

### USC Civic Engagement: Educational Attainment in the Community

The University of Southern California and its relationship with its surrounding neighborhood is steeped in a large amount of stereotypes and misconceptions. Especially in relation to the USC's development plans, it is not uncommon to hear USC painted as an institution filled with a bully and privilege mentality, one that ultimately does not care for the community itself. However, the USC Civic Engagement department focuses on utilizing USC resources to support community initiatives and fostering partnerships, especially in relation to education.

First, one must have an understanding of the actual USC campus and its surrounding neighborhood. USC's University Park Campus (UPC) is officially located in its own 90089 ZIP code. Immediately bordering the campus are ZIP codes 90007, 90018, 90037 and 90062. At USC, the Civic Engagement department is tasked with building partnerships within the community, especially those that support educational programs for youth. These programs are primarily centered in an approximately two-mile radius area around the USC campus known as the University Neighborhood Outreach (UNO) community. UNO community is officially comprised of the following census tracts: 2215, 2216.10, 2217.10, 2218.10, 2218.20, 2219, 2221, 2222, 2225, 2226, 2227, 2244.10, 2244.20, 2247, 2312.10, 2312.20 and 2313.

This project takes a deeper glance at the USC UNO outreach area in relation to education attainment in the community. As a renowned institution in the community, USC has the opportunity to utilize its resources (especially money) to support education in schools. One of the focuses in the Civic Engagement department is in its Family of Schools (FOS) partnerships. FOS partnerships currently exist with 11 local schools in the community (ranging from elementary to high schools) that provide opportunities to over 10,000 local students. Programs include theatre

workshops, dance education, science laboratory experience and science fairs<sup>1</sup>. For many of the schools, such programs would not otherwise exist if not for partnerships with the university. The main goal of all these programs is to provide youth with opportunities that will encourage them to complete high school and obtain a college degree. However, though USC has official partnerships with 11 local schools within a two mile radius, there are over 50 other schools in a five mile radius that are not officially part of FOS partnerships.

With this all in mind, this project's focus is on the effect that USC has or has not had on educational attainment rates in the UNO community. This will be gauged by comparing the educational attainment levels of the UNO census tracts from 2000 to 2010. In theory, the hope of the Civic Engagement department is that there are visible improvements in high school and college degree attainment rates within the 10-year period. A secondary focus will be on comparing the educational attainment rates of the UNO outreach area with that of the immediately surrounding ZIP codes. Doing so may bring up areas and schools that USC may want to consider partnering with in the future.

Beginning this project, I expected to find that the educational attainment levels of the surrounding neighborhoods (in both the UNO area and the greater surrounding area) to be quite low. First, the overall high school graduation rate in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is quite low at around 61%. Secondly, I grew up and attended middle school in the five mile radius surrounding USC. Even at that age, it was abundantly clear how many of my fellow students struggled to finish middle school with proper support and skills, let alone finish high school and attend college. For those students, excelling at school and graduating was often seen as a dream goal: desired but ultimately out of reach. I eventually attended a high school that was

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<sup>1</sup> List of projects that have been funded for the 2012-2013 school year that partner with FOS schools: <http://communities.usc.edu/uno/grantees.html>

a FOS school and saw firsthand how powerful USC programs could prove to be for many students. Programs at my high school gave students from low-income families the ability to work in USC laboratories and assist in research that gave them firsthand experience and supported their efforts to go to college. As such, while I expected educational attainment rates to be low in the USC UNO and the greater USC community, I also expected to see the rates increase from 2000 to 2010 for both high school degrees and bachelor's degrees.

### **Data**

From the beginning of my project the boundaries of the areas that were to be examined were always clear: the USC UNO area (which consists of seventeen census tracts) and the ZIP codes immediately surrounding USC (which includes an additional thirty census tracts). The University itself sets the USC UNO boundary, while I personally chose the comparison boundary (which is approximately a five mile diameter around USC). Before mapping the data, I decided on a comparison boundary that was based on the immediate surrounding ZIP codes. Since the UNO boundary has a diameter of approximately two miles, expanding the comparison boundary to a five-mile radius was a logical choice. While five miles may not seem like a significant number, it expanded the pool of schools being examined by over fifty and is an amount that can still be considered within the same neighborhood.

Currently, there are officially 10 FOS schools and over 50 schools surrounding USC. Data on the surrounding schools was gathered from the National Center for Education Statistics' website, which allows the ability to search for schools by ZIP code. For the purposes of the project, I choose to not include private schools in the data because USC primarily partners with LAUSD public schools and the resource disparity between public and private schools may widely differ (it must be noted that two current FOS schools are private parochial schools).

