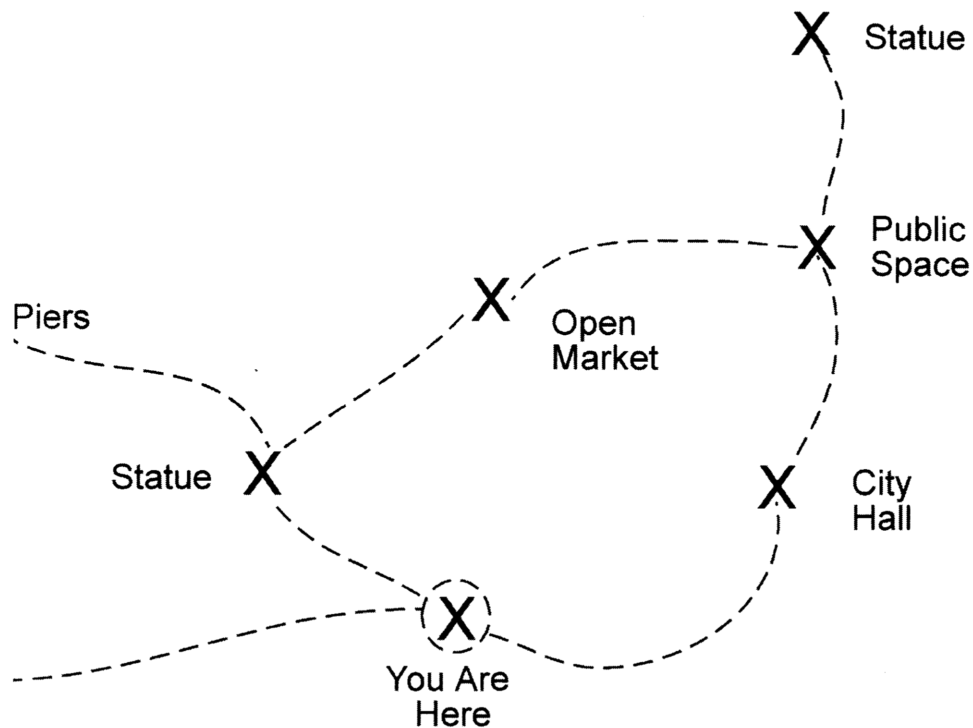
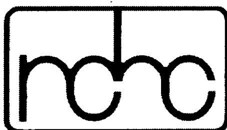
# PLACE AS TEXT:

## APPROACHES TO ACTIVE LEARNING




**Editors**

**Bernice Braid and Ada Long**



National Collegiate Honors Council
Monographs in Honors Education

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# DEDICATION

To John and Edythe Portz
Godparents of NCHC's active learning projects

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# 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 Honors Semesters Committee, which is charged with 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 witnessed 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 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-four others, including five 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.

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 Development Institutes. It has offered miniature City as Text© experiences at conference sites as a means of helping faculty and students appropriate, in modest measure, those sites.* Some three 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.

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.

NCHC Honors Semesters provide American higher education with a model worth adapting, in whole or in part, to local circumstances. In their pedagogy, they demonstrate the efficacy of providing an impetus to engage in the construction of a sense of place. In their lingering impact on former participants, they validate the transformative nature of active learning.

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 copyright 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 are normally in the form of critiques of the educational system itself—at all levels. Commonly heard are voices bemoaning 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 accountability and outcomes assessment, of the benefits of a more business-like approach to educational delivery systems. Often such misgivings are not without 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 nineteen-fifties and sixties. In perusing the literature of that time one reads again and again of a need to break the "lock-step" curriculum found in most institutions. Common practice required a standard list of courses for all students designed to insure the basics of a "general education" without regard either to individual differences or capabilities. It was similar to 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. And therein lies a common weakness in many proposed educational reforms today. Students' involvement in and responsibility for

determining their own educational experience are frequently omitted or discounted. Education is conceived as something that is designed for and applied to students rather than a joint process that critically involves all participants at every level.

One product of the honors form of education has been the National Honors Semesters initiative of the National Collegiate Honors Council. Theme-based undergraduate semesters were conceived to be examples of 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 20 years. Their implementation has evolved and been refined over time, but they remain central to an experiment that has proved to be uniquely successful.

First, there is the concept of active learning, learning as both process and product in which the student, not the faculty member, is the primary agent. Secondly, there is an expanded concept of text, of the material that is the focus of study and analysis. A third principle is that of an integrated and collaborative approach to learning, an approach that reflects the complexity and varying dimensions of an adequate understanding of any given subject. Finally, there 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 National Honors Semesters.

In order to explicate 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 the utilization of a conceptual pattern or context within which the particular elements are organized into a coherent relational structure. The basic paradigm is that of a common geographical map, a symbolic image of perhaps a physical place that locates streets or structures or political divisions or geological variations in relationship to each other. Maps vary as to 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 of importance. Such a device provides a symbolic representation that both interprets and defines the elements that comprise the referent subject of the map.

Maps, of course, differ in their purpose or function and in the nature of the subject matter which they represent. For example, Aristotle thought 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 organizing and interpreting 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 the suggestion is that almost every discipline has a way of 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.

Of course one can push the analogy too far, but 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 to be made is that students are those who 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.

One should note that there is an experimental quality to active learning. 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 the 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 the 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). This is a dynamic process in which it soon becomes clear that there is no absolute uninterpreted given that is to be learned. It is rather an ongoing process that produces levels of understanding that also involves 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 you 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 emigrants 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 whose products are always subject to revisions. The analogy with education is obvious.

Honors Semesters seek to enable students to construct their own maps in the broadest sense. Honors Semesters take us out of the ordinary, away from the familiar, and ask us 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. To do so would be to insure that this will be exactly what they will see and find. Thus provided with a specific theme and place, a student's task is to learn how to find or construct a meaningful map as well as understand how that field has been mapped in the past from a variety of perspectives and purposes. For example, 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, of finding meaningful revisions. In other words, we 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. And too 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, of telling 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, first–hand contact with what a written text is about constitutes the primary material to be encountered and

analyzed. Honors Semesters require the usual reading and written analysis, but if we are to come to know the topic, then we must encounter it in its primal state. This is, of course, not unique to Honors Semesters, for direct field experience 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 select 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 ingredient 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 that of 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, 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. And 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.

