

Researching the Individual in Society  
GSOC 140  
Dr. Beth A. Eck

**Preface to the Assignment**

The following is a copy of the in-class group assignment.

The day prior, I have laid out field research (what it is and why we do it), as well as the ethical and practical things to consider.

By the time the students are given the in-class assignment, they have been exposed to the IRB process in lecture.

On the day they get the assignment sheet, I show them some alcohol use stats and consequences for JMU college students compared to their peers.

The students have one day to work in small groups on the project. I don't collect it, and not all of them report out.

I walk around the room and participate with, ask questions to, and answer questions of each group as I go.

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**The following are the questions around which you must construct a research design**, taking into consideration everything we have outlined in our discussion on researching the individual in society.

What is the role of drinking in college student life?  
Why and how is it a part of the culture?  
What is the relationship between one's identity as a JMU student and drinking behavior?

**You must answer this question keeping in mind the basics of symbolic interactionism and interpretive inquiry:**

Interaction  
Process  
Socialization  
Identity/Self  
Culture

**How does each of these occur and what do they produce in relation to the research questions listed above about drinking at JMU?** (Think about your readings from Cahill)

Though your proposed project would also include interviewing, for now you are to only focus on the **observation** portion of your methodology.

Here is just a sampling of the questions you will have to answer before you even enter "the field." I expect more questions will come up as you discuss. You should be prepared to share, explain, and defend, your design with the class.

Picking the site:

What and where will you observe?  
How many sites will you choose and how many hours will you need to observe to say something meaningful about how drinking is part of JMU culture?  
How will you measure "culture"? What are the components of JMU drinking "culture"?  
Why these sites? Why these behaviors/interactions?

Role of the Researcher:

Will you be a known or unknown observer?  
Will you be a participant or non-participant?  
If more than one of you on the team is observing, how will you account for different styles in note taking and observation skill?  
When, where and how will you record what it is you see?

### Status characteristics:

How will your status characteristics help or hurt you?

What are the advantages/disadvantages to your research of being one who usually participates in drinking at JMU or one who usually does not?

Will you observe people you know or people you don't know? What are the pros and cons of each of these choices?

### Ethical Issues:

If you are a non-drinker, how comfortable are you investigating these scenes?

If you are a drinker and underage, are you willing to take the risk of being arrested for your research?

Are you going to intervene if you see someone being over-served?

Will you call an ambulance or the police if someone is in danger?

Can or should you tell people to stop drinking if you think they are being unsafe?

What is your role as the researcher here?

### Confidentiality and Informed Consent:

How will you inform those you are observing that you are observing them?

Will you hand each one of them a consent form?

Whose permission do you need?

How will you keep their identity in confidence?

If you have answered all of the above questions and you have time, you may now consider the interviewing portion of your research.

### Interviewing:

Who will you interview? Drinkers? Non-Drinkers? Both? If both, why? If only one of these groups, why?

What will you ask them to get to this overall issue of "identity" of a JMU student and its connection with drinking?

Think of 10 questions (outside of demographic ones – age, gender, year in school, etc.) that you might ask. How might your observations inform what you ask?