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Transforming Community-Based Learning through City as Text™

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ELIZABETH TOWN COLLEGE

Honors students at Elizabethtown College have used City as Text™ (CAT) strategies to address the racism they experienced in new student orientation programming, to transform volunteerism opportunities into sustained civic engagement experiences, to prepare for study abroad and study away, and to strengthen their applications for prestigious scholarships and fellowships. Their research projects have enabled them to publish scholarship informing federal, state, and local historic preservation public works projects; to improve town and gown relationships; and to partner with local stakeholders in community economic development initiatives. Drawing on City as Text pedagogy, they have introduced new courses and academic programs into our curriculum, in the process making our co-curricular programming consistent with the values, mission, and heritage of the college (Long; Braid and Long; Machonis). City as Text has proven an effective vehicle through which our honors students have demonstrated inspirational leadership: a tale of multiple success stories that have evolved from their own imaginative uses of a productive framework.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CITY AS TEXT

For seven decades the local tourism industry has been a major contributor to the economy of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The number of direct jobs in that industry makes tourism the county's sixth largest private sector, non-farm category in our local economy. In 2018, some 8.85 million visitors came to Lancaster, up 2.25% from the previous year. The tourism industry highlights rural communities of the Historic Peace Churches: Amish, Mennonites, Brethren, and Quakers. Chief among these religious sects, driving local tourism, are the Amish. Lancaster's Amish population reached 33,143 in 2018, up 3.2% from the previous year. In 1899, one of the Historic Peace Churches—the Church of the Brethren—founded Elizabethtown College. The college hosts an international center for scholarship about the Amish, Mennonites, Brethren, and Quakers. Ten miles from campus is Hershey, Pennsylvania, another prime tourist attraction. The Hershey Company funded the creation of the Elizabethtown College Honors Program in 2000.

City as Text is a perfect fit for a campus located in Lancaster County, a destination where people come to explore. The campus is located within one of Lancaster County's eighteen boroughs. These eighteenth-century small villages are perfect for exploring a local community on foot and experiencing community culture. The cities of Lancaster, Lebanon, Reading, and York introduce students to small urban experiences near campus. Easily accessible via the nearby Amtrak train station, just a mile from campus, are Harrisburg, the state capitol, just twenty miles away, and Philadelphia, the largest urban center, ninety miles away.

The Elizabethtown College motto "Educate for Service" is expressed in community-based learning courses that have been integrated into the curriculum. City as Text has given purpose and structure to our honors program's version of community-based learning courses and civic engagement opportunities. In its broader campus application, CAT has been a transformative experience for the majority of our students, most of whom have grown up in the suburbs that exist between one to one hundred miles from campus. As suburbanites, many of them have never thought of exploring the

quaint villages of Lancaster or the hamlets between Elizabethtown and Philadelphia along what we call “The Main Line.” Most of our students have only been to Harrisburg, Philadelphia, or Baltimore to attend professional sporting events, and their entertainment, recreation, socialization, and even introspection have mostly occurred in the suburban mall. The mall has been the hub of their community: mall hallways are their main streets, the mall’s food court their restaurant row, and the intersection of the mall anchor stores their own square or village green. Despite our emphasis on civic engagement, for many of them just crossing the street—leaving campus, going into the local town—is entering a new universe. For most of them, flying to a major U.S. city to attend NCHC’s annual conference is a significant experience; thus the leadership they have demonstrated in integrating City as Text into their own curriculum is deeply impressive.

Initial success with City as Text contributed to our college’s receipt of a Mellon Grant: “Confronting Challenges with Confidence: Humanities for Our World Today.” Given the campus context, located among historic communities drawing millions of visitors who contributed \$2.91 billion in tourism in 2018, an important component of the grant is “Regional Heritage Studies.” CAT has been the approach students use to explore their local region. To date, the Mellon Grant has funded three honors courses with community-based learning components whose foundation is CAT pedagogy.

CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CITY AS TEXT

Campus-wide curriculum has also benefited from applications of CAT. For more than thirty years, incoming students have been required to enroll in a First-Year Seminar. Based on scholarship and best practices identified by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition at the University of South Carolina, we developed a First-Year Experience program to assist students in making a smooth transition from high school to college. The Mellon Grant’s Regional Heritage Studies focus has added an Honors First-Year Seminar entitled “Landmarks and Legends: Learning Local History.” Here, students learn about the history

of our campus, the local community, and the region. We want them to understand the context but also the role that their college and local community play in the region's contribution to a growing, lucrative tourist industry. Students are challenged to think critically about why people from around the nation and the world travel to Lancaster County to learn and explore and why so much scholarship has been generated about the region's Historic Peace Church communities.

