Social scientists spend much of their time investigating complex patterns of human interaction within the context of the larger society. A social scientist is primarily concerned with understanding human experience, evident in the form of collective social groups and/or individual people. One of the many methods researchers use to study human interaction is called “participant observation.” The participant observer method gives social scientists the freedom to study individuals and their counterparts by placing them directly with the groups being studied. In other words, researchers gather data through conversations, by participating at various events or meetings, while attending public talks or lectures, etc.

Over the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site, similar to that of a social scientist. You will also write about your experience on a weekly basis. This packet contains a series of weekly Reflective Questions, or prompts, specifically designed to help focus your attention to understanding the complexities of the construction of deviance in US society. The Reflective Questions are designed to help you reflect on your experiences and prepare you for writing your term paper.

As soon as you leave your JEP site (or ASAP), write down as much as you can recall about your experiences. Use the Reflective Questions as prompts to guide you, but go beyond the prompts, writing about whatever seems important to you about your service project; especially experiences and concepts related to understanding deviance. Use your journal to describe the social interactions and activities you observe; trying to do so from the points of view of the children/teens with whom you are working.

Avoid generalizations and psychological explanations of behavior, focusing instead on writing detailed and concrete accounts of people, social settings, conversations (including direct quotes, when possible), etc. You are only required to turn in responses to the questions below. However, you are strongly encouraged to take comprehensive notes throughout the semester. While they may seem time consuming now, these notes will serve as crucial sources of information required for the research paper. To help facilitate this process, you may want to keep a small notebook with you and jot down some notes when you have a spare moment (or perhaps take a moment before leaving the site). The more work you do now, the better your paper will become! You may turn in a copy of your more extensive notes if you wish, as long as they address the issues posed by the Reflective Questions.

Please read through all of the Reflective Questions prior to beginning your assignment. Doing so will help to focus your observations and improve the quality of your journal responses. In addition to carefully reading the term paper assignment guidelines provided by your Professor, you may wish to review the chapter *The Ethnographic Field Research Paper*: Giarrusso, R., Richlin-Klonsky, J., Roy, W. G., Strenski, E. 21. A guide to writing sociology papers, th edition, (pp. 11-131). New York: St. Martin’s Press, which you can find in Leavey Library.
The core parts of each Reflection Question (which you need to focus on) are highlighted in bold. Use the additional parts of the question to guide/supplement your answer.

Walk or look around your site and take in the environment; specifically, provide details about the size, space, decor, noise level, etc. of the classroom (or meeting room), the building(s) making up the site, its grounds, the neighborhood (or whatever you could see of the neighborhood on your way to your site). How do the aesthetics and overall feel of the site and neighborhood compare with the USC campus and/or other places you have worked or attended school? What are some of the main differences and similarities? Do you think that these differences or similarities have any impact on the learning experiences of students at the site?

This week you will be meeting one-on-one with your Program Assistant to talk about your experiences in JEP. In place of a full-length journal assignment this week, we ask that you take a few minutes to . For example, what are your tasks at the site and how are you adjusting to your new role? How are you relating to the people at your site? Are you having any problems with any of the logistical aspects of your assignment (e.g., schedule, transportation, Blackboard access, etc.) or do you have any concerns about collecting data for your research paper?

Rather than providing written comments, your PA will discuss the issues with you during your “chat.”

As an admissions “prerequisite,” the youth at Western Academy and Kirby Center have committed some kind of “deviant” act. Why are they at Western/Kirby and how did they get there (make sure not to make assumptions and generalizations about this)? Use your course readings to explain why the act they committed is considered deviant by society. What kinds of programs are in place at the site to prevent its population from becoming repeat offenders?

Your Anderson et al. and Goffman readings address the various ways in which people manage social stigma. In your Week Three journal, you already discussed why the behaviors that brought your student to Western Academy or the Kirby Center are frowned upon by society.

How do the youths appear to manage stigma? Be sure to use specific examples of comments, behaviors, etc., in your response.
By now, you will need to decide upon a clearly defined topic for your paper. (Check your course syllabus for the paper outline due date) This week’s question aims to help you identify a specific research topic.

Reflecting on your experiences thus far, what stands out as one of the most significant issues related to the construction of deviance and deviant subculture with which you are working at Western Academy or Kirby Center?

Ask yourself the following questions: why is this group a “deviant” subculture; what specifically do you want to learn about this group; how do your observations and activities at Western/Kirby allow you to better understand the youths as individuals and as members of a subculture (a group); and are there any issues that might be difficult to understand given the relatively limited time at Western/Kirby or the limitations of participant observation?

Writing “memos” is an early step in the process of analyzing ethnographic data. It allows the researcher to step back from the field experience and to think about the emerging themes in an analytical and theoretical manner. The weekly Reflective Questions serve this same analytical purpose, but “memos” are less structured and allow students to pursue their own interests, hunches, and ideas. In preparation for your term paper, write a “memo” that addresses your experiences at Western Academy or Kirby Center.

Focussing on a very narrow and specific issue even more narrow than your overall topic and moving beyond a merely descriptive account begin to consider various explanations for why this is so. What are your sociological hunches about this particular issue? Why does it seem significant? Does it run counter to common sense explanations? Does it illustrate a common pattern? What can you learn about the youth from this issue not only regarding their perspectives, but also in terms of the social context in which they are living, going to school, etc.?

Sociological theory should be an important element of your research paper. Throughout the course it is emphasized that deviants are created (constructed) and not necessarily born as such. Use your course readings to select one of the theoretical explanations of deviance (e.g., structural, interaction, or labeling theories). Briefly summarize the theory and discuss how it may help you to explain why the youths are at Western Academy or Kirby Center. Do you find any aspects of their experiences that are not addressed or adequately explained by the theory (make sure to elaborate; a simple “yes” or “no” is not sufficient)?

What theories or concepts “came to life” most dramatically for you in your work with the youth at Western Academy or Kirby Center? How have your perceptions of deviance changed, if at all? (Be sure to provide specific examples). How has JEP supplemented your classroom experiences? Highlight a noteworthy experience to illustrate your response.