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## “Not only as Students, but as Citizens”: Integrative Learning and Civic Research in a First-Year Learning Community Course

Nate Mickelson

*CUNY Guttman Community College*, nate.mickelson@guttman.cuny.edu

Molly Makris

*CUNY Guttman Community College*, molly.makris@guttman.cuny.edu

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# “Not only as Students, but as Citizens”: Integrative Learning and Civic Research in a First-Year Learning Community Course

## **Abstract**

Learning communities (LCs) provide an ideal context for civic learning because they foreground the integrative and interactive nature of learning and skills development. While the academic benefits of LCs have been well documented, their potential to promote civic learning and engagement has received less attention. Indeed, the potential of LCs to serve as a catalyst for civic learning through their emphasis on integrative and interactive learning has gone mostly unremarked. The authors address these gaps in the literature in this article by analyzing the possibilities of integrating civic research in a first-semester LC at an urban community college. Extrapolating from their experiences, they argue that structuring LCs around civic learning can enable students to develop academic skills while at the same time building new understandings of themselves as active citizens and potential change makers in larger communities. The authors also recommend that colleges that plan to integrate civic learning in their LCs invest in recruiting and maintaining consistent teaching teams in order to enable the revision and improvement of curricula over time.

## **Keywords**

civic learning, undergraduate research, community college

## Introduction

The civic purposes of postsecondary education have never been more relevant or urgent. While vocational skills and employment outcomes often take precedence in national discussions, colleges across the country are recommitting to the goal of preparing students to become informed and active citizens. Promoting civic learning is critical for community colleges, in particular, because it contributes to the goals of "lessening educational inequalities and providing educational programs and services leading to stronger communities" (Kisker, Weintraub, & Newell, 2016, para. 2). Recent studies suggest that civic learning experiences, including service learning projects and community-based research, also contribute positively to the academic success of underprepared students (see Butler & Christofili, 2014; Prentice, 2009; Rochford & Hoch, 2010; Sass & Coll, 2015). Despite these promising findings, educators have struggled to integrate civic learning in courses that focus on skills development. The Democracy Commitment (TDC) recently completed a survey that suggests that the degree and quality of civic learning at individual community colleges depends on the availability of local resources and the passionate involvement of individual faculty members and administrators (see Kisker, 2016). More broadly, research suggests that in order to promote civic learning across the curriculum, colleges need develop intentional structures that enable students to "interact with one another, wrestle with thorny social or political issues, and engage in their communities" (Kisker et al., 2016, para. 49).

Learning communities (LCs) provide an ideal context for civic learning because they foreground the integrative and interactive nature of learning and skills development. In fact one of the primary purposes of LCs is to bring together the academic and social dimensions of learning. As Kuh (2008) and others argue, the benefits of academic-social integration are particularly important for students who start college underprepared. Participation in LCs has been shown to increase persistence, contribute to higher grade point averages and credit accumulation, and decrease the likelihood students will drop courses in a given semester (Tinto & Engstrom, 2014; Popiolek, Fine, & Eilman, 2013; and Visher, Weiss, Weissman, Rudd, & Wathington, 2012). While the academic benefits of LCs have been well documented, their potential to promote civic learning and engagement has received less attention. One exception is the work by Butler and Christofili (2014) who report improved student learning associated with students who integrated community-based research and service projects into existing LCs. In this article, we address the gaps in the literature by analyzing the possibilities of integrating civic research in a first-semester LC at an urban community college. Extrapolating from our experiences, we argue that structuring LCs around civic learning can enable students to develop academic skills while at the same time

building new understandings of themselves as active citizens and potential change makers in larger communities. Further, we recommend that colleges support stable teaching teams that will provide continuity and thus enable the revision and improvement of curricula over time.

