

AUSTIN MONITOR IN THE CLASSROOM

2015-16 FINAL REPORT, JUNE 2016



Google fiber



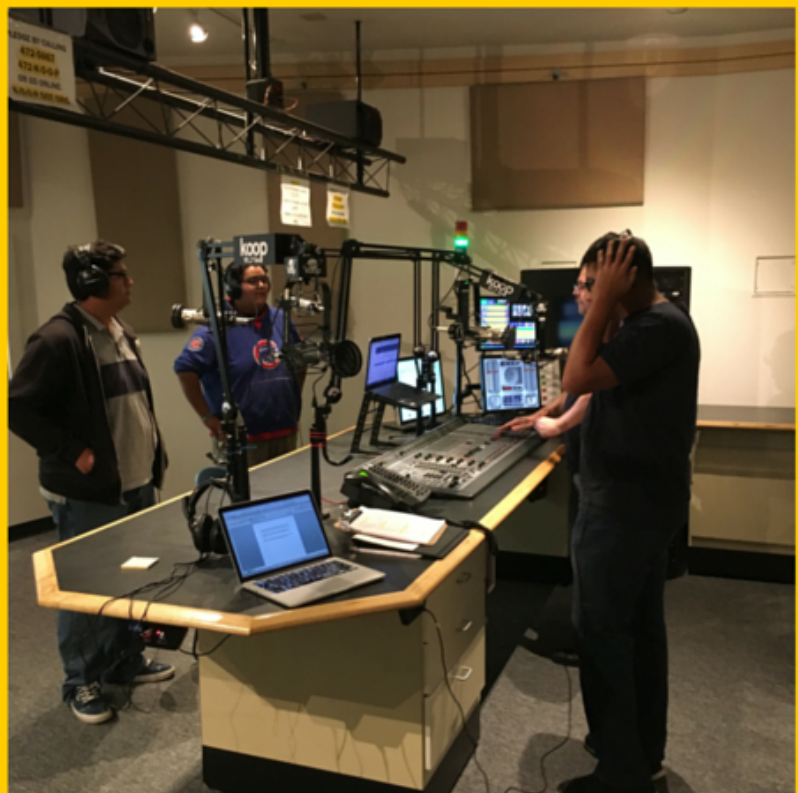
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In fall 2015, Google Fiber agreed to support a pilot version of the Capital of Texas Media Foundation's Monitor in the Classroom project. This effort is conceived as a way to inspire young future voters to participate in civic activity. In so doing, it is also an attempt to help local educators make existing subject material more relevant to students via Austin Monitor reporting. Over the first semester, with support from Monitor publisher Mike Kanin, the program produced opportunities that wouldn't have been available to students without Monitor involvement, including a class trip to present a traffic solution to an Austin City Council Member, a trip by the same students to present to the entire Austin City Council, an award-winning civics fair prize, and broader understanding of U.S. history through local reporting. The second semester continued our program of supplemented learning experiences with the use of Monitor content to enrich AP US History lessons, the production of a "This American Life"-style radio program that examined the history of Lanier High, the neighborhood that surrounds it, and the perceptions of its students against the backdrop of a fight at a school basketball game, and even a civics application for a freshman math class. The Monitor was also invited to assist teachers at the Austin Achieve Charter School with student preparation for the Annette Strauss Institute's Speak Up Speak Out civics fair. There, student efforts, with Monitor assistance, resulted in an award-winning entry. Though the Monitor did being initial preparations to offer English programming at Travis High School, where Kanin also visited with two sections, that effort ran smack into testing season, and was delayed. Subsequent discussions with AISD administration officials produced a suggestion that, in order to build a well rounded, saleable effort, the program focus on Lanier High School for the 2016-17 year. Conversations are currently underway with the school's geography, journalism, criminal justice, and economics departments. Those will be added to AP US History, AP Government, and math efforts from 2015-16. There are also plans to discuss an English program, and to produce another reported audio effort.

Impact Summary

2015-2016

Students Served.....	180
Participating Schools.....	2
Participating Classrooms.....	4
Monitor Classroom Visits...	25
Electeds reached.....	11



Progress at Lanier

The Monitor's Mike Kanin met with Lanier teacher Taylor Hawkins and Lanier Principal Ryan Hopkins. Hawkins and Hopkins listed off a set of teachers they felt would be most interested in the program. Eventually, two—AP U.S. Government teacher Guillermo Tabasco and AP U.S. History teacher Laurie Beaman—agreed to get started with the program immediately.