In every semester there is an intentional integrative component whose primary task is to bring together the various 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 requires 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. There must be 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. The unexamined life that accepts what we have been told is replaced by 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 that of 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. To implement that 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 base action and decisions upon those analyses.

Respect for autonomy in oneself and also in others is a guiding principle for Honors Semesters. As we seek to 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 in ourselves but also appreciating the individuality of others. This latter dimension recognizes the role of a learning community whose goal is collaborative effort. Students in Honors Semesters come to realize that the educational experience is not essentially a competitive process in which there are 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 the development 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.

# 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 you cannot understand them from one point of view only, that you 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 Semester assembly: every national Honors Semester is an exploration of a built environment. The architecture of the project is itself an orchestration of moveable parts—whence 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, 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 to watch themselves moving through uncharted territory. The mapping which 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 in which students begin to 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 1980's, 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 William 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 which serves 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 this question: 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, 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, sensitivity to these aspects floats to the surface: Whom 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 are out 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, parks, in front of museums, in subways? How do others respond to these uses? How do you, as observer, respond? How do you feel while watching others? Why do you 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, 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, about assumptions, about point 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 debate in town, 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," begins rather quickly to permeate 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 essay-length Turning Point Essays (also called 'critical incidents' ) timed to coincide with the termination of discrete chunks of the academic calendar. These are usually: 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. Students are asked to consider what they understand better or differently, as a result of which events or activities, as of the moment of their writing. For the final essay they are asked to consider these same questions but to 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 co-terminous 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 performance and private productivity with a heavily public dimension of social and intellectual encounters.

## III. SCHEDULE

A typical Semester schedule looks like this:

**Orientation**

Up to 10 days: introduction to site, cohort, instructional staff and setting,

including residential arrangements

- organize governance structure
- undertake initial exploration of off-campus site
- begin formal observations and recording of them
- initiate discussion of Semester theme with instructional staff
- explore campus life
- learn where to shop to run communal kitchen; host preliminary social events
- host formal Opening Event (local officials, outside resource people, NCHC representative, faculty, student participants)
- extended field explorations: How is this place 'organized'? Who lives where? How? How do we get there? Etc.
- City as Text© seminars on observation methodology begin; reading of student observations as 'texts'
- 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)
- internships or local interviews begin
- one weekday left open for reading and exploring

**Inter-module Break**

Three-six days—short non-academic break to areas quite opposite of Semester site, usually 3 days

**Module II**

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

**Writing Time**

Three-five days

- Students prepare program for symposium
- Prepare panel groupings for symposium
- Students complete and submit 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 'yearbook' or other memento

## 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–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; debriefings after internship experiences or expert testimony. Parallel to the formal and informal Opening Events are Closing Events: the Symposium, which provides intellectual closure, and a party, which provides emotional closure for what is, by now, a very close 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 wherever they think students will feel most at ease. In addition, the Honors Semesters Committee schedules a professional development 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 is a relief and a help.

Visits from one or two assessors (designated members of the Honors Semesters Committee) can also help. Students 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 pinpoint the importance to themselves of this kind of learning.

Finally, the Symposium is public. There is a printed program, with abstracts, to guide the audience and serve as permanent record for presenters. Producing the Symposium program and designing the mid-module break are orchestrating tasks in the hands of an academic director and a 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 former 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. The three courses selected are often chosen out of a possible four or five and become an opportunity to reconfigure working groups within the larger whole. No one can return home without some advanced credit in humanities, social science, and, occasionally, 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, say public policy/local culture, or local history/environmental concerns. It is not uncommon for students to hold internships or to attach themselves as volunteers to local institutions, such as Mexican elementary schools dedicated to the permanently poor, and to 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 must be submitted, on schedule: time disappears in 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 but conveys a sense of urgency, given due dates and public events.

There is 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 the program itself must provide pedagogical tools to help 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 which expands the general discourse about theme and site. Local resource persons who have helped participants develop their projects are invited. Once home, participants commonly utilize their Semester 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 project and 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 context of a residential community, social structure, small team assignments, and emphasis on exploration, helps produce what alums consistently report as their "transformation."

Diverse though these programs have been in location and age/ preparation of levels of participants, they have been constructed on a similar model regarding the crux of the matter: active learning and connected knowing. The mix of students—putting into a single cohort those who are strangers to one another—is essential. Getting them to see that both their own lived past and their present learning are pertinent to their achievements is a way of inviting them to heed Parker Palmer's admonition: "to intersect their biography with that of the world."

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 topics in that world and bring back what they have discovered. Cognitively, they begin to 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 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.

# 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"— 4–5 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 to faculty. They have proven to be catalysts for involvement in conference events and to have provoked long–term sensitivity and reflection about the human experience in the built environment.

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 4–5. 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 vehicles 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 will be dealing with, and conversations with local people about jobs, food, recreation, directions—all the kinds of things 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. That is, 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 context created by one's own presence in the scene.

There are questions here of impression and of 'fact' which participants are invited to mull over. A recent photography exhibit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, PASSAGES (1999), provides 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 seen as a stage set for human drama as it unfolds, for instance, suggests to them that all the solidity outside the hotel 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© 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

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 over 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 re-drawing 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 to 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 the methods of 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's out there. A simple adage is this: 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 Development Institutes

William 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 paradigm honors educational 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 subject. 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 of 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, it was 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 development institutes. These institutes are normally—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 that of developing the necessary tools that will enable others 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, 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 and varying aspect. But each has centered on the methods and techniques for adapting the principles of experiential, integrated, field-based learning to a given physical place.

## Summer High School Field Experience

BERNICE BRAID

One of the oldest uses of 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 hopes of seeing possible problem students 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. Equally, everyone collaborates to mount an exhibit of the original photos, sketches, collages, and poems that are included in the group's photocopied publication ("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, folklore, and complex in politics, social relations, and economics, this area includes 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/field exploration; recording of observations and turning points, with their retrospective view of the writers' experiences; and the intensity that results from firm deadlines for public performances. Also, as in Semesters, the interdependence and independence individuals project—real community—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 fifteen years of this project, among the always positive and delightful results, are these:

- √ every participant has 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
- √ every participant has been astonished by the city itself, and by how much a part of the communal whole (s)he feels by the end of only one month together

Remembering that these youngsters were deemed to be at risk of dropping out of high school, such results are impressive. They, 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.

