

More Guidance on Your Final Reports

Each of your Final Reports will be different, tailored to the nature of your particular fieldwork and to the questions and concerns you bring to it. Each student or team should meet with me to develop a plan about your specific project, but here are some general guidelines that I believe will apply to all Final Reports.

Your grade in the class will be based fundamentally on your fieldwork. However, exceptionally strong or exceptionally weak participation in class activities and discussions could raise or lower that basic grade by as much as a full letter grade.

Although I hope that I will be able to observe many of the fieldwork activities carried out by people in the class, I expect that will not always be possible. Accordingly, your Final Report will be the main vehicle through which I can understand and evaluate your fieldwork. It will be the main “window” through which I look.

This probably goes without saying, but let me be clear that “failed” projects are not necessarily failed learning experiences. We often learn more from mistakes well-evaluated and pondered than we do from smooth successes. Accordingly you might produce a terrific Final Report even though your effort at community legal education was filled with problems that distress you. Similarly, you could pull off a successful event in the community, but produce a mediocre report that didn’t document the event very well, or that failed to reflect thoughtfully on the issues or to distill helpful lessons from your success. The former sort of report would get a better grade than the latter, even though you would certainly receive some credit for the successful event.

1. Narrative and reflection

This section of your Final Report, which each of you will produce individually, should tell the story of your fieldwork and should reflect upon your fieldwork experience in light of what we have read and what we have discussed or done in class, at the Highlander workshop, etc.

As you can see, there should be a narrative and descriptive aspect to this section (where you tell what you and others did, and generally what happened with your project). These narratives may vary tremendously, of course. But each of them should include:

Some description of what you learned in the “listening/learning” phase of the project.

Some joint evaluation or assessment of the project that you develop with your community partner toward the end of the semester. The evaluation might be developed through a formal evaluation session or in a brief telephone call, but it should reflect some interaction and (hopefully) points of consensus.

There should also be a more reflective and analytical aspect to this section. Many times students are a little intimidated about what they should do in reflecting and analyzing, so here are some ideas about what you could do in the reflective and analytical component. No one paper would do all of these things, of course, they are just possibilities:

Using the readings to more deeply understand and evaluate your own efforts -- You could discuss ways in which a reading that we had helps you to understand or think about a problem you encountered in your fieldwork. Perhaps one or more of the readings provide a context or categories or principles that you find helpful in looking back on your work.

Using your own efforts to more deeply understand and evaluate the readings -- You could discuss how an experience you had in your fieldwork causes you to question or doubt or reconsider or criticize something (or several things) you read in one of the assignments.

Using comments from other students and partners -- You should also feel free to refer to and utilize discussions we have in class, or comments made by fellow class members or by community partners. In other words, you can treat these discussions and comments as “texts” that may aid understanding, or texts that you want to reconsider or critique.

Examining pedagogical issues -- You could do a close “micro-examination” of a particular event in your fieldwork – maybe one interaction in which you were listening and learning, or one effort at planning or facilitating an educational activity, and you could compare that experience or effort to a pedagogical structure, sequence, strategy or approach that is recommended in the readings, and then try to decide what that close comparison shows you about your own practice or about the recommended practice.

There is one required subject of reflection -- Somewhere in the reflective part of your Final Report, please include some attention to the role of “law-related education” with disempowered communities. You could try to draw conclusions from your fieldwork or your readings about the role of law, lawyering, and the legal system in the lives of your community partners and people like them. Is “community legal education” a good way for law students and lawyers to spend their time? Are community people interested in this kind of education? Do they benefit from it? How and why (or why not)? Do you see yourself doing this kind of work in the future?

In general, feel free to include non-legal materials in your narrative and reflection. If you decide to keep a teaching journal, you could include excerpts from that here. You may quote poems and songs, or tell about relevant incidents in your own life.

2. Showing your fieldwork

Your Final Report should also include some way of representing or embodying or displaying your fieldwork. In some cases you will be producing physical objects for and/or with your community partner, and copies or pictures of these products could just be attached. (For instance, some of your projects may include producing a written lesson plan, or an “opinion letter” appropriately designed for your audience, or handouts or posters, or a painting.) In other cases you may arrange for a workshop you conduct to be captured as it takes place -- maybe on videotape, or in still photographs, or on pages from a flip chart, and these “capturings” could be attached. Some of you may get press coverage. Some of you may interview your students afterwards to get their impressions, and you could write up their comments.

Whatever it is that you do for your fieldwork, you should think about documenting it in some way, capturing it in a form that can be included in your Final Report. Your grade will be based in part on the work itself not just this representation of your work, but this is your chance to *show* the work so that it can be seen and understood by others who were not present as it was taking place.

3. A Lawyer-to-lawyer Exit Memo

Your Final Report should also include an Exit Memo written as an aid to me and to any future law students who end up working with your community partner or with a similar group in a community legal education project. The exit memo should include:

- a. Any advice you have to offer about doing this kind of work in general or relating to this particular partner or community constituency.
- b. A research report on the underlying legal issues that you researched for the project, together with citations to relevant authority. Unlike your work in the field with your community partner, you do not have to face the challenge of pitching your report to a lay audience. To the contrary, you should assume that this memo will go to law-educated readers who will want to know how they can find and update the relevant sources.