Demographic data was gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau's American FactFinder. Utilizing high school and college educational attainments rates was decided upon because those are two areas in which the Civic Engagement department strives to support: high school and college graduation. As such, it made the most sense to examine the change in educational attainment rates to gauge what effects USC's partnerships within the last ten years may have had on the community at large and what areas may need future USC support.

Beginning with the addresses of USC, the FOS schools and the public schools within the defined boundary (which were generated from the NCES website), I geocoded all addresses and mapped them in GIS within their respective boundaries. Since the FactFinder required little formatting it was simple to join the data with the corresponding census tract shapefile. The metadata information guided me in which values to symbolize, which were then placed on one layout for comparison's sake.

The biggest limitation due to the data was the difference in data available from 2000 versus 2010. The 2010 census data provides a larger breadth of data related to education and educational attainment rates and has different statistics compared to the data from 2000. For example, in the "High School Graduate Percentage (2000, 2010)" map, the 2000 map utilizes data showing the total percentage of individuals 25 years and older from the population who are high school graduates or higher. Moreover, the 2010 map utilizes data showing the total percentage of individuals from the population who are high school graduates or higher. As such, the 2000 data and map do not depict those younger than 25 years of age who have at least a high school degree. This means that while examining the map, one must keep in mind that the 2000 percentages are likely to be much higher if those under the age of 25 were to be included. This issue also exists on the "Bachelor's Degree Percentage (2000, 2010)" map, where the 2000 data

utilizes data that the total percentage of individuals 25 years and older as compared to the total population for 2010. Overall, the 2010 census data provided a broader view of educational characteristics of census tracts than the 2000 census data (which means that direct comparisons and analysis are more difficult). Also, the data for the USC census tract did not match my assumptions regarding the level of educational attainment rates, which may be due to the fact that USC has its own separate ZIP code.

Even with this issue, the maps provide an interesting examination of education attainment rates in the surrounding neighborhood and glimpses where resources may need to be dedicated.

### **Conclusions**

Starting off with the “High School Graduate Percentage (2000, 2010)” map, it is immediately apparent that a majority of the census tracts surrounding the USC campus had high school degree attainment rates below 50%, including census tracts where five different FOS schools existed. (USC and its corresponding census tract is listed as having a 0-25% high school degree attainment rates.) In 2010, five census tracts surrounding the USC campus have over a 75% attainment rate and located within these tracts are five FOS schools. The remaining FOS schools and their corresponding census tracts all saw increases in attainment rates: all had between a 26-50% rate in 2000 which then rose to between a 51-75% rate in 2010. For USC, that would be a positive indicator that partnerships with these schools may have led to a positive increase in high school degree attainment rates. However, while a large majority of census tracts saw increases in attainment rates, a few census tracts dropped to lower rates than compared to 2000. Three census tracts fell to less than a 25% attainment rate, even though they are home to five schools. From that perspective, USC and the Civic Engagement department may want to reach out to these schools and open the doors to possible partnership opportunities. Areas that the

CE department may also want to target are the census tracts immediately to the northeast and south of the campus, as there are clusters where the attainment rates are less than 50%. Overall, the map shows that high school attainment rates in the area have primarily increased from 2000 to 2010 and FOS schools are in tracts where the rates are all over 51%. In 2010, within the UNO boundary and ZIP code boundary, high school degree attainment rates were not surprising (LAUSD's high school graduation rate is currently around 60%).

Moreover, the "Bachelor's Degree Percentage (2000, 2010)" map depicts the extreme need for additional resources and support to increase college graduation rates within the community. In 2000, all but three (out of forty seven) census tracts had bachelor's degree attainment rates below 17%. In 2010, only six census tracts had attainment rates above 31%; 11 census tracts had less than a 5% attainment rate. Even census tracts with FOS schools located within did not have significantly higher attainment rates. Overall, the map shows that a bachelor's degrees attainment is not a common trait within the community and its neighborhood. Though USC has a large variety of programs that target high school students with the goal of supporting them as they prepare for college, more needs to be done in order to increase college degree attainment rates.

Though FOS schools and their corresponding census tracts show higher rates of high school and college degree attainment, one must wonder how the population of USC students and staff who live in the community affect the census data. A large amount of USC students do not live on campus or in any USC-related housing and, as such, may be a partial explanation for the higher than average rates compared to the rest of the surrounding neighborhoods.

