

## Assignment 1

### Gen Ed 1092

**Due: Sunday September 20 at 5PM**

Your assignment is to pick a neighborhood, collect information on it through both census and survey data and observation, and share your findings. In particular, we will be looking at inequality and opportunity data. You will work both individually and with a group to create a composite sketch of your neighborhood. After collecting your data you will compare what you can learn from these different sources of information.

You are free to choose any neighborhood that interests you for the subject of your study. You may wish to start with the neighborhood where you currently reside, focusing on the census tract in which your home is located (or one that is nearby). This likely will make it easier for you to complete the part of the assignment in which you gather data about your chosen neighborhood through eyewitness observation. If you do not want to, or cannot, choose your current address, you can pick another one—perhaps someplace you once lived or someplace your relatives live, or where you are staying temporarily, or where you have a friend or roommate who can serve as a local informant. (For those of you outside of the country, you should choose a place in the US. You should consult with your TF if you need advice on that.) The main factor in your choice should be that you have a way of finding out information about the neighborhood, either by walking or driving its boundaries, drawing on your own knowledge of the neighborhood, or a brief interview with someone who lives there. You can also use [Google Street View](#) and [Google Earth](#) to examine the neighborhood virtually.

### **Step One: Compile Geographic Data from Social Explorer and Opportunity Atlas** **INDIVIDUAL**

For this step, you will be creating a map using data found in [Social Explorer](#), an online database that allows you to make maps and reports for neighborhoods, census tracts and block groups. We'll use it to access information for our chosen neighborhoods by *Census tract* and *Block Group*. You can also break down data by zip code, county, city, and state.

Here's how to get started with Social Explorer:

1. Go to <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:socialex>.
2. You will be prompted for your Harvard key and password, then you will be logged into the main Social Explorer dashboard.
3. The first time you login, you should create an account for yourself (in the upper right corner) so you can save your project as you work on it.
4. Click on "Create new..." under "My projects" in the left side menu, and choose "map" from the available options.
5. Give your map a title, then choose "United States" as your dataset.
6. Click on the search function in the upper right hand corner.
7. Type in your address in the search bar. This will center the map on your address and you can hover over it and see the outlines of the census tract.
8. Use your map to identify the block groups within the census tract and the boundaries of the tract.

Now you're ready to begin exploring what the different kinds of data available—income, veteran status, transportation, etc.—can tell you about your neighborhood. Your objective in this part of the assignment is to create a map that highlights ONE variable you think helps identify the neighborhood—education level, race and ethnicity, income, renters vs. owners, population density. Here's what to do:

9. Choose different data to explore from the left hand menu, by clicking change data.

- NB: The help page provides a detailed introduction to Social Explorer and provides information on all the different kinds of data available:  
<https://www.socialexplorer.com/help/>
10. Once you've chosen the variable you'd like to highlight, save your map as an image. You'll include your map with your paper.

Social Explorer also allows you to generate a report corresponding to the information you've displayed on your map. You should plan to include a report with your paper, as well. Here's what to do:

11. Under the tab that says Change Data is a button that has three lines. Hover over it until it says More Options. Choose "Create Report." When you are ready, download your report.

Create a table with some descriptive data on the neighborhood (census tract). Include 2-5 variables. What information helps you explain the neighborhood to someone who does not know it well? How would you characterize the neighborhood in terms of its socio-economic status?

### Collect Data from the Opportunity Atlas **INDIVIDUAL**

Next, look up your census tract in the [The Opportunity Atlas](#) and determine if they provide more or less opportunity to children brought up there than the national average.

Here's how to proceed:

1. Go to [opportunityatlas.org](http://opportunityatlas.org)
2. Enter your address and it will take you to your census tract.
3. On the right hand side, you can select the characteristics of parents (high to low income) and race and gender.
4. Note what the projected income of a child raised in that census tract would be, overall and if they grow up in a family at different levels of income.
5. You can compare your census tract to others nearby, to see if just a short change in location provides more or less opportunity.
6. Write a summary of 1–2 paragraphs addressing the following questions:
  - a. Compare your census tract's track record on providing opportunities to children with the national average. Does the comparison surprise you? Or does it confirm what you would have guessed?
  - b. Are there census tracts near your tract that are better or worse for opportunity?
  - c. Can you think of a reason why?

