Community Service — Making a Lasting Impression on Alumni

BY TAMMARA ANDERSON, Executive Director

“The USC Alumni Association is proud to announce that our 2013 Alumni Attitude Study affirms that community service, both as an activity as a student and as a lifelong obligation after graduation, endures as one of the most celebrated values and priorities in the lives of Trojan alumni. As a leader in community service at USC over the past four decades, the Joint Educational Project has not only enhanced the USC student experience and bettered the community around campus, but has also helped to enrich the worldwide impact of the Trojan Family as our alumni carry these values forward and give back to society on a local, national and global scale.”

– Patrick Auerbach, Associate Senior Vice President, Alumni Relations

When Patrick Auerbach shared the 2013 Alumni Attitude Study with me, I was thrilled that his findings confirm what we have seen with the qualitative and quantitative data collected in our JEP student and alumni surveys over the past decade: that service learning has meaningful, long-term impact not only on the student volunteers, but also in the communities they serve. The values and experiences gained by our students have continued to guide our alumni throughout their lives, with many choosing a career path strongly tied to community involvement, such as teaching or social work, law or medicine.

Last fall, Vice Dean George Sanchez completed “Joint Educational Project: Changing Lives and Transforming Community” in which he documented the life of JEP from 1972 to present, capturing the evolution of our program – a truly extraordinary gift! The book includes compelling personal stories from alumni across the last four decades who recount les-

>>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 3
• The Boeing Project Year 2
PAGE 4
• Talking about Math
PAGE 5
• Update on JEP’s 40th Anniversary Gala
PAGE 6
• JEP and Occupational Therapy
PAGE 7
• JEP Graduating Student Staff
• LA Times Festival of Books Photos

JEP PROFESSIONAL STAFF

Tammara Anderson, Executive Director
Susan Harris, Associate Director
Research and Academic Affairs
Tina Koneazny, Associate Director
Administration & Educational Outreach
Brenda Pesante, Director of Community Partnerships

Jake Peters, Assistant Director
Research and Academic Affairs
Emma Rendon, Office Manager
Jacqueline Whitley, Director of Non-Profit Partnerships
sons learned and friendships established through their JEP experiences. There is a clear correlation between the narratives, illustrating that beyond majors or hometowns, community service allows students to understand and experience the importance of giving back to the community, learning about diversity, and witnessing first-hand the myriad of social issues affecting our society.

What was most striking to me was that despite their current positions—a politician, teacher, professional athlete, college dean, professor, or investment banker—each noted how their JEP experience continues to be present in their lives. It didn’t matter whether they participated 2 years ago or 40 years ago. JEP alumni were emphatic about how memories and experiences of their assignment continue to influence their everyday lives.

So, it is no wonder that the USC Service Day has become such a successful event within the Trojan Family. This year, some 2,500 alumni participated in about 80 service projects! Members of the USC Black Alumni Association partnered with JEP staff to work on a project with Richard Merkin Middle School, one of our partner sites. JEP alums Patrice Theard (’82) and Megan Pearson (’02), with assistance from Jeremy Wingerter (Dornsife Alumni Relations), coordinated this service project and BAA members worked side-by-side with students in Merkin Student Government to install recycling bins in the school, upgrade gardens, and organize the school’s library. It was a fantastic day ending with the alums sharing personal stories about their educational journeys and the youth asking questions and being inspired about higher education.

JEP operates on the principle that to truly create impactful change, we must serve with the understanding that we do not act alone, but are part of a larger community and society. JEP and USC Service Days allow that relationship and sense of place to be experienced. The opportunity to discover the intersection of coursework and its meaning and impact in the real world creates experiences that not only expand students’ education but also their concept of what it means to be a member of a community and meaningfully contribute to society.

In one of our surveys, an alum stated “The JEP experience made me realize that teaching was the profession I needed to do so that I can help enrich students’ lives. I put my education to use and it exposed me to things that I normally would not have seen or done. It was more meaningful than most of my other activities because of the direct and hopefully lasting impact it had on the community and the direct and lasting impact it has on me personally.” It is this marriage of education, impact, and community that makes the JEP experience so invaluable to both students, alumni, and our partners.

