

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

PHIL 140: Contemporary Moral & Social Issues
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INTRODUCTION

JEP is a *service-learning* program. As such, JEP provides students with opportunities to learn about a variety of subjects while providing valuable services to the community. For your Philosophy course, your work as a mentor, teaching assistant, or helper in the community provides a context for understanding ethical issues within schools and social service agencies.

In some ways, your work in the community is similar to that of a scientist who conducts “participant-observer” research. Throughout the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site, and you will write about your “findings” on a weekly basis. These JEP Reflective Questions are designed to help you focus your observations and critically reflect on your experiences in relation to what you are learning about in your Philosophy course. In addition, your responses to these questions might serve as the basis for the paper assignments for the course.

Please read through all of the Reflective Questions prior to beginning your JEP site experience and assignment. The questions are related to and build upon one other. We encourage you to refer back to previous responses and to take seriously your P.A.’s feedback each week. Doing so will help you to develop your ideas and arguments over the course of the semester and to learn more from your experiences.

ALTERNATE QUESTION

If your experience at your JEP site doesn’t allow you to adequately answer a Reflective Question, you may choose another topic to write about. For example, choose a critical incident that might have occurred that week, and discuss the incident with help of a theory that may provide further insight in to why it happened. Please choose one of the Alternate Questions at the end of the list as a guide. *Please note:* The assigned Reflective Questions for Weeks One and Eight are required.

YOUR WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:

The core parts of each Reflection Question (which you need to focus on) are highlighted in **bold**. Use the additional parts of the question to guide/supplement your answer.

WEEK ONE – First Impressions:

Describe your initial experience at your JEP assignment. Include a detailed description of the responsibilities and activities involved in your particular assignment. What are your most vivid impressions of the site? What were some of your expectations prior to beginning your assignment? How do your experiences during Week One compare to your expectations?

WEEK TWO – The Social Context of Your Community Site:

Describe the social and physical context of your JEP site. Try to be as specific as possible about the number of people that are there, as well as the age, sex, race, ethnicity, and any other significant characteristics of all those involved in your JEP assignment. Walk or look around your site and take in the environment; specifically, provide details about the size, space, decor, noise level, etc. of the classroom (or meeting room), the building(s) making up the site, and its grounds. How do the aesthetics and overall feel of the site compare with the USC campus and/or other places you have worked or attended school? What are some of the main difference and similarities? Do you think that these differences or similarities have any impact on the learning experiences of students at the site?

WEEK THREE – The Ethics of Service-Learning Assignments:

Your professor is offering extra credit for providing community service. Consider the potential ethical and moral value of this practice. **Can you think of any ethical arguments against asking students to do community service for course credit and/or any circumstances in which this practice might be unethical?**

WEEK FOUR – Ethical Dilemmas:

Have you observed any ethical dilemmas while working at your site? If so, please describe the circumstances and how they were addressed (if at all). If not, what might you imagine are some of the key ethical issues faced by the professional staff at, or individuals served by, your site? **Discuss the moral considerations relevant to these issues.**

WEEK FIVE – Utilitarianism and Educational Reform:

Refer back to week three's assigned readings on Utilitarianism (Boss, Chapter 1). According to utilitarian theory, the guidelines for analyzing moral issues include 1) determining who or what will be affected, 2) examining the possible consequences, 3) maximizing happiness, and 4) minimizing pain. Proponents of this theory argue that it is useful in shaping social policy. **Apply this theory to an analysis of one or more of the political debates surrounding public school education in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Is a utilitarianism perspective useful or not?** Please elaborate. Integrate course readings or class discussions to anchor your analysis

WEEK SIX – Justice Theory, the Veil of Ignorance and Educational Inequality:

Consider the John Rawls readings on justice (Boss, Chapter 1). **What are the components of Justice Theory? Define Rawls theoretical construct on the “veil of ignorance.”** How does this theory relate (or fail to relate) to a discussion about the inequities in the educational system? Is society bound to the idea that justice must be applicable to the educational system? Integrate course readings, lectures, and discussions to support your point of view.

WEEK SEVEN – Gender and the Classroom:

What are the influences of gender or sex at your community site? Do you notice particular individuals practicing certain gender stereotypes? Are there cues to such stereotypes? In what ways do the individuals with whom you are working act in socially “acceptable” or “unacceptable” ways? Are there rewards or consequences for acting a certain way either between peers or from those in positions of authority? In your opinion, do those in authority act in “good” or “bad” ways to reinforce positive or negative gender stereotypes or advantages and disadvantages. Please illustrate your opinions with examples from your community experience.

WEEK EIGHT – Final Reflections:

According to USC's mission statement, “The central mission of the University of Southern California is the development of human beings and society as a whole through the cultivation and enrichment of the human mind and spirit. The principal means by which our mission is accomplished are teaching, research, artistic creation, professional practice and selected forms of public service”.

http://www.usc.edu/private/factbook/USCRole_and_Mission_Statement_1993.pdf

Consider this statement in light of your experiences in JEP. Do you think public service-and specifically your service-learning experiences in the community via JEP-have helped to “cultivate” or “enrich” your “mind” and “spirit” and/or those of the community members with whom you worked? If so, how? If not, why not? Please describe in detail what you have gained from your experiences through JEP from an intellectual, spiritual and/or ethical perspective. How have your experiences in JEP compared to what you expected to get out of the program?

ALTERNATE QUESTIONS

Option #1: Apply one of the theories or concepts from the course you think is particularly apt or flawed for explaining the significance of some phenomenon at your site. First, briefly summarize the theory or concept. Next, describe the particular experience or encounter at your site of relevance to the theory. Finally, how well does the theory explain your experience?

Option #2: Describe a meaningful event or series of events in which you were involved at your site. What are your thoughts and feelings about the event(s)? What are the perceptions and reactions of the other persons involved? How has this event affected or changed your relationship, your perspective roles, and/or your perspective about your assignment?