Context for the teaching methodology and its implementation

I proposed, developed, and taught a new honors course titled Cultural Geography – Why Place Matters (beginning Spring 2018) which revolves around a high-impact semester-long and community-based experiential education opportunity titled the Glassboro Memory Mapping Project.

The Glassboro Memory Mapping (GMM) project is a collaborative digital scholarship project exploring history, memory, and place in Glassboro, New Jersey. The ultimate purpose of the project is to increase student and community emotional attachment to, intellectual curiosity about, and appreciation for the diverse and dynamic heritage of Glassboro. The GMM project was developed as an innovative community geography partnership between my Honors Cultural Geography course (HONR 16210 / GEOG 11610), the Rowan University Libraries Digital Scholarship Center (DSC), the Glassboro Historical Society, and the Heritage Glass Museum.

The Glassboro Memory Mapping project creates a publicly accessible online digital archive (accessible here: http://glassborohistoricalsociety.com/digitalarchive/) containing a wide variety of material related to the history and development of Glassboro, NJ. This material includes historical photographs, video, audio recordings, documents, maps, oral histories, digitized books, student projects, and a comprehensive resource list. I continue to teach Honors Cultural Geography each semester and further develop the GMM project with Mike Benson, DSC Coordinator, and the involvement of a growing list of community and University contributors.

Why this technique is innovative

The Glassboro Memory Mapping project is innovative for engaging both Rowan students and Glassboro community members in the creation of a free, digital archive and map of historical material through collaborative and participatory public scholarship. Utilizing both digital scholarship and historical and cultural geography research methods, the project also uniquely enlists and engages students, most of whom are not geography majors, in place-based or community geography pedagogy; students generate new place-based knowledge for public dissemination. The beginning of the semester is focused on reading, writing, and discussion of key cultural geography concepts and the remainder of the semester includes experiential learning opportunities: guided walking tours, exploring historical societies and museums, photo-elicitation with Glassboro Historical Society community members, workshops at the DSC, and independent research online and in local archives.

Student contributions to the GMM project take two primary forms: 1) research and writing a short historical record in the digital archive and 2) crafting an interactive online essay (using Scalar) employing a geographic approach to culture. Importantly, both assignments are related to a self-selected cultural topic of interest, which allows for students from diverse disciplines to leverage their academic expertise, personal experience, and intellectual curiosity. The interactive essay affords students with independent research design, creative expression, and opportunities self-reflection integral to best practices in experiential education. The purpose of the interactive essay is for students to generate new place-based knowledge through doing cultural geography—investigating interactions between people and place, past and present, from local to global scales.

The development of this project provides honors cultural geography students with academic content, relevant, real-world experience, and transferable skills including exposure to archival research and source-based writing, interviewing community members (photo-elicitation and oral history), rephotography and fieldwork, critical and spatial thinking, creative and design thinking, GIS, metadata, handling archival material, and digital media development. Students are provided opportunities to autonomously investigate a wide range of social and cultural issues using research methods within the fields of cultural and historical geography, public history, and museum and archival studies. Students gain unique personal experiences interacting with a diverse multigenerational community to document
memories and preserve endangered historical material and information directly related to the founding and development of Glassboro, NJ and the United States. At the conclusion of this course, students have two publically available digital scholarship products (historical record and interactive online essay) to showcase their academic and professional skills in future internship, job, and graduate school applications.

Recently, Mike Benson and I received interest and positive feedback on the GMM project at the Blended Learning in the Liberal Arts Conference at Bryn Mawr (May 22-23, 2019) where we presented it as an innovative example of blended learning, characterized as “instruction that supports close faculty-student interactions or high-impact, student-centered pedagogies, promotes, life-long learning, or otherwise contributes to the goals and mission of a liberal arts education.” We are in the process of pursuing local grants for additional GMM project development of the public archive, student interns, and future public programming.

Evidence of impact on students
Below are excerpts from student reflections on their GMM project experience (Spring 2018, Fall 2018, Spring 2019).

