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\(^1\) 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

County residents during the first week of March 2011 at the Student Union at Northern Kentucky University. During this time, 11 student researchers developed interview skills in a student friendly environment and began collecting data on local governance knowledge. The student researchers interviewed 24 Kenton County residents at the Independence Branch Library during the third week of March 2011 and during the second week of April 2011, 42 Kenton County residents were interviewed.

After noting the approximate age and sex of the informant, interviews consisted of asking the following demographic questions:

1. In which county do you live?
2. How long have you been a resident of __________ County?
3. What is it that you do?
4. Have you or any of your immediate kin/family been employed by any local, state, or federal government office (e.g., libraries, courts, schools...)?
5. Do you pay attention to the news and if so which news and how often?
6. Do you care about politics?
7. Does the government affect you on a daily basis?
8. What political party do you identify with?
9. Do you vote?

After the demographic questions, informants were asked to list the parts of his/her city and county governments. For each part of government elicited, informants were asked if there were any suborganizations or whether the part of local government could be included within a larger entity. Finally, informants were asked about the relationships between the parts of government that they knew.

The student researchers completed a preliminary analysis of their data (field notes and digital audio recordings) outlining models of knowledge that they found during their interviews. Douglas Hume then consolidated these results during the following fall in preparation for this report.

**Findings**

We found that only a few informants could name more than five parts of local governance. The majority of informants could only list a few local services (e.g., post office,
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.

**Limited Knowledge Model**
The largest proportion of informants, approximately 60%, has limited, knowing three to five parts of local government, knowledge of the parts of local government. Informants with this model include all ages and both sexes. None of the demographic variables collected indicate a pattern relevant to this group. Informants with this model are able to name up to five parts of local government. Examples of parts of government listed by this group include the following:

1. female approximately 20 years old listed district judge, mayor, and mini congress;
2. male approximately 50 years old – listed police, fire department, public services, paramedics;
3. female approximately 25 years old listed library, city council, and mayor;
4. female approximately 75 years old listed police, court, and city council;
5. female approximately 45 years old listed fire, police, schools, and city council; and
6. male approximately 20 years old listed fire department, police department, and city council.

**Federal and State Government Model**
Many informants, approximately 20%, conflate local government with the federal or state government. These informants tended to be younger and did not have anyone within their family working for or in local government. There were no other patterns among the demographic answers in this group. Examples of parts of government elicited for the federal and state government model include the following:

1. female approximately 20 years old listed mail delivery, Internal Revenue Service, postal office workers, repossession, and Department of Motor Vehicles;
2. female approximately 38 years old listed city council, mayors, senators, and congressmen;
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, principles, 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.
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your age? ______ years old
2. Are you ☐ Female or ☐ Male?

3. Which one of the following best describes your ethnicity?
   ☐ Latin-American  ☐ Middle Eastern-American  ☐ Native-American  ☐ Pacific Island-American

4. Married with children?

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  ☐ Some 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 any of your close family or friends’ work for the government? ☐ Yes ☐ No
9. How long have you lived in Kenton County? ______ years
10. How often do you watch/read the news? Every day, several times a week, once a week, etc...
11. Where do you get the news (e.g., television, internet, radio, newspaper, womb)? ____________________________

GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION

Which of the following have you heard about? If so, do you know what they do?

Kenton County Government

- County Officials
  - Fiscal Court – County Commission (☐ Judge Executive*, three ☐ Commissioners and ☐ Deputy Judge-Executive)
  - County Attorney
  - County Clerk
  - County Jailer
  - Property Valuation Administrator
  - County Sheriff

- County Departments
  - Animal Shelter
  - County Finance (☐ Treasurer, ☐ Occupational License, and ☐ Procurement Departments)
  - Information Technology
  - Parks & Recreation
  - Personnel
  - Public Safety (☐ Fire Association, ☐ Homeland Security & Emergency Management, ☐ Kenton County Dispatch, ☐ Kenton County Police [☐ Chief of Police, ☐ Bureau of Administration, ☐ Patrol Bureau, ☐ Community Services, ☐ Animal Control])
  - Public Works (☐ Fleet Maintenance, ☐ Road Department, ☐ Solid Waste Management)

City Government (Titles of officials/departments differ from city to city and some cities may not have each of the officials/departments listed below)

- Administration
  - ☐ Mayor
  - ☐ City Council/Commissioners
  - ☐ City Manager/Administrative Officer
  - ☐ City Clerk

- Departments
  - ☐ Police Department
  - ☐ Fire Department
  - ☐ Emergency Medical Services Department
  - ☐ Urban Planning/Code Enforcement/Engineering/Building/Zoning Department
  - ☐ Solid Waste/Recycling Department
  - ☐ Community Relations/Neighborhood Services/Economic/Tourism Development Department
  - ☐ Public Services/Works/Maintenance
  - ☐ Accounting/Finance Department
  - ☐ Emergency Management
  - ☐ Community Housing Resource Group/Housing Authority
  - ☐ City Attorney Legal Department
  - ☐ Municipal Court/Ombudsman
  - ☐ Personnel/Human Resources
  - ☐ Parks & Recreation/Recreation Department
  - ☐ Information Technology Department
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<th>County Government Officials and Departments</th>
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Blank = do not cooperate
X = cooperate (egalitarian)
arrow up or vertical line = city tells them what to do
arrow left or horizontal line = county tells them what to do
* = I do not know