Aligning Technology with Service-Learning Pedagogy

JEP team reaches the finals of the 2012 Digital Media and Learning Competition

By Susan C. Harris, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Research & Academic Affairs

A team representing JEP participated in the 4th annual Digital Media and Learning (DML) competition in San Francisco in February. Sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation and Mozilla, and administered by the Humanities, Arts, Science and Technology Advanced Collaborative (HASTAC) at UC Irvine, the competition received hundreds of proposals from public and private institutions, ranging from museums, to corporations, to colleges and universities. The purpose of the competition was to support the development of “digital badge systems”—a 21st century adaptation of the concept underlying Boy Scout and Girl Scout badges, where children earn insignia that represent the development of knowledge or a particular skill.

The DML competition aimed to support institutions creating badge systems that incentivize and reward the development of “lifelong learning” skills, such as critical thinking, leadership and teamwork, or knowledge acquired outside of traditional academic contexts, such as on the job or in the community. Because they are digital, badges not only provide a visual representation of a particular skill, they can also communicate information about the specific criteria or steps taken to earn the badge. Badge earners can use Mozilla’s “Open Badge Infrastructure” to export the digital icons from the >>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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institution that granted the badge to an electronic resume, a Facebook or LinkedIn account, or anywhere else they want to display their achievements online.

The DML competition’s goals closely correspond with those underlying service-learning pedagogy, which intentionally creates contexts for learning outside of the classroom and cultivates many “lifelong learning” skills, such as the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively and to work in diverse social settings. However, since JEP functions primarily as a supplement to existing courses, which typically offer participation in JEP as an extra credit opportunity, students’ learning outcomes are generally invisible and unacknowledged outside of our program. JEP’s proposed badge system would provide a lasting record of a student’s successful participation in JEP, as well as acknowledge the many “hard” and “soft” skills developed over the course of a single semester, or multiple semesters and service-learning experiences.

JEP’s DML proposal progressed through three stages of the competition to the finals. While ultimately not among the funded projects, we are still planning to move forward with the creation of a badge system, which will be piloted this summer. More information about the new system—including the specific badges and criteria for earning them—will be available next fall.

Comments? Suggestions? Please contact Susan Harris at scharris@usc.edu or 213-740-1830.

On December 1, 2011, JEP and USC’s Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI) co-hosted an event to mark the conclusion of the Freshman Seminar, “(W)rites of Passage,” taught by JEP Associate Director, Susan Harris.

The course explored the rites of passage that mark the transition from high school to college, focusing in particular on the college admissions process. Nine first-year students served as writing-mentors for college-bound seniors from Foshay Learning Center, helping them with their college applications and with writing the dreaded college essay.

The event included a screening of the documentary, First Generation, which traces the experiences of four first-generation college students. December 1st was also the deadline for NAI students to submit their college applications to USC, so the event served as a celebration of this major milestone as well. For more information about the event, please visit http://dornsife.usc.edu/news/stories/1078/tears-of-joy

Freshman Seminar Sparks ‘Tears of Joy!’

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JUNE 23-24 - NORTH ANDOVER, MA
SUMMER RESEARCH INSTITUTE ON THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION.
FOR MORE INFORMATION: WWW.MERRIMACK.EDU

SEPTEMBER 23-25 - BALTIMORE
THE 12TH ANNUAL IARSLCE CONFERENCE
THEME: CONNECTED KNOWING.
FOR MORE INFORMATION: WWW.RESEARCHSLCE.ORG
“IR Explore” Brings International Focus to Local Schools

The student-created program receives rave reviews its first semester

BY TRAVIS GLYNN, JEP Program Assistant

“By teaching students the importance of Los Angeles in international relations at a young age, we are giving them the tools to be the leaders of tomorrow.”

– Chelsea Massoud, IR Explore Volunteer

This semester I launched the “IR Explore” program through JEP. IR Explore is designed to challenge both USC and LA community students to think about Los Angeles through a global lens. JEP volunteers introduce LA students to topics from diplomacy to migration and current events. However, the key mission is to allow students to look at a global issue and explore how Los Angeles fits into the picture. As a team, the USC and community students develop a research question and work throughout the semester to explore Los Angeles as a global city.