Specifically, in the Landmarks and Legends: Learning Local History seminar, students are assigned historically significant people from the campus, community, and region about whom they author a biographical sketch. CAT inspires our students to develop and lead walking tours of campus and community. They design an ArcGIS map where they regularly publish their research findings with photographs from CAT explorations. These ArcGIS maps have opened a dialogue between students and alumni, faculty, staff, administrators, local residents, local government leaders, and community activists. An expression of the college's motto, "Educate for Service," is demonstrable civic engagement: first-year students' learning context uses CAT as a framework to engage with the heritage of the surrounding region.

CAT has also provided students with context for their service learning experiences and raised several questions: What does "Educate for Service" mean? What does it mean to be a member of a residential community? How is one part of a local community? How does one contribute to town and gown relations? How does City as Text inform understanding of civic engagement beyond volunteerism?

The positive impact of CAT practices has also led to the establishment of a Certificate in Public Heritage Studies, a new academic concentration in the history department for students pursuing graduate degrees and careers in public history. The required introductory course for this certificate is Honors 201: Elizabethtown History: Campus and Community. Students in this course are assigned a historically significant property in the local community. They conduct National Historic Preservation Act (NHPC) Section 106 Reviews of the properties. Their research involves extensive deed searches;

identification of historically significant people who have lived, worked, and worshipped on these properties; interpretation of the historical significance of architectural details; and investigation of the role, function, and purpose of the properties as they relate to the region's heritage.

Each year, honors students present their research findings on campus at the Scholarship and Creative Arts Day (SCAD) academic conference; at a similar one called the Summer Scholarship, Creative Arts and Research Projects (SCARP); at NCHC annual conferences; and at historic preservation conferences sponsored by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. In every conference presentation, students reflect on how they made use of CAT in their own research for their regional heritage studies projects. In addition, the ArcGIS maps documenting the campus, local community, and regional heritage caught the attention of Pennsylvania's Department of Transportation's (PennDOT) Architectural Historian for District 8-0. CAT has since been used to facilitate a community-based collaboration between the Elizabethtown College Honors Program and the Architectural Historian for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

Our first collaborative community-based learning project involved honors students enrolled in our local history research methods course using CAT interactive skills to conduct NHPC Section 106 Reviews for a historic preservation project sponsored by the Federal Department of Transportation. Elizabethtown Borough has a new bridge on Market Street designed to retain and preserve parts of one built in 1910; it was constructed on the remains of earlier bridges built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Honors students published their findings on an ArcGIS map, and their scholarship was used by the Pennsylvania and Federal Departments of Transportation in filing the NHPC Section 106 Review necessary for this project. The community approval of the bridge design was based in part on the positive relationships students forged with local residents; of course, CAT was integrated into this community-based learning collaboration between town and gown.

Our second collaborative community-based learning project called on honors students enrolled in the same course to bolster a

grassroots campaign to save a local landmark from being razed. On the town square stands an enormous building that sets the architectural tone for its community. Built in the 1920s, this classic example of Colonial Revival Architectural style was home to the local lodge of the national fraternal organization the Loyal Order of Moose. For decades, this private space served a public function; it housed the headquarters for the local lodge but also featured a movie theater, ballroom, and retail space. The building's architect was Cassius Emlen Urban (1863–1939), a native of Lancaster County who designed more than one hundred buildings in the region and most of the structures in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Elizabethtown boasts the borough with the most buildings and homes he designed. Over ten of Urban's buildings are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Urban's Moose Lodge was slated for sale, with the intention of razing it to build a parking garage in the heart of this historic community. Honors students conducted NHP Section 106 Reviews of this property and others Urban designed. Their scholarship was used by the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County to launch a grassroots campaign to save the building. This historically and architecturally important property, purchased by the Church of the Brethren (the founding denomination of our college), is now being carefully restored to its original 1920s design and will serve a function once again that is true to its history and open to the public. CAT provided students with a strategy to explore this private-public space, informed their research, and helped them establish relations with community partners through carefully orchestrated civic engagement.