Serve On!
The Boeing Project - Year 2

New staff brings renewed focus on water and sustainability initiatives to local teachers

By Erica Seubert, Boeing Project Manager

A two year STEM education initiative sponsored by The Boeing Company and focused on water and sustainability began in the fall of 2012. The program offers 4th and 5th grade teachers with training in these topics through a series of workshops connecting them with current research being performed at USC, providing related lesson plans, and installing water education centers at each of the five USC partner schools. The focus for the 2013-2014 school year has been to continue the teacher trainings with on-site workshops and providing lesson plans centered around the water education systems installed at each school.

I am a recent USC graduate and have been managing this project for JEP since January, along with current USC graduate student Markeith Royster. While completing my PhD, I was a member of the Marine Biology and Biological Oceanography section of the Biological Sciences Department doing research focused on harmful algal bloom ecology in Southern California, including their impact on desalination plants and the influence of sewage treatment plant discharges on bloom formation. Markeith is currently studying Education Psychology while pursuing his Doctorate of Education at the Rossier School of Education. He has a background in K-12 education and he is currently studying effective strategies that can be utilized to increase student engagement and motivation. Thus far, we have held several workshops at the participating schools, collecting feedback from teachers on how the water curriculum guide provided in 2013 has been incorporated into their classrooms and engaging the teachers in conversation about what they would like integrated into the 2014 curriculum guide currently in development. These workshops have been attended by kindergarten through 5th grade teachers to encourage use of the water systems by the entire elementary school and to spread enthusiasm about water and sustainability.

The water systems at each school are unique, but each are intended to be teaching tools around important water topics. The installation at 32nd Street School showcases water capture, evaporation, condensation, precipitation, motion, gravity and energy transfer with water flowing down bamboo ramps and “raining” into a galvanized trough. At Foshay Learning Center, energy transfer, gravity, momentum and surface tension are modeled with a series of water wheels, troughs and copper leaves, onto which the water falls. The Vermont Avenue and Norwood Elementary installations feature rain barrel planters that collect rainwater via rain chains connected to existing downspouts and use canvas ropes to carry the collected water up to the soil to where native plants grow. Students use these systems to learn about rainwater, gardening, capillary action, gravity and soil properties. This year, painted aluminum panels featuring a diagram of the water cycle and a map of the Los Angeles River watershed were added to the Vermont and Norwood installations to teach students about the water cycle and their connection to the health of local aquatic habitats. Additional panels will be installed at Lenicia B. Weemes Elementary with a display of artificial plants surrounding each panel.

Water and sustainability should be of immediate concern to all Los Angeles residents. Empowering elementary schools teachers with knowledge about water and sustainability topics will allow them to educate our youth for years to come, long after this program has ended. Hopefully these youth will be inspired to incorporate sustainable water practices into their daily lives and to encourage their family members to follow suit.
Talking About Math

Students’ and Professors’ Thoughts on Learning and Teaching Math

BY JAKE PETERS, Assistant Director Research and Academic Affairs

JEP has happily experienced an increase in the number of students applying to be Math Mentors in recent semesters—this spring devoting three undergraduate Program Assistants to work with over 90 students. Many students are repeat mentors, such as [Laura] who was returning to Weemes Elementary School. In her pre-reflection essay she wrote:

“I am excited to interact with a new group of students and see the difference between a kindergarten and fourth grade student (who I had last semester). When I first came to this area, I had heard nothing, but soon after being here, everyone (especially the parents) seemed to be concerned about the safety of the neighborhood … I have never felt unsafe on this campus and I walk around at night all the time. I think some of the stereotypes that are associated with this neighborhood occur because people choose to focus on the crimes. In a huge city like Los Angeles, crime is going to happen, but basing one’s opinion of the entire community off of a few people who do bad things is preposterous.” – Laura Wright

As [Laura] makes clear, Math Mentors learn much more than how to mentor and tutor K-12 students in math: they engage with, and begin to process and understand the broader neighborhoods and city in which they live. But math sits at the heart of being a Math Mentor. As MATH 126 instructor David Crombeque explains, there is an opportunity for math professors to help train and prepare their students to be Math Mentors, in part to help USC students think about how math learning does and can work:

“As our own USC students, this is a great opportunity to revisit the “elementary” math concepts they have learned in their childhood perhaps more consciously now and with a mind more mathematically trained. By revisiting those concepts and helping others understand them, our USC students will most likely deepen their understanding of the concepts as well as being able to analyze how people internalize mathematical concepts.” – David Crombeque

