

Unit IV: Finding Communities Profile of an Online Community

Rough Draft Due: April 12th

Peer Review Due: April 17th

Final Draft Due: April 19th

Article length: 1,000-1,600 words + visuals

Published on Weebly site *as standard page*

PDF + author's note uploaded to D2L

THE ASSIGNMENT

For this assignment, you will write a profile that explores an **online community** that you find **significant** and **meaningful**, presenting it to an audience that is unfamiliar with this group. Your goal will be to **introduce**, **explore**, and **explain** the community. You are not simply reporting facts; you are providing **insight** and an **interpretation** into a community's distinctive aspects and exploring what the **meaning** of those aspects might be. Ultimately, I want you to answer the question: what is this community's **purpose**? Why does it appear to exist, and what benefit and/or challenges does it provide its members?

TOPIC SELECTION

We will discuss in class what constitutes an "online community," but two things you want to consider when selecting your topic:

- 1) You must choose a community with which you are familiar. Either a) you are part of this community but don't regularly engage with it, b) you would like to join this community, or c) someone you know is part of the community and is willing to be your guide. You cannot just select a random community and hope to study it; you need to have both access and a personal connection/investment in the community to do this project well.
- 2) The online community must be public in some way. The fact that it is online means it is likely at least semi-public. If your community is password-protected or requires an invitation, you will need to make sure the privacy of those involved in the community is safeguarded, since your profiles will be posted publicly. There are ways to protect member identities (see Visuals section below), and we will talk about responsibility and ethics in class.

You will post a **topic proposal** to a D2L assignment box (not discussion forum; see document on D2L for more information). Your proposals will be due by **Friday, March 30 at midnight**, and Ms. Kelm will let you know that weekend if your proposal has been approved.

FRAMES FOR RESEARCH

Once your topic has been approved, you will need to begin research. Like in unit III, you'll want to use **multiple research strategies**: 1) observation with field notes and photos/screenshots; 2) interview(s); and/or 3) published research on the history and/or current context of your community and its platform. Use the research skills you've already developed this semester to assist you in crafting a profile of this community. Consider the following frames for your research:

Person: Who is involved in this community, and why? Finding a person who is part of the community to talk about their experience with it will provide a fuller picture of how the community functions and what its purpose is. Even so, keep in mind that individuals cannot fully speak for an entire community, as groups are composed of individuals who bring their unique backgrounds, personalities, and perspectives. So, who you choose to **interview** will shape your profile. Will you interview someone who founded the community? Someone who has been a longtime member? Someone new to the community? It must be clear why you selected this person to interview. You may conduct this interview over email or some other electronic textual communication, but I recommend talking (either on the phone or in person) if possible. We will talk about proper interview technique in class and your interviewee must sign a permission slip. Be aware of time constraints, especially regarding the scheduling of your interview. Have a plan B (or C, or D, or E...) *While an interview is not required, it is highly suggested; if you have concerns about interviewing someone in your particular community, come and talk with me.*

Place: Where is this community located online? Like we discussed in both units II and III, the conventions and constraints of a particular platform impact the kind of information and interaction that happens there. So, **observe** the platform this community uses; do “field research.” What is unique about this particular platform? Why does this community use it? How do they use it? How did they find it? When did this community start? Use your best descriptive skills so that your readers can picture and understand the place this community operates within. Your goal will be to “thickly describe” this place (a term which we will discuss). You will also want to provide visuals.

Interaction: How does this community communicate and engage? This question is related to the place/platform, but see if you can **identify** how people interact in this community. What are the different ways people interact? What are the topics they discuss? How frequently do they interact? What language or jargon is used? What is unique about their interactions? This is where you may need to be concerned about the privacy of the individuals involved (see below for more information).

All of this research needs to lead to a **conclusion** in which you bring everything you’ve learned from your interviews, observation, and sources together to answer the question “So what?” **Who** does this community attract, and what is its **purpose**? Try to go deeper than, “It’s a place for people who like X to talk about X.” What’s special about this particular corner of the internet? And what does this tell you about online communities as a whole? What function do they serve members? Your conclusions should have both local and global aspects.

RESEARCH

You will be persuading an unfamiliar audience of the accuracy of your interpretation of this online community. Thus, you will need to support any claims you make about this culture with clear data: from your own experiences, from interviews, or from outside sources. A combination of all three types of research will be the most compelling and persuasive.

You will need to cite **at least three reputable and appropriate sources** within your article, in addition to your interview. These sources must be secondary sources, some sort of commentary on or information about the community. You may find this information through the online community itself, or you may find it outside of the community. Consider whether it is an *inside* source or an *outside* source (we will talk more about this in class). All sources must be listed at the end of your article in a **reference list**. You will also need to use some sort of consistent citation style; all sources must be cited (this includes any photos that are not your own). You may hyperlink to sources, but make sure those sources are accessible to your audience.

VISUALS & SECURITY

Include **at least three visuals**. Think strategically about what kinds of visuals would be most helpful in your article. What does your audience need to *see* to understand this community? All visuals must be cited/attribution to their original creator in some way. If the community is not fully public (i.e. a closed Facebook group, etc.), you must remove all identifying information from any visuals if you have not gotten permission from the user to post their interactions. This includes user names and images of the users. Failure to do so will affect your grade. You may use pseudonyms to protect identity, but be sure to inform your audience that you are using a pseudonym. If you have permission to use someone’s name and/or image, you need to upload a permission slip to D2L with your final project (like you did for Unit II, only this time you have a particular permission slip to use).

SUBMISSION & AUTHOR’S NOTE

For the workshop of the rough draft, you will submit the PDF and (short) author’s note to the D2L assignment boxes, as well as a discussion thread for peer workshop. For the final draft, you will submit a PDF of the completed page, along with your longer author’s note (see the author’s note handout on D2L for more information) and a link to your completed page to the D2L assignment box.

Course outcomes met:

- ❖ *Write in a range of genres, using appropriate rhetorical conventions*
- ❖ *Demonstrate competency in reading, quoting and citing sources, as well as competency in balancing your own voice with secondary sources*
- ❖ *Demonstrate the ability to employ flexible strategies for generating and revising your writing (such as: invention, drafting, revising, recording, and editing)*