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Math for Liberal Arts

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The people in Newport's West Side are mixed as to whether they are hurting or in a good place. They seem to have good culture (or at least the capacity for it) and a rich history. They have old buildings and historical sites that were very important to the history of the midwest, and they have theaters and arts centers and Monmouth Street where cultural events can take place. But economically and educationally, they are below average, and their health suffers from lack of fresh foods and lead exposure. Old buildings can be good for history, but they also pose risks to health and safety; they could contain asbestos and lead paint, or they could house gangs or drug deals if abandoned. Though Newport is not necessarily a bad neighborhood, it is a poor neighborhood, and the image projected to outsiders seems to be a negative one. Though Monmouth Street seems to be helping the neighborhood's prosperity, there is a danger that all the crime and poverty was simply pushed to the periphery but was not actually lessened by the street's businesses.

To measure the extent to which the neighborhood is hurting, we need to take into account census data for sure. But we also need to account for the real needs within the community. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs may help with understanding and deciding what issues to address. First are the physiological needs. Are the people of Westside Newport getting enough food? Enough healthy food? Is their air safe to breathe, free (or as free as possible) from pollution and lead contamination? Is there good water to drink? The second level of needs

to look at is safety. Is there adequate housing for people to live there? Is there a lot of crime and violence? Is there law and order within the community? If these preliminary needs are met, people will have more time and energy to devote to getting a steady income (which could, in turn, help fix these needs further), to building love within families, to growing a vibrant culture and community. These higher-level needs like family stability, culture, and spirituality are not easily quantifiable, and the top-down approach that seems to be the style of this class may not be the best way to go about them. Perhaps grassroots methods would work better for these problems.

To measure the lower-level hurt within the community, we could conduct research into access to and use of health- and safety-related resources: grocery stores, farmer's markets, doctors, counselors, police stations, and home repair men. We would first have to determine what is adequate for each of these resources based on comparisons with other areas. Putting them against a norm would help us to see how far away from sufficient Newport actually is, and it may surprise us if it is above the norm in certain areas. This would involve some research into what stores and offices are actually in the area, and for comparison's sake, it would also involve research into other areas' resources.

The first step of comparison between Newport and other areas would be to collect data on food and water access. This could be taken from city records for a more objective view, but in order to account for the idiosyncrasies of the community, it may be wise to ask people how accessible they feel things are. While collection of data is important from a mathematical standpoint, we must take the inhabitants into account because their view of their own happiness or amount of hurt, whichever it is, may be very different from our view as outsiders.