

# JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

---

BISC 102 *Humans and their Environment*  
Professor Kiefer & Moffett  
PA: Kin Yan  
FALL 2011

---

These JEP Reflective Questions are designed to help you reflect upon your experiences as a member of a mini-team so that you can make the most of your community teaching experiences. 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 regular basis. These JEP Reflective Questions 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:

1. **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.
2. **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 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.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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.
6. **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 - “Pre-reflection”**

***(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 JEP, 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: Assessing your Plan**

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

Consider the eight-week plan that you are developing with your mini-team. **What are the major themes in your biological sciences course that you plan to emphasize throughout the following weeks?** How are you going to put these themes together into a mini-course? That is, explain how each week will build on the last and explain how you think students will be able to learn the larger lessons about biological sciences that you want to develop with the mini-course. The most important themes are often the most difficult to address, so pick one major theme that you think will be particularly challenging to address over the coming weeks and explain **1) why you think it will be difficult; 2) why you think its important theme; and 3) what varying strategies you will use over the course of the next five weeks to make this theme meaningful for your students.**

## **EIGHT-WEEK PLAN DUE**

***(due: 10/10-10/14)***

See your PA agreement for details.

## **ESSAY THREE: The Team**

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

**Describe your impressions of your mini-course team.** How well are you gelling as a team? What strengths do you think each member brings to the table? What weaknesses are you concerned about, if any? How do you think about your own role in the team? **That is, what strength and weaknesses do you bring and what skills would you like to develop?**

## **ESSAY FOUR: Environmental and Social Contexts for Health**

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

Go to the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services and review the report on “Key Indicators of

Health”: <http://lapublichealth.org/docs/keyindicators.pdf>. How does the local Metro Service Planning Area (SPA 6, which includes the area surrounding USC) compare to other regions of Los Angeles and Los Angeles County as a whole, in terms of the health of its residents? How would you describe the overall health of the children at your school site? **Have you observed any of the problems that are noted in the report? Drawing upon your experiences at the site, what do you consider to be the most significant health problem or risk for children at the school and why?**

Note: if you are working outside of the USC area, please review the information for your Service Planning Area. Here is a link to a map of the LA County SPAs: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/spa/spamap.htm>. In addition, this website is searchable by specific health criteria and geographic area: <http://www.lapublichealth.org/phcommon/public/hdi/index.cfm>.

### **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: Eliminating Toxins and Education**

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

Go to the Environmental Protection Agency’s “MyEnvironment” website and look up data about the community in which you are working: <http://www.epa.gov/myenvironment/>.

Enter the address of your site and explore the results. **Make sure to click on “view interactive map” and then use the “map contents” box in the upper right of the map to view different types of toxic emissions and risk factors.** Zoom out to get a larger picture of the region and to get some basis of comparison.

What kinds of pollutants and toxic chemicals are located near your JEP site? How many and what kinds of EPA-regulated industries are nearby? Where are they located? **In general, what surprised you about this data and what did you find interesting?**

**What role do you think schools can have in making sure that children are not exposed to toxic chemicals that contribute to health problems?** Think broadly about what you know about the toxins out there from EPA site, what you know about the school, students and teachers from your JEP experience, what you know about the chemistry of toxins from Chem 105 and how they move in different mediums (i.e. air, water, the ground, buildings, etc.), and what you know about developing lessons and teaching from your work with your mini-team. **What would you recommend that teachers, parents, administrators, and/or students do to eliminate exposure to toxins that affect children at the school? How could they organize? How might such work become part of chemistry education?**

### **ESSAY SIX: Individuals and the Environment**

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

Teaching about environmental issues means confronting some serious structural problems and inequalities in society that are very difficult to change and can feel daunting to address – for instance, climate change or various water crises around the globe. There is a strong impulse to offer solutions to such problems and inequalities; however, there is often an equally strong impulse to offer solutions that focus on the individual, such as “green” campaigns that encourage “you” to save the environment through individual acts of conservation – when, for instance, in the case of global warming, individual consumption is only a small part of the problem. **Take an example of an action designed to “help/save/conserve” the environment that has come up in your mini-course, explain the example in detail, and then explore the larger issues related to the action:** What are the underlying environmental issues? What ethical concerns frame the issue? What can individual acts accomplish in this case and what aspects of this issue might require different sorts of solutions? What might these solutions look like? How can individual conservation be linked to larger structural changes that would address this issue? Finally, based on your experience trying to teach about this issue, what strategies would you use if you taught that issue again? **Explain how and why you think these strategies would be an improvement and how they would link individual action to structural change.**

### **ESSAY SEVEN: Final Reflections**

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

Take a look back at the essays you have written (make sure to use Blackboard, so you can see your PA's comments), and think about what you have learned over the past few weeks. It is often noted that one of the benefits of service-learning for participating students is “higher academic achievement.” For this final essay, we want you to focus on this particular outcome vis a vis your JEP assignment. **First, consider the premise itself: how does participating in a service-learning program lead to higher academic achievement?** When does it fail to do so? Do students’ outcomes vary by the subject matter of the course? Or do they vary by their experiences in the community? **Describe what you think are the most important factors in a service-learning assignment that ensure “higher academic achievement” for university students.**

**Next, think about your JEP experiences in the context of your USC course: What is the most significant “academic” outcome of your JEP assignment? How has JEP affected your understanding of the course content?** Why do you think your professor is giving academic credit for JEP? What are his or her goals for you? In answering these questions, make sure to use specific examples from your course. Think broadly about the relationship between JEP and your course. Even if you believe there is no direct connection, consider how you could apply a course concept to help better understand or explain something you encounter in your JEP experience. You might focus on detailing a specific learning outcome (e.g., describing a particular theory and how it came to life through your experiences, or how teaching helped you to understand a particular course concept). Alternatively, you might reflect on how your experiences in JEP shed light on material you have learned in other courses at USC.

*The goal of this assignment is for you to think critically about the academic outcomes of service-learning and describe what you learned from your experience. If you are struggling to make the connection, as an alternative, explain, in detail, how you think the course or JEP could be redesigned to foster a more meaningful connection between your course and a service-learning experience in the community.*