## College Recruitment Exercise

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 experience 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 and observe 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 business 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 Exercise

BERNADETTE LOW

Many honors directors use a model of this exploration and observation to orient new students or honors students to their campus. Students become members of small teams that 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 didn't 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 Exercise

BERNADETTE LOW

This active learning model has also been adapted for faculty development. 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 NCHC conferences, participants made conjectures 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 also adapted the active learning model, in particular the City as Text© model, to various disciplines. One adaptation has been Freshman Writing. In one course offered at a community college, scheduled once a 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 in other ways, such as the evolution of the row house or a description of a newly-gentrified neighborhood based on an interview with local residents.

The model has also been adapted to an honors seminar. In a seminar drawing on City as Text©, one course 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 of 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 to lead them to interests that they researched for their seminar papers.

Recently this approach was changed a bit to add service learning to the exploration. Here students not only explored a neighborhood, they also worked in one performing some service. The service included such activities as tutoring recent Hispanic immigrants, planting trees in a neighborhood, or

cleaning up a lot for a community garden. These service activities gave the students additional insights into their field experiences, enabling them to see first-hand some of the problems and attempted solutions of the communities. The service learning component, which included personal reflection as well as action, motivated students to think about what makes up a community. Here they experienced community by moving beyond simple observation and conjecture.

# AN EXAMPLE OF ACTIVE LEARNING IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

Shirley Forbes Thomas

My area of specialization is Renaissance English literature; I have never had a course in cultural anthropology or any remotely related field. However, helping structure and evaluate Honors Semesters during several years' tenure on NCHC's Semesters Committee 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, 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, beginning in the fall of 1994.

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, roughly half the class is focused 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" (19). In addition to using place as text, like the NCHC Semesters, the class is experiential, collaborative, analytical, self–reflective, and integrative. In designing the course, I found 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 by 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 *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 Honors Comp projects are, in one way or another, designed to have students gather data that include the imaginative or mythological, such as oral and written tales about the area, as well as historical and contemporary facets of the culture; the students then integrate these two aspects with personal experiences, from the lives of those interviewed during field experiences and 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

The 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 19th 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 served as an introduction to site-specific learning, it was more formally structured and emphasized impressions based on observations more than the data gathering utilized in 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 19th century for almost 40 years. Bruce Ross very graciously talked to the students for over an hour about the Ross Family connections with the Murrells, Cherokee history, and current Native American concerns. He even introduced the Cherokee syllabary to interested students.

One of the immediate results of the meeting with Bruce Ross and attendance at *Trail of Tears* was that stereotypes and presuppositions began

to crumble. In this particular group of students there were no Native American students, although there were some from non-U. S. cultures: JBU's 1300 plus students come from 44 states and 37 countries. Almost across the board, the responses reflected surprise that 19th–century Cherokees had lived in houses, not tepees, and had worn clothing much like that of their white neighbors, not feathers and loin cloths. However, even more thought-provoking and startling 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 19th 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 themselves had been, as is 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. (Paffi 1)

Another wrote apologetically,

> I did not know that the Cherokee Nation had tried so desperately to comply with the wishes of our leaders. (Rorabaugh 1)

Although I had scheduled a debriefing, 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 eleven o'clock that night 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 serves as the location for 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.

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. Again, the result seemed to be 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 had to turn 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" (Rode 2).

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 (Thomas 2).

Another student made a meticulous record of the costumes (which to his

surprise turned out to be predominantly Kiowa, as opposed to 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. (Semones 3)

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 the 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 Honors Comp students in hosting Rabbi Chaim Potok, award winning novelist; 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 seemed to open 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 Jerotich Seii, a native of Kenya. Titled "Beating Stories," it replicated Momaday's structural technique, even to the extent of the narration of folk tales by Seii'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:

> ... 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. (Anderson 2)

One member of the Cherokee quartet 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. (Nichols 3)

## 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 there was a broad range of subjects covered, most major projects were on an aspect of one of the two primary cultures; a few more were on local minority cultures, such as the 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 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 re-discovered 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 have recently started a new semester of place-as-text in Honors Comp. This semester began with the class attending the events of the Cherokee national holiday, including the State of the Nation address by the new Principal Chief. Soon I shall be meeting with the JBU honors committee and with honors faculty to discuss the implications of what we have learned from the pilot experience and how these precepts could be applied to other courses in the JBU honors program. I am fully 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 should 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: ASSESSMENT OF HONORS SEMESTERS

# INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

ANN RAIA

## The Committee

Internal assessment has been an integral part of the planning process in the Honors Semesters Committee since its inception. Not long after it asked itself the question "What should the Honors Semester be?" it asked "What did the Honors Semester do?" and "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, it has evolved an assessment practice that is appropriate to this unusual model of education and one that parallels its philosophy of active learning through observation, research, thesis testing, and self-examination. By undertaking a variety of collaborative Semesters projects over 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 of 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 that there is 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. The internal 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 help modify projects in progress. The dynamic is less one of delivery and return than one of assay and redirection. This behavior is almost counter–intuitive 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 as they do feedback based on experience and the 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 this may take place initially by phone or letter, actual review of the proposal takes place during a meeting of the full Honors Semesters Committee, where questions of goals, thematic coherence, and 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 which begins with review of a recently concluded Honors Semester. Thus, the wisdom gained from a previous Honors Semester informs the planning even as the prospective director is introduced to systematic planning based on self–assessment.

Each Honors Semester is encouraged to develop a method and instruments of internal assessment appropriate to its 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 meeting of host team and Honors Semesters Committee members
- meetings of Honors Semester faculty and Director
- participant town meetings
- mid–point informal assessments by students and faculty
- student reflective writing in the integrating 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
- Director's report to the Honors Semesters Committee

## Planning Sessions at the Host Institution

The Honors Semesters Committee's close reading of the proposal and interview with the proposer becomes 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 imbedded in the activities, living arrangements, courses, teaching styles, and assignment.

