



## **Evidence Document**

for Higher Learning Commission Reaccreditation

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**Document Title:** Tibetans in Exile Today (TEXT) Program

**Office of Origin:** J. William Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences

### **Document Summary:**

The TEXT Program is an oral-history project designed to record the stories of Tibetans currently living in refugee settlements in India. The program focuses on the Tibetans who left their country in 1959 but still have vivid memories of traditional Tibetan culture.



J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT  
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

TIBETANS IN EXILE TODAY

# XT Program

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University of Arkansas

[Fulbright College Honors Program](#)

Old Main 517

Fayetteville AR 72701

[text@uark.edu](mailto:text@uark.edu)

P: (479) 575-2509

F: (479) 575-2491



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## Testimonials

"I originally embarked on The TEXT Program hoping to assist Tibetans living in exile; however, their compassion, hopefulness, and zeal for life made a greater impression on my life than I ever could on theirs. Not many students can say that they have had the opportunity to create and contribute to a dialogue between strikingly different cultures, and to find myself among those ranks was an enlightening and humbling experience. I now feel more comfort holding this position, and am excited to see how I can use the knowledge I gained from The TEXT Program in a future foreign affairs career." — Hilary Zedlitz (TEXT '15)

"Prior to leaving for India, I became aware of a couple of people who had participated in The TEXT Program 2+ times — meaning they forked over thousands of dollars one summer, then chose to do so again two summers later. I wondered



what was so alluring that a broke, overworked college student would choose to make the push a second or third time. I learned why. TEXT is not your typical study abroad program. Every program will say it's atypical, but this one is truly magical. You'll learn more about humanity than you would while studying a foreign language on the Mediterranean. You'll uncover a knowledge-set our universities do not teach. Personal fulfillment aside, your work will contribute to the nonviolent efforts of the Tibetan people to achieve either full independence or autonomy with China. Sign up for The TEXT Program if you're up for a journey like none other." — Lauren Robinson (TEXT '15)

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"For a while I thought we would never get to India, but once we got there, I never wanted to leave. It was so much more than a backdrop for the Taj Mahal - the country itself was vibrant and beautiful. Aside from my interview with a Tibetan, driving up the foothills of the Himalayas to Dharamsala was my favorite part of the trip. However the TEXT Program isn't just about going to another country. Through the interviews, I got to learn about the culture of the Tibetan people - a culture that they have worked so hard to preserve so far from their homeland. The Tibetans we met were so extraordinarily welcoming and compassionate. Every interview we did was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The TEXT Program was incredible." — Samantha Mason (TEXT '15)

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"The University of Arkansas' TEXT Program gave us unprecedented access to exiled Tibetan communities in India. Geshe Dorjee, a Tibetan monk teaching at the University, and Professor Burris made travel arrangements and organized interviews with their contacts in India. The two men were able to bring us into the heart of the Tibetan struggle and to give us a brief glimpse of a culture in exile. The exposure we had to the Tibetans living in India was unique and something that few Westerners will ever experience. I am truly thankful for The TEXT Program and all that it brings to students at the University of Arkansas." — Adams Pryor (TEXT '15)

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"The TEXT Program provided me with insight into two opposite worlds—one of injustice, and one of hope—both populated by the Tibetan people. I knew little about the Tibetan struggle or way of life before beginning this program. In three short weeks, I helped document the stories of a people in exile, and I also caught a glimpse of something beautiful. I watched face after face light up with hope for the future. I was shown love from complete strangers. People who had every right in the world to play the victim and blame others were living their lives with hope, compassion, and understanding beyond my comprehension. I came away with a wonderful cultural experience and empathy for the Tibetan struggle, but the Tibetans did not only share their stories. They helped shaped mine."—Jessi Hicks (TEXT '13)

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"The TEXT Program allows students the rare privilege of penetrating communities of Tibetans striving to preserve one of the world's oldest, purest cultures outside their homeland, as well as the adventure of exploring the rich, complex culture of India. After going on the trip, I do feel as if I've helped the Tibetans in some small way, but I am more persuaded that the Tibetans have helped me. The precedent their culture sets for compassion in everyday life is unrivaled and affected me deeply. Their perseverance in unimaginable conflict is inspiring. My mind and heart are broader now. Every place we visited, every person we interviewed gave me a new piece of the world—from the beautiful to the deplorable—to examine and learn from. I'll never get over my experience with the TEXT Program."—Emalie Spann (TEXT '13)

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"The TEXT program was my first trip out of the United States. Three weeks with a compassionate and enduring people was an introduction to the global community that was better than I could have ever possibly imagined. TEXT is much more than just a study abroad program; it is a trip that will cause you to reflect on many different issues and hopefully, transform the way you perceive the world. This is a once in a lifetime experience that I would recommend to anyone, regardless of background."—Caitlin Curry (TEXT '13)

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"As far as study abroad programs go, the TEXT Program is unique. We experienced India through the lenses of humanitarians, rather than those of a student, and our most precious lessons were learned in the service of an oppressed people, rather than in the classroom. (Not to mention, we got to ride an elephant.) Rare is the individual who, before leaving college, can say, "I have made a meaningful difference in this world." Following our trip abroad, we can say that with confidence. The TEXT Project has proven to be a great blessing in my life."—Bobby Howard ('11)

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"It's difficult to find the right words to describe this trip because nothing could do it proper justice. The TEXT Program is unlike any other study abroad program out there. It stands apart on all levels. The TEXT Program exposes you to diverse, rich cultures living side by side, while at the same time you are able to assist the struggle of the Tibetan people as you gather and record their remarkable stories. You learn countless new things about yourself and others. From this trip you will walk away with unique experiences, a new self and world perspective, and a strong desire to help others."—Shea Stewart ('11)

