Course Syllabus for Sociology 30902
Research Methods in Sociology (Undergraduates)
Spring 2026

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Course Canvas Page: https://canvas.nd.edu/courses/130819

Time and Place Debartolo 113, MW 2:00 – 3:15 PM

Canvas/Web use We will make extensive use of both Canvas and the course web page in this class. The web page will have most of the readings and homeworks. The Canvas page will include the most critical links for the course, e.g. announcements, assignments, Zoom links. You should check it regularly. All assignments should be submitted through Canvas unless you are told otherwise. You may understand Canvas better than I do, but if you need help you can either click the help button in Canvas or check out https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Student-Guide/tkb-p/student .

Office Hours MW 12:30-1:30 and by appointment. You are welcome, encouraged, and sometimes required to schedule appointments with me. I am generally very accessible via phone, voicemail, email, and Zoom – including on nights and weekends if necessary.

Course objectives

Sociology 30902 is designed to provide an overview of research methods in the social sciences. Topics covered include (1) hypothesis formulation and theory construction (2) the measurement of sociological variables (3) data collection techniques - experimental, survey, electronic, and observational.

Course Web Page/ Required Readings

Course Readings Page (Check it often). Online readings, discussion questions and other points of interest will be available on the course readings page. The course Canvas page will have the necessary links.

I have decided to go with an all-online packet this year. It will include required or optional links to textbook-type entries. Most of the other online readings are designed to illustrate the application of research principles and strategies; hence, you should understand the major points

contained in each reading, but you do not have to be concerned with memorizing every little detail.

Classroom Policies & Format

We will use a variety of learning styles in this class – I will lecture some but much of the class will be taught seminar style, including small-group discussions and end-of-year student presentations.

- Readings and classroom discussion are critical! If you stay on top of the readings, instead of just cramming for exams, the classroom experience will be much better for you and everyone else.
- Around 6 times a semester, usually on the last day we are discussing a topic, I will break you down into small groups to go over discussion questions based on the readings. I want everyone to be ready for these discussions; so, as noted below, you need to turn in your discussion notes beforehand.
- I will often do low cost cold-calling on people. I am not trying to embarrass anyone – you can occasionally defer on a question – but cold calling can be a good way to keep students involved and paying attention. If speaking in class is a major problem for you, please let me know as soon as possible.
- Some material may be presented asynchronously, e.g. instead of having a regular class you will be asked to watch something on your own and discuss it later. This was very popular when the course was all-online so I occasionally keep doing it.
- You are strongly encouraged (and sometimes required) to make contact with me outside of class, either in person or by phone or electronically. If necessary and mutually convenient, I am willing to have Zoom meetings on nights and weekends, especially when major assignments are soon due.
- Check your ND email regularly, preferably every day or so. You may not use email much but I do, and I frequently send messages about upcoming readings and discussion topics. The most critical announcements should also be available on Canvas.
- Do not lose your work – use some sort of Cloud backup service.
- Any longer files you send me (e.g. exams, papers) should begin with your last name so I can easily alphabetize them, e.g. WilliamsExam1.docx. The document itself should include your name, so I do not have to dig through my email to figure out who sent something. Include page numbers on any document more than 2 pages!!! (It is a major source of irritation to me that some students repeatedly fail to do so!) I greatly prefer Word or PDF formats.

Assignments, Exams and Grading

There will be one take-home exam during the semester, two projects, and a take-home final. These are each worth 21% of your grade.

Exams. Both exams will consist of short answer problems and 2-3 essay questions. The final will emphasize material from the second half of the course but will also give you a chance to apply principles that were learned earlier in the semester.

One of the things that will be most important on the exams will be your ability to incorporate and apply material from the readings. The best exams will go beyond what was said in class and will cite specific facts, opinions, authors and articles. Citing sources and offering specific details and quotations from them will demonstrate that you really have done the readings, and will strengthen your answers and make them seem more authoritative. The best exams will further show your ability to apply general principles to specific research studies. They will be like short research papers, incorporating information from a variety of sources, except I have provided you with the readings in advance.