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—a rather unusual and liberating 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 being made for Semester components, such as accommodations, field experiences, special options, and assignments.

Application essays have also 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 assessor are also present, introducing them to each other and adding voices to the final planning.

At this meeting Honors Semester faculty are divided into smaller groups to work with Committee members, addressing issues of coherence and goals. Faculty present their syllabi and their rationale for assignments and activities to Committee members, whose questions and suggestions help to 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 regularly, minimally on a bi–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 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 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 an almost 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 helps to engage students in solving them.

## Participant Town Meetings

Students organize themselves as a community that meets with the directors (sometimes faculty also) on a bi–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: (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 problem–solve. They contribute to the formation of a bonded community. They, too, play a major role in formative assessment in that they provide a safe venue for reflection, voice dissatisfaction, and engage in group problem–solving and consensus formation.

## Mid-Point 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 assessor usually visits at this point.

Mid–point assessments are sometimes written, sometimes verbal. They can be conducted by faculty, directors, or the assessor. 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 Integrating Seminar

Writing assignments associated with the Integrating Seminar encourage student self-awareness and self-assessment. In them students confront and document changes that have taken place in their understanding of the larger issues of the Honors Semester.

Responses to 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 are asked to 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, it is yet another impetus to reflection on the content and themes 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, with representatives from NCHC, and with members of the host institution.

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

## Written Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are completed by students and submitted anonymously. They are distributed at the end of the Honors Semester and as such are part of the summative assessment. This mode of assessment is familiar to faculty and students. It is not always used as an assessment

instrument in Honors Semesters because the information it provides has limited application—although perhaps it is helpful to the faculty being assessed.

Course evaluations give students an opportunity to "grade" the course, the professor, and the role of a single course in the larger content 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 students in small groups, and students complete an Honors Semester evaluation form [see appendix for an example]. The form is a checklist of Semester components followed by several questions. Students are asked to review the list of elements first and then to assess whether the Honors Semester has achieved its goals and to make recommendations for the future.

Student evaluations are read by the directors and the assessor, who incorporate responses into their separate reports.

## Closing Faculty Evaluations

After the Honors Semester is over, faculty may be asked to submit a written evaluation for the director's report, to attend an evaluation meeting at which a composite faculty evaluation is put together, or to 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 each write a summative assessment of the Honors Semester and make a presentation to the Honors Semesters Committee. Reports are descriptive and reflective, attempting to incorporate 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 ASSESSMENT

Ada Long

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. What follows is a detailed description of this role, followed by some brief suggestions on how to apply the Honors Semesters evaluation process to smaller–scale active–learning contexts.

No matter what the length and level of ambition of an active learning project, its external evaluator needs to be aware of the special needs and demands of evaluating this particular kind of experience. 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 should 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 after the experience. 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.

## I. External Evaluation of an Honors Semester

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);
- 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 needs to have 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 Honors 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 be involved with 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 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 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 during the visit and then the evaluator's perspective provided before departure. 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 be useful to the Director in intervening with administrators or faculty—or even 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 conference 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 will also include 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 to the planning of 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 her/his 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, extracurricular activities, etc.;
- 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 final report is distributed 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—of 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 is not required to attend this committee meeting.

## II. External Evaluation of Other Forms of Active Learning

External evaluation of shorter–term or less ambitious forms of active learning than the Honors Semesters will, of course, be far less structured and ambitious than the rather rigorous model provided above. Nevertheless, some principles of the Honors Semesters model can be extrapolated to design an effective evaluation of other active learning experiences.

Even for a day–long City as Text© experience, for instance, a person familiar with the principles of active learning can be invited to participate as an observer as well as participant. The evaluator can accompany one group of students on the explorations or can alternate between different groups. She or he can take part in the debriefing at the end of the experience, talk to participants about the quality of the experience, and then provide an oral or written report to the organizer of the educational opportunity.

The Honors Semesters Committee is a resource to all faculty and administrators who want to devise new programs for active learning. The Committee cannot provide an external evaluator for all such activities, but it can communicate by phone, letter, or e–mail with project directors in order to suggest ideas and to help evaluate the success of a project. It can also provide written materials about a wide range of activities that have been successful on diverse campuses.

# ACTIVE LEARNING: 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 (Braid 1990). But the proof of whether it succeeds in practice comes from listening to the student participants after they have finished their specific Honors Semester. The students' assessments are a most important piece of all the examinations we do of each semester. After 24 years of Honors Semesters, it is natural that a pattern emerges of what students have to say about the value of the Honors Semesters. This chapter is a collection of the reflections of a number of the participants, ranging from a participant in the first Honors Semester, The Washington Bicentennial Semester in 1976, to the Greek Honors Semester in 1998.

The responses quoted below are from students who responded to an e–mail inquiry sent out in January 1999 to Honors Semester alums. Thus we are able to assess, in the context of time and distance, the effect of the Honors Semesters. The participants' reflections speak in powerful ways about the meaning and impact the Honors Semester had on their lives. Students begin the Honors Semester with different expectations and end with different meanings. Nevertheless, Honors Semesters are designed for these elements to be present and could be described as having the natural characteristics of a kaleidoscope: 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 each stands at different places throughout the Honors Semester.

Fundamentally, the Honors Semester's intellectual focus is on learning. Students' reflections about what they learned during the Semester really 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.

Essentially, the Honors Semester's methods support the type of learning advocated by John Abbott, head of the 21st–Century Learning Initiative. His position is that today's world requires people to know more than the basics taught in the traditional curriculum. Students need to learn how to conceptualize and understand abstract problems, relate their abstractions to

real issues and problems, utilize interrelated thinking to search for solutions to the problems, and understand the 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., the 1976 Bicentennial Semester and the first Grand Canyon Honors Semester in 1978, writes this about what he got out of 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 which 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. This presents a kind of "clean slate" approach for the students, signaling 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 begin to 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

*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...(the discussions) 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, New York City/United Nations Honors Semester, 1991:
Resident Director New York City 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

Renata and Geoffrey Caine's book *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain* emphasizes that the most effective learning is the result of connections: "tapping into the brain's infinite capacity to make connections between what is being learned, current experiences, past knowledge, and future behavior." John Abbott reinforces this principle by arguing that the acquisition of knowledge is "constructed by the learner, often through a purposive activity done with others, and takes root with use."