When comparing the high school graduate map with the bachelor's degree map, an expected relationship between high school degree rates and college degree rates is noticed:

census tracts that have higher levels of high school graduates tend to have higher levels of college graduates. For students that can only dream of graduating high school, attending college and graduating with a bachelor's degree may seem like another world away. As such, the Civic Engagement department may want to ask some questions about programs and partnerships that may include: What type of programs/partnerships would best support students on a path to college? Do current programs have success in supporting high school graduation rates? Which programs have worked and which programs may need to be shifted in order to better support students?

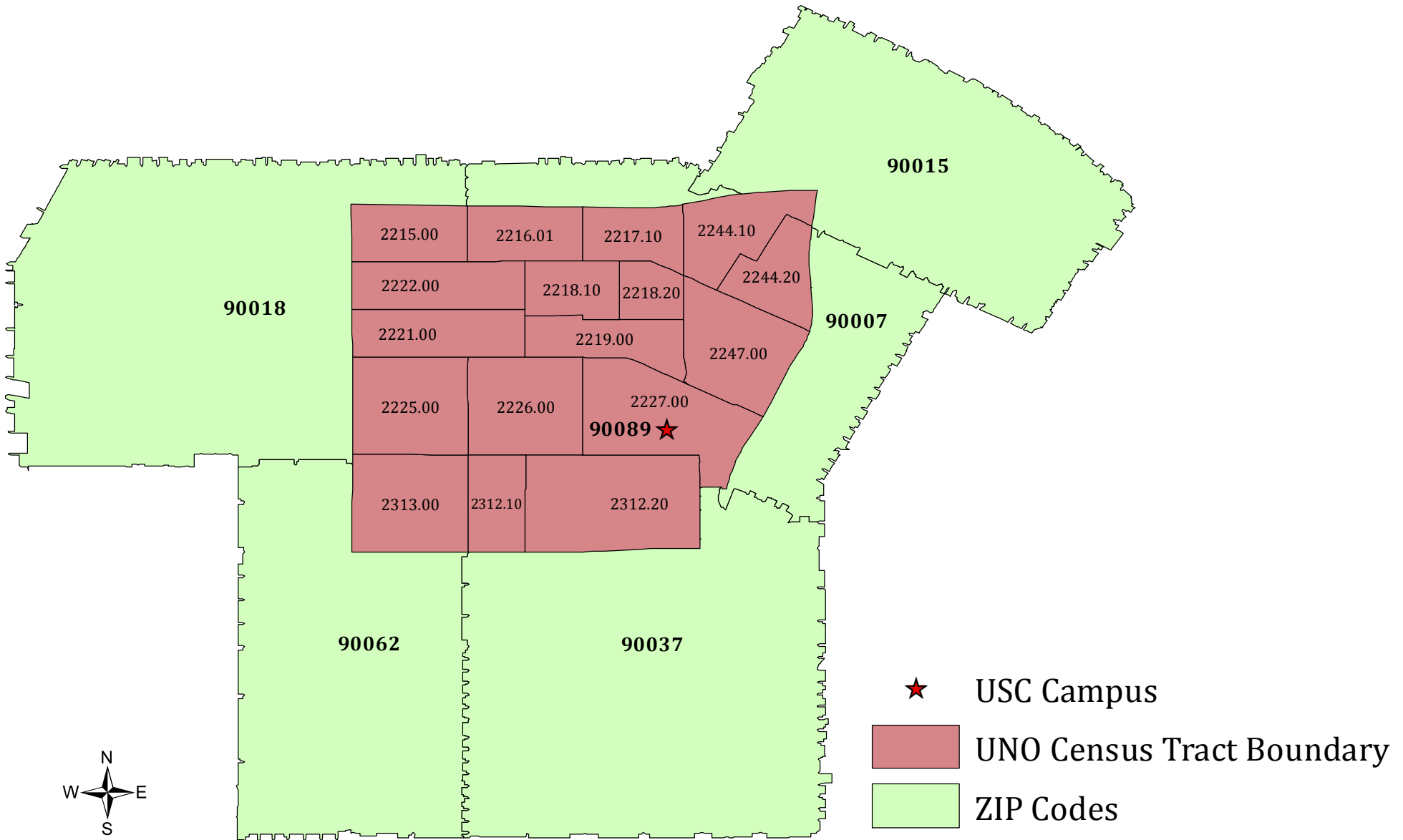
The data, for the most part, did not surprise me because I expected high school attainment rates to be below average, even by LAUSD standards. However, I was pleasantly surprised to see that FOS schools were in census tracts that had high levels of high school graduates. What I was surprised about were the very low levels of bachelor's degree attainment in the entire five-mile diameter. While I expected rates to be lower than other areas of Los Angeles, I was astonished by the amount of census tracts that had rates lower than 30%, 15% and even 5%. If nothing else, this project brought forth statistics to support what many who grow up in these neighborhoods are already aware of: high school and college degrees are difficult achievements in this community.

