536 PAPER 1: COMMUNITY IMMERSION

Learning Support
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

For USC MSW students, the first major assignment is the SOWK 536 community immersion paper. Although the assignment instructions for this paper come in a bullet list format, you will still need to review them carefully to find exactly which information you will need and how to best structure your paper.

You will be evaluated on two things:
Ability to research and gather information
Quality of assessment and analysis of that information

This tutorial will address both a recommended overall format for your 536 paper, and the types and quality of information expected of graduate level papers.
CHOOSING A COMMUNITY
Carefully choose the community you are going to focus on.

- A community that is too small or limited may be challenging to find enough information for a research-based paper.
- A community that is too large or broad may require more research and writing than reasonable for this length of paper. Remember to plan for 6-9 pages of text; no more than 2 pages per section!

Check whether demographic information is available on the U.S. Census and other sources for the community you have chosen.
USE OF SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

Don’t Use

- **Wikipedia**, except as a method of locating legitimate, non-commercial websites, academic articles, and newspaper articles and then read and cite those articles and websites (you must *never* cite Wikipedia).

- Information from **commercial sites** such as **realtors** (they want to sell you a house and are therefore less reliable). Most commercial sites are just getting their info from the US Census which you can access directly. And if they’re not, track down the original source they’re using and see if it is appropriate for you to use (if they don’t have a source listed, the information is not reliable).

- dictionary.com or any other unverifiable online source

- Websites that do not mention authors or source material
USE OF SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

Do Use

- City or community websites (look for .gov)
- City-specific history books available through local libraries or using ILLIAD
- Peer-reviewed articles
- Local, regional, and national newspapers

For demographics

- The US Census (2010), which you can locate by visiting the US Census “Quickfacts” or “Factfinder.”
- The USC MSW Libguide: http://libguides.usc.edu/socialwork/
  - “Find Statistics” tab
  - “SOWK 536” under the “course guides” tab
ACADEMIC WRITING

The general convention in academic writing is to use third person, as it creates a more formal and professional tone. Only use first person (I) where your professor approves.

- Avoid using “I” and “we” as well as “our,” and other versions of 1st person (singular or plural).

- When 1st person viewpoint is necessary, try “the author” instead. Example: “The author observed…” Check with your professor first.

- Avoid 2nd person “you.” It implies assumptions about how the person reading thinks, feels, or behaves.

- Using 3rd person is best, but avoid vague versions such as “a person” or “a student.” Who is the person? Who is the student?
ACADEMIC WRITING

Styles to Avoid

- Language that is vague or general such as “stuff,” “things,” and “some people/studies/researchers state that…”
- Informal, conversational language. Rather than “Well, the community doesn’t have a police station,” try “The community does not have a police station.”
- Slang and colloquialisms, such as “off the bat.”
- Imagery used to evoke an emotional response. “As stable as a rock” is pretty, but what does it really mean? How stable is the rock? Which rock? Instead, use specific language, such as “The client has a stable job.”
- Clichés are overused phrases (and often general). “Since the beginning of time” is one. “Throughout history” is another. Clichés do not add meaning to your text.
OVERALL STRUCTURE
Your community immersion paper must have the following sections:

- Introduction
- Community Demographics
- Community Characteristics and Culture
- Community Decision-Making
- Reflection and Conclusion

Although your assignments do not always explicitly state that you must have an introduction with a thesis, topic sentences in every paragraph, and a conclusion for every academic paper, these elements are assumed because they are part of standard APA format unless your assignment instructions say otherwise.
USING HEADINGS AND SUBHEADINGS

Review the assignment instructions!

Roman numerals on the instruction sheet indicate the need for a new section in the paper using an APA format, 1st level heading. For example, Introduction and Community Demographics would be formatted as 1st level headings: bold, centered, first letter of every major word capitalized.

Introduction

Most bullet points will indicate a place in your paper in which you can consider either using a 2nd level heading or at least a new paragraph. 2nd level headings are bold, left justified, first letter of every major word capitalized.

Identifying Information

*See the Learning Support Libguides page for an APA template
MAINTAIN STRONG PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE

✓ A **topic sentence** responds directly to the prompt and makes a statement or claim that the rest of the paragraph will prove. Topic sentences should be your own idea and not evidence from a source.

