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

District III

A Fieldwork Research Project
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For

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Introduction

In a collaborative effort on the part of the Honors Cultural Anthropology class in the spring of 2009, we all decided to take a survey of the city of Long Beach. During our class meetings early in the semester, and after many discussions, the class decided that it would be a good idea to find out if the people of Long Beach felt they had a good quality of life. The class felt as though quality of life was something that was important for city administrators to know about, but also something the class would benefit from as well. While discussing different methods for collecting data, the class decided on doing short surveys in order to gather information. In mutual agreement, the class decided that everyone would gather a minimum of 50 surveys each. The surveys would consist of questions about quality of life that the people in class found were the most relevant, and they would be presented on a likert scale. The purpose of the research was to gain first hand anthropological experience. While at the same time, doing something that would contribute to our everyday lives. The value of assessing quality of life would be beneficial to ourselves individually in understanding what we can do to improve quality of life in Long Beach, but also for city administrators to understand the citizen's viewpoint of quality of life in Long Beach. After collecting all of the surveys, the information would be compiled and presented as comparable data. Then, offered in a final synopsis to the city of Long Beach, in hopes that the city will respond to our recommendations.

Summary

When gathering information with surveys for a research project, it's hard to know where to start. Especially since this was the first time I had done this. The class decided everyone
would be in charge of gathering information from all the different districts in Long Beach. I chose to do my surveys in my neighborhood of Belmont Shore, which is district three. After doing a test run of survey's on friends and family, I gained a good idea of how long the surveys would take, and also the best way to go about asking the questions. Now that I sorted out all the minor details, I had to figure a good way to find people to interview. Initially I started off going to local coffee shops and simply asking people who looked like they needed some conversation. Other than coffee shops, I also found that the beach was a good place to talk with people. It took a little more time at the beach to find people to interview compared to the coffee shops. Mostly people who were walking their dogs, fishing, taking photographs, or just walking alone turned out to be the most responsive. Generally, I got the same conclusion with people hanging out at the beach as I did with people at coffee shops. Although coffee shops and the beach were the source for just over half of my surveys, they weren't the most efficient ways of finding people to interview. For me, the best method I used in order to gain the most diverse set of people was through a referral process. I simply asked the initial interviewers if they had any friends or family who would want to participate and who also lived in Long Beach. This proved to be the best way to get a diverse sample because there were a lot of people who would ask their friends and neighbors. Oddly enough, if someone had a friend who wanted to participate, we would meet up at one of the local coffee shops. This process led me to people all over my district.

Sometimes getting people to give simple yes or no answers in a survey can be difficult. I found the best way to find out how people truly felt was to simply strike up a conversation. People like to talk and when you give them an opportunity to do so, they'll easily share their viewpoints on many different topics. Although this may have been the best way to get people's true feelings, it was not always the best for speed and efficiency. So the best way for me to
conduct the surveys was to have a mixture between questions and conversation, and it was up to me to get the conversation back on track if it drifted. As the person doing the survey, I had the questions in front of me and I knew the questions and purpose for the survey. The person participating in the survey doesn't know what questions I'm going to ask or how many, so it was up to me to moderate the conversation.

If there's one thing that I've learned from this project, it's that people love to talk. When discussing something like quality of life, I found it difficult not to get off subject because it is something that both the interviewer and subject find important. I also found that one shouldn't ask people to take a survey if they are busy doing any kind of work or having conversations with other people. People generally don't like to be interrupted, but if you can get people before they sit down and talk, it worked out most of the time. There is one difference in approaches that I would like to talk a little about. When asking the people to take the survey, I tried out a couple ways. The first was to just ask someone if they wanted to take a survey about quality of life. This first way was quite negative. The second way was to explain myself, the project, and why I was doing the survey. This way proved to be very, very successful. If people hear a legitimate reason to do a survey, they might be more likely to take part.

**Conclusion**

It's important to be fully prepared before initiating surveys with the public. The best way to do so, might be to do a test run with family and friends in order to get a better understanding of the instrument you're using. It definitely helped me in knowing how to ask the questions but it also made me more comfortable in presenting a survey to someone. It's also good to keep a journal during the surveying process, especially if you're doing research over a longer period of
time. A journal allows you to look back on times where methods did or did not work well. I had a lot of success using the referral method mentioned before. I think it is a good idea to use if you’re surveying an area where there is a tight knit community. It might be more difficult in an area where no one knows their neighbors, but it never hurts to ask. As far as the survey itself goes, I wouldn’t have changed anything. The class did a great job in analyzing and formatting the survey into something that works very well. The biggest problems I encountered was when I would ask people who were in conversations with other people, if they wanted to take the survey. One aspect of the process that played a large factor in the responses I got was the time of day. Cooperation varied depending on when I went out to talk with people. I went out a couple times in the morning and that didn’t really work at all because everyone is in a hurry to start the day and get to work. I found the best time was either around lunch time or early evening. People were much more relaxed and receptive during those times.

After looking through the finished surveys, I found that for the most part, people in my area based a high quality of life on money and family. Although everyone I interviewed was very polite, and from what I could tell, very good people, I think they might be a little out of touch with other parts of the city of Long Beach. Almost all of them had some form of higher education and made very good money, and I think this success might have a strong influence on how district three views quality of life. Based on my sampling, it seemed as though district three's idea of quality of life might be dependant on more material items, rather than essential needs.

**Recommended Research**

I believe this was a very good project to undertake. It was both relevant and fun. One way that this research could be taken further would be to break this survey up into more specific
projects. For example: Take one aspect of quality of life, such as housing, and develop a survey just around housing. Essentially, try to narrow down topics and get really specific data on each topic. One other idea that I think would be beneficial to the people of Long Beach and city administrators, would be to do this survey in other cities and compare the results. Doing this could give everyone in Long Beach a better comprehension of which concepts and ideas work to develop good quality of life and to uphold these things and move our city forward.