

First Writing Assignment
Freshman Honors Seminar
(Due: Thursday, February 21, 2008)

Bill Evans
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Most recipients of federal housing subsidies live in housing projects or neighborhoods with a high rate of poverty. A number of authors have documented that economic outcomes are poorer for those who live in high poverty areas. To examine the link between neighborhood poverty and economic outcomes, the government ran a detailed experiment called Moving to Opportunity (MTO), a 10-year research demonstration project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Participants in the MTO were randomly assigned to one of three groups with the treatment group providing recipients with a housing voucher that could only be used for a rental apartment that was low-poverty neighborhood. Therefore, the experiment was designed to see whether moving to low-poverty areas altered economic outcomes for families.

A family friend has pulled some strings and you have received an internship with a US House Representative who will soon be conducting hearings about the federal housing program. She knows little about the MTO experiment but three witnesses at the hearings will present their work about the program. Your assignment is to write a five to seven page, double spaced paper that brings the Congresswoman 'up to speed' on the MTO project.

In your paper, please summarize a) the motivation for the project, b) the basic structure of the experiment, c) why participants were interested in being part of the experiment, d) the basic results of the experiment, e) what are some of the weaknesses of the study, and f) what the implications of the experiment are for federal housing programs. For question d), make sure to focus on outcomes for adults and children. Adult outcomes included employment, wages, crime victimization, and physical and mental health. For children, outcomes included such variables as progress in school, involvement in crime, and crime victimization, plus others. Please spend some time on part f) as well -- this is your chance to step outside the box and apply what you have learned.

Use complete sentences – do not just present bullet points. This is a memo so structure it as such. Also, please appropriately document all references and include a bibliography. This is for a non-technical audience so write the memo for the Congresswoman, not your professor.

To get you started, below are two articles that outline some results from the MTO project. Both articles are available in electronic form through the JSTOR system or through the library. JSTOR is an electronic catalog of articles from major publications in a number of fields and anyone with a Notre Dame IP can access this data bank. These two articles should NOT be the only sources for your paper.

Katz, Lawrence, Kling, Jeffrey, and Liebman, Jeffrey, "Moving to Opportunity in Boston: Early Results of a Randomized Mobility Experiment," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116(2), May 2001, 607-654.

Ludwig, Jens, Duncan, Greg, and Hirschfeld, "Urban Poverty and Juvenile Crime: Evidence from a Randomized Housing-Mobility Experiment," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 116(2), May 2001, 655-679.