Lab Session #1: Overview

This course has a weekly lab as part of the regular class lineup. As noted in the syllabus, it meets Fridays in Eggers 030. As students in Soc.363, you will have scheduled as well as unscheduled access to this space for your work. In order for you to access the lab, your ID numbers will be added to the list of those with authorized access. If swiping your ID card does not gain you access, please check with the Ms. Coria in the Soc. Dept. office (Max 302). By next week everyone should be able to use their card for lab entry. Because 030 is less busy than other campus labs (Kimmel for ex.), some students prefer to work here. On the other hand, the 030 setup may differ from other undergrad clusters. While (presumably) the screens look like the other clusters, there continue to be differences between Maxwell and other campus systems that may trip you up on occasion. Be aware of this and remember to save and take your work/files with you.

We advise caution in dealing with this (& all) computing environments. Though much improved in terms of their “ease-of-use” as opposed to a few years ago, they are still not hassle-free.

In addition to reading about cities, this course aims to provide you with a set of tools: analytical, research etc., to enable you to complete the major projects in the course. These will also improve your general competencies, and will help you perform better in other courses. What you learn here will also improve your standing amidst other candidates with whom you will be competing in the job market, next summer, next year, etc. Take advantage of the opportunity. This is one of the few places at SU to hone these skills.

What do we want you to know; what should you be able to do when you finish the course?

There are 4 areas of skill we will be working on:

- **Word processing.** We take it for granted that you know how to type, and use either SU facilities or your own hardware/software to do your work. We have also noted, however, that few students have more than rudimentary skills in using word processing software. To do the work in this course, you will need to be able to do more with that software. You should learn about and know how to use macros, templates & styles, cutting and pasting between documents, sorting of text, appropriate formatting, etc.

- **Research skills, i.e. library and Internet competencies.** A fundamental principle of our approach is not just to give you information about the history, development, etc. of cities but equally importantly to show you how to find out for yourself what you need to know and what we don’t (have time to) teach you. To that end we want to make sure you are well versed in navigating SU’s Library’s system, as well as libraries and the Web/world beyond Bird/SU. There are different resources, different tools to access them, in different places; and you need to be able to make appropriate use of Bird, and other resources both online and off. SU’s library systems continue undergoing substantial change. We will be scheduling an information session with the Sociology Librarian (Ms. Bonnie Ryan) to bring you up to date.
about the resources and services Bird has to offer. That session will be at our regular class time. Watch your email for the date & location.

- Information resources; much of the information you will need to do your projects, we will not directly provide. We will show you how & where to find what you need. E.g., while we have some data at hand re. US cities, you will most likely have to find more factual and numerical data to flesh out the analyses you wish to make. We will show you how to identify & get that information from the census, newsgroups/listserves, websites etc. (We also strongly encourage you to make Ms. Ryan’s (the Sociology Librarian) acquaintance)

- Getting basic information is only part of the process; you will need appropriate tools to analyze it. Excel is the tool we will use here to handle quantitative information. If you are familiar with it, you are ahead of the game, (if you are familiar with SAS or SPSS, even better). If you are not, we will show you the rudiments of what you need to know to get your projects done. Be advised, however, that Business increasingly regards spreadsheet competency as a “taken for granted” skill. You should therefore really familiarize yourself with Excel. Work regularly on these skills. There will not be time in the last three weeks of the semester to learn what you could/should have readily learned in more measured fashion from the start

- Work Groups/ Collaboration.¹

Today’s Lab assignment:
A for today:
1. Find the US Census site, (last year’s class found Social Explorer easier to use than the Census site) and look up the population for your town, city, or county, etc.
2. Make a simple table comparing the 1990/2000/2010 pop. Numbers. Include the pop. totals and also the categories by Race, (White, Black, Asian) & Hispanic, bkgd. Include the percent change and a brief paragraph explaining what the figures show, i.e., what it tells you/what you learned. Please make it neat and well formatted.
3. Upload this exercise to BB by next Wed. (1/23). Share and critique/correct your efforts (before I get them)

For those of you from larger cities i.e., ones that occupy all or most of a county/counties, (e.g., Chicago, or Philadelphia), compare the 1990- 2010 (& latest estimates) overall pop. and racial breakdowns of your city with a nearby suburban county, e.g., Philadelphia vs. Montgomery, or Bucks County; NYC vs. Westchester or Nassau. For those from or near cities that are within a larger county (e.g., Newark, Yonkers, Pittsburgh), compare the same (1990-2000) pop. figures with those of the surrounding county, Hudson, Westchester, Allegheny, etc. Include a map showing the area(s) you’re describing.
Again, make a table, so it’s neat and easy to read. Remember: clarity of exposition, neatness counts. In other words, make it look good if you expect full credit.

¹(While there are only 19/20 machines, students can bring laptops and work wirelessly)