

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT
FOR THE HUMANITIES**

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE



Humanities Initiatives at Institutions with High Hispanic Enrollment
Institution: New York City College of Technology



NATIONAL
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National Endowment for the Humanities

Division of Education Programs

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

This sample of the narrative portion from a grant is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with staff members in the NEH Division of Education Programs well before a grant deadline. This sample proposal does not include a budget, letters of commitment, or resumes.

Project Title: *Water and Work: The Ecology of Downtown Brooklyn*

Institution: New York City College of Technology

Project Director: Richard Hanley

Grant Program: Humanities Initiatives for Faculty at Institutions with High Hispanic Enrollment

Water and Work: The Ecology of Downtown Brooklyn

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New York City College of Technology (CUNY) Fact Sheet

Water and Work: The Ecology of Downtown Brooklyn

New York City College of Technology (CUNY), a four-year Hispanic Serving Institution located in downtown Brooklyn at the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, is one of the most diverse colleges in the nation. Countries of origin of the 13,370 member student body number 110; countries of origin of faculty also span the globe. This project is built upon a successful NEH-sponsored humanities initiative entitled *Retentions and Transfiguration, the Technological Evolution and Social History of Five New York Neighborhoods*. In this proposal the college is focusing on the Brooklyn waterfront as a complex natural and cultural phenomenon that lies at the interface of the humanities and science.

The initiative has three components: a rigorous year-long faculty seminar for 16 faculty representing a range of disciplines who will study with external scholars the books these scholars have written. We also propose public lectures for a wider audience and partnerships with the Brooklyn Historical Society and the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment to use primary source materials and hands-on investigative techniques to understand the waterfront in its historical and natural context.

The project will result in the creation of a brand new interdisciplinary course for first year students that will focus on downtown Brooklyn, the immediate environs of the college. It is also anticipated to produce strengthened collaborations among faculty across disciplinary boundaries and a renewed intellectual climate.

Water and Work: The Ecology of Downtown Brooklyn

“But today the National Trust for Historic Preservation plans to sound the alarm by declaring Brooklyn’s industrial waterfront one of America’s 11 most endangered historic places.”

“Brooklyn Waterfront Called Endangered Site” *New York Times* 6/14/2007

1. Intellectual Rationale

New York City College of Technology (CUNY), in partnership with the Brooklyn Historical Society and the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment, proposes a faculty development program to broaden faculty understanding and engagement with the history and the ecology of downtown Brooklyn, the immediate environment of the college. We define *ecology* in the broadest sense as the relationship between people and their environment, the recursive relationship between people and place and how each affects the other. The history of downtown Brooklyn is defined by its relationship to the waterfront.

New York City has 578 miles of waterfront, yet many City Tech students have never been to the water’s edge. Within their lifetimes, that water’s edge, however, might come to them. Scientists studying climate change and extreme weather predict that coastal cities such as New York might be in danger of flooding. Our new program will have faculty and, ultimately, students look at the role of the waterfront in Brooklyn’s past, understand its current state, and look forward to social, ethical, and environmental challenges it will present in the future.

We propose to engage faculty from a range of disciplines spanning the breadth of our curriculum in an intensive interdisciplinary study of the literary, economic/labor, and natural history of the Brooklyn waterfront. Six external scholars will lead seminars and speak to the college community on their work. These include Joshua Freeman, CUNY Graduate Center, author of *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II*; Karen Karbeiner, New York University, *Walt Whitman and New York*; Marc Levinson, economist and author, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger*; Betsy McCully, Kingsborough Community College (CUNY), *City at the Water’s Edge: A Natural History of New York*; Paul Mohai, University of Michigan, "Dispelling Old Myths: African American Concern for the Environment"; and Craig Wilder, Dartmouth, *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn*. Their publications will form the core readings for the faculty seminar. We will also be working with the Brooklyn Historical Society, our institutional neighbor, and the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment on the use of primary source materials and approaches to hands-on investigation.

Through colloquia, a year-long faculty seminar, and field trips linked to the readings, six lead faculty members and 10 additional participating faculty will immerse themselves in the interdisciplinary theme. Unlike previous curriculum development projects in which individual faculty members have revised course content in the courses they teach, the proposed project will bring faculty together to design a required interdisciplinary course for first-year students. They will create, pilot, and institutionalize an interdisciplinary

course for entering students that will teach hands-on research methods, develop information literacy, and introduce students to the history and environment of the Brooklyn neighborhood in which they study.

