

Neighborhood Field Study: Getting to Know Your Cluster

Introduction

By now you know which neighborhood cluster you've been assigned to. You may or may not have engaged in background research regarding the neighborhoods prior to this point, but now your next step is to get into the data and become even more familiar with your neighborhoods before you conduct the field work portion.

Purpose

The purposes of this phase of the project are for you

1. to become familiar with census data: interpreting maps and demographic data, comparing neighborhood, city, and national data, using information from the Office of Neighborhood Involvement, etc.
2. to become familiar with the historical background of the neighborhoods that comprise your cluster by accessing data at the Oregon Historical Society, as well as online and library resources
3. to become familiar with the nature of and extent to which the neighborhoods in your cluster are politically active
4. to decide on whether or not you may want to work alone or in teams or half and half (e.g., do some neighborhood observation in teams, but project work individually)
5. to think about how you may want to go about presenting your project

Background/Review

You may already have done some of the tasks below, but now is the time to do them with the specific intention of learning about your cluster using available statistical and other information.

As noted, unlike many cities, Portland has an Office of Neighborhood Involvement at <http://www.portlandonline.com/index.cfm?c=25967> , which is actually part of our city government, constituting one of the city bureaus and overseen by a city commissioner.

Portland is divided into **seven Neighborhood Coalitions** (go to http://www.marthabianco.com/Courses/neighborhood_coalitions.pdf for a printable color map), which make up the "top level" of our neighborhood system. **Your neighborhood cluster does not necessarily correspond with a formal coalition.** You can link to contact information about the coalitions, including web addresses at <http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/index.cfm?c=28390>.

At the level below the coalitions are the **individual neighborhood associations** themselves. There are **90-95 associations** (depending on whether you include five that are "recognized" but not affiliated with any Coalition). You can look at the large map of street and neighborhood detail at <http://www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=60599> to see exactly where your neighborhood clusters are. Note that Fairview and Orenco are not included, because they are not within Portland's city limits.

When you visit the detailed neighborhood map, please note that it takes a long time to load and will probably appear unreadably small on your screen. You will need to use the **zoom-in tool**, located on the toolbar in Adobe, to click on the general area where you live. Keep clicking until you see your street and neighborhood clearly.

Researching Your Neighborhood Cluster

Now you need to find out some very basic background information about your cluster. This section will guide you through a few useful research steps.

I. Census and Mapping Data

1. **Obtain a “searchable address” for the neighborhood** by looking in the Neighborhood Directory, at <http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/index.cfm?&a=65925>. These begin on p. 11 of the directory. For each neighborhood, the Directory lists officers (e.g., chair, secretary, etc., and their contact info). Use the address for the chairperson. For example, for the Alameda Neighborhood Association, the chair’s address is 2867 NE Hamblet St. If you are studying **Fairview**, use the intersection of NE Halsey St. and NE Fairview Ave.; for **Orenco**, use the address 1453 NE 61st Ave., Hillsboro.
2. **Get preliminary data** from PortlandMaps, at <http://www.portlandmaps.com/>. To search for neighborhood Census data, you must enter an address, so enter in the address you obtained for the chair or other neighborhood officer (or for Fairview/Orenco). What will come up on the first screen will be some basic information about the property at that address. **Ignore that.** Instead, **click on the “Census” tab in the upper right.** This will reveal some preliminary Census information about the neighborhood, along with some graphs and maps. Keep in mind that these data are not very useful until you compare them with citywide or national data. Otherwise, they are just stand-alone numbers.
3. **Get 2000 Census data to learn even more** about the neighborhood by going directly to the U.S. Census, at <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Type **Portland** and choose **Oregon**; then click **GO**. If you are studying Fairview, type in **Fairview**, Oregon, and for or Orenco, type in **Hillsboro**, Oregon.

Notice that in addition to whole numbers of people in certain categories, the Census provides percents and **also compares the percent in this city with the U.S. average.**

Also, notice that for many variables, there are **maps**. For example, go down to Median age (years) and click on map (to the right). A map of Portland will come up. You can see areas color coded according to the median age. For example, you can see that there is a large dark-green area in the far northwest of Portland, which corresponds with the highest median age range.

