving less preparation of lecture materials and more responsiveness to individual students. In this process, faculty often do more work after class than before, tracking down answers to questions students have raised. For this reason, and also because the process connects students and faculty in a personal way, learning becomes both active and interactive for the teacher as well as the student.

**Administrators** can establish programs and curricula that include active-learning opportunities both in and out of class. Active learning is always a form of independent research, and its principles can be incorporated at the introductory level of virtually any discipline to promote students' thinking of themselves as researchers and to help them acquire the basic skills required for research. Librarians can draw on this process to help students learn how to navigate all the resources of a given library. Staff members in Student Life can use a City as Text™ approach for orientations, helping students find their way around a campus before explaining what is available. What all the models have in common is that student exploration precedes expertise whether the expert is describing library holdings or campus housing or research methodologies.

Administrators would do well also to employ the strategies of active learning to take a fresh look at their own jobs and campuses. A crucial

asset of active learning is providing a mechanism for disrupting our habits and assumptions. Many administrators have ideas about their institutions that might have been accurate five years ago but that are no longer valid; the challenge is to notice the changes that have taken place. Doing an exercise in “Campus as Text” and then coming together with one’s colleagues—and with, for instance, campus planners as the experts—can be a shocking and invaluable experience.

**Professional** organizations at the local, regional, and/or national levels can use exercises in active learning as a conference component. The National Collegiate Honors Council has incorporated City as Text™ explorations in all of its conferences since 1983. Typically, these explorations occur at the beginning of the conference and give people a wonderful opportunity to meet each other and rapidly develop a common background. They also allow conference participants to observe and experience the conference site. And, most importantly, they provide a model of active learning that conference participants can take back to their home institutions. Conference components based on the City as Text™ model can be developed for any professional organization, adding to the value and diversity of conference offerings.



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# **APPENDICES**



## Planning An Honors Semester

**Elizabeth Beck and Lillian Mayberry**

This discussion section explains the steps a person follows in order to offer an NCHC Honors Semester. Included are the obvious first steps of determining what in a particular locality would lend itself to experiential site-based learning and be attractive to students. Next is a discussion of how to present the concept to the NCHC, followed by information on institutional arrangements that will be necessary: development of the semester theses and courses, calendar, budget, and advertisement of the semester. The exact procedures can be modified from one situation to another, but this information provides the basic framework for offering an Honors Semester.

### Getting Started

1. Determine what is unique in a particular locality that would lend itself to experiential site-based learning and be attractive to students.
2. Contact the chair of the Honors Semesters Committee to indicate your interest in offering an Honors Semester.
3. Contact appropriate administrators at your institution: President, Provost or Vice President for Academic Affairs, Deans, Vice President for Finance and Administration, and Vice President for Student Affairs. Explain the semester concept and theme, and secure their support and authorization to host a semester. It may take a year to accomplish steps 1, 2, and 3.
4. Present the basic theme for the semester to the National Collegiate Honors Council Semesters Committee, along with a proposal to co-sponsor the semester. Ideally this should be done at least two years prior to the time the semester will be offered.
5. If the proposal is accepted by the NCHC Semesters Committee, secure a letter of invitation from the president of the host institution to the NCHC Board of Directors; this should include a request for a memorandum of understanding from the NCHC.

### Academic/Curriculum

6. Attend an NCHC Honors Semesters Committee meeting and listen to how the committee “works” a theme with the host institution’s representative to achieve the right balance of academic wholeness in the semester; this includes the use of field experiences to fill out the intellectual/experiential learning.

