

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

ECONOMICS
PA: Deborah
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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:

- **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.
- **Be respectful.** Show your respect by being mindful of the limits of your experience and knowledge. Avoid generalizations and psychological 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.
- **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 seven-week plan that you will soon be developing with your mini-team. **What are the major themes in your USC course that you plan to emphasize throughout the next few 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 economics 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 it is an important theme; and 3) what various strategies you will use over the course of the next few 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 strengths and weaknesses do you bring and what skills would you like to develop?**

ESSAY FOUR: Externalities

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

As you know, externalities are outcomes (positive and negative) of an economic activity that are not taken into account by those engaged in the given activity, and that affect people, places and environments somehow considered “outside” the activity. For example, the environmental costs of producing and consuming the dozens of cell phones you may own in your lifetime are externalized to the environments, health, and lives of people who live, work and play at or near the raw material extraction sites (mines), manufacturing plants, as

well as dumps and electronic-waste processing facilities primarily located outside of the US. Your challenge for this essay is to apply the logic of externalities to the education system. Take a look at this California Department of Education news release about budget cuts:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr10/yr10rel34.asp>

What are externalities involved in public K-12 education funding are implicated by the CDE news release? What are some externalities not addressed by the CDE in this document? Think about time (the long-term and short-term effects of budget planning) as well as place (Who is impacted where? Are there outcomes outside of CA?) in your response. **Make sure to use a detailed example based on your experience at your JEP site in your response.** And make sure to ground your example in your observations—although you may end up speculating about positive and negative externalities that have effects in places and times outside of your experience.

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: Economic Theory and Complexity

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

Economic theory is based in a set of core assumptions about the behaviors and choices that human beings will make in the aggregate. Although everyday life and the reasons that people make choices are often far more complex than any given economic theory accounts for, every theory attempts to account for complexity as best as possible. **Pick one theoretical concept from your economics course and apply it to some event that involves a form of economic decision making you have witnessed at your JEP site.** This application of theory requires that you 1) define the theory or concept; 2) use a clear and well explained example from your JEP site to evaluate the theory; 3) analyze how the concept can explain the event or behavior you are describing; and finally, 4) think broadly about the complexity of people's everyday lives and analyze the limits of this concept. **What does the theory not take into account (i.e. what is bracketed)?** How does the theory attempt to account for complexity? **Finally, discuss any issues do you think might arise if economic theory does not account for complexity.**

ESSAY SIX: The “Value-Added” Controversy

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

For this essay you will use what you have learned about economics to evaluate a real example of the use of economic principles that affects the schools, teachers and students in LA: the presentation and analysis of data in the recent “Value-Added” controversy in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Even if you are familiar with the issue, read the *LA Times* “what is value added” FAQ, paying close attention to how the concept of “value” is defined and used:

http://projects.latimes.com/value-added/faq/#what_is_value_added

First, based on your knowledge of economics, what do you think are the merits and problems of using this particular analysis of test scores to evaluate teachers and schools? Make sure to use course concepts to explain your reasoning. **Second, based on your experience in the classroom, with students and teachers, what other data do you think are important to consider in evaluating teachers and schools?** That is, what nuances might be missed by value-added analysis? **And finally, come up with a solution that you think an economist hired as a consultant to evaluate this system would offer to better evaluate teachers.** Think about what you have seen in your time with JEP that might be missed by the value-added analysis and then explain how would your solution would address the problem of teacher evaluation. Make sure to use clear examples from your JEP experience in your response.

ESSAY SEVEN: Final Reflections on Service-Learning

(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.