

CENSUS ESSAY

EXAMINING YOUR OWN COMMUNITY WITH CENSUS DATA

HABILIDADES (SKILLS)

- Interviewing people about social trends
- Data analysis
- Weaving together information from different sources

TAREA (ASSIGNMENT)

This **two-phase** essay is an opportunity for students to use U.S. Census data to explain social trends in their own hometowns or in a geographic area that they are familiar with or interested in analyzing. I would prefer for each student to write his or her essay about the town/city that they grew up in. However, I am open to students writing about a town or city other than their hometown.

Please focus your essay on recent social trends within the community you choose to study: unemployment, housing ownership, hiring trends, population increases/decreases, population types (more/less ethnic groups), migration, homicide rates, teen birthrates, suicides, etc. Your essay should also incorporate two or three short interviews with individuals currently living in your community. Interviews are best done in person but obviously they may be done over the phone if going home is not an option.

This assignment is divided into **two separate phases**, each of which is described below.

Part I:

1. Create a folder on your computer/jumpdrive labeled "Soc 100 Census Essay"
 - a. Within this folder create a Microsoft Word document titled "Soc 100 Essay Part 1."
 - b. Within this folder create an additional document titled "Soc 100 Essay Part 2."
 - c. Within this folder create an additional document titled "Notes for Essay 1 & 2."
 - d. Within "Soc 100 Essay" create another folder labeled "Census Data."
 - e. Within "Soc 100 Essay" create a folder labeled "Scholarly Articles."

- f. Within “Soc 100 Essay” create another folder labeled “Interviews.”
 - g. Within “Interviews” create a Microsoft Word document titled “Notes from Interviews.”
2. Conduct four short interviews with individuals currently living in the place you want to study. Interviews should range from 10-20 minutes. Please use the [StoryCorp](#) app to help you come up with good interview questions. I highly recommend using StoryCorp to structure your interview *and* record it. In general, your interviews should address questions like:
 - a. What are some of the principle social issues affecting _____(town name) in recent years?
 - b. Can you please provide some examples or elaborate? (If they haven’t already)
 - c. Why do you think these issues are so widespread/prevalent?
 - d. Be sure to jot down your interviewees’ main points within the document titled “Notes from Interviews.”
 - e. After your interviews write down any additional information you think might be of importance.

When you are done, save your interview recordings and notes from your interviews in the folder titled “Interviews.”

3. Go to [The Conversation](#) and look for several articles that address the social issue you’re interested in writing about.
 - a. Save these articles in the folder you created titled “Scholarly articles.”
 - b. Follow the links within the articles on [The Conversation](#) that are of interest to you as a means of finding several additional resources. Save these articles within the same folder.
 - c. As you read these articles, begin thinking about how larger social issues (mines closing, tourist industries opening/closing, military service, war, anti-immigrant sentiments, etc.) may relate to other trends (minority/majority populations, employment rates, housing ownership, birthrates, education rates, etc.).
4. Next, look over the notes you jotted down during their interviews. Try to identify any reoccurring trends across the interviews and articles that you read.
 - a. Open the document “Notes for Essay 1 & 2” and type up a series of notes concerning the major issues in the community in question.
 - b. In “Notes for Essay 1 & 2” jot down any thoughts you have and at least two hypotheses. (Ex: H₁: Economic downturns lead to lower fertility rates.)
 - c. Think of what kind of data might be useful in researching the validity of your hypotheses.
5. Census Factfinder: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml#none>

- a. Under “Community Facts” type in the name of the community you are focusing on. Select your town and click on “Go”.
 - b. In the section labeled “CommunityFacts” you will find information from the *2010 Census* and from the *American Community Survey*. Review the data in each of these links and search specifically for data that helps reveal the social issues you have identified in the community.
 - c. Download all of the available data on your town as Microsoft Excel files (.xls) and save the data to the folder labeled “Census Data”.
 - d. Repeat these steps for data from the *2000 Census*. (See directions below.)
6. Click on “Advanced Search” and then “Show Me All.” (Left-hand side of the screen.)
 - a. This option will allow you to filter for other variables you might be interested in.
 - b. Begin by clicking on “Topics” and then filter for “Year” by choosing 2000.
7. Create the following charts in Excel:
 - a. A chart of population growth for town, including data from the 2000 and 2010 census.
 - b. A chart of population growth by race and ethnicity for 2000 and 2010.
 - c. A chart of education attainment for 2000 and 2010.
 - d. A chart of median income for 2000 and 2010.
 - e. A chart of unemployment for 2000 and 2010.
 - f. A chart of single-mother households 2000 and 2010.
 - g. Any other chart(s) you think might be useful for your final essay.
8. Essay 1 Write-up: First, provide a brief description of your hometown—at least one paragraph. Include basic information, including: total population, economic activity, political tendencies, types of education and any other relevant social issues. Second, introduce each of your charts with a brief description. Be sure to copy and paste your chart into word and provide each chart with a title. Finally, discuss a particular finding from your initial analysis that caught your attention. Why is this finding of interest to you?
9. **Turn in Essay 1 Write-up in class on the date specified in the course syllabus.** Along with the write-up described in step 8, include a copy of: “Notes for Essay 1 & 2” and “Notes from Interviews.” Please note that you will be graded based on how well you follow instructions 1-9.

Part II:

10. Sketch out a basic outline for your final essay in the file labeled “Notes for Essay 1 & 2”.
11. With your outline and notes opened in a separate Word document, open up “Soc 100 Essay 2” and begin the first draft of your essay. Your essay may be organized in the way you best see fit but must include the following information:
 - i. Introduction to the community and social issue(s) that you chose to focus your study on
 - ii. A basic description of demographics (population) in your town
 - iii. Reference to at least 3 interviews. Please use pseudonyms to describe your interviewees but describe everyone’s age, gender, and occupation. For example, “I spoke with Vanessa Randal at her home in Garland, Colorado. Vanessa is a 25-year-old teacher who has lived in the outskirts of town her entire life. As she pointed out...”
 - iv. Reference to at least 3 outside sources such as articles from *The Conversation* or other scholarly sources.
 - v. A discussion regarding the relationship between social issues in your town and Census data.
 - vi. At least 4 graphics (charts/tables/maps/etc.) that reveal evidence for your main points. To receive credit you must use graphs that you created.
 - vii. A brief conclusion, including at least one policy recommendation. For example, “Based on the research presented here I recommend that local politicians consider increasing school funding in future years” or “As this research reveals, in order to improve employment rates local politicians will likely have to pressure state officials to provide more support for small businesses in the area”. Keep in mind, these are merely examples. Your policy recommendations will depend a great deal on the focus of your study.
 - viii. Your final essay should be **7 to 8 pages** in length, including charts/maps/tables/graphs, etc. Be sure to cite any outside sources—including census data, interviews and articles—in your bibliography. Please use [ASA formatting](#).
12. If you’d like, you can take your final essay to the writing studio and have them help you edit it. Keep in mind, you will likely have to schedule an appointment several days in advance. This is not mandatory but I will give students 5 percent extra credit on this assignment for visiting the writing studio.
13. If you get your essay done early, feel free to send me a draft and I will review it and provide feedback.
14. **Turn in your final essay on Canvas the date specified in the course syllabus.**