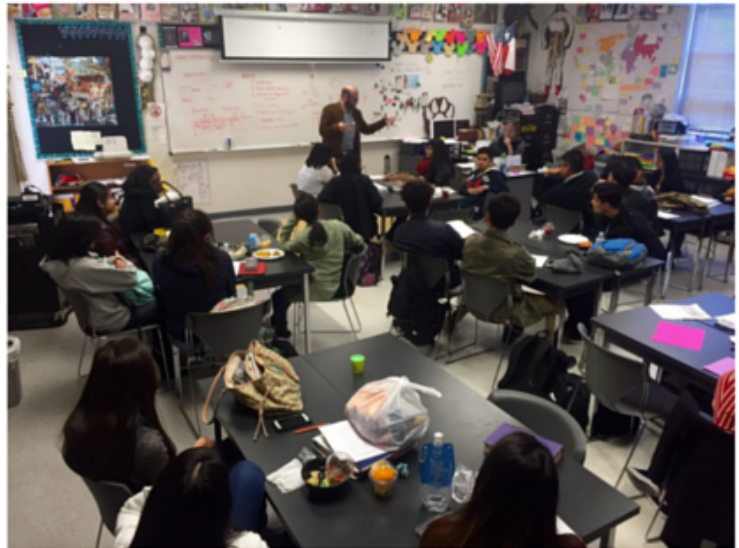
AN "OUT OF THEIR WORLD" EXPERIENCE

Government Class to City Hall Guillermo Tabasco's fall 2015 AP U.S. Government class was the first to participate in the Austin Monitor in the Classroom program. Beginning in October 2015, Tabasco's class used the Monitor for regular current events reading assignments. This was supplemented with two in-class visits from Kanin. The first, for a lesson on the role of media in a democracy, and the second for a lesson on special interests and how they interact with government. (Each of these presentations is attached in the appendix.) In addition to these uses, Tabasco employed the Monitor to supplement an already-scheduled lesson in ordinance writing. Tabasco's students elected to pursue their concerns over traffic safety around Lanier High, and in neighborhoods surrounding the school, and wrote a resolution calling for improvements. The Monitor added a practical element to this exercise, arranging for a class visit with Austin City Council Member Greg Casar . In preparation for the visit, students prepared a powerpoint presentation. The meeting took place in Casar's office on November 18, 2015. Armed with facts about the situation—and a great sense of timing, informed by Monitor coverage of a coming vote on the dispensation of transportation dollars—the students convinced Casar that the improvements should be considered for a portion of the dollars reserved for his district by Council vote. In late January, Casar invited Tabasco's class to deliver their presentation to the rest of Council (pictured, above). This they did, and their proposal was included as part of a set of transportation-related expenditures pitched by the Council Member.

For his part, Tabasco noted that the experience offered his students an opportunity to engage in government in a way that would not otherwise be available. He called the experience, "out of their world."

"FANTASTIC CONTENT"

History Class made relevant A.P. U.S. History teacher Laurie Beaman elected to use the Monitor in the classroom program to supplement existing lessons plans. She asked Kanin to produce a list of articles that would touch on six successive already planned-for themes (see the appendix for details). She assigned these articles as reading material for her students. Beaman said that the synthesis between existing lessons and Monitor content was "fantastic," and added that her students asked questions she couldn't answer about Austin and the articles they were reading. This has produced a slight change for the second semester of they year. All 85 of Beaman's students were able to participate in this portion of the program. The design here prompted deeper thinking about critical local issues, and future efforts should produce valuable discussion opportunities for Lanier students.

