

research PORTFOLIOS

Your Research Portfolios are generally defined by the original project assignment sheet you received some time ago. Please refer to that for a discussion of what your portfolio is to contain and how it is to be organized.

This handout attempts to make clear what is expected of the material that *you generate* to

- guide a reader through the portfolio and
- provide interpretation and context.

Below are a few examples based on likely categories in your portfolio.

Statistical **RESEARCH**

It is especially important to write a substantive introduction to any sections containing raw data, lists of statistics, or other “bits” of information.

The following example offers *interpretive statements* and incorporates some of the statistics into a kind of *summary* or *highlighting of the most significant facts*. Notice below the phrases or sentences that probably would refer to more detailed information contained within this section.

Most people believe that the distance between being domiciled and being homeless is a great chasm. Many assume that they know the homeless not because they have ever spoken to a homeless person but because they have seen them in public (Desjarlais, 1997). This assumption is a barrier to understanding that the homeless population is as diverse and varied as any cross section of culture.

Many more people experience homelessness than is commonly thought, and most of them do not remain homeless. The National Coalition for the Homeless (1999) emphasizes that homelessness is generally a temporary circumstance, not a permanent condition. Most attempts to count the number of homeless people are limited to counting those individuals who are on the street or in shelters. There are large numbers of people not found on the streets or in shelters who experience homelessness and are never counted. People staying with friends or family, in automobiles, campgrounds, or other places are not easily found by researchers. The results largely misrepresent the problem of homelessness. The reality of homelessness extends to groups that do not fit our cultural stereotypes of a street person.

The current estimate is that 700,000 people are homeless on any given night and that 3 million people experience homelessness in a year. There has been an increase in homelessness in the last 15 to 20 years, due largely to the shortage of affordable housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty (NCH, 1999). The ethnic make-up of homeless populations varies across the United States but tends to show a correlation with ethnic groups that are commonly marginalized in other ways.

The most current information on the causes of homelessness cites lack of affordable housing, employment problems, and domestic violence (NCH, 1999). In a study conducted by Bunston and Breton in 1992, the reason most often cited among women was. . .

site,population/**PROGRAMMING**

Another useful category might be a description of the *population* served by the organization, the *site* of the offices or what-have-you, and any *programming* or *activities* coordinated by the org (depending on the org, these might need to be three different categories). This might also be a good place to introduce the *mission statement or goals* of the organization (though these may find their way into other sections as well). The example below begins with “core values,” briefly describes the agency, then programming and population served. Notice in the example that the writer describes things that only she notices or would think to document. The contents of this sections are most likely brochures, flyers, mission statements, perhaps some statistics or records of who has been served, more detailed program descriptions.

Deborah's Place Core Values

- * To foster an environment that encourages creative expression and self-determination, and supports an individual's freedom to make choices.
- *To build community through relationships, communication and social commitment.
- * To provide quality services with respect and empathy.
- * To promote diversity that honors differences in age, culture, and social orientation.
- * To provide and advocate for safe, clean, and affordable housing.

Deborah's Place is a not for profit agency that serves homeless and formerly homeless women. As an art therapy intern I have had the opportunity to work in three Deborah's Place programs. The several programs within the agency are tailored to the diverse needs of the participants. The agency offers an overnight shelter, a daytime support center, a four month transitional program, a two year transitional living program, and permanent apartments. The women in all the programs are provided with individualized case management services. There is a full time art therapist, Jean Durkin, ATR., who divides her time between the daytime support program and the two art and learning centers housed in the transitional living programs. The agency also provides a Career Exploration Program that includes classes, internships, and mentoring. Many of the women do internships within the agency while going through the Career Exploration Program. The agency is committed to its core values, and truly provides many women who have not been served effectively in the past with the respect, hope, and time they need to recreate their lives.

Marah's, the two year transitional housing program is located in a turn of the century building with space that meets the needs of Marah's participants by providing both privacy and community. The building was once a convent and still retains the elegance and peacefulness of a sacred structure. Throughout the building there are deeply colored stain glass windows that create a sense of sanctuary even in the stair wells. Every time I enter Marah's I feel welcomed by the warmth of the environment and the generosity of the participants and staff. Entering the courtyard, there is a gazebo surrounded by a stone path. The women created the path with the help of Archi-design by embellishing each stone with colored tiles. The stones personalize the courtyard and create a feeling of warmth and welcoming.

