

**The Center for Community Studies  
at  
Jefferson Community College**

Presentation of Results:

**The First Annual Survey of  
the Community**

June, 2000



Dr. Richard L. Halpin, Director

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## Acknowledgements

The Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College was established in October, 1999. The primary mission of The Center for Community Studies is to support and facilitate a wide range of community building activities. In collaboration with community partners, the Center conducts community-based research and provides a forum for the productive discussion of ideas and issues of significance to the community. The Center's activities reflect its commitment to engaging the community and enhancing the quality of life of the area.

One annual project of the Center will be to conduct a representative survey of the attitudes and opinions of citizens of Jefferson County. This report is a summary of the findings of the First Annual Survey of the Community. Over time, these results can be analyzed for year-to-year variations, and conclusions about patterns of Jefferson County thinking and living will be possible.

The 340 interviews on which this report is based were conducted on April 3-6, 2000 from 6:15 to 8:45 each evening. The actual interviewers were statistics or sociology students at Jefferson Community College, working under the supervision of faculty at the College.

Participating students included the following:

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The Advisory Committee of the Center for Community Studies includes the following people:

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Please contact the Center for Community Studies at (315) 786-2488 for additional information about this report. The report is available online at [www.sunyjefferson.edu/cs.htm](http://www.sunyjefferson.edu/cs.htm)

Dr. Richard L. Halpin, Director of the Center for Community Studies  
Ms. Jeanne Gardner, Administrative Assistant, Center for Community Studies



## Summary of Results

# The First Annual Survey of the Community

*based on 340 telephone surveys, conducted April 3-6, 2000*

### Introduction

The Center for Community Studies at Jefferson Community College was established in October, 1999, to engage in a variety of community-based research activities and to promote the productive discussion of ideas and issues of significance to our community. One of the specific annual activities of the Center is to conduct an annual survey of the community, which will gauge the attitudes and opinions of a representative sample of Jefferson County citizens. The results of this survey will provide important information about contemporary thinking of citizens, and over time will provide important baseline and comparative information as well.

The first survey of the community was conducted on April 3-6, 2000 from 6:15 to 8:45 each evening. The survey was conducted by telephone. About 1,400 listed residential telephone numbers (from about 29,000) were randomly selected from the Jefferson County telephone book. Of the 1,400 numbers contacted, approximately 54% resulted in an answer, while 19% resulted in an answering machine or a "no answer," 11% were persistently busy, and 17% were invalid or not in service. Multiple attempts were made to reach the members of the sample. Of the answered telephones, (approximately 750), 45% agreed to participate, while the remainder declined or could not participate for other reasons (not a householder, under age 18, etc.).

The telephone interviewers were students from Jefferson Community College, enrolled in Statistics or Sociology classes. The students were invited to participate, trained, and compensated for their time. They worked in teams of twelve each evening, under the supervision of two faculty members who were present at all times.

The survey instrument was constructed by a team of Jefferson Community College faculty including the following:

Dr. Richard L. Halpin	Professor, Sociology; Director of the Center for Community Studies
Mr. Joel LaLone	Associate Professor, Mathematics
Dr. Ingrid Overacker	Assistant Professor, History
Dr. Ronald A. Palmer	Associate Professor, History
Dr. Raymond Petersen	Associate Professor, Political Science
Ms. Rebecca Riehm	Assistant Professor, Sociology
Mr. Michael White	Associate Professor, Mathematics
Dr. Jerome Wichelns	Associate Professor, Philosophy

The survey itself was somewhat patterned after a similar survey constructed and conducted by the Center for the Study of Local Issues at Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland. The specific content – issues and questions – emerged from informal surveys, conducted by The Center for Community Studies during the previous six months, including such groups as The Center for Community Studies Advisory Committee, participants at the Greater Watertown Chamber of Commerce 1999 Business Fair, attendees at a Watertown Rotary meeting on January 26, 2000 and others.

Students in Math 184 – Probability and Statistics II at Jefferson Community College tabulated the surveys and provided a preliminary analysis of the results. Additional analyses were conducted by Joel LaLone, Associate Professor of Mathematics and Dr. Richard L. Halpin, Professor of Sociology and Director of The Center for Community Studies.