## APPENDICES

7. At the home campus, form a planning committee and hold meetings to brainstorm about possible course content related to the semester's theme. The semester must include sixteen credit hours, four of which are directed study and three of which are integrative seminar. These planning meetings build a sense of community and camaraderie among faculty.
8. Identify courses at your institution whose titles and numbers correspond to the courses you plan to offer, or, if possible, create course numbers and titles as appropriate; all courses must be upper-division and designated as Honors. Each needs to have multiple applications for students at their home institution. One model used in the "Mexico/U.S. Semester: Crossing Borders" was the integrative seminar that was called "Border Life." It was listed as Sociology 4341, Economics 4425, and Political Science 4470. In this example, the courses were cross-listed at the host institution, and students could enroll under the department/area of their choice. Careful consideration should be given, however, to whether all elements can actually be covered in the course.
9. Prepare course titles, which may be subtitles on a transcript, and descriptions that are exciting and attractive to students. All courses should complement each other and be limited to semester participants.
10. Obtain approval, as in the model presented in #8, from chairs of departments in which courses are to be cross-listed. Faculty Senate approval also has to be obtained nine months before the semester begins since it is necessary to change some courses to variable credit.
11. Identify specific teaching faculty for the courses you plan to offer. The faculty should be dynamic and be experts in their fields. Negotiate with deans and/or department chairs for faculty course release or buy-out.
12. Attend a second NCHC Semesters Committee working meeting and present specific information on the semester content/design and calendar. The 100-day calendar should include the mapping laboratory (orientation), module schedule, break for a trip, closing symposium, and closing event.
13. Arrange travel, prior to the semester, for representatives of the Honors Semesters Committee to the host campus and conduct a workshop to help the faculty integrate their courses.



14. Develop a mapping laboratory for orientation week to introduce the students to the semester theme, each other, the location, and experiential learning. The exercise should include an opening event, usually a reception, to which an NCHC officer is invited to convey greetings from the organization.

### **Financial/Budgetary**

15. Prepare a budget that includes funds to cover items such as the following: advance publicity/mailings (include publicity development, copying costs, postage, etc.); resident director's salary (include fringe benefits, if necessary); field budget (to support student activities as well as copying, telephone costs, etc.); university support personnel for the semester; housing, including deposit, for participants and the resident director; faculty release time; tuition and fees; NCHC overhead; insurance; and meal plan options, if used. Anticipate inflationary increases in costs and protect against price changes, if possible. The semester is not designed to make a profit, but any money left in the academic budget is retained by the university while any money left in the field budget is retained by NCHC.
16. Calculate the field budget to cover expenses such as food and beverages for any group events; transportation for field excursions and break trip; external housing for field experiences; consulting or speaker fees; admission fees; equipment fees; break fees; kitchen expenses for group living facility; gas money, as needed for resident director; driver fees; banquet fees; and contingency fees.
17. Consult the controller of accounts, the registrar, and the directors of financial aid, scholarships, and admissions in order to set up accounts for the semester, to process financial aid, and to admit and register the students.

### **Residential/Staff**

18. With the assistance of the Honors Semesters Committee and previous Honors Semesters directors, identify a resident director (RD) six months prior to the semester. This individual should be a semester alum who is mature and has good interpersonal skills. The RD will need to be able to deal with conflict resolution and is extremely important in developing the sense of community that is so important to the semester.
19. Clarify that the resident director has responsibilities in both the living and learning areas of the semester and reports to and is under the supervision of the academic director (AD). Administratively,

## APPENDICES

the RD is responsible for oversight of the student move-in and move-out; supervises the semester students in their living quarters; organizes group meetings and special events; monitors clean-up duties; and serves as a liaison with appropriate persons at the host university in terms of rules, dorm activities, etc. The RD is required to keep regular office hours, including evenings and weekends. These are discussed with the AD. The RD travels with the group on field trips, assists in facilitating field experiences and co-curricular activities, and serves as a liaison between students, faculty, and the AD. Other duties are determined as needed by the academic director, as is the RD's role in assisting with City as Text™ discussions.

20. Two months prior to the semester, have the RD contact all students and have them complete a "lifestyle form." This information is helpful in assigning roommates. The RD should also contact the students to suggest items they might bring for the semester. Students should also be advised of pre-semester readings.