✓ **Evidence** is information from outside sources that define definitions of terms or concepts from a theory which your reader must understand for your analysis. Each sentence that contains evidence should be cited.

✓ **Analysis** takes a critical look at the evidence or applies the theories or concepts to the specific client or topic (in this case the community and its residents). Do not cite your own analysis, explanations, or application of concepts and theories as they are your own ideas and not from a source.

✓ Do not forget a **concluding sentence** (uncited) that consolidates your evidence and relates it back to your topic sentence for your reader!
INSTRUCTIONS

- This assignment asks you to reflect on understanding communities from a social work perspective.
- Review the theories and concepts presented in chapter 5 of Bruce Jansson’s Social Welfare Policy and Advocacy, pages 115-120, and incorporate them into your writing.
- You must cite all information you use from Jansson’s textbook. Citing at the end of a paragraph is not enough – make sure to cite each sentence in which you use information from any source.
- Do not cite your analysis or application of this information since your analysis did not come from the textbook.
- A good paragraph will contain both cited and uncited material as you present evidence from a source and analysis of that information.
APPLYING PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE: CITED AND UNCITED MATERIAL

Original: Though families influence those contexts to some degree, in the main families are the recipients of events, values, and norms that comprise community collective life.


Student Paragraph (citation in red):

When social workers enter a community, they must respect the inherent uniqueness not only of the community as a whole, but of the family units and individuals within it. Families, in particular, live within a community and are exposed to the community’s assumptions about acceptable behavior and appropriate value structures (Mancini & Bowen, 2012). The individuals within the family are therefore also influenced by the community through their identity within the family unit. Social workers should take into account the complex interrelationships between individuals, family units, and communities at all times.
INTRODUCTION

Review the assignment instructions and think about the directions in the form of questions:

- Consider the roles of social workers as a whole and within a community in particular. What do these roles require of the social worker in terms of understanding communities?

- How can using this understanding benefit the community in which a social worker operates? How can it benefit the families?

- How does your response relate to the community of interest? Make sure this analysis does not overshadow the main point.

- You can discuss what you saw when walking through your community, but do not use first person unless your professor has approved it. Instead, use, “the author observed…” or something similar.
INTRODUCTION
Remember that your introduction, like that of any academic paper, must end in a thesis statement that shows your understanding of the purpose of the paper. The thesis takes the place of the concluding sentence in a supporting paragraph.

When writing your thesis, consider the question:

What does being immersed in a community reveal to a social worker about the relationship between the community as a whole and the individual families who make up that community?
INTRODUCTION: SECOND BULLET POINT

- Name of community and location (city, state, etc.).
- If the community is part of a city or county, identify its borders.
- Major landmarks that are significant to the identity of the community.
- A simple map.
- Initial impressions and observations from your immersion.

Avoid incorporating any additional information as it will likely be required in a later section and is not required in this one.
COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

The bullet points require both research and analysis.

- You can choose to list all demographics first and provide analysis afterwards.
- However, the analysis is more accessible to the reader if you combine each demographic element with its analysis.
- In some cases, you can combine two or more demographics in the same paragraph - for example, median income and poverty are closely related.
COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS: FIRST BULLET POINT

Research the demographics of the community

- Number of residents, population density, ethnicity and religion, median income, rent and home prices, poverty and crime rates, educational attainment, number of renters vs. owners, number of immigrant vs. native born, etc.

- Include only the information you feel is relevant to understanding your unique community, but use all of the information that is relevant. Use specific facts and numbers and cite your sources.
  - Utilize the US Census Bureau data for 2010 (Factfinder).
  - Use only reliable information from credible websites!
COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS: SECOND BULLET POINT

Explain the demographics and what they mean. Imagine that you are writing this section for a social worker from a different state who is moving to this community and who is completely unfamiliar with the area. What information would he or she need to know?

- Remember to begin each paragraph with a topic sentence that clearly states what the paragraph is about and why it is important/significant for understanding the community.

- Note specific evidence, facts, and observations and cite each sentence in which you use information from an outside source.
COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS: SECOND BULLET POINT CONT’D

- Also include your analysis of the observations, evidence and facts. How do this community’s unique demographics affect the families who live in it? How do they affect a social worker’s role(s) in the community?