On the first floor there is a staff office; a staff member is on duty 24 hours a day. Case management offices are located on the first floor as well and provide space for individual meetings. A large meeting room is available for staff meetings and activities for the women. Women can often be found in the smoking room or TV room which are both located on the first floor near the offices. The kitchen and dining room are also located on the first floor. The participants help prepare all meals and gather in the sunny dining area for meals with staff and volunteers. There are laundry facilities are available in the basement where there is also a recreation area where the women can watch television, play a game of ping pong, or ride exercise bikes.

Each woman has her own room equipped with bedroom furniture and a closet. The rooms are located on the second and third floors. An elevator is available and makes all of the floors accessible. On the second floor there is a chapel room which contains a large granite altar. Though the room was labeled the “Meditation Room” to give it a more secular meaning, the women still refer to it as “The Chapel.” The Art and Learning Center is also located on the second floor. One of the unique aspects of Deborah's Place is that the agency has made an effort to employ former program

participants in its many programs. The Art and Learning Center at Marah's is staffed by two formerly homeless women. The Center is open on weekdays and is not open to the participants when there is not a staff member on duty. The Center is comprised of two large rooms connected by one door. They are both well lit by the sun with windows lining two sides of the rooms. In the art space, the walls opposite the windows have built-in oak cabinets and drawers. There are several activities available to the women through the Art and Learning Center: art therapy, craft activities, movies, field trips, support groups, aerobics, book clubs, and games. The other room is reserved for quiet activities and houses several computers for the women's use. Many of the women are working on their high school equivalency degrees and others are attending college courses. They often come to the art and learning center to study or work with one of the volunteer tutors. Marah's is a home that offers women a chance to regain their strength so that they can find their way out of homelessness permanently. The feeling of the environment offers hope and safety to women who have not always experienced those things in their everyday environment.

The Art and Learning Center is open to the participants of Marah's and to women in any other Deborah's Place program. Primarily the women that I have spent time with in the center have been from Marah's or Teresa's, a four month transitional shelter. Occasionally, women who have found permanent housing either through Deborah's Place Apartments or outside the agency come to the art and learning center to work with tutors or to make art.

The twenty-two women served by Deborah's Place all have homelessness and gender in common. Beyond that, they are a diverse group of women from various backgrounds. They range in age between 21 and 60, with the majority of the women falling between 35 and 50 years old. The largest racial group represented is African American, followed by Caucasian. Diversity at Marah's is also evident in the presence of women from other countries. Many of the participants have experienced sexual abuse, domestic violence, and chemical dependency. Once a woman has reached Marah's, she is on the path to permanent housing and has begun to stabilize her life to achieve that goal. The Marah's women are actively involved in recovery programs or mental health services on an individual basis. Each woman pays a percentage of her income for her room at Marah's. That money is put away in a savings account for her to receive when she is ready to move into her own housing. These women have made a commitment to build a better life for themselves. The agency's outcome study from 1998 showed that 93% of the women who had begun the year in housing remained in housing throughout the year. The majority of the women in that study were graduates of Marah's transitional housing program.

organizational**HISTORY**

The organizational history is probably the easiest to imagine introducing; but remember that the less the history itself is composed and organized, the more *your introduction has to do the work*. It may be that the history section is entirely your writing, *compiling information from a variety of sources* that are actually in other parts of the portfolio and containing information that may have no other form but your record. If the history is entirely or mostly your writing of what you have discovered, logically, you can keep the introduction brief (use it to summarize). If, on the other hand, the history you have gathered is in many forms bundled together, take special care in writing an introduction to those materials that gives a *full, clear story behind the organization*. History may include the story of the organization's founding, accomplishments, mission statements, leadership, growth, etc. History should also include history of the issues with which your organization is concerned, including comparison, where available, to similar organizations. The example below describes a neighborhood in Phoenix that, in order to save itself, has had to organize to fight the city government and Phoenix's Sky Harbor International Airport. Your organization may have historical documents to draw from; you may include sections of interview that deal with history; you may include newspaper clippings, printouts from the web, etc.

The Central City South section of Phoenix was once nicknamed “the Bucket of Blood.” El Campito is one of the nine barrios that make up Central City South. The area has a long history of hardships. Since its establishment in 1910, the residents here have endured poverty, segregation, pollution, and disease (Leonard, 1999).