### **The City Seminar Learning Community**

The City Seminar LC we describe in this article is integrated at both the structural and curricular levels. Designed to address the needs of underprepared community college students in New York City, the LC meets for 10.5 hours per week and is taught collaboratively by three faculty members and a graduate student coordinator. Students are enrolled in the LC regardless of their reading, writing, or mathematics proficiencies.<sup>1</sup> Each instructor leads one of the four different components of the course: Critical Issue takes a social science approach to critical research and thinking skills; Quantitative Reasoning engages students in numerical reasoning and statistical analysis; Reading and Writing supports students in practicing college-level writing; and Studio, led by the graduate coordinator, provides opportunities for reflection and integration. Students are block-registered for all components of the LC in cohorts of 25 and earn three credits and a single grade for their work. During the semester, faculty participate in weekly instructional team meetings to calibrate assignments and discuss emerging strengths and challenges for particular students. Faculty receive the equivalent of one-half course release per semester for these required meetings.

Each City Seminar LC addresses college-wide learning outcomes while focusing on a relevant urban topic chosen by the instructional team. Regardless of topic, the course focuses on the city and the experiences of its multiple stakeholders. The college-wide learning outcomes include the ability to:

- identify, interpret, and assess the perspectives of multiple stakeholders;
- demonstrate understanding of the policy-making process and the relative effects of policies on urban development and urban life in view of geographic, environmental, cultural and political realities;
- make judgments and draw conclusions based on quantitative analysis of data, while also articulating the limits of this analysis; and

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<sup>1</sup> The college embeds remediation in reading, writing, and quantitative reasoning in credit-bearing coursework by requiring additional time-on-task in first-year LCs. Although the integration of developmental and credit-bearing work is important for the overall structure of the LC, it is not the focus of this article. For further discussion of LCs and developmental education, see Schnee (2014) and Bailey (2009) Weinbaum, Rodríguez, and Bauer-Maglin (2013) provide information about the curricular model of the community college where this integrated LC was developed and taught. Information about the structure and purpose of the college's instructional teams can be found in Blake (2015).

- present evidence-based proposals for solutions to contemporary urban problems in written, oral, and digital media formats.

The topic we selected for our LC was gentrification. We chose gentrification for three reasons: first, it was a primary research interest of the team member leading the Critical Issue component of the course; second, we felt it offered excellent opportunities for civic research related to our course outcomes; and third, it is a topic relevant to the daily lives of our students and therefore an easily accessible yet nuanced and engaging area of study.

Once we agreed to the theme, we utilized a backward planning approach to design integrative assignments. We discussed various types of assignments that might allow students to demonstrate mastery of the knowledge and skills we had identified as important outcomes of the course. Assignment ideas discussed included research papers, digital stories, podcasts, and documentary films. We ultimately decided on a sequence of assignments that focused on civic research and the development and evaluation of grant proposals. These assignments mirror the kinds of research and action taking place in cities across the country as communities confront the complex challenges of gentrification. In the end, we developed a sequence of three integrative assignments designed to provide students with opportunities to practice skills and integrate learning from each of the course components. In later sections of this article, we describe these assignments and the lessons we have learned from the work.

Before turning to those details, we want to emphasize our rationale for integrating civic research as part of the assignment sequence. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (2009) defines civic engagement in course settings as “activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community” (Definition section, para. 1). Further, AAC&U specifies that developing “civic identity and commitment” is a fundamental element of civic learning (Rubric section, row 3). Students—not to mention all of us—must see themselves as capable of making change before they will engage in community-based action. Our primary reason for including civic research in our LC was to foreground “what it means for students to wield authority” over their academic learning and everyday experiences (Giroux & Giroux, 2004, p. 243). To put it another way, we hoped that conducting civic research would provide opportunities for students to experience what Jean Lave (1993; 1996) defines as “learning in practice” or learning that enabled them to make connections between their everyday and school lives. As Lave (1993) explains, “learning is an integral aspect of activity in and with the world at all times” rather than a set of practices that can be isolated from everyday experience (p. 8). Students learn by doing things with each other and with their instructors in particular contexts: the classroom, the college, the community. These contexts and the relationships among them affect the quality of

student learning because students are learning all the time, including when they are not engaged in formal classroom activities or assignments. In AAC&U's terms, students who are researchers and experts on issues in their own communities develop efficacious civic identities and lay a foundation for ongoing civic engagement. We designed our LC with these overlapping contexts and practices in mind. Following Tinto and Engstrom (2008), we imagined the LC as a context within which students would integrate academic knowledge and skills alongside everyday experience.