As an international relations major myself, I have grown to appreciate the role Los Angeles plays in international relations. Thus, I wanted to develop a program that would challenge LA students to think about their city in the larger picture while also challenging USC students to apply their international relations studies to their current environment. Another key component to “IR Explore” is for volunteers to engage LA students in discussions on current events. Every lesson throughout the semester involves a current event on politics, economics, US-foreign relations, modern science, or education. Students are asked to think critically and identify the who, what, where, when, and why of each event. Through engaging students in current events now, “IR Explore” prepares both USC and LA students to be informed, critical thinkers in the future.

The program was placed in two different area schools this semester, and it was an overwhelming success in both cases. One team, teaching third graders at Magnolia Avenue School, focused on immigration and its impact on the cultural diversity of Los Angeles.

Volunteer Chelsea Massoud reports, “I have been given the opportunity to educate students about important components of international relations, such as culture, tolerance, and conflict management, when they normally would not be exposed to these topics in depth until middle or high school”. After teaching the third graders about tolerance, culture, and diversity, the team led discussions and activities concerning many of the cultures that make up Los Angeles; learning commonly used Arabic phrases during Middle Eastern culture week and different Chinese customs during Asia week, Chelsea’s students are creating “culture journals” which, when completed, will reflect lessons learned on the cultural diversity of Los Angeles.

In addition to creating a project throughout the semester, every week students discuss current events. Julia Bonestroo, a current volunteer at Richard Merkin Middle School, explains, “I think one of the most important aspects of the IR Explore program is the current event component. Every week our 8th graders are excited to discuss what is happening around the world. After identifying the important issues in an event, students are always eager to talk about their thoughts. It is truly amazing what they remember from week to week.” Through critically analyzing different current events students are learning how to be informed thinkers and responsible citizens.

The IR Explore program has proven a success this semester. I am excited to see the program grow in the future and to see how it impacts how both USC and LA students come to view Los Angeles.

CONGRATULATIONS TO TRAVIS FOR BECOMING A TRUMAN SCHOLAR!

THIS PRESTIGIOUS AWARD RECOGNIZES COLLEGE JUNIORS WITH EXCEPTIONAL LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL WHO ARE COMMITTED TO CAREERS IN PUBLIC SERVICE.

TRAVIS IS ONLY THE 17TH TROJAN TO RECEIVE THIS SCHOLARSHIP IN THE 34 YEAR HISTORY OF THE AWARD!

WE ARE PROUD TO CALL HIM ONE OF OUR OWN!
Welcome to My World

International students share their customs and cultures with local classrooms

By Tina Koneazny, Associate Director, Administration & Educational Outreach

For the tenth year in a row, USC has been recognized for having the largest number of international students enrolled of any college or university in the United States. With the support of the university’s American Language Institute and the Office of International Students, JEP piloted four-week mini courses that gave some of our international students the opportunity to share elements of their home countries with children living in our urban neighborhood. This program recognizes the great cultural richness on our campus and takes advantage of the wealth of various experiences and perspectives held by our diverse student population.

These new ‘Multi-Cultural Mini Courses’ grouped teams of three to five students from various countries as team members. Teams worked together to create four lessons that introduced K-12 students to the language, geography and landscape, notable landmarks and people, food and music, traditions and holidays, and other unique aspects of their countries. Our first cohort of these Multi-Cultural minis consisted of four teams that were sent out into neighborhood schools with great success. Not only were the teams well received, but the USC students greatly enjoyed their experiences and many voiced their recommendation to extend the four-week minis to the typical eight-week length of our JEP mini course assignments.

USC student, Angela Lu, reflected on her experiences at Adams Middle School: “I thought the JEP experience was amazing! It was so wonderful teaching the kids about my culture and seeing them embrace it for the first time. It was a very fulfilling period for myself as well because I got to understand my culture better and appreciate it even more. I’m really thankful for the opportunity to get involved in the multi-cultural minis. If I could, I would do it every semester!”

