

JEP REFLECTIVE QUESTION

Public Service in an Urban Setting (PPD 372)
Spring 2008

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As a service provider, your work in the community is much like that of the participant-observer researcher or ethnographer. Throughout the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your service site. These journal questions are designed to help you in the process of writing up “field notes” that document your experiences and prepare you for writing your service-learning project.

As soon as possible after leaving the “field” (i.e., your service site), write down as much as you can recall about your experiences. Use these journal questions as prompts to guide your field notes, but go beyond the prompts, writing about whatever seems important to you about your service experience – especially that which is related to the issues of poverty and diversity. While they may seem time-consuming now, these notes will serve as crucial sources of “data” for the required service-learning project (due on the last day of class). Therefore, the more you write now, the better your paper later!

You are only required to turn in responses to the questions below. However, you are *strongly* encouraged to take comprehensive field notes throughout the semester. (Note that field notes can also serve as a personal journal/record of your experiences. If you do not wish to share the entire contents of your field notes, you may turn in a separate response to the questions below.)

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. **Note, however, that you are required to answer Weeks One and Eight.**

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 of your JEP Site

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 and what were these expectations based on (e.g., mass media images or personal encounters)? How do your experiences this week compare to your expectations?

WEEK TWO - The Social and Physical Context

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, its grounds, the neighborhood (or whatever you could see of the neighborhood on your way to your site). How do the aesthetics and overall feel of the site and neighborhood 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 (e.g., of the physical context of the class room) have any impact on the learning experiences of students at the site?

WEEK THREE – The Community

Please note: this week you have two options.

Option One: What is the primary community served by your school or organization? Are there physical or geographic boundaries that clearly demarcate the community? Can you identify any non-physical boundaries (e.g., social, legal, psychological, etc.) that are significant in establishing the “catchment” area of the organization? How are these boundaries used in defining the mission of the school or agency and/or the scope of its potential impact?

Go to the “American Factfinder” section of the U.S. Census Bureau’s website and look up demographic information about the community served by the organization: <http://factfinder.census.gov/>. Enter the zip code (or the city or county, if that is more relevant) for the catchment community and click “go.” If you are placed at a school or another organization that serves a small neighborhood, click on the “search by address” link in the box with the zip code you entered and enter the address of your site (or an address relevant to your particular project). A Census tract link will appear near the top of the page, under the “Fact Sheet” header. Review the demographic information and explore the map features available in the chart that appears. What are some of the more interesting or surprising statistics about the community? How does the community fare compared to Los Angeles County? How do these findings about the community relate to or inform your work at your JEP site?

Option Two: What is the primary community served by your school or organization? Are there physical or geographic boundaries that clearly demarcate the community? Can you identify any non-physical boundaries (e.g., social, legal, psychological, etc.) that are significant in establishing the “catchment” area of the organization? How are these boundaries used in defining the mission of the school or agency and/or the scope of its potential impact?

Go to Google Maps to learn more about the physical content and conditions of the community served by the school or organization: <http://maps.google.com/maps>. Enter the address of your site (or an address relevant to your particular project) and click “search maps.” Play around with the “satellite” or “hybrid” views and zoom in for a closer look at the community. Click on the “street view” and move around the human figure that appears to see various locations from the ground level. What types of buildings are present in the neighborhood and how would you describe their apparent condition and purpose (e.g., single- or multi-family residential housing, commercial -- and what types of businesses, etc.)? How much land appears to be used for community purposes and of this land, how much is private (shopping centers, restaurants, some hospitals, some churches, professional and some social service agencies, etc.) and how much is public (schools, community centers, libraries, police and fire departments, government offices, city parks, etc.)? How much green and/or open space is available, if any? How pedestrian-friendly is the community (e.g., for children walking to school)? How do these findings about the community relate to or inform your work at your JEP site?

WEEK FOUR - Community Support

In part III of the course, you examined how American society, historically, has responded to the plight of disadvantaged groups in society. You also examined the culturally based differences in the practices of service and caring among various ethnic and culture groups. **What are the traditions of service and mutual support for the particular cultural group with whom you are working (e.g., transnational familial support, assistance to new immigrants, links to the church)? (Note: if you are working for an agency with a diverse population, focus on one of the cultural groups present. Also, If you have trouble finding out about traditions of service and mutual support for the people served by your site, you may want speak with some of the site staff.)** Based on your experiences at your site, what evidence do you see of these traditional forms of communal support (i.e., are they integral to the agency’s primary service goals and/or structure, or are they mostly limited to the efforts of individuals at the site)? What are the apparent motivations of community members to get involved at the site – as staff, volunteers, and/or recipients? How does the site cultivate, maintain and/or draw upon community and cultural resources?

WEEK FIVE - Inequality and Diversity

How does the site at which you are working address issues of socioeconomic inequality and diversity? Are these issues primary to the agency’s agenda (e.g., supporting immigrant-workers’ rights, the education of children from low income families in a diverse community, etc.)? If so, what is perceived as the source of the problem(s) and what kinds of programs are in place to remedy the problem(s)? If not, how do economic inequality and diversity impact the main goals of the organization (e.g., the education of children in a diverse community)? What kinds of additional resources, supplemental programs, etc., are needed to address these issues? Whether primary or secondary to its purposes, how does diversity inform the mission of the agency site?

WEEK SIX - Critical Incidents

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?

WEEK SEVEN – Critically Assessing Service

Based on your experiences in class and in the community over the course of the semester, critically assess the mission and programmatic structure of the site. Is the site’s mission oriented more toward providing charity or promoting social change? How closely do site staff work with those served by the site to identify needs and develop programmatic goals? Regardless of how they are established, how well do you think the organization meets its goals? What are the strengths and limitations of the site’s approach? What alternatives could be proposed at the site level? What broader changes in public policy/society might further address this issue?

WEEK EIGHT - Review

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?