

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

AMST 350: Junior Seminar in American Studies: Race, Ethnicity & Crime
Professor Huey
PAs: Kelly & Maya
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 when at your site will help focus your observations and improve your response to all RQs.
- **Take field notes.** Not only will this make writing your essays for JEP easier, it is a requirement for your term paper for AMST 350. Even just taking a few notes about 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.
- 1. **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.
- 2. **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.
- 3. **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.
- 4. **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: Living Advantage and JEP

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

In the summer of 2011, Foshay Learning Center partnered with JEP and the non-profit organization, Living Advantage (www.livingadvantageinc.org) to pair USC student-mentors with Foshay students who have been taken into protective custody by the child welfare (a.k.a., foster care) system or who are at risk of out-of-home placement. You are one of those mentors. Explore Living Advantage's website to learn about this unique organization. **Briefly describe the agency's mission and the services it provides.** Now explore the JEP website (www.usc.edu/jep) to find out more about JEP's mission and programs. **How does JEP's mission complement the work of Living Advantage (and vice versa)? How do you think your work with foster youth will further the missions of both Living Advantage and JEP?**

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: Developing a Research Question

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

Based on what you have learned in class and from your observations in the community thus far, **start to develop a research question for your AMST 350 term paper. Write out your draft research question and provide some context or rationale for the question.** (If you have already picked a topic, try to focus the question with this essay; if you have yet to pick a topic, feel free to work through a few different possibilities.) What about your experiences in the community suggest that this is an important question to answer? How might your coursework shed light on the issue? What additional information would you need in order to answer the question (e.g., data, statistics, further reading)? **Use at least one example of an experience you have had in JEP that provides context for the research question and/or could provide useful data for your research.**

ESSAY FOUR: The Child Welfare System

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

Take a look at this report, which provides national data on foster care for 2009:

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/foster.cfm>. In addition, and for a local comparison, review this "fact sheet" about child welfare services in 2010 from the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Service (DCFS): http://www.lacdcfs.org/aboutus/fact_sheet/DRS/December2010/CY_2010_Fact_Sheet.htm.

Compare and contrast the local child welfare system with national trends. For example, what percentage of

children in local and national child welfare systems are in out-of-home placements? How do these placements vary at the local and national level (e.g., are foster children placed primarily in relative care, non-relative foster homes, adoptive homes, etc.)? What are the demographic characteristics of foster youth in Los Angeles and nationally? Are they proportionate to the general population? **What else strikes you about these data and their implications for foster youth?** What are some of the unique challenges facing children in the local community?

Note: If you are unfamiliar with any of the terms in the reports (e.g., “family maintenance,” “permanent placement,” etc.), please look them up in the DCFS Glossary: <http://dcfs.co.la.ca.us/Policy/Hndbook%20CWS/1300/GLOSSARYv0109.doc>. In addition, if you wish to compare the demographic characteristics of foster youth with the general population, the latter data can be found on the US Census Bureau’s website (www.census.gov).

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: Narrowing the Scope

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

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 you to pursue your own interests, hunches, and ideas. In preparation for your term paper, write a “memo” that addresses your experiences at your site.

Focusing on a very narrow and specific issue (even more narrow than your paper topic) and moving beyond a merely descriptive account, begin to consider various explanations for what is going on and why. **What are your analytical hunches about this particular issue?** Why does it seem significant? In your memo **write out a question that you would like to answer** (this can be part of your term paper research question or just something you are curious about). This is great time to figure out the “prior questions” for your topic. Prior questions are the questions you need to ask *before* you can answer the question you just wrote down. Think about what you need to know about the education system, the law, student’s backgrounds, what you can learn from the children, etc. **What are the “prior questions” for your question?**

ESSAY SIX: Thesis Statement

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

In Essay Three, you outlined a research question and then in Essay Five, you narrowed the scope of your paper and have by now hopefully honed in on a solid paper topic. This week, you will develop a preliminary thesis statement: **a research statement or question that you intend to answer using your weekly JEP observations and field notes, as well as any other relevant research required for AMST 350.** The thesis statement is usually a single sentence somewhere in the first paragraph of your paper’s introduction that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation of the research data. **Write a thesis statement and a brief**

explanation on why and how you are going to argue the thesis in your paper using your JEP observations.

Thesis statements are often a challenge to write—especially at this stage of research and writing. But doing the work now will help focus your research and writing, even if you end up revising the thesis statement later.

Remember, a thesis statement should let your reader know 1) the topic you are going address; 2) what you are going to argue about that topic; and 3) how you are going to go about making your argument (a hint at what methods or evidence you will use).

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? How do you think service-learning affected the argument you are developing in your term paper?** Looking back is there anything you think you could have done (or anyway your experience could have been different) that would improve your term paper? **How could the JEP-Living Advantage partnership be improved in the future for the benefit of JEP students—and the foster youth with whom they are working?** What does Living Advantage as an organization have to offer service-learning students? In answering these questions, be sure to explain your reasoning and use specific examples from your service-learning assignment and your course.