

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

VOLUNTEERS

PA: Angel

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As a JEP student, your work in the community is similar to that of a social scientist who conducts “participant-observer” research. 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 (RQs) 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 - “Preflection”

(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 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: The Built Environment

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

Describe the social and physical context of your community service site. Try to be **as specific and descriptive as possible**. Pay attention to the **built environment**; specifically, provide details about the size, space, decor, noise level, etc. of the classroom (or meeting room), the building(s) making up the site, and its grounds. How do the aesthetics and overall feel of the site compare with the USC campus and/or other places you have worked or attended school? What are some of the main difference and similarities? The built environment might not always be designed or built for the uses taking place today—people remake place to fit their needs all the time. **Can you see any examples at your site where people are using something in a manner that appears to different than its intended use?** *If you do not see anything used in that manner, how well do you think the built environment meets the needs of the people using it?*

ONE-ON-ONE CHATS:

(Scheduled with your PA, 10/10-10/14)

This week you will be meeting one-on-one with your Program Assistant to talk about your experiences in JEP. In place of a full-length essay this week, we ask that you take a few minutes to **jot down any questions, comments or concerns that you have about your JEP assignment so far**. For example, what are your tasks at the site and how are you adjusting to your new role? How are you relating to the people at your site? Are you having any problems with any of the logistical aspects of your assignment (e.g., schedule, transportation, Blackboard access, etc.)? *You do not need to submit these notes on Blackboard; rather, take them with you to your one-on-one chat with your PA so you are prepared and remember to talk about any issues that need to be addressed.*

ESSAY THREE: Emotional Responses

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

Experiencing novel and diverse environments sometimes cause us to feel stress, discomfort, or even fear. In this sense, situations that challenge our existing beliefs or understanding of the world can often be an emotional experience. These emotions may lead to a variety of reactions: reflection (e.g., why am I feeling anxious?), confrontation (e.g., challenging someone on his/her conflicting experience or view), complacency (e.g., hoping for the best, waiting for the negative emotional reaction to change), or avoidance (e.g., not returning to a site or avoiding individuals who tend to cause these feelings of uneasiness). Try to recall a similar experience where diverse individuals, environments, or discussions surrounding diversity elicited some sort of emotional response in your experiences at your site. **Describe this experience: the context, the emotions experienced, the ways you experienced these emotions (e.g., physical reactions, how you acted, how felt). Then reflect on your reaction to these emotions and how this reaction may have encouraged or hindered learning or working towards other goals at your site.**

ESSAY FOUR: Environmental and Social Contexts

(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? **What did you find most interesting about the data for SPA 6?** Have you observed any examples of what you found interested in the report? (If you are placed at a site in a different area, take a look at this map to determine your Service Planning Area: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/spa/spamap.htm>)

How might the organization or school you are working with be affected by what you have learned or found interesting from the report? How can the school or organization you are working with address the issues in the report?

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: Race/ethnicity and Inequality in Schools

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

Go to the California Department of Education website and look up information about your JEP site:
<http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

(If you are placed at a non-LAUSD school site, look up your site on Google Maps and then “search nearby” for “schools.” Select the closest equivalent-level (elementary or secondary) school and look that up in the DOE database. If you are not placed at a school for JEP, please look up information about Vermont Elementary, a member of the USC Family of Schools.)

- For box #1 (“Level”) select “school”
- For box #2 select “create your own report” at the bottom of the drop down list
- Click the “submit” button
- Check the boxes for the data elements listed in the table below, including race/ethnicity, pupil-teacher ratio, 4-year drop-out rate, free/reduced lunch, and any other variables that interest you, such as class size or internet access.
- Scroll to the bottom of the page and make sure that the correct school is highlighted in the Select Agency box
- Click “Submit”

(Note that not all data points are available for all school for all years. Also, you can change the year to see change over time and to see if data is available for different years)

Look at the information provided about the school and compare it to the data in the following table:

State of California (race/ethnicity data for general population ¹ ; school data for state student population ²) 2009-10 data	%	Los Angeles County (race/ethnicity data for general population ¹ ; school data for state student population ²) 2009-10 data	%	Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) (All data for LAUSD student population ²) 2009-10 data	%
African Am	6.2	African Am	8.7	African Am (non-Hispanic)	10.3
American Indian	1.0	American Indian	0.7	American Indian (non-Hispanic)	0.3
Asian	13.0	Asian	13.7	Asian (non-Hispanic)	5.5
Latino (any race)	37.6	Latino (any race)	47.7	Latino	73.6
Pacific Islander	0.4	Pacific Islander	0.3	Pacific Islander (non-Hispanic)	0.3
White	57.6	White	50.3	White (non-Hispanic)	8.9
Other	17.0	Other	21.8		
Multi-racial or No Response	4.9	Multi or No Response	4.5	Multi or No Response	1.1
Pupil : Teacher ratio	21:3	Pupil : Teacher ratio	21:1	Pupil : Teacher ratio	20.6
4 Year Drop out rate (9 th -12 th grades, %)	21.5	4 Year Drop out rate (9 th -12 th grades, %)	24.3	4 Year Drop out rate (9 th -12 th grades, %)	29.6
% students receiving free or reduced price meals (indicator of poverty rates)	55.9	% students receiving free or reduced price meals (indicator of poverty rates)	65.5	% students receiving free or reduced price meals (indicator of poverty rates)	76.9

Sources: 1: 2010 US Census, 2: California Department of Education

Note that the LAUSD data reports race and ethnicity independently of one another (i.e., it reports “Latinos” along with non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic African Americans, etc.), while the Census reports race and ethnicity together (i.e., it reports the % of white-Latinos, Black- Latinos, etc., as well as a multiracial “Latino” category. Thus, the Census totals are >100%. The large “Other” category for the Census likely includes many Latinos who

do not identify with a particular racial category).

While not entirely comparable, the data in the table above nevertheless suggest vast differences in the demographics of the Los Angeles County public school population and the state and county populations in general. **Compare and contrast these data with those you collected for your school site.** (Please indicate the school's name and location.) How are they similar and different? What interests or surprises you about the data? **What do the data suggest about racial and ethnic inequality in the Los Angeles County public school system and/or your school site?**

ESSAY SIX: A Meaningful Event

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

Describe a meaningful event or series of events (positive or negative) in which you were involved at your site, and go into detail describing the who, what, where, when, why, and how. Why does this event stand out as particularly important or meaningful to you? How has it affected your relationship to others at the site, your role there, and/or your perspective about your JEP assignment?

ESSAY SEVEN:

(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.