As we describe below, by requiring students to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data using expertise derived from their own and their family and friends' first-hand experiences in the city, the assignments exceed what is normally expected of first-year community college students. The assignments engage students as participant-researchers and put them in position to create knowledge. As Bergold and Thomas (2012) explain, "Participatory research methods are geared towards planning and conducting the research process *with* those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study" (para. 1, emphasis added). Participatory research methodologies also shift the power of the traditional researcher relationship (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). As they developed their projects, students furthered their critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, and reading and writing skills while contributing new knowledge to a topic of relevance in their everyday lives. These projects also significantly sharpened their perspectives on social justice.

### **Designing the Gentrification Assignment Sequence**

Prior to the beginning of the semester, we met as an instructional team three times to choose a topic, design integrative assignments, and develop a curriculum for the LC. Following Lardner and Malnarich's (2008) framework for designing "integrative and purposeful assignments," we started by identifying the big ideas we hoped students would understand and the fundamental skills we hoped they would develop through participation in our course (p. 35). With some modification and combination, these ideas and skills became the learning outcomes of our LC. Like the "Passion Projects" that Ball (2016) uses to encourage students to practice basic reading skills, our assignment sequence centers on students' emerging expertise about the causes and effects of an urgent local problem. Importantly, the sequence requires students to take up different roles in the classroom and the community. Over the span of the semester, our students begin as individual civic researchers, then join together in groups to develop grant proposals, and conclude by individually critiquing each other's work.<sup>2</sup> By assuming these different roles, they engage in recursive practices that

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<sup>2</sup> The instructions for the three assignments are included in the Appendix.

are central to the big ideas and fundamental skills we identified as our learning outcomes.

Students grapple with the multiple dimensions of gentrification in the Critical Issue component of the LC. Throughout the semester they create their own ever-evolving definitions of the topic, a process that often leads to more questions than answers. Their definitions are informed by reading and discussing scholarly work on gentrification: its history (Glass, 1964; Smith, 1996; Zukin, 2009); its effects on residents (Perez, 2004; Freeman, 2006; Patillo, 2008; Small, 2004); the powers that influence it (Butler & Lees, 2006; Florida, 2003; Logan & Molotch, 1987); and its intersection with issues such as public housing, education, health, and the environment (Makris, 2015). Students also watch a variety of feature and documentary films, read current news articles, participate in a debate around the topic, and research best practices on the local, national and international levels. In particular, they focus on what community members and neighborhood organizations are doing to address emerging problems. Because gentrification is a personal topic for many students—for example, students have cried in class and become angry discussing something that affects their own families—it is important for them to contextualize their own experiences in the research and have an awareness of the activism around this topic. The work students do in Critical Issue is reinforced through reading, discussions, and analysis of quantitative data in the other components of the course.

### **Assignment 1: Telling a Story of Neighborhood Change**

The first assignment asks students to work individually to examine the extent of gentrification in an assigned neighborhood and analyze its positive and negative effects. Students gather evidence through in-person ethnographic observation and through analysis of census data. We reserve one class session of each of the components of the LC, or a total of 4.5 clock hours, for students to research their neighborhoods and require them to submit detailed field notes and photographs documenting their work. Students present their findings in multimedia e-Portfolios. The assignment instructions invite students to “tell a story of neighborhood change” and require them to integrate evidence that includes at least one chart of quantitative data showing changes in the neighborhood over time; a written description and analysis of the quantitative data; excerpts from field notes and corresponding analysis; a narrative vignette based on the field research experience; and at least three photographs with descriptive captions. We provide a detailed grading rubric when we hand out the assignment instructions and ask students to peer review a rough draft of the project during one class session. The assignment is co-assessed by the three instructors.