Our campus is located a few miles from the Susquehanna River. The town of Marietta, Pennsylvania, sits along the banks of this river and the former Pennsylvania Canal. Marietta is itself a National Historic District. For several years honors students have been working with thirteen community partners: the Lancaster Economic Development Company, the Lancaster County Planning Department, the Lancaster County Redevelopment Authority, the National Main Street Center, the Pennsylvania Downtown Center, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation Pennsylvania, the Marietta Restoration Associates, Our Marietta, RiverStewards, Susquehanna

Riverlands, Marietta Area Business Association, and the Marietta Borough. These efforts cultivate viable working relationships among local government and business leaders, residents, community-based organizations, and regional agencies, and this engagement benefits the community and the future economic development of Marietta Borough. Through exploration skills begun with CAT, our students are contributing to Marietta's asset-based planning process, which identifies and mobilizes existing as well as unrecognized resources that include physical, human, social, financial, environmental, political, cultural, and historic assets.

Based on their success with CAT applications connected to local opportunities, our students are introducing a "This Place Matters" campaign in Marietta. This Place Matters is a national campaign, created by the National Historic Preservation Trust, that encourages people to celebrate places meaningful to them and to their communities. Since 2015, participants in the Marietta campaign have shared more than ten thousand photographs of themselves and their favorite places on social media, using the hashtag #ThisPlaceMatters. The Trust provides a toolkit for communities to launch their own campaign. People around the world are sharing photos of places of historic significance. The campaign is not just public awareness through photography and social media; it tells the stories of why these places hold historic significance. Through This Place Matters, the Trust encourages and inspires an ongoing dialogue about the importance of place and preservation.

STUDY AWAY AND CITY AS TEXT

This level of community-based learning and civic engagement gained from structural application of CAT strategies is the basis of our first Honors Study Away program. Honors 170, a new course funded by the Mellon Grant, uses CAT structures for field exploration in the District of Columbia to learn about historic preservation; it is a laboratory in which students probe the complexities of protecting, preserving, and providing public access to American history. Because of COVID-19, the course did not run in May 2020, but when it runs post-pandemic, it will challenge students to think

critically about who determines what is a national, state, or local historic site; who decides which historic properties are worthy of preservation; how historical museums, sites, monuments, homes, battlefields, cemeteries, libraries, archives, and historical societies are established, governed, funded, and staffed; and what role these institutions play in educating the general public about history.

Honors students will spend the May term living and learning in Washington, D.C. They will learn about the politics of historic preservation past and present through mapping the city and studying with historians and professionals in related fields at historic sites. They will gain practical field experience and get a sense of potential careers in historic preservation, archival science, oral history, museum curatorship, and other related fields. During this process, they will begin to consider how their undergraduate experiences in community-based immersion projects can serve as preparation for a life of civic engagement that exemplifies “Educate for Service.”

ORIENTATION AND CITY AS TEXT

An application of CAT and its implications that is closer to home for our students has to do with everyday campus life and events such as Orientation Day for newcomers. Although no one can remember why or when, for decades a component of fall orientation has included an event called “The First-Year Walk.” First-Year Seminar Groups, led by their First-Year Seminar Peer Mentors, walk double-file off campus into Elizabethtown. They walk into town along Market Street (the main street) and continue back onto campus.

In the past, there has been no expressed purpose for this exercise except futile attempts to spur students to patronize local businesses. The greatest challenge experienced by incoming students with the First-Year Walk has been hazing from other students and verbal harassment from neighbors and passing motorists. Most recently, students of color and particularly women have been targets of racial and sexist bias incidents during this First-Year Walk. The population of Elizabethtown Borough is 11,445, 96.32% of whom are Caucasian. Student enrollment at the College is 1,622, 86.6% of whom are

Caucasian. Unfortunately, racial macroaggressions and microaggressions on and off campus are common.

In the fall of 2018 and 2019, honors students serving in the Student Senate and working as First-Year Peer Mentors introduced reforms in the First-Year Walk. They integrated City as Text into orientation planning. An honors student who participated in CAT at NCHC-Seattle and another who took part in NCHC-Boston's CAT sessions reinvented the First-Year Walk, running it like City as Text at NCHC. Incoming students in groups of three to four explored the entire borough, not just main street, interacting with local business owners and residential neighbors, learning about the local community, learning from each other, and engaging in self-reflection about what they saw and heard.

Instead of over four hundred students filing into town en masse, becoming targets for racial/ethnic harassment, students strategically integrated into the local setting. For the first time in decades, there was not one report of a racial harassment incident. Proprietors of local businesses, borough council leaders, community leaders, and residents described positively their interchanges with students and remarked that town and gown relations improved through this new design, which the honors student leaders proudly claimed as their version of NCHC's City as Text.

