

University of Southern Maine

Report on Class Service Learning Project
Sustain Southern Maine – Focus Group Interviews

ANT 315 – Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, Practice
Fall 2012

Summary Report by Kreg T. Ettenger, Ph.D.¹

Introduction

USM was approached by Carol Morris of Morris Communications in the summer of 2012 about the possibility of having faculty and students work with her firm on the Sustain Southern Maine (SSM) community planning project. While several faculty expressed interest, in the end one fall class seemed well suited for the project, which involved conducting group interviews with low-income, immigrant, and other underrepresented populations in southern Maine. This class was ANT 315, “Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, Practice,” taught by Dr. Kreg Ettenger, Associate Professor of Anthropology in the Program in Geography-Anthropology, Muskie School of Public Service.

The structure and goals of the class, which involves training undergraduate students in interviewing and other ethnographic research methods, matched closely the objectives of the project, which was part of the community outreach aspect of SSM. Following discussions between Dr. Ettenger, Carol Morris, and Andrea Thompson McCall, Director of USM’s Office of Community Service Learning, the decision was made to have students in ANT 315 participate in the SSM planning project, assuming the research was approved by USM’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and cleared other hurdles (this process is summarized below).

The net result of the project was that information was collected at nine meetings held with various community organizations and ESL classes in the Greater Portland area (see Appendix D for list of meeting types and locations). The material covered several main topics, including community satisfaction, transportation, housing, and financial issues, that were relevant to the goals of the Sustain Southern Maine project. Not all meetings covered all topics, for reasons that will become apparent when reading the interview summary reports. And due to significant differences in the lengths of meetings, number and types of participants, settings, language issues and other factors, the amount and quality of information collected varied considerably across the sample. Still, we feel that the material collected should prove useful to researchers and planners seeking to learn how certain underserved populations feel about some of the issues related to the SSM project.

This report presents a brief overview of the project and its outcomes, followed by a set of individual reports that summarize the results of each meeting. In all but one case these reports also include a transcript of the digital audio recording of the meeting. These two items together should give readers a good sense of the information collected at each of the nine meetings.

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About “Sustain Southern Maine”

Sustain Southern Maine is a group of 35 partner organizations working to help communities become more prosperous, healthy and attractive, now and in the future. By focusing on supporting growth and prosperity in specific locations, SSM is designed to boost the region’s economic wellbeing and protect things that make Maine special, including safe places to live and a strong sense of community. SSM was funded by a \$1.6 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), with support from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Transportation (DOT). It is one of dozens of grants awarded around the country to help regions develop sustainable plans. SSM is designed to create communities that use fewer scarce resources, create equitable opportunities for all populations, and plan for such things as climate change and erosion of natural resources. The USM Muskie School of Public Service, as well as the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) and the Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC), are major players in implementing this grant. Mobilize Maine is partnering on the economic development portion. In the end there will be 6-12 demonstration communities positioned to get federal grant dollars for planning and infrastructure to support implementation of sustainable principles as adapted to rural and urban Maine communities.

Community Outreach for SSM

Since SSM is funded through HUD, there is a special interest in housing equity and underserved populations. In HUD’s parlance, “underserved populations” means people of color, immigrants, those living at or below poverty level, and others who may have such barriers as language, lack of ability to come to meetings, or feelings of being disenfranchised. HUD does not count elderly and young people in this group, although they are targets for this project. After meeting with service agencies in Portland, along with York County Community Action, Morris Communications was advised that working with individuals in pre-existing meetings would work best. The meetings that took place were all therefore pre-arranged, including ESL classes, community dinners, tenants groups, and other activities. Scott Hastings of Morris Communications set up the nine meetings, drawing upon a network of community organizations including: LearningWorks and the Portland School District, both of which provide English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in the Greater Portland area; the Parkside Neighborhood Center, which provides services to low-income people in this section of Portland; the Portland Housing Authority, which administers several low-income apartment complexes; and two organizations that serve the homeless in Portland and Sanford.

Sample Group

The sample was mainly focused on two groups deemed by the SSM project (and Morris Communications) as being frequently underrepresented in community and regional planning processes. These are (a) people of low income, and (b) recent immigrant populations. In many cases in southern Maine these two populations are directly related, due to the problems that recent immigrants have in finding jobs or other sources of income. Another underrepresented group is the homeless population in the region, and two meetings were set up to document their views. One of these meetings turned out to be more specifically a group of veteran’s service providers, so we also learned something about the needs and views of this population. The total number of individuals at all meetings was somewhere around 150, although an exact total is not available due to the dynamic nature of many meetings, with people entering and leaving at will. Of this total roughly two-thirds were recent immigrants, mostly from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. The length of residence in the Portland area ranged from a few months to five years or more.

Student Instruction and Training

Students in the class ANT 315, “Ethnography: Methods, Ethics, Practice,” used this project to apply and refine their interviewing, focus group management, transcribing, and report-writing skills. The work carried out included (a) conducting interviews, with recording of fieldnotes and audio; (b) transcribing the audio recordings; (c) writing summary reports of each meeting; and (d) presenting results orally in class, with clients present. Students also completed USM’s CITI training for Social and Behavioral Research to conduct research with human subjects, and helped prepare a consent form and set of interview questions used in the focus group meetings.

Interview Transcripts

Students were instructed to record all meetings/interviews using a digital audio recorder. They then transcribed the audio recording to use, along with written fieldnotes, as the basis for their summary reports and presentations. Students were instructed on field recording techniques in order to achieve the best sound quality possible. Due to inherent problems with recording group settings, however, including the distance from microphones as well as cross-dialogue, the sound of the audio recordings is sometimes poor, and occasionally unintelligible. Where any material is left out of a transcript because the recording is indecipherable, this is noted. In a few cases material was left out because it identified the speaker, or because it was of a personal or sensitive nature and/or because it was deemed not directly related to the goals of the project.

Transcripts were edited for clarity, as is normal practice for this kind of research, especially when individual speakers’ voices are intertwined and must be “detangled” in order to make sense of statements. Some editing was also done to make statements more grammatically correct and understandable to the average reader. Many recent immigrant speakers struggled with English grammar and vocabulary, and in some cases students modified statements with the understanding that the content of the interviews was more critical than retaining strict verbal integrity. Students were instructed, however, to try to preserve some sense of the language style of each speaker, in order to remain more authentic to the recorded interview.

As per the guidelines of the USM IRB approval for this project, transcripts and reports do not contain the full names or other identifying individuals for those interviewed. In most cases if a speaker is identified at all, it is by a first name that they gave to the researchers. All participants were told that they could use a pseudonym instead of their actual name if they wished, and they were not asked to tell us which they were using. Therefore we feel that the identities of those interviewed is adequately protected as per USM guidelines on human subjects and confidentiality.

Institutional Review Board

As this project was deemed “human subjects research” by USM’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), a formal review of the research goals and methods was required. All materials were submitted via the IRB’s e-Protocol system. The project’s consent form (Appendix A), interview questions (Appendix B), funding sources, data security systems, and other information was reviewed. It was determined that the project qualified as “Exempt” due to its low risk to participants and its potential benefits to the regional planning process. A copy of this IRB assessment can be obtained from the researchers upon request.