Each time we have taught the course, students have found the main challenge of the first assignment was integrating their different streams of information to tell a coherent story. For example, students describe how they struggled to connect what their photographs show about physical changes in their neighborhoods with what their quantitative analysis suggests about the neighborhood's changing demographics. The most successful—that is, coherent—multimedia e-Portfolios were organized like well-written essays, proceeding from introductions that summarized the neighborhood's story through sections that introduced and explained relevant evidence to conclusions that reinforced key findings. One student's analysis was evident from the start in the title he chose, "The Dichotomy of Central Harlem South." Another student foregrounded the connections between her data in a strong introduction: "What does Gentrification in Harlem *really* mean? Is it just about the new buildings and the tourist attractions? Or is it more about the fight of the original residence [sic] to try and keep what is theirs?" Projects that were less effective lumped visual, narrative, and quantitative evidence together without showing clear relationships or explaining what their data revealed about the neighborhood.

After teaching the course for the first time we revised the instructions for the first assignment to ask explicitly for students to integrate their data in order to tell a cohesive story about changes in the neighborhood. The revised instructions helped students make clearer connections. For example, one student wrote in her introduction that "visiting, taking field notes, researching, and analyzing demographical [sic] and educational data about Long Island City provided enough evidence to draw a conclusion that this neighborhood is in the midst of gentrification. After spending a day here, it is clear that LIC is divided and will soon be mainly a high income and desirable neighborhood, pushing out the residents who will no longer be able to keep up with the living expenses." Another student wrote a detailed summary that integrated quantitative analysis with qualitative data collected during field research and insights about the processes of gentrification gained through class discussions:

The prime location of East Harlem is the key to why gentrification is starting to pick up more than ever within the last decade. [. . .] The neighborhood being only a short subway ride away from Midtown and the Financial District via the express 4 and 5 trains is one of a few reasons why more young urban professionals are moving into the neighborhood. The fact that property is cheaper than most of the rest of Manhattan and some of the more gentrified parts of Brooklyn and Queens means that it has become a go to place for people who want to live in a reasonably close location to work without spending top dollar for the higher rent neighborhoods. The real estate development industry is picking up the potential to be able to develop this neighborhood and that is evident by the number of luxury developments



popping up in this area. [. . .] Demographic statistics looking at race and education depict the change documented in East Harlem by 2010. [. . .] More of the races who lived in the neighborhood pre-gentrification showed a decrease in presence with the Black non-Hispanic population declining by 11% and the non-Hispanic of two or more races population by 8%. With the original races that lived in this neighborhood starting to decrease and the races with a much smaller presence in this neighborhood growing it is clear that gentrification is taking effect.

## **Assignment 2: Group Grant Proposal**

In the second integrative assignment, students work in groups to consolidate their research findings and define an urgent problem in their assigned neighborhood stemming from gentrification, such as loss of culture, displacement, or the closing of small businesses. Students read each other's multimedia e-Portfolios and identify additional research they would need to do in order to understand and respond to problems gentrification has caused. After defining the problem and using evidence to show its urgency, the groups propose plans of action in the form of a grant proposal to ameliorate the problem. To support the grant proposals, we reserve another day of classes for students to return to their neighborhoods where they interview a minimum of four residents and collect surveys from a minimum of ten residents, visitors, and workers. This second visit to the neighborhood serves multiple purposes. In addition to providing an opportunity for research specific to the grant proposal assignment, the visit also introduces students to the dynamics of working together outside the classroom. One student wrote in his final reflection for the course that conducting research with his group helped him learn about his responsibilities as a member of the community: "In and out of class experience[s] helped me realize how I work with groups, how I can focus inside a classroom, and my pros and cons. As I worked with [the] Astoria group to do the 4 interviews and surveys I felt more engaged into the community. Working outside of Guttman taught me responsibility to work outside my comfort zone."

