When President Clinton announced the formation of an America Reads initiative in 1997, the staff at the Joint Educational Project immediately thought that the program could easily be created by slightly revamping the JEP model. We proposed to the university and local school principals that we could begin a pilot program during the summer to test how the model would function. They agreed and we became the first America Reads program in the nation.

We learned during that summer that we would need to have a director who was an educator and a promoter of reading, yet someone comfortable running a complex program with a lot of moving parts. Tina Koneazny had worked with us earlier as a VISTA volunteer and fit the bill perfectly. Tina agreed to leave Wisconsin and join us, and the rest is history.

In USC ReadersPlus, we have, in my opinion, one of the most effective and successful America Reads programs in the nation, with the most dedicated and enthusiastic university students giving their time and talents to help kids in our community develop literacy and math skills. Now, after 20 years of program experience, I cannot think of a single thing I would change in the model. Congratulations to all the Readers for making our program a success.

By Dick Cone, Former Executive Director of JEP
Class of 2017: Central Staff

Name: Vanessa Arteaga
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 8
Position: Coordinator at Vermont Elementary
Major: Human Biology
Minor: Occupational Science
Plans after graduation: Enroll in a post-baccalaureate program before going into nursing or medical school

Name: Brittany Acevedo
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 5
Position: Coordinator at Weemes Elementary
Major: Psychology, Sociology
What she will miss: Being challenged weekly as a leader; being a part of an inspiring team; Tina, Eric, and Krystle for their support and making her feel like a part of the JEP family

Name: Melanie Alvarez
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 7
Position: Coordinator at John Mack Elementary
Major: Psychology, Cognitive Science
Plans after graduation: Graduate school in Education, with credential to teach for five years, then get Ed.D

Name: Ava Burnell
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 5
Position: Coordinator at Foshay Learning Center
Major: Social Sciences
Minor: Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
What she will miss: The Foshay family, for being a home away from home

Name: Perla Solorzano
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 8
Position: Coordinator at Science Center
Major: Classics
Minor: American Studies
What she will miss: Being able to work with the fabulous people I currently work with!

Name: Hannah Aftalion
Semesters with ReadersPlus: 5
Position: Coordinator at Norwood Elementary
Major: Linguistics
What she will miss: Collaborating with the staff and students at Norwood
Class of 2017: Tutors

Name: Calvin Huang  
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 1  
**Position:** Math tutor at Weemes  
**Major:** Business Administration  
**What he will miss:** The kids!

Name: Edna Barco  
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 8  
**Position:** Math and Reading tutor at Weemes  
**Major:** Psychology  
**Minor:** Ceramics  
**What she will miss:** Working with our students and seeing their faces light up

Name: Fernando Sigala  
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 4  
**Position:** Math and Reading tutor at Vermont  
**Major:** Biochemistry  
**Plans after graduation:** Teaching program, then apply to medical school

Name: Joee Denis  
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 1  
**Position:** Math tutor at Vermont  
**Major:** Human Biology  
**Plans after graduation:** Moving to Colorado and taking more classes

Name: Sophia Li  
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 1  
**Position:** Reading tutor at Foshay  
**Major:** Sociology  
**What she will miss:** The kids!

Name: Yesol Chai  
**Semesters with Readers**\(^\text{Plus}\): 6  
**Position:** Math and Reading tutor at Mack  
**Major:** Business Administration  
**Minor:** Psychology  
**What she will miss:** The friendly staff and students at Mack

