

Two Part Essay: Using U.S. Census Data to Analysis Social Trends

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 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 should focus their essays on recent social trends within the township in question: unemployment, housing ownership, hiring trends, population increases/decreases, population types (more/less ethnic groups), migration, homicide rates, teen birthrates, suicides, etc. Student essays 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/city 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 201 Census Essay"
 - a. Within this folder create a Microsoft Word document titled "Soc 201 Essay Part 1."
 - b. Within this folder create an additional document titled "Soc 201 Essay Part 2."
 - c. Within this folder create an additional document titled "Notes for Essay 1 & 2."
 - d. Within "Soc 201 Essay" create another folder labeled "Census Data."
 - e. Within "Soc 201 Essay" create a folder labeled "Newspaper articles."
 - f. Within "Soc 201 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 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 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.

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, war, etc.) may relate to other trends (minority/majority populations, employment rates, housing ownership, birthrates, education rates, 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 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: H_1 : 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 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 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 4 graphics (charts/tables/maps/etc.) that reveal evidence for your main points. (Note: To receive credit you must use graphs that you created!)
 - 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.
 - vii. 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 newspapers—in your bibliography. Please refer to the Chicago Manual of Style for questions concerning formatting.

12. 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.) This is not mandatory but I will give students 5 percent extra credit 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 the date specified in the course syllabus.**