

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Department of Urban Studies and Planning**



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**11.204: Planning, Communication & Digital Media  
Fall 2004**

**Project 2:  
Exploring, Analyzing, and Describing a Massachusetts Town**

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**Assigned: Week 8, Rec 8**

**Due: Town and Topic Selection, Week 9, Lec. 9**

**Due: Final Project, Week 12, Pres 1**

**Due: Group Presentations, Week 12, Pres 1 (Groups 1, 2, 3, and 4) and Week 12, Pres 2 (Groups 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9)**

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### **I. Scenario**

This project, the second for the course, is somewhat open-ended. We hope that this project allows group members to demonstrate their technical skills, we also expect you to work as a group to effectively communicate a single, simple visual argument about a town (or a specific neighborhood or place within a town) in the Boston, MA metro area. While we encourage the groups to confront this project creatively, there are several guidelines we expect each group to follow. They are:

**A. Each group will select a single MA Town or City – [Brockton](#), [Cambridge](#), [Chelsea](#), [Lawrence](#), [Lincoln](#), [Lynn](#), [Newton](#), [Revere](#), [Somerville](#), [Watertown](#), and [Wellesley](#).**

For each of the six lab exercises, individual students have collected and/or analyzed data pertaining to Central Square. Now and as a group of 4 to 5 students (which have been randomly assigned by the instructors), you will apply the skills that you acquired in the laboratory exercises to create a visual argument. As a team, you will select a town and a substantive topic of inquiry. You may choose to analyze an issue that involves the entire town (e.g., how and why have homeownership rates changed over time?) or you may choose to focus on a neighborhood (e.g., which neighborhoods are changing with respect to racial composition? why might they be changing?), a place (e.g., are housing values influenced by proximity to public transportation stops/hubs?) or a type of place (e.g., do children have access to parks and open space? who lives near the town's parks?) within the town.

One approach is to generate a question or hypothesis before you visit the town, collect and analyze data, and create a visual argument that answers the original question.

Another approach would be to review the data available to each group, and generate a question based on your preliminary understanding of basic patterns (e.g., Gee, homeownership rates in the City of Lawrence are lower than any other town. One neighborhood has particularly low homeownership rates. Why is that so?). Next, spend some time in the selected town or neighborhood. Can a group gather additional evidence (photographs) to answer the question?

While each group may decide to collect additional data, groups are not required to do so. There are a host of arguments that groups can make with the **data** provided in the course locker (race, housing, poverty, gender, etc.). **We are keenly interested in seeing each group construct a clear and effective visual argument with the data provided. We will be more critical of work that incorporates additional data sets.**

**B. Each group will address a substantive issue.**

For example, a group may choose to further explore a theme a member uncovered in their photographic essay (Lab 2). Alternatively, the group may choose to abandon their photographic essays and select an issue that interests all (or most) of the group members. For example, you may begin by conducting an analysis (basic summary statistics) of race or home ownership for a census tract in the selected town. Next, you may generate some charts and maps that defend the group's position. If a photographic image would further support your group's case, seek and obtain the evidence. Beyond the collection of additional visual data (photographs), we expect each group to work only with the **data sets and maps** that have been provided in the course locker. It will be very time consuming if a group decides to acquire additional Census data or GIS shape files, and we hope each group can avoid the urge to do so.

**C. Groups will use a variety of tools to craft a visual argument and convey their position.**

We expect each group to rely on a variety of tools (WWW, photographs, charts/graphs, tables/spreadsheets, GIS, and relational databases) to complete this project; however, groups should be strategic about the images they decide to include in their project. For example, a creative, persuasive and concise argument is more effective than a stream of redundant images. In fact, each group should limit their presentation to only a few images (no more than 10) and phrases (no more than 150 words). It might be a

good idea to collect and organize a host of images, write a lengthy narrative, then select the key images and phrases and delete the others. It is never easy to shorten your work, but less *really* is more.

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## II. Directions

### A. Constructing a Framework for Your Group's Research

For this project, each group will design the framework for both the analysis and the presentation. To provide some guidance, we listed the types of questions that are typically part of such a process. You should review the questions as a group. While we do not expect a written response, **they are the elements that we will use to evaluate a group's work.**

#### 1. Selecting a Town – Due: Week 9, Lec. 9

Site Visits. Each of the eleven towns are accessible by [public transportation](#) if group members do not have access to a car. Sometime between Week 8, Rec. 8 and Week 9, Lec. 9, groups should attempt to visit at least one municipality to get a sense of the area and possible research topics.