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"I will never forget the perspective through which the TEXT Program has presented India, the Tibetan community, and by extension, the world. Dr. Burris, Geshe Dorjee, and our many other teachers on this trip taught me the virtue of asking questions and listening to their answers with an open heart and mind. As a potential member of the global medical community, this and the many other lessons of this trip will surely come into both my professional and personal practices."—*Devin O'Dea ('11)*

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"At first glance, it is easy to see why the TEXT Program is an alluring and acclaimed study abroad program. But the real greatness of the TEXT Program lies in the fact that it facilitates a community between people separated by language, ways of life, and thousands of miles. In a world where populations are increasingly defined by their differences from each other, the TEXT Program offers an opportunity to bond over common human characteristics often pushed to the wayside by the everyday hustle and bustle: compassion, conviction, comedy and friendship."—*Rachel Atterstrom ('11)*

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"The TEXT Program changed my world-view. I'm currently working to get into graduate school, after which I'd like to return to India to teach. At a time when I had no idea what I was going to do after I graduated, I was given a huge gift by the TEXT Program: clarity and purpose."—*Megan Garner ('08, '09)*

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"I think that The TEXT Program is important to the university because it shows what capabilities any university has-- including this one--to become more involved around the world, not just in our own community and not just in the US, but branching out to Tibetan Buddhism in India. Whenever I would tell someone about The TEXT Program, they'd be like, "Oh, where are you doing that?" and I was like "Oh, at the University of Arkansas."—*Leah Fleischner ('09)*

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"The TEXT Program provided an opportunity to explore a rich culture of philosophy, resilience and self-determination. As a social worker, the TEXT Program gave me new insight into social justice issues that require the involvement and support of the international community. The program ignited in me an interest to further research and studies of nonviolence as well as continue advocacy work for the Tibetan cause. I am currently a graduate student at Tulane University with an emphasis on international social work. My long-term goal is to work with the Tibetan organizations to conduct needs assessments in the settlement camps for the development of social service programs that will assist the displaced community."—*Leann Halsey ('08)*

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"The stories that this program is saving are a priceless and dwindling resource, both for the cause of the exiled Tibetan community and for the world. While I feel that on one hand my experience strengthened my resolve to pursue a career in human rights law, it also helped give validity to my passion for writing by showing me the immense value of stories and the emotive power stories can have on the world. I am honored to have been a part of these efforts. People rarely have the opportunity to do so much to bring justice by doing as little as holding a camera."—*Jane Kelly ('09)*

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"The TEXT Program gives students a different perspective on how to live, on how to think, on how to associate with people. As westerners we really get caught up in all this, y'know, somebody pulls out in front of us and we get upset. And you see these Tibetan people who've had everything taken away from them, and they're just so innately happy. And it's something we all can learn from, quite honestly."—*Stacy Calloway ('09)*

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"While I always wanted to become a lawyer and help the disadvantaged, I was unsure how I could really make a difference. After being exposed to the struggles of Tibetan refugees first-hand with The TEXT Program, I realized that I could use my time as a law student to study immigration and international law so I can work to protect human rights. And that's what I'm going to do."—*Jeremiah Wax ('08, '09)*

"I applied to The TEXT Program on a whim, having no idea that it would play such a major role in my life. The trip itself is hard to describe, because words alone cannot relate all I learned, felt, and experienced. The project exposed me to several rich cultures, but I also saw injustice and suffering, and it is due to this experience that I found my passion for human rights and international law, with hopes of pursuing a life and career devoted to this passion."—*Matthew Haynie ('09)*



"The TEXT Program is such a humbling experience. Yes, we are there to help get the Tibetan story out to the world, but these people give more to us than we could ever give to them. The Tibetan communities that we work with in India are absolutely beautiful and have so much to share with us -- it's an invaluable opportunity."—*Shannon Sanders ('09)*

"Being uprooted from the boundaries that limit your perceptions provides for a truly new experience. India demands that one see, hear, smell, taste, and feel the differences that create unique cultures while reiterating the fundamental truth that we are all one and the same. The TEXT Program has the added benefit of emphasizing altruistic development, understanding, and preservation, which is much needed during our precarious times."—*Angela Moore ('08)*

"Interacting with Tibetans, who tend to be so rich in spirit, is truly a life-enhancing experience. If you want to get beyond the poverty mentality that you were taught to accept and actually do something to make yourself a better person and the world a better place, The TEXT Program is for you."—*Alex Hetherington ('09)*

"I wanted to be a part of The TEXT Program because it is a completely unique and immediately relevant study abroad opportunity that has the rare quality of benefiting everyone involved with it. It was truly a life-changing experience that I am glad I was able to share in."—*Casey Trzcinski ('09)*

"I'm generally skeptical about any assertion saying that the key to life is x or the thing that makes society work is y, but what I observed in getting a first-hand exposure to Tibetan culture in India really impressed me: the idea that a reflexive compassion, a built in respect for other people and their happiness and suffering, these can really lead to social benefits. What you learn from The TEXT Program changes the way you look at your own lives, the way you act in society, and the way you see the world as a community."—*Matthew Sample ('08)*



UNIVERSITY OF  
ARKANSAS

THE YOU OF A

1 University of Arkansas

Fayetteville, Arkansas

(479) 575-2000

[uofa@uark.edu](mailto:uofa@uark.edu)

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### **Calendar of events**

- [Ageism Study Participants Needed \(9/19/2016 - 12/9/2016\)](#)
- [OLLI: If You Have a Passion For Teaching... \(10/24/2016 - 6/30/2017\)](#)
- [SMART Recovery \(10/26/2016 - 12/7/2016\)](#)
- [FREE Webinar Series \(11/10/2016 - 4/13/2017\)](#)