

Reflective Questions

Changing Family Forms (SOC1 169)
Spring 2008

Professors Pillitteri and Casper
PAs:
Kaelin Burns
Lindsay Palmer
Megan MacMillan

INTRODUCTION

Social scientists spend much of their time studying, interpreting and understanding human interactions in a variety of settings. These scientists, often referred to as “empirical researchers,” collect data in order for us to better understand the inner-workings of our social world. Your role as a JEP student is to approach your site with the eyes of a volunteer and social scientist. Over the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site. In addition to your first-hand site volunteering, you are asked to write about and critically reflect upon your JEP experiences. Referred to as “Reflective Questions,” these prompts are designed to help you focus your observations and experiences in relation to your class readings, lectures, and discussions in your SOC1 169 Changing Family Forms course.

Please read through the entire set of Reflective Questions prior to beginning your JEP assignment. We encourage you to refer back to previous journal responses and to take Program Assistant’s feedback seriously. This will help you develop your ideas more clearly and will help you think critically about a variety of issues. In addition, please explore the websites listed throughout this set of questions. These sites contain a wealth of information about American families that you can use to supplement course material and your observations as you respond to the Reflective Questions.

Please note: Your JEP assignment will provide you with a valuable opportunity to apply what you are learning in class about families. In some cases, you may learn about the intimate details of individuals’ lives – the challenges, triumphs and tragedies people have experienced in their families. In other cases, you may find that people are hesitant to open up to you. **In all cases, it is extremely important that you behave sensitively and responsibly in your role as a service-learning student.** Although this project is intended to teach you about family life in a variety of contexts, you must balance your enthusiasm for exploring ideas from class (and answering these Reflective Questions) with the need to respect people’s privacy. If you ever feel like your roles as a student-investigator and a service provider are in conflict, please give priority to the latter. Your primary duty is to provide support to the JEP site, always being respectful of the people with whom you are working and aware of the limits of your experience and knowledge. At the same time, we encourage you to view every encounter at your site as potentially educative. If you approach your work in the community with the attitude, “What can I learn about families, about social service organizations, about diversity, about myself?,” we promise that you will learn something important from your experience.

Your Program Assistants and the JEP staff are available to help you get the most out of your assignment. We can help you identify resources or resolve any problems that may come up at your site. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need any assistance. We can be reached at (213) 740-1837.

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? How do your experiences during this first week compare to your expectations prior to beginning your assignment? (In your response, please indicate the site at which you are placed.).

WEEK TWO – Mission and Social Context of the Site

Describe the person and/or group of people with whom you are working at your JEP site. Try to be as specific as possible about the size of the group (i.e., number of people), as well as the age, sex, race, ethnicity, and role (e.g., staff or “client”) of all those involved in your assignment. Generally speaking, how does the site at which you are working serve children and families -- that is, what is the agency/school/site’s mission in relation to serving families – and what kinds of “clients” does it mostly serve (e.g., children, students, foster families, homeless families, domestic abuse survivors, teen parents, poor families, immigrant families, etc.)? What is the site’s primary goal for the children and families it serves?

Additional resources: Most of the agencies and schools have websites that can give you additional information about their missions, initiatives, demographics, etc.:

All People’s Community Center: www.allpeoplescc.org

A Place Called Home: www.apch.org

Children, Youth and Families Collaborative: www.cyfcla.org

Los Angeles Archdiocese: <http://www.la-archdiocese.org/learning/schools/index.php> (Click “Find a Catholic School” to find information about your specific school site)

Los Angeles Unified School District: <http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us> (You can find information about your specific LAUSD school site by clicking on the “Schools -- Find a School” tab at the top of the LAUSD home page.

The demographic information for each school is available in the “School Profile” section. Note that some schools have their own websites which have additional information.

Good Shepherd Shelter: <http://www.goodshepherdshelter.org>

St. Francis Center: <http://www.stfranciscenterla.org/>

1736 Family Crisis Center: <http://www.1736fcc.org/>

Salvation Army Center: <http://www1.salvationarmy.org/southla>

WEEK THREE – Families and Households in the Neighborhood

Go to the U.S. Census Bureau to gather information about the families living in the neighborhood surrounding your site:

1. Go to www.factfinder.census.gov/
2. Enter the address for your JEP site in the “address search” box on the lower left side of the screen and click “Go.”
3. Highlight the “Census Tract” number in the box that appears and click OK. (*NOTE: record the Census tract number someplace where you can find it. You’ll need it again for Week 6.*)