Examine the Data. The municipalities have their own individual folders in the course locker. Groups should look at the Census data and maps and perform some basic data analysis in Excel to determine whether any of the towns possess patterns of interest to the group.

Consult Others. If your group has an idea for a topic, but would like additional feedback, ask course instructors, TAs, other faculty members, or fellow students in the DUSP what they think.

#### 2. Before You Begin Your Research

*What is your argument and who is your intended audience?*

Discuss this as a group - be specific and descriptive. Also, the group's point of view does not need to be as a DUSP student. For example, a group can frame their argument such that they are consultants, political advisors, community leaders, etc. Similarly, a group can determine their audience. For some examples, take a look at the work done last year.

*What is the question and why is it important?*

Make sure that your group's question is clearly articulated. Be sure to describe why or to whom it is important. Formulating a question that can be addressed in just three weeks and with limited data may be the most challenging aspect of the project. We encourage each group to seek help. Talk to instructors and teaching assistants and determine your focus as early as possible! Furthermore, we expect the groups to formulate a basic or simple argument that can be addressed in a concise and/or creative fashion. It is not intended to overwhelm a group.

#### 3. During the Research Process

After some analysis, a group will likely refine their question. This is a short project, and it will be difficult to successfully tackle an extremely complex question. Try to scale it down or simplify it. To do this, groups will need to make some assumptions. Also, what is the principal finding? Did your group's analysis support or deny your original question? (Both are valid!) Did group members discover a finding that was only remotely related to their original question, and subsequently change their question? (This is legal, too!) Be sure to describe your assumptions as well as your findings in your oral presentation.

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## III. Things to ponder

- Identify the most significant constraint team members experienced during the research process. A limited amount of time is not a valid constraint. You should think about the group's ability to manipulate the tools, the functionality of the tools available to you, your ability to analyze qualitative data, the challenges associated with gathering additional data, the availability of teaching assistants, the quality of MIT's workstations, etc. We welcome your comments and criticisms.
  - Identify one action the group would take to overcome the above identified constraint(s). Imagine that the team was given the entire semester to complete the project. What action(s) would you take to improve the end result?
  - Did the group enjoy the process? Why or why not? How might team members change their approach or question so that it had more meaning or held their interest? Think about your role and responsibilities for this project. Are you satisfied with your individual performance? The group's performance?
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## IV. Materials to submit

The project is **due at 5:00pm on Week 12, Pres 1.**

Each student will e-mail the URL for Project 2 to his or her TA with '11.204: Project 2' appearing in the subject line (project must be available in each group member's online portfolio).

While each group will exercise a good deal of freedom throughout this project, yet there are some basic requirements. They are:

1. Create a presentation that is no more than 3 pages in length (You should print it to see that it can fit on three sheets of 8.5" x 11")
2. Use any combination of images (photographs, charts, graphs, tables, maps, etc.) to support the group's position. Use no more than 10 images and 150 words.
3. Each group member needs to make at least one site visit to the selected town.

*You will organize and display these components on the Web using Dreamweaver. The presentation must be no more than 3 pages in length (you should print it to see that it can fit on three sheets of 8.5" x 11"). Each group will have exactly 10 minutes to present their work (the 3 pages), so be certain to practice the delivery in advance. One, some, or all of the group members may present the work that's up to you. [This paragraph is added on Nov. 5, 2004.]*

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## **V. Grading criteria**

Quality of Images (Composition, frame/perspective, size, color, labeling, etc.) --- 30%

Quality of Argument (Clarity, relevance to planning, sequencing, etc.) --- 30%

Composition (Arrangement of graphic content, text selection and positioning, creativity) --- 30%

Oral Presentation (Organization, delivery, and length) --- 10%

**Project 2 is worth a total of 30 percentage points toward each student's final course grade.**

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Created November 2002 by Jinhua Zhao. Updated November 2002 by Lorlene Hoyt, April 2003 by Masa Matsuura, November 2003 by Lorlene Hoyt, July 2004 by Shannon McKay. Updated July 2004 by Lorlene Hoyt. Updated September 2004 by Shannon McKay.

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