

ASSIGNMENT OPTIONS

ANALYZING A PARTICULAR COMMUNITY

Write an essay that describes, defines, and analyzes a particular community of which you are a part or about which you are particularly curious. It could be a community defined by geography (e.g., home town, neighborhood, campus, city), a group or collective with which you have long identified (perhaps defined by ethnicity, race, religion, identity, interest, profession, etc.), or a community that you have entered recently or hope to enter soon (e.g., college, dorm, service-learning site, peer social group, club, fraternity). The essay should include analysis of language practices.

Drawing on experience, observation, and research, include a textured description of the community that is comprehensible to outsiders. Include analysis of the key community tensions and language practices. Some guiding questions include the following:

- What factors define the group (geography, age, interests, ethnicity, shared history, etc.)?
- What is the history of the community? How does that history shape current practices and attitudes?
- What is the typical process of entering the community?
- What language practices are common to the community (special terms, habits of communication, etc.)? How do talk and writing reflect certain kinds of group membership?
- What other patterns of sameness are evident within the community (dress, rituals, values, behaviors, etc.)?
- How does the community deal with difference?
- What are the rewards and costs of membership?
- How does the community express and negotiate key tensions?
- How might people from alternate perspectives (i.e., insider vs. outsider) define the community differently from one another?

Readings from this chapter will help you apply such questions to a particular community.

DEFINING COMMUNITY

Drawing on the readings in this chapter, craft an extended definition of *community*. Follow the guidelines and rhetorical strategies for extended definitions explained in the chapter, and use examples and experience to support your claims.

Community Tensions

Communities are dynamic rather than static. Consciously or not, each community, whether large or small, must negotiate between forces of togetherness and separateness, collective values and individual preferences, connection to the past and movement toward the future. Because tensions constitute a natural part of community life, recognizing them is a fruitful place to begin our analysis.

Excerpt: David L. Kirp, *Almost Home: America's Love-Hate Relationship with Community*

David L. Kirp is a professor of public policy at the University of California, Berkeley. The following is drawn from the introduction to his most recent book.

On a warm September afternoon a few weeks into the fall 1999 term, Berkeley's Sproul Plaza teems with life. Students scurry between classes or head toward Telegraph Avenue. The quintessentially Berkeley characters are on the scene—the preacher cajoling, the man with the fake microphone crooning off-key, and the drummer pounding away.

In this scruffy square, the cultural revolution had its tumultuous start with the Free Speech Movement. But now that seems like ancient history. Mario Savio, the personification of the Movement, has been transformed into an icon, his death mourned by a chancellor whose predecessor sicced the police on him. When compared to the 1960s, the occasional protests over the demise of affirmative action or the university's unwillingness to let its teaching assistants unionize are timid affairs. A small circle embedded in the Plaza is inscribed with the words, "This Space is the Territory of No Nation," but to the oblivious passerby, that circle—with the utopian fantasy that it represents—is just part of the pavement.

On this Indian summer day, student organizations are recruiting new members. Tables have been set up along the edge of Sproul Plaza—an astonishing one hundred and seventy-six tables—manned by students who together represent a benign Babel. Campus Greens are here as well as Campus Republicans. So are the Undergraduate Minority Business Association and the Pre-Med Honor Society; the New Life Christian Club, the Asian Baptists, and the Bahia Club; the Taiwanese Student Association and La Familia; Cal Dykes and Chi Phi; the Golden Bear Victory Fellowship and Food Not Bombs; Swingin' Out and Take Back the Night. The hockey team hopes to convert roller-bladers into goalies; the debating society hopes to lure silver-tongued orators.