

# **Knowledge about Local Governance in Kenton County, Kentucky**

## **Introduction**

The Applied Environmental Anthropology Research Group (AEARG) at Northern Kentucky University (NKU), in collaboration with the Kenton County Governance Study, completed a preliminary investigation into the cultural models of local governance in response to the Northern Kentucky Forum that took place April 24, 2010. The purpose of this service-learning research project was to document how residents of Kenton County, Kentucky, understand the cooperation between local and county governments. In particular, Kenton County residents' knowledge of the parts of local governance and the relationship of these parts to each other was collected. During this research (spring 2011), 11 students in the Anthropology 100H, Honors Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, conducted ethnographic interviews with 98 Kenton County residents at Northern Kentucky University and public libraries in Kenton County. During interviews, participants were asked to describe the parts of local government and the relationship between these parts. We found that residents of Kenton County have only limited knowledge about their local government.

## **Methods**

In preparation for this research project, 11 students in the spring 2011 Honors Cultural Anthropology course were trained in ethnographic interview methods<sup>1</sup> and logistical planning for the project was completed. In addition to ethnographic methods, the students were trained in research ethics involving human subjects in accord with the Institutional Review Board requirements at NKU to ensure that the individuals with whom they spoke were protected from any ramifications of their participation in this research.

In January 2011 AEARG Director Douglas Hume sent letters to public libraries, grocery stores, and shopping malls in Kenton County requesting permission to interview on their premises. Only Independence and Erlanger branches of the Kenton County Library gave permission and fit the scheduling needs of the students.

The student researchers interviewed 32 students, faculty, and staff who were Kenton

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<sup>1</sup> McCurdy, David W., James P. Spradley, and Dianna J. Shandy. 2004. *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society*, Second Edition. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press.



police, fire, and garbage collection). Many conflated state or national government with local government. The informants that had more knowledge of local government had either previous experience working in local government or had a close family member employed in local government. These patterns of knowledge indicate the presence of three models of knowledge about local government among Kenton County residents.

3. male approximately 18 years old listed legislative and judicial.

#### Moderate Knowledge Model

The smallest proportion of informants, approximately 10%, has a moderate amount of knowledge about the parts of local government. These informants tend to be older and have worked with or have a family member who has worked with local government. Informants with this model could list on average ten parts of local government, for example:

1. male approximately 25 years old listed judge executive, city attorney, court house, police department, fire department, code enforcement, water district, and county solicitor;
2. female approximately 45 years old listed judge, county clerk, fire stations, fire chief, firefighters, police, police chief, county sheriff, school systems, school superintendent, board of education, principals, teachers, planning commission, library, county water, city water, sewage, motor commissions;
3. male approximately 65 years old listed city major, city council, city attorney, county commissioner, judge executive, judges, county sheriff;
4. male approximately 55 years old listed judge executor, police, fire, mayor, fire chief, dog catcher, police chief, dog catcher, years old listed county pound, city pound, zoning board/housing, parking, utilities, sheriff, district representatives, judges, prosecutors;

#### **Conclusion**

Due to the limited number of informants interviewed, to learn the extent of knowledge about local governance in Kenton County, a questionnaire should be developed and administered. To continue this research on local governance, we propose to administer the attached questionnaire, which should be mailed to approximately 5,000 randomly selected Kenton County residents. In the questionnaires, participants will be asked to agree or disagree with propositional statements of the relationships between the parts of local government that were collected during the interviews. The final phase of this research, would involve Douglas Hume and his students analyzing the questionnaire data.

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DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ years old
2. Are you ! Female or ! Male?  
Married with children?
3. Which one of the following best describes your ethnicity?  
! African-American      ! Asian-American      ! European-American      ! Hispanic-American      ! Indian-American  
! Latin-American      ! Middle Eastern-American      ! Native-American      ! Pacific Island-American
5. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?  
! Grade School      ! High School      ! Some Junior/Community College  
! Some Trade School      ! Some Vocational School      ! Junior/Community College (A.A.)  
! Completed Trade School      ! Completed Vocational School      ! Some College (four year)  
! College (e.g., B.A/B.S)      ! Some Graduate/Medical/Law School/  
! Graduate School (e.g., M.A./M.S)      ! Graduate/Medical School (e.g., Ph.D./M.D./J.D.)
6. What is your total (combined) household income per year?  
! \$0 - \$10,000      ! \$10,001 - \$20,000      ! \$20,001 - \$30,000      ! \$30,001 - \$40,000      ! \$40,001 - \$50,000  
! \$50,001 - \$60,000      ! \$60,001 - \$70,000      ! \$70,001 - \$80,000      ! \$80,001 - \$90,000      ! \$90,001 - \$100,000  
! \$100,001 - \$110,000      ! \$110,001 - \$120,000      ! \$120,001 - \$130,000      ! \$130,001 - \$140,000      ! \$140,001 - \$150,000  
! \$150,001 - \$160,000      ! \$160,001 - \$170,000      ! \$170,001 - \$180,000      ! \$180,001 - \$190,000      ! \$190,001 - \$200,000  
! \$200,001 - \$250,000      ! \$250,001 - \$300,000      ! \$300,001 or more
7. Have you worked for the government? ! Yes ! No
8. Have you of your close family or friends?  
! Yes ! No

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