Projects. The two projects (attached) give you the opportunity to apply the principles you have learned to real or hypothetical problems. In the first project you will design an experiment. In the second project you will do a demographic and qualitative profile of your home community and compare and contrast it with a very different area you are familiar with. I have found that students who talk with me outside of class are less likely to make major mistakes on their projects. (This seems to be especially true for the first project on experiments.) At the end of the semester you will give a 12 to 15 minute presentation on the project of your choice. Some sessions may be held outside of regular classtime. If you attend or present in such a session you will be allowed to miss one of our regular classes.

Short assignments/ class participation/ paper presentations/ attendance account for the other 16% of your grade. Do not underestimate the importance of these!!!

- This should be an easy 16 points for you. Come to class, keep up on the readings, hand in all the required short assignments and notes on the readings on time, and participate in discussions at least occasionally. In other words, do what you should be doing anyway. Unfortunately, missed classes and assignments sometimes lower final grades substantially. More critically, though, I think these will help you to understand the material better, produce better papers and exams, and improve the overall quality of the classroom experience.
- To make sure that everyone is familiar with the material and has something to contribute, I want you to jot down at least a dozen notes from the readings that you think are especially important, any thoughts of your own on the subject, and questions which you would like to see discussed. (It is a good idea to always do this but it is especially critical to do so on discussion days.) In general, you should be prepared to make at least a few points about *every* major discussion question asked. In your notes, I encourage you to keep track of the sources you are getting information from, as specific citations can strengthen your answers.
- In particular, you will be required to hand in discussion notes before class for each topic before the days we are breaking down into small groups, approximately 6 times this semester.
- Assignments handed in on time will be worth up to 2 points (12 to 16 pts total), late assignments can still earn 1 point for a few days, and after that they will get 0 points. I'm not super-picky when grading these so long as I see a good faith effort, but I do expect you to have enough to meaningfully contribute to discussion. In the past, some people have turned in about a page, others have turned in 10 pages. The better your notes are as we go along, the easier you may find the exams to be.
- Besides affecting your participation grade, these notes will be a great help on the exam, as the discussion questions I give you on the readings often bear a remarkable similarity to the

exam questions. Canvas lets you know when the notes are due so make sure you stay on top of things.

- The due date for the discussion notes should NOT be interpreted as being the day you have to finally start the readings!!! I will let you know what readings you should have done before each class. Doing readings before class will make it easier for you to follow along.
- Regular attendance & punctuality are expected and factor into your participation grade (2 to 4 pts). You are allowed up to three absences for any reason. Attendance will be taken each class. If absences are excessive, University policy allows me to give you a D or F after providing written notice.

Honor Code

Entering Notre Dame you were required to study the on-line edition of the Academic Code of Honor, to pass a quiz on it, and to sign a pledge to abide by it. The full Code is available at https://honorcode.nd.edu/. I reserve the right to use University-approved mechanisms if I suspect plagiarism or cheating. Note: I am ok with students going to Notre Dame's Writing Center so long as they don't get help with the actual content of their work.

Reasonable Accommodations for Properly Documented Disabilities

It is the policy and practice of The University of Notre Dame to provide reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. Students who have questions about Sara Bea Accessibility Services or who have, or think they may have, a disability are invited to contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services for a confidential discussion by emailing at sarabeacenter@nd.edu or by phone at 574-631-7157. Because the University's Academic Accommodations Processes generally require students to request accommodations well in advance of the dates when they are needed, students who believe they may need an accommodation for this course are encouraged to contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services at their earliest opportunity. For additional information about Sara Bea Accessibility Services and to learn more about the student process for requesting accommodations, please visit Accessibility Support. Note: While I can have a little flexibility on due dates for exams and papers, I do want discussion notes handed in on time. If you haven't done the notes you will not be able to get the full benefits of class discussion.

