

Assignment 3: Essay Assignment Social Class and Educational Quality

From the beginning of the discipline, sociologists have documented the negative social consequences of class inequality. Durkheim believed that universal access to good schools would diminish the negative consequences of class inequality. We see some of Durkheim's point of view in historical appeals to create and support a good public education system in the United States. Yet, the quality of public education varies greatly across American communities. Some sociologists have even argued that our public schools are more likely to reproduce—rather than counter—class inequality.

Your essay assignment is to make an argument about the relationship between the quality of a public school and its location within the American class structure. As a preliminary exercise to this essay, you will be given data on two San Francisco Bay area schools and their surrounding communities. You will be asked to find the same data about your own high school and home community.* **After comparing data from the three schools, consider how the quality of one's high school education might affect one's life chances as well as how the quality of high schools may be influenced by the socio-economic status of the surrounding community.** Having given some thought to some general ways in which socio-economic factors affect educational quality, **how has your own educational experience been influenced by the socio-economic context of your high school and home community?**

There are two components to this assignment—the data worksheet and the essay. A copy of the completed worksheet should be stapled to the final essay, but **I will also collect one copy of your completed data worksheet in class on Sept. 27th.** (Make two copies of the worksheet before class on the 27th.) Your completed essay should be between 1125 and 1375 words (4.5 to 5.5 pages), typed and double-spaced. Your word count should be posted on the top left side of the first page. Print your name and student I.D. number on the top right side of the first page. **The final essay is due in class on October 11th.** (Bring hard copies of your essays to class. I will not accept electronically submitted papers without advance permission—the extenuating circumstances must be extreme!)

*If you went to a private high school in California, look up data on the public high school you might have attended. These data may be useful in explaining the decision to attend a private school. If you grew up outside California (but in the United States), see if you can find data about your high school at www.greatschools.net. If you are an international student or cannot find sufficient data about your own school or attended Balboa or Piedmont, use one of these four high schools to practice collecting statistical data. Feel free to write about your own schooling experiences in your essay, but also try to make use of some of the data collected on the third school.

High School/City:
Marshall (Thurgood) (San Francisco) (make sure you're getting SF data—a lot of schools have this name)

District: San Francisco Unified
State API ranking: 3
Zip Code: 94124
(urban school, Asian, African American & Latino)

High School/City:
Las Lomas High (Walnut Creek)

District: Acalanes Union High
State API ranking: 10
Zip Code: 94596
(suburban school, mostly white students, with minority Asian American and Latino population)

High School/City:
Livermore High (Livermore)
District: Livermore Unified
State API ranking: 6
Zip Code: 94550
(rural community with new suburban
developments, majority white students
with large Latino minority)

High School/City:
Willits High (Willits is in Mendocino County)
District: Willits Unified
State API ranking: 4
Zip Code: 95490
(small town, majority white students, some
Latinos)

Goals of the Essay Assignment (most of your letter grade will be based on items 3, 4 and 5)

- 1) Learn basic internet skills to gather statistical data on a given problem;
- 2) Be able to interpret data about income/wealth, education, occupation to generally place a school's student population and home communities within a larger class structure (poor/working class/middle class/upper middle class/wealthy);
- 3) Be able to show knowledge of assigned readings as a source of information for your essay;**
- 4) Be able to present a sociologically grounded argument to justify one's conclusions about the relationship between class inequality and public school quality;**
- 5) Be able to identify and explain how external social factors have shaped your own educational experiences;**
- 6) Be able to express your ideas clearly with some evidence of original thought;
- 7) Be able to appropriately cite scholarly ideas and use scholarly quotes (see the handout entitled "Essay Structure and Citations" on the course website).

Some hints before starting

Much of this essay is a reflection in your own words upon your own experiences, but papers are awarded higher grades if they do two things: 1) present ideas that are organized around a central argument and 2) show familiarity with the course readings and content. Read the handout on Essay Structure and Citations before you start your work.