### **Representativeness of the Sample**

The results of this survey are generally applicable to the population of Jefferson County. The participants in the survey are representative of the Jefferson County population in terms of a number of demographic characteristics, including location of residence (Table 25), household income (Table 18), and racial characteristics (Table 21). Women are somewhat overrepresented (Table 24), which may have an effect on those questions that specifically deal with opinions, but which has no effect on questions relating to activities and characteristics of households. Members of the sample also appear to have a higher level of educational attainment than does the county population as a whole, although the comparative county data are dated and must therefore be considered with caution (Table 17). Also, in terms of age, younger adults (age 18-34) are somewhat underrepresented and middle age adults (age 35-54) are somewhat overrepresented, while the proportion of older respondents (age 55 and over) is representative (Table 16). The findings must be considered with these demographic factors in mind.

For the categorical data reported from this survey, the margin of error is +/- 5%.

A profile of our "typical" respondent would be as follows. She is female, white, married, and 35-54 years of age. She has lived in Jefferson County more than seven years, and she intends to continue living here in the future. She has a high school education and perhaps some college, and lives in a household with an annual income between \$25,000 and \$50,000. She is politically moderate with conservative leanings. The household has a computer, which is used about 16 hours per week and which is connected to the Internet. She relies on the local daily newspaper for her news about local events. She currently has no children under 18 living in the household. She views the overall quality of life in the region very positively, although she wishes there were more job opportunities and economic growth in the region. She has not made up her mind about the upcoming political races for President and U. S. Senate.

## **Sample of Findings**

1. Jefferson County's population is very stable—83.3% of the respondents have lived in the County for seven years or more, and 80.6% expect to be living here in five years.
2. Most respondents view the quality of life in the region as positive and improving. Internet access, access to higher education, shopping opportunities, K-12 education and recreational opportunities are all seen as aspects of Jefferson County life that are improving. The one very persistent negative perception involved economic and job-related issues.
3. The Jefferson County population seems to use computers and the Internet at home to a greater degree than many would assume. Sixty-four percent of our respondents have a working computer in the home, and, of those, 88.5% have an Internet connection. More than half of those with computers have made an on-line purchase within the past year.
4. About three-fifths of Jefferson County residents have crossed the border into Southeastern Ontario within the past year, while nearly two-fifths have not done so. About 1/5 cross the border with some frequency--more than six times in the past year.
5. Jefferson County preferences in the U. S. Presidential and Senatorial races, for the November , 2000 elections, as they existed in April 2000 were essentially even--with very large numbers of undecided voters.
6. Residence in Jefferson County is related to civilian or military employment at Fort Drum by one out of every six households in the survey group.
7. About one-half of Jefferson County residents are satisfied with the availability of goods and services available locally, while half are not.
8. Nearly half of Jefferson County residents get their information about local events from the Watertown daily newspaper, while one-fourth cited Watertown television stations as their primary source of information. Ten percent of our respondents rely on a Syracuse newspaper for local information.

## **Results of the First Annual Survey of the Community**

Detail of the results of the survey follows. These interviews produced a large volume of data, which can be analyzed and assessed in a number of different ways. Please contact The Center for Community Studies for specific analyses.

A preliminary question of respondents was an inquiry about whether or not they "had heard of" the survey. Since this was our first-ever survey of the community, we conducted an aggressive "media blitz" to inform citizens of the project. After a standard introductory script, surveyors asked, "have you heard of this survey?" The 340 participants responded as follows:

Had heard	120	(35.3%)
Had not heard	211	(62.1)
No response/not recorded	<u>9</u>	(2.6%)
Total	340	

### **Section 1: Living in Jefferson County**

The first main section of the survey was intended to elicit information about how long respondents had lived in Jefferson County, and their intentions for the future..

Table 1  
**How long have you lived in Jefferson County?**

Less than one year	3	.8%
1-3 years	38	11.1%
4-7 years	14	4.1%
more than 7 years	285	83.8%
<b>Total</b>	340	

Table 2  
**Do you expect that you will still be living in Jefferson County in 5 years?**

Yes	274	80.6%
No	59	17.4%
Not sure	7	2.1%
Total	340	

The population of Jefferson County is very stable and does not intend to leave.

An open-ended follow-up question was asked of the respondents who indicated that they do expect to still be living in Jefferson County in 5 years, requesting their reasons for their intentions to stay. The two common responses were:

Table 3  
**Reasons for remaining in Jefferson County**

Family-related reasons: <i>"its home, roots, grew up here"</i>	130	49.8%
Work, business, job-related reasons	73	28.0

An alternative open-ended follow-up question was asked of the respondents who indicated that they do not expect to still be living in Jefferson County in 5 years, requesting their reasons for their intention to leave. The most common response, cited in 47.3 % of the cases, related to the **military employment of a member of the household.**

## **Section 2. Trends in Issues**

The next section was comprised of a list of 18 issues to which respondents were requested to indicate whether they thought the issue had “gotten better,” “stayed about the same,” or “gotten worse” in the past year. Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 on the following two pages present those results.

