

The purpose of this guide is to provide information about how the *Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet* can be incorporated into a class assignment or learning activity. This guide includes a detailed description of the *Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet*, its interactive dashboard, FAQs on how to use the dashboard as well as assignments with learning objectives.

We hope this guide will help you to incorporate our *Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet* into your courses to help students understand how poverty affects their neighbors in Alabama. The assignments in this guide are designed to be used with secondary and postsecondary students.

When completing these assignments, we encourage you to educate your students about using People-First Language (PFL) while discussing people who live in poverty. Here is a brief description of PFL:

“People-first language aims to make personhood the essential characteristic of every person. People-first language views other descriptive social identities that people may hold as secondary and non-essential. Strict adherence to people-first language can lead to awkward sentence construction and may not align with reclamations of social identities, but we maintain that attuning to our shared humanity by telling stories that center people first, rather than exploiting identities, should be an aim of progressive writing (Thomas & Hirsch, 2016).”

Here is a list of resources from Alabama Possible’s website (alabamapossible.org/datasheet):

Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet

We compile and summarize our research on an annual basis through the Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet, which highlights statewide poverty data related to food security, educational attainment, employment, and health insurance coverage. This data sheet can be found at: <https://alabamapossible.org/datasheet/>

Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Dashboard

In addition to our data sheet, we have an interactive online resource that you can use to analyze poverty in Alabama. With this resource, you can examine or compare poverty data by county and download data directly from the dashboard. This resource can be found at: <https://alabamapossible.org/datasheet/>

How to use the dashboard:

- *To compare poverty rates by state:* Click on tab that says “Poverty by State.” Select state. Scroll to see overall poverty rate, child poverty rate, and median household income.
- *To examine poverty by county:* Click on tab that says “Poverty by County.” Select county. Scroll to see complete data set including population, poverty rate, food security, education, employment, and health insurance coverage for the selected county.
- *County Data Table:* Click on tab that says “County Data Table.” Select one county, multiple counties, or all counties on the right in order to populate the table with different counties.
 - From there, you can sort the data by field. For example, if you want to sort the counties by Child Poverty Rate: select the “Children Poverty Rate” column heading, click the menu button to sort descending/ascending by child poverty rate by county.
 - If you want to compare data of select counties: Locate the list of counties to the right of the data table. Deselect (All). Select the counties you wish to compare.

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In-Class Discussion Questions

DESCRIPTION:

These discussion questions are designed to be used in conjunction with the *Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet and Dashboard*. Make sure that all students have access to the data sheet and/or dashboard. The questions can be used in the seated classroom as well as an online course.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the class session, students will be able to:

1. Describe the rates of poverty in Alabama across different groups and discuss measures related to food security, education, employment, and health insurance coverage
2. Interpret how the data about poverty in Alabama translates into real-world living conditions for people and communities
3. Identify through critical reflection the influence of personal biases and values toward those living in poverty

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- a. The official definition of poverty used by the Census Bureau draws an income line each year, and households falling below that line are considered to be experiencing poverty. In the *Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet*, we contrast the total population with the number of people, children, and seniors in poverty. What is the advantage of looking at the different poverty rates across different groups?
- b. There is much stigma surrounding people experiencing poverty. Research has shown that when a group is stigmatized, the general public often disassociates itself from that group (Phelan et. al 2014). Find your county on the map. What is the poverty rate there? Why do you think having a discussion on lived experiences with poverty is so difficult?
- c. Look at the poverty rate of your home county. What might be some other circumstances and factors that contribute to poverty? Support this discussion with education and employment rates of the same county.
- d. When you look at poverty rates among different racial and ethnic groups, what do you notice? Among which groups of people is the unemployment rate highest? Why do you think this is so?
- e. Black Belt counties experience a significant Black-white poverty gap. A 2013 study by Equality of Opportunity Project showed upward mobility is lowest for people who live in communities with high-poverty. For example, in Lowndes County the white poverty rate is 8.0% while the Black or African American poverty rate is 25.8%. What other counties have similar disparities?
- f. There are many circumstances that can produce poverty-level income. Sometimes the causes are personal, such as poor health. Other cases result from economic events, such as a factory shutdown. But much poverty is less event-specific and more related to the effect of long-established factors such as the legacy of race discrimination, or low-wage regional and rural economies in which even full-time workers may receive only poverty-level incomes. What circumstances do you think affect poverty in these Black Belt Counties?



- g. Shelby County is the richest county in Alabama, while Sumter County remains the poorest in the state, based on median household income. Take a look at the data of these two counties. What are the differences in poverty rate, workforce participation rate, educational attainment, and health insurance coverage?
- h. The United States currently expends among the fewest resources within the industrialized countries in terms of pulling families out of poverty and protecting them from falling into poverty (Smeeding 2016). Compare and contrast the poverty rate with SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) participation rates of two counties. What effect does this federal program have on poverty in these counties?
- i. As noted in the data sheet, Alabama is the nation's sixth poorest state. Why do you think this is so? What circumstances that lead to poverty are more likely to affect Alabamians than other states?
- j. Education is frequently noted as a key factor in being lifted out of poverty. And, indeed, in virtually every county, the poverty rate decreases as educational attainment rises. But counties with dynamic economies do a better job of providing higher-paying jobs at all education levels. The poverty rate of those with less than a high school diploma in Shelby County is 18.1%. List at least 5 counties whose poverty rate is higher than 18.1% among those with at least a high school diploma. What does this indicate about the differences between these counties?
- k. The persistence of poverty in the state has inspired many reform efforts, ranging from private charity (food pantries, thrift stores, clothing closets) to systemic attempts to change the economic systems put in place. What are some ways that poverty can be addressed in Alabama?
- l. Many of these data points reflect the impact of COVID-19 on Alabama. More than 400,000 Alabamians lost their jobs between early March and early May 2020. How do you think families are coping now, more than three years later, with the resulting financial disruption? How are they meeting their basic needs for food, shelter, health care, and education? What kind of long-term impact could the pandemic have had on their financial security, including the ability to save and pay down debt?

