

Public Justice 325: The Poor and the Courts
FIELD PROJECT

Site location summary due **Tuesday, February 12, 2008**

Written Field Project report is due **Tuesday, May 6, 2008**

Oral Presentations will be scheduled according to your individual project plans

This project requires visiting the same community agency on **two** occasions to observe the practices, clients, and professionals. You may choose an agency in or near Oswego or one closer to your own home. Your chosen agency may reflect your career or practicum interests or may be totally different. You and a classmate may conduct your observations together, but you must each write your own paper. You should visit an agency that is new to you so that this assignment will broaden your exposure and experience and be easier to write. Plan to spend at least two hours at your agency for each visit.

Some agencies, such as most courts or police stations are open to the public. Thus you need only call the agency to determine the hours when they are open. You might, however, want to arrange to speak with an agency official before or after your observation. Other agencies, such as probation offices, and legal aid and public defender's offices, require official permission before you can obtain entry. You might also consider homeless shelters, Department of Social Services application waiting rooms, or soup kitchens. Volunteering to help prepare meals may be one way to gain admission to a soup kitchen or shelter. You may ask a school or other agency social worker, a foster care worker, a drug counselor, a mediator, a lawyer, or a youth agency recreation worker if you can spend a day or part of a day following them around. You may observe in any type of public justice facility that interests you. If you have any question about access to an agency, please see me.

You may have to do some phoning to ascertain where the activity you want to observe takes place. If you have trouble finding the location, consider what it must be like for applicants actually in need of such service. If you receive a warm reception, assess how an applicant might respond.

By **Tuesday, February 12th**, each student is to hand in a description of his or her plan for this field project, including the location and dates when you plan to observe and/or volunteer and what you expect to see.

During each observation take notes on the layout of your situation, including the specific room and building and its accessibility for people who may not own a car. **(In some settings taking notes is either awkward or prohibited.** If you can not comfortably take notes while observing, summarize your experiences as soon as you leave.) Observe the staff and clients or applicants. Around what needs does this activity revolve? How successfully are needs met?

You may observe with another student, but you are each responsible for your own written report. Dress appropriately. You want to blend in, not stand out.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ISSUES, ALTHOUGH ALL OF THESE ISSUES WILL NOT BE APPROPRIATE FOR ALL SITES:

1. Where was your agency located? Was it accessible to those who do not have a car? Was it hard to find?

2. What hours is your agency available? Was there a choice of times for participants? How long must participants wait?
3. What are the purposes and goals of your agency? Do they appear to meet these goals?
4. Is there a fee for service? Are poor people treated differently than those with more resources?
5. Is this location used for other activities besides the one you observed? Is the atmosphere welcoming or threatening? Consider how you might feel if you or your family members were clients or prospective clients of this agency? How did those waiting respond to the location? Was there privacy for applicants? Did that seem important?
6. Did the location impress you differently on your second visit? If so, what were your differing feelings on your first and second visits? If you have been to a similar location prior to this assignment and wish to share that information, how does this time differ?
7. Who were the participants in this agency and activity? Comment on the dress, behavior and apparent comfort of the participants. For example, in court these would include the judge, litigants, lawyers, court employees (clerks, attendants, bailiffs, etc.), family members and other observers. How comfortable or uncomfortable did they appear? Describe the behavior which led you to come to your conclusions about their comfort.
8. How were the participants served? Was there a first come, first serve arrangement or did some people seem get priority service? Did the participants have a chance to express themselves? Did someone else speak for the participant, such as a lawyer, counselor or friend? Who seemed to be in charge and how did that person conduct herself or himself? How did the applicants and employees respond to that person?
9. How did the participants interact with each other? For example, did the lawyers sit with other lawyers or with their clients, the judge, police officers, or the district attorney? How did the professionals relate to their clients or to other professionals? Did you see a difference in the way different clients and/or professionals were treated? Do you have an opinion about why these differences occurred or about their importance?
10. Finally, what was your impression of this whole experience? Was your experience much as you expected, or did it differ from what you anticipated? Explain. Did these observations alter your confidence in the public justice system? If so, how? Some students are surprised by their personal reactions to their field site, were you?

This paper should be typed and should not exceed FIVE double-spaced pages. While full sentences and good quality English are expected, brevity and clarity are encouraged. You have a lot of material to compress into FIVE pages so there is no room for padding. This is meant to be an analytical exercise, not a term paper.

If you have any questions, please ask them early in the semester. **YOU MUST PLAN AHEAD.** Last minute excuses, such as my car broke down or that agency's hours conflict with my class schedule will not be accepted. **It is not necessary to miss this class or any other class to fulfill this assignment.** If you are having difficulty arranging an observation site, come to office hours so that we can discuss your options.