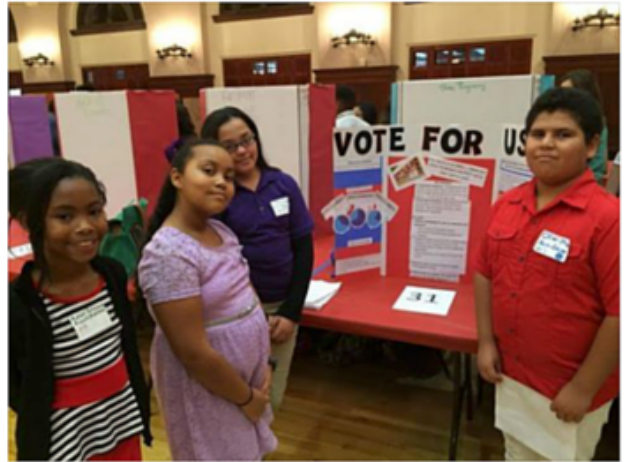


"You don't know Lanier" Beaman also partnered with the Monitor to offer five of her students a chance to report, record, edit, and produce their own "This American Life"-style radio program. Spurred on by a Tweet from an Austin American-Statesman reporter that suggested that Lanier students had been the primary instigators behind a fight at a basketball game, Beaman's students attempted to offer a portrayal of their school that differed from a seeming narrative about the Lanier community. They explored issues of race, growth, and gentrification through the frame of Lanier's history, as well as the neighborhood that surrounds it. The program aired on May 25th on KOOP Radio as part of the Austin Monitor Radio program. After the student-produced show aired, its producers joined Monitor publisher Mike Kanin for an interview about the project.

The logarithms are going to get you Math teacher Taylor Hawkins used Monitor coverage of the City of Austin's sound ordinance—specifically, the behavior of sound waves—to teach a practical application of logarithms. To do it, Hawkins hosted presentations from an active neighbor concerned about the impact of sound waves from outdoor festivals held in Zilker Park on his quality of life, a promoter in charge of one of those festivals, and Austin Police Department reps who are charged with enforcing the ordinance. Each representative made arguments based on their positions. Austin Police reps offered details about the ordinance, how officials measure sound, and detail about enforcement. Hawkins then led his students through a series of regression tests using the school's PA system. These were designed to mimic conditions in the field. Students then compiled their data, and presented it to a panel including the Monitor's Kanin, Council Member Greg Casar, and the neighborhood representative. Each presentation reached conclusions about flaws in the current sound ordinance, offered solutions, and used the math associated with it all to address the issue.

Progress at Austin Achieve

Austin Monitor in the Classroom started at Austin Achieve with teacher Ellie Ezzell. Ellie saw an opportunity to use Monitor content to help her Civics Club prepare an entry for the Annette Strauss Institute's Speak Up! Speak Out! civics fair.



"THANK YOU FOR ALL OF YOUR SUPPORT"

Getting 'em while they are young Ezzell's club is part of a mandatory extra-curricular program provided by Austin Achieve. She and the sixth graders who participated in the Civics Club met twice a week for much of the fall semester. Kanin joined them for multiple sessions. This included a presentation that introduced students to the branches of government as they are organized in the City of Austin (see appendix). However, Ezzell found Kanin most useful as a resource to a group of students working on a project for the fair about civic engagement. There, Kanin used his expertise to guide research and the development of the project from early on. Though the students did not place, they did win an award. Ezzell puts it in context: "They (all students with Austin Achieve) were the youngest group there, competing against 8th and 9th graders," she told Kanin in an email. "There were about 400 competitors presenting 75 projects. They gave out 7 awards, a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place, and then four honorable mentions in four categories. "The (civic engagement group) won an honorable mention for creativity!!!," she continued. "Thank you for all of your support! They were so pumped to win, and they did an incredible job." Despite ultimate success, it is worth noting that the Austin Achieve wing of the project ran into issues with accessing the publication. Ezzell attributed this to age, and the fact that not all students had access to email—a necessity for Monitor log-in. We aim to address these problems in the second semester.

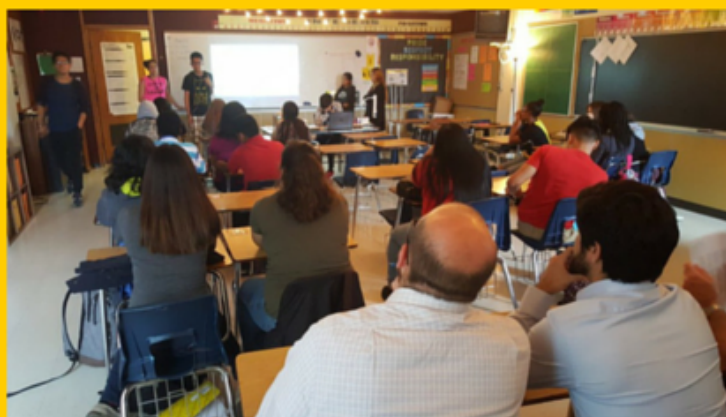
WHAT'S NEXT?

