

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

*Supporting Foster Youth in Transition to Adulthood (SYFTA) Volunteers
Youth & Family Agencies Program
PAs: Kelly & Maya
FALL 2011*

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: Living Advantage and JEP

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

In the summer of 2011, Foshay Learning Center partnered with JEP and the non-profit organization, Living Advantage (www.livingadvantageinc.org) to pair USC student-mentors with Foshay students who have been taken into protective custody by the child welfare (a.k.a., foster care) system or who are at risk of out-of-home placement. You are one of those mentors. Explore Living Advantage's website to learn about this unique organization. **Briefly describe the agency's mission and the services it provides.** Now explore the JEP website (www.usc.edu/jep) to find out more about JEP's mission and programs. **How does JEP's mission complement the work of Living Advantage (and vice versa)? How do you think your work with foster youth will further the missions of both Living Advantage and JEP?**

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: Your JEP Mentee(s)

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

Describe your initial experiences at your JEP assignment. What are your most vivid impressions of the first few weeks? **What have you learned about the youth with whom you are working?** What are the student(s)' goals—short-term, long-term, regarding education, work, family, etc.—and what do they think they need to accomplish these goals? What noteworthy behavioral observations have you made? **How do your initial visits**

to your JEP site compare and contrast with your expectations (e.g., from Essay #1)?

NOTE: Please be respectful of individuals' privacy. If those with whom you are working have not offered personal information about their lives, do not probe for details. If you can't answer the specific questions in this week's assignment, focus your response on what you've learned in general about the children and families associated with your site, either from the staff at the site or your research for Essay #2.

ESSAY FOUR: The Child Welfare System

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

Take a look at this report, which provides national data on foster care for 2009:

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/foster.cfm>. In addition, and for a local comparison, review this "fact sheet" about child welfare services in 2010 from the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Service (DCFS): http://www.lacdcfs.org/aboutus/fact_sheet/DRS/December2010/CY_2010_Fact_Sheet.htm.

Compare and contrast the local child welfare system with national trends. For example, what percentage of children in local and national child welfare systems are in out-of-home placements? How do these placements vary at the local and national level (e.g., are foster children placed primarily in relative care, non-relative foster homes, adoptive homes, etc.)? What are the demographic characteristics of foster youth in Los Angeles and nationally? Are they proportionate to the general population? **What else strikes you about these data and their implications for foster youth?** What are some of the unique challenges facing children in the local community?

Note: If you are unfamiliar with any of the terms in the reports (e.g., "family maintenance," "permanent placement," etc.), please look them up in the DCFS Glossary:

<http://dcfs.co.la.ca.us/Policy/Hndbook%20CWS/1300/GLOSSARYv0109.doc>. In addition, if you wish to compare the demographic characteristics of foster youth with the general population, the latter data can be found on the US Census Bureau's website (www.census.gov).

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. Yet because you work independently, you rarely have the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of other SFYTA volunteers. 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: Environmental and Social Contexts

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

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 do these data inform your work with youth in the SFYTA program?** How might the environmental and social context of SPA 6 help you understand the experiences of foster youth living in the area? How can Living Advantage work to address the issues in the report?

ESSAY SIX: Mentoring Foster Youth

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

Think critically about your role as a mentor and the relationship you have developed with your mentee over the course of the semester. What went well and not so well in your mentoring relationship? What are the benefits and limitations of short-term mentoring? What additional resources might your mentee need after your JEP assignment ends? **How could the JEP-Living Advantage partnership be improved in the future for the benefit of foster youth and JEP students?** What does Living Advantage as an organization have to offer its volunteers, and in particular USC students?

ESSAY SEVEN: Final Reflections

(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.