Non-Discrimination/ Inclusion Statement

The University of Notre Dame is dedicated to fostering social justice. I share this commitment and aim to create a positive learning environment grounded in open communication, mutual respect, and inclusivity. In this class, we will uphold these values and ensure that discrimination based on race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin is not tolerated. Your suggestions for enhancing our classroom environment are welcome and will be seriously considered.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

An annotated bibliography documenting the claims I make about AI is available at https://academicweb.nd.edu/~rwilliam/AIConcerns/AIBibliography.pdf.

I know this section is long but I want you to read it carefully so you will be sure to understand it. Further I will ask you questions about AI and your comments may help me make improvements.

I firmly believe that, when used well, AI can help make good people even better. AI can quickly answer basic questions, synthesizing key information from multiple sources. It often provides links to those sources, allowing you to investigate further. It can provide alternative explanations of concepts that may help you to understand things better. Once you have a draft of your answer, you can use AI (which includes programs like Grammarly) to refine and improve your writing.

But, I also believe that, when used improperly, AI can hamper people from getting good in the first place. AI can lead to superficial learning or no learning at all. It can lead to students making terrible and embarrassing mistakes. Even the environment can suffer from excessive use of AI.

Before using AI, students should understand the following.

I. When it comes to learning, research shows that AI can be inferior to more traditional approaches. A 2024 review of the literature found that "Over-reliance on AI can lead to diminished creativity and critical thinking abilities, as students may become too dependent on AI-generated content and less engaged in developing their ideas… This dependency can foster complacency and reduce essential problem-solving skills."

An experiment conducted by researchers at MIT made the potential harms of AI even clearer. In the experiment, some randomly chosen students used AI to write essays, some used search engines, while still others used neither (i.e., brain-only). The results were disturbing:

> "The most consistent and significant behavioral divergence between the groups was observed in the ability to quote one's own essay. LLM users significantly underperformed in this domain, with 83% of participants (15/18) reporting difficulty quoting in Session 1, and none providing correct quotes… Search Engine and Brain-only participants did not display such impairments… *If users rely heavily on AI tools, they may achieve superficial fluency but fail to internalize the knowledge or feel a sense of ownership over it.* … ChatGPT users showed dramatically weaker brain connectivity… and when they later tried to write without AI, their brains looked more like novices than practiced writers."

I do not find these results surprising. With modest user effort, AI may be able to quickly crank out a nice paper, but how much of it are you going to remember a day later?

There are even concerns that AI is destroying basic learning. A high schooler wrote in the Atlantic in 2025 about how he saw his fellow students, *during classtime*, use AI to write what was supposed to be "a reflective, thought-provoking discussion on slavery and human resilience" and to solve algebra problems. Little effort was required and the amount of actual learning was likely even less. The student wrote

> "The dominant worldview seems to be: *Why worry about actually learning anything when you can get an A for outsourcing your thinking to a machine?* … In the real world, chatbots cannot hold the powerful to account in the way an investigative reporter does, through relentless interviews and vetting hard-to-find information. They cannot perform open-heart surgery or ballet. Many of us are so accustomed to outsourcing that we're dulling the very instincts that we need to prevail in life: grit, critical thinking, and the ability to function smoothly under stress… If chatbots have made school easier to get through, they are also making school equally as hard to grow out of. The technology is producing a generation of eternal novices, unable to think or perform for themselves."

Sure, AI makes things easier, but so would hiring somebody to write your paper for you! In classes like mine, which emphasize discussion and students learning from each other, some people using AI to make things as easy as possible for themselves can potentially damage everyone's learning. Employers may want you to know how to use AI, but they probably also want you to show that you actually learned something in all those classes somebody spent a fortune on for you to take.

II. AI frequently hallucinates!!! Just because it doesn't know the answer doesn't mean it won't give you one!

There are numerous horror stories that illustrate this.