### Step Two: Compare Geographic Data and Create a Methodology for Observation **GROUP**

In this part of the assignment, you will meet with your group to compare your findings from step one, using a feedback protocol to compare / analyze tables and maps. During each round of feedback, you will move through the three roles. If your group has more than three people, the additional people will be assigned to be either a Reviewer or a Scribe making sure that each person fulfills each role at least once.

1. **The Researcher.** Your role, as the researcher who created the map and table under discussion, is to answer questions from the Reviewer and the Scribe. You should feel free to be vocal about questions like:
  - a. what you were trying to explain about the neighborhood;

- b. how you thought the descriptive data helped you make that argument;
  - c. anything surprising you discovered about your neighborhood;
  - d. thoughts you're already having about the next research steps or revisions to your table; and
  - e. any data that you chose not to include in your table.
2. **The Reviewer.** Here you're playing the role of the skeptic or easily confused reader. It is your role to ask about the decisions that the researcher made in creating their table and the ways they are using data to support their characterization and description of their neighborhood. Your role is to help the researcher think about the ways they have used descriptive data, make any revisions to their table that may be necessary, and prepare to do additional research on their neighborhood.
  3. **The Scribe.** Your job is to assist the Researcher by taking notes on two fronts: 1) the questions that arise in the conversation with the Skeptic and 2) the Researcher's responses. You can also ask questions along with the Reviewer, but don't forget to transcribe them in your notes. After the conversation, give the group a recap of your notes so that everyone can agree they are accurate.

Next, you will work with your group to come up with a plan for how you will collect information on your neighborhood. While exploring your neighborhood you will need to look for things that weren't evident from the Social Explorer and the Opportunity Atlas.

You will need to determine:

1. if you plan to explore your neighborhood in person (by walking or driving around it and its boundaries) or virtually by using [Google Street View](#) and [Google Earth](#) .
2. what information you will observe and record.

Try to decide as a group what you might want to observe or question in your neighborhood. Some ideas could include racial segregation, patterns of transportation, availability of resources for children such as libraries or playgrounds, apparent affluence or poverty of the neighborhood. Be creative.

### Step Three: Observe **INDIVIDUAL**

Once your group's observation methodology is designed, you should put it into practice in your chosen neighborhood. At the conclusion, you should compile a report that addresses the following questions:

1. What do you learn by observing your neighborhood that is not evident in the data from Social Explorer and the Opportunity Atlas?
2. Were you able to identify evidence of the trends suggested by Social Explorer and Opportunity Atlas? (e.g. Social explorer might show that median housing values are high/low, but is that obvious when walking around?)
3. Were there things you didn't plan to look for that stood out to you?
4. Do the boundaries make sense to you? Do they fit with the mental map a resident of the neighborhood would have? Or do they seem arbitrary to you?

### Step Four: Your Paper **INDIVIDUAL**

Your paper should be about 1000 words (4 pages double spaced; maps and tables don't count for word total). You should answer the following questions, by putting all the steps together:

1-Introduce your neighborhood (census tract level). Where is it? What does your map tell you? What variables did you choose for your table analyzing your neighborhood? Do the census tract boundaries make sense? Do they seem arbitrary or sensible? Do they comport with a resident's (either you or an informant you have talked to) definition of the neighborhood? How do the data you provide help you to explain your neighborhood to others who do not know it?

2-Is your neighborhood a place that provides more or less opportunity to children growing up there? Compare it to the US as a whole. Compare it to your classmates in your group. Were you surprised or not by how your neighborhood is characterized in the opportunity atlas? Is your census tract close to tracts with better or worse opportunity? Why do you think it is or is not?

3-What did you learn from comparing your choice of variables and studying your neighborhood compared to other group members? Did different variables make sense for different neighborhoods or did you all use the same variables? Do you think you learned more from observation and your own or informants' knowledge of the neighborhood or from the data?