Each semester, the second integrated assignment presents the daunting challenge of managing the dynamics of group research. However, even students whose groups struggle to work together ultimately recognize the benefits of the experience. For example, one student who found the group grant proposal project frustrating wrote in her final reflection, "I honestly did not like [working in the group] but reflecting on my work and the friends I made within my cohort, I would not have done as good in college overall if it weren't for my peers [. . .] I am more social with people within and outside of my house [and] it improves my communication skills and contacts as well." This student found ways to contribute to her group by constructing a new role for herself as a member of a larger

network of contacts. As she explains, the benefits of participating in the group research experience extended beyond the particulars of the assignment to her college experience as a whole. Bookending the group grant proposal assignment with two individual assignments balanced the frustrations students encounter while working in groups with the freedom of individual accountability.

The grant proposal assignment requires students to engage in descriptive, analytical, and persuasive writing and to use the qualitative and quantitative data they gathered individually and in their groups as evidence to support their claims. Each of these modes of analysis is central to the course learning outcomes. Because the assignment is integrated across the four components of the LC, it also serves as a context for recursive practice and engagement with the civic dimensions of the course topic. For example, at the same time that students are tabulating and analyzing data collected through their surveys in the Quantitative Reasoning component, they are transcribing and discussing basic coding of interview notes in Critical Issue and developing outlines for their grant proposals in Reading and Writing. Students use Social Explorer (<http://socialexplorer.com>) to create maps documenting demographic change, used Microsoft Excel to create budgets for their grant proposals, and attend a panel of experts on gentrification that we hosted on campus to gather ideas they could use in their plans of action. A student described the importance of the civic dimension of the grant proposal assignment in her final reflection:

During the semester I felt most engaged with East Harlem when we were told to find a solution to a problem that was caused by gentrification that is affecting the residents negatively. While doing this assignment mine and my classmate[s'] role was to interview residents of East Harlem which I felt was very important to the assignment because you got the residents perspective on what they felt was a problem in the neighborhood.

Another student summarized her experience of the grant proposal assignment by explaining how researching and discussing gentrification helped her discover ways to apply her understanding of the topic in her everyday life: "Even though I got tired of hearing the word gentrification this word is now a part of my brain. When I go places I see and know the steps of gentrification. I say the word often and if people don't know the word I enlighten them just like I was enlightened by my professors." As her reflection suggests, the student substantively connected the assignments she completed in the LC and her everyday experiences in her home community. She engaged with the topic from three perspectives over the course of the semester: as a student, as a researcher, and as a citizen. By shifting between these roles she experienced what Lave (1993) terms "learning in practice." The assignments also challenged her to apply her emerging understanding of gentrification by drawing on a range of skills, experiences and contexts, all of which culminated in the multimedia e-Portfolio

that she prepared individually and the grant proposal that she developed with her group. Through these repeated exposures and performance tasks, as she explains, gentrification became "part of [her] brain," something she understood in practice rather than as an abstract concept.

The students present their grant proposals to their peers and are encouraged to be creative in their presentations. Their classmates and guests are given handouts where they provide feedback and vote for the winning proposal. At the conclusion of the semester, the LC instructors host a party where they award a (fake) large check to the winning grant proposal (the group with the highest overall grade as co-assessed by the 3 instructors) and additional prizes for the People's Choice Award (selected by the students). This provides them with an opportunity to work together and support one another in public speaking and presentation skills, and the contest serves to further engage students in the work.