- A student of mine had an interesting, plausible-sounding, seemingly well-written discussion of one of the class readings. Unfortunately for the student, I had actually read the article I'd assigned, and recognized immediately that the answer was total nonsense. If the student had read even the first few sentences of the article they too would have realized the answer was absurd, but apparently that was just too much darn hard work. The student failed the final exam and ended up barely holding on to a C for the course.
- The Chicago Sun Times recently published a recommended summer reading list, but it didn't turn out so well. "So... the Chicago Sun-Times, which recently laid off 20% of its staff, has published an article titled Summer reading list for 2025. It lists books by well-known authors. There's only one problem: while the authors are real, most of the books are not. Clearly, with the absence of journalistic staff, they resorted to the short cut of asking ChatGPT — and ChatGPT did what it does best: it hallucinated a bunch of nonexistent citations."
- These incidents are embarrassing, maybe even a little amusing. But the costs of AI mistakes can be far greater. A researcher on climate security had an even worse story to tell.

> "As a researcher active in the climate security field, I recently conducted my own experiments with GenAI. The results were not merely disappointing; they were alarming. Despite the existence of easily accessible information, both GenAI platforms I used drew upon fictional data – and did not make this usage transparent… As someone who has worked in the field for many years, I picked up these issues with GenAI results quickly. *But students, researchers, and decision makers less familiar with climate security research would be likely to take such responses at face value. The replies provided by Copilot and ChatGPT sounded plausible, confident, and nuanced, and neither AI platform admitted any error until I explicitly pointed to them. In a field of knowledge like climate security, in which the stakes are high, this suggests that GenAI should never be the only – and not even the first – source of information.*

- AI referred Sarah Mustillo, a former Dean of the Notre Dame College of Arts and Letters, to a promising sounding source entitled "AI and the Liberal Arts: Why Humanistic Perspectives Matter" (American Academy of Arts & Sciences 2023 report). Try as she might, though, she couldn't find it. When she asked AI why she couldn't find it, AI admitted "I **inferred a report title that sounded plausible but doesn't correspond to an actual, standalone published report under that exact name**… I generalized the structure of [AAAS's] existing work into a citation that seemed like it should exist, even though it technically doesn't…" (Technically???) The former dean said her mind was blown, and she wondered if students knew that [AI] has a tendency to just make stuff up like this if they might be more careful about using it.

- AI accuracy may be improving, but an October 2025 report showed that serious problems remain.

  "All the major AI assistants are routinely misrepresenting news content … according to the biggest-ever research study on the topic. [The study found that] all the major AI assistants are misleading their readers on a regular basis. The researchers evaluated more than 3,000 responses from ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini and Perplexity against key criteria, including accuracy, sourcing, distinguishing opinion from fact and providing context. And, they found, 45% of all AI answers had at least one significant issue, and 14 failed to provide sufficient context. More than 3 in 10 showed serious sourcing problems — missing, misleading or incorrect attributions — while 1 in 5 contained major accuracy issues, including hallucinated details and outdated information. Gemini was the worst performer, with significant issues in 76% of responses…"

I'll add that, I've asked AI questions I ask my students, and students generally have better, more accurate, and insightful answers (at least when students have carefully gone over the material themselves).

III. AI can harm the environment

The MIT Technology Review warns that AI video may be especially problematic. "*When we tested the energy demands of various models, we found the energy required to produce even a low-quality, five-second video to be pretty shocking: It was 42,000 times more than the amount needed for a chatbot answer to a question about a recipe, and enough to power a microwave for over an hour*. If there's one type of AI whose energy appetite should worry you, it's this one."

IV. So, is there no hope for AI???

No, that is NOT the conclusion reached by the MIT study cited earlier. In fact, it found that people who wrote without AI assistance first, then used ChatGPT to edit their work, actually showed increased brain connectivity. "That means: Do the cognitive heavy lifting yourself first, then use AI as a refinement tool rather than a replacement for thinking. Your brain needs that initial workout to stay strong when you later add AI assistance."

V. Course Policy

If I could effectively ban all use of AI in my classes, I'd be very tempted to do so. But, I doubt that I could do that, so I am doing the following instead.