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**Welcome New Tutors!**

**32nd Street**  
Sabrina Barrow, Rigo Sanchez Bravo, Shoko Furukawa, Miguel Garcia Rodriguez

**Foshay**  
Emma Dessau, Carlos Garcia, Lizzy Gunn, Sophia Li, Cynique Murray, Melanie Romero

**Norwood**  
Eunice Barragan, Dylan Specht, Michelle Strohecker

**Vermont**  
Joee Denis, Ivianna Law, Carly Shihadeh

**Weemes**  
Soraya Alizadeh, Alex Blackwell, Dominique Codjia, Calvin Huang, Luis Loza, Denisse Suastegui Olivares

**John Mack**  
Sal Verduzco

**Science Center**  
Hannah Barach, Anna Collier, Jose Cordova, Amani Fields, Bryson Nihipali
Director Reflections

Eric Mellis, Literacy Director

The great lyricist, Vitamin C, once wrote, “as we go on, we remember all the times we’ve had together, and as our lives change, come whatever, we will always be friends forever.” Vitamin C, born Colleen Ann Fitzpatrick, sums up perfectly the bittersweet nature of graduating in a way that is both dripping with anticipation and a soon-to-be nostalgia. Looking back on my two years as Literacy Director of ReadersPlus, it’s safe to say I left an indelible mark. As a former teacher of 2nd graders, I strived to infuse every tutor training and meeting with a captivating delivery and uplifting message. Moreover, this style of leadership percolated into other goals I accomplished. For example, redesigning the Turn the Page after school curriculum into learning center reading activities greatly increased engagement with our students while still delivering important literacy content. I’m also proud of the creation of lesson planning guidelines and the monthly lesson planning contest - both of which have resulted in more effective and innovative tutoring sessions.

More dear to me than my accomplishments are the relationships I forged through this role. Working with Tina and Krystle for the past two years has been a blessing. It’s been an honor working with so many undergraduate leaders, including the two central coordinators and all of our site coordinators. Moving forward, I’ll be taking my degree in postsecondary administration to a university in the LA-area. Colleen Ann Fitzpatrick’s namesake, Vitamin C, is an important nutrient in the repair of tissues; tissues are used to comfort us when we’re crying; people cry when they’re sad or very happy; I’m both very sad to be leaving and also very happy to have had this experience.

My experience with ReadersPlus has been extraordinary. As I graduate with my Masters degree in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs, ReadersPlus has solidified my passion in working with students in higher education. When I was an undergraduate student, I was, coincidentally enough, a tutor for America Reads at UC Santa Barbara, and I ended up coming back full circle as the Math Director for the program here at USC. Although my responsibilities have changed, the one thing that has remained constant is how rewarding and impactful this program is to the community, the students, and to myself.

Although my role as a Director requires me to support and train students, I have also learned a lot from them as well. My experience has prepared me to provide individual and group coaching to our student staff. Developing our staff has taught me to work collaboratively with individuals from different backgrounds and skill sets. I have thoroughly enjoyed building relationships with the students and supporting them with lesson planning, behavior management, and program policies and procedures, as well as personal development. Working in such a diverse environment has allowed me to foster safe spaces for honest dialog with tutors. When I first started my role as a Director, I struggled with learning my new role and making it my own. Over time, I became more comfortable with my responsibilities and was willing to take risks and try new things. After I graduate, I want to continue supporting students and managing programs at a college or university setting. I will miss JEP and ReadersPlus. It has been an amazing journey and an experience I will never forget.

Krystle Zhang, Math Director

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StatisticsPlus: Then Vs. Now

Since 1997, ReadersPlus tutors have worked with five schools in the surrounding USC area, which include 32nd Street School, Foshay Learning Center, Norwood Elementary, Vermont Elementary, and Weemes Elementary. John W. Mack Elementary and Alexander Science Center were later added in 2011. Since the inception of our program, our tutors have provided individualized academic assistance to students from kindergarten to fifth grade in literacy. In 1999, math assistance was added. Today, our tutors continue to provide literacy and math one-on-one sessions and participate in after school programs, which include homework help, yoga (Little Yoginis), literacy (Turn the Page), and STEM (Wonderkids), having provided academic support and mentorship to nearly 20,000 K-5 students over these past 20 years.

![StatisticsPlus: Then Vs. Now](image)

**StatisticsPlus: Then Vs. Now**

then (1997) vs. now (2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutors</th>
<th>66</th>
<th>80</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Sites</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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Photos:
1. Leadership staff at the 2002 Christmas party
2. Tina at Fall training, 2002
3. Leadership staff at the end of the year celebration, Spring 2004
Symposium Background

Over the 20 years that I’ve been directing this special program, I have attended conferences that allowed me to connect with others meeting the America Reads Challenge on their campuses, comparing notes, and sharing best practices with one another. This fall, as I reflected upon the upcoming 20th anniversary of America Reads in May, I realized that for the past several years (or more) recent conferences that I have attended did not provide any information or networking opportunities around these programs. Thus, I set out to find a conference this year that would do just that.