“I feel like this project has helped to bring more meaning to Glassboro and the history of our university. At the same time, we are making history as Rowan partners with the local community to document life in their community, and I think this is a really special endeavor to be a part of. Glassboro, for me, has become much more than just the college town that I originally came to Rowan and became a part of. Instead, it has become a place with a story worth sharing. I hope that my experience in this class and community will continue to be an experience that I will grow and allow to be a part of my time here at Rowan and for years to come.”

“I absolutely loved this project honestly. I thought it was so different than any project I had previously done. I think the most valuable part of this was visiting the University Archives. This is something that could have definitely been useful to me in previous years, however I never knew that it existed. I really enjoyed looking through all of Rowans history, especially since I am a tour guide and that is something that we talk about a lot.”

“Before this project I didn’t put much thought into how Glassboro was mapped out or the cultural aspects of the community. However, once I started to look at my digitized images and connect them with different locations I started to realize how the old culture has affected the overall look of Glassboro. An example that really stood out to me is when we were on our walking tour and realized that the train station was positioned in a way so that Bunce hall was the first thing passengers saw when they got off the train. Learning about this sort of infrastructure/architectural planning was interesting to me as an engineering major.”

“The entire premise of this project was to explore the historical value of Glassboro and share how this place we have come to know, and love truly matters. Through this endeavor, we have explored the past and present features that make Glassboro special, and thus we have been able to archive these things for others to see. Through exploring the past landmarks, important locations, and historical events in Glassboro such as the glass factory and the civil rights march, we can see the things that made this place matter. As a result, the project has helped to quantify and make this information readily available to the public, so they may also see why this place matters. In documenting these photos, what were once a single person’s memories, can become powerful tools for expressing the importance of Glassboro New Jersey.”
“Through learning about Glassboro’s history, I became more aware of my surroundings. From a physical cognizance of street names and old brick buildings to a newfound curiosity about the people I share “Third Places” with, wondering how their perception of their surroundings was different than mine, my heightened awareness has made me feel more informed yet…my unanswered questions have made me aware of how much I still don’t know about Glassboro, of how much more there is to learn from locals. Everyone has their own perception of a place that is made up of a combination of their memories of the place, their identity, their sense of belonging in the place, and so many other factors that create a unique meaning to the individual…To the Rowan alumni I interviewed, thinking about Landmark made them reflect on the town of Glassboro and their time at Rowan as a whole because of how intricately tied into “The college experience” that this bar is. It’s just a bar, but it means so much to people. Even to the locals, who also have countless stories at that geographic location, the Landmark is a piece of the town’s pride because it carries on the legacy that the Franklin House began. In my project, I hope to have captured a bit of that pride and put together a story that expresses Landmark’s place and identity in Glassboro.”

“I think we should have Rowan University recognize our projects and the GMM Project program by having a article about the project in the Rowan newspaper or better still an article on the Rowan University website. Overall I really enjoyed this project because I learned a lot of skills that I can use in my life, I can also use this article for my resume and I am proud of my contribution to the community.”

Supplemental Materials
Honors cultural geography class photo in front of Campbell Library Fall 2018

Honors cultural geography walking tour of Glassboro history led by Mike Benson, DSC

Student photo elicitation with GHS member Maureen St. John at the DSC

Outside the Heritage Glass Museum, preparing for a tour by HGM member Rick Grenda

Examples of student’s online interactive essays

The Landmark: The 200 Year History of the Franklin House

Segregation in Glassboro

Making the Invisible Visible: A Queer Glassboro History

Glassboro German Prison Labor Camp

by Paul Buzi
Website visitors can search by keywords (location, person, topic) or simply clicking on the map.

This record was written by Honors Cultural Geography student Thomas Schofield, Spring 2018. He had the opportunity to interview Robert Tucker, local historian and Planning Board member, who is visible in this photograph (between the two American flags) in class about the Civil Rights march which took place on High St. April 6, 1968 in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.