Impact of 2006 NEH Faculty Development Grant

City Tech's 2006 NEH Faculty Development Grant was conducted in partnership with the Municipal Art Society (MAS), one of New York's oldest and most respected institutions devoted to the study of the built environment. The project, entitled *Retentions and Transfigurations: The Technological Evolution and Social History of Five New York City Neighborhoods*, comprised a rigorous year-long seminar for fifteen faculty members led by scholars affiliated with MAS, enriched by closely-linked field studies of the five neighborhoods. Readings and discussion were linked with walking tours led by scholars from MAS. The understanding of the history and literature of each location was deepened by physical experience of that place. The project also enabled the development and implementation of a Humanities Across the Curriculum model for the infusion of humanities content into technical and professional studies by means of the development of curricular units which participating faculty incorporated into courses they are currently teaching. These span fields ranging from Architectural Technology to Hospitality Tourism. Approximately 20 courses have been reworked; with an average enrollment of 18 students per class, 360 students will be impacted next fall.

That humanities initiative has helped transform the intellectual culture of the college—it is becoming more open, interdisciplinary, real-world centered, and collaborative. *The Leonardo Project*, a writing-intensive curriculum project designed to improve writing, speaking, and analytical skills using Leonardo's Notebooks as a common point of departure in classes across the curriculum, has been funded by the City University of New York. *Green Brooklyn: An Interdisciplinary Approach To Urban Environmental Studies*, a faculty development project that has just been funded by CUNY, took direct inspiration from *Retentions and Transformations*. In this project, participants will develop a collaborative unit of study for classes in multiple fields to create a walking tour of the college's immediate neighborhood with a focus on environmentalism. Perhaps most importantly, the NEH project created a new model of knowledge exchange bringing together technical, professional, library, and humanities faculty. [See press clippings in the Appendix demonstrating our successes.]

The project went beyond the walls of the college. For example, Professor Robin Michals, a faculty liaison in the 2006 project, gave a talk at the Municipal Art Society entitled "GPS: Not Just for Geeks" which included a map of the NEH group's Sunset Park walking tour with geocoded photos. The electronic outputs from the project include a database of project activities and a library of curriculum units that are being disseminated through the project's web site scheduled to launch this fall. The college's partnership with MAS also serves as an example of the synergy that occurs when institutions with overlapping educational missions collaborate; this new relationship provides the inspiration for partnerships, proposed here, with the Brooklyn Historical Society and the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment.

A New Humanities Course for First-Year Students

The project proposed here will lead to the formation of a new first-year course. The envisioned class will teach the fundamental research skills that will improve student success in subsequent studies. The course will combine scholarship in the humanities with hands-on learning to teach students the fundamentals of research, using the archives of the Brooklyn Historical Society. Fieldwork will combine the descriptive analysis of humanities with the quantitative data collection of science and will engage students at the outset of their post-secondary education in the construction of both humanistic and scientific knowledge. Students will be actively engaged in the research process, conducting interviews, performing basic science experiments, and analyzing primary sources such as manuscripts, newspaper articles, photographs, and paintings. After the course has been developed, it will be piloted and refined and then submitted to the curriculum committee of the college for adoption as a new humanities requirement.

Another goal of the new course is the immersion of students in interdisciplinary work. The course will be built around the theme of 21st-century urban technology and Brooklyn. The aim will be to integrate ideas of sustainability of urban life with the culture and traditions of this old yet vigorous city and its waterfront. To achieve this integration of humanities with science and technology, each student project will be designed to include history, literature, artistic expression, and some issue of science or technology. Ideally, we hope to make each student sensitive to the humanistic skills of perceiving, describing, and understanding the cultural and historical context of a wide array of technical, political, architectural, and engineering issues.

2. Content and Design

Workplan

Semester 1: The History of the Brooklyn Waterfront

Inaugural Public Event: “Water and Work: An Interdisciplinary Look at the Brooklyn Waterfront”

This panel event will feature three eminent scholars, who will focus on the Brooklyn waterfront from their areas of specialization. Professor Karen Karbiener will discuss Walt Whitman’s close relationship to the waterfront and its presence in his poetry. Professor Joshua Freeman will focus on the history of waterfront labor in Brooklyn since World War II. Professor Betsy McCully will focus on the natural history of Brooklyn’s waterfront.