Unfortunately, as I began researching various conferences, I found nothing. Not only was I unable to identify any gathering that addressed America Reads (or its partner initiative – America Counts), but I could not find a webpage of any kind connecting these programs. I was baffled. This is a federal, nationwide program -- how can it be that there is no website providing information about the initiatives, providing direction and resources for those running programs, or even a list of campuses administering these programs with contacts to connect one another?

I consulted with Dick Cone, former Executive Director of JEP, and the man who brought ReadersPlus to USC. He, too, was dismayed by the lack of identity and support for programs, especially considering that we are now embarking upon this milestone year. He encouraged me to do something I had never done – organize a symposium at USC. With the support and encouragement from Dick and Tammy Anderson, our current JEP Executive Director, along with the incredible help from Alyssa Rubio, our ReadersPlus Central Coordinator, and our dedicated tutors who contributed their time to assist, we pulled off a one-day symposium with the participation of 12 other Southern California Universities from Fresno to Santa Barbara to San Diego! Beyond the program directors and our wonderful USC Financial Aid team present at the event, a student panel with representation from four different campus (USC, UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, and Cal State LA) were all engaged.

Our hope is that continued conversations, connections, and celebrations will occur based on the momentum we have started and the realization that many programs have been going strong, with little or no support at the national level, for nearly 20 years. Here’s to 20 more!

By Tina Koneazny, Associate Director of JEP
AR/AC Symposium - Student Reflections

The best part about the symposium was realizing that ReadersPlus is truly a part of a bigger movement. There are hundreds of other college students in Southern California, and across the country, who are striving toward the same goal that we are: to help the kids in our communities. Being on the student panel gave me a chance to hear the stories of other students, and I was surprised by how similar our experiences are. Even though we come from different backgrounds, we all have the same passion for and dedication to teaching. When we were asked how many of us changed our career paths to education because of these tutoring programs almost all of us raised our hands. The symposium was a great opportunity to network and share best practices. It was so inspiring to see all of these different programs coming together to figure out how to best serve our students. I think the symposium really set the foundation for an ongoing partnership among America Reads/America Counts programs that will allow for support of each other. It no longer feels like ReadersPlus is operating in a vacuum, and I am excited to see where the program goes in the upcoming years.

By Ava Burnell, Foshay Coordinator

As a Coordinator, I felt the symposium was very beneficial for it allowed me to interact with other students workers that also share my passion for education. It was refreshing to get a new perspective, fresh ideas, and to make new friends. We all connected by sharing the struggles we face as students leaders and tutors, however, we were also able to discuss the rewards that come with the hard work that we do everyday. ReadersPlus has improved my confidence and has morphed me into the hard worker I am today. Speaking on the student panel was an experience that I will never forget. It was extremely rewarding to share my techniques, struggles, and lessons learned as a Coordinator. I was able to share my experiences about the children I work with, the amazing tutors I lead, and the ReadersPlus central team I consider family. Lastly, we touched upon the importance contributing to the well-being of our surrounding communities. I am extremely grateful to have participated in such a salient event in America Reads and America Counts history, and I am excited to see how our programs will continue to develop.

By Brittany Acevedo, Weemes Coordinator

Being a part of the symposium was a really amazing experience because I was able to interact with and learn from tutors and administrators from other America Reads/America Counts programs. It was really interesting to hear how their programs have developed in order to fit the needs of the communities that they serve within the broader topic of community service. It was really touching to know that, despite the differences in our programs, we all simply wanted to help and be involved in our communities, making a difference as much as possible. The tutors who came to the symposium from other universities shared how they come from similar, if not the same, communities than the ones they work with, and how that makes their work so much more meaningful. I also share that experience, so I was able to relate and connect with what they shared. One of the main goals for this symposium was to create a sense of community amongst other AR/AC programs, and I believe the symposium really made that happen.