Ms. Nigro, a teacher at Adams Middle School, was impressed by the three-person mini team assigned to her classroom, stating that they often stayed longer than the one hour that they were actually scheduled each Friday. They introduced students to Mandarin vocabulary, engaged them in a Chinese lantern activity, and invited a friend to join them as a guest speaker to teach the sixth and seventh graders the important lessons of discipline and respect learned through the art of Kung Fu. Ms. Nigro shares, “This has been an incredible experience for the students to learn about Chinese culture. I’m sure this will forever enhance their views about China and Malaysia!”
THE JOINT EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

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Sharing the Wonders of Science

Working to meet the needs of local educators by providing instruction in science & math

BY TINA KONEAZNY, Associate Director, Administration & Educational Outreach

For 40 years, JEP has been committed to meeting the needs of its partner schools and agencies and, at the same time, to offering our university students meaningful learning opportunities through service-learning assignments. This article highlights one of our most recent examples of this.

Back in 2005, JEP surveyed principals in USC’s Family of Schools about the amount of science education in their schools and found that there was much concern. Principals worried about students’ readiness for state fifth grade science testing, teachers’ lack of preparation in math and science instruction, the limited time provided for math and science instruction, and the lack of integration of math and science into language arts.

With funding from the Weingart Foundation in 2006, we designed the Young Scientist Program (YSP) in an effort to address these issues. YSP was first introduced at Weemes Elementary School, and it is now thriving at the original five of USC’s Family of Schools. The program places undergraduate students studying the sciences as Teaching Assistants at the schools presenting hands-on, standards-based labs to fourth and fifth grade classrooms in order to help prepare students for the state mandated standardized science test given to all fifth grade students. Based on the success of YSP and the continued need for increased math and science support to our schools, we began thinking about ways to create a USC Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) pathway for K-12 that would build a solid foundation in math and the science for our neighborhood students as they matriculate from elementary to high school, and inspire them to pursue STEM careers.

Looking beyond our neighborhood, there is a nation-wide need for K-12 students today to have a solid foundation in STEM areas in order to be prepared to live and work in the 21st century. According to a recent article posted on the White House blog, The United States is falling behind our foreign competitors in STEM subjects. According to one study, American 15-year-olds rank 21st in science and 25th in math compared to other countries.

The U.S. Department of Labor workforce projections for 2014 show that 15 of the 20 fastest growing occupations require significant science or mathematics training, and according to the U.S. Department of Education, the US ranks 20th world-wide in terms of the number of graduate degrees awarded in engineering, computer science, and mathematics.

This past year, in an effort to engage children in greater STEM instruction at an early age, we implemented a new afterschool curriculum, WonderKids, aimed at first through third grade students. This program introduces young children to careers in the sciences. Selected science professions are studied in one-hour blocks, two days a week during the regular USC ReadersPlus programming (which includes homework help and other educational enrichment activities). A total of four hours of focus is dedicated to each STEM profession.

Day one of each focus block draws and builds upon children’s background knowledge about a particular “science person” through reading and discussion of children’s literature about the topic.

Days two and three present children with engaging hands-on lessons that allow them to gain a better understanding of what each particular scientist does in his/her work. Day four of each block consists of a visit by a guest scientist who presents students with additional insight and hands-on activities and experi-

PHOTO CREDIT: USC READERSPLUS

Student trying on scuba gear during Marine Biologist, Terri Bidle’s, guest visit.

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enedences related to their real work in the field.

I was fortunate to have DJ Kast assist me in designing the program curriculum. DJ received her BS in Biological Sciences and her MS in Marine Environmental Biology here at USC, and is now program assistant for the USC QuickScience program – a marine biology competition for middle and high school students. Not only has DJ volunteered her time to work on the curriculum, she has also scheduled our program guest scientists and visited our schools as a guest speaker herself. Asked why she dedicates her time to WonderKids, DJ states, “I think that the earlier kids are exposed to science and shown how fun it can be, the more we can inspire the next generation of scientists. I love that the first grade students are able to meet people in different fields to see what it’s like to be a deep sea scientist, or an environmental scientist. I love science and I love teaching science, and this program addresses both my passions, but it also provides a vital science program in lieu of education budget cuts.”

Susan Harris, JEP’s Associate Director for Research & Academic Affairs, co-authored a chapter in the book Service-Learning in Design and Planning: Educating at the Boundaries.