This project's goal was to examine the USC UNO community's and the greater USC neighborhood's educational attainment rates in relation to the Civic Engagement department's Family of Schools partnerships. Though what was discovered through GIS mapping was not necessarily surprising, it provides a way in which the department may choose to move forth in the future when deciding on new programs and partnerships. What is clear is that the surrounding

neighborhoods are in need of support in order to ensure that students have the necessary resources and skills to be able to graduate from high school and college.

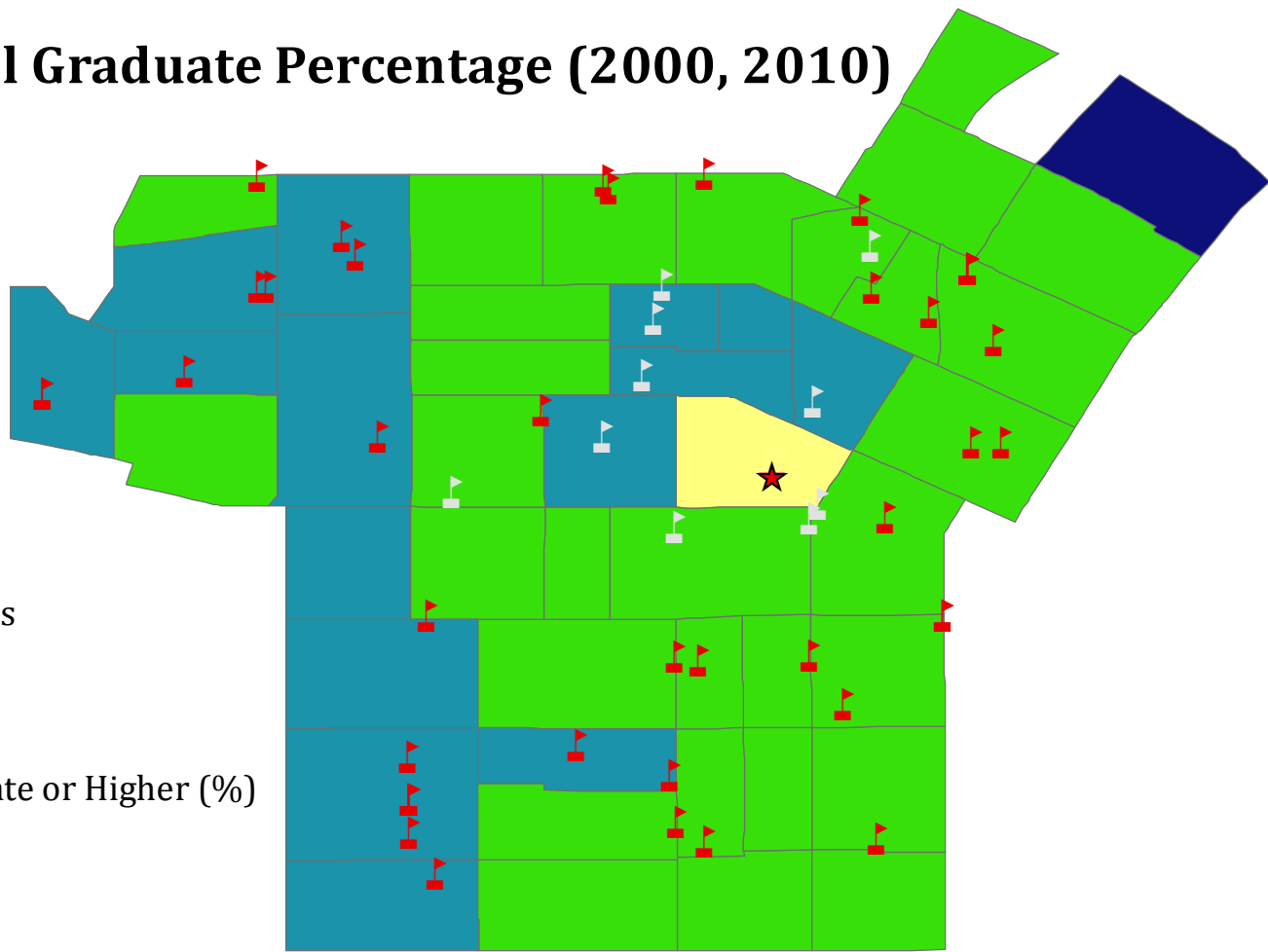


# USC Neighborhood UNO Boundary and Surrounding ZIP Codes





# High School Graduate Percentage (2000, 2010)

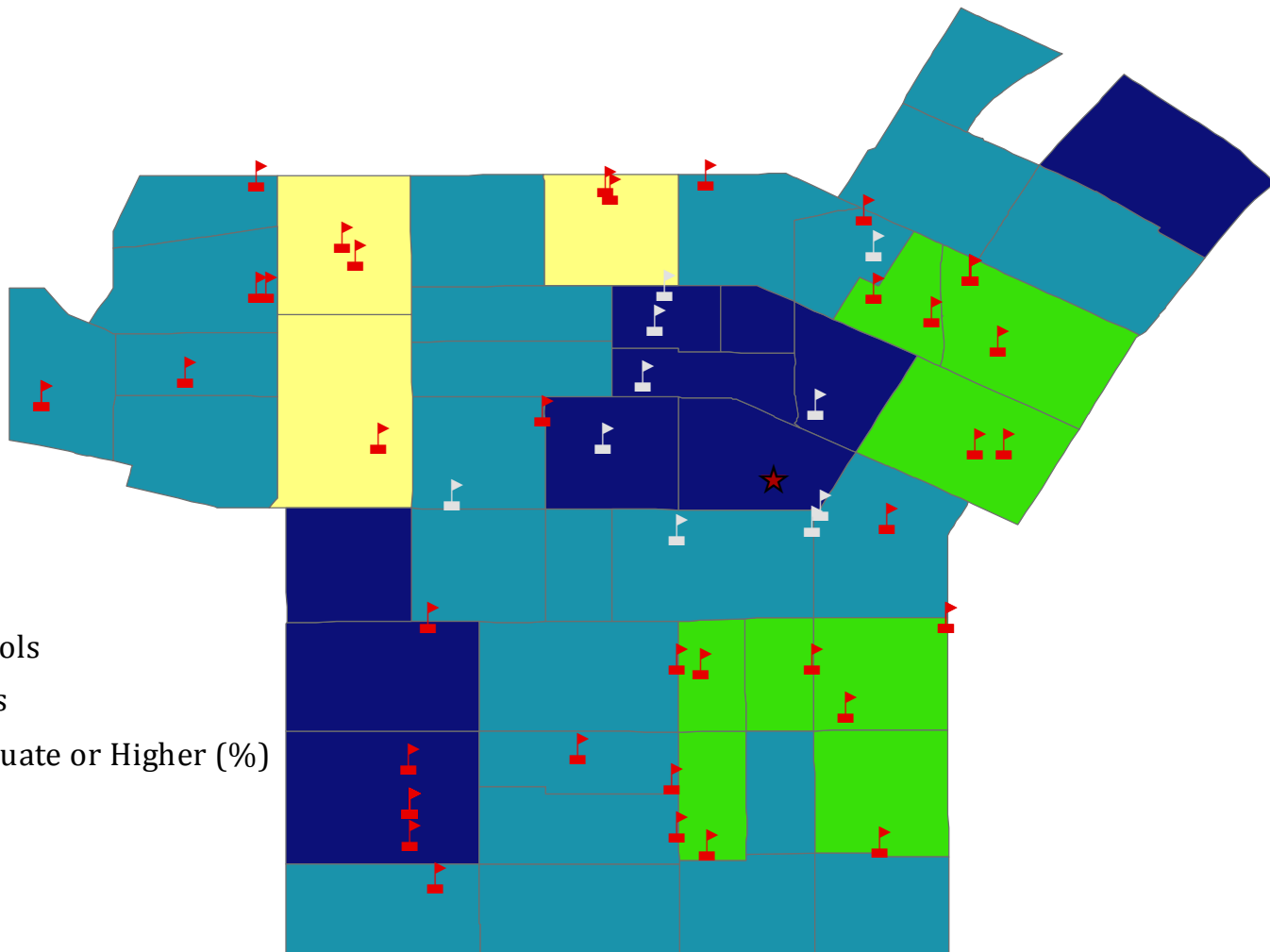


2000

- Public Schools
- FOS Schools
- USC

High School Graduate or Higher (%)