By Perla Solorzano, Science Center Coordinator
Alumni Spotlights

To celebrate our 20th anniversary, we reached out to alumni of ReadersPlus to reflect on their time with the program and how it has shaped them into the people they are today. Here is what some of them had to say:

Nikki Sharma, Class of 2010

The USC ReadersPlus program has been integral to my career path and interests. Working with children one-on-one has inspired me to devote my career to education policy, most recently as a Portfolio Planning Analyst for Chicago public schools. The best part of my job as ReadersPlus Central Coordinator was the opportunity to work with other mentors who were equally dissatisfied with the current state of education. I am lucky to be part of a program that is invaluable to USC and the surrounding community!

Chris Llovera, Class of 1999

It was during my junior year at USC that I knew I wanted to be an elementary school teacher. I was looking for an opportunity to gain experience and knowledge as a teacher, and I heard about USC Readers as a work study job and I'm so glad I tried it. Working at Vermont Elementary was a great opportunity to do something that I loved, working with children and educating them. USC Readers helped me to become a better teacher, learn valuable insight, and gave me the opportunity to work with many students of all grade levels and learning abilities. I loved seeing the progress my students made, and the education I received through the various teachers I worked with helped me after graduation to start my career as a teacher. I am currently a 3rd grade teacher at Weemes Elementary School and have been teaching for 17 years now. I will always remember my time as a USC Reader!

Josh Brown, Class of 2003

Being a part of USC ReadersPlus was one of the highlights of my undergraduate experience and laid the groundwork for my career as a pediatric occupational therapist. I feel so fortunate to have had a job in college where I worked alongside such compassionate, motivated, and creative individuals, several of whom I still keep in touch with years later. To this day, I recall valuable lessons I learned about how to engage students in the learning process and how to design activities that tap into their interests and strengths. In addition to my direct experience with students, serving as site coordinator at Foshay allowed me to gain valuable leadership and program development experience that impacted my confidence and skills as a leader.
Alumni Spotlights

Danielle Schutz Tremain, Class of 2007

I came to college with a pre-med major, even though I had known for as long as I can remember that I was meant to be a teacher. Working for USC ReadersPlus gave me the opportunity to tap into my passion, ultimately giving me the confidence to switch majors to education. I became part of not only the JEP community, but the one surrounding USC, giving me a glimpse of challenges I had not yet faced and the chance to examine my own biases, fears, and dreams. More than anything, I learned the importance of relationships, and how building them requires effort that is never wasted, especially when it comes to children. I am currently an Annex Coordinator, overseeing before and after school programs at all 20 school sites in the San Mateo-Foster City School District.

Sherry Chan, Class of 2015

The hours I spent with my students at 32nd St. were some of the fondest memories of my undergrad years. JEP was often the best part of my day! I still reminisce both humorous and meaningful conversations I had with students and still hope for the best for them today. While I’m currently on a career path outside of education working in a startup, I’ve taken a lot of the skills I nurtured through my JEP experiences into my life now. For example, I have learned how to look at situations more holistically. As a coordinator, I also learned how to resolve conflict with different parties of interest. Most importantly, I realized the significant impact I had as a mentor and continue to volunteer as a mentor to high school students today.

Jesus Diaz, Class of 2005

My favorite thing about being a USC Reader was the challenge in developing creative activities to help students become excited about reading. Once we made the process enjoyable, it was remarkable to see the progress students made in their abilities and overall confidence. This experience became the roots of my current work as an occupational therapist, were I get to use my creativity to help my patients engage in meaningful activities in their daily lives. In addition, I am an Assistant Research Professor in the Division of Occupational Science and Therapy here at USC. Along with the wonderful time I got to spend with students at the schools, being a USC Reader gave me the opportunity to meet amazing individuals at USC who have had such a positive and powerful impact in my life, and for this I will always be grateful.
The Annual ReadersPlus Writing Contest

