The Joint Educational Project

JEP: At the Heart of Dornsife College

BY TAMMARA ANDERSON, Executive Director

“At every renowned institution of higher education, the foundational work of inquiry and discovery takes place within this community, within the disciplines of the humanities, social sciences and sciences. We (the Dornsife College) are the heart of the university.”

Dean Howard Gillman

Within the heart of the Dornsife College, at the intersection of Trousdale and 34th Street stands an old Victorian house where some 2000 USC students circulate each year to learn through a combination of community service, academic inquiry and discovery. It is a place where it is not unusual to see groups of students engaged in spirited discussions about inequality (in education or health care), race, class, gender and poverty based on their experiences in the community. This House at the heart of the Dornsife College is the home of the Joint Educational Project, fondly known as JEP.

Originally, our program was designed primarily to provide badly needed resources to our local schools. As a consequence, the program was more successful at raising and addressing issues of social justice than at educating university students. The emphasis was on recruiting large numbers of students into the program so that we could place large numbers of “helpers” in the community.

Today, JEP offers what we refer to as a “full-service” service-learning program. We inform faculty of involvement opportunities and offer technical assistance to professors new to the service-learning pedagogy. JEP staff members recruit, train, and place, student participants. We develop weekly thought questions, read weekly reflection papers, and evaluate students at the conclusion of the semester. In addition, our staff maintains collaborative relationships with over 50 community partner sites including (elementary/secondary schools, hospitals/clinics, and social service agencies).

For almost 40 years, more than 70,000 students have participated in community assignments. They have come from disciplines across Dornsife to give assistance. They are mentors/tutors, members of teaching teams, health care assistants, translators, and social service providers contributing thousands of hours of service each year.

For many students, the JEP experience is their first entrée into an urban public school, a busy emergency room in one of the largest hospitals in Los Angeles, or a shelter for battered women and their children. It might be the first time they actually have a conversation with a person of a different socio-economic, racial or ethnic background. For some, the experience is transformative, offering them the opportunity to question stereotypes, explore possible careers, make professional contacts, and contribute to society.

Each semester, over 100 Dornsife faculty work with JEP staff to tailor a community experience for their students that parallel the course(s) they are teaching. Through their partnership with JEP, they are encouraging their students to take their education beyond the classroom to gain a deeper, richer knowledge of the discipline. A wonderful example of this is our partnership with Prof. Car-
men Silva-Corvalan (SPAN 413 - Social & Geographic Varieties of Spanish), Prof. Jody Vallejo (SO CI 155 Immigrant America) and Prof. Christine Jun (SO CI 355 Immigrants in the US) whose students we place at the Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), a non-profit founded in 1983 by a group of Salvadoran refugees who were seeking to obtain legal citizenship status for the thousands of Central Americans fleeing disastrous civil wars. Students from these courses help individuals to prepare for their citizenship exam by going over United States geography and history and assisting them in mock interviews. They report in their weekly reflections that this is a powerful experience. One student commented, “Seeing first-hand what the people go through to become citizens is truly eye-opening. I’m an American and I didn’t even know some of the questions on the citizenship examination.”

Clearly, students in Dornsife are being prepared for life and lifelong learning through their work with renowned faculty, academic departments, research centers and institutes. Through their participation in JEP, students explore the connections between the academy and the “real world.” Fundamentally, we believe our work at JEP contributes centrally to the goals of a liberal arts education and to the mission of USC: to develop “human beings and society as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit” – and, we would add, the “heart.”

DO YOU KNOW ANY STUDENTS WHO DESERVE TO BE RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR SERVICE?

THE EXTRAORDINARY COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD
A $1,000 cash award is provided to the graduating senior who offers outstanding service to the community.

THE GRACE FORD SALVATORI COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD
This $2,500 scholarship is given to up to six sophomores or juniors with majors in Dornsife College. It is based upon community service, academic performance, need, and civic leadership.

THE DESIREE BENSON AWARD
Two $750 scholarships are given to workstudy students who have performed outstanding community service.

For more information please go to: http://sait.usc.edu/volunteer/scholarships-and-awards.aspx
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

--- **November 7 - December 2**
JEP Planning with Professors for next semester’s placements.

--- **November 18, 2:30-5:30pm**
The Young Scientist Program Health and Fitness Studio at Weemes Elementary.
Contact nafari@usc.edu for more information.

--- **December 1, 5:30-8:00pm**
Film screening of *First Generation*, a new documentary about first generation college students. For more information see below.

--- **April 11-13, 2012**
The Continuums of Service conference, “Creating the New Vision for Higher Education” hosted in Seattle, WA by the Western Regional Campus Compact.

SCREENING AT USC

**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1st**
5:30-8:30pm
SLH 200

The screening will be followed by a Q&A with Filmmakers Adam and Jaye Fenderson.

Celebrate with high school seniors in USC’s Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI) Program as they submit their college essays!

Light refreshments will be provided.

For more information & to RSVP, call 213.740.1837.

Sponsored by NAI & JEP.
JEP HAS MOVED TO ‘THE LOT’ DURING RENOVATIONS. WE HOPE TO BE BACK IN THE JEP HOUSE BY SUMMER 2012.

OUR NEW LOCATION IS 925 W. DOWNEY WAY
COME SEE US!