Building a Culture of Service in Higher Education

The Joint Educational Project was recognized by the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll

BY Tammy Anderson, JEP Executive Director

In 2014, USC was listed “with Distinction” on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. Launched in 2006 by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Department of Education, the Honor Roll annually highlights the role that colleges and universities play in solving community problems and placing more students on a lifelong path of civic engagement by recognizing institutions that achieve meaningful, measurable outcomes in the communities they serve. This was the fourth time USC has been included on the Honor Roll and the first time “with Distinction.”

In academic year 2013-2014, USC students contributed more than 765,000 hours in community service projects through programs like the Joint Educational Project (JEP), the Dental Mobile Van, MESA, STEM, Athletics Outreach, Kid Watch and many others. This is a remarkable number of hours given that so many of our students carry a rigorous course load and work at least part-time. For some, it might be a surprising achievement, as well, given USC’s status as an elite research university.

There are those in our society who think that the only way to be “civically engaged” is to vote, and characterize young people as unaffected, disinterested, and cynical because they frequently do not exercise this right. However, on college and university campuses across this country, students are finding more and different ways to become involved in, make contributions to, and take responsibility for their communities.

At JEP, we believe that public service helps

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students broaden and deepen their vision and learn about the world. In fact, service has become a de facto part of USC’s undergraduate curriculum with students expecting that some form of public service will be an essential component of their education.

Over the years, our “culture of service” has become well known to not only our students, faculty, staff and alumni but to other colleges and universities internationally. Two delegations from Inha University in Korea visited JEP both in the fall and the spring because they were interested in learning more about our service-learning programs and meeting participating students, faculty and community partners. Serve on! 🙌

Spotlight On Sable Manson

PhD student’s dissertation gains campus-wide recognition

BY MATTHEW STEVENS, Managing Editor, Office of Communications, USC Rossier School of Education

Last summer, Sable Manson, a 2009 graduate with a Master of Education in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs and current PhD candidate was named to the Future50 along with 49 other interfaith leaders, including congregants, nonprofit professionals, educators, volunteers, board members, organizers, artists and activists. Future50 is a project of the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) and the Interreligious Council of Southern California (IRC) that seeks to uncover, highlight and provide support to the rising generation of leaders inspired by their faith who are committed to the values core to IRC.

Sable’s work with JEP and her topic of dissertation played a large role in her being given this honor.

Her dissertation addresses the role of religion and spirituality in higher education, with a focus on the Souljourner Interfaith Service Scholars Program. This program is a collaborative project between the Office of Religious Life and JEP that encourages interfaith engagement by partnering with academic courses to facilitate interfaith experiences outside the classroom and weekly written reflection.

Sable will receive the “Dick Cone” award at this year’s Community Service Awards banquet on April 28th. Named after the former JEP Executive Director, the Cone Award recognizes graduate students whose research has important, practical applications outside of the academy. Congratulations, Sable! 🙌

Read more online:
This article was condensed from a longer piece by Matthew Stevens available here: www.rossier.usc.edu/phd-student-sable-manson-lends-a-hand-as-member-of-future50/
JEPedia: JEP Receives “Data-Driven Assignment” Grant

JEP uses the grant to create an on-line encyclopedia focusing on JEP students’ experience in the community

By Susan Harris, PhD  JEP Associate Director

In November 2014, JEP received a $3000 grant from USC Learning Design and Technology (LD&T, formerly known as the Center for Scholarly Technology) to develop a “data-driven assignment” for JEP students. Part of a larger initiative advanced by the Provost’s office, the grant supports projects that help undergraduates to develop data literacy.

JEP staff have worked with colleagues from LD&T and the USC Libraries to develop an assignment requiring JEP students to conduct research on the University Park neighborhood, drawing from a number of data-rich resources. The students post their findings on a wiki – the “JEPedia” – creating new pages and categories for content. The three-part assignment involves more than 250 students contributing to, reviewing and editing the wiki, drawing from their research on the community.

One of JEP’s primary goals is to help students develop critical thinking skills and greater awareness about the neighborhoods surrounding USC. Our curricula is intentionally designed to move students from thinking primarily about their personal experiences in schools and organizations towards considering the larger forces—structural, environmental, political, etc.—that shape the local community, as well as individuals’ experiences within that community. The JEPedia assignment is designed to challenge the “N of 1” thinking that characterizes many students’ early reflections and give students tools to better understand the larger contexts in which they are working. The assignment also takes advantage of our program structure—hundreds of students drawn from a wide range of academic disciplines—to encourage integrative and multidisciplinary understandings about the local community.