Play around with the tools at this site. With the tool in the upper right-hand corner, you can zoom down to 12 miles across, 4 miles across, etc. You’ll be able to see actual street names. With the tool in the upper left, you’ll be able to click on the *i* to get information about the specific area you’re looking at. To do this,

1. first click, the *i* and then
 2. **to avoid pop-up problems**, press your control key, and keeping it pressed,
 3. click on the neighborhood or area of interest (hold the control key down until all the information appears).
 4. **Keep in mind that for Fairview and Orenco, Census data will be for the general Hillsboro and Gresham areas and will not be representative of those two planned communities. You will need to zoom in to get to the specific locations.**
4. **Compare the Census data** from Step 3. You can look at maps of Portland to see how sociodemographic data are arrayed and, comparing the Census maps from Step 3 with the Portland neighborhood map at <http://www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=60599>, you can find information about the neighborhoods you’re looking at (e.g., median age in Alameda is 34).
 5. **Look for patterns.** The neighborhood clusters are made up of neighborhoods that have some key sociodemographic or cultural features in common. You might notice, for instance, that the neighborhoods you’re looking at in one of the clusters has a relatively high percentage of black or Hispanic residents.

Take notes that will help you choose a cluster. Remember, one of the goals of this exercise is to learn about the variety of communities in the Portland area, so look for clusters that contain sociodemographic variables that are of interest to you.

6. **You can also get a street-level map** of each neighborhood at <http://www.portlandonline.com/oni/index.cfm?c=35281>.

II. Historical and Other Information

Visit public and university libraries online and search for materials using some of the following types of keyword search phrases:

- Portland neighborhood history
- Portland Oregon history
- Portland urban history
- [individual neighborhood name]

You should also visit the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) online and perform similar searches of the OHS [library catalog at http://librarycatalog.ohs.org/WebOPAC/index.asp](http://librarycatalog.ohs.org/WebOPAC/index.asp). In addition, you can find historical photos at the OHS Portland Photo Categories Webpage at <http://www.ohs.org/collections/library/Portland-Photo-Categories.cfm>. You may use those photos free of charge as long as you are using them for educational purposes. You will need to check with the Oregon Historical Society for the library's hours. If you show your student ID, admittance is free.

Also, visit the neighborhood's web pages by going first to the City of Portland's Office of Neighborhood Involvement, at <http://www.ci.portland.or.us/oni/index.html> and at <http://www.neighborhoodlink.com>. See what you can find out about the personality of the neighborhoods in your cluster, as well as the nature and extent of their political activism (some neighborhoods are very busy, constantly involved in city politics, while others are much less involved – *why?*).

For **Orenco** and **Fairview**, do a web search for “Orenco Station” and “Fairview Village.”

<http://www.movingtoportland.net/> has a lot of information about neighborhoods in and around Portland; just remember that it's a real estate page site and is meant to attract people to Portland. It has an inherent bias, but also does provide interesting factual information and history.

Think About Your Approach to the Project and Presentation

Do you like to work alone or in teams? There are at least two people assigned to each cluster. You'll be given an opportunity to meet to decide whether you want to work alone or together or a little bit of each.

Also, begin to think about how you will want to present your field study. You'll be doing some actual field work (see “What's Next?” below) and combining your field observations with the information you've obtained from census, mapping, historical, and online sources. You will have three minutes in which to make your presentation (more about that later), so you need to decide what kind of presentation you will probably want to make. Remember, the basic choices are:

- Poster
- PowerPoint presentation
- Web Site creation and presentation
- Regular paper, with short (3-minute) oral presentation to class
- Online digital photo tour (which should include some factual information and have a focal point – not just random pictures ☺)
- Printed photos – in a portfolio or poster, again, along with factual information and a focal point
- Other (art, poetry, collage, etc., but, again, with a message and focal point)

You will learn some basic design principles and presentation methods to help you with your project. By the end of this week, you should know what type of approach you will want to take.

What's Next?

Once you've become familiar with your neighborhood clusters in terms of statistical, historical, and other information, you will be sent out into the field. We will talk about some basic field observation techniques, and then you'll be going out to observe, take notes, take photos, record images, etc. Finally, you'll begin putting together your final project.