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 very 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 frustrations to all around them. Nevertheless, they leave the Honors Semester understanding not only how to do this, but the value of knowing how to do this.

> *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 City Honors Semester, 1997

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 Honors Semester 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 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 City Honors Semester, 1997

Renate and Geoffrey Caine's work recognizes that there are two processes operating as learning principles: the conscious and the unconscious. The synthesis of both processes may not happen until hours, weeks, or months later. They advocate that curricula should be organized in order to facilitate this synthesis and should include the incorporation of reflection and activities that force the students to think about thinking.

Honors Semester students talk about how the 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 would not be doing that work today if it weren't for the honors semester I attended 19 years ago.*

Cathy Chamberlain Engstrom
Appalachian Culture Honors Semester, 1979

There is a second very important long-term lesson that is embedded in the Honors Semester, and that is the power of community. Only in recent years have universities 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 have always been the best way to accomplish our goals. Honors Semesters create 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, and to learn to live productively with 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

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 about how to manage what they do know. This is a significant intellectual and social step for the students. However, there is also a profound and lasting transformation that involves the personal and moral fiber of the individual student. This transformation makes the Honors Semester experiences different from other types of off–campus national or international study experiences. They 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 student. Most importantly, the change 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. There is a recognized level of fear that all have at the beginning of the Honors Semester, much of which has to do with 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. Yet, as the Honors Semester progresses, pressure to do it all, see it all, get it all done, and meet the deadlines continues to build, and students are channeled into the third learning element of the 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, his* [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, hopefully, a high degree of competence).*
>
> Greg Wolk, New York City/United Nations Honors Semester, 1991:
> Resident Director New York City Honors Semester, 1994

The success of the Honors Semesters is quite 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. Isn't this what we wish could happen to every student who comes through the doors of an institution of higher education?

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# HONORS SEMESTERS MILESTONES

ANN RAIA AND ROSALIE SALTZMAN

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

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| 1980 Spring | **Washington Election Semester**<br>Location: Washington, D.C.<br>Director: James Herbert<br>Host Institution: University of Maryland, College Park |
| 1981 Fall | **United Nations Semester**<br>Location: New York City<br>Director: Bernice Braid<br>Host Institution: Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus |
| 1981 | *NCHC Faculty Institute*<br>Location: New York City, NY |
| 1983 Spring | **Puerto Rico Semester**<br>Location: San Juan, P.R.<br>Director: Marshall Morris<br>Host Institution: University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras |
| 1983 | *First NCHC Faculty Institute*<br>Location: San Juan, PR |
| 1983 | City as Text© introduced at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Philadelphia, PA |
| 1984 Fall | **United Nations Semester: From Urban to Global Community**<br>Location: New York City, NY<br>Director: Ann Raia<br>Host Institution: Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus<br>Introduction of the first Honors Semester Symposium<br>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<br>Location: Memphis, TN |

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|---|---|
| 1985 Spring | **Appalachian Culture Semester**<br>Location: Boone, North Carolina<br>Director: Thomas McLaughlin<br>Host Institution: Appalachian State University |
| 1985 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Salt Lake City, UT |
| 1986 Spring | **El Paso Semester: Borderlands**<br>Location: El Paso, Texas<br>Director: Cheryl Martin<br>Host Institution: University of Texas, El Paso |
| 1986 | *NCHC Faculty Institute*:<br>Location: El Paso, TX |
| 1986 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Miami, FL |
| 1987 Spring | **Mexican Semester: Mapping Cultures**<br>Location: Puebla, Mexico<br>Director: Irene Vasquez<br>Host Institution: University of the Americas: Puebla, Mexico<br>Sponsoring Institution: Western Michigan University |
| 1987 | *NCHC Faculty Institute*<br>Location: Puebla, Mexico |
| 1987 Fall | **United Nations Semester: From Urban to Global Community**<br>Location: New York City<br>Director: Bernice Braid<br>Host Institution: Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus<br>First publication of student papers<br>External Evaluator: Marilyn Stocker, Northwestern University |
| 1987 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Dallas, TX |

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|---|---|
| 1988 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Las Vegas, NV |
| 1989 Spring | **United Nations Semester**<br>Location: New York City, NY<br>Director: Bernice Braid<br>Host Institution: Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus |
| 1989 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: New Orleans, LA |
| 1990 Fall | **Iowa Semester: Who Goes Hungry? The Politics of Food**<br>Location: Ames, Iowa<br>Director: Elizabeth Beck<br>Host Institution: Iowa State University |
| 1990 | *NCHC Faculty Institute*<br>Location: San Francisco, CA |
| 1990 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Baltimore, MD |
| 1991 Spring | **Morocco Semester: Mapping Cultures through Time and Space** (postponed because of the Gulf War)<br>Director: Ron Messier<br>Sponsoring Institution: Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro |
| 1991 Fall | **New York City/United Nations Semester: From Urban to Global Community**<br>Location: New York City, NY<br>Director: Bernice Braid<br>Host Institution: Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus |
| 1991 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Chicago, IL |

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

Host Institution: Palacky University
Sponsoring Institution: University of Nebraska, Omaha

1995 *NCHC Faculty Institute*
Location: Prague, Czech Republic

1995 City as Text© at the NCHC conference
Location: Pittsburgh, PA

1996 Fall **New York Semester: Media & Image: 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 Fall **New York Semester: Globalization and Communication**
Location: New York City, NY
Director: Bernice Braid, Ross Wheeler
Host Institution: Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus

1997 *NCHC Faculty Institute*
Location: Washington, D.C.