I presented preliminary “lessons learned” from our experiences with the JEPedia this semester at a LD&T Faculty Forum on April 17th. While not without some complications, the project was an overall success. By the end of the semester, the JEP students had produced a content-rich wiki covering diverse topics, ranging from demographic trends, to urban oil fields, to the best places to eat in the University Park neighborhood. Students learned basic research skills as well as how to use a wiki as a tool for communication. They grappled with the ethics of editing one another’s work while acknowledging the benefits of contributing to this collective endeavor.

We will continue to explore ways to use the wiki to encourage data literacy and collaboration.

JEP has been fortunate to consistently have fantastic student workers. Many of these accomplished students are graduating. We would like to take this opportunity to recognize this year’s graduates:

Undergraduates:
Ali Parker • Ali Vogelsang • Angela Mfutakamba • Ani Misirian
Colleen O’Brien • Connor Gustafson • Ebony Davis
Hikaru Komiyama • Jack Foraker • Jeremy Megginson • Melina Sutton
Melissa Ortiz • Mitchell Diesko • Nicole Runkle • Ricardo Portillo
Sherry Chan • Vijeta Tandon

Graduates:
Zheng An: PhD in Communication
Adrienne Kibler: Masters of Public Administration
Sable Manson: PhD in Urban Education Policy
Rosaline Tio: Masters of Urban Planning

Best of luck to you. We couldn’t be more proud!
Since October 2014, Susan Harris and her research team have worked together to conduct a mixed methods research project that assesses service-learning's effects on the adjustment experiences of international students to college. The research team includes international students and scholars from China and Thailand from several academic disciplines: Zheng An, Doctoral Candidate in Communication from the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, Bel Napatthorn Laoboonchai, Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership from the Rossier School of Education, and Dan Lu, Visiting Scholar from Yunnan University of Finance & Economics in Kunming City, Yunnan Province, P.R. China. The diversity of the team adds richness and provides a distinct lens for approaching and interpreting the findings of the project.

In 2012-13, the number of international students studying at U.S. universities increased to 819,644 – 40% more than a decade ago (Institute of International Education, 2013). Approximately 15% of JEP students are international students, roughly equivalent to the overall international student population at USC which tops the list of U.S. universities with the most international students. During the adjustment period, international students often struggle with many challenges including language barriers, loss of social support, acculturative stress, and racial discrimination, to name a few. These challenges can make international students feel isolated from their host nation peers and prevent them from engaging in civic life. The research literature suggests that service-learning is beneficial to college students in multiple areas, e.g., academic, civic, soft skill development. However, few studies have focused on international students, and how service-learning experiences can benefit this particular group of students.

The International Student Experience Project at JEP is designed to explore the experiences/perspectives of international service-learning students and to assess the impact of service-learning on their adjustment. The mixed methods study incorporates pre-post surveys research (N=953: 795 domestic students and 158 international students) and 17 semi-structured interviews. This project proposes that service-learning can be utilized as an alternative support to address challenges international students face, and to help them develop civic participation and professional skills.

Research shows that service-learning helps international students gain insights on local cultures and communities.

By Bel Napatthorn, JEP Research Assistant

From the preliminary findings, international students who participated in service-learning report the following:

* Civic Engagement: International students have distinct and/or limited understandings of the concept of “civic engagement,” and minimal prior experience with American-style service-learning.

“This is a feeling that is a little different from our culture, Americans got the right to do some things, they feel they got the right to do it . . . But as an international student, I feel, [Americans] care more about power, human rights. In China, power is held by few people; you don’t feel you can change anything, let alone organize people to do anything.” (J.C., China)

* Skills: Service-learning helps international students to develop a number of “soft” and “hard” skills.

“But beside that what I really developed is the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences, to be able to work with students from varieties of backgrounds.” (K.C., China)

* Culture and Identity: International service-learning students report deeper understandings of culture, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status.

