

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

*Math Mentors
PA: Kin Yan Woo
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As a JEP student, you will be working as a Math Mentor with K-12 students. 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 Math course.

REFLECTIVE QUESTION 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 a few 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 page, 10 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.

ESSAY TWO: Goals

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

Describe the student(s) with whom you are working at your JEP site. For instance, what do you know about her/his/their social background and how do you know it? How do they come across to you (e.g., shy or confident) and how has this changed over the first few weeks? **Why do you think that your student was identified as someone who could benefit from math tutorial assistance?** How would you categorize your student's attitude towards math in general? **In the second half of your essay, outline your goals and expectations for the coming weeks—both for yourself and the student(s) you are mentoring.**

ESSAY THREE – Math in K-12 Education

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

Compare and contrast your experiences at your JEP site with your own K-12 education. How is the JEP school, its facilities, its approach to education and teaching, etc., similar to or different from what it was like at your school? Think back to any experiences you may have had learning about math in K-12 settings: how might you have responded to the classroom environment of your mentee(s) or to the mentoring techniques and strategies you are using? How would you categorize your students' responses to your strategies and techniques?

ESSAY FOUR – Mentoring Techniques

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

By now you've had some experience as a mentor and are likely starting to get a feel for what sort of mentoring techniques and strategies seem to work and not work. In order help you refine your approach and find new ideas for the coming weeks, it is time to share your successes and failures with the other Math Mentors.

Instructions: Go to Blackboard and click the “Discussion Board” link on the main menu. Click on the “JEP Discussion” link. Your PA has posted the discussion prompt in a thread entitled “*Mentoring Techniques and Strategies.*” You may click on this thread to read and reply to the prompt. Or you may create a new thread (see below).

Discussion Prompt: Think about how you developed the strategies you have used so far. Did any strategies end up working in surprising ways or work out differently than you planned? **Share with your fellow mentors one strategy or technique that worked really well with your students and one that could use improvement.** Make sure to clearly identify what you think made certain plans or activities successful or unsuccessful. **If there are any problems you've been having with a particular strategy, ask the other mentors for ideas and help.** And of course, when you see someone else's post and you have a suggestion, offer your ideas and help!

To review all of the postings, go back to the “Forum: JEP Discussion” page and click the box in the grey frame above all the list of threads to select all postings. Click “Collect” and a new page will open with each individual post listed by date. To respond to another student’s posting, click the orange “reply” button next to the thread. Enter your message (and upload any attachments, if relevant) and click Submit.

If you wish to take the discussion in another direction (while sticking with the general theme of the prompt), you may return to the “Forum: JEP Discussion” page and create a new thread. Give the thread a subject/title and enter your comments in the Message box. Click submit.

Grading: To receive full credit for your participation in this discussion, you must post a minimum of two comments, questions, suggestions, etc., in addition to your original posting that addresses the prompt. *Your original posting should be approximately one page in length and your comments should each be at least a substantial paragraph.*

Your PA will provide more details on the timeline for this discussion.

ESSAY FIVE – Mentee Progress

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

Now that you have spent some substantial time with your mentee(s), it is a good time to reflect on the progress you are making or would like to make. **Do you feel that the student(s) you are working with is starting to make good progress in terms of advancing her/his math skills?** To answer this question, compare your progress to the goals you set in essay two.

Take a look at the discussion from last week and review the techniques and strategies discussed by your fellow mentors. What do you think might work to help the student(s) you are working with? How do you think you can improve your mentoring skills in the remaining few weeks? **Make sure to use clear and detailed examples of progress (or struggles) in your response and to clearly explain why you think particular strategies will work.**

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.