

# JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

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HISTORY 200: American Experience  
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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 the “American Experience” 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: Designing a Research Question**

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

Imagine that you have been assigned to write a research paper for your professor based on your JEP experiences. Based on what you have learned in class and from your observations in the community thus far, **develop a hypothetical research question that asks students in History 200 to think about the history of the area around USC?** Your question should be relevant to both what you are learning in History 200 and what you are learning at your JEP site. What historical information would you like to know about people and places that constitute your site? How do you think that history would fit in with the “American Experience?” In addition, it should be a question you can imagine your professor assigning (tied to course content) *and* something that you find interesting, curious, upsetting, or otherwise engaging. **Write out your research question and provide some context or rationale for the question.** What about your experiences in the community makes you think that this is an important question to answer? How would the readings and lecture shed light on the issue? What additional information would you need in order to answer the question—that is, what sort of historical sources would help answer the question? How would you find these sources? 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 hypothetical research.

*Keep this research question in mind; we will return to later in the semester.*

### **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: Approaches to Teaching History**

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

In History 200 you are learning about a different “cast of characters” than is usually considered in “American History” courses in elementary and secondary school. That is, the historical events you are covering now may be the same, but the *explanations* of those events—e.g., who was involved and who mattered in the events—are likely to be different. There are always choices to make about whose perspective, whose lives, and whose struggles to represent in any given historical account—you made some of these choices when you developed your eight-week plan, and you make them every time you create a lesson plan. Reflect on these choices and how you are thinking about history. **Do you think of your mini-team as introducing a different way of thinking about history or do you see the work of the mini-team as reinforcing what students are already learning? How does your mini course address the diversity of actors that might be considered when teaching history?** Use an example from a lesson plan and how you think it was received to explain your response. **What you hope to impart to the students about history in general—i.e., aside from learning facts and dates, what do you want your students to learn about an *approach* to history. Finally, how do you think the students reacting to the sort of history you are trying to teach?**

## **ESSAY SIX: Research Findings**

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

Return to the research question you developed for assignment #2. Consider the readings you've been assigned in History 200. How do they supplement what a student like yourself might learn from research in the "field" (that is, from going out into the area around USC as a participant in JEP? Alternatively, find another source—for example, a scholarly journal article, an archive or a set of data from a credible source, etc.—that addresses the topic of your research question. (Ask your PA if you have any questions about what counts as a "credible" source.) **Select one particularly helpful source from either History 200 (or that you found elsewhere) and briefly summarize the parts that are relevant to your research question.**

That is, how does the article, data, etc. shed light on the issues at stake in your research question? Be sure to properly cite any and all sources you draw from in your essay. **Finally, if your fellow students were to answer your question, what do you imagine they would argue? Briefly sketch out (in a short thesis statement) what you think a good argument might sound like in response to your question *and* what you think a less successful or superficial argument might sound like.**

## **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.