“I think JEP experience is precious. I’ve learned a lot! As an international student, I constantly have identity problems. I work with many students who are Hispanic American. I feel some connections. I can see their struggles as ethnic minorities with the mainstream culture. They do not explicitly express [their struggles]. When I help them prepare their essays, I need to ask them about their experience. And I can feel something similar.” (D.B., China)

The research team presented their research project at the 18th Annual Continuums of Service Conference in Long Beach, California on April 8, 2015.
JEP Launches a New Research Program: The Community Scholars

Program was created to give advanced service-learning students a more research-based community experience

By Thalia Henderson & Yifei Bai
Community Scholar Program Participants

Two of the community scholars this semester are taking a closer look at JEP’s community partners. One, Yifei Bai (a senior with a double-major in Economics and Math) is collecting the accounting information at A Place Called Home, a non-profit focusing on providing after-school education and recreation for students K-12. The end product of this quantitative project will be a financial prediction model, indicating the most efficient way for them to utilize scholarships and other funds. This project has required the JEP student to learn new skills in coding and finance that were previously unexplored, while allowing her to bring a tool to this non-profit that assists in a way unlike the usual service-learning partnership. Another community scholar, Thalia Henderson (a junior with a double-major in English and Psychology) is working on a project that explores education for homeless or formerly homeless adults at Midnight Mission, a non-profit on Skid Row that provides a path to sobriety with housing, meals, education, and job training. This project uses participant-observer research and interviews to evaluate possible causes for disinterest in providing education to these individuals, their hesitations in seeking learning, and potential solutions to further engaging this specific community in higher education. In addition to learning scholarly methods of researching social issues, this student will be able to provide the community partners with an outline of realistic improvements that directly address learning within the population they serve.

The Community Scholars program is a unique opportunity for JEP students and community partners to benefit in long-lasting ways from the service-learning experience. After a successful pilot year, it is anticipated that this new program will continue to expand and inspire more students to take on varying challenging projects in the coming years.
A Visiting Scholar at the Joint Educational Project

Chinese scholar, Dan Lu, spends the year with JEP to learn about successful experiential learning

I am Dan Lu. I work for Yunnan University of Finance & Economics (YUFE), P. R. China. In spring 2014, I was so happy to receive funding from Yunnan Provincial Department of Education (YPDE) to study and conduct research abroad. Meanwhile, I was so excited to get a one-year (Aug. 2014-Aug. 2015) visiting scholar position from the Joint Educational Project (JEP) at USC. Dr. George J. Sanchez is my sponsor and Dr. Susan Harris is my advisor.

I am a senior lecturer and I have been lecturing on Career Management and Experiential Learning, Team Building, Entrepreneurship Foundation, and Basic Psychology for undergraduates in YUFE. My research focuses on Career Management and Experiential Learning, Moral Education, Quality Education, and Higher Education.

I definitely have had wonderful experiences at JEP. Under Dr. Susan’s guidance, I have participated mainly in two projects:

One is that I am a Program Assistant. I have had an opportunity to be engaged in the Individual Assignment Program. I have learned: (1) the types of programs and projects run by JEP, (2) JEP’s procedures for supporting students and the neighborhood surrounding the campus, (3) learning objectives for students and curriculum development. This has given me many ideas that apply to my research at YPDE on building an experiential-moral education model.

I have also taken part in a research project studying international JEP students. Our research project focuses on the improvement of the JEP service-learning program, with particular interest in understanding how international students are engaged in this program. I appreciate that my research capacity was improved and our findings will help me add to and improve the content of the curriculum at YUFE.

In addition, in order to improve my English level and teaching skills, I audited Dr. Tessy Tzoytzoyrakos’ ALI 256 class and attended some events organized by the Center for Excellence in Teaching.

I have benefitted so much from JEP and have gotten a lot of help from Dr. Susan, Tammy, Brenda, Jake and other staff members of JEP. I really appreciate it! JEP is really like a big family. I love JEP!

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Calendar of Events

April 25 - The 82nd Annual USC Alumni Awards
The Westin Bonaventure Hotel, Los Angeles

April 28 - Dornsife College’s Community Service Awards Dinner
Town & Gown, USC

May 28-30 - 6th International Symposium on Service-Learning
University of Indianapolis, in Indianapolis, Indiana

November 16-18 - International Association for Research on Service-Learning & Community Engagement Conference
Boston, MA
JEP is hiring!

The Joint Educational Project has an opening for a full-time “Office Technology Specialist”: http://jobs.usc.edu/postings/43155.

We’re looking for a tech-minded individual who can assist JEP with a wide range of tasks, from maintaining our database and student records, to serving as JEP’s webmaster, to providing daily support to JEP students and staff.

If you would like to work for one of the best organizations at USC, please consider applying!

For more information about the position, please contact Susan Harris (scharris@usc.edu, 213-740-1830).
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 Dornsife 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