Interview Summary Reports and Transcripts

<i><u>Interview Type & Location and Researchers</u></i>	<i><u>Interview Date & Time</u></i>
1. ESL Class, West School, Portland Researchers: Alissa Brown and Rachel Emery	November 8, 2012; 6:00 pm
2. Low Income Family Dinner, Parkside Center, Portland Researchers: Alissa Brown, Alison Parker and Maria Sedler	November 13, 2012; 5:30 pm
3. ESL Class, West School, Portland Researcher: Joseph Perry	November 14, 2012; 11:45 am
4. ESL Class - LearningWorks, Portland Researchers: John Grigas, Laura Collard and Jordan Boudway	November 14, 2012; 1:00 pm
5. Tenants Meeting, Riverton Park Housing Complex, Portland Researchers: Amelia Lyons, Molly Carl, Adaline Colby and Justin Barr	November 19, 2012; 5:00 pm
6. ESL Class, LearningWorks, Danforth St., Portland Researcher: Jordan Boudway	November 27, 2012; 9:00 am
7. Veteran Support Groups Meeting, Springvale Researcher: Amelia Lyons	November 27, 2012; 11:00 am
8. Homeless Voices for Justice Meeting, Portland Researchers: Laura Collard and John Grigas	November 28, 2012; 10:30 am
9. Central African Dinner, Parkside Center, Portland Researchers: Molly Carl and Joe Perry	December 3, 2012; 6:00 pm

Interview 1

ESL Class, West School, Portland

Meeting Information

Date: November 8, 2012; 6:00 pm.

Student Researchers: Alissa Brown, Rachel Emery

Setting and Participants

On Thursday, November 8th, we attended an evening English as a Second Language (ESL) class at the West School in Portland. The school is relatively small and resides in the outskirts of a quiet neighborhood off Congress Street. Inside a few classrooms were occupied and it appeared most people were preparing to head home for the night. The interview was conducted by Rachel and Alissa with Kreg Ettenger and Carol Morris present for assistance. The school provided an adequate setting for the interview and allowed it to be completed with no interruptions.

The class consisted of 14 individuals from their early 20s to their late 40s, approximately. Most were female. All were capable of speaking English. Among the participants were five Somalis, three females and two males. Three have been in the Portland area for over eight years, one for six years, and one moved here four months ago. Two participants from Burundi, one male and one female, immigrated within the past two years. A female from Iraq moved to the Portland area two years ago. A male from Russia and a female from Ethiopia both arrived eight years ago. The most recent immigrant was a male from Rwanda who arrived less than four months ago.

Community Satisfaction

Although there were some differing opinions, overall satisfaction with the Portland community was high. A female participant pointed out the open-minded nature of people in this community compared to other areas of the country. "I realize people [are] more open mind(ed), like the difference between people, it doesn't matter where you're from. They just care about what you do, what you will do," said Nagham, a young female from Iraq. Portland is relatively diverse and therefore minorities may not be looked down upon or stereotyped. Another recurring response was the adoration of Maine scenery and nature. "It's a Vacationland! It's a beautiful place for outdoors," said Fatuma, a mother of three from Somalia. This aspect seemed to lure many of the respondents to Portland and its livability kept them here. Several respondents commented that this community is not too expensive and provides a safe place for raising children.

After discussing respondents' overall satisfaction with their community, our questions aimed to understand their contentment. One woman remarked that the community provides steps for incoming immigrants in order to integrate them into the community. She disclosed her appreciation for that and added that she was extremely pleased to see her country's holidays in a Maine calendar. When asked what keeps them in this community, many reported that they like the large immigrant population. Not only does this area provide immigrants with benefit, but it also makes them feel included. "I think Portland is a safe city," said Rosie, a young female immigrant from Sudan. Another common response was centered around the safety of Portland as a city and its desirability for raising children. "I like the whole city, small city, good for raising kids," said Mahdi, an immigrant from Somalia.

Among the negative aspects noted was a need for an immigrant community center and places to hold certain religious practices, especially for holidays. It was mentioned that some Portland neighborhoods provide these places, but many do not. Although in many cases there is not a designated place of worship, they still stated that it does not stop them from coming together.

Financial Situation

We inquired about residents' financial situation and whether access to aid is difficult or simple. Many responded that it is relatively easy to obtain loans and financial aid or find a job in this area. Another commonality was that nearly all participants had a local bank account. These benefits contribute a great deal to their overall satisfaction and long-standing residency in Portland.

Housing

The majority of the group seemed to be renting housing, while one man from Somalia has owned his house since 2008. Most of the group seemed to experience the same issues with housing: the apartments are too small for the large families that tend to be the norm for immigrant families; they have experienced frequent troubles with bedbugs in the area; one person mentioned that heating systems were inefficient and the insulation inadequate. "Maine has very small house[s] everywhere. And when you go out and try to find an apartment, and they find out you are nine or eight, they don't accept you!" said Nagham, an immigrant from Iraq. A few mentioned low income housing programs as helpful when they first moved here, but they also think it is a system that shouldn't be taken advantage of, or thought of as 'permanent' housing for immigrants.

Transportation

The group's responses on transportation issues were particularly vocal. Many members of the group had access to a car, either their own or a family member's. All agreed that a car is the best, most effective way to get around Portland and Southern Maine. It was stated by a few that it was difficult and time consuming to get a driver's license, and expensive to get and maintain a car. Many used the Portland bus system frequently as a form of transportation, but all agreed it was not as efficient or reliable enough to use on a regular basis.

Interview Issues

There were minimal problems encountered, considering it was a rather large group and the first interview of this project. The main issue encountered during the interview and the transcribing process was the slight language barrier. The group, being part of an ESL class, understood most of the questions and responded appropriately about three-fourths of the time, but because of differences in language, some questions proved difficult for some members of the group to understand. In the same way, some of the group's responses were difficult for transcribers to understand fully.

The transcription is written without any intentional editing or omissions of what the group said, but due to language differences, things that were unable to be clearly understood have been replaced with "[unintelligible]" to make this clear.

Interview 2

Family Supper, Parkside Center, Portland

Meeting Information

Date: November 13, 2012; 5:30 pm.

Student Researchers: Alissa Brown, Alison Parker, Maria Sedler

Setting and Participants

The following interview took place at the Parkside Community Center on Grant Street in Portland, Maine. The participants had gathered for a community supper. Those who attended were predominantly local and low-income. Participants included: Bud, a visually impaired senior citizen who lives on Lancaster in an apartment complex; Steve, a senior who lives alone in a mobile home in Yarmouth; Becky, a recent widow with developmental issues who lives alone on Grant St.; Janice, a senior cancer patient living in a house in the West End; and Collette, a Cumberland Avenue Resident [left early due to bus schedule]. The interview took place in a room typically reserved for children's activities. The interview was conducted by Maria Sedler, Alison Parker, and Alissa Brown. Also present as researchers were Kreg Ettenger and Scott Hastings.

Community Satisfaction

During the interview, issues of housing, transportation, community satisfaction, financial situations, and safety were voiced. When asked about their favorite parts of their respective communities, convenience of location was mentioned. Those who lived in town often enjoyed the fact that they were able to walk to almost anything they needed. One woman was quoted as saying, "I used to live on Cumberland Avenue, which is right in town. You know, five minutes here, five minutes there. Now I'm on Board Street, which I hate where I'm living." This suggests she dislikes where she lives because of lack of access to things she used to be able to walk to. Though all voiced some concerns, satisfaction with the community was at least moderate. People generally seemed to like the fact that they are close to what they need. So much so that one individual stated, "I think the next time I move it will probably be in a pine box."

Transportation

Public transportation is available, but can be problematic. One participant stated that bus passes were 45 dollars per month, and that seniors were charged 75 cents per ride, which made bus travel expensive. One individual was allowed free bus fare so long as he is heading to and from his counselor. Others do not have this privilege. One said that bus passes are not cost effective, saying that "If you wish to get a bus pass it would be 45 bucks a month, which you'd have to use it a lot to get that." Transportation was also not seen as accommodating to people with special needs. An individual with visual impairment told of his experience with bus drivers who do not accommodate him despite him asking them to tell him when they came to his stop. He did say that bus drivers were willing to reform once complaints had been made against them. There was some praise for the DownEaster train. Those who owned cars noted that parking was exceptionally difficult.

Housing

Housing concerns were focused around the cost of energy. Participants agreed that they kept their thermostats low in order to save energy and cut costs. One participant noted that he typically keeps his apartment at 65 degrees. Some interviewees had radiators, while others have natural gas.