### **Advertising the Semester**

21. Market the semester by preparing a flier advertising the semester theme, courses, faculty teaching in the semester, and applications for the semester and scholarships. Send a copy of the flier to the Honors Semesters Committee for review.
22. Set up display at the NCHC Annual Conference's Idea Exchange a year prior to the semester—a photographic display works well, along with distribution of fliers, handouts, or brochures.
23. Advertise the semester by publishing the flier in the monthly NCHC E-Letters and on the NCHC website.
24. Prepare a first mailing of all materials nine to twelve months prior to the semester. These materials should be mailed to all NCHC individual and institutional members through the NCHC's national headquarters. Application deadlines are set by the Honors Semesters Committee, and applications/acceptances/rejections are processed by the committee.
25. After the student participants have been selected, arrange for local publicity through your institution's office of public relations. Also, develop and mail a generic press release that can be used by each student's honors director or dean to publicize the student's achievements in his or her hometown.

**Finale**

26. Bring the semester to closure with an intellectual event featuring the students' directed study results followed by a social event. Both should be developed and directed by the semester participants, the academic director, and the resident director.



## Planning A City As Text™ Walkabout

### **Bernice Braid**

This section focuses on planning City as Text™ events for an annual NCHC conference. Strategies for planning such events in other venues can be easily extrapolated from this set of guidelines.

Since a City as Text™ event is site-specific, the planners need to be familiar with the area or willing to visit it several times to familiarize themselves with the layout, local transportation, cultural highlights, overall distribution of population, and economics. The most compelling attributes of the location should be assembled into a set of destinations likely to provoke a sense of discovery among the participants who register. The cohort will include mostly first-time visitors and will include both students and faculty. Indeed, many students secure funding support from administrators in order to participate in this opening session and then to report on it back home for the benefit of their associates in honors.

### **Planning Flow**

#### *Scouting*

About two years in advance of the actual program, schedule a preliminary visit and conversation with local colleagues. Collecting articles and books of interest, not targeted at tourists, intelligent but not densely scholarly, is an important preparatory activity. Think about which short pieces could provide a framework for explorers to organize their initial thinking about their exploration.

#### *Shaping*

Considering the theme of the conference, which is usually decided about a year before the program occurs, begin to think about how mapping teams could spread around the city to collect information and impressions. Remember to think in terms of distance and travel time: normally all explorers congregate for no more than thirty minutes, form into teams of four or five, conduct their fieldwork during which time they have lunch, and return to share reports about three hours later.

#### *Preregistration*

To advertise this session, submit a flier/registration form to the NCHC headquarters to be included in all information disseminated by mail and online to the membership. Members appear to like receiving hard copies of short readings in advance of the visit and should receive them about six weeks before the conference; alternatively, readings can be posted on the NCHC website. Ten to twelve destinations should suffice.

*Debriefing*

Make sure all groups return roughly at the same time and have at least thirty minutes to prepare their summary report. The formal wrap-up presentation of each group cannot take more than five minutes since many presenters must report and time is short. There may be four hundred people in the room.

*Local Experience*

If possible, arrange for the presence of a small panel of local professionals with a particularly accurate or contrarian view of the site to attend the wrap-up session. The wrap-up time sometimes has to be reduced to accommodate such a panel, but, when it is good, it is terrific: speakers listen to impressions of outsiders and then address the group reports by introducing their own views on theme, site, destinations, and the work of our members.

**Logistics**

1. REGISTRATION FORMS are submitted via the conference website.
2. QUESTIONS should be compiled for each explorer to be aware of while wandering around, including suggestions for interaction: visiting a real estate agency or purchasing something in a farmers' market, supermarket, drugstore, or mom-and-pop store. Be sure that teams for each destination are aware of the underlying theme that organizes the observational questions.
3. ORIENTATION ROOM is chaotic because the group is large, some have forgotten their choices, and newcomers have appeared without preparation. Display the destinations on large signs, and secure the services of a large group of facilitators, at least one per destination; these people must create teams, review maps and destinations, and herd everyone out the door.
4. MAILINGS to facilitators should include a master alphabetical roster showing all destinations plus a master roster for the one destination this facilitator will be responsible for; these lists should go with the readings. Alternatively, the information and readings can be sent via email.
5. OPTIONS should include enough destinations that can be reached on foot or via public transportation to accommodate a crowd. If wheels are needed for one or more choices, then rosters must be accurate since space is limited.

