

Using U.S. Census Data to Analysis Social Trends

This 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. I would prefer for each student to write his or her essay about the town/city that he/she grew up in. However, I am open to student's writing about a town or city other than his or her hometown. (In this case, please consult with me prior to beginning.) Students may focus their essays on recent social trends: 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 inhabiting the town/city in question. (Note: Interviews are best done in person but obviously they may be done over the phone if visiting the town in question is not an option.) An example essay is provided on the course website: "When the tears dry up: Economic Dependency in Southern Colorado". Your final essay should be 4 to 5 pages in length, including charts/maps/tables/graphs, etc.

1. Create a folder on your computer/jumpdrive labeled "Soc 201 Essay 2"
 - a. Within this folder create a Microsoft Word document titled "Soc 201 Essay 2".
 - b. Within this folder create an additional Word document titled "Notes for Essay 2".
 - c. Within "Soc 201 Essay 2" create another folder labeled "Census Data".
 - d. Within "Soc 201 Essay 2" create a folder labeled "Newspaper articles".
 - e. Within "Soc 201 Essay 2" create another folder labeled "Interviews".
 - f. Within "Interviews" create a Microsoft Word document titled "Notes from Interviews".
2. Conduct two or three short interviews with individuals currently living in the site of the study. Interviews should range from 3-5 minutes and they should address questions such as:
 - a. What are some of the principle social problems 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". After your interviews write down any additional information you think might be of importance.

3. Go to your town's local newspaper (or a regional newspaper) and try and find a few articles regarding some of the issues that were brought up in your interviews.
 - a. Read several articles concerning the town/area in question.
 - b. Save a copy of each article in the folder titled "Newspaper articles".
 - c. Begin thinking of how larger social issues (mines closing, tourist industries opening/closing, military service, etc.) may relate to other trends (minority/majority populations, employment rates, housing ownership, etc.).
4. Next students should look over the notes they 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 2" and type up a series of notes concerning the major issues in the community in question.
 - b. Think of what kind of data might be useful in documenting these issues.
5. Go to the U.S. Census website: <http://www.census.gov/>
 - a. Look for "Quick Facts" (on left-hand side of screen) and select the state in which your town/city is located. (If your community is not available skip to step 4.)
 - b. Look over the comparisons between the community you chose and the statewide data.
 - c. Take note of your aforementioned comparisons and include this information in your final write-up. (In the meantime, save any important notes/references in the document titled "Notes for Essay 2".
6. Census Factfinder: <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml#none>
 - a. Under "Quick Start", in the second space (centered, towards the top of the screen), type in the name of the community you are focusing on. Select your town and click on "Go".
 - b. In the section labeled "Community Facts" 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".
7. Sketch out a basic outline for your essay in the file labeled "Notes for Essay 2".

8. With your outline and notes opened in a separate Word document, open up “Soc 201 Essay 2” and begin your 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 town and the issue(s) that you focus on in your write-up.
 - ii. A basic description of demographics (population) in your town.
 - iii. Reference to at least three interviews. (Please use pseudonyms to describe your interviewees.)
 - iv. A discussion regarding the relationship between social issues in your town and Census data. For an example, please go to the course website and look over the essay titled “When the tears dry up: Economic Dependency in Southern Colorado”.
 - v. At least 3 graphics (charts/tables/maps/etc.) that reveal evidence for your main points. For examples of tables and charts, please go to the course website and look over the essay titled “Guanajuato: Driving Dependency and Global Capitalism into the Future”. I would recommend using Microsoft Excel for charts/plots/etc.
 - vi. 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 write-up.
9. Take your final essay to the writing studio on the second floor of MCD and have them help you edit it. (Keep in mind, you will likely have to schedule an appointment several days in advance.)
 - a. I will give students 5 percent extra credit for visiting the writing studio.
10. If you get your essay done early, feel free to send me a draft and I will review it and provide feedback!
11. Turn in your final essay on Friday, November 2nd in class. (11/02/2012.)