A participant struggling against cancer noted that while she used to conserve energy, she now has blood circulation problems, presumably due to treatment, and has to keep her thermostat higher; she still uses blankets to keep her warm. Weatherproofing efforts to conserve energy have not done much to change the situation. As one participant observed, “Well, I had them come out, but they really didn’t accomplish much. But I’m very much supportive of that because I think we need to conserve oil. And we need to be concerned about the environment. I think it’s ridiculous we don’t take more affirmative action with respect to conserving energy.”

Employment and Finances

The interviewees were not well-off people. Financial struggle was an aspect of their lives that they coped with daily. One participant has someone who handles her bills because she is unable to do so herself. Other participants have taken to using credit unions. The participants coped with their financial difficulties by taking advantage of the free services provided by various places in Portland. As previously mentioned, community suppers were utilized whenever possible.

Crime and Safety

The issue of safety was important to those interviewed. Most said that they felt at least somewhat unsafe where they lived. When asked what would make communities better places to live, one interviewee responded that communities would be improved with “a lot less violence.” This individual was taking a class at Hadley School for the Blind called “Safety without Sight.” Others found that they felt safer walking with a cell phone or in the daytime. People felt that certain places were safer than the ones in which they were living. For example, one participant believed that communities such as those on “the other side of Park Avenue, toward the University” and “up next to the Maine Medical Center” were suitable for children and the elderly, but there were other places in the city that were not sufficiently safe. Individuals reported numerous instances of theft.

Community Programs

Individuals felt that community programs were very helpful. This might have reflected the fact that the interview took place at a community supper. One participant was able to obtain four meals per week by utilizing free community meals offered by various churches and charities, despite having no personal transportation. Those with transportation seemed to have more options. Many felt that the addition of more community programs would be beneficial. In relation to community safety, one interviewee from Yarmouth suggested that there be local neighborhood groups to prevent crimes in order to “make it safe to go out in the street at night.” He also suggested that there be more programs for the elderly and new immigrants.

Conclusions

The interview provided a significant amount of information, including some that was unanticipated. One participant provided an excellent window into the challenges faced by Portland’s visually impaired population. There was much concern about a perceived or actual lack of safety within the city. The consensus from the interviewees was that public transportation needed to be cheaper and more widely available.

Interview 3

ESL Class, West School, Portland

Meeting Information

Date: November 14, 2012; 11:45 am.

Student Researcher: Joseph Perry

Contact Information: joseph.w.perry@maine.edu

Setting and Participants

On November 14, 2012, we conducted an interview at the West School located on 196 Allen Avenue. This interview was in an English as a Second Language (ESL) adult education class. The classroom was typical; students were fairly spread out inside the space. Present for this interview was the USM student-interviewer, Joseph Perry; Sustain Southern Maine consultant Scott Hastings; the teacher of the class; and the ESL students. The students were middle-aged adults of various ethnic backgrounds. Among the participants were Sudanese, Somali, Vietnamese and Eastern European individuals. Initially the class was comprised of 11-12 participants, but it increased to 15-16 with some late arrivals. The language capacity of this group of students was mostly basic conversational English. A few participants were fluent, bordering on loquacious. It was difficult to ascertain the views of a portion of the class as they chose to listen and did not respond to questions. The greatest language issue was that two female respondents spoke softly, making it difficult to discern some of their answers. From those who responded, the average time in the United States was two years.

Community Satisfaction

When discussing Portland and Maine, the overwhelming response from participants was that they were thankful to live in Maine and enjoyed the community. As the heritage of the students was diverse, responses varied to specific experiences. One respondent felt that Portland was spatially small, which allowed for an intimate experience. The students all felt that Portland was a safe place to live, and a number of them commented on the enjoyment of “green” areas, such as the parks spread through the city. Most of the students made it a point to mention how the locals in Portland were very nice to them. The only physical complaint about the Portland location was that it is cold in the winter. Parents and single interviewees all felt that there need to be more services for school age children, such as after school programs. In discussing what could make the community better, all of the participants began to discuss housing, which will be described below.

Housing

Housing was a topic of conversation that drew some of the most impassioned responses. Most participants felt that housing was too small, and there were complaints about maintenance issues. Additionally, access to air conditioning in the summer is limited. Some apartments are on upper levels of buildings and easily overheat in the summer months. Conversely, in the winter, heating is expensive and many are forced to compromise their comfort. There were a few students who felt it was unfair that they were assigned housing with no input or choice involved. Interestingly, almost all of the interviewees had issues with the mixing of populations in apartment buildings. Some families work nights, some work days, some have kids, some are single. The people who had issue with this mixing felt like families should be grouped together, and work schedules should also be considered as a potential housing determinant. One participant owned his own house and claimed, “You will never be happy renting.” The ownership of this house was made possible by

“Housing for Humanity” and, as he was a Muslim, it was against his religious beliefs to pay interest. Due to religion, this respondent was able to develop a mortgage without interest.

Transportation

In discussing transportation, participants agreed that taking the local bus system is difficult. The bus routes are limited and intervals between buses are too long to be feasible. Some respondents would like to take a bus, but choose to walk instead of wait. All of the students felt that the best option was to drive in a car, and one claimed that the only good reason to walk is for exercise, not travel. Most of the participants lived too far from shopping, such as groceries, to walk both ways.

Employment and Finances

When the question of finances was brought up, most respondents were indifferent about their current jobs. One participant, the homeowner, was self-employed and was very satisfied with being his own boss. A respondent of Vietnamese descent expressed gratitude that she was able to work with other people of her ethnic group. All students felt that there were not enough jobs available. Also getting agreement from the entire group was the difficulty of attending adult education classes while working. Similarly, the difficulty of parenting and working was noted. In regards to questions about what participants would like to do for work in the future, a young man from Somalia said that he was a war orphan, and would one day like to help other war orphans in need. As the conversation turned to public assistance, one participant was very upset at how difficult it is to get help when she did not have children. Other participants in the interview engaged in a dialogue about the misuse of assistance by some people. The classmates all wished that assistance could be given to those most deserving of help. None of the interviewees felt they had a chance to borrow money from a bank. The consensus was that finances are negatively affected by how difficult it is to get started as a transplant. In many cases, getting started with a job requires housing, but in order to find suitable housing, a job is required. These two fundamental and connected issues are clearly one of the largest problems when considering advancement and quality of life.

Conclusions

Aside from the difficulties that came from having a language barrier, the interview process was mostly smooth. Ideally, all of the students would have been present at the beginning of the interview, as it interrupted the flow to integrate new people into the discussion. Spatially, the class would have been better to sit around a single table or in a circle. To counteract this, it was necessary to ask questions while walking around the classroom. As the lone interviewer it was challenging to manage the various tasks. For example, while the audio recorder appeared to be functioning for the entire session, it was actually on a record-pause mode. There was also some confusion at the end of the interviews about the lack of Hannaford gift cards, since these were expected by the students who gave up their time.

Interview 4 ESL Class, LearningWorks, Portland

Meeting Information

Date: November 14, 2012; 1:00 pm

Student Researchers: John Grigas, Laura Collard and Jordan Boudway

Contact Info: john.grigas@maine.edu; laura.a.collard@gmail.com; jordan.boudway@maine.edu.

Setting and Participants

This interview occurred during an ESL class at LearningWorks in Portland. Students were mostly asylum seekers from African nations. The room was small and rectangular, with a conference table in the center surrounded by chairs. It was fairly crowded and several people were forced to stand. Due to the cramped conditions, and other people working outside the room, there was a great deal of background noise to contend with. The student interviewers were John Grigas, Laura Collard, and Jordan Boudway. Scott Hastings was also present, as was class instructor Sally, and the ESL Director whose name was not given. In addition, there was a woman named Joyce, another named Jenny, a teaching assistant named Sahad, and Alie Parker.