1998 Fall **Thessaloniki Semester: Crossroads of Continents and Civilizations**
Location: Thessaloniki, Greece
Director: Rosalie Saltzman, James Czarnecki
Host Institution: Aristotle University
Sponsoring Institution: University of Nebraska, Omaha

1998 *NCHC Faculty Institute*
Location: Crete, Greece

1998 City as Text© at the NCHC conference
Location: Chicago, IL

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|---|---|
| 1999 Fall | **Grand Canyon Semester: The West as Image and Reality**<br>Location: Flagstaff, AZ<br>Director: Charles Barnes<br>Host Institution: Northern Arizona University |
| 1999 | *NCHC Faculty Institute*<br>Location: Flagstaff, AZ |
| 1999 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Orlando, FL |
| 2000 | *NCHC Faculty Institute*<br>Location: Alcala de Henares, Spain |
| 2000 Fall | **Spain Semester: Cultures That Clash and Cleave**<br>Location: Alcala de Henares, Spain<br>Directors: Ada Long, Sheri Long<br>Host Institution: Alcala University<br>Sponsoring Institution: University of Alabama at Birmingham |
| 2000 | City as Text© at the NCHC Conference<br>Location: Washington, D.C. |
| 2001 Fall | **New York Semester**<br>Location: New York City, NY<br>Directors: Bernice Braid, Ross Wheeler<br>Host Institution: Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus |
| 2001 | City as Text© at the NCHC conference<br>Location: Chicago, IL |
| 2001 | *NCHC Faculty Institute*<br>Location: New York City, NY |
| 2002 Spring | **Korean Semester: Asian Heritage and Global Vision**<br>Location: Teagu, Korea<br>Director: Joan Digby<br>Host Institution: Keimyung University<br>Sponsoring Institution: Long Island University, C.W. Post Campus |

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

ADA LONG

What started as a modest innovation in higher education has developed into an ambitious and established series of National Honors Semesters, 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. 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 will help these students become better scholars and thinkers; it will also help 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 get their bearings and start developing a feel for the terrain. Then they develop a knowledge of how sites are connected to each other, what the neighborhoods are like. Finally, if they're interested enough, they might take courses or get 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 too many cases, they are

told to go to an agency, where they do what they are told to do, and they finish up their hours and leave the experience behind. They may have had deep and complicated feelings about what they observed and what they did, but they don't 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's 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 time as undergraduates but in the rest of their lives, perhaps helping to improve the energy and quality of not only their volunteer work 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 might some day discover 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 of the arts, humanities, behavioral sciences, or social sciences. 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 then 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 get students thinking of themselves as researchers and acquiring some of 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 A CITY AS TEXT© WALKABOUT

BERNICE BRAID

Since this event is site specific, the planners need to be familiar with the area or willing to visit it a couple of times to familiarize themselves with the layout, local transportation, cultural highlights, and overall distribution of population and economics. Whatever the most compelling attributes of the location, these should be assembled into a set of destinations likely to provoke a sense of <u>discovery</u> among participants who register to take part. 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 take part 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, a preliminary visit and conversation with local colleagues is advisable. 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 be copied to provide a framework for exploreres 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 30 minutes, form into teams of 4–5 (facilitators need to do this), conduct their fieldwork AND get a takeout lunch, and return to share reports about three hours later.

### Pre-registration

A flyer/registration form should be included in an early mailing to advertise this session. Members appear to like receiving short readings in advance of the visit and should receive them about six weeks before the conference. Ten to twelve destinations should suffice.

**De–briefing**
All groups should try to return roughly at the same time and have 30–45 minutes to prepare their summary report. The formal wrap–up presentation of each group cannot take more than 5 minutes since there are many presenters and time is short. There may be 400 people in the room.

**Local Experience**
It is possible to secure the presence of a small panel of local professionals with a particularly accurate or contrarian view of the site. The wrap–up time is 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.

## Logisitics

1. FORMS returned for pre–registration are often late and have illegible addresses. Recently planners have been bulk–mailing readings and confirmations of destination to honors directors, who must distribute materials for others to read.
2. QUESTIONS should be compiled for each explorer to be aware of while wandering around, including suggestions for interaction: visit a real estate agency, purchase something in a farmer's market or supermarket or drugstore, etc. 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: two per destination, these people must create teams, review maps and destinations, and get 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 help (including name and phone number of partners). These lists should go with the readings.
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.
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 for double-checking 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 AN HONORS SEMESTER

ELIZABETH BECK AND LILLIAN MAYBERRY

This discussion deals with the steps a person may follow 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. This is followed by a presentation of the concept to the NCHC, information on institutional arrangements that will be necessary, development of the semester theses and courses, calendar, budget, advertisement of the semester, etc. The exact procedures will have to be modified from one situation to another, but it is anticipated that this information will provide the basic frame-work for offering a 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 Bernice Braid, Chair of the Honors Semesters Committee, to inform her of your interest in offering an Honors Semester.
3. Contact appropriate administrators at your institution: President, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Deans of appropriate colleges, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Vice President for Student Affairs, etc. Explain the semester concept, theme, etc., 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 Executive Committee. 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 Semesters Committee "works" a theme with the host

institution's representative to get the right balance of academic "wholeness" to the semester. This includes the use of field experience/ trips to help fill out the intellectual/experiential learning.

7. At the home campus, form a planning committee and hold meetings with them to brainstorm about possible course content related to the semester's theme. The semester must include 16 credit hours, four of which are directed study and three of which are integrative seminar. These planning meetings begin to 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 the example given, the courses were actually cross-listed at the host institution and the 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 "sexy," i.e., exciting and attractive to students. All courses should complement each other and be limited to semester participants.
10. In the model presented in 8, approval was obtained from Chairs of departments in which courses were to be cross–listed. Faculty Senate approval also had to be obtained nine months before the semester began since it was 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 Dean or Department Chair for faculty's 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. Prior to the semester, representatives from the Honors Semesters Committee will travel to the home campus and conduct a workshop to help the faculty integrate their courses.
14. Develop a mapping laboratory (orientation week) that will 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 as an organizational "welcomer."

## Financial/Budgetary

15. Prepare a budget that includes money 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, meal plan and 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. The field budget should be calculated to cover expenses such as: food and beverages for any group events; transportation for field excursions/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 directors of financial aid, scholarships, admissions, and the registrar 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, a Resident Director (RD) should be identified six months prior to the semester. This should be a semester alum who is mature with 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. 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. Administratively, 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 liaison with appropriate persons at the host university in terms of rules, dorm activities, etc. The Resident Director is required to keep regular office hours, including evenings and weekends. These are discussed with the Academic Director. The Resident Director travels with the group on field trips. Academically, the Resident Director assists in facilitating field experiences and co–curricular activities and serves as a liaison between students, faculty and the Academic Director. 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, the RD should contact all students and have them complete a "lifestyle form." This information is helpful in assigning roommates. The RD should also write the students and indicate items they might bring for the semester. They should also be advised of pre–semester reading.

