

WCSC Seminar – Spring 2021  
**Neighborhood Case Study Assignment**

The Neighborhood Case Study assignment—including all components—counts toward 50% of your final grade in The Urban Landscape. Through this assignment, you will use a variety of ways of knowing to describe the neighborhood you are studying. Who lives there? What's it like? How has the neighborhood changed in recent decades? What makes that place unique? What challenges does the community face? Your research for this project will be completed through a minimum of three field visits to the neighborhood, in addition to background research you conduct online and at the library.

The Neighborhood Case Study includes a total of five required submissions and a final presentation. The first three submissions are each worth 10% of your grade and will eventually be compiled into a single document describing the neighborhood across physical, social and cultural, and economic dimensions.

- 1) The neighborhood in physical space (1<sup>st</sup> field visit) – DUE: **2/4 by 11am** (10%)
- 2) The neighborhood in social and cultural space (2<sup>nd</sup> field visit) – DUE: **3/4 by 11am** (10%)
- 3) The neighborhood in economic space (3<sup>rd</sup> field visit) – DUE: **3/25 by 11am** (10%)
- 4) Draft paper for writing workshop – DUE: **4/8 by 11am** (5%)
- 5) Final neighborhood case study (and presentation) – DUE: **4/29 by 11am** (15%)

**The Neighborhood in Physical Space** (1<sup>st</sup> field visit) – DUE: **2/4 by 11:00am**

The goal of this field visit and written report is to describe the neighborhood's physical characteristics. What does it look like? How does it smell? How does it sound? What kinds of architecture are prominent? What are the boundaries of the neighborhood? What kinds of outdoor spaces or amenities do you see?

Instructions:

- 1) Before you go:
  - a. Do some online research to see how the boundaries of the neighborhood are defined in different representations or descriptions of the neighborhood. Is there variation in the boundaries that are identified?
  - b. Use Google Maps to identify residential areas and commercial corridors in the neighborhood.
- 2) While you're there:
  - a. Walk down a **commercial corridor** and through some of the **residential areas** within the neighborhood. Be observant. What do you see? What do you smell and hear? How would you describe those spaces to people who had never been there? Are they clean? Are they run down? Make a note of things that stand out to you. Is there public art? What types of public amenities do you see (e.g., playground equipment, bus/metro stop, bike trail, sports field, etc.)?
  - b. **Take pictures** of a typical business and a typical house. What characteristics of this business and house reflect what is typical in the neighborhood?
  - c. **Ask a few people** what the boundaries of the neighborhood are. You can tell them you are doing a school project on DC neighborhoods and are trying to learn about this one.
- 3) When you're back:
  - a. **Draw a map** of the neighborhood on a sheet of paper. Include those features that you think would be most important for conveying the physical space of the neighborhood to somebody

- who has never been there. Be clear about what boundaries mark the edges of the neighborhood on your map.
- b. Write up a **narrative description** of the neighborhood. This is not a step-by-step, first-person recounting of what you did during your visit. Rather it is a description that should convey through word images what a visitor to the neighborhood would see, smell, and hear. Try to make your writing as engaging as possible. The point is to make it interesting and to evoke for your reader a vision of **what the neighborhood looks, smells, and sounds like**. Include the **photographs** you took of a typical business and a typical house. Including more photographs is great, but not required.
  - c. **Your narrative description should be a minimum of 900 words**. Submit your narrative description, along with a digital image of your map through the Moodle assignment. (Please also bring the hardcopy of your map to class.)

### **The Neighborhood in Social and Cultural Space (2<sup>nd</sup> field visit) – DUE: 3/4 by 11:00am**

The goal of this field visit and written report is to describe the social and cultural world of the neighborhood. Who lives there? Who works there? What languages are spoken? What faiths are practiced? Who does the neighborhood belong to—and who belongs in the neighborhood? What does it feel like for you to be there?

Instructions:

- 1) Before you go:
  - a. Use StatisticalAtlas.com to look up **demographic information** for the neighborhood, or as close to that scale of geography as you can get. What are the racial demographics? What is the median household income? What percentage of households receive food stamps (now called SNAP)? What percentage of adults have high school or college degrees?
  - b. Identify a church or house of worship within the neighborhood. What faith or denomination worships there? How long has that congregation been in that location?
- 2) While you're there:
  - a. Observe a few **public places** and make note of the people you see. Describe them (at least as they appear to you). Age? Gender? Race? Ethnicity? Class? **Take a picture** of one of the public spaces that you observe.
  - b. What kinds of things are people doing? What patterns do you observe about what behavior is acceptable in public places in this neighborhood? What languages do you hear spoken?
  - c. ~~[Requirement removed due to COVID.] Walk into a few **businesses**. Have coffee or lunch. How does it feel to be in those spaces? Do you belong? Do you feel at home? Who *does* belong? Who does not? How do you know?~~
  - d. Stop by the **church or house of worship** you identified. Learn what you can about the congregation (How large is it? How long have they been there? When was the building originally built and what group did it originally house?)
- 3) When you're back:
  - a. Describe the neighborhood as a **social and cultural space**. What characterizes the people who live, work, and play there? What languages did you hear or see written? What evidence did you see of specific cultural groups? Describe the house of worship that you researched. **Refer to both the demographic data you found and your observations from the field**

- visit in filling out this description. (You should report the numerical demographic data in a table.)
- b. Write a first-person reflection describing **what it has felt like** for you to be in the neighborhood. Did you feel like you belonged? Did you feel like an outsider? Did you feel safe or unsafe? What types of things gave rise to these emotions?
  - c. **Your write-up, including the description of the social and cultural space and your first-person reflections, should be a minimum of 900 words.** Submit your write up through the Moodle assignment portal.