The female informants were Odette, Jocelyn, Josiane, and another Josiane (jokingly referred to as Josiane 2) who were all from Rwanda; Samantha from Burundi; Giti from Iran; and Peniae, whose country of origin was not given. The male informants were Michael from Burundi, Jean Claude from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Osman from Somalia. Though informants were not asked for their ages, the majority of participants appeared to fall within the 20-40 year age range. Most of the informants' English skills were fairly limited, though some seemed to be more comfortable speaking English than others. Native language groups represented included Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Farsi, Somali, and others. Most participants spoke multiple languages and a fair number were proficient in French. Informants had been living within the United States for anywhere from a few months up to three years. Though it was not explicitly stated, it appeared that most informants had been living in Portland for the entirety of their time in the United States.

Community Satisfaction

The interview began with questions about the communities in which the informants currently lived. Most participants' place of residence was Portland, except for one who lived in Westbrook. Participants stated that they liked to go to the beach, to museums, to the movies, and one also stated that they would like to attend American football games. Most participants stated that it was difficult for them to go anywhere. Because they were mostly asylum seekers, and are not allowed to work, they have no money to pay for public transportation and their general assistance vouchers do not cover it. Obviously, this means that they also cannot afford their own vehicle or the costs of activities. These difficulties mean that the participants are unable to enjoy some places in their community that they would like to. With the preceding in mind, it is no surprise that one of the biggest suggestions they made for improving their community was to improve public transportation. Many also stated that less expensive housing, and advocates in the housing realm, were necessary. In fact, housing and transportation were so important that the conversation frequently returned to those topics. All participants agreed that they felt very safe within their communities and this was not a point that they felt required any improvements.

Participants stated that being involved in their communities was a somewhat difficult thing for them. Their lack of English skills was a barrier for involvement with most groups in their local community. Town meetings and even entertainment events were a source of discomfort as they felt self-conscious due to their imperfect grasp of the English language. Many stated that any community involvement came about through church, the library, and even the General Assistance office. Even in these cases, community involvement did not necessarily extend to their city, or even their neighborhood, but was usually focused on getting together with people who shared their cultural background.

Housing

As mentioned, most participants felt that housing prices were too high and that it was too difficult to find a home. This was usually because landlords demanded co-signers that recent immigrants were not likely to have. Other than this, when participants were asked if they were happy with where they were living they almost unanimously stated that they were. One person stated that he was mostly happy with his home, that it was about “50/50.” Most agreed that the biggest problems with housing involved dealing with landlords. Participants largely agreed that landlords were not taking care of problems in the apartments, and that some were refusing to provide heat, which was a big problem in winter. The quotes below highlight some of these issues.

One lady . . . the ceiling of her bathroom, it fell down. There's a lot of cockroaches. She told the assistant of the landlord, and he didn't help her, he didn't fix it. One day he fixed the ceiling, but he didn't fix the original problem. The water's coming from the upper [floor]. The one day I ask her, 'do you have to call the landlord? This assistant of the landlord, if he did not fix your [ceiling] you have to tell the landlord.' And she say, 'No, I am afraid for that.' They feel, maybe, if they talk to landlord they are afraid to be put outside. - *Immigrant from Somalia who resides in Westbrook.*

“The landlord, they don't care to give you heat. So now they [tenants] have problem to live, because now it's cold, and they don't have heat. That is a problem with the landlord. - *Immigrant from Rwanda who resides in Westbrook.*

Transportation

As mentioned, transportation was an important issue for the participants, and they considered improvements to it to be a vital part of bettering their overall community. Since they are not allowed to work it is impossible for them to purchase their own vehicles or even take public transportation. Though they have General Assistance vouchers to pay for most things, these do not pay for public transportation. Also, all of the participants agreed that the distances involved made it impractical for them to walk from their places of residence to most of the places that they needed to travel to, including the class where the interview was held. Most of them made these extremely long walks anyways, because they had no other option and could not afford not to make the trips.

I came here two days per week to increase my ESL, and really I don't have transportation. When the weather is good, mostly I take my bike. [It] takes me 25-30 minutes to come here. When the weather is not good, I try to get the public transportation.... The problem is transportation.” - *Immigrant from Somalia who resides in Westbrook.*

Employment and Finances

As asylees the participants are not allowed to work until they receive government recognition and legal status within the United States. This means that questions about finances and employment were largely inapplicable to the group. The few who were allowed to work stated that finding a job was usually extremely difficult for them. In addition, they found they could only seem to get low-paying jobs despite the fact that they all had high school educations, and some even had bachelor's degrees or better. Their credentials are not acceptable within the United States, so once they are allowed to work they cannot work in their chosen field without going back to school, which is something else they cannot do until they are given legal status.

Problems Encountered

During the interview there were several people who arrived late and were not present when demographic information was gathered. This was also a frequent cause for distraction, which served to derail the conversation at several points and also caused noise on the audio that completely drowned out participants' answers several times. Another problem was the cramped quarters and the number of people present at the interview. There was a great deal of noise and side conversation going on that made it difficult to hear people's answers at times. Also, the instructor and director often interjected in ways that steered the participants towards particular topics rather than allowing the conversation to progress naturally. While both were able to provide valuable insider information, these interruptions took control out of the hands of the interviewers and certainly influenced the responses of the participants according to what the director and instructor thought was important.

To solve both of the aforementioned problems during future interviews taking place in similar locations, it might be best to ask for volunteers from the group and then remove them from the classroom to a quieter and less crowded room. This would ensure that noise was minimized and would allow the class to go on as normal for those who have no interest in being involved in the interview process. The removal of non-participants would also ensure that answers were not steered by anyone but the participants themselves. People like the instructor and the director could easily be contacted outside of the interview and asked for any non-sensitive information that they might be able to offer, thereby allowing their valuable insider information to still be shared with the project without it interfering with the interview.

Language turned out to be less of a problem than may have been expected. Though many of the participants were clearly new to English, those who spoke it seemed to be fairly capable of articulating their thoughts in an understandable way. However, based on some of the confused looks around the table, many of them may not have completely understood what a question might mean. Simpler wording, or the presence of an interpreter where practical, could increase the likelihood that the questions would be understood and hopefully elicit even more information.

Interview 5

Tenants Meeting, Riverton Park Complex, Portland

Meeting Information

Date: November 19, 2012; 5:00 pm

Student Researchers: Adaline Colby, Justin Barr, Amelia Lyons, Molly Carl

Contact Info: justin.barr@maine.edu, molly.carl@maine.edu, adaline.colby@maine.edu, amelia.lyons@maine.edu

Setting and Participants

The interview took place at a tenants meeting at Riverton Park in Portland, in a small building used for similar community gatherings. Riverton provides subsidized housing for low income families. Interviewers Adaline Colby, Amelia Lyons, Molly Carl, Justin Barr, and Professor Kreg Ettenger arrived during a meeting on whether residents thought there was a need for a neighborhood watch. In addition to the interviewers and the participating residents, Carol Morris, Scott Hastings, a housing authority official, and three translators were also present during the interview. Adaline, Amelia, and Molly were in charge of asking the prepared interview questions and Justin was responsible for recording the audio of the interview.

There were eight adults, both male and female, and one child present during the interview. These participants were immigrants from three different countries: Vietnam, Somalia, and Iran. Each ethnic group had a translator (pertinent to their language) to assist in this interview. Though we did not collect any information on how long these individuals had lived in the United States, most of the residents seemed to be settled in the community.

Community Satisfaction

Residents at Riverton Park feel a strong sense of community. They seem to all know their fellow community members and have good relationships with them despite the cultural diversity. Residents seemed happy and very thankful to be living in the Riverton neighborhood. There also seems to be a unanimous concern for the well-being of their children. These concerns had a lot to do with their education and thus their ability to get a good job. There aren't many opportunities in Riverton Park for the youth and all of the participants seemed very aware of this.

