

# Trip to Jennings

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During our research this past weekend, I learned a few things about the difference between the academic life and the “World of Work.” I learned that in the work world, it’s important to reevaluate yourself and your project goals. On the other hand, in the academic world, it’s easier to focus on grades and individual assignments. In a way, there’s less thought on the student’s end about the overall goal of each assignment. In the work world, you create your own “assignments” and are more responsible for them. First I’ll give an overview of what we did this weekend, and then I’ll explain more about what I learned.

For the past few weeks we've been preparing for a trip to Jennings, LA. We put together an interview guide for in-depth interviews and a survey to pass out to local residents. Our goal for the trip was to gather information regarding the Jennings residents' lifestyles and community needs. From the 1940s-80s, a site very close to Jennings was used for refining oil and treating wood. It was recently discovered that harsh chemicals (such as arsenic and chromium) were barreled up and buried underground. These chemicals have since leaked through the barrels and into the surrounding soil and water. Our job is to explore if there are any additional resources they need to address associated concerns about their community.

We originally planned to go door-to-door, pass out the surveys, and conduct in-depth interviews with those who were willing. However, about halfway through the day, the Principal Investigator (Dr. McKinney) started to realize that our survey questions needed to be revised to capture the information of interest. We really did not know what to expect before arriving in Jennings, but this weekend's trip was extremely useful in helping us realize more effective ways to capture the information of interest. Now that we have an image of the town and a better understanding of the local residents, we can develop a better strategy. This was a learning experience for me, because I realized how my mindset as a student was different than that of my professor's. I was just going through our plan for the day and passing out surveys, but not reevaluating our strategy as my professor was. Once she explained to me why she thought we should change up our plan, it all made sense and I completely agreed with her. In school, it's easy to see each project as a linear task with a singular goal. In the work force, it's more complicated than that. Dr. McKinney had a bigger-picture outlook on our project as a whole, while I was more focused on the task at hand. It made me realize that it's important to incorporate both styles of thinking into our professional and academic lives. For that matter, it's probably also a good idea to incorporate that style of thinking into our lives in general.