## PLACE AS TEXT

6. RECEIPTS for reimbursement by NCHC should include readings, photocopies, mailings, and maps. Bus or van expenses might be billed directly to NCHC.

### Comments

At least one additional site visit is necessary to confirm destinations and transportation details, to visit local officials for maps and other tools, and to double-check prices and eateries. Participants seek eating options that are cheap, good, and typical of areas they are exploring.

At least one overarching assignment to which discrete questions might be attached appears to help teams stay focused and see more. Samples:

- Were you interested in moving to this city, what would it take to make the move possible (jobs, housing)? Consult want-ads and real estate ads to form your impression; talk to individuals at bus stops or in shops to check their impressions, too.
- Imagine yourself as a visitor from outer space who has a vague sense this city is interesting but knows nothing about who lives here or how. As a seeker of such information, what would you examine to start considering what this place is really like?
- Living spaces have both surface realities and hidden truths, both of which have a direct impact on people living in them. What are some examples of each of these—surface vs. hidden—that you can find in this district? Who is affected, and how, by these aspects of housing, services, costs, jobs, support networks? What makes you think so?

Of all of these points, those that have to do with “what makes you think so” are the most important and must be drawn out of the explorers upon their return and wrap-up. Facilitators can use the original assignments as their own discussion guides during the wrap-up to help participants construct their views and to enter into a genuine discussion about their brief reports.





## Planning A Sleeping Bag Seminar

**Joan Digby**

A host institution plans and organizes a Sleeping Bag Seminar. In the Northeast Region of the NCHC, the regional group has assisted in the planning and ultimately reviewed and officially sanctioned the Sleeping Bag Seminar through its Sleeping Bag Seminar Committee. NE-NCHC has offered stipends up to \$500 to defray some of the costs of the seminar. In the other regions, such as that covered by the Southern Regional Honors Council, the seminars have more often been planned by a single institution, which then applies for a grant from the SRHC.

The ideal number of participants in a Sleeping Bag Seminar depends on the activities planned and resource limitations, in particular sleeping space for the guests. The name Sleeping Bag Seminar reflects the way many honors programs have accommodated guests, having students bring sleeping bags and sleep on the floor of rooms in a dorm or an honors residence hall. Commuter schools have handled overnight accommodations by having their honors students invite guests into their homes. Sleeping Bag Seminars work well with twenty to thirty participants, including the students from the host institution.

The cost of the Sleeping Bag Seminar to participants should be reasonable. Often participants are charged around \$50 for the weekend, a fee that includes most meals.

Flexibility in the starting events and the Friday evening meal is suggested. Travel arrangements often will stagger arrivals from Friday late afternoon to evening. Experience suggests that students will wish to end the weekend late Sunday morning to return to their campuses.

The following outlines the organization and activities of "Reflected Images: The Illustration of Poetry Sleeping Bag Seminar" held in March 1998.

### **Friday**

Arrive in the late afternoon; dinner and "poetry slam" get-together; posting of poetry and illustrations; pairing off for more creative work; student performance of poetry set to music.

### **Saturday**

Breakfast; workshop visit to Hillwood Museum; lecture by rare book curator; lunch visit to Walt Whitman birthplace and museum; dinner and poetry reading.

### **Sunday**

Breakfast; preparation for publication on website and/or volume in collaboration with C.W. Post design and computer graphics students; lunch; departure.