As it turns out, some Math Mentors feel the same way, as MATH 245 student Sammy Nabahani explains how he sees learning occurring as a Math Mentor in a reflective essay in the early weeks of the semester:

“While I will be helping students learn algebra, a subject that I already know well, I still feel that I will be able to strengthen the foundation of my math knowledge. Personally, I feel that I learn best when I teach people a subject or concept that they are struggling with. By teaching other students, I will see the material from a different angle which will help me understand the concepts fully.” – Sammy Nabahani

Tutoring one or a few students on basic math concepts offers USC students a valuable opportunity to analyze and understand how math learning works. Prof. Cymra Haskell understands this work as thinking critically about math and engaging with deceptively complex and abstract ideas:

“When students mentor younger students in mathematics, they will find themselves thinking more deeply about the subject and may find the need to answer questions about ‘why’ that they might not otherwise

>>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 5
have asked themselves. Many students see elementary mathematics as a set of rules that simply need to be memorized and applied. In fact, the contrary is true; elementary mathematics is quite sophisticated and abstract." – Prof. Cymra Haskell

In their reflective essays, Math Mentors often make surprising connections between math subjects that appear to outsiders to be unconnected—such as teaching about geometric shapes while learning college calculus:

“Being a math mentor for the past few weeks has subtly changed my experience as a college student in a few ways. Being exposed to simple problems like moving toothpicks around to create new geometric shapes, as well as word problems that introduce kids to algebra, helps me remember that math is always about solving a problem. I know that might sound obvious, but when the math I’m looking at is a jumble of alphabets, integrals, and complex graphs, I sometimes forget that math is meat to be played with and explored.” – JEP Math Mentor

This process of connecting learners and teaching has the potential to introduce college math learners to careers in math education. Even if the USC student does not end up going on to answer the current need for high quality math and science teachers in the US, thinking through the process of teaching helps students engage in college courses:

“Being a math mentor has also interestingly changed the way I experience my calculus classes. As a ‘rookie’ teacher, I’m looking for the best ways to communicate the subject matter to my students while keeping them interested. Ever since I started teaching, I have noticed that I have now been putting myself in Professor Crombecque’s shoes whenever he is at the front of the class. Even though the level of math is very different, the skills of teaching usually remain the same. Whenever his class is unresponsive, I take note of what Crombecque says or does to the class, and see whether it’s something that I could do to my own students.” – JEP Math Mentor

Interestingly, both professor and student see all of the sorts of learning discussed above as having broad-ranging benefits, from developing into more informed and engaged residents of Los Angeles to developing what Prof. Haskell identifies as the “habits of the mind of a mathematician … posing questions, reasoning and explaining”. USC freshman Lindsey Estrada keenly names what can develop out of the work of being a Math Mentor “problem approaching,” in a similar vein to Prof. Haskell’s “habits of the mind.”

“Last semester, my JEP assignment improved my knowledge of basic math, allowed me to practice and improve my professional skills, and make me more aware of the community around me. This semester I have the joy and privilege to serve as a math mentor to third grade boys and girls. Since they are still just getting started with their math education, I’m thoroughly excited to see what they have already learned and what they are in the process of learning. Although what third graders are learning may seem miniscule and irrelevant compared to calculus, I believe the JEP work will help me work on problem approaching and solving.” – Lindsey Estrada

At JEP we are looking forward to continuing to grow the Math Mentor program and all it has to offer USC students, K-12 math learners, and USC professors.

Update on JEP’s 40th Anniversary Gala:

Since the Gala last October, JEP alumni have led in giving, raising some $280,000 to assist with programs such as Trojan Health Volunteers, ReadersPlus, Little Yogninis, Wonder Kids and the Young Scientist Program.

On behalf of the entire JEP Staff – a big “Thank You” to all who have been so generous!
April marks the start of OT Awareness Month. But, what is OT? As a second-year master’s student in USC’s Division of Occupational Science (OS) and Occupational Therapy (OT), I am quite familiar with this question. According to USC’s Division of OS and OT, the purpose of occupational therapy is to optimize people’s engagement in the ordinary and extraordinary activities of daily life. Participation in these activities, or occupations, affects a person’s well-being and life satisfaction. Occupational Therapists (OTs) enable people, regardless of gender, age, health, culture, religion, and capabilities, to participate in the activities they find meaningful. OTs work in almost limitless contexts and environments; my particular interest lies in school-based practice.