Housing

Riverton Park is operated by the Portland Housing Authority, which provides for low-income citizens in Portland. Residents here seem content with the housing; however, specific questions were not asked on this topic. One reason mentioned that would push them to potentially move elsewhere would be for the purpose of their kids gaining more opportunities and a place to learn. Specific questions pertaining to the buildings they lived in, energy and heating were not addressed.

Transportation

The majority of participants said they used the bus. They seemed to like the bus and mentioned no problems with it. A few residents said they also did some walking to get around. When asked if any of them used biking as a mode of transportation they were very pronounced in answering no, especially the females. At another point during the interview we learned that they felt that the bike

routes were very unsafe and something they would enjoy seeing improve. But for now, public transportation seemed most important to them and necessary where they live.

Employment and Finances

Approximately four residents had bank accounts. The topic of there being limited jobs in the area near the Riverton neighborhood was brought up. The participants specifically mentioned the lack of larger factories or companies nearby to work for. Both the youth and adults are looking for jobs. The youth partake in volunteer programs such as CHEETA, but that provides little income. They also mentioned the challenge of balancing work and school. They also face the challenges of no longer receiving aid as children grow older and finish school.

Additional Issues

In addition to the topics addressed above, Riverton residents had a strong desire for an indoor recreational facility, an affordable gym where they could enjoy some physical activity. They thought this would be a great way to stay active during the cold Maine winters, as they didn't seem like they did too many other activities during this time of the year. Participants also had enthusiasm towards tutoring programs, especially for adults. Residents mentioned a desire for a place to study and learn about American culture and a place to work on getting an education.

Interview Information

Distractions emerged throughout the interview when residents chatted amongst themselves at the same time the translators were responding to the interview questions. People entering and exiting the room also made for a difficult sound environment. The most significant problem encountered during research was the language barriers between the interviewers and the interviewees. None of the residents interviewed spoke more than a few words in English and none of the interviewers knew the languages in the room. Because of this a translator for each group was there to assist in the interview. Though it was also difficult to understand the translators, it was very helpful in understanding the responses of the residents. Not only was the listening aspect of it challenging, but because we were asking questions through the translators it was harder to feel a connection with the residents. These problems led this interview to be far from ideal. For a similar interview in the future, we would recommend dividing the participants up into smaller groups according to their language. We believe this would provide the interview with more clarity and better end results.

Interview 6
ESL Class, LearningWorks, Danforth St., Portland

Meeting Information

Date: November 27, 2012; 9:00 am

Student Researcher: Jordan Boudway

Contact Info: jordan.boudway@maine.edu

Setting and Participants

The classroom was in the basement of the St. Louis Church. We set up in the only well lighted corner at a pair of folding tables. I set up the recorder in the center of the workspace and waited for the students to begin coming in. As I waited I discussed the plan with Scott Hastings. We decided to “tag team” the interview, since it would be difficult to record, take notes, and lead the conversation. At about ten past nine we began the interview.

Once everyone had arrived, we were introduced by Paul, one of the teachers at Learningworks. The students then took turns introducing themselves. There were four students in this class, which was a relief, since I had worked with a large class previously and it had been fairly chaotic. There were three men, Theogane, Alphanie, and August. Alphanie and August seemed to be in their late twenties, or early thirties. Theogane was obviously the youngest in the group. He appeared to be in his late teens or early twenties. There was also a woman named Georgette who was in her thirties. She and August were both from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The people in the group were new to America, and were all here seeking asylum. Alphanie had been here the longest, at one year. Theogane had the least amount of time here at less than a month, which was actually surprising since he spoke English quite well. August and Georgette had been here three and seven months, respectively. None of them indicated that they had lived anywhere other than Portland since they arrived in America. As a group, they were all very willing to participate in the survey, and had quite a lot to say. I was surprised at how fluent they were in English, since they had not been here long. They had very little trouble understanding what Scott and I were saying. The only problem they had was when we would speak too quickly.

Housing

Housing was one of the biggest topics discussed in the interview. I was surprised to find that the class was more bothered by the attitudes they had received from landlords than they were by the price of housing. As a group, they felt that landlords in Portland were dishonest and blamed them for things that weren't their fault. Alphanie, the most outspoken in the group, told us a story about the first place he'd lived in Portland. He had a hard time talking about it. He said that when he arrived in America he didn't have bedbugs. However, shortly after moving in he was evicted by the landlord, who said he had brought them to the building. He was visibly upset about it, even though it happened quite a while back. It may just be my white, middle class upbringing, but I would have thought this type of treatment was uncommon. Alphanie also told us that whenever he called the landlord to fix something, they never did. They didn't return his calls either.

Other members of the class didn't talk as much about landlords, though they did agree when Alphanie said that landlords are dishonest. They instead focused on the cost of housing in Portland. They pointed out that since they have so little, they have to live within walking distance of the General Assistance offices, which are in the Bayside neighborhood. They can't afford buses or cars,

so they have to be able to walk there. Unfortunately, apartments in the city are quite expensive. They told us that their rent takes up a very large portion of their monthly budget, and leaves little room for anything else.

Transportation

The class had very little experience with public transportation. They all agreed that they'd like to take the bus, but cannot because they have no income. Georgette told us that she has a hard time making it to class because of how far she must walk to get there. She said that she needs the bus, but can't afford it. This is the case for all of the people in the class. They all told us they walk everywhere they go, which is very difficult for them in the winter. Georgette also told us about the tedium of having to walk to General Assistance to get vouchers. All four of the students agreed with her when she told us she had to walk to the offices very early in the morning so she could get a spot near the front of the line. Apparently assistance vouchers are on a first come first served system, and not everyone can be helped on the same day. They have to walk there at two or three in the morning, then wait in line until the office opens at eight. Once the office is open it may be as late as noon before they are seen, if they get seen that day. Georgette also told us that she was often afraid when she had to walk to the offices in the dark, because she is by herself. While the General Assistance kerfuffle is a problem that isn't likely to be remedied by Sustain Southern Maine, a public transportation plan that accommodates asylum seekers could make a huge difference.

Employment and Finances

Since all of the students in the class are refugees, they all depend on vouchers from General Assistance. In terms of urban living, what they get is the bare minimum. They must prepare a budget and present it to the General Assistance offices for approval. Alphanie drew up a rough sketch of his monthly budget on his class notes for me. After his rent and food he had less than twenty dollars to work with. He was better off than the other people in the class, though. He had been here longer and had food stamps as well as freecare. The other members of the class seemed surprised by the level of assistance he was able to get, and when they said they didn't get food stamps his reply was "you are new," meaning it is easier for him, having a full year in America under his belt. Georgette, who has been here seven months, was having trouble paying for a prescription when she was sick, and had to ask her church for the money. The Sustain Southern Maine project isn't tied to immigration or general assistance, but that is the only income these people have. I think it serves to illustrate the lack of coverage this plan has in some areas. I understand the importance of building a better community via cheaper housing and public transportation, but refugee communities seem to have bigger problems.

Interview Issues

The only problem we encountered in terms of carrying out the interview was the fact that my planned partner did not show up. This is where Scott was instrumental. He had already done a few interviews and had a good idea of how to go about conducting it. He and I managed to pull together a very informative interview even though we had had a last minute mixup. Before the interview we figured out what questions we were going to ask. He realized it would be difficult for me to lead the interview and record it, as well as take notes, so he helped out as much as possible.

Interview 7 Veterans Services Meeting, Springvale

Meeting Information

Date: November 27, 2012; 11:00 am

Student Researcher: Amelia Lyons

Contact Info: amelia.lyons@maine.edu

Setting and Participants

The interview was held on November 27, 2012, in a conference room at the Springvale Maine Veterans' Services Office. The interview was at a meeting for service providers who help veterans. The participants were all of middle to older age, the youngest being perhaps 35. There were five men and three women who all work with veterans' organizations in the region. There were three interviewers, Kreg Ettenger, Carol Morris, and Amelia Lyons. No interpreters were needed.