According to an Urban Planning Project conducted at Arizona State University, the first house built on this land went up in 1867. It was a farmhouse. Other settlers followed. By 1891, it was discovered that the area was a flood plain. Wealthy residents moved north to higher ground, leaving poorer minorities behind. The area continued to endure floods until the 1940’s (Leonard, 1999). Today, 80% of the residents who live on this old flood plain are Latino. 85% of these people live below the poverty level. (Gibbs, 1999).

Throughout Central City South’s history, one thing has been consistent: poverty. Even though these people work very hard, they have remained poor. In 1910 work was mainly on the farm. Eventually the Union Pacific Railroad moved in and provided new jobs. Warehouses and train yards became a monumental presence in the area (Leonard, 1999).

[...]

Former President Bill Clinton visited El Campito during his nationwide tour of the poorest areas in our country. He paid a visit to Chicanos Por La Causa. This organization was formed by Hispanic citizens and supported as a Ford Foundation grantee. They increase employment and education opportunities for initially disadvantaged residents in Phoenix and Arizona. Their office is located at the center of El Campito. Raul Torres, who works for Chicanos Por La Causa, feels that “the city of Phoenix has been unresponsive to the needs of these people” [...]

meetingsInterviews

Introducing an interview is generally *scene setting* (descriptions of the place and the person), a description of *your goals* going into the meeting, a *summary*, or sometimes just a teaser, of *what you got out of it*, or a conglomeration of aspects from several of interviews, which together give some perspective on a bigger picture. If you attend meetings, or have any casual meetings, interactions that are not transcribed, the introduction is a good time to summarize and describe those encounters. You may write a separate intro for each interview or one big one for them all. The text below is a good example of gathering bits and pieces from several interviews and conversations and piecing them together to explore the broader topic at hand.

I am in Roy B. Sanchez’s adobe home on South 9th place in Phoenix, Arizona. Roy and his late wife, Sophia, bought the house in 1967 and raised their four girls here. The house is small. Two tiny bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom and a porch is all they need. The house is yellow. Roy and Sophia’s room is brilliant pink, separated from the rest of the house by a curtain. An altar to the Virgen de Guadalupe takes up an entire wall in the living room. The little yellow adobe house is comfortable. It even has a fireplace, which is lit on chilly 65 degree nights.

The yard encircling the Sanchez house is large and surrounded by a chain link fence. Roy is an artist. He has decorated the fence and yard with found objects. On the fence hang old license plates, belt buckles, and gears. In one of the trees hangs a rocking horse.

Roy and Sophia’s third child, Irma D Sanchez, is raising her son Isaiah here. In Central City South, in the heart of the El

Campito barrio live three generations of the Sanchez family.

[...]

One distinctive feature of the Sanchez's yard is that commercial jetliners often fly overhead, not more than 500 feet from the ground. On evenings, while talking under the Palos Verde, conversation has to pause as the planes fly by. The noise is loud.

[...the researcher meets several people in this setting, and records certain aspects of the conversation:]

Residents fear a buyout will destroy their culture. What about the schools and churches that lie in the airport's path? Many people was to stay in their homes. Many of the residents have lived in their homes for over thirty years (Diaz). "I can't imagine living anyplace else," said the 53 year old Metcalf, who pays \$250 monthly to her sisters, who owns the home, "I've lived her all my life." Other residents expressed similar views:

"My grandpa and grandma, they've lived her all their lives.:"

"My dad has been here 50 years."

"This is our hood."

"It's just going to be an empty field."

"People are already living here, having a nice life."

"Let us be."

"The noise doesn't bother me."

"That's how you know you're in our hood - those planes."

"It will be very hard, if they take it down."

"This is all family."

Most of the residents of El Campito are accustomed to the noise after living in the neighborhood for 30 years..... Unfortunately, the residents of El Campito and other threatened neighborhoods have no legal recourse to defend themselves.

Some residents, even those who have been here for fifty years, are ready to leave. "I want to get out of here," says a single mother of four. "If we get a fair price, we will take it." Even Irma feels this way sometimes.

"Mary Jane, it's hard living here. My dad is like, 'People should try to improve their lives, move out, move on. Memories are in your heart, not in your house.' And that sums it up."

However, residents wanting to sell want help in relocation and adequate money for their land. "We'd have to go either way; the government gets what they want," says Ricardo Castro, a lifetime resident.

[and so on]

HAVE FUN