CoTMFs work to establish Monitor in the Classroom programs in targeted areas this fall was supplemented by continuing outreach to test interested in expanding the program. To that end, Matthew Meldrum, AISD's High School Language Arts Curriculum Specialist, arranged for Kanin to attend two cross-district departmental meetings. From journalism teachers looking for help establishing a school newspaper, to English teachers looking for supplemental writing material, interest there was significant. Indeed, as we've already noted, there is interest from other teachers at Lanier and Austin Achieve in expanding the program on those two campuses. Meldrum and Kanin have also discussed building a potential curriculum around feature writing. Though the Monitor does not currently feature such writing, Kanin has experience in the field, and would offer his expertise here. CoTMF has also established contact with government and history administrators at AISD. Officials with the district will remain apprised of progress with the program. At a higher level, AISD District 6 rep (and vice chair) Paul Saldaña has indicated interested in the program. As the program grows, statements of support from AISD's board seem likely.

That all said, though initial success over the fall term left CoTMF with the impression that a fast growing program—one that reached a much larger realization within another 12-24 months—would be possible, we plan to reconfigure that approach. That, after a suggestion from AISD admin officials who are familiar with granting in this space suggested that a focus on one high school might be the best way to both focus efforts and build a program that is sturdy enough to scale. That, along with conversations with Lanier faculty and staff, have led us to go deeper rather than wider. In so doing, we aim to mount the Monitor in the classroom for a single campus.

We've seen exciting results in a limited pilot project that has fostered civic engagement in small group of Austin's students, and strong exposure for the Monitor and our mission to foster transparency and engagement in local government. We remain grateful to Google Fiber for the support necessary to take these first steps. We hope that we can continue to count on the organization as we do the work that will form a foundation for a program that reach students across the city.

Still, growth here is not just about the Monitor, Lanier, or AISD. We believe that this model holds the possibility for replication across the state and indeed the U.S. As the program develops, we aim to use the lessons (read: new knowledge and the literal lessons) we take from this experience as a starting point for other interested parties and partners.



APPENDIX

Lanier Plans, 2016-17

Austin Monitor Collaboration Proposal 2016-2017 School Year

Subject: AP US History

Summary

The Austin Monitor would like to support and enhance AP US History content by providing synthesis from historical content and themes to current issues facing the people of Austin. History--especially US History--is typically taught as a somewhat stagnant subject matter, and often ignores connecting past trends to current issues. By fostering these real-world connections, we hope to increase student interest and understanding of both past subject matter and current debates within the Austin community, as well as better prepare them for the synthesis portion of the AP US History exam. We also hope to highlight the minority experience and population Lanier serves within the context of history, as well as in the current Austin community.

Resources

The Austin Monitor will provide themed articles for students, that are selected based on the content that they are studying in class. There will be accompanying questions to the articles co-created by the publisher and classroom teacher.

There will also be discussions (some during class and some during lunch time) led by the Austin monitor publisher, in which students can openly discuss current situations within the Austin community.

The monitor can also provide links to statistical information, as well as potentially bringing in expert guest speakers from within the community where appropriate.

Vision

This collaboration would be on-going throughout the year. At least one article would be presented each unit, although there may be more as applicable. The teacher would work with the publisher, Mr. Kanin, by providing the class scope and sequence, and requesting articles around these pre-planned units and content criteria.

Austin Monitor facts

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We will partner with Google Fiber to focus on one high school during the 2016-17 school year. This will allow

Austin Monitor Collaboration Proposal 2016-2017 School Year

Subject: AP US Government

Summary

The Austin Monitor would like to also return to Lanier AP US Government classrooms in the fall. Last fall, the Monitor provided support for Guillermo Tabasco's class by offering presentations on the role of media in government and the current governmental landscape. We also worked with Mr. Tabasco's students on a project that eventually saw a group make a pitch to Austin City Council Member Greg Casar for traffic improvements around Lanier. Casar then invited those students to brief the full Austin City Council about their proposal.