The three primary issues during the interview were housing, transportation, and childcare. Another issue was the lack of collaboration between different agencies. As one service provider mentioned, "We're all out here doing this stuff as volunteers, when there are parts of the government that are paid and who aren't coordinating with the guy next door!" Another issue that always arises when talking with these types of organizations is that of funding.

Housing

Housing was identified as a key issue for veterans. Many of the service providers work to help this situation, but elaborated upon the difficulty in getting information out. Homelessness was noted as a major problem with veterans, especially older ones from the Vietnam era. Mental health issues can lead to strained relations in the home and result in the veterans no longer being welcome at home. As one service provider elaborated, "With those struggling with PTSD or traumatic brain injuries, those cards become stressed over the years and that's where they cycle into homelessness. And that's really where the Vietnam veterans are. They turned their back on it so they were resistant. Once they became homeless, maybe ten, fifteen years after they served in Vietnam, it took them another ten to fifteen years to say, 'Well, maybe I should be getting something out of this.'"

Transportation

Transportation was recognized as a difficult issue for veterans. Out of eight veterans' organizations present, only one had the ability to provide transportation. Their one van is available only one day per week, and they have a need for volunteer drivers. It was also mentioned that veterans could receive travel reimbursements, however, that means they need the money at the beginning. VA appointments were brought up, as they are the main place where veterans need transportation.

Other Issues

Childcare was a third issue that arose, but unfortunately we did not have sufficient time to delve into this subject. The major problem encountered was that of miscommunication. We had anticipated the meeting to be of homeless veterans themselves, but it was actually for the service providers. This led to a difficult time constraint of 15-20 minutes for the entire interview. For this reason, we were unable to collect extensive information.

Interview 8

Homeless Voices for Justice Meeting, Preble Street Resource Center, Portland

Meeting Information

Date: November 28, 2012; 10:30 am

Student Researchers: Laura Collard and John Grigas

Contact Info: laura.a.collard@gmail.com, john.grigas@maine.edu

Setting and Participants

The interview took place in a conference room at the Preble St. Shelter in Portland. It was a meeting of homeless people acting as advocates for their community. The group consisted of seven women, aged roughly from their early twenties to late fifties, and seven men, aged from their early forties to early sixties. Of the women, four spoke about having children. All were either widowed or divorced. Ten of the participants revealed how long they had been homeless, which ranged from four months to ten years, with six having been homeless for at least one year. About half of the group was consistently vocal while the other half remained silent or spoke once or twice when prompted by their peers. The room was crowded and everyone was seated around a long conference table. Refreshments had been provided. The interview was led by Carol Morris. University of Southern Maine students in attendance were Laura Collard and John Grigas. Also in attendance were Scott Hastings (researcher) and Betsy Whitman (contact at the Preble St. Shelter).

Community Satisfaction

In general the focus group was dissatisfied with the resources available to their community. Resources are limited, waiting lists are long, and a lot of people fall through the cracks. Shelters are cramped and chaotic. Displacement, family issues and lack of employment lead to loss of housing; lack of housing leads to stress and health problems; health problems and lack of transportation make keeping a job difficult; which makes it impossible to afford even low income housing.

Another issue brought up was feeling unsafe in Portland. Many neighborhoods are known for drug activity or violence. Interview participants felt that local law enforcement looks down on the homeless community and does not take them seriously, either not coming to their aid when it is needed or threatening arrest in unwarranted situations. There was also a recurring theme of resentment on the part of the female interviewees toward the men at the shelter. According to the women there is not enough room for the men and the men invade their space, walking through the women's section at night or using their bathrooms. The women said in order to reserve room at the shelter they have to wait in more lines than men do.

The image the greater community has of homeless people was of particular concern for the participants. The general perception of the homeless community is a negative one. Not everyone in a position of homelessness is mentally unstable or drug addicted, but the stereotype of the homeless person as an unbalanced 'druggie' or lazy alcoholic colors public opinion. It was the opinion of some of the focus group that town officials and the general population don't take the time to understand the real conditions of homelessness or the circumstances that put people into a shelter. The systems in place intended to help the homeless get back on their feet are not always helpful or efficient and making improvements is no one's priority.

Housing

Housing was discussed in terms of the shelters in Portland and availability of housing for individuals. The consensus was that there is not enough room at any of the area shelters to accommodate the homeless population. This is primarily due to the sheer numbers of individuals in need of help. There is usually an overflow of people at Preble St. and many are sent to a General Assistance (GA) facility overnight where they are not allowed to sleep. It was also brought up that even newer shelters like Florence House (a women's shelter) were not designed to accommodate very many people. Entire floors devoted to apartments that house a limited number of people might be more useful if they served as a shelter facility, able to house more people on any given night.

In terms of finding affordable housing there seemed to be several roadblocks for this group. There isn't a good deal of available housing in Portland to begin with, and the places that would be affordable are not in safe areas. Many in the group had no income and were depending on subsidies, GA, or the Bridging Rental Assistance Program (BRAP). Because of this it is hard to find landlords that will work with them without a co-signer. Eligibility requirements set in place to qualify for low income housing or BRAP are difficult to meet. Several people mentioned a \$2,000 minimum income requirement for many housing offers; a number that serves to shut out most of the homeless community who may be living on subsidies or nothing at all. Public housing is often set aside for people with disabilities or the elderly. Many people say that they are continually passed over when aid is distributed because if they don't have a disability or children to care for they are not considered a priority.

Transportation

The primary mode of transportation for the group was walking. Public transportation is not an option for people with no income. According to one participant there are sometimes bus passes available at the Preble St. shelter. These passes, however, are only available for use when going to a job interview, not for travel to work, doctors appointments, etc. Inability to use public transportation limits possible housing locations because any resources available to this group are in the city of Portland. They can't live out in the country because they can't travel to the city, even if a bus or train services those areas.

Employment and Finances

Most of the focus group was unemployed, which was identified as the primary reason for their homelessness. Finding a job in this economy is difficult and keeping a job is nearly impossible considering the transportation issues these people have, and in some cases their disabilities. When asked what a reasonable amount would be per month for rent (everything included) the estimate was \$650. Even if one could come up with the \$600-\$800 it would take to pay rent on the low income housing available, the required minimum income of \$2,000 is not reachable.

Problems Encountered

The room was crowded and there were several times when people began talking over each other but order was restored each time. Two people mumbled or were difficult to understand, but everyone spoke English so there was no language barrier. Six participants contributed the majority of responses to questions and two of the women consistently had a lot to say. Carol had to redirect things a few times to make sure that the conversation was not monopolized by any one person.

Interview 9
Central African Dinner, Parkside Center, Portland

Meeting Information

Date: December 3, 2012; 6:00 pm

Student Researchers: Molly Carl and Joe Perry

Contact Information: molly.carl@maine.edu, joseph.w.perry@maine.edu

Setting and Participants

This interview was conducted at the Parkside Community Center in Portland, Maine. This was a dinner for community members and also a time for them to discuss current issues in their lives and communities. The interview was conducted in a meeting room that was set up for events such as this and there was no problem with distractions or noise. The student researchers present were Joseph Perry and Molly Carl. Carol Morris and Scott Hastings were also present at the meeting.

The participants were all Central African immigrants. Most of them were in their 20s and 30s, some maybe older in their 40's. Most of them did not speak English and there was a translator for the group. Based on the information from the interview it sounds like most of the participants have been in the community for at least 6 months, although some have been here for a few years.