Table 4  
**Trends in Issues**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Better (%)</b>	<b>Same (%)</b>	<b>Worse (%)</b>	<b>don't know, not sure, etc (%)</b>
1. opportunities for youth	33.0	40.7	18.0	8.3
2. cultural / entertainment opportunities	37.2	44.4	12.4	5.9
3. cost of energy	2.4	13.5	<b>77.7</b>	6.5
4. health care quality	32.1	40.0	21.5	6.5
5. quality of k-12 education	<b>47.8</b>	26.3	11.5	14.5
6. access to higher education	<b>62.1</b>	27.7	3.2	7.1
7. internet access	<b>74.9</b>	7.7	1.8	15.6
8. recreational opportunities	<b>41.8</b>	45.0	9.1	4.1
9. quality of the environment	30.0	<b>47.9</b>	19.7	2.4
10. local government	16.8	<b>50.0</b>	21.2	12.1
11. real estate taxes	12.1	32.7	38.2	17.1
12. the downtown of Watertown	34.5	24.2	38.1	17.1
13. policing and crime control	34.1	<b>48.2</b>	13.5	4.1
14. availability of good jobs	15.0	26.6	<b>54.3</b>	4.1
15. shopping opportunities	<b>49.4</b>	43.1	15.0	1.5
16. health care access	32.7	42.7	19.7	5.0
17. the overall state of the local economy	27.1	38.4	30.7	3.8
18. the overall quality of life in the area	40.0	<b>47.4</b>	11.5	1.2

Highlights:

Table 5  
**Issues perceived as "getting better" – most improved – were the following:**

Internet access	74.9% responded "getting better"
Access to higher education	62.1%
Shopping opportunities	49.4%
Quality of K-12 education	47.8%
Recreational opportunities	41.8%

Table 6  
**Issues perceived as “getting worse” included the following:**

Cost of energy	77.7% reported that it is "getting worse"
Availability of good jobs	54.3%

We believe the “cost of energy” was an especially sensitive issue during the week of April 3-6, 2000, as petroleum prices for home heating oil and gasoline had been rising throughout the previous months and were at a peak in early April.

Table 7  
**Issues most often perceived as stable (“about the same”) included the following:**

Local government	50% reported “about the same”
Policing and crime control	48.2%
Quality of the environment	47.9%
Overall quality of life in the area	47.4%

**Section 3: Jefferson County Issues**

The next section of the survey asked respondents to identify “the most important issue facing residents of the Jefferson County area at the present time.” This was a completely open-ended question; no prompts were given.

By a very wide margin, the most common response related to **perceived lack of job opportunities and the associated general lack of vigor in the local economy**, spontaneously cited by 39 % of the respondents. No other single issue received more than 7% of the responses.

**Section 4: Quality of Life in Jefferson County**

The next section contained a set of three open-ended questions intended to elicit perceptions of the overall quality of life in the region.

In response to the first question, “What are the *best aspects* of living in Jefferson County?” the answers were as follows (multiple answers allowed):

Table 8  
**Best Aspects of Jefferson County**

<b>Positive Aspect</b>	<b>Number Citing</b>	<b>Percentage Citing</b>
"the people"	171	50.3%
"the overall quality of life"	117	34.4%
"safe communities"	57	16.8%

In response to the second question, “What are the *main drawbacks* of living in Jefferson County?” the answers were as follows (multiple answers allowed):

Table 9  
**Main Drawbacks of Jefferson County**

<b>Drawback</b>	<b>Number citing</b>	<b>Percentage Citing</b>
economic and job issues	150	44.1%
lack of "leisure opportunities" (cultural/entertainment/recreational/ shopping)	117	34.4%
the weather	48	14.4%

The third question in this set asked for the respondents’ opinions about "one change that would make Jefferson County a better place to live?" The two most common responses were: (single answers only):

Table 10  
**One Desired Change**

<b>Desired Change</b>	<b>Number Citing</b>	<b>Percentage Citing</b>
more jobs and economic opportunities	145	49.2%
more cultural/recreational/entertainment/shopping opportunities	36	17.2%

## **Section 5: Miscellaneous**

The fifth section included questions about a variety of miscellaneous issues that had been identified by our preliminary inquiries.

### **Computer and Internet Use**

The first set of questions related to home-based computer and Internet access. In response to a question about whether there was a “working computer in your home,” 64.2% of the respondents indicated “yes” and 35.8% indicated “no.”

