

Exploration of the Meaning of Power as it relates to American County Characteristics

Episode 1: Introduction to the Honors Capstone and my Project

Greetings fellow listeners and welcome to this four-part series that is my honors capstone project! I am Frank Wright, an undergraduate college student attending the University of Wyoming where I am a senior and plan to graduate in the Spring of 2023 and I began in the Fall of 2019. I am a student with a Geography major and I also am in the Haub school of natural resources where I am working on the major of environment and natural resources. In terms of minors, I am working on a Spanish minor, and I also am working on a minor in honors, more on this last minor later on. Before I started attending the University of Wyoming, I took concurrent enrollment classes for Front Range Community College in Fort Collins, Colorado and Colorado University, Denver as well as taking advanced placement exams for college board. I took these courses during high school, which I graduated from in May of 2019, in the city in which I was born and raised in, Fort Collins, Colorado. In terms of myself outside of the classroom, I love to play and watch many sports, watch TV, listen to music, jump on the trampoline, spend time with my girlfriend, as well as other activities. At the University of Wyoming, I am a part of the Wyoming Navigators, the university tennis club, and Wyoming Honors Organization. I also currently work as a research assistant for one of my old professors and I also work as an academic athletic intern at the office of academic support for student athletes.

So now that you know a little bit about who I am, I think it is now critical that I address the elephant in the room which obviously is, what the heck even is an honors capstone project? Well, first it is key to note that I am an honors student at the University of Wyoming and as such to receive our minor in Honors we as undergraduate students are asked to complete an honors capstone project. The parameters of the project in general are incredibly broad so students have a lot of freedom in what they would like to conduct research on. Typically, students will base their

project on what they are majoring in, which is accurate for my case, but they do not have to and if the student's major requires a project such as this one then it is also acceptable to have the project from their major count for their major and for the honors capstone.

Since the figurative “ball” is in the student's “court” if you will, students are asked to complete a proposal online with the help of a project mentor. The project mentor can be any University of Wyoming professor, but it is advisable for the mentor to have some sort of expertise with the subject matter of the project. For example, with my specific project being heavily based in Geography, I selected one of my previous Geography professors, Richard Vercoe, to be my honors project mentor. Fortunately for me, Professor Vercoe accepted, and we have been working together on this project since spring semester of 2022. Specifically speaking, the job of the mentor is based on what the project entails, but generally it includes assisting the student with the proposal, being a resource for subject knowledge, literature, and ideal people to contact as well as assisting in editing the final paper and presentation for the project.

The project can be started as soon as the student enters the honors program and must be finished, at the latest, by the time they graduate. I plan on graduating in the spring of 2023 and that is also when I plan to have my project completed. Furthermore, there are several benchmarks that each student must accomplish to finish the project including, the initial copy of the project due, revisions to the mentor, faculty evaluation rubric, presentation of the project, and the final project due. These are all typically due in the month that the project is to be completed at the latest. So, with my project, these due dates will begin in mid to late April and end in mid-May. Also, with the presentation of the project, there is an event on campus called “research day” where students who have worked on their honors capstone projects and projects like these

present their findings to a general audience in classrooms across the classroom building. This event occurs typically on a Saturday and has presentations go on throughout the day.

Speaking of research day, I attended this event in April of 2022 and I was fortunate enough to learn about some honors capstone projects as well as other projects. One of the honors projects I learned about was a podcast on some traveling spots in Wyoming and another was a business plan to make a traveling vegan food truck that would be based in Laramie. I also viewed a presentation about archeologic animal findings of a crocodile-like animal. All of these presentations were in the same classroom as presenters would gather and then rotate.

Now that the general parameters of the honors capstone project have been addressed, I should probably get to the moment you've all been waiting for (*chuckles*) and reveal fully what I have been hinting at thus far. The goal of my specific project is to reveal and to disseminate why counties have the names that they do and why they have the shapes and sizes that they have. I will admit that this does seem quite elementary on its face, but when you start really looking into something seemingly so simple you begin to find that there is a lot of weight and nuisance in this topic. What I mean here is that when a place is named it is named that name for a reason and there was a group of people who had enough power to name it, and have it stay that specific name long after they had died. Moreover, in what I have found these groups are influenced by people who have greater power than they do which signifies that relationships of power are at work.