## Resource People

### Ada Long

Elizabeth Beck

Co-Chair of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Director of the 1990 Iowa Honors Semester

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Former Director of the Honors Program at Iowa State University,  
Ames, IA

Bernice Braid

Co-Chair of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Founder and annual conference organizer of City as Text™

Director of the 1978, 1981, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1994, 1997, and 2001  
Honors Semesters in New York City

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Director of Core Seminar, Advisor to the Provost, and Former

Director of University Honors at Long Island University–Brooklyn  
Campus

William Daniel

Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Former Honors Director at Winthrop University, SC

Joan Digby

Former Sponsor of Sleeping Bag Seminars

Founder of Partners in the Parks

Director of the Honors Program at Long Island University–C.W. Post  
Campus, Brookville, NY

Devon Graham

Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

President of Project Amazonas

Adjunct Professor in the Honors College at Florida International  
University

Ada Long

Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Co-Director of the 2000 Honors Semester in Spain

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Former Director of the University Honors Program at University of  
Alabama at Birmingham

## APPENDICES

Kathy Lyon

Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Honors Director at Winthrop University, SC

Peter Machonis

Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Editor, *Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education*

Professor in the Honors College at Florida International University

Matt Nickerson

Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes and Partners in the Parks

Director of the Honors Program at Southern Utah University

Ann Raia

Former Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Director of the 1984 and 1996 Honors Semesters in New York

Former Director of the Honors Program at College of New Rochelle, NY

Jim Ruebel

Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Dean of the Honors College at Ball State University, IN

Rosalie Saltzman

Former Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Co-Director of the 1992 Honors Semester in Czechoslovakia, the 1995

Honors Semester in the Czech Republic, and the 1998 Honors Semester in Greece

Director of the Honors Program at University of Nebraska at Omaha

Robert Strikwerda

Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Associate Professor at St. Louis University, MO

Shirley Forbes Thomas

Former Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee

Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Former Director of the Honors Program at John Brown University,  
Siloam Springs, AK

PLACE AS TEXT

The office of the Executive Director of the National Collegiate Honors Council holds copies of publications related to Honors Semesters Projects. For copies, please contact:

Executive Director  
National Collegiate Honors Council  
University of Nebraska–Lincoln  
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**SAMPLE HONORS SEMESTER  
EVALUATION FORMS**





## Pre-Semester Faculty Questionnaire

The answers to these questions should be short (no more than a sentence or two) because they are intended to be a “snapshot” of faculty participant views as the Honors Semester begins.

1. What do you hope to accomplish in this thematic, modular, field-based learning situation that you can't accomplish in the traditional classroom setting?

Is there anything you anticipate that might be 'difficult' in this format?

2. How do your expectations of the students enrolled in the Honors Semester differ from those of students you teach in the traditional learning situation?
3. List two things you hope the students gain from the Honors Semester experience.

What kinds of explorations or student initiatives have you designed to help them accomplish this?

4. What do you, as an instructor, hope to gain by participation in the Honors Semester?

Academically

Personally

## End-of-Semester Faculty Questionnaire

The answers to these questions should be short (no more than a sentence or two) because they are intended to be a snapshot of faculty participant views as the Honors Semester ends.

1. What did you accomplish in this thematic, modular, field-based learning situation that you couldn't accomplish in the traditional classroom setting?

What did you find 'difficult' in this format?

2. List two things you believe the students gained from the Honors Semester experience.

What kinds of explorations or initiatives helped the students accomplish these?

3. What did you, as an instructor, gain by participation in the Honors Semester?

Academically

Personally

## **Post-Semester Faculty Evaluation/Assessment**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Department \_\_\_\_\_

Course Taught \_\_\_\_\_

1. Briefly state your overall assessment of the Honors Semester and your role as an instructor in this program.
2. What was/were the strength(s) of this semester?
3. What would you want to see changed?
4. What else would you like to share with members of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee?

## **Pre-Semester Student Questionnaire**

The answers to these questions should be short (a sentence or two) because they are intended to be a snapshot of student participant views as the Honors Semester begins.