Meeting One: “The Brooklyn Waterfront: From Red Hook to Greenpoint”

This session will be held at the Brooklyn Historical Society. Led by the staff, faculty participants will be introduced to a vast store of primary source materials—manuscripts, paintings, photographs, and maps that document the evolution of Brooklyn from indigenous populations to the present. Particular focus will be on the Pierrepont Papers which cover the development of the Brooklyn Heights esplanade and the Brooklyn ferries. We will also explore the history of land use in Brooklyn, its evolution from

farmland to the second largest American city in the 19th century, and its industrialization in the 20th century.

Readings: Ellen Snyder-Grenier, *Brooklyn: An Illustrated History*; Marcia Reiss, *Brooklyn: Then and Now*; Ray Saurez, “The American Factory, Brooklyn, N.Y.” from *The Old Neighborhood*; John Tierney, “Brooklyn Could Have Been a Contender.”

Meeting Two: “Walt Whitman’s Brooklyn”

This session will be led by Karen Karbeiner, who will speak on Whitman’s Brooklyn boyhood and his poetry and journalistic writings about it. Professor Mark Noonan will moderate.

Readings: Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Barnes and Noble edition, with foreword by Karen Karbiener), Henry M. Christman, ed. *Walt Whitman’s New York*; David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman’s America*.

Meeting Three: “The Change in Maritime Technologies Along the Waterfront”

This session, led by visiting scholar Marc Levinson and facilitated by Professor Richard Hanley, will focus on Levinson’s recent book *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger*. The discussion will center on the effects of the change in maritime technology from labor-intensive break-bulk shipment to containerization. The group will also view the film *On the Waterfront*, which will serve as another historical reference to waterfront labor.

Meeting Four: “Yesterday’s and Today’s Waterfront—A Walking Tour of the Brooklyn Navy Yard and Its Environs”

The Brooklyn Navy Yard is a 261-acre maritime and industrial park with 4.3 million square feet of building floor area mostly in mid-rise loft structures, five piers and six dry docks. Purchased by the U.S. Navy in 1801, it employed 70,000 people at its peak during WWII. As indicated in New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan of 1994, the Navy Yard had 85 industrial establishments employing 2,555 workers and an additional 600 non-industrial jobs. Led by the Brooklyn Historical Society and Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment, this field study will enable faculty to tour Brooklyn’s massive naval facility with a focus on the history of the buildings, its current usage, and changing labor history.

Reading: Joshua Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II*.

Semester 2: Brooklyn’s Waterfront: Today and Tomorrow

Meeting One: “A Different Perspective: Viewing the Waterfront from the Water”

This session will explore the nature of Brooklyn’s environment from the earliest times till today. For example, what kind of flora and fauna were there and are there now? What were/are the environmental effects of working on the waterfront? What are the effects of waterfront industries on air and water quality? This session will be a boat tour led by the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment and Professor Betsy McCully.

Reading: Betsy McCully, *City at the Water's Edge: A Natural History of New York*

Public Lecture: Professor Craig Wilder (Dartmouth) will discuss his book *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn*

Meeting Two: “Ethnicity and Ecology: Myths and Realities”

This unit will explore the connections and disjunctions between African Americans and the environment. It has sometimes been the case that African Americans are seen as being less concerned with issues of environmental justice, conservation and pollution of land, air and water. Yet there is also considerable evidence in the other direction—African Americans are in the forefront of many battles for environmental justice. Consider, for example, the work of the Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark Atlanta University. The writings of African Americans illustrate that their relationship with the land is as complex, deep and diverse as the places from which they came. However, the literature also contains a strain of "urban determinism" that suggests that African American life is determined by the hostile urban environment for which they have no connection or concern. Leading this discussion will be Professor Paul Mohai from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Professor Stephen James will moderate.

Readings: Paul Mohai, "Dispelling Old Myths: African American Concern for the Environment"; Maria Balshaw, excerpts from *Looking for Harlem: Urban Aesthetics in African American Literature*, Paule Marshall, selections from *Brown Girl, Brownstones*; Ann Petry, selections from *The Street*; Nikki Giovanni, "For Sandra."

Meeting Three: “‘Look for Me Under Your Boot-soles’: Calculating Environmental Footprints Along the Waterfront”

Moderated by Professor Peter Spellane, this session is designed to assess the impact of human activity on Brooklyn’s waterfront. It will seek to create an environmental snapshot of this location, measuring, for example, the amount of the waterfront presently used for commerce, recreation, power generation, and other purposes. It will also seek to measure the impact of new residential construction along the waterfront.

