

Essay 1 for Cities Suburbs and Schools Seminar at Trinity College, Spring 2016

Qualitative analysis of school choice parental information

The Assignment:

Write an evidence-based essay, no more than 750 words, that answers our research question:

How do public school choice programs communicate with Hartford-area families?

Your essay should include:

- 1) Intro: Raise 2 insightful arguments (or 2-part argument) from the data & significance
- 2) Short methodology paragraph: Briefly describe process & data collection for outsiders
- 3) Body paragraphs: Clarify each argument with topic sentence and persuasive evidence
- 4) Conclusion: Emphasize why findings matter & connect to at least 1 secondary source

Evaluation criteria (for readers who will comment on your essay):

- Does the author make clear & insightful arguments, relevant to the research question?
- Are the arguments supported with persuasive evidence and interpretation?
- Does the essay make you think about this topic in a new way?

Deadlines:

- Post essay on GDoc Organizer, so anyone with the link can comment, by the end of Fri Feb 12
- Each student will be assigned to peer edit another GDoc essay by the end of Sunday Feb 14
- Revise and repost your essay on our Trinity-Yale GDoc organizer by the end of Mon Feb 15

Advice on how to think, organize ideas, and write this essay:

In class, look for interesting themes that emerge when reading **other students'** field notes, not just your own. Themes are **conceptual categories** about how choice schools and prospective families communicate, which appear in **some** field notes, but not necessarily all.

Themes may be:

- **Literal:** (e.g. findable in a text search); more interesting if you see patterns about who raises the theme, or when/where/how it is raised, or its frequency in certain settings
- **Subtle:** not a specific word, but a concept that requires interpretation, or a way of seeing
- **Absent:** what is missing in the field notes that few people seem to notice?

To help you detect themes, feel free to scan the GDoc field notes and Insert > Comments Dig below the surface. The most insightful arguments identify deeper themes, which are not obvious at first glance, and draw interesting connections with secondary source readings.

Define your terms: When writing your essay, define your themes and convince us that they are present in the field notes, especially for readers who did not attend the same event.

Argument sentence templates:

If you're trying to frame an argument, think about possible sentence templates to get started:

Although on the surface it appears that _____, in reality _____.

See also: They Say / I Say sentence templates: <http://bit.ly/TheySayISayTemplates>

Paraphrasing versus direct quotations: To communicate effectively with your readers, summarize the field note settings and interactions in your own words, and use direct quotations to draw our attention to specific phrases and keywords.

Quick citations for field notes: When paraphrasing or quoting from field notes, which are not viewable to the public, simply insert parentheses and initials, like this:

Visitors “were not asked specifics” about their needs (T1).

or

Recruiters emphasized that the school “is very rigorous” (L).

Full citations for published sources: Use any academic citation style, such as Chicago-style footnotes or APA/MLA inline citations. If you need guidance, see <http://commons.trincoll.edu/colorandmoney/assignments/citing-sources/>

Data confidentiality: We attended public settings and collected field notes where people did not have an expectation of individual-level privacy. You may use real names of schools and programs, but do not use real names of individual school program staff or recruiters.

Dear commenter:

Authors were asked to write an evidence-based essay of no more than 750 words, drawing upon our observational field notes and at least one secondary source, in response to this question:

- How do public school choice programs communicate with Hartford-area families?

Please comment on their essays with these questions in mind:

- 1) Does the author make clear & insightful arguments, relevant to the research question?
- 2) Are the arguments supported with persuasive evidence and interpretation?
- 3) Does the essay make you think about this topic in a new way?

Please respond by using the “Suggesting” mode and/or select text and Insert > Comment.