- There are several short assignments worth 1 to 3 points. Most of these involve taking notes on the readings and then discussing them in class. *Any and all use of AI on the short assignments is forbidden!!!* I want you to actually do the readings and take your own notes on them. If you make some mistakes or have things that you don't understand, that is fine; the small group and class discussions we have are designed to increase your understanding. If one student misses something, another may pick it up. I'm not super-picky about the short assignments but whatever you do, I want it to be your work, not AI's.
    - Incidentally, the readings have historically been one of the most popular aspects of the course. If you just have AI summarize the readings for you, you are going to miss out on a lot of very interesting material, and the entire class may suffer because of your being unable to meaningfully contribute.
- For papers and projects, you can use AI to identify sources that might be helpful. I do this myself. Further I suspect that knowing how to use AI as an aid to research is one of the things employers will be most interested in. *However you must actually look at those sources and not just trust or copy what AI says about them*.
- All first drafts of the major assignment must be written entirely by yourself. If you then want AI to refine your writing, you can. But, you must tell me that you did so, and include both your first and final drafts in your submission. In other words, exercise your mind first before you ask AI for assistance.
- Please, no AI-created videos!!! I don't want thousands of trees to die just so your paper or presentation looks a little cooler.
- You are responsible for the accuracy of everything you say. Sure, people make mistakes. But, *if your work includes obvious AI hallucinations, you will be severely penalized, and potentially even fail the assignment*. (In other words, if you try to make AI do most of the work for you, you better be very, very sure that AI got it right!)
- I reserve the right to use AI detection software. I hate to spend time policing students, but I think there needs to be credible threats of enforcement to deter the few people who may be tempted to cheat. I will let students know if AI detectors or my own reading causes me to be concerned. If I do believe the policy has been seriously violated I will follow the procedures outlined in the Academic Honor Code.

Finally, I'll stress that this policy is for your benefit. You are here to learn, and not just get a good grade. Or at least that is my goal for you! But even if you are here just to get a good grade (perhaps with as little work as possible), *the surest way to not get a good grade is to be caught violating my policies*. Further, employers do not just want you to demonstrate that you know how to type a prompt into AI. They want you to show that you know how to use AI properly, and that you've learned enough from your college courses to help you do that.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Sociology 30902
Research Methods in Sociology (Undergraduates)
Spring 2026

NOTE: The Canvas Syllabus page will have modified dates if necessary.

Jan 12, 14 - Introduction.

Readings Packet, "Introduction"

Jan 21, 26, 28, Feb 2, 4, 9 (6 classes) – Formulating Hypotheses; Threats to Causal Inference; Experimentation. Advantages and disadvantages of experiments, threats to internal and external validity, Experimental design, Lab vs. field experiments, quasi-experiments, how to conduct an experiment. While experimentation is the first research technique we focus on, principles concerning causality that are presented here are applied throughout the semester.

Readings Packet, "Experimentation."

Feb 17 - First project due before midnight. You are required to meet with me about this project before you hand it in.

Feb 11, 16, 18, 23 - Measurement. Levels of measurement, validity, reliability, random vs. nonrandom error; Scaling, questionnaire construction; Sensitive topics.

Readings Packet, "Measurement."

Feb 23 – Midterm Exam passed out at end of class

Feb 25 – Optional (but recommended) Review Session

Feb 26 – Take Home Exam due before midnight

Mar 2, 4, 16, 18, 23 – Survey Research. Reasons for surveys, types of surveys, sample vs. population, types of samples, probability vs. nonprobability sampling, examples of surveys, longitudinal designs, methods for administering surveys. The readings packet includes a study I did that may help you with project 2.

Readings Packet, "Surveys."

Mar 25, 30, Apr 1 – Qualitative Methods; Case study research; Unobtrusive research. Introduction to case study research, qualitative methods, Oral history analysis, Content analysis, unobtrusive measures, secondary analysis.

Readings Packet, "Content Analysis & Oral Histories"

Apr 2 - Second project due by Midnight. Meeting with me beforehand to discuss the project is recommended but not required.