### **Assignment 3: Grant Proposal Critique Essay**

The third and final integrative assignment asks students to write individual critiques of another group's grant proposal as if they were members of a review committee. Using the criteria of the grant proposal assignment, they rate the proposals on the quality of the evidence and analysis presented and the feasibility of the solutions proposed. The assignment positions students as experts on gentrification research and policy and asks them to determine whether their peers' projects should be funded. Crucially, since students have just completed their own grant proposals, the expertise the assignment demanded is authentic. They understand the "conditions and context" in which they are being asked to apply what they have learned, to use Ambrose et al.'s (2010) terms, because they have constructed those conditions themselves. The critique assignment reinforces the interactive nature of the LC by asking students to analyze each other's work. Students advocate on behalf of the neighborhoods they have studied by advising the foundation whether or not to fund another group's proposal. We assure students that their critiques would not affect their peers' grades and keep the authors of the grant proposals anonymous. The critiques are again co-assessed by all instructors.

### **Lessons Learned from the Gentrification Assignment Sequence**

The main lessons we have learned from the gentrification assignment sequence relate to the importance of maintaining consistency on the LC instructional team and the centrality of civic learning to students' experiences in the course. We address these lessons below.

### **Maintain the Consistency of Teaching Teams**

The coauthors have had the opportunity to teach together in the gentrification-themed LC for three years. While we have integrated new faculty into the team each year, the deliberate consistency of having two faculty members work together over the years has enabled us to revise and improve the assignments, add detail to assignment rubrics to clarify expectations, and adapt daily classroom work to better integrate civic learning. We have found that as we make the assignments more challenging, students rise to our expectations. Bringing new faculty into the team, while also maintaining some consistency, has allowed us to incorporate new perspectives on the topic and assignments. This staffing model has also allowed new faculty members at the college to be integrated seamlessly into our LC program without having to build a new curriculum from the ground up.

As we prepare to teach the LC for a fourth time, we plan to improve the assignment sequence by deepening its social justice focus, for example, by asking students to get involved in activism, action research, and perhaps the development of grant proposals in cooperation with already-existing community groups. Prior revisions—for instance, adjusting the permitted budget amount and adding a requirement that group’s conduct research into work that is already being done—have produced increasingly thoughtful grant proposals such as plans for hydroponic urban farms, fundraising partnerships with successful community-based organizations, and the formation of community land trusts. Based on this, we hope to find new ways to encourage students to be creative in their proposals while, at the same time, remaining realistic about budgets and building on anti-gentrification work they have identified in the neighborhoods they are investigating.

### **Put Civic Learning at the Center of Integrative Assignments**

The integrative assignments in our City Seminar LC required students to engage in civic research activities while they also practiced fundamental reading, writing, and analytical skills in increasingly complex assignments. The assignments immersed students in the topic of gentrification by requiring them to explore it through their roles as learners, civic researchers, and neighborhood advocates. For some students a primary outcome of the course was developing new understandings of their own communities. One student wrote about this kind of discovery in her final reflection for the course: “I had been living in Central Harlem for at least 10 years [ . . . ] but as I revisited my neighborhood with the thought of gentrification now I felt like it was my first time in the neighborhood because I [now] started realizing so many changes that have affected the residents and the community within itself.” Another student wrote about the new perspective she developed when she visited her former home neighborhood as a researcher:

I went to school in the root of Harlem, 124th street between 5th and Lenox and for this assignment I went back to the same neighborhood. Already as I got there, there are different faces walking the street. You see an abundance of white people walking through the crowds of Africans and Spanish people. There are so many unnecessary new shops. More cafes and restaurants have bloomed out of nowhere causing prices in the area for the people who live there to go up. Going further uptown, it's also noticeable that the streets have gotten cleaner, it's not as much trash on the floor but the neighborhood is getting more familiar with white people walking the streets. Going back down there didn't scream Harlem, it seemed awkward having to walk down every street questioning, "When did this get here" because it's true. When did all this stuff get here?