One of my courses last fall focused on developing a proposal for a community-based program. As someone who is passionate about education, JEP was an ideal place to begin research. After a semester of gathering information on developing a thorough OT curriculum at JEP, I was offered the opportunity to implement it. This spring, ten students from undergraduate OT courses signed up for a JEP mini-team. Once a week, each of three teams brings OT-informed lessons to a 1st, 2nd, and 7th grade classrooms. JEP’s service-learning approach, combined with the diverse field of occupational therapy, provides an enriching learning experience for all involved.

Service-learning requires students to apply academic learning to meeting the real needs of a community, and to reflect on that process. At the start of the semester, my students were unsure how occupational therapy related to primary education. The new Common Core State Standards provide benchmarks for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics, but definitely no guidance about OT. The students were faced with a challenge, how can teaching about occupational therapy address the Common Core? The JEP students soon discovered that OT concepts – the importance of play and creativity, and the impact of occupation on health and wellness – can inform a variety of activities designed to meet the standards. For example, the mini-teams learned to avoid lecturing about OT’s definition of “play,” and instead used play as a method for exploring new concepts. In one classroom, 1st graders drew examples of activities they enjoy now, and chose a costume to represent their future occupations.

The students were very excited to use their imagination and dress in whatever way they wanted. Participating in this playful and creative activity not only educated students about the significance of occupation, but it also strengthened skills related to the Common Core. As for the JEP students, they witnessed the power of creativity as a tool for encouraging students to participate in learning. The mini-course students who wish to pursue a career as a school-based therapist, will now have one technique for motivating a student to successfully access their education.

In short, school-based practice supports children in fulfilling their various roles as a student. A major aspect of the student role is the ability to stay seated and pay close attention. However, this skill does not come easily to everyone. With this in mind, one mini-course designed a lesson around how emotions and the arousal system affect the occupation of learning. In order to simulate this concept, students rotated through various visual, tactile, and olfactory activities designed to meet the standards. For example, the mini-teams learned to avoid lecturing about OT’s definition of “play,” and instead used play as a method for exploring new concepts. In one classroom, 1st graders drew examples of activities they enjoy now, and chose a costume to represent their future occupations.

The students were very excited to use their imagination and dress in whatever way they wanted. Participating in this playful and creative activity not only educated students about the significance of occupation, but it also strengthened skills related to the Common Core. As for the JEP students, they witnessed the power of creativity as a tool for encouraging students to participate in learning. The mini-course students who wish to pursue a career as a school-based therapist, will now have one technique for motivating a student to successfully access their education.

In short, school-based practice supports children in fulfilling their various roles as a student. A major aspect of the student role is the ability to stay seated and pay close attention. However, this skill does not come easily to everyone. With this in mind, one mini-course designed a lesson around how emotions and the arousal system affect the occupation of learning. In order to simulate this concept, students rotated through various visual, tactile, and olfactory activities designed to meet the standards. For example, the mini-teams learned to avoid lecturing about OT’s definition of “play,” and instead used play as a method for exploring new concepts. In one classroom, 1st graders drew examples of activities they enjoy now, and chose a costume to represent their future occupations.

The students were very excited to use their imagination and dress in whatever way they wanted. Participating in this playful and creative activity not only educated students about the significance of occupation, but it also strengthened skills related to the Common Core. As for the JEP students, they witnessed the power of creativity as a tool for encouraging students to participate in learning. The mini-course students who wish to pursue a career as a school-based therapist, will now have one technique for motivating a student to successfully access their education.

In short, school-based practice supports children in fulfilling their various roles as a student. A major aspect of the student role is the ability to stay seated and pay close attention. However, this skill does not come easily to everyone. With this in mind, one mini-course designed a lesson around how emotions and the arousal system affect the occupation of learning. In order to simulate this concept, students rotated through various visual, tactile, and olfactory activities designed to meet the standards. For example, the mini-teams learned to avoid lecturing about OT’s definition of “play,” and instead used play as a method for exploring new concepts. In one classroom, 1st graders drew examples of activities they enjoy now, and chose a costume to represent their future occupations.

The students were very excited to use their imagination and dress in whatever way they wanted. Participating in this playful and creative activity not only educated students about the significance of occupation, but it also strengthened skills related to the Common Core. As for the JEP students, they witnessed the power of creativity as a tool for encouraging students to participate in learning. The mini-course students who wish to pursue a career as a school-based therapist, will now have one technique for motivating a student to successfully access their education.