For those who have computers, the average number of hours per week that it was used was 15.6 hours (standard deviation 14.1, range 1-84). Of those who have computers, 88.5% have an Internet connection. Therefore, we can estimate that 56.8% of the total population (Jefferson County) have an Internet connection in their homes. More than half – 53.6% -- of those who have computers have made at least one on-line Internet purchase within the past year.

For comparison, according to the U. S. Census Bureau as of December 1998, 42.1% of U. S. households had a computer. Regarding household Internet connections, in the Northeast just 26.7% were connected (29.7% in Northeast rural areas). Even considering the 16 month gap in time frames, we conclude that Jefferson County appears to be "more connected" than is the nation as a whole. \*

### **Cross-Border Travel**

The second question in this section attempted to gauge the frequency of crossing the border into Southeastern Ontario during the past year. The results were as follows:

Table 11  
**Frequency of Border Crossings**

No border crossings	38.8%
Once or twice	26.3
3-5 times	16.3
More than 5 times	18.6

The majority of our respondents – 61.2% - have crossed into Southeastern Ontario within the past year, but a very significant minority – 38.8% - have not done so. About a fifth – 18.6% - cross fairly frequently – 6 or more times during the past year.

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\* *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide (revised 11/99)*. U. S. Department of Commerce, 1999.

Presidential Preferences

The next question was phrased as follows: “If the national Presidential Election were to be held right now, for whom would you most likely vote for President?” The results were as follows:

Table 12  
**Presidential Preferences**

Bush	33.8%
Gore	31.8%
Other (specify)	3.9%
Would not vote	6.8%
Not sure/don't know	23.7%

With a confidence limit of +/-5%, combined with the very large “not sure/don't know” responses, the presidential race in Jefferson County must be considered a dead heat.

U. S. Senate Preferences

Another question asked about preferences for the election of a U.S. Senator from New York. The results were as follows:

Table 13  
**U. S. Senate Preferences**

Clinton	30.9%
Guiliani	27%
Other (specify)	2.1%
Would not vote	8%
Not sure/don't know	32.1%

Again, with the confidence limits of +/-5% combined with the large “not sure/don't know” responses, this was also a statistical dead heat as of the first week in April. Of course, now that Mr. Guiliani is no longer a candidate, this question is obsolete.

*Satisfaction with Availability of Goods and Services in Jefferson County*

The next question asked about level of satisfaction with the availability of goods and services at reasonable prices in Jefferson County. The results were as follows:

Table 14  
**Satisfaction / Goods and Services**

Excellent	5.1%
Good	44.7%
Fair	38.7%
Poor	11.4%

Nearly one-half of the respondents – 49.9% - indicated *good* or *excellent*, while 38.7% indicated just *fair*, and 11.4% said *poor*.

*Primary Source of Information about Local Events*

What is the primary source of information about local events in Jefferson County? Our next question asked that, and the responses were as follows:

Table 15  
**Primary Sources of Information**

A Watertown daily newspaper	49.1%
A Watertown television station	26.7%
A Syracuse newspaper	10.4%
A weekly newspaper	4.6%
Friends and acquaintances	4.3%
Radio	3.1%
A Syracuse television station	1.8%

**Section 6: Demographic Variables**

The last section of the interview asked people for some general information about themselves, so that "we could better understand the general nature of the people who helped us with this survey." The results, along with comparable population information from the U. S. Census on the characteristics of the County as a whole (where available) were as follows:

Table 16  
**Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age Range	Survey percentage	Actual Jefferson County percentage (1990)
18-24	7.8%	19.4%
25-34	14.1%	25.7%
35-44	28.1%	18.5%
45-54	21.0%	11.3%
55-64	11.7%	9.8%
65-74	10.2%	8.5%
75-84	6.6%	4.9%
85+	0.6%	1.8%

Younger adults, age 18-34 are underrepresented in this survey, whereas middle aged adults, age 35-54 are overrepresented.

Table 17  
**Education**

Educational Attainment	Survey Participants	Jefferson County, age 25+, 1990
Less than high school graduate	6.0%	23.6%
High school graduate	29.0%	38.4%
Some college, no degree	26.7%	16.3%
Associate's degree	12.0%	8.1%
Bachelor's degree	12.3%	8.9%
Graduate or professional degree	14.1%	4.7%

The participants in this survey appear to have attained higher levels of formal education than the County population as a whole. However, the education data for the County are from the 1990 census, and must be regarded with caution given the emphasis on formal education during the past decade.