Another student wrote about applying the insights he developed through participation in the LC in new contexts: "It open[ed] my eyes when I was interviewing people and they talked about how gentrification has affected them [. . .] I was like wow this is not just something we are learning in class but [it's] a real thing outside of class. What [I'm] saying is that part of the project just gave me a chance to see other places and get out in the world, it taught me that [there's] more out there [than] just where I live and that I should look around."

What stands out in these reflections is how students have developed new civic identities as they worked on their LC assignments and began to see themselves as agents of change around issues of social justice in their communities.

The topic of gentrification fostered civic engagement by requiring students to employ varying perspectives that drew on their developing range of skills. The integrated nature of the LC enabled them to embrace "big ideas"—such as activism—as well as fundamental skills. One noted that the class discussions underway in the course had really "lit a fire" in him. Other students expressed in their final reflections how the sequence of assignments in the LC created a kind of awakening within them to broader issues of social justice and a desire to do something to make a difference. The civic research activities pushed them into spaces that were uncomfortable but also helpful to their growth. For example, one student wrote: "This project lead me to open my eyes on what is going [on] around a certain neighborhood, and to talk to people who I never met before. This was very challenging for me because I am a shy person and I have to stop people on the street to survey and by doing this some people ignored or reject you, and you have to deal with it." Another student noted that interviewing members of the community had benefits beyond the assignment: "My group and I were able to meet, and interview, multiple residents who had such strong opinions on gentrification and were not shy about talking for very long periods of time about how much they hate it. I felt like we helped them release some pent up anger on

the issue, we were the catalyst for change in some people it seemed.” Perhaps the richest reflection was written by a student who was learning English at the same time she was taking the course. We were impressed throughout the semester by her understanding of the issues we discussed. She demonstrated this understanding in her final reflection for the course:

Lesson I gained from these experiences were that we not only as students, but as citizens are responsible of acting respectfully and serene towards the problems the society is confronting nowadays [ . . . ] My thoughts about these assignments were that their main goal was to create individuals [who are] conscious about society and other individuals by making us think from a critical eye. Instead of forming part of the problem, we were part of the solution.

While the student’s mastery of English is still emerging, it is clear from her reflection that she was thinking deeply about what was at stake in her assignments. Further, it shows that participating in our course led her to develop a new way of engaging with the world: “not only as students, but as citizens,” she explains, we have choices to make about whether we will form “part of the problem” or “part of the solution.”

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## Appendix: Assignment Instructions

### Assignment 1: Telling a Story of Neighborhood Change

(200 points or 20% of your grade for the course)

#### Prompt

This semester in City Seminar 1 you are engaging in qualitative and quantitative urban research and learning about your relationship to society and the city, urban neighborhood change, and gentrification. For your first integrated assignment you will use Digication to create a multimedia portfolio which describes in detail one of the following neighborhoods and how it has changed over the last 10-20 years.

East Harlem (Manhattan)

Central Harlem South (Manhattan)

Williamsburg (Brooklyn)

Crown Heights (Brooklyn)

Long Island City (Queens)

#### Learning Outcomes

- Describe the field of urban studies and its primary objects of study, fundamental questions, and core research strategies.
- Identify, interpret, and assess the perspectives of multiple stakeholders in different parts of the world on critical urban issues and evaluate the evidence supporting each position.
- Make judgments and draw conclusions based on quantitative analysis of data, while also articulating the limits of this analysis.
- Present evidence-based proposals for solutions to contemporary urban problems in written, oral, and digital media formats.