## Advertising the Semester

21. Marketing of the semester is extremely important. Prepare 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. Advertise the semester at the NCHC Annual Meeting Idea Market a year prior to the semester—a photographic display works well, along with distribution of fliers, etc.
23 Advertise the semester at the NCHC Regional Meetings: send fliers, applications, etc. to a regional affiliate's President. A short video or slide presentation that could be shown at the meeting would be helpful as well.
24. First mailing of all materials should be completed nine to twelve months prior to the semester. These materials should be mailed to all NCHC individual and institutional members—labels are available from the NCHC Executive Secretary's Office. Application deadlines are set by the 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 News/Publications Office. Also, develop and mail a generic press release that can be used by each student's Honors Director to publicize the student's achievements in his/her hometown.

## Finale

26. The semester should be brought 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 SLEEPING BAG SEMINAR

JOAN DIGBY

## Introduction

Sleeping Bag Seminars are thematic, site-specific, active learning experiences which occur regularly in the Northeast Region of the National Collegiate Honors Council. They function as mini–versions of Honors Semesters and are 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.

## Sleeping Bag Seminar Themes

Each Sleeping Bag Seminar reflects a "theme" such as: an issue about which the institution and its faculty have particular expertise, a theme unique to the geographical location of the institution, or one which the students of the host institution are committed to and energized by. Recent 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.

## Sleeping Bag Seminar Organization

A host institution plans and organizes the seminar. The Northeast Region of the National Collegiate Honors Council assists in the planning, and ultimately reviews and officially sanctions the Sleeping Bag Seminar through its Sleeping Bag Seminar Committee. NE–NCHC offers stipends up to $500 to help defray the costs of the seminar.

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 Seminars reflects the way many Honors Programs have accommodated guests—by having students bring sleeping bags and sleep on the floor of rooms in a dorm or Honors Residence Hall. Commuter schools have handled the overnight accommodations by having their honors students invite guests into their homes. Sleeping Bag Seminars seem to work well with 20-30 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 $30 – $35 for the weekend, a fee which includes provision of 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 the 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 poetry reading

Sunday

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

## Final Comments

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. Indeed, the Sleeping Bag Seminar is a focused and extremely productive model of active learning that can solidify the local honors community.

# RESOURCE PEOPLE

Ada Long

Susan Bagby
Member of the NCHC Honors Semester Committee
Director of the Honors Program, Longwood College, Farmville, Virginia

Charles Barnes
Director of the 1999 Honors Semester in Flagstaff/Grand Canyon
Director of the Honors Program at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona

Elizabeth Beck
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the 1990 Iowa Honors Semester
Director of the Honors Program at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa

Bernice Braid
Chair of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Founder and annual conference organizer of City as Text©
Director of the 1978, 1981, 1987, 1989, 1991, and 1994, and Co-Director of the 1997 and 2001 Honors Semesters in New York City
Dean of Academic and Instructional Resources and Director of University Honors at Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus

Maureen Connelly
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the Honors Program Guild, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland

William Daniel
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Winthrop University, Rock Hill, South Carolina
Coordinator of Faculty Institutes

Joan Digby
Sponsor of Sleeping Bag Seminars
Director of the Honors Program at Long Island University, C. W. Post Campus, Brookville, New York

Ron Edgerton
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the Honors Program at University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado

John Grady
Former Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Experienced organizer of City as Text©
Director of the Honors Program at La Salle University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

James Herbert
Director of 1976 and 1980 Honors Semesters in Washington, D.C.
Director of Research at the National Endowment for the Humanities

Betty Krasne
Former Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Mercy College, Dobbs Ferry, New York

Ada Long
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Co-Director of the 2000 Honors Semester in Spain
Director of the University Honors Program at University of Alabama at Birmingham

Bernadette Low
Former member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Dundalk Community College, Maryland

Lillian Mayberry
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the 1994 Honors Semesters in El Paso
Director of the Honors Program at University of Texas at El Paso

Nora McGuinness
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the Honors Program at the University of California, Davis

Rosalie Otero
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the Honors Program at University of New Mexico

Ann Raia
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the 1984 and 1996 Honors Semesters in New York
Director of the Honors Program at College of New Rochelle, New York

Rosalie Saltzman
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Co-Director of the 1992 Honors Semester in Czechoslovakia
Co-Director of the 1995 Honors Semester in the Czech Republic
Co-Director of the 1998 Honors Semester in Greece
Director of the Honors Program at University of Nebraska, Omaha

Samuel Schuman
Director of the 1978 Maine Coastal Semester in Orono
Chancellor of the University of Minnesota, Morris

Shirley Thomas
Member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the Honors Program at John Brown University, Siloam Springs, Arkansas

Patricia Warunek
Former member of the NCHC Honors Semesters Committee
Director of the Honors Program at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, New Jersey

Ross Wheeler
Co-Director of the 1997 and 2001 Honors Semester in New York City
Associate Director of University Honors Program at Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus

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

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Radford University
Radford, VA 24142-7017
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Facsimilie: (540) 831-5004
Email: nchc@runet.edu

# SAMPLE HONORS SEMESTER EVALUATIONS

# PRE–SEMESTER FACULTY QUESTIONNAIRE

The answers to these questions should be short (no more than a sentence or two) as 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 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 answer to these questions should be short (no more than a sentence or two) as 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 answer to these questions should be short (a sentence or two) as 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 answer to these questions should be short (a sentence or two) as 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. What strengths did you bring to this opportunity?

3. At this point in time, how do you view the type of learning you experienced as different from that on your home campus?

4. 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.

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, special speakers, etc.)? 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

Overall assessment of this Honors Semester.

What was the most outstanding feature of the semester experience?

Strength(s) of semester.

What would you want to see changed?