1. List two expectations you have related to the place and theme of the Honors Semester.
2. What are the strengths you think you bring to this opportunity?
3. At this point in time, how do you view the type of learning you are going to experience as different from that on your home campus?
4. What do you hope to gain through participation in the Honors Semester?

Academically

Personally

## **End-of-Semester Student Questionnaire**

The answers to these questions should be short (a sentence or two) because they are intended to be a snapshot of student participant views as the Honors Semester ends.

1. List two ways the semester met your expectations as related to the place and theme of the Honors Semester.
2. List two ways the semester was different from what you expected.
3. What strengths did you bring to this opportunity?
4. At this point in time, how do you view the type of learning you experienced as different from that on your home campus?
5. What did you gain through participation in the Honors Semester?

Academically

Personally

## Post-Semester Student Assessment/Evaluation

Name \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Class standing \_\_\_\_\_

Major \_\_\_\_\_

### I. Curriculum Assessment

- A. What is your opinion of the semester theme? Did the courses address the theme?
- B. What did you like about the courses? Which courses did you find particularly interesting or successful? Why? What improvements would you suggest?

### II. Assessment of Participation

- A. How would you describe your own level of participation? Did it change as the semester progressed? Under what circumstances might you have contributed more or differently?
- B. How would you describe the participation of your semester instructors? What might the instructors have done to make the class more interesting? To encourage more participation?
- C. What role did your fellow students play? What might they have done to enhance the classes and the level of group discussions?

### III. Class Assignments

- A. How would you characterize your homework or reading assignments? Were they challenging? Stimulating? Enjoyable? Were there enough? Too many? Were they appropriate to the course? Give examples.

## PLACE AS TEXT

B. Did you find the writing assignments to be effective learning experiences? Why or why not? Would you recommend more or fewer writing assignments? What other kinds of writing assignments might be useful in an Honors Semester?

C. Were your final grades what you hoped or expected them to be?

### **IV. Social Aspects**

What did you think of the semester's extracurricular activities (orientation, field trips, or special speakers)? Were there enough social activities? Too many? What other kinds of events might have been useful?

### **V. Overall Comments And Suggestions**

What worked well in the semester? What changes or improvements would you suggest? Please comment. Feel free to use the back of this page or additional pages.

## **End-of-Semester Evaluator's Summary of Group Discussion**

1. Give your overall assessment of this Honors Semester.
2. What was the most outstanding feature of the semester experience?
3. What were the strength(s) of the semester?
4. What would you want to see changed?
5. Comment on the following aspects:

Integration of the theme throughout the courses and experiences

Fostering critical thinking/analysis

Coverage of factual information in courses

Quality of instruction

Directed studies/independent field research

Region as text

Housing

Symposium

Support from faculty and resident director



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Elizabeth Beck** is co-chair of the Honors Semesters Committee and retired Director of the Iowa State University Honors Program. A student in the first Honors Semester, the Washington Bicentennial Semester, returned so transformed by the experience that Beck has been committed to the pedagogy ever since.

**Bernice Braid** is Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature at Long Island University–Brooklyn Campus, where she directed the University Honors Program for thirty-seven years. She was one of the founders of NCHC's Honors Semesters, into which she introduced City as Text™ to be the integrative field-based seminar in 1981. She continues to facilitate faculty workshops and institutes on experiential learning.

**William Daniel** is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC. He was Director of the Honors Program 1972–1989 and has served as vice president and president of NCHC. He has been a member of the Honors Semesters Committee since 1980, has led/facilitated several domestic and international NCHC Faculty Institutes on experiential education, and has been an external evaluator of several Honors Semesters.

**Joan Digby** is Director of the Honors Program at the C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University and a past president of NCHC. She hosted several Sleeping Bag Seminars and invented Partners in the Parks, which is the subject of her monograph: *Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks*.