This collection of case studies explores the current practice of service-learning in architecture, landscape design, and urban planning, radically revising the standard protocol for university-initiated design and planning projects in the community. Susan’s chapter, co-authored with Clara Irazábal (former USC Price professor who is now at Columbia) was entitled, “Learning to Reflect and Evaluate Transforming Subjectivities: Service that Expands Learning in Urban Planning”.

Available for purchase at amazon.com

GOOD BYE JAMESON!

It is with great sadness and excitement that our JEP family prepares to say goodbye to Jameson Yu. For 15 years Jameson has been our technology go-to guy, handyman, and the person we turn to when we need help in answering students’ questions. He truly is a jack-of-all-trades whose shoes will be impossible to fill. Though we will certainly miss him, we are excited for him to begin this next stage in his life.

This summer Jameson will marry another past-JEP staff member, Dr. Alice Villasenor, (we partnered more than just students with the community! ) and move to Buffalo, New York to be with his new wife.

We have no doubt that the future holds great things for Jameson and we look forward to hearing all about it.

Best of luck and tons of love,

The JEP Staff

Jameson & Alice soon after getting engaged in England, April 2011
JEP and MAT: A New Collaboration

The School of Education's MAT students provide much needed data for USC ReadersPlus

BY TINA KONEAZNY, Associate Director, Administration & Educational Outreach

I came to JEP in 1997 to direct USC’s version of the America Reads/America Counts work-study program initiated by President Clinton. Over the nearly 15 years of the program’s existence, over 1500 work-study students have been trained and placed to work in our neighborhood schools for at least eight hours each week, offering some 540,000 hours of individualized reading and math assistance to thousands of students in the closest public schools in the neighborhood surrounding the University Park campus. While principals and teachers praise the program for helping children improve their academic skills, the issue of student assessment and program evaluation has been a challenge for our staff.

For the past several years, USC ReadersPlus reading and math tutors have been trained to administer both reading and math assessments to their students. The assessment tools have been selected and analyzed by program administrative staff (one professional staff member and two graduate students) but with often limited or incomplete results. Two of the greatest challenges have been 1) a lack of confidence on the part of tutors in assessment implementation due to limited knowledge and practice with the assessment tools as non-professionals, and 2) an increased workload placed on the graduate students in managing data collection and analysis.

Reflecting on our struggles and limitations in terms of program evaluation, we came to the conclusion that the strengths of our program ultimately lie in the assistance that our tutors provide to children in our schools, and the support our graduate students provide to our tutors. We needed to find other resources to help us design and implement effective math and reading assessments. So last year I reached out to Professor Eugenia Mora-Flores, who teaches in the Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) Program in the Rossier School of Education. Through some very fruitful discussions we created an opportunity for MAT students to gain service-learning experience in which they apply methods learned in their USC courses to real life program evaluation. Literacy assessment tools presented through EDUC 504 - Foundations of Literacy Development and Instruction course are implemented by USC ReadersPlus in pre- and post-testing sessions with their students, and MAT multiple subject candidates enrolled in the course assess and analyze the data retrieved. With one semester completed, we found that MAT students were provided rich learning experiences while allowing our student staff — undergraduate and graduate — to focus their time and attention on the tutoring sessions, maximizing the children's academic growth and self-confidence.

This spring, Professor Eugenia Mora-Flores and I presented a session entitled “Designing Authentic Service-learning Opportunities: A Partnership Between Two University Departments” at Campus Compact’s annual Continuums of Service conference in Seattle, Washington. This session showcased our cross-department collaboration and the anticipated outcomes for each department. The data and analyses gathered by the MAT students provided concrete and reliable program evaluation information for JEP to share with a variety of stakeholders, including reading tutors (to help guide future lessons); classroom teachers (to provide greater insight into student learning); school principals (from all seven partner schools); and colleagues across campus serving the same population of students as a means (to share program information and best practices).

According to Dr. Mora-Flores, “There is no greater learning opportunity than to be able to see theory come to life in the field. The MAT students get an opportunity to learn from children by reviewing and analyzing their reading development. They learn to make informed instructional decisions based on student data. They prepare instructional plans that are catered to meet the needs of individual students. This experience prepares them for the work of a teacher in the field. They take the learning from our collaboration with JEP and apply it to their field-based experiences as they progress through our program. The strong foundation set by our collaboration with JEP helps the MAT prepare great teachers for all children.”
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