The ReadersPlus Writing Contest has provided elementary students from seven local schools the opportunity to be recognized and rewarded for their excellent writing and creative engagement with themes related to community, educational aspirations, and social issues affecting children. The Writing Contest sparks creative ideas in students’ minds, while also allowing them to polish and enhance their writing skills. Themes for the Writing Contest differ every year; this year the theme was: “If I were president, one thing I would do to change for the better is...”. To enter the Writing Contest, students must be enrolled in grades K-5 at one of the seven local schools we partner with and must create their own original essay to the given prompt and theme. Entries are judged on the merits of composition, content, and voice. All contestants receive a certificate of participation. One winner is then selected from each grade level and not only receives a $50 USC Bookstore gift card, but the opportunity to have their essay displayed at the LA Time Festival of Books at the ReadersPlus booth.

By Kiara Damian-Rodriguez, incoming Math Director

Upcoming: The LA Times Festival of Books

USC ReadersPlus will be representing both USC Dornsife and JEP at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books, which will be held at the USC campus from April 22-23, 2017. We will be at Booth 066, on Trousdale near the LA Times tent. There will be staff from our program there during the entirety of the festival. Every year, our booth includes tutor-created hands-on reading and math activities for each child who stops by. These activities are based on books that are read aloud by our tutors at the booth, relating to the theme of our writing contest. In addition to taking the creative activity home with them, children from any of the seven schools with whom we partner have the opportunity to receive free books donated by the Ella Fitzgerald Foundation and DK Books, which are distributed out at our booth.

By Alyssa Rubio, Central Coordinator
After School Highlights

Turn the Page

Turn the Page has been totally redesigned and has had its most successful semester yet! The new curriculum involves learning centers focused on reading and writing. These centers are aligned with seasons and holidays to boost knowledge of social studies curriculum as well. ReadersPlus tutors have reported that students enjoy the learning centers because they get to work in small groups and do kinesthetic and visual activities. My hope is that Turn the Page will continue to boost literacy proficiency in our students for semesters to come.

By Eric Mellis, Literacy Director

Little Yoginis

There has been more and more evidence supporting the benefits of yoga for school-aged children, and USC ReadersPlus is proud to continue introducing our Little Yoginis curriculum to first through third grade after school students at many of our schools. Two examples of the books and themes that have framed our yoga lessons this semester were from Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister, which engaged children in partner poses to teach the values of sharing and caring, and Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes, which focused on both respect for others and self-confidence. Through the yoga themes, poses, and breathing practice, children gain mind-body awareness, self-regulation and physical fitness. And, most of all, they have fun!

By Tina Koneazny, Associate Director of JEP

Wonderkids Acknowledgments

There were four units of STEM this semester: material science, global medicine, archaeology, and ecology. We partnered with different local organizations to arrange volunteers and speakers at each participating school (32nd St., Foshay, Weemes, and Vermont). Thanks to the following for their contributions of time, materials, and sharing their passions for science.

1) For material science, the Marinescu lab speakers were Nick Orchanian, Damir Popov, Giovanni Rangel, and Eric Johnson.


3) For archaeology, we partnered with the USC Director of Archaeology, Dr. Lynn Dodd, with speakers Kiana van Vlack, Madelyn Gorden, and Alleluia Tyus.

4) For ecology, Inside the Outdoors Foundation organized for Yarib Dheming and Erin McParland to speak at 32nd St.

By Dieuwertje Kast, STEM Programs Manager
USC Readers\textsuperscript{Plus} is an “America Reads/America Counts” literacy and math tutoring program under the USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences.

The Program is administered by the Joint Educational Project and funded in part through the USC Good Neighbor’s Campaign with the support of the USC Financial Aid Office. Our tutors work with seven of the “Family of Schools” surrounding USC.

In 1997, President Clinton launched legislation that would provide additional work-study money to colleges and universities with the condition that a large portion of it go to one-on-one literacy programs for children grade K-6. The JEP version of America Reads was the first in the nation to begin working under these guidelines, launching in May 19, 1997. In May of 1999, America Counts was added to include math education and it was at this time that the USC Readers program was changed to USC Readers\textsuperscript{Plus}. 

\textbf{About Us}

USC Readers\textsuperscript{Plus}

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