Reading: NYC Department of City Planning, *Plan for the Brooklyn Waterfront*.

Meeting Four: “Designing a New Academic Course in the Humanities”

In this session, participating faculty will synthesize their learning experiences to design a new humanities course for first-year students. The participants will identify ten appropriate units derived from the seminar series. Each topic could form the theme for two lectures or fieldwork exercises in the academic course. Professors Robin Michals and Monica Berger will moderate this session. Teams of participating and lead faculty will co-teach and pilot the course.

Final Symposium: Participating Faculty will introduce the new first year course in the humanities to the faculty at large.

3. Institutional Context

Scholarship in both the sciences and the humanities increasingly bridges disciplines but introductory courses typically do not reflect this trend. While there is broad agreement that the humanities are the requisite educational foundation for all students regardless of programs of study or career aspirations, the responsibility for infusing humanities perspectives has heretofore rested with individual faculty members. The project proposed here will result in the creation a permanent instrument for the delivery of humanities perspectives through the creation of a required humanities course for all freshmen.

A number of parallel initiatives have strengthened the teaching of the humanities. While for much of the college's history the departments of English, social sciences, and philosophy were considered "service" departments to the technical and vocational programs and the intellectual ethos has historically been overwhelmingly technical and expedient, the humanities are now coming into their own right as providers of critical intellectual skills that all students need, regardless of their majors. This reevaluation of the humanities is also a result of an infusion of new faculty (50% are new hires within the past five years). Of these new hires, more than 80% hold doctoral degrees, many earned at the nation's most prestigious research universities. These faculty members have brought to the school a more collegial orientation as well as a keen interest in knowing who their students are.

Resources to be Applied

Brooklyn Historical Society. The Brooklyn Historical Society is a museum, library and educational center dedicated to encouraging the exploration and appreciation of Brooklyn's rich heritage. The Brooklyn Historical Society fulfills this mission by collecting, preserving and making available important materials representative of Brooklyn's diverse peoples and cultures both past and present. The Brooklyn Historical Society places the materials it collects in a meaningful context by presenting innovative exhibitions and public programs.

Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment. Founded in 1978, Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment is dedicated to educating children, individuals and families about the built and natural environments of New York City.

4. Staff and Participants

Administrative Oversight. Dr. Bonne August, provost and vice-president for academic affairs at New York City College of Technology, was previously professor of English and department chair at Kingsborough Community College of CUNY. She holds a doctorate from New York University in British and American literature. Her earlier scholarly work focused on women writers and includes *By a Woman Writt: Literature from Six Centuries by and about Women* (1973, assistant editor) and archival, editorial, and critical work on the American poet Jean Garrigue. Dr. August's recent work has largely been in the areas of rhetoric, composition, and basic writing and professional development for faculty. She was a founding director of Looking Both Ways, a collaborative program of CUNY and the New York City Department of Education and co-editor of the collection *Facilitating Collaboration: Issues in High School/ College*

Professional Development (2004). Dr. August served as chair of the faculty committee that developed the CUNY Proficiency Examination, a mid-career test of academic literacy and critical thinking. She is co-editor of the peer-reviewed *Journal of Basic Writing*. A member of the Executive Committee of the Association of Departments of English, she has been selected to serve as Committee chair in 2008.

Project Director. Dr. Richard E. Hanley, an English professor at NYCCT, is the founding editor of the international *Journal of Urban Technology* (published by Taylor and Francis) and chairman of the board of the City University's CUNY Institute for Urban Systems (CIUS). In his editing of the journal, Professor Hanley has worked extensively on issues of sustainability. A special issue on this topic, entitled "Energy, Cities, and the Post-Oil Paradigm," is now under preparation. Similarly, his work at CIUS involves him in the production of knowledge about the systems and networks central to the sustainable operation of New York City, including water, energy, transportation, communications, information, buildings, and urban greenery. Professor Hanley was the general editor of the Networked Cities book series published by Routledge. In that series, he edited *Moving People, Goods, and Information in the 21st Century* (2004) and co-edited *Sustaining Urban Networks* (2005). He was a participant in the City Tech NEH grant, "Retentions and Transfigurations: The Technological Development and Social History of Five New York Neighborhoods." As a professor of English, Professor Hanley has specialized in the literature of the American City.