In short, school-based practice supports children in fulfilling their various roles as a student. A major aspect of the student role is the ability to stay seated and pay close attention. However, this skill does not come easily to everyone. With this in mind, one mini-course designed a lesson around how emotions and the arousal system affect the occupation of learning. In order to simulate this concept, students rotated through various visual, tactile, and olfactory activities designed to meet the standards. For example, the mini-teams learned to avoid lecturing about OT’s definition of “play,” and instead used play as a method for exploring new concepts. In one classroom, 1st graders drew examples of activities they enjoy now, and chose a costume to represent their future occupations.
sensory experiences. Toward the end of the activity, both the JEP team and 2nd graders discussed how sensations may elicit feelings of alertness or relaxation. The students learned about basic physiological responses, but more importantly, identified strategies to maintain focus, or relax in school. The JEP students used course material to examine the impact of sensory experiences on children in a school environment. Combining real-world experience with lecture material was far more advantageous for the JEP students than reading alone. In terms of my own service-learning, the opportunity to test and reflect on intervention strategies prior to starting practice is incredibly beneficial to my development as a future school-based practitioner.

The last crucial feature of successful service-learning requires students to reflect on their experiences. This assessment method compels students to develop a deeper understanding of occupational therapy, while constructing their own meaning of the experience. Observations capture the JEP students’ ability to lead, build rapport, and engage their audience; however, reflective assignments give me access to each student’s internal transformation. The greatest amount of change between essays occurred in students’ personal goals, and their understanding of their role as an OT student. Some answers revolved around emphasizing the importance of occupation, others focused more on personal growth. While reading the second reflective essays, I noticed one freshman student, Allie, decided to redefine her role. Allie found her new place as “a secondary character that points [students] toward the end goal – their understanding of the great value of participating in enjoyable occupations, and their understanding of their own capacity to become something great.” Allie’s self-discovery was made possible by participating in JEP, and truly embodied the spirit of OT. Central to occupational therapy is the belief that people are the protagonists of their own lives. OTs do not do things for other people, they enable people to do for themselves. Thoroughly adopting this value is impossible without a connection to real-life experience. Occupational therapy is about serving others, and is best understood, while serving others. JEP afforded the OT students an invaluable approach to learning, and I am grateful for their support. For my students and me, JEP is not an obligation, but a meaningful occupation.

Congratulations to our Graduating JEP Student Staff!

Undergraduate Staff:
Sam Bush-Joseph, BA Sociology and Public Policy
Alexander Furrow, BA Cognitive Science and Creative Writing
A’aron Heard, BA Creative Writing
Kelley Lowe, Juris Doctor Degree, Law
Kenny Martin, BA Writing for Screen & Television
Mollie McSherry, BA French and Psychology
Jessica Pearigen, BA Spanish, Philosophy, Politics & Law
Maya Raman, BA Health Promotion & Disease Prevention (Biological Sciences)
Dimiana Saad, Psychology & Spanish
Whitney Tolar, BA English (Psychology & Law)
Priyanka Vachhani, BA Health Promotion & Disease Prevention (Biological Sciences)
Melissa Viesca, BA Psychology (Nutrition)
Carly Woodworth, BA Writing for Screen & Television

Graduate Staff:
Madison Aguirre, MS Occupational Therapy
Laurel Felt, PhD Communication
Yujung Nam, PhD Communication

Best of luck to all of you and many thanks for the valuable contributions you have made to JEP!

JEP Represents Dornsife College at the LA Times Festival of Books April 11 & 12.
ABOUT THE JOINT EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

The Joint Educational Project (JEP) is one of the oldest and largest service-learning programs in the United States. JEP is based in USC’s College of Letters, Arts and Sciences and works with faculty across the university. The program is designed to connect academic courses with schools and community-based organizations in order to provide students with out-of-classroom experiences that complement and enrich what they are learning in the classroom while simultaneously providing a valued service to the community. Each year, JEP partners with approximately 50 schools and agencies to place nearly 2,000 students in the neighborhood as mentors, “mini-course” instructors, translators, research assistants, teaching assistants, and aides to other helping professionals.

For more information about the services available through JEP, please contact our staff or visit our website at www.dornsife.usc.edu/jep

Joint Educational Project
801 W.34th Street
Los Angeles, CA  90089-0471