**Ada Long** is a past president of NCHC, member of the Honors Semesters Committee, and co-editor of the *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* and *Honors in Practice*. She is Professor Emerita of English and was Founding Director of the University Honors Program (1982–2004) at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

**Bernadette Low** is a professor of English at the Dundalk Campus of the Community College of Baltimore County. She was honors director for sixteen years at Dundalk Community College when the campus was a sister college rather than a campus of CCBC.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Lillian Mayberry** served the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Texas at El Paso as a Research Professor from 1978 to 2003. During this time she also served for eleven years as Director of the University Honors Program and was a member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee. She hosted two Honors Semesters at UTEP with themes centered on crossing borders.

**Ann Raia** is Professor Emerita of Classics at the College of New Rochelle, where she founded and directed the Honors Program from 1974 to 2001. A member of NCHC since 1974, she served several terms on the Executive Committee, the Small College Honors Programs Committee, the Portz Committee, and the Honors Semesters Committee. She directed the 1984 United Nations Honors Semester and the 1996 New York City Honors Semester.

**Rosalie Saltzman** is Director of the University of Nebraska at Omaha Honors Program. She has been a member of the Executive Committee of the National Collegiate Honors Council, is a past president of NCHC's Great Plains Region, and is an NCHC consultant. Saltzman coordinated and helped design curriculum for two international Honors Semesters, one in the Czech Republic and other in Greece.

**Shirley Forbes Thomas** is retired from John Brown University where she taught English for thirty-three years. In her last fifteen years at JBU, she also served as Director of the Honors Scholars Program. She now lives in the Ozark Mountains with her husband, son, and a herd of pesky deer.

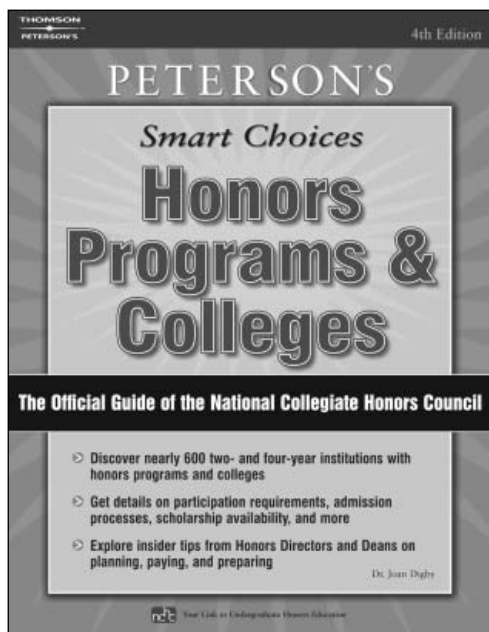
## NOTES

## NOTES

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## NOTES

## NOTES



The official guide to NCHC member institutions has a new name, a new look, and expanded information!

- Peter Sederberg's essay on honors colleges brings readers up to date on how they differ from honors programs.
- Lydia Lyons' new essay shows how two-year honors experiences can benefit students and lead them to great choices in completing the bachelor's degree and going beyond.
- Kate Bruce adds an enriched view of travels with honors students.

These and all the other helpful essays on scholarships, community, Honors Semesters, parenting, and partnerships make the 4th edition a must in your collection of current honors reference works. *This book is STILL the only honors guide on the market*, and it is your best tool for networking with local high schools and community colleges as well as for keeping your administration up to date on what your program offers.

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**Contact the NCHC office to access these out-of-print titles online:**

- Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook
- A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges
- Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges (2nd Ed.)
- Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students

## NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL MONOGRAPHS & JOURNALS

*Assessing and Evaluating Honors Programs and Honors Colleges: A Practical Handbook* by Rosalie Otero and Robert Spurrier (2005, 98pp). This monograph includes an overview of assessment and evaluation practices and strategies. It explores the process for conducting self-studies and discusses the differences between using consultants and external reviewers. It provides a guide to conducting external reviews along with information about how to become an NCHC-Recommended Site Visitor. A dozen appendices provide examples of "best practices."