Apr 8, 13, 15 - Observational research. Participant observation, field studies.

Readings Packet, "Observational Research."

Apr 20, 22 –In-class presentations of projects. If all goes according to plan, there will be 2 paper sessions during regular classtime and (depending on enrollment) 1 or 2 special sessions outside of regular classtime, probably via Zoom. You only have to participate in 2 sessions total, the one you present in and one other. This worked very well in past years and I hope it can again. Smaller groups allow a more casual atmosphere and discussion of each other's work. If for some reason we can't work out special sessions I will revise the rest of the class schedule.

Apr 27, 29 - Research ethics. Finish any remaining presentations. Small group discussions on ethics.

Readings Packet, "Ethics."

Apr 29 – Take home final passed out

May 6 Take Home Final due by 9:30 pm. You do not need to show up in class. I am not allowed to give incompletes and I only have a few days to get my grades in, so make sure you are done on time.

Key Dates

Feb 17	First project due before midnight
Feb 26	Take home midterm exam due before midnight
Apr 2	Second Project due before midnight
Apr 20, 22	Class presentations. Depending on enrollment one or two extra sessions outside of regular classtime may also likely be scheduled. You will only have to attend two of the sessions.
Apr 29	Catch up; Review for final exam; Take home final handed out
May 6	Take home final exam due by 9:30 pm

FIRST PROJECT: EXPERIMENTS
Sociology 30902
Due Feb 17, 2026

In this project, you will formulate a hypothesis and design a lab or a field experiment to test it.

(1) Develop a hypothesis on a topic that is interesting to you. Briefly explain why you think it would be important and worthwhile to test your hypothesis. Also explain why you think your hypothesis is plausible. For example, you might note how your hypothesis can be inferred from some sociological theory, how the hypothesis is consistent with your own personal observations, etc. Try to show that you have given some thought to the problem before blindly going out to investigate it.

(2) Design either a lab or a field experiment to test your hypothesis. Ideally, the experiment will be something that could reasonably be conducted by a researcher with a small grant (or even by a student such as yourself).

(3) Discuss the following:

(a) How would you set the stage? What "cover story" (if any) would you use? That is, if your experiment uses deception, how would you keep subjects from becoming suspicious of the true nature of the experiment? Also, be sure to note just who your subjects would be (e.g., college students, riders on a subway, etc.), and where the experiment would take place.

(b) Explain how you would construct the treatment and manipulate the independent variables. Explain why you feel your variables have *measurement validity*, i.e. they really are good ways of measuring the concepts you are interested in. Be very explicit as to what the treatment would be, and explain why you think the treatment is appropriate given your hypothesis. Also explain how you would go about controlling for extraneous influences - for example, would you use random assignment to groups? If you didn't (or couldn't) use random assignment, what would you do to safeguard against threats to internal validity?

(c) Discuss how you would measure the dependent variable. Again, be very explicit as to what the dependent variable is, and why you think it is appropriate. Note whether you would rely on the respondent's own reports, or whether you would rely on observations of his/her actions.

(4) Critique your experiment. Note how well or how poorly it deals with threats to internal and external validity. Be sure to note the advantages and disadvantages of the type of setting you have chosen. Point out any problems you think you may encounter. Most research is not perfect, and good researchers recognize and acknowledge the limitations of their work.

(5) Not including tables or figures, the paper should be typed, double-spaced, and approximately 5 to 8 pages long.

TIPS:

(1) When looking for inspiration for your hypothesis, you may find it helpful to refer to coursework you have had in sociology or other fields. Doing a little bit of research on the topic could be tremendously helpful, e.g. you could refer to related work or briefly go over some relevant theory. This might help you to develop your ideas better and make them seem more credible.

(2) It is permissible to use one of the course readings as a source of inspiration for your hypothesis. However, your experiment(s) should be radically different, i.e. don't just make one or two little changes.

