

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

AMST 100: Los Angeles and the American Dream
Professor Mills
PA: Samantha
FALL 2011

As a JEP student, your work in the community is similar to that of a social scientist who conducts “participant-observer” research. Throughout the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site, and you will write about your experiences on a weekly basis. These JEP Reflective Questions (RQs) are designed to help you focus your observations and critically reflect on your experiences in relation to what you are learning about in your USC course.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS HINTS:

- **Read the questions first.** Reading the question before you go to your JEP site is required in order to answer many RQs and having the questions on your mind will when at your site will help focus your observations and improve your response to all RQs.
 - **Write as soon as possible.** As soon as possible after leaving your site, sketch out your answer to that week’s RQ. Even just taking a few notes with some difficult moments, things that surprised you or highlights will make writing later much easier and will provide the examples and observations you need to write an outstanding journal.
 - **Proof your work.** Like any college-level writing assignment, proof your work to make sure the writing is clear, error-free, and that you answer the question at hand.
 - **Read and respond to your PA's comments.** The questions are related to and build upon one other. So refer back to previous responses and to take seriously your PA’s feedback each week and respond to the feedback by following the PAs suggestions.
1. **Be respectful.** Show your respect by being mindful of the limits of your experience and knowledge. Avoid generalizations and stereotypical explanations of behavior; in other words, do not make arguments that assume you know how someone else thinks or feels or use these assumptions to explain the way people act or their circumstances.
 2. **Use examples.** Focus on writing detailed and concrete accounts of people, social settings and conversations (including direct quotes, when possible). Never make claims without evidence or examples!

YOUR ESSAY ASSIGNMENTS

The core parts of each assignment (which you need to focus on) are highlighted in **bold**. Use the additional questions to guide/supplement your answer. Please refer to the PA agreement you received in training for instructions regarding journal due dates and format requirements. *Note that some weeks require longer responses and are worth more points.*

ESSAY ONE - “Preflection”

(1 page, 10 points, due: 9/26)

Please respond to one of the following prompts. Question #2 is for returning students only.

#1: Over the next eight-weeks you will be taking your college education outside of the walls of the University. Based on what you know about JEP and what you know about your site, what do you imagine your JEP experience will be like? Make sure to explain why you think what you think and use examples from your experiences at USC and in the community to explain yourself. Make your imagined vision of your JEP experience specific by addressing these two questions: **Ideally, what would you like to learn from your experiences in JEP? When you think about JEP, what makes you the most nervous or concerned?**

#2: Think back to your last experience in JEP and think about how you can take what you've learned about JEP, USC and the surrounding neighborhood, or the organization or school you worked with and improve your experience this time around. **Now that you know something about how JEP works, what do you hope to learn from doing JEP again? What was the biggest obstacle you faced in your last JEP experience and how will you address that issue this time?** Make sure to use clear and detailed examples from your last JEP experience to explain your reasoning.

ESSAY TWO: The Built Environment

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 10/3)

Describe the social and physical context of your community service site. Try to be **as specific and descriptive as possible**. Pay attention to the **built 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, and its grounds. How do the aesthetics and overall feel of the site compare with the USC campus and/or other places you have worked or attended school? What are some of the main difference and similarities? The built environment might not always be designed or built for the uses taking place today—people remake place to fit their needs all the time. **Can you see any examples at your site where people are using something in a manner that appears to different than its intended use?** *If you do not see anything used in that manner, how well do you think the built environment meets the needs of the people using it?*

ONE-ON-ONE CHATS

(Scheduled with your PA, 10/10-10/14)

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 essay this week, we ask that you take a few minutes to **jot down any questions, comments or concerns that you have about your JEP assignment so far**. 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.)? *You do not need to submit these notes on Blackboard; rather, take them with you to your one-on-one chat with your PA so you are prepared and remember to talk about any issues that need to be addressed.*

ESSAY THREE: Emotional Responses

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 10/17)

Experiencing novel and diverse environments sometimes cause us to feel stress, discomfort, or even fear. In this sense, situations that challenge our existing beliefs or understanding of the world can often be an emotional experience. These emotions may lead to a variety of reactions: reflection (e.g., why am I feeling anxious?), confrontation (e.g., challenging someone on his/her conflicting experience or view), complacency (e.g., hoping for the best, waiting for the negative emotional reaction to change), or avoidance (e.g., not returning to a site or avoiding individuals who tend to cause these feelings of uneasiness). Try to recall a similar experience where diverse individuals, environments, or discussions surrounding diversity elicited some sort of emotional response in your experiences at your site. **Describe this experience: the context, the emotions experienced, the ways you experienced these emotions (e.g., physical reactions, how you acted, how felt). Then reflect on your reaction to these emotions and how this reaction may have encouraged or hindered learning.**

ESSAY FOUR: Census Tract Level Data and Research Questions

(2 pages, 20 points, due: 10/24)

Census data can reveal much about a neighborhood, but as you have learned in American Studies 100, there are many complexities to people's lives and histories that might not be revealed in such data. To begin with, take a look at census data for the census tract around the site at which you are placed.