- 0 - 25
- 26 - 50
- 51 - 75
- 76 - 100



2010

- USC
- Public Schools
- FOS Schools

High School Graduate or Higher (%)

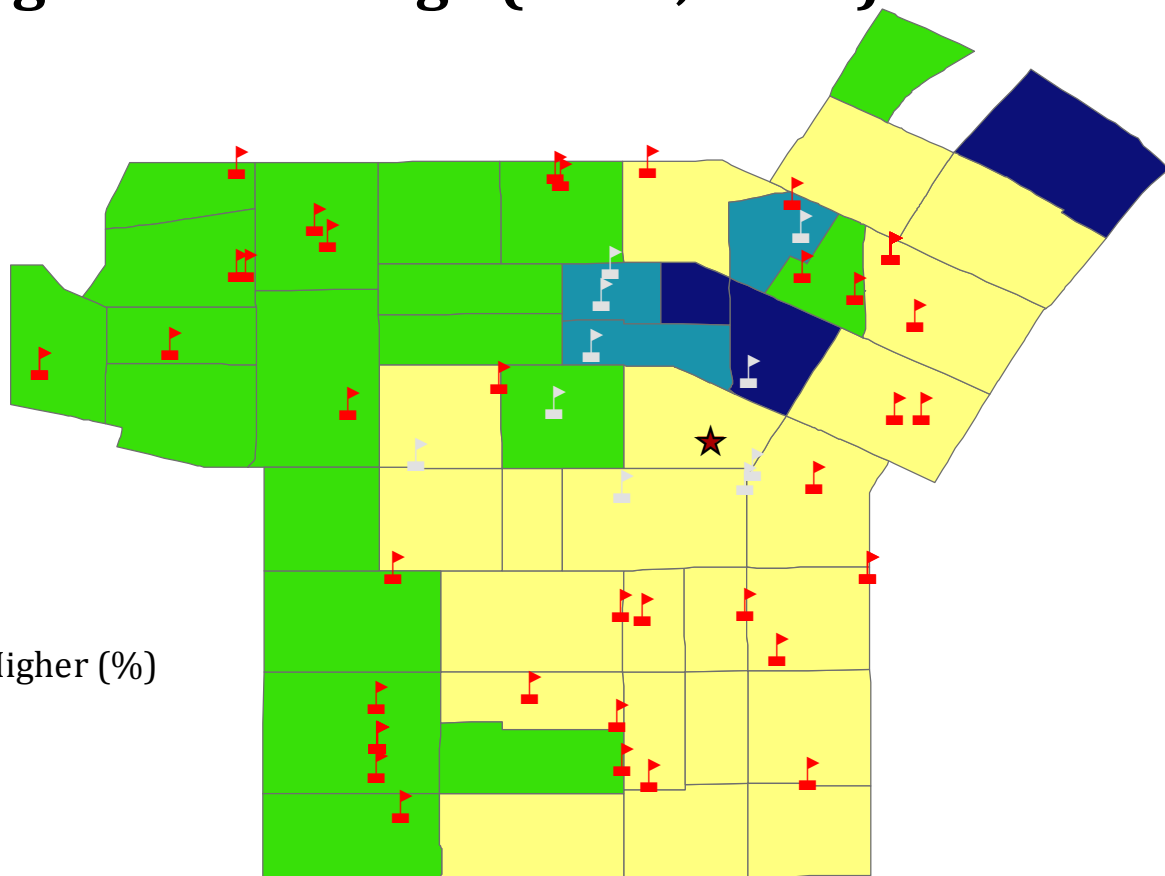
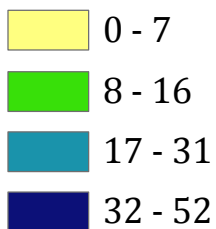
- 0 - 25
- 26 - 50
- 51 - 75
- 76 - 100

# Bachelor's Degree Percentage (2000, 2010)

2000

- ★ USC
- ⚑ FOS
- 🚩 Public Schools

Bachelor's Degree or Higher (%)



2010

- ★ USC
- ⚑ FOS
- 🚩 Public Schools

Bachelor's Degree or Higher (%)