Comments regarding 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

# ORDERING ADDITIONAL COPIES

## *PLACE AS TEXT: APPROACHES TO LEARNING*

To order additional copies of *Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning*, contact the office of the Executive Secretary/Treasurer of the NCHC. The price per copy is $2.50 for NCHC members and $5.00 for non-members. Send to:

Earl B. Brown, Jr.
Executive Secretary/Treasurer
NCHC
Radford University
Box 7017
Radford, VA 24142-7017

**Interested in joining the NCHC**? You may use the application below to apply for membership to NCHC, order copies of *Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning*, and/or order other publications listed on the back of this page. Mail your payment with the application to the address above.

I would like to order_____copies of *Place as Text: Approaches to Active Learning* at the member price of____ $2.50 per copy or non-member price of $5.00____.

I would like to order the following publication(s) from the NCHC (see descriptions on page 104):

______ Beginning in Honors: A Handbook
______ A Handbook for Honors Administrators
______ Honors Programs: Development, Review and Revitalization
______ Evaluating Honors Programs: An Outcomes Approach
______ Honors Programs at Smaller Colleges
______ NCHC Handbook

I wish to apply for the following membership (check one):

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____ Institutional ($250)
____ Affiliate Member ($50)
____ Faculty from member institution ($50)
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I enclose $____________ in payment.

Name (print or type)________________________________________

Title________________________Institution________________________

Mailing Address________________________________________________

City______________________________State________Zip____________

Telephone______________Fax____________Email__________________

Questions? Call (540) 831-6100 or fax (540) 831-5004. You can also email: nchc@runet.edu.

# OTHER NATIONAL COLLEGIATE HONORS COUNCIL MONOGRAPHS

Institutional members receive one copy of the NCHC Handbook (with annual updates), and one copy of all other NCHC publications, free. Additional copies of NCHC publications may be obtained by writing to the address listed below. Make check or money order payable to National Collegiate Honors Council and send to: NCHC, Radford University, Box 7017, Radford, VA 24142-7017.

***Beginning in Honors: A Handbook*** by Samuel Schuman (1989, 53pp.). 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. Members $2.50. Non-members $5.00.

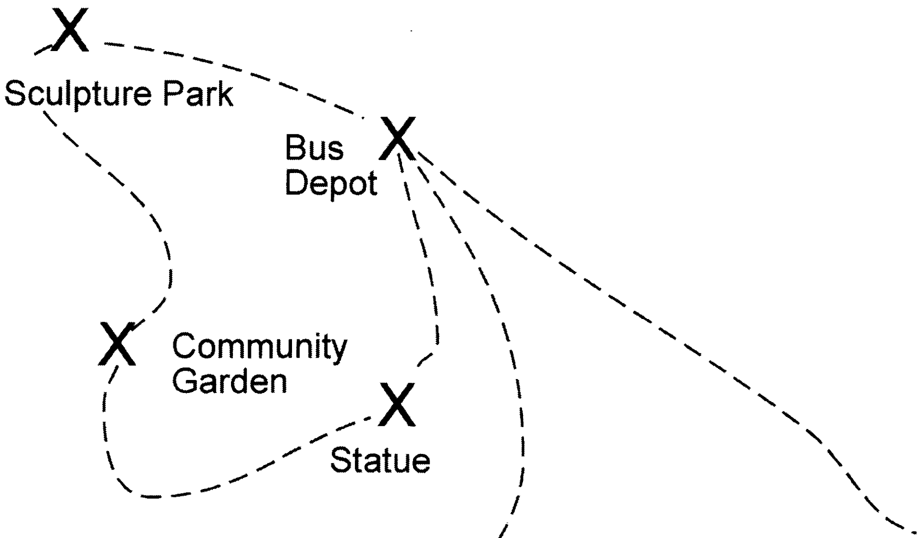
***A Handbook for Honors Administrators*** by Ada Long (1995, 117pp.) Everything an honors administrator needs to know including a description of some models of Honors Administration. Members $2.50. Non-members $5.00.

***Honors Programs: Development, Review, and Revitalization*** by C. Grey Austin (1991, 60pp.). A guide for evaluating and revitalizing an existing program. Members $2.50. Non-members $5.00.

***Evaluating Honors Programs: An Outcomes Approach*** by Jacqueline Reihman, Sara Varhus, and William R. Whipple (1990, 52pp.). How to evaluate an existing honors program. Members $2.50. Non-members $5.00.

***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. Members $2.50. Non-members $5.00.

***NCHC Handbook.*** Included are lists of all NCHC members, NCHC Constitution and Bylaws, committees and committee charges, and other useful information. Members $10.00. Non-members $20.00.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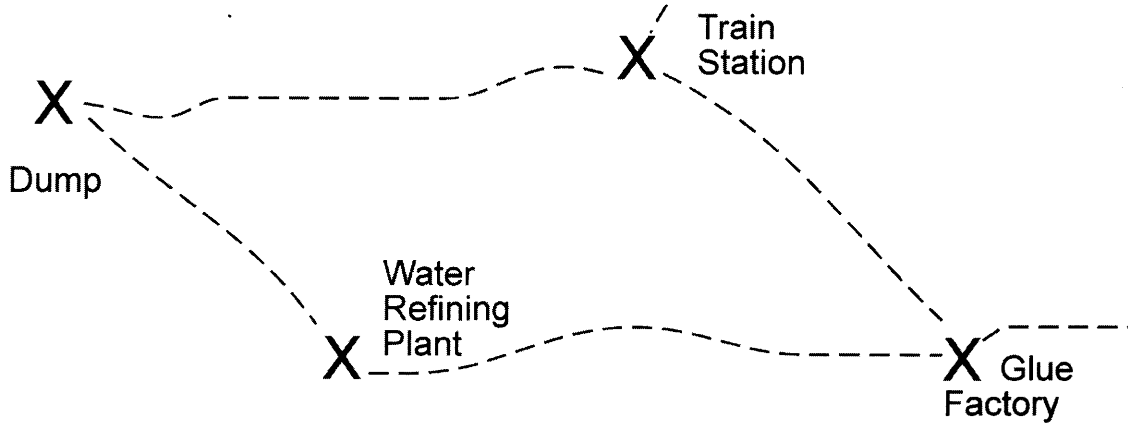
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