Housing

Housing was an issue that presented a lot of problems for these community members. Some of their major concerns were with sanitation, heat and safety. Most of these related back to issues they have with their landlords. Many complained that the apartments they were living in were not clean and didn't have sanitary utilities. Another concern was bedbugs and cockroaches. Many agreed that bedbugs were a big problem, especially dealing with bagging everything up if they found bedbugs. Heat was also a problem, but mostly in terms of their landlord not turning it on, or choosing when it was time to turn on the heat. The participants also stated that it was hard to contact their landlord if problems like this came up. Lastly, they were concerned for their safety. One woman gave an example of how homeless people would often come in and sleep in the hallways of their apartment and many times vomit because they were drunk. In some cases the woman said she had to clean it up herself.

Transportation

In general, the people in this interview had a lot of problems with transportation. Many of them can't have cars and their only option was taking the bus or walking. The bus poses challenges. Often it doesn't travel as far as these community members would like or need. Many stated that they sometimes needed to go to South Portland, Scarborough or even Sanford, but the bus does not travel that far south. The bus schedule is also a major problem for them and waiting an hour for the bus is almost pointless when they can walk to their destination in that amount of time. Bus fare is another obstacle. Many of these people don't have jobs and cannot pay for the bus fare so they have to walk. Walking becomes an issue when they have to walk to get their groceries or when it becomes cold outside in the winter.

Employment and Finances

What we found was that these people desperately want to work. They admitted that they are bored and just want to do something. Many of them have skills in different areas but just don't know how or where to put their skills to work. There was a consensus among the group that they wanted assistance in looking for jobs and applying their knowledge so they could start making money and being productive and successful here.

Other Issues: Asylum and Integration

Another key topic of discussion was the asylum process. Many expressed frustration with how long the process takes. Some even said that people will leave and get asylum in other states because it takes too long here. They said it can take up to six months, which is time where they can't really do anything except wait. Lastly, the topic of integration was brought up a few times. Many people in the group agreed that there needs to be a better way to integrate themselves and future immigrants into the community. When they first arrive in Portland, they stay in the shelter for a while but when they get out they are kind of lost and don't have a direction to go in. They would like to see programs that would teach newcomers how to get involved in the community. Also they mentioned having more things like sports teams and clubs to join. The bottom line was that they wanted some direction and assistance to get them on their feet and being productive.

Interview Issues

The biggest challenge we faced while conducting the interview was the language barrier and having to use a translator. The translator did a very good job, but it still was hard to know exactly what everyone was saying and what they really meant. Also, some spoke English as well as French and they would sometimes start a sentence in English and end in French so some of their answers would be lost in translation. Joe actually speaks a little French so he was able to use what he knew to relate to the group more and make it more personal. He was also able to understand what they were saying in French at times and could better interpret what they meant. There was one man who came in late but he didn't disrupt things too, too much although he did have a lot to say.

APPENDIX A Oral Consent Form

Due to the low risk of the research and the fact that written consent forms would have required participants to give identifying information (names) that otherwise would not be collected, the USM Institutional Review Board agreed that an oral consent form would be most appropriate for this project. The following form was approved by the IRB and used for the project. Student researchers read the form to participants and then signed the form to indicate that all participants had agreed to take part. Copies of the original, signed forms will be kept by Kreg Ettenger at the University of Southern Maine for two years as required by the IRB.

University of Southern Maine

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Summary

The purpose of this consent form is to provide you with information about this research study and explain your rights. You are encouraged to ask any questions you may have about this study now or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may leave the meeting at any time. You may also decide later that you no longer wish to participate in the project.

Project Title

The title of this project is the “Sustain Southern Maine” Community Planning Project.

Principal Investigators

The main researchers, also known as the principal investigators, are Kreg T. Ettenger, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Southern Maine in Gorham, and Carol Morris, President of Morris Communications in Kennebunkport.

Description of Project

You have been asked to participate in a research project that is part of a planning project called “Sustain Southern Maine.” This project is designed to help create more sustainable and livable communities in southern Maine, in part by asking people like you what you think about your community and what could be done to make it even better. Some of the subjects that may be discussed include transportation, housing, and employment.

Purpose of Project

This study will help communities in southern Maine plan for the future by understanding what kinds of services local residents need, and what kinds of places they would like to live in. The study will focus on people who may not normally take part in community planning. Some of the groups that may be involved include recent immigrants and minorities. The results will help planners create more livable communities that allow for growth and economic development while protecting the things that make southern Maine a place people want to live. This study is being funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

What You Will be Asked to Do

You will be asked to take part in this one meeting, which should last no more than an hour. Students from USM will ask questions about topics like transportation, housing, energy, and employment in your community. You do not have to answer all the questions. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may leave the meeting at any time.

Possible Risks

The main risk is that you may be uncomfortable answering some questions. You may choose not to answer those questions, and you may also leave the meeting for any reason. If you feel like any of the information you are asked for could be used against you, we would prefer that you not give that information, or discuss your concerns first with the researchers.

Possible Benefits and Costs

Your participation can help make southern Maine a more livable and sustainable place in the future. Knowing what you think and what your needs are can help planners prepare for the future by improving transportation, housing and other things in your area. There is no cost to participate.

How Your Privacy Will Be Protected

During this meeting we will only use your first name or a pseudonym (made-up name) that you give us. The researchers who know your identity will not include that information in any reports, and will protect it to the best of their ability.

How Your Data Will be Kept Confidential

Because we will use only first names in this meeting and pseudonyms in reports or other materials that come out of this project, no one other than the researchers should be able to connect your name identity with any of the information that we collect. The primary investigators (researcher) will be the only ones who will generally be able to connect what you say with your actual identity. However, in some cases funding agencies, regulatory agencies, and the University of Southern Maine Institutional Review Board may review research records. Also, it's possible that members of this group may share information with others outside this group. This interview will be recorded for the purpose of making a transcript (written record) of the interview. The recording will be destroyed after being transcribed, and no information that could identify you will be included in the transcript.

Your Rights as a Research Subject

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate there is no penalty. Your decision not to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University or with any other cooperating institutions. You are also free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty. If you choose to participate in this study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact one of the primary investigators at the contact information below.

Contact Information

The researchers conducting this study are listed below. For questions or more information concerning this project you may contact them directly.

Kreg T. Ettenger, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Southern Maine
300 Bailey Hall, Gorham, ME 04038. 207-780-5322. Email: ettenger@usm.maine.edu

Carol Morris, President, Morris Communications
12 High Tide Road, Kennebunkport, ME 04046. 207-329-6502. Email: cmorris@morriscomm.net

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may also call the USM Human Protections Administrator at (207) 228-8434 or email them at usmirb@usm.maine.edu.

Consent to Participate

If you understand the purpose of this project and what you will be asked to do, and agree to participate in this study, we invite you to remain in this meeting. Otherwise you are free to leave with no penalty or consequences whatsoever. Your presence at the meeting is interpreted as your agreement to participate in the study. However, you may leave at any time.

Researcher's Statement

I/we have read the above consent form to all participants, and the participants had sufficient time to consider the information and sufficient opportunity to ask questions. All those participants who remained and whose views were recorded voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

Printed name _____

APPENDIX B

Group Interview Questions

Background

This question list was used as a general guide for the interviews. Not all questions were asked at every interview, due to time constraints and the varying relevance of the questions to specific groups. Participants at most meetings were also asked to provide some background information to help researchers understand their perspectives. Depending on the meeting, such information included community of residence, years in the community, country of origin, occupations, etc. Researchers also noted the general age and gender distribution of participants, but did not ask specifically for any identifying information.

A. Community Satisfaction

1. What do you like about this community? Do you have a favorite place to go?
2. What kinds of things might make your community better, in your opinion? If you could change one thing, what would it be?
3. Would you consider your community a safe place to live? Do you think it is a good place to raise children? Is it a good place for older people to live?
4. In what ways are you involved with other members of your community? For example, are you part of a church? Do you attend town meetings or other public meetings? Is there anything else you do that makes you feel like a part of your community?
5. If someone had to, could they get help from banks or other institutions in this community? Is there somewhere else in the community that people could go if they need financial help?
6. Do you plan to stay in this community? Are there things like family and friends that make you want to stay here? What else keeps you here?

