A Survey of the Quality of Life in the City of Long Beach:

Districts 5 and 3

By

Laura Ashcraft & Kellee Green

For

Dr. Adrian Novotny, Professor
Honors Cultural Anthropology

April 28, 2009

Long Beach City College

Long Beach, California
Introduction

As students of the Honors Anthropology class of Long Beach City College we, Kellee Green and Laura Ashcraft, were assigned the project of assessing the quality of life as perceived by the citizens of Long Beach, California. To do this, we surveyed a random sampling of people throughout our assigned districts within Long Beach (see map on page 8). These individuals ranked the City of Long Beach on how well it provided its citizens with the elements required for a good quality of life. They also indicated where the City needs to improve.

What Did We Do?

In the introduction to his anthropology website, Dr. Christopher Kaplonski tells of a conversation he had with a research assistant in Mongolia:

I was walking down the street in Ulaanbaatar with a woman who had just started working as an assistant for me. “You’re weird,” she suddenly proclaimed. “Oh, why is that?” I asked, more intrigued to hear what she had to say than offended or hurt. “Well,” she said, “You aren’t a businessman. You didn’t come here to get rich off us Mongolians.” “Nope.” “And you aren’t a missionary. You aren’t trying to convert us or save our souls.” “Nope.” “So, you came from literally the other side of the world just to talk to people, and find out what they think?” “That’s about it.” “Like I said, you’re weird” (Kaplonski 2002).

This is what we set out to do in our fieldwork (with the exception of being perceived as weird): we talked to the people of Long Beach and found out what they thought was necessary for a “high quality of life.” This assessment consisted of personal interviews with a survey that would allow the participants to state their view and grade the City of Long Beach on how well it contributes to the quality of life (QOL) of its people.

Why We Interviewed

The purpose of this research project was to familiarize the Honors Anthropology student with the process of fieldwork. After all, we are well read about the area and are fluent in the language spoken by the people. However, a greater purpose was served in our efforts to study
Long Beach. Its people have been given a voice and their viewpoints will be represented at a city council meeting later this year. Further, Long Beach City Council members will have a sample of perspectives given by those affected by their decisions. This is anthropology in action.

**Who We Interviewed**

The people we interviewed live and/or work within the City of Long Beach and are qualified to respond to our survey based on those criteria alone. We understood that Long Beach “The International City” is very diverse in its population and that our sampling had to be just as diverse. For this reason, it was not enough to go for “people whom it [was] convenient to question” (Boone 2004). It was important to have the opinion of Long Beach’s retirement community, gay community, student community, migrant community, homeless community, affluent community, and working community. To include all of these populations, we carefully considered where we would interview.

**Where & When We Interviewed**

Our given areas were districts 3 and 5 (see map on page 8). We set off as a team in area 5 and worked individually in area 3. We gathered a segment of the working community at local businesses in and near the Long Beach Towne Center. Much of the student community was represented in local coffee shops. People at coffee shops are very receptive. If you find that people are studying, let them know that the survey will only take a few minutes. A quick search on a map search engine will gave the locations of all the coffee shops in your district.

Parks are a good place to find respondents that are not busy. The migrant (Hispanic) community can be found playing soccer in parks on Sundays. However, we recommend staying away from parks in the evening hours when illegal activity is more likely to be taking place. Again, a map search will let you know where the parks in your district are located.
Local pubs have samples of several different populations. They have a greater number of patrons in the evening hours. You will find that people in pubs are very responsive.

We discovered senior centers were also filled with people that were more than happy to participate in the QOL survey. The seniors’ perspectives are very interesting because they have a long-term outlook. Many have lived in Long Beach for more than twenty years and can clearly articulate how the quality of life has improved and/or degenerated over the years.

**How We Interviewed**

As stated above, we used interviews and surveys, as well as eliciting devices such as a tablet pc (everybody loves new technology), and a specific introduction for assuring our academic purpose for such personal information.

