

Research Paper/Practical Project Guidelines

For the semester project, you will design and carry out a service-oriented project, collaborating with an organization in the Mississippi Delta. You can choose whether you wish to take a research or practical orientation to this project. Your project should focus on a specific environmental issue that affects communities in the Delta. You have substantial latitude in defining your project, but some parameters are provided here. Once you have completed your field research or practical activities, you will prepare and submit a 12-page report on your findings and accomplishments, and present a summary of your paper/project to the class.

General Parameters

(1) You should start by identifying an environmental issue that you believe is significant in the Mississippi Delta region. Your issue may pertain to resource scarcity, land management, pollution, environmental health, toxic waste, environmental justice, or other similar environmental issues.

(2) You then need to identify a local organization working on this issue in some way. This may be a community-based or non-profit organization, a government agency (city, county, state, national), a business, a chamber of commerce, a church group, or any similar group that has environmental protection as one of its goals. You should contact the group and explain the assignment and offer to assist them in fulfilling some of their needs. You will collaborate with this group on a research or policy-oriented project, either designing a small research project to collect data that will help them in their planning or other activities, or assisting them directly with their planning or management. Your project should be broadly related to community development and to assisting the organization at the level of planning and management; volunteering to clean up litter and similar projects are not appropriate for this assignment.

(3) You may pair up with one other student and collaborate with the same organization. You each should develop your own independent project with the organization, however.

(4) You should establish a primary contact with someone in your organization. This person will be your contact and supervisor in this project.

(5) Once you have identified a topic and an organization, you should write up a brief plan of action that you will use to guide your project. Turn this plan into the course instructor by **February 10**. Provide the course instructor with the name and contact information (telephone, e-mail) for your contact/supervisor along with your initial project plan. Also, have your contact/supervisor prepare a letter on their organizational letterhead stating that they agree to collaborate with you on this project. Your supervisor should send this letter to the course instructor (Dr. Barton, c/o Box 3264, DSU, Cleveland, MS 38733).

(6) You should spend approximately 20 to 24 hours in the field collecting data or working on your practical project. This is **field time**, not the total amount of time you spend on this project.

(7) Once you have completed the field portion of your research or mini-practicum, write a report describing your experiences. The report should be 12 pages, and should describe:

- (a) the environmental issue and how it is manifested here in the Delta;
- (b) the organization you worked with;
- (c) the specific project you developed, and how it addresses the environmental issue and helps the organization;
- (d) what you did and what you learned.

If you did a research project, (c) and (d) should include your research design/methodology and results. If you did a practical project, (c) and (d) should discuss your activities, lessons, and policy ramifications. The paper is due on **April 28**.

(8) You will prepare a brief, 15-minute presentation on your project and results, and present it to the class on **May 3**.

Research Paper

Your organization may have some information they need to know from people in the area. You should design a brief research project, using either quantitative or qualitative techniques, to assist the organization in understanding some aspect of the problem. You may, for example, design a short survey questionnaire, select a sample of about 20 to 25 respondents, administer the questionnaire, and analyze the results. Alternatively, you may hold two or three focus groups with five or six people to discuss their impressions and perceptions about your issue, or carry out extended interviews with 8 carefully selected people or so. You will then analyze these interviews and develop results for the organization. Don't rely solely on friends and family for your subjects; make sure you find a broad, representative array of people to survey or interview.

Practical Project

Your organization may have a particular problem that you can apply your training and expertise in community development to help them address. You may, for example, help them in their strategic planning, you may write a policy brief for them, or you may evaluate some aspect of their organization or operations. You may use either a policy/planning or a community-empowerment framework to conceptualize your project. You should keep a journal of activities to document what you do. You may present your results to the organizational managers or its clients in a paper or a presentation, but you should write a paper summarizing your activities (don't just include your journal; extract and describe the salient activities) and findings or lessons learned. In your report, you should reflect on your experiences and their value both to the organization and to you.

Timeline of Dates to Remember

Jan.	Identify an environmental issue and collaborating organization. Contact the organization and develop a brief project plan.
Feb. 10	Initial project plan due. Include the name and contact information for your contact/supervisor.
Feb.-Apr.	Work on your project. You should spend 20-24 hours in field work.
Apr.	By the beginning of April, you should start writing up your results.
Apr. 28	Turn in your 12-page project report.
May 3	Presentation to the class.