

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

GEOG 257: Environment and Ethics
Professor McKenzie
PA: Lena Cronin
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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 weekly 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 geography 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. **Take Notes.** As soon as possible after leaving your site, take a few minutes to quickly write down a few notes about your experience that day—difficult moments, things that surprised you, highlights from teaching, etc. Taking 2-3 minutes to do this each week will save you time later and will provide the examples and observations you need to write an outstanding essay.
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 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.
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 WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

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. Please refer to the PA agreement you received in training for instructions regarding due dates and format requirements. *Note that some weeks require longer responses and are worth more points.*

ESSAY ONE - “Pre-reflection”

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

Please respond to one of the following prompts. The second set of questions is for returning volunteers 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.

EASSAY TWO: Assessing your Plan

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 2/21)

Consider the plan for the semester that you will be working on shortly with your mini-team. **What are the major themes do you plan to emphasize throughout the following weeks?** How are you going to put these themes together into an environmental issues 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 the environment that you want to develop with course. The most important themes are often the most difficult to address, so pick one major environmental 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 environmental theme; and 3) what varying strategies you will use over the course of the next few weeks to make this theme meaningful for your students.**

ESSAY THREE – The Team

(1 page, 10 points, due: 3/7)

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 Redevelopment

(2 pages, 20 points, due: 3/21)

For this essay you will walk the area around your JEP site and prepare an informal environmental redevelopment recommendation for the area around your JEP site. Before going to your site this week take a look at the “Green Alley Guide” for some inspiration as to the sort of transformations that are possible:

http://www.usc.edu/schools/sppd/csc/documents/mwd_brochure_june_30_09.pdf

Walking and observing is a simple method that allows you to take the time to reflect on the landscape and people around you and to see things 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.* Document your walking with detail, describe the landscape in a manner that will allow your PA understand what you see. (Hint: taking notes or photographs while you walk will make this much easier!) **Based on what you observe, what recommendations would you make to redevelop the environment in the area you walked?** Think broadly and imaginatively about reuse and redevelopment. And remember that many environment issues are not readily visible in landscape and have effects that cross neighborhood, regulatory jurisdiction and other boundaries. Take a look at these two fact sheets from USC's Program for Environment and Regional Equality for examples:

http://college.usc.edu/per/documents/California_ClimateGap_Fact_Sheet_FINAL.pdf

http://college.usc.edu/per/documents/mindingthegap_factsheet.pdf.

Finally, like any good researcher, discuss the limitations of your report – what do you not know? What would you need to know to meaningfully complete the report?

**If for any reason you are unable to walk to your site, just take a walk around the block of your JEP site. As always, be safe, and use common sense.*

ESSAY FIVE – From the Individual to the Structural

(2 pages, 20 points, due: 4/4)

Teaching about environmental issues means confronting some serious structural problems and inequalities in the environment that are very difficult to change and can feel daunting to address – for instance, 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 water crisis, 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 explode the issue:** What is the underlying environmental issue? 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 SIX – Town and Gown: Students and Community

(1.5-2 pages, 15 points, due: 4/11/2011)

Please choose one of the two options below:

Option 1 – Your role in the community

USC's master plan (<http://www.usc.edu/community/upcmasterplan/>) lays out USC's vision for developing the area surround the University Park Campus. Students are not mentioned in the majority of the plan save for the section on "community outreach:"

Throughout its 125-year history, USC has put high value on being a good neighbor—and on programs and projects that have a positive and visible impact on its neighborhoods. In his 1991 inaugural address, USC President Steven B. Sample spelled out his vision of the urban university, where traditional boundaries between university and community become blurred and permeable, and students have the opportunity to be active participants in the interchange.

As a result, USC has come together with local residents in one of the most ambitious social-outreach programs of any university in the nation. This culturally diverse, living laboratory of community collaboration reveals itself in more than 300 academic and professional programs that address educational, cultural, economic and safety issues in the local communities—and which earned USC the distinction of College of the Year 2000 from Time magazine and The Princeton Review.

<http://www.usc.edu/community/upcmasterplan/>
http://www.usc.edu/about/core_documents/role_and_mission_of_usc.htm,

Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), a non-profit agency in the Figueroa Corridor, presents a different opinion on the role of students in the community (full article: <http://bit.ly/fUd7tJ>):

"Students today aren't going to be here when any of the master plan is implemented, but these people in the community - they live here, and they're raising their kids here, and they want to retire here."

The UPC Master Plan is a general outline for redevelopment that would provide thousands of new beds in housing complexes, construct new academic buildings and lure high-end retailers and restaurants over the next two decades.

[SAJE staff] and others want to see a commitment to building affordable housing and funding real community improvement alongside plans for expansion and a promise that new retailers will serve both the school and the community.

Consider the contrasting perspectives above as you answer the following questions. **Do you think your participation in a program like JEP serves USC's greater goals?** If so, be specific about how these goals are served. If not, be specific about why not. **Next, do you think**

USC's goals serve the community? Again, make sure to explain why you think what you think. **Finally, based on your experiences in JEP, what roles and responsibilities do you think USC students should have as residents of the neighborhood and/or as students of the University?** 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. Use any experiences you have had at your JEP site and in the community (with JEP or in any other capacity) that have changed your understanding of your role as a college student and as a resident of this neighborhood and city in your answer. (If you live outside of the university community, reflect generally on the roles and responsibilities you think that college students do have and should have to their city and neighborhoods in which a university resides.) *(If you have not had any experiences that have shifted your thinking about the role and responsibilities of University students in regards to any of these issues, explain why you think you have never had any such experience.)*

If you've participated in JEP before: you may also include your thoughts on how your current JEP assignment differs, complements or reinforces what you learned from your previous JEP experience(s).

Option 2 - Benefits of Service-Learning for Students

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.

(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.

ESSAY SEVEN – Final Reflections

(3 pages, 25 points, due: 4/20/2011)

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. As noted in the assignment for Essay #6 (Option 2), 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.