RESOURCES:

Phelan, J. C., Lucas, J. W., Ridgeway, C. L., & Taylor, C. J. (2014). Stigma, status, and population health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 103, 15–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2013.10.004>

Smeeding, T., & Thévenot, C. (2016). Addressing Child Poverty: How Does the United States Compare With Other Nations? *Academic Pediatrics*, 16(3, Supplement), S67–S75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2016.01.011>

The Equality of Opportunity Project. (n.d.). The Geography of Upward Mobility in America. Retrieved from America. <http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/neighborhoods/>



Community Assessment Worksheet

DESCRIPTION:

This worksheet is designed to help students understand how poverty looks in their home community as compared to the State of Alabama. Please use this worksheet in conjunction with the *Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet and Dashboard*.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this assignment, students will be able to:



1. Compare the rates of poverty in Alabama with your home community across different groups and discuss measures related to food security, education, employment, and health insurance coverage
2. Interpret how the data about poverty in your home community translates into real-world living conditions for people and communities
3. Summarize what you learned about poverty in your home community

Assessing your Home Community Worksheet

The home community and the State of Alabama. Complete each of the provided tables to help summarize the data.



What is your home community? _____

Find the *Poverty Rate* for your community and the State of Alabama.

	My Home Community	<i>All Persons</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Older Adults</i>
	Percentage			
	State of Alabama	<i>All Persons</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Older Adults</i>
	Percentage			

Write a few sentences to describe these data. Which group has the highest level of poverty? Which has the lowest? How does your home community compare to the State of Alabama?

Find the *Poverty Rate by Race* for your community and the State of Alabama.

	My Home Community	<i>White</i>	<i>Black or African American</i>	<i>Hispanic or Latino</i>
	Percentage			
	State of Alabama	<i>White</i>	<i>Black or African American</i>	<i>Hispanic or Latino</i>
	Percentage			

Write a few sentences to describe these data. Which group has the highest level of poverty? Which has the lowest? How does your home community compare to the State of Alabama?

Find the *Poverty Rates based on Education* for your community and the State of Alabama.

My Home Community	<i>Less than High School</i>	<i>High School Graduate or Equivalent</i>	<i>Some College or An Associate Degree</i>	<i>Bachelor's Degree or Higher</i>
	Percentage			
State of Alabama	<i>Less than High School</i>	<i>High School Graduate or Equivalent</i>	<i>Some College or An Associate Degree</i>	<i>Bachelor's Degree or Higher</i>
	Percentage			

Write a few sentences to describe these data. Which group has the highest level of poverty? Which has the lowest? How does your home community compare to the State of Alabama?

Find the *Food Security Rate* for your community and the State of Alabama.

My Home Community	<i>Overall Food Insecurity</i>	<i>Childhood Food Insecurity</i>	<i>SNAP Recipients</i>
	Percentage		
State of Alabama	<i>Overall Food Insecurity</i>	<i>Childhood Food Insecurity</i>	<i>SNAP Recipients</i>
	Percentage		

Write a few sentences to describe these data. Which group has the highest level of food insecurity? Which has the lowest? How does your home community compare to the State of Alabama? Include the percentages in your sentences.

Next, using all the data you collected, write a short paragraph about what poverty looks like in your home community.



If you had only 2 minutes to describe poverty in your home community to your elected official, what would you say?

Describe at least two different ways that you can use the information from this worksheet in other classes, outside of class, or your future professional life.

What questions does this worksheet bring up for you?



Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet Infographic

DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this infographic assignment is for students to use data collected from the *Alabama Possible Barriers to Prosperity Data Sheet* and create a visual representation of what poverty looks like in their home community.

Infographics are visual representations of information. They can include numbers, text, images, or any combination of the three. Just as in traditional writing assignments, infographics can take on any of the various rhetorical modes — informative, instructive, descriptive, persuasive, etc. Infographics provide authors with a quick way to convey a lot of information.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of this assignment, students will be able to:

1. Create an engaging infographic that provides awareness and/or describes poverty in their home community
2. Conduct research to identify statistics, resources, and other data relevant to poverty in their home community
3. Increase ability to interpret and communicate information about poverty in Alabama
4. Demonstrate communication and advocacy skills by sharing and promoting one's infographic

Using the data collected from the Assessing your Home Community Worksheet, create an infographic about what poverty looks like in your home community. Include data about poverty rates for different groups of people in your home community and how this compares with the State of Alabama. Your infographic should answer the following questions:

- What is poverty?
- What is the scope of the problem; that is how widespread is it?
- What population(s) is/are affected by poverty in your home community? What are the diverse characteristics of the population(s)?
- What can be done to address poverty in your home community?
- How can someone stay informed about poverty in Alabama?

After creating your infographic, get feedback from a peer in class and revise before submitting your final infographic for class. Share your infographic with the staff at Alabama Possible.

REFERENCES

Thomas, H. & Hirsch, A. (2016). A Progressive's Style Guide. Retrieved from: https://s3.amazonaws.com/s3.sumofus.org/images/SUMOFUS_PROGRESSIVE-STYLEGUIDE.pdf