Specifically, Michael Foucault talks a lot about this in the book he is interviewed for *Power and Knowledge*. This was a book that I got from my honors mentor and is an incredibly dense read as both Foucault and the people interviewing him are especially intelligent. In this book, he makes note of how causality works in a societal sense (Foucault 69, 70, 72, 74, 114,

117). In doing so, Foucault also makes note of how influential power is, how it moves, and how it also relates to knowledge (69, 70, 72, 74, 114, 117). From what I read in the book my favorite line and one that relates most to what I am researching from Foucault is, “The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, municipalities, desires, forces. There is much that could be said as well on the problems of regional identity and its conflicts with national identity (74).”

In terms of why I decided to pick the content that I chose for this project, really it began for me as early as freshman year in college. Let me explain, I hail from Fort Collins, Colorado which resides in Larimer County and if you know anything about the surrounding geography the town to the north, *Laramie*, is the home of the University of Wyoming. Sound familiar? But what really started to get my attention was when I learned the name of the county that Laramie is in, Albany. Albany?!? Yes, verbatim of the capital city of New York State. This was intriguing but it never really got to me until I was in my junior year, fall of 2021, and I needed to figure out what I was doing for this project. What also was fueling this was my appreciation for geography, as it is one of my majors, and specifically within that realm my fascination with maps which has been with me since my childhood. I especially enjoy studying political maps, which for those of you who don't know are maps that have the primary focus of showing the urban areas and constructs on a given portion of landscape.

Furthermore, I honestly was not very familiar with county names at all outside of the immediate area surrounding my hometown. Therefore, I was interested in learning more about the county names from across the county. Another influence on me in this project was the history channel television series “How the States Got Their Shapes” which details the influences and causes on why the states have the appearance that they do on the present-day US map.

Personally, I loved watching this show and it encouraged me to try to figure out just how, why, and what the counties sizes and shapes are the way they are.

In terms of why I was drawn to recording a podcast, I was drawn to the simplicity of the process of writing, recording, editing, and finally releasing. Of course, all of this is much easier said than done, but I was able to get a bit of a head start on the process during the fall semester of 2022 when I participated in the making of a podcast about Pilot Hill for one of my environment and natural resources class, which is my other major. Moreover, I was comfortable with recording in general because in my spare time I like to write and record rap songs on my own. In this experience I have used the recording applications of garage band and voice memos on my laptop and the rap chat recording studio on my iPhone.

I also was attracted to the idea of making a podcast because of how accessible it is for the consumer to receive and learn the information. Speaking of, I also think that this medium is an especially helpful way of spreading accurate information about what, in my experience, has been a little-known topic on a national level at least. At the University of Wyoming, we also have a great resource for recording with the “Voice Box” recording studio in the Studio Coe Creation Space which resides on the second floor of Coe Library on campus.

Regarding how I plan to bring this project about, before I started writing this script Professor Vercoe and I worked out a strategy. We began the work for this project by meeting together periodically to hash out how the project was going to be carried out and what its content would be. Then we began to work out a vision for the future. This plan included continuing to meet but not as frequently and in the meantime working on certain phases of the project. For example, I began by collecting data which specifically was conducting a literature review on relevant texts and maps as well as reading from Foucault's book. Then, I organized the

information I received from this review so I could better understand it and following that I began to draft scripts for the podcast episode. I went on to begin reaching out to and conducting interviews with people who I believed would shed valuable light on the subject matter of the project and then started recording and editing podcast episodes.

Next episode I will be diving into what I have found in terms of my research on the shapes and sizes of some of the counties in the US and try to answer why they have the shapes and sizes that they have. So, with all of that in mind, welcome again to my honors capstone project, thanks for listening, and I hope you listen to and enjoy the next episodes!