- You may find it useful to compare the community’s demographics with those of other communities. For example, how does your community compare to a neighboring community? To the state average? To the nation’s average? Is your community more or less wealthy than those that surround it? Is unemployment lower or higher than the national average?

- Wrap up each paragraph with a concluding sentence showing how your analysis helps to prove the claim in the topic sentence.
COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Explain the demographics and what they mean, particularly to an outsider who may be unfamiliar with the community.

• Remember to begin each paragraph with a topic sentence before incorporating research and analysis of that research.

• Include a description of what you saw in the neighborhood as well as the facts from your research in your supporting sentences.

• Also include your analysis of the observations and facts. How do this community’s unique demographics affect the individuals who live in it? The organizations? The overall community as a whole?

• Don’t forget to wrap up each paragraph with a concluding sentence showing how your analysis helps to prove the claim in your topic sentence.
COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS: EXAMPLE OF DATA + ANALYSIS

EXAMPLE. Consider the following data (US Census Factfinder):
Zip Code 90007 (USC and surrounding area)
- Median household income: $22,420
- Unemployment: 13.7%

Los Angeles County, California
- Median household income: $55,909
- Unemployment: 11.4%

Analysis of data:
- What accounts for the great disparities in income and unemployment rates?
- How do these disparities affect USC and its surrounding community?
- What does this information mean from a social work perspective?
COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURE

Use chapter 5 of Bruce Jansson’s Social Welfare Policy and Advocacy and the aspects listed in the instructions to help you identify and describe community strengths, weaknesses, and challenges.

You may choose to focus your paragraphs according to (a) strengths, (b) weaknesses, and (c) challenges, including no more than 3 of each.

Example - (a) Strengths: (1) abundant health care providers, (2) residents work in their community, (3) excellent parks.

You may also choose to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and challenges grouped together under three main topics. For example, you might have one (or more) paragraph about health care providers and include the community’s (a) strengths, (b) weaknesses, and (c) challenges.

Example - (1) Health care providers: (a) Many facilities, (b) but residents need to travel to get to them and (c) their quality of care varies based on cost.
COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURE

Within each paragraph, address the impact on those who live in the community: working professionals, visitors, new residents.

Strengths: abundant health care providers, residents work in their community, excellent parks.

Since most of the residents work in their community, those who work and those who live there equally benefit from easy access to good health care…

Health care providers: Many facilities, but residents need to travel to get to them and their quality of care varies based on cost.

Professionals who work in the area but live elsewhere are less likely to be affected by travel time to health care facilities or quality of care as they can use providers closer to their homes…
COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING

Who are the leaders of the community?
Do not forget to “name names” and find appropriate evidence to back up all claims.

**Formal leaders:** Find the decision-makers with formal authority to make decisions for the community. Do they impact the community or are they ineffectual? In what ways do they help the community and in what ways are they lacking or even harmful to the residents?

**Informal leaders:** Locate people or groups with unofficial influence in the community. Do they impact the community? In what way? Are they helping or harming?

Considering both the formal and informal leadership in the community, where does the power for change truly lie?
REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

Think about all you have discovered in researching and analyzing the community. Base your responses on what you’ve learned.

Consider the community from the perspective of a resident.
- What would be your reasons for staying?
- Reasons for leaving?

Then consider the community from the perspective of a social worker working to benefit the community. What issues would you address first?
- What might have the quickest impact on improving the community and the lives of the families in it?
- What would have the greatest long-term impact?
- Who, specifically, would your proposals help most?
A HELPFUL TIP
For this paper, students are encouraged to include information taken from conversations with community residents and community leaders. This information will need to be cited! Below are the proper formats for doing so. Remember – standard APA says to cite personal communication in-text but not on the reference page.

If you have not used the name of the person with whom you communicated in your sentence, your citation will match the following outline:
(F. Last, personal communication, Month day, year).
(R. Tyler, personal communication, September 3, 2016).

If you have used the name of the other person in the preceding sentence, you can remove the name from the parentheses, so that your citation looks like this:
(personal communication, Month day, year).