Hi, I’m an Anthropology student at Long Beach City College. We’re doing a study on the quality of life here in Long Beach, and I was hoping that I could get your opinions. The survey will take less than five minutes and is completely anonymous. Would that be okay?

The partnership worked quite well, for safety and encouragement. We succeeded together in approaching complete strangers. Our morale was strong. Perhaps the key to our success (we turned in over 100 surveys) was that we approached with a friendly smile. A smile melts many barriers between people. Out of over 100 attempts we had six refusals. Don’t fear rejection.

**Our Reception**

When first embarking on our project, we both were skeptical as to how we would be received by total strangers. In our experiences dealing with unsolicited agents, we were sometimes frustrated, impatient, or apathetic. So, to offset such reactions from those we approached, we prepared a careful, yet short introduction. We kept it brief and were astonished at how well it worked.
Much to our surprise, 95% of the people we asked did positively accept us and were enthusiastic to take the survey. And the other 5% were working on something and were polite in letting us know that otherwise they would participate. Common respect and decency are still alive, we’re glad to report.

**Summary**

As stated above, most people we interviewed were pleased to answer questions regarding Long Beach in terms of health, safety, education, and quality of life. Some advice to future researchers on the subject of interviewing would be:

a) Keep an organized journal of your interview experiences from start to finish.

b) Prepare your introduction and present yourself professionally. (No disheveled appearance, as it makes for unfavorable impressions and respondents may not take you seriously.)

c) Start early, because the closer to lunch time it gets, the more stressed people seem to get in regards to conserving their time.

d) Finally, always keep a cheerful and attentive attitude, as people like to feel energized and like attention paid to them.

To avoid making inaccuracies in the data due to paraphrasing or defining words for the respondent, we had almost all our respondents fill in the questionnaire themselves. “[W]hen [an interviewer] paraphrases [], it is likely that some aspect of the question will be changed, and the response will be different to the one that would have been obtained from the original question. Good interviewer training will instill into the interviewer that the wording on the questionnaire is to be kept to” (Brace 15). We kept to this advice and only filled in the questionnaire for respondents that preferred to have us read the questions and fill in the answers for them.
Revisions to the Instrument

Overall, the instrument that the class came up with was very effective. The questions provoked conversation with respondents and provided a lot of information. There are, however, a couple of revisions that would optimize the effectiveness of our instrument.

Part I, Question 4 (Household income) does not have a space for people to indicate an income of 61-70k. There was only one respondent who commented on this error.

Part I, Question 8 (Total number of years of education), respondents were confused about from which year in their education they should begin to count. The question should clarify that we mean from first grade forward. Initially, there were several respondents who commented on the lack of clarity. Thus, we clarified that we intended for them to count from first grade forward on question number 8 before people started the survey.

Part II, Question 3 (How do you rate the effectiveness of police protection in the Long Beach area?) should be an open ended question. We found that people had a lot to say when it came to rating Long Beach’s police department. People in economically challenged neighborhoods complained of racial profiling and harassment. People from more affluent neighborhoods were very satisfied with police protection. There were many personal experiences that people reported.

Part II, Question 6 (How do you rate the affordability of health care in the Long Beach area?) was irrelevant for many respondents. While for the most part they agreed that health care is not affordable, people felt that it had nothing to do with the City of Long Beach, but rather it is a nation-wide issue.

Recommended Further Research

During several interviews, respondents expressed concerns about the current president’s desire to move toward “socialized medicine”. Perhaps, instead of questioning people about the
affordability of healthcare, we could ask about socialized medicine. What would be the pros and cons of a government run healthcare system? Do the people responding to the survey feel the City of Long Beach could adequately provide such healthcare? How do people rate the hospitals, clinics, and healthcare providers within the City of Long Beach?

Remember, “if a survey is to be repeated over time the important thing is to ensure consistency of measurement[,] so that whatever ‘[quality of life]’ means we can be sure that we are measuring it the same way each time” (Dorofeev and Grant 4).
Long Beach District Map
Reference Sources


<http://www.kevinboone.com/howto_survey.html#5%20Bias>.


