

GEN ED 1092.AMERICAN SOCIETY AND PUBLIC POLICY

SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENT #3

1,000 WORDS (4 DOUBLE-SPACED PAGES)

DUE: FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30, BY 11:59 PM

COVID-19 IMPACT: YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD AND CLASSMATES' NEIGHBORHOODS

Your assignment is: first, to analyze the impact of COVID-19 in your neighborhood, county, and state; second, to see how that compares and contrasts with your classmates' findings from their areas; and, third, to write a paper reporting your findings from the first two steps and concluding with some thoughts about local contexts and policy prescriptions. To understand how COVID-19 has played out in your geographic area, you will gather data on your area and connect it to what you know about the government safety net and local Covid health policy. Next, in a small group, you will each share your findings and, *as a group*, compose a few paragraphs highlighting similarities and differences across your group's different areas. Finally, you will individually submit a paper including: your findings on your neighborhood, county, and state; your groups' comparison paragraphs; and a conclusion with your thoughts about local contexts and policy prescriptions.

QUESTIONS YOUR PAPER SHOULD TRY TO ANSWER:

- How has COVID-19 impacted your community?
- What has been the shape of the epidemic? (Specifically: One wave? Two waves? More? When did it peak? Are cases rising or falling now? Other significant indicators?)
- How many cases, hospitalizations, and deaths?
- What subgroups (e.g., racial and ethnic groups, people in nursing homes or prisons, colleges and universities, front line workers) have been most affected by COVID-19?
- How has the pandemic affected employment for low-wage workers? For high-wage workers?
- How has the pandemic affected consumer spending, unemployment claims, time spent outside the home?
- What is happening with local schools?
- What public health rules have been implemented? Have they been followed? Have they been controversial?
- How does your area compare with your classmates' areas? Has Covid hit your area differently?
- What do you think will happen in the coming months?
- What social policies and/or particular aspects of the safety net does your community need?

BASIC STEPS (elaborated below):

- 1) **Compile COVID-19 data for your neighborhood, county, and state. INDIVIDUAL**
- 2) **Compare geographic data with your classmates. GROUP**
- 3) **Write a paper including your individually researched findings, your group's comparison paragraphs, and a conclusion with your thoughts about local contexts and policy prescriptions. INDIVIDUAL**

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STEP ONE: COMPILE COVID-19 DATA FOR YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD, COUNTY, AND STATE. INDIVIDUAL

For this step, you will use the data sources below, starting with Social Explorer and then using other sources. Please note that, unlike in Assignment #1, most of these sources will give data for the metro, county, or state level. If you can find data at the tract level, that's great, but just be aware that most data will be at a more aggregate level.

Start with Social Explorer. You can start with Social Explorer, which has a Covid database with information on cases, hospitalizations, and deaths as well as data on mobility changes. Note, for the Covid data to appear in the drop-down menu, you need to make sure you are asking for **2020 data** (the only year with Covid data).

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 HarvardKey login info and 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 and this will lead to your census tract, metro area, county, and state.
8. Choose different data to explore from the left-hand menu, by clicking change data.

Remember to request **2020 data** (the only year with Covid data).

Note: 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/>

Other Data Sources to Use. There are a number of other data sources listed below. You definitely do not need to look at all of these. You need to choose some data to explain how the pandemic has affected your area in terms of illness, unemployment, and declining economic activity and geographic mobility. You should find out what the state and local laws are about masks, closing businesses, etc. You can find state-level data in the below sources. You can also use local media, such as newspapers, county health board websites, city information pages, etc., to find information about your geographic area.

- **Covid-19 Risk Assessment Data Tool**
<https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu/>
- **Opportunity Insights Economic Recovery Tool**
<https://tracktherecovery.org/>
- **National Association of Manufacturers State and Local Policy Tracker**
<https://www.nam.org/state-and-local-orders/>
- **Monitoring State Unemployment Insurance Claims during the COVID-19 Pandemic**
<https://www.urban.org/features/monitoring-state-unemployment-insurance-claims-during-covid-19-pandemic>
- **Where to Prioritize Emergency Rental Assistance to Keep Renters in Their Homes**
<https://www.urban.org/features/where-prioritize-emergency-rental-assistance-keep-renters-their-homes>
- **Where Low-Income Jobs are Being Lost to COVID-19**
<https://www.urban.org/features/where-low-income-jobs-are-being-lost-covid-19>
- **Local Newspapers, Radio, and TV**
- **County and City Health Department Web Pages**

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STEP TWO: COMPARE GEOGRAPHIC DATA WITH YOUR CLASSMATES. GROUP

In this part of the assignment, you will meet with your group to compare your findings from Step One. Are there similarities across the geographic areas? What are the key differences you all notice? Write up a few paragraphs together that highlight the similarities and differences across your areas. You will include these group-composed paragraphs in your individual papers. Label them under the heading “Comparing Geographic Areas.”

STEP THREE: WRITE A PAPER INCLUDING YOUR INDIVIDUALLY RESEARCHED FINDINGS AND YOUR GROUP’S COMPARISON PARAGRAPHS AND CONCLUDE THE PAPER WITH YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT LOCAL CONTEXTS AND POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS. INDIVIDUAL

Your paper should be about 1000 words (4 double-spaced pages) and will include your individually researched findings, your group’s comparison paragraphs, and some concluding thoughts as elaborated below. Maps and tables are not required; but if used, won’t count towards the word total.

Conclude the paper by thinking about how local context makes a difference. Based on your research and what you have learned in class, respond to the following questions:

- Should the US have a national COVID-19 policy that is the same everywhere?
- Or, should there be more latitude for state and local areas?
- What are the three most important policy solutions you would recommend to the president or to the governor of your state? These suggestions do not need to be long or complicated. Suggestions could include ideas such as building field hospitals, closing bars, closing or opening schools, requiring masks, increasing support to small businesses, increasing unemployment payments, eviction moratoriums, herd immunity, etc.