We aim to repeat this project, or to serve in any capacity necessary to supplement existing curriculum.

Resources

The Monitor can provide support in the form of relevant articles, in-class discussion, and connections to key thought leaders and decision makers that will better illustrate the role of local government in Austin--and, in so doing, make curriculum more relevant for students.

Vision

This collaboration would be on-going throughout the year. At least one article would be presented each unit, although there may be more as applicable. The teacher would work with the publisher, Mr. Kanin, by providing the class scope and sequence, and requesting articles around these pre-planned units and content criteria.

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Austin Monitor Collaboration Proposal 2016-2017 School Year

Algebra I

Summary

Last year, Lanier math teacher Taylor Hawkins build a program to study logarithms by using the Monitor's coverage of the City of Austin sound ordinance. With help from the Monitor, this unit featured in-class presenters from the neighborhoods concerned with sound pollution, the Austin Police Department, who enforce the ordinance, and Transmission Events, who are directly impacted by it. Students engaged with speakers, did field tests in decibel measurement, and performed calculations designed to test the validity of CoA rules.

This all culminated with a presentation to a panel that included Monitor publisher Mike Kanin and Austin City Council Member Greg Casar from students on whether or how city officials should alter their sound ordinance.

We believe that this approach made what might otherwise have been abstract math concepts more relevant to the students engaged in the program. We hope to offer this unit, or something very like it, in 2016-17.

We are also open to any other approach that might better fit with existing curriculum.

Resources

The Monitor can offer access to sound ordinance coverage, help in digging-up media coverage from that publication and others, connections to key community members (as noted above), and logistical support in making arrangements.

Monitor publisher Mike Kanin can also serve as a discussion leader, and conversation moderator.

Monitor support should allow for smooth curriculum integration.

Vision

This unit covers roughly three weeks. Monitor publisher, Mike Kanin, will work with the teacher(s) to make all in-class arrangements, curate class content, and ensure program success.

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Austin Monitor Collaboration Proposal 2016-2017 School Year

Criminal Justice

Summary

At the heart of the emotional national debate over police use of force is a tangible question: What does it take to police a city? The City of Austin has engaged in this debate over the past decade as it wrestled with what has been the ratio used to determine the number of police officers that APD should hire.

This unit would look at that debate. In so doing, it provides real-world material that will draw students into the topic of Criminal Justice in a way that would, we believe, make the subject more relevant to those in the class.

Students could use this information to weigh in on the issue, perhaps as part of a presentation to thought-leaders and/or elected officials.

Resources

Monitor publisher Mike Kanin will arrange for speakers, curate a selection of Monitor (and other) coverage of the subject, connections to key members--including the likes of APD officials, former Council Member and current LBJ professor Bill Spelman, who played a key role in this debate (and who's area of study runs along these lines), and current Council members who continue the debate--and provide general logistical support. This should allow for smooth curriculum integration.

Vision

This would be offered as a unit.

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Austin Monitor Collaboration Proposal 2016-2017 School Year

Finance/Money Matters

Summary

The Austin City Council commands a \$3 billion-plus annual budget. Each year, city officials wrangle over revenues and expenditures in what amounts to the greatest show in local politics.

We propose a unit that would integrate this debate into lessons about how money works on a more personal level. In so doing, students would learn that budgeting does indeed matter, even for an entity the size of the City of Austin--and that many of the concepts involved in individual budgeting carry up through all levels of money management.

The Monitor could also explore a unit that would look at what it takes to start a business in the City of Austin. This would help students understand the economy of the City, the process involved in setting up a business, and otherwise generally make the concept less abstract.

Resources

The Monitor can provide access to our extensive coverage of the City of Austin's budgeting process. We can also provide connections to key Council members, CoA officials who engage in the budgeting process (including Ed Van Eenoo, current deputy CFO and former High School teacher), business community leaders, and our reporting staff who have to make sometimes-opaque processes clear for the general public.

Vision

Each of these ideas represents one individual unit.

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Austin Monitor Collaboration Proposal 2016-2017 School Year

Algebra II Finance

Summary

Many argue that a key reason for the City of Austin's success are its continued high bond ratings. These allow for lower interest rates, greater interest in bond sales, and general security that--city leaders might argue--solidifies Austin's position at the top of many national lists.

