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Undergraduate Library Research Award

Project Title: *From Decay to Cool: Street Art and Urban Renewal in Kreuzberg, Berlin and the East End of London*

As a Political Science major passionate about art, I wrote my senior thesis on street art, a form of illegal urban art that communicates sociopolitical messages through images and paintings. I began this project in November 2013 after winning funding from the Nanovic Institute for European Studies and traveling to London to observe the East End, the district of London with the most street art. In viewing the phenomenon in action, I discovered that the abundance of street art was interestingly juxtaposed with gentrification. A later trip to Kreuzberg, a neighborhood in Berlin, unearthed the same phenomenon. Inspired by the curious presence of street art in both gentrifying spaces, my thesis aimed to determine why there is a relationship between street art and urban renewal through case studies of the East End and Kreuzberg.

Since I was completing qualitative case studies, I primarily used qualitative methods of inquiry, including observation, literature reviews, field notes, interviews and photographic documentation, to unpack the relationship between street art and gentrification. Through these methods, I first found that street art appeared most in neighborhoods that were transitioning out of poverty. I additionally used qualitative methods of inquiry, including government statistics on changes in demographics, poverty level and housing prices, to build strong, evidence-based analyses of urban renewal in Kreuzberg and the East End.

My research process involved fieldwork tasks: observations, interviews, field notes and documentation and Hesburgh Library tasks: consulting electronic journals, print sources, websites, subject librarians, research specialists and attending senior thesis camp. Library resources were crucial in my project because I could not build strong case studies on observation alone. Engaging with texts, librarians and my thesis advisor allowed me to learn more about Kreuzberg and the East End, synthesize quantitative and qualitative information, and determine why street art has been an element of urban renewal in these neighborhoods.

I would liken my research process to putting together a puzzle. While primary data from government and city reports were often displayed in objective Excel Spreadsheets, the library's extensive online journal collection, specifically publications such as *Urban Studies*, further helped me find specific dissertations, articles and papers on Kreuzberg and the East End. Information from Hesburgh Library sources helped me to contextualize and synthesize the figures on poverty, demographics and housing I encountered on city government websites. Importantly, library resources helped me define terms, a crucial step in my research. Through consulting electronic journals, I gained deep knowledge about my thesis's core ideas: gentrification, street art, and cultural capital.

I navigated the complicated process of managing, organizing and synthesizing the high quantity of information I found by starting my thesis early and organizing my writing into smaller sections. This way, I thoroughly integrated quantitative statistics, historical information and observations and made the overwhelming information synthesizing process more

manageable. Going section-by-section meant when I worked on my thesis in the library, I had specific literature, statistics or observations I wanted to access on library databases or the Internet. Through setting goals for finding and writing about specific information, I could focus on writing compelling analytical text.

The 2014 Fall Senior Thesis Camp was invaluable to my research process. The social aspect of the camp was especially motivating. Through meals and meetings, I conferred with other thesis writers and learned skills for writing, synthesizing information and recovering from writer's block. This 40-hour period of research and writing helped me organize my research into manageable chunks, streamline the academic language of my argument and successfully access and integrate information I found on shelves, in electronic journals and from my interviews and observations. Meeting with the Political Science librarian during camp taught me how to access the information I needed on electronic journals through better keyword searches and selecting appropriate databases. Mapping and outlining the information I encountered with another librarian helped me see the bigger picture of my research. I saw how ideas in my thesis: Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, Kelling's broken windows theory and gentrification were connected. Visualizing these relationships helped me synthesize them into writing.

After two years of finding and synthesizing evidence, I created new information. My thesis concluded that the East End and Kreuzberg have become areas characterized by street art and urban renewal because they were industrial districts severely bombed during WWII. Both were targeted to destroy factories that produced war goods and subsequently experienced severe damage and poverty. The resulting inexpensive housing stock made them attractive to artists, students, bohemians and immigrants beginning in the 1960's. Postwar physical decay made each area a target for illegal street art. Ironically, the cultural capital generated by the creative class and the rise of street art is translating to economic capital today in the form of increased rents, population and housing demand.