- Go to factfinder2.census.gov
- Click on the “street address” link in the lower right corner of the screen (it’s the second box up from the bottom).
- Enter the street address for your JEP site in the “address search” pop-up box and click “Go.”
- In the “Geography Results” that appear click the “Census Tract” link and it will appear in the upper left under “Your Selections”
- Click on the “Map” tab to see the census tract so that you know the size and location of the area.
- Close the “Select Geographies” pop-up box by clicking the “x” in the upper right.
- Take a look at DP-1, QT-H3 and QT-P11 data sets (look for these in the “ID” column), and anything else you find interesting. Click “View.”
- If there is something in particular you are curious about, such as how much people pay in rent as a percentage of their income, return to the main page and review the specific “topics” in the box on the left or use the search feature to look up “rent.”
Note that data might be from different census years.

Explore the tables and describe the people who live in the neighborhood in which you are working. What interesting information do you find? What makes you wonder if there is a larger story to the data you have before you in the census tables? **Use what you have learned in American Studies 100 to take what you find interesting and turn it into a hypothetical research question.** This means taking some concept or something you have learned about from

lectures or readings and using the concept or ideas to ask some questions about the data. The research question you develop should be both a paper you could imagine Professor Mills asking you to write about and something that you find interesting enough to write about. **Write out your research question and explain why you think it is an important question to ask.**

Explain what data inspired you ask the question and provide some context for why this is a question that needs to be asked. **Finally, talk about what sort of research you would need to perform in order to answer this question and how your experiences in JEP would help you answer the question.** That is, what do you need to know that is not in this data? How would you figure it out? Are there any resources from American Studies 100 that would be useful? Use at least one example of an experience you have had at JEP that provides context for the research question and/or could provide useful data for your hypothetical research.

BLACKBOARD DISCUSSION: Topic To Be Announced

(2 posts to Blackboard, 10 points, due: 10/31-11/4)

Instructions and topic will be posted on Blackboard.

Discussion purpose: Your weekly journals consistently reveal a wide range of interesting insights and abilities that result from your coursework and service-learning assignments. Since students participate in JEP from more than 100 different courses each semester, and rarely do all students in a particular class choose to enroll in JEP, we lack the opportunity to bring you together on a regular basis to learn from one another. As a result, the educational benefits of participating in JEP are limited mostly to your individual or small group experiences. This forum is designed to counter the relative isolation of JEP's service-learning assignments by providing an opportunity for you to share your insights with your peers.

ESSAY FIVE: The Landscape Transformed

(2 pages, 20 points, due: 11/7)

Water is essential to the growth of Los Angeles. As you have learned, the “growth machine” required water and various sorts of transportation infrastructure to transform the environment for housing development. **This week, look to the landscape to see if you can find evidence of what you have learned about water and transportation, as well as the history of diverse communities in Los Angeles who live in the housing built by the growth machine.** Walking and observing is a simple method that allows you to take the time to reflect on the landscape and see things that you would miss from a car, or even a bike. So, this week, walk (don't bike, take the bus or drive) to your JEP site and use walking as a method to research the neighborhood.* What do you see in the environment? **Relate this to what you see to what you have learned in American Studies 100—think about water, transportation, etc.** Document your walking with detail, describe the landscape in manner that will allow your PA understand what you see. (Hint: taking notes or photographs while you walk will make this much easier!)

**If for any reason you are unable to walk to your site, arrange to take a mile long trip around your JEP site. As always, be safe, use common sense.*

ESSAY SIX: Education and the American Dream

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 11/14)

Education is frequently cited as “the road to opportunity” in the myth of the American Dream. In other words, through education, upward social mobility is believed to become much more feasible. In the American Studies 100 you have learned about the power of story-telling to affect how we understand the world around us and in previous weeks you reflected on structural inequalities in schools and the 90007 area. This week, **tell a story about an event or series of events you witnessed at your JEP site where you can see education as a “road” or “roadblock” to upward mobility for the students at your site.** Think structurally about education and the myth of American Dream—meaning if education is the key the dream, what does that mean under conditions of structural un- and under-employment? What factors affect paths to upward mobility (for the better or worse) for students at your JEP site? **What are the larger lessons about education that you can take from your JEP experience?**

ESSAY SEVEN: Final Reflections

(2.5-3 pages, 25 points, due: 11/21)

In addition to potentially providing beneficial services for the communities in which it is implemented, service-learning is also credited with numerous benefits for the participating students. In particular:

- Young people gain access to the range of supports and opportunities (or developmental assets) they need to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. One study of youth civic activism found that these settings had particular strength in cultivating youth and community involvement (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003).
- Increased sense of self-efficacy as young people learn that they can impact real social challenges, problems, and needs.
- Higher academic achievement and interest in furthering their education.
- Enhanced problem-solving skills, ability to work in teams, and planning abilities.
- Enhanced civic engagement attitudes, skills and behaviors. Many leaders in public service today speak about how they were nurtured, inspired, and shaped in early experiences in community service or volunteering.

(Sources: Chung, 1997; Coe-Regan et al, in press; Lewis-Charp et al., 2003; Tannenbaum, S. C., 2007; and YMCA of the USA, 2004)

Consider these benefits and reflect on the various ways in which your JEP experience has impacted you this semester. **Based on your personal experience, do you believe that the above-mentioned benefits can come from participating in a service-learning program? Which outcomes seem most likely for service-learning students? Which seem least likely? Are there other benefits that you have experienced that are not listed above?** In answering these questions, make sure to explain your reasoning and use specific examples from your service-learning assignment and your course.