This unit would examine those ratings, the theoretical impact of a decline there (what might lead to such a decline), and the concepts of municipal finance. We'd use existing curriculum to bring relevance to what otherwise would be an abstract concept.

Other ideas could include a deeper examination of the inner workings of municipal finance, or anything any other approach that might better fit with existing curriculum.

Resources

The Monitor can provide access to articles and coverage of city bond ratings, and the overall impact of maintaining a positive rating. We can also provide access to city officials who deal with these ratings, and can discuss their importance, as well as local economists who understand their broader impact.

Vision

This is a unit.

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Austin Monitor Collaboration Proposal 2016-2017 School Year

English I and II

Summary

The Austin Monitor would provide expert support for existing writing programs built around student construction of op-ed and feature pieces.

Resources

Though the Monitor does not publish op-eds or features, Monitor publisher Mike Kanin has experience in writing feature-length articles, and is generally aware of industry standards about each of these subjects.

Kanin would provide stand-alone support for teachers in the program. This would include article curation, discussion of article construction, and help in filtering subject matter.

Vision

This is a stand-alone program.

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Aquatic Science

Summary

The current state of Austin city politics is framed by a conversation that cast the local environmental community against a developer who sought to build a project close to Barton Springs--and, more importantly, the development restrictions that resulted from that interaction. Those restrictions have helped define Austin's growth over the past two decades.

And though environmental issues run through the Save Our Springs ordinance, some would argue that runoff and impervious cover reside at the center of all this. We propose an ongoing Monitor-fueled effort that looks at these regulations, their origins in environmental activism, and the aquatic science behind them.

Other options include a deeper look at the highland lakes, lake levels, water policy, and the politics that make it all so fascinating.

Resources

The Monitor would bring its continuing coverage of the Save Our Springs movement, access to key scientists, city politicians, activists, developers, and legal experts connected to the ordinance, and logistical support in arranging it into a class schedule.

Publisher Mike Kanin has, in his reporting life, covered both the LCRA and Austin Water. He would bring his experience in those arenas.

Vision

This would be a recurring plan.

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Economics

Summary

Austin, Texas remains at or near the top of any number of superficial lists. Some argue that this popularity plays as part of an economic engine that has, they would argue, raised the cost of living to untenable levels.

We propose a look at what it takes in terms of income to live in the City of Austin, how this has changed overtime, and what factors contribute to the situation.

Alternately (or additionally), transportation is perhaps the headlining item in City of Austin politics of late. The question of how, where, and even whether to build a rail line remains a central question in that conversation.

We propose a unit that looks at the economics of transportation in the City of Austin. What goes into the key decisions around the construction of a rail project? Why is one idea better than another. What does the lack of a system cost the local population? What role does the local economy play in it all?

Resources

The Austin Monitor will bring our coverage of the rail issue going back over the past decade. We can also offer connections to experts that can outline the decision-making process that went into the most recent bond election, and logistical support in setting the unit up.

Vision

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English IV

Summary

The Monitor hopes to find a partner in the English IV program willing to use our work as a teaching tool. Whether this effort includes lessons in rhetoric and argument construction based on local issues, references the Monitor as an example of reverse pyramid construction, or somewhere in between, we believe that this sort of approach will both offer students a reason to pay attention to local civics, and bring a new sort of relevance to english coursework.

We're open to serving whatever needs would best fit your classroom and civic engagement.

Resources

The Monitor offers its archive as a teaching tool, alongside publisher Mike Kanin, who can use his many years of freelancing experience to help offer real-world examples of the importance (perhaps relevance?) of writing.

Vision

We'd adjust the program to whatever suits the teacher's needs.

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Geography

Summary

A sense of place, of course, defines the character of a city. Of late, that sense of place has been disrupted as many major U.S. cities go through the process of gentrification.

The Monitor proposes a unit that looks at the economic, historical, social, and geographic factors that contribute to the process of gentrification in the City of Austin.

Additionally (or alternately), we could look at local transportation, why transportation lines exist (and don't) in certain areas of the city, and future prospects for transportation in the City of Austin.

Resources

The Austin Monitor provides access to its coverage of the growth of the City of Austin. We also offer access to key politicians, thinkers, and community activists who engage in the conflicts that develop around the process of gentrification, as well as logistical support to ensure a successful classroom implementation.

Vision

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