After finding the data to complete your worksheet, make a sociological sketch of the Balboa and Piedmont High and their home communities. I selected Balboa and Piedmont because they were comparably sized schools with evident class differences. As you are making your sketch, how do you know that one school is "better" than the other? Is one school dealing with more social issues (e.g., poverty, low parent education level, knowledge of English, diverse student body) than another? Would an "excellent" student at Balboa have the same opportunities and preparation for college as an "excellent" student at Piedmont? How might an "average" student at Piedmont fare after high school versus an "average" student at Balboa? Which of these average students would be more likely to go on to college? What can you say about the neighborhoods surrounding the schools? What can you say about public education and the degree to which students are empowered or held back by the quality of the institution they attend?

Once you have identified some general factors indicating a relationship between the quality of each school and the class position of its students at Balboa and Piedmont, reflect on your own educational experiences. Your educational experiences might introduce specific or unique factors that modify some of the general conclusions drawn from the Balboa and Piedmont data. Have your life chances been affected by the quality of your high school education and the community in which you grew up (e.g., can you see advantages or

disadvantages derived from your high school education and community)? If so, explain how. If not, explain why not.

Make sure you download and print the "Guide to the Worksheets" and "Essay Structure and Citation Guide" from the Essay 1 file in the assignments folder on Blackboard. The "Guide to the Worksheets" will walk you through the steps needed to get your school data from the internet sites. The "Essay Structure and Citation Guidelines" will give you pointers on how to organize your essay and how to properly cite scholarly sources.

Assignment Calendar

Date	Event	Activity
Sept. 20	Receive essay assignment in class	Go to websites to collect data for worksheets. Note differences among the schools and home communities. Which data are particularly reflective of class differences?
Sept. 22	Discussion of Data Worksheets	Did you have any problems finding the information required by the worksheets? <u>If so, bring your questions to class.</u> How would you describe the different schools in terms of class differences and racial/ethnic differences? Does one school seem much better or worse than the other two? How would you support your assessment of school quality?
Sept. 27	Make two copies of completed worksheets. Turn in one copy in class.	Formulate a rough version of an argument that you think explains your Data. Start working on the body of your paper.
Sept. 29	No assignments due	Finish first draft of paper. Refine the argument—especially as presented in the introduction.
Oct. 4	First in-class quiz (30 min.) Bring in data worksheets, drafts of essay	Discuss your educational experiences and interpretations of your data with your classmates in small groups. Help each other refine your central argument.
Oct. 6	No assignments due	Revise your essay in light of Oct. 4 th discussion. Incorporate the best suggestions. Ask friends to read your paper. Proofread and polish final draft.

Oct. 11	Essay due in class
---------	--------------------

Essay Criteria

Introduction	Excellent	Fair	Inadequate
--------------	-----------	------	------------

Presents topic, or theme, of the paper in a way that reflects understanding of the relevant course-related issues.	E	F	I
--	---	---	---

Presents sociologically-grounded argument about the relationship between class inequality and public school quality in a clear and concise way.	E	f	I
---	---	---	---

Body of the Essay

Course readings or material are used appropriately to provide context and to define relevant sociological terms.	E	F	I
--	---	---	---

Data from worksheets is used to support argument, and to place	E	F	I
--	---	---	---

A school's student population and home communities within a larger class structure.	E	F	I
---	---	---	---

Demonstrates a basic knowledge of how class location is determined based on income/wealth, occupation, and education.	E	F	I
---	---	---	---

Personal reflection is used to enhance argument about the influence of external social factors on personal educational experience.	E	F	I
--	---	---	---

Essay has a natural and logical flow, with paragraphs relating clearly to the main argument, and transitional sentences connecting one idea to the next.	E	F	I
--	---	---	---

Significant quotes and ideas gleaned from readings, articles, or other sources are attributed to particular authors.	E	F	I
--	---	---	---

Conclusion

Summarizes main argument of the paper in a clearly-stated manner, and ideally returns to a major idea (now in more nuanced form) initially presented in the introduction.	E	F	I
---	---	---	---

Mechanics and Citation

Writing is polished. Proofreads for correct grammar and spelling.	E	F	I
---	---	---	---

Attached data sheet is complete and accurate.	E	F	I
---	---	---	---

Follows citation format as outlined in the "Essay Structure and Citation Guide" with very few errors.	E	F	I
---	---	---	---