### **The Neighborhood in Economic Space (3<sup>rd</sup> field visit) – DUE: 3/25 by 11:00am**

The goal of this field visit and written report is to describe patterns of investment and development in the neighborhood. Are developers building new buildings? (Or, conversely, are buildings sitting vacant?) Have new businesses opened recently? Is the City investing in public infrastructure? Are property values going up or going down?

- 1) Before you go:
  - a. Use Zillow.com to look up the **median home value** in the neighborhood today and compare it to the median home value in 2010. Are home values rising? Falling? By how much?
- 2) While you're there:
  - a. Walk around 4 or 5 blocks. Include residential and commercial streets. **Identify what appear to be the newest buildings, businesses, and infrastructure** (sidewalks, benches, bus stops, etc.). Document these with **photographs** and record their locations.
  - b. Who do you think they were built for? Were they built for the people you described in your social and cultural space write up? Were they built for somebody else? Do you think they reflect neighborhood change? Why?
  - c. Take note of the condition of the housing stock. Are houses well-maintained? Do you see vacant properties? Properties for sale? Do you see construction? Identify two houses or apartment buildings that appear typical for the neighborhood. **Take pictures** of those buildings and record their addresses.
- 3) When you're back:
  - a. **Draw a neighborhood map** on a sheet of paper with a few basic landmarks and mark on this map the location of the newer buildings, businesses, and infrastructure that you documented.
  - b. For the two typical houses or apartment buildings you identified, **look up** the date and price of most recent sale using Zillow.com. Report these values along with your photographs of the properties.
  - c. **Describe** the patterns of investment and development that you observed (and that you have represented on your map). Where is economic development happening? What types of development did you (or did you not) observe? Include at least **four photographs** within your write-up.
  - d. Based on these observations, do you think that the neighborhood is seen as a profitable site for development? Explain your reasoning. If you think the neighborhood would benefit from outside investment, why do you think this has not happened? Again, explain your reasoning.

- e. **Your write-up should be a minimum of 600 words.** Submit your write up, along with a digital image of your map through the Moodle assignment portal. (Please also bring the hardcopy of your map to class.)

### **Draft Neighborhood Case Study for Writing Workshop – DUE: 4/8 by 11:00am**

Your full neighborhood description will incorporate each of the three components you have already written. In addition:

- 1) **Add an introduction** that frames the purpose of the paper and previews what you accomplish in each of the three sections (you can think about this as the central takeaways). Then check each of the sections for flow and tone. Do they sit comfortably alongside each other as a single document? Are there redundancies? Consider modifying the transitional paragraphs at the beginning and end of each section so the reader can move smoothly from one to the next, with a clear sense of your larger purpose.
- 2) **Add a discussion section**, in which you provide your own broad assessment of the neighborhood. This is where you pull it all together. What do you see as the neighborhood's strengths? What are the challenges it faces? What makes the neighborhood unique? What characterizes the neighborhood? Stability? Change? Diversity? Homogeneity? Additionally, **look up five references** to your neighborhood in the news from the past 10 years. How does the representation of the neighborhood in the story compare to your assessment of the neighborhood? Properly cite all five sources using APA style.
- 3) **Add a conclusion** at the end of the paper. In the conclusion, reiterate your purpose for writing (hit those takeaways again so the reader has no doubt about what you just communicated).

On April 8, we will use our seminar meeting to workshop your neighborhood descriptions. You should submit a draft of your neighborhood case studies **on Moodle by 11am on that day**. Be sure to also **bring two hard copies of your draft to class** (printing on scratch paper is fine). Submitting the draft and participating in the workshop represent 5% of your grade.

### **Final Neighborhood Case Study – DUE: 4/29 by 11:00am**

Revise your full neighborhood case study, incorporating feedback that you received through the writing workshop. **Your full report should be at least 3,000 words.** Include the maps, photographs, and tables that were part of your initial submissions. Any sources should be properly cited in APA format. If you have any questions about citation formatting, please ask me. Submit your full report **on Moodle**.

**On April 29, you will each give a presentation of your project, as part of an end-of-semester celebration of the work you have done in seminar.** You will have 10-12 minutes to share an overview of what you have learned. At a minimum, describe the neighborhood across physical, social and cultural, and economic dimensions. You are expected to use projected images (aka, slides) to support your presentations. However, slides should primarily be used for images (maps and photographs). *Use text extremely sparingly.* This is your chance to articulate and communicate what you learned. What was interesting? What was surprising? What made you like (or really dislike) this neighborhood? Why? Help us—the audience—to understand what's going on in the neighborhood and how the neighborhood fits within larger processes of change in Washington, DC.