Lead Faculty

Professor Peter Spellane studied Chemistry at the University of Washington and the University of California at Santa Barbara. As a postdoctoral chemist at the IBM T. J. Watson Laboratory, he studied polymers and continued in technical work at corporate research labs of Akzo Nobel Chemicals in New York and in the Netherlands. His work at Akzo Nobel led to a number of patents concerning use of conjugated polymers in anti-corrosion coatings for metals. In September 2003, Dr. Spellane joined the Chemistry faculty at New York City College of Technology-CUNY. His research there concerns the preparation of new compounds that link dye molecules to conjugated polymers. In early 2006, Dr. Spellane became a co-director of the Writing Across the Curriculum/ Writing in the Disciplines program at City Tech.

Professor Robin Michals is an Assistant Professor in the department of Advertising Design and Graphic Arts. Her experience as an art director and designer for such major clients as American Express, FOX, CondeNet, and American Lawyer Media will support faculty in their efforts to organize and present the work created in their courses and in disseminating final projects into public forums. Her experience teaching photography and digital imaging at both the advanced and beginner levels will aid seminar participants in effectively expanding documentary assignments into visual media. She holds an M.F.A. from Columbia University and a B.A. from Barnard College.

Dr. Mark Noonan, Assistant Professor of English, has just published *The Places Where We Dwell: Reading and Writing About New York City*, with his City Tech English

Department colleagues, Dr. Juanita But and Dr. Brian Keener. Dr. Noonan will bring to the project an active scholarly orientation with particular expertise on how New York City and Brooklyn have entered into the literary imagination of people all over the world. He also teaches “Masterpieces of New York Literature” at New York University’s School of Continuing Education.

Dr. Stephen James is a professor in the Department of African American Studies at City Tech. He is a lifelong resident of the south Bronx who graduated from Lehman College. Upon graduation, he was accepted into the graduate program in English and American literature and language at Harvard GSAS. Since then, he has taught at Harvard in the Department of History and Literature and served as a visiting professor at Columbia. In 1996, he returned to teach at CUNY, first at Lehman and currently at City Tech.

Professor of Library Science Monica Berger will support seminar participants in the identification of resource materials in various media including maps and photographs, and will also facilitate the development of information literacy modules for integration into the new course. She holds a B.A. from Cornell University, an M.L.S. from Columbia, and an M.A. from the CUNY Graduate Center in American Studies. She is president of the New York section of the Association of College Research Libraries.

Selection of Participating Faculty: Under the direction of the provost and the project director, ten additional faculty participants will be selected. A competitive process will be used to provide a balanced cohort from technical and professional departments. Selection criteria will include the strength of a required Statement of Interest; commitment to complete all readings and attend all seminar sessions; and commitment to produce curricular materials for the new course.

5. Evaluation

The evaluation will describe the extent of project impact. The evaluation will focus on three levels of project impact. First is the measurement of how lead faculty understanding of the central theme of the project has changed as a result of participation in the Faculty Seminar and through interaction with other faculty participants and with consulting scholars. For that, the primary data source is the lead faculty themselves. Secondly, the evaluation will measure the contributions that faculty participants from technical and professional programs make to the new course. Specifically, new course content will be analyzed to determine what content from the faculty seminars has been included and what new pedagogical practices or modes of inquiry are demonstrated as a result of project participation. Here special note will be taken of activities that build students’ information literacy, defined as broadening the use of various types of information media and evaluating the sources of information critically. Finally, the evaluation will consider the impact of the project on the college as a whole as a strategy for strengthening the foundational knowledge of students and revitalizing the intellectual climate of the college.

6. Follow-up and Dissemination

Development of digital materials or other products

City Tech will explore with the Brooklyn Historical Society and the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment the possibility of co-sponsoring a documentary exhibit of faculty and student projects related to the theme. At minimum, such an exhibit will be presented at the College to show the community what this interdisciplinary project has achieved—a seminar and field study project that meshes disciplines and enlivens course content across the curriculum through the humanities.

The team of City Tech faculty members that has planned this faculty seminar will draw upon the exceptional learning resources of New York City, *qua urbi*, to understand historical, technological, and creative forces that have created downtown Brooklyn. Curriculum materials developed for the new course will be available through the Web. These follow-up activities are designed to support disseminate knowledge created in the seminar to a wider professional audience through web-based dissemination tools and presentations at professional conferences.

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