The next year during fall orientation, CAT provided the context for students to learn about the local community while engaging in service learning informed by the *Center for Community and Civic Engagement at Elizabethtown College: Community-Based Learning Faculty Handbook*, which has the following mission:

In keeping with Elizabethtown College's educational philosophy of 'Educate for Service,' the Center for Community and Civic Engagement provides opportunities to strengthen scholarship and leadership beyond the classroom, in order for students to learn actively through practical experiences and civic engagement. (1)

While working on orientation programming with the college's Center for Community and Civic Engagement, honors students spearheaded

integrating service learning opportunities into the First-Year Walk while practicing City as Text methodology to introduce students to our local community. Proprietors of local businesses and others were impressed with how the students were exemplifying the college's motto, "Educate for Service." For the second consecutive year, there was not one report of a racial harassment incident, incoming students embraced City as Text strategies as they returned to the local community throughout the academic year to engage in their service learning projects.

Student Senators and First-Year Seminar Peer Mentors for whom City as Text and civic engagement were not part of their First-Year Walk experience, however, expressed opposition to these innovations. They demanded a return to the First-Year Walk of over four hundred students marching into town aimlessly, despite reports of harassment, arguing that it was "tradition." The Student Senate then announced that in the fall of 2020, City as Text and civic engagement would be removed from the First-Year Walk, so student leaders on the Honors Council responded by integrating City as Text formally into honors pre-orientation, a domain over which they had direct responsibility. Honors newcomers arrive two days ahead of the incoming class. They go off campus to nearby Gretna Glen to participate in an Honors Outdoor Orientation Trek (HOOT), engaging in a ropes challenge course. When they return to campus, they spend part of the day exploring their new local community. In the past, this local exploration operated with little intentional structure, but the Honors Council leaders who brought City as Text home from NCHC planned to integrate it into the post-ropes course challenge to explore the local surroundings in depth.

COVID-19 resulted in planning for 2020 taking place remotely. HOOT, facilitated by Zoom, focused on the leadership development typically achieved through the ropes course challenge. So as not to cause Zoom fatigue among students, the Honors Council decided to offer CAT remotely to begin the spring semester in 2021. Weaving students into their network of support as they returned to campus for spring 2021, a hybrid approach to CAT that was both online via Zoom and in person with social distancing was planned to kick off the second semester of the academic year for honors students.

Yet another way that CAT has transformed our orientation programming involves an academic advising program with a pre-orientation component called Momentum. The college created this program, funded by a grant from the Council of Independent Colleges in Washington, D.C., for first-generation students from racially/ethnically diverse underrepresented socioeconomic populations. Key components of the program have involved teaching students about the history of the campus, civically engaging in the local community, exploring local urban centers, and studying abroad. Momentum is tied to the college's key values, expressed by benefactor Mennonite Elmer Esbenshade (1881–1967), who wrote in 1967 that he believed “every youth, regardless of race, creed, or color, ought to prepare themselves for life by securing an education that will qualify them for some worthwhile vocation,” adding that the world needs individuals who “will influence not only their own destiny, but also serve the interests and welfare of human kind.” City as Text has been integrated into the curricular and co-curricular programming of Momentum, helping students gain confidence in living on campus, become part of the local community, develop as leaders on and off campus, and work as agents of change to make town and gown more inclusive. Momentum students believe CAT is in part responsible for their ability to have positive, transformative, cross-cultural experiences when they study abroad. Indeed, many Momentum students who have been awarded prestigious scholarships and fellowships attribute their success to CAT, explaining that it has provided them with the necessary tools and skills to navigate living abroad and has facilitated opportunities to practice citizen diplomacy.

Walt Whitman wrote in “Poem of The Road” from *Leaves of Grass*:

You rows of houses! you window-pierc'd facades! you roofs!
 You porches and entrances! you copings and iron guards!
 You windows whose transparent shells might expose so much!
 You doors and ascending steps! you arches!
 You gray stones of interminable pavements! you trodden crossings!
 From all that has been near you I believe you have imparted to
 yourselves, and now would impart the same secretly to me,

From the living and the dead I think you have peopled your impassive surfaces, and the spirits thereof would be evident and amicable with me. (225)

The poem's message is the same as *City as Text*'s: get outside, take notice of the built environment, get inside the community, learn to know the people, dig deep, explore the neighborhoods and subcultures, then integrate and become civically engaged. Make a positive contribution to the place, and practice peacemaking: this is how *City as Text* has been a transformative experience for the Elizabethtown College Honors Program.

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