Table 18  
**Household Income Range**

Up to \$10,000	5.0%
\$10,000-\$25,000	21.7%
\$25,000-\$50,000	39.1%
\$50,000-\$75,000	21.1%
\$75,000-\$100,000	10.9%
Over \$100,000	2.2%

The U. S. Census Bureau reports that the median household income in Jefferson County in 1993 was \$28, 321. That is consistent with our finding of the primary category of household income falling within the \$25,000-50,000 range.

Table 19  
**Is your residence in Jefferson County related to either civilian or military employment at Fort Drum, by either you or a family member?**

Yes	16.7%
No	83.3%

Table 20  
**How many children under 18 are living in the household?**

0	58.7%
1	17.4%
2	14.4%
3	7.5%
4	1.5%
5 or more	0.6%

Table 21  
**Regarding race, how would you describe yourself?**

Black	1.5%
White	93.9%
Hispanic	0.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.6%
Native American	1.5%
Multiracial	0.6%
Other	0.9%

The U. S. Census Bureau projects that 91.1% of Jefferson County residents were white, and 8.9% were other than white as of 1996.

Table 22  
**Politically, how would you classify your political beliefs?**

Liberal	19.9%
Moderate	33.5%
Conservative	27.5%
Other	19.0%

Table 23  
**Marital Status**

Single	21.2%
Married	66.0%
Other	12.8%

Table 24  
**Sex**

Male	35.2%
Female	64.8%

As of July 1, 1996, the population of Jefferson County was 52.3% male and 47.7% female. Therefore, females are over-represented in this survey.

Table 25  
**Township of Residence**

Town	Number of Respondents*	Percentage of Respondents	Total Population (1998 Census est)	% of Total County Pop (1998 Census est)
Adams	15	<b>4.5</b>	4953	<b>4.5</b>
Alexandra	12	<b>3.6</b>	3942	<b>3.6</b>
Antwerp	7	<b>2.1</b>	1814	<b>1.6</b>
Brownville	22	<b>6.6</b>	5529	<b>5.0</b>
Cape Vincent	11	<b>3.3</b>	4013	<b>3.6</b>
Champion	7	<b>2.1</b>	4461	<b>4.0</b>
Clayton	24	<b>7.2</b>	4594	<b>4.1</b>
Ellisburg	8	<b>2.4</b>	3386	<b>3.1</b>
Henderson	8	<b>2.4</b>	1281	<b>1.2</b>
Houndsfield	11	<b>3.3</b>	3068	<b>2.8</b>
LeRay	21	<b>6.3</b>	19,139	<b>17.2</b>
Lorraine	7	<b>2.1</b>	784	<b>.7</b>
Lyme	10	<b>3.0</b>	1673	<b>1.5</b>
Orleans	5	<b>1.5</b>	1077	<b>1.0</b>
Pamelia	7	<b>2.1</b>	2836	<b>2.6</b>
Philadelphia	6	<b>1.8</b>	2064	<b>1.9</b>
Rodman	6	<b>1.8</b>	1077	<b>1.0</b>
Rutland	9	<b>2.7</b>	3026	<b>2.8</b>
Theresa	12	<b>3.6</b>	2243	<b>2.0</b>
T/Watertown	29	<b>8.7</b>	4337	<b>3.9</b>
C/Watertown	77	<b>23.2</b>	27,759	<b>25.0</b>
Wilna	13	<b>3.9</b>	6622	<b>5.9</b>
Worth	5	<b>1.5</b>	221	<b>.2</b>
Total County	332*		111, 014	

\* n=332; 8 respondents were not classified

The respondents represented all areas of the county, with equitable rural / urban representation. Only the town of LeRay, with 17.2% of the county's population including most of the Fort Drum population, was notably underrepresented among the survey participants.

## **Conclusion**

This report is a descriptive presentation of the information collected from 340 telephone interviews conducted during the evenings of April 3-6, 2000. The Center for Community Studies exists to engage in a variety of community-based research activities and to promote the productive discussion of ideas and issues of significance to our community. As such, the results of this survey are made available for use by any citizen or organization in the community. If you use this information from this survey, we simply ask that you acknowledge the source.

These interviews produced a large volume of data, which can be analyzed and assessed in a number of different ways. Please contact The Center for Community Studies if you need specific analyses. Additionally, we are available to make presentations of these survey findings to community groups and organizations upon request. Please contact Dr. Richard L. Halpin, Director of the Center for Community Studies, for additional information about the First Annual Survey of the Community.

The Second Annual Survey of the Community is tentatively scheduled for April 2-5, 2001.