B. Transportation

7. Can you tell us about how you usually get around from place to place?
8. If you had to, could you walk to places you need to go, like work or shopping? Would you want to if you could? Are there any places that you walk to now?
9. Can you take public transportation, like a bus, to any of these places? Would you want to if you could?
10. How important is it to you to be able to live in a place where you could walk, bike or take public transportation? Would you ever move somewhere just for this reason?

C. Housing

11. Are you generally happy with the house or apartment where you are living?
12. If you could change something about your housing situation, what would it be?
13. Do you ever do things to save energy, like keeping your thermostat turned down in the winter? If so, is this mainly because of costs or for other reasons?
14. Have you or your landlord done anything to save energy, like weatherproofing? Is this something you would like to have done?

D. Employment and Finances

15. Do you currently have a job that you like? If not, what is it that you would like to do?
16. Do you think there are enough job opportunities in your area? Is it hard to get and keep a job near where you live?
17. What is your biggest challenge on a daily basis? Do you get any help from your community in this area? How else could the community help?
18. Do you feel like there are support systems in your community to help people who might be in need? Without sharing names, could you tell us any stories about people using these?

E. Optional Questions

19. Is there another place you'd rather live in Maine or elsewhere? If so, why? Is there a reason you don't live there now?
20. Can you get everything you need in your community, including the foods you like? If not, what kinds of things can't you get there, and where do you go to get them?
21. Does your community provide you with opportunities for recreation? What about cultural and educational experiences? Places for worship?
22. Where do you see yourself and your family in ten years? What would your ideal situation be?

APPENDIX C

Guidelines for Interview Summary Reports & Transcripts

Background

Students were required to prepare “Interview Summary Reports” for each of the nine group interviews conducted. They were also required to prepare transcripts of the audio recordings from each interview. This work was done in teams, or by a single student with input from other team members. The following guidelines were provided to students to help ensure that the reports and transcripts were reasonably consistent with each other and conformed to standard practices. Some variation does occur, however, in the structure and content of the reports, and the way that individual transcripts were prepared and edited. As the writer and editor of this report I have made minor changes where needed to ensure a general level of consistency among the materials. I have not made major changes to either the reports or the transcripts, however, nor have I checked the transcripts against the original audio recordings to gauge their accuracy.

Interview Summary Reports

The interview summaries should be roughly 3-4 pages in length (1.5 line spaces). These should be written in a Word document and posted on the class wiki site. The summaries should contain the following sections (with approximate length shown in parentheses).

1) Interview Environment [1 paragraph]

Describe the interview environment, including physical location, type of class or meeting, any noise or distractions encountered, other people present, and so on. Also list the students who conducted the interview and any other researchers (Kreg, Scott, etc.) present.

2) Participant Description [1-2 par.]

Summarize the participants in terms of gender, age, and any other demographic information you collected. If it was an ESL class, describe where people were from, how long they have been in the U.S., and their general language skills. Also talk about how long participants have been in this particular community, giving examples. Do not include a full list of participants in this description (this information should be in your transcript, however).

3) Summary of Interview [5-6 par.]

In this section you should discuss in general terms what you found during the interview. Break this section down with subheadings for each of the main subject areas you asked about: housing, transportation, community satisfaction, finances, etc. One or two paragraphs for each topic should be sufficient, but you can add more for those subjects that this meeting had substantial information about. In terms of writing this section, it makes sense for the team member whose transcript includes most of the material for a particular subject, like transportation, to write that part.

4) Problems Encountered [1-2 par.]

List any problems that you encountered during your research. This might include distractions, language problems, sensitive topics, people coming in and out, etc. Also describe how you handled these challenges, and any recommendations you may have.

5) *Interview Transcript Info [1 par.]*

State in a paragraph which student(s) completed each part of the transcript for this interview. Explain any issues encountered, or any other information that a reader of the transcript might find helpful.

6) *Contact Info [1 par.]*

Provide contact information for all team members (email addresses are sufficient).

Interview Transcripts

The process of transcribing or transcription involves listening to an audio recording and writing out what is said. This can be relatively simple when there is one person speaking, the audio is clear, and there are no distractions such as background noise or interruptions. In cases of multiple speakers, like group interviews, it can become more complicated. The following guidelines should be followed when preparing your transcripts.

a) Determine who will transcribe which portions of the interview

In most cases you will have to figure out which team members are going to transcribe the interview, and how to divide the material. The simplest way is to look at the length of the recording and divide that by the number of transcribers. For example, a 60-minute interview can be easily divided into three 20-minute sections. Then have one person do the first part, another do the second, and so on. In most cases there will not be “natural breaks” in the interview at these dividing points, so decide who will do the overlap portion (e.g., the first person goes to 21:14 so that he or she can finish transcribing one person’s comment).

b) Distribute audio files to all team members

Whoever has the audio recording should upload it as an mp3 file to the Blackboard site for your group (in the Interview Teams section). Each transcriber should get the entire audio recording, but fast forward to the section that he or she will be transcribing. That way all team members will have the whole interview, and all will know what is being said at point 35:17, for example. Also, transcribers of the latter sections can go back to the beginning to hear the part where participants say their names in their own voices.

c) Transcribe audio for your section

Listen to the audio using an mp3 player or your computer and type out exactly what is said. You may have to listen several times to each section, and/or slow down playback. You can use a website like “Transcribe” [<http://transcribe.wreally.com/>], which allows you to listen and type on the same page, plus slow down and reverse the recording as needed. You can find other transcribing software or websites using a Google search.

d) Use brackets to show your own words

If any portion of the audio cannot be understood, for example if people are talking at the same time, write [unintelligible] at that point. Also use brackets around your own words summarizing something that is happening, for example [everyone laughs] or [new participant walks into room] or [several people agree with comment]. Some of this might be from your own notes rather than the audio recording, so keep those handy.

e) Identify individuals in transcript

If possible you should indicate when a comment can be attributed to a particular speaker. For each interview you should have a record of all participants, collected at the beginning of the meeting. If only one team member recorded this, make sure they type it up and provide it to all the transcribers. As you listen to the recording, try to identify who is saying what, and use your information about participants to include this in the transcript. Use the following (invented) sample to see how to show this in your transcript.

Q [Rachel]: So would you say you are happy with where you are living now?

A [Sama]: In general, no. The house is much too small for my family.

Q [Alissa]: Do others have this problem? [general agreement; unintelligible comments]

A [Ahmed]: Apartments in Portland are much too small! I have nine people in my family and we are [unintelligible]. We are living in a shoebox! [general laughter].

A [Samira?]: I have eight in my family and we are in a three-bedroom [apartment].

Note that in the last response I used a question mark after the name to show that I wasn't completely sure who made the comment. I also added the word "apartment" in brackets to help clarify her statement. These are some of the ways you as a transcriber can help the reader understand what is being said. Also, you can get rid of words or sounds like "ummm" if they don't add anything to the sentence and are distracting to the reader.

f) Provide key information on transcript

At the beginning of each transcript (including all the separate pieces), include the following information:

- Type of meeting (ESL class, etc.), location, date, and time
- First names and demographic information for all participants
- Names of all present doing the interview (students, plus instructor, Scott, etc.)
- Name of person transcribing this part of the interview

g) Combine transcript pieces and upload file to Blackboard

Once all portions of the transcript are completed, one team member should be responsible for putting these together in one Word document, with any overlapping or redundant material removed. Key information about the interview should appear once, at the beginning of the transcript. To be fair to all team members, especially the more prompt ones, this step should be done by the last person to complete their part of the transcript. The completed *draft* interview transcript should be posted in the Interview Teams section for that interview.