(3) When grading, I will be primarily interested in how well the paper illustrates your understanding of lab and field experiments and your appreciation for threats to internal and external validity. Beyond that, I will consider such things as how innovative and original the experiment is, the complexity of the experiment, how well you have thought out the issues you wish to address, how feasible it would be to actually conduct the experiment, and your appreciation for problems researchers are likely to encounter.

(4) People often make serious mistakes on this project – mistakes that could have been avoided if they had talked to me for 15 minutes or so first. For example, their proposal may not really be an experiment, but the basic idea could be reworked so it was an experiment. Or, some part of the proposal comes across as highly implausible, but with some brainstorming it could be fixed. Hence, with this project it is required that you meet with me and run your ideas by me first.

(5) A lot of otherwise-good projects have been hurt by a poor critique of internal and external validity (Part 4). One good strategy may be to look at a list of the threats to internal and external validity, and then explicitly discuss (by name, e.g. history, maturation) how the threat is or is not a potential problem in this case. Perhaps the threat is unlikely to occur in the first place, or if it does occur random assignment will neutralize its effects. A related weakness is that people sometimes say something is a threat, but then fail to discuss how the experimental design (e.g. the use of random assignment) does or does not take care of it.

Sociology 30902
Second project: Surveys and Measurement
Due April 2, 2026

Using Census Data (including the American Community Survey) or other statistical information available on the web or elsewhere, do a statistical and qualitative profile of your home town or community, and compare and contrast it with one or more other areas (e.g. the entire US; a very different community that you are very familiar with) and/or look at changes within your community across time. (In practice, you may want to examine the county or MSA you are from – but if you want, you could even examine the census tract your family lives in.) Some of the topics your profile could include (but you are welcome to choose others) are

1. The racial composition of your community compared to the entire U.S. or to some other community you are looking at.

2. How your community compares economically to the U.S. Is your home town relatively poorer or richer? Is there relatively more poverty where you live, or less? You may also want to consider related variables, such as education, occupation, female-headed families, age distribution, or anything else you think is relevant.

3. How did the racial and economic composition of your community change across time, e.g. between 2000 or 2010 and today?

4. Based on what you know about the area you are from, offer any insights you may have about why it differs from the United States as a whole, e.g. what are some of the historical and economic factors that have made your community what it is? You can also discuss the possible causes of any changes, e.g. were there factors that attracted many immigrants to your area, were there changes in schools or industry that attracted or drove people away? Anybody could do a demographic profile of your area, but you have a lot of personal knowledge that won't be obvious from the data, and you should try to share those insights.

5. Whatever you focus on, begin by telling a little bit about your community. Where is it located? Is it a small town out in the middle of nowhere? A rich suburb of a large city? Or what?

6. Don't just attach pages and pages of computer output and expect the reader to make sense out of it. Good tables and figures can help to convey information effectively.

Not including tables or figures, the paper should be typed, double-spaced, and approximately 5 to 8 pages long. Charts and figures will usually help. They can be hand-drawn, but this would be a great time to learn how to use Excel or some other program for such a purpose if you don't know how already.

Resources. The course web page or other material I give you will include links to several useful Census (and other) web sites. The best strategy, I think, is just to play around with these sites a bit and find out what information they have to offer. In general, you can usually find fairly detailed information, right down to the census tract level. The readings packet includes a paper I did several years ago examining one of South Bend's neighborhoods which may give you some ideas. There may be web pages on your community that can give you additional information, e.g. your town or neighborhood association may have their own webpages, and even Wikipedia may have useful historical and background information to offer.

Options for Foreign Students. Foreign students are welcome to choose the neighborhood they live in now or lived in in the past for Project 2. However, they are also welcome to compare, say, their country with the US, or some other country, or the entire world. You could, for example, compare countries on literacy rates, educational attainment, women in the labor force and other gender-related variables, birth rates, population growth, use of contraception, health and mortality, income. Actually, there are a lot of interesting variables in international data sets that you do not find in the US Census. I will suggest good resources for foreign students too.