#### Requirements and Process

This is an **individual** assignment. You will:

- Conduct preliminary research on your neighborhood to understand how the demographics have changed as well as other changes to the neighborhood
- Visit the neighborhood at least once (class time will be made available on September 26)
  - During the required visit you will take photographs and field notes and begin to develop an understanding of the neighborhood, of gentrification in the neighborhood, and who has been affected by gentrification in this neighborhood

- Create a multimedia portfolio to display your data. Your portfolio must combine the following elements into a rich description of the neighborhood and how it has gentrified over the last 20 years
  - at least one chart of quantitative data
  - description of the type of information that the chart provides
  - analysis of your quantitative data
  - at least one narrative vignette based on your in-person observations
  - one article about the neighborhood with a summary of the article
  - field notes in the required format which includes both description and reflection/analysis
  - at least three of your own photographs and captions
  - any additional data that you think might enhance your description of the neighborhood and how it has changed
  - a summary that brings together **all of this data** to describe and demonstrate specific ways the neighborhood has changed

### **Assignment 2: Group Grant Proposal**

(250 points or 25% of your grade for the course)

The Center for Urban Growth is a non-profit organization that works to address the challenges of a growing, changing New York City. We provide funding for innovative, evidence-driven projects that help alleviate problems associated with gentrification in New York City neighborhoods.

Last year, we received an overwhelming number of applications so make sure you provide clear and compelling arguments and specific evidence for why we should accept your proposal. Grant proposals must be submitted through the "Portfolio Tools" tab in ePortfolio. In addition, groups must provide 3 printed copies of their proposal when they make their presentation.

Additionally, all applicants are required to present their proposals to a panel of their peers. The presentation can take the form of a PowerPoint or Prezi. Special consideration will be given to applicants who present their proposals in creative and dynamic ways. A winning proposal will be selected for each neighborhood.

The Center would prefer a proposal with a budget of \$50,000 - \$250,000 but will consider proposals requiring funding up to \$1 million. A variety of different types of projects will be considered, but each proposal must do the following.

- **Identify the neighborhood** in which your program will be implemented.

- **Provide a brief background** of the history of the neighborhood and gentrification in the neighborhood. Use interview, survey data, and maps to help demonstrate this.
- **Provide a description and analysis of at least two sets of quantitative data** (presented in table or graph form) that show the demographic and socioeconomic changes that have taken place in the neighborhood.
- **Identify and define one problem** that has developed in this neighborhood as a result of gentrification.
- **Provide evidence that the problem you have identified is really a problem.** Your evidence should include survey results, interview excerpts, information from the panelists, quantitative evidence, and evidence from mapping.
- **Describe how each piece of evidence demonstrates** that the problem your group has identified exists in the neighborhood.
- **Apply insights from outside research** (at least 2 outside sources) which shows how other groups or individuals in NYC or other cities have attempted to ameliorate the problem you identified in other communities and explain how your work was informed by these sources.
- **Describe in detail how your program will use the money** from the grant to address this problem. Your description should include a written plan of action and an itemized budget.

### **Assignment 3: Grant Proposal Critique Essay**

(125 points or 12.5% of your grade for the course)

#### **Instructions**

For this assignment, you will individually critique a grant proposal submitted to the GLO Center for Urban Growth. Your objective is to make an argument for whether or not the proposal should be funded. The GLO Center uses the following evaluation criteria and a scale of 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Excellent. Write at least one paragraph providing specific evidence to support your rating for each of the criteria.

#### **Evaluation Criteria**

**1=POOR; 2=FAIR; 3=GOOD; 4=EXCELLENT**

1. **The problem:** How clearly is the problem defined? How convinced are you that the problem is real and urgent?

2. **Quantitative evidence:** How effectively does the proposal use quantitative data to show the problem is real and urgent? Give 2 examples which show either effective or ineffective uses of quantitative evidence.

3. **Qualitative evidence:** How effectively does the proposal use qualitative data to show the problem is real and urgent? Give 2 examples which show either effective or ineffective uses of qualitative evidence.

4. **Plan of action:** How clearly is the plan of action explained? How convinced are you that the plan will be effective?

5. **Budget:** Is the proposed budget sufficient to implement the plan of action? How convinced are you that the plan of action will work?

**Note:** Your critique of the grant proposal will not affect your classmates' grades, so please be honest and thorough in your evaluation.