*Beginning in Honors: A Handbook* by Samuel Schuman (Fourth Edition, 2006, 80pp). Advice on starting a new honors program. Covers budgets, recruiting students and faculty, physical plant, administrative concerns, curriculum design, and descriptions of some model programs.

*Fundraising for Honor\$: A Handbook* by Larry R. Andrews (2009, 160pp). Offers information and advice on raising money for honors, beginning with easy first steps and progressing to more sophisticated and ambitious fundraising activities.

*A Handbook for Honors Administrators* by Ada Long (1995, 117pp). Everything an honors administrator needs to know, including a description of some models of honors administration.

*A Handbook for Honors Programs at Two-Year Colleges* by Theresa James (2006, 136pp). A useful handbook for two-year schools contemplating beginning or redesigning their honors program and for four-year schools doing likewise or wanting to increase awareness about two-year programs and articulation agreements. Contains extensive appendices about honors contracts and a comprehensive bibliography on honors education.

*Honors Composition: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Practices* by Annmarie Guzy (2003, 182pp). Parallel historical developments in honors and composition studies; contemporary honors writing projects ranging from admission essays to theses as reported by over 300 NCHC members.

*Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges* by Samuel Schuman (Second Edition, 1999, 53pp). How to implement an honors program, with particular emphasis on colleges with fewer than 3000 students.

*Inspiring Exemplary Teaching and Learning: Perspectives on Teaching Academically Talented College Students* edited by Larry Clark and John Zubizarreta (2008, 216pp). This rich collection of essays offers valuable insights into innovative teaching and significant learning in the context of academically challenging classrooms and programs. The volume provides theoretical, descriptive, and practical resources, including models of effective instructional practices, examples of successful courses designed for enhanced learning, and a list of online links to teaching and learning centers and educational databases worldwide.

*Partners in the Parks: Field Guide to an Experiential Program in the National Parks* by Joan Digby with reflective essays on theory and practice by student and faculty participants and National Park Service personnel (2010, 272pp). This monograph explores an experiential-learning program that fosters immersion in and stewardship of the national parks. The topics include program designs, group dynamics, philosophical and political issues, photography, wilderness exploration, and assessment.

*Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning* edited by Bernice Braid and Ada Long (Second Edition, 2010, 128pp). Updated theory, information, and advice on experiential pedagogies developed within NCHC during the past 35 years, including Honors Semesters and City as Text™, along with suggested adaptations to multiple educational contexts.

*Setting the Table for Diversity* edited by Lisa L. Coleman and Jonathan D. Kotinek (2010, 288pp). This collection of essays provides definitions of diversity in honors, explores the challenges and opportunities diversity brings to honors education, and depicts the transformative nature of diversity when coupled with equity and inclusion. These essays discuss African American, Latina/o, international, and first-generation students as well as students with disabilities. Other issues include experiential and service learning, the politics of diversity, and the psychological resistance to it. Appendices relating to NCHC member institutions contain diversity statements and a structural diversity survey.

*Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education* edited by Peter A. Machonis (2008, 160pp). A companion piece to *Place as Text*, focusing on recent, innovative applications of City as Text™ teaching strategies. Chapters on campus as text, local neighborhoods, study abroad, science courses, writing exercises, and philosophical considerations, with practical materials for instituting this pedagogy.

*Teaching and Learning in Honors* edited by Cheryl L. Fuiks and Larry Clark (2000, 128pp). Presents a variety of perspectives on teaching and learning useful to anyone developing new or renovating established honors curricula.

*Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council (JNCHC)* is a semi-annual periodical featuring scholarly articles on honors education. Articles may include analyses of trends in teaching methodology, articles on interdisciplinary efforts, discussions of problems common to honors programs, items on the national higher education agenda, and presentations of emergent issues relevant to honors education.

*Honors in Practice (HIP)* is an annual journal that accommodates the need and desire for articles about nuts-and-bolts practices by featuring practical and descriptive essays on topics such as successful honors courses, suggestions for out-of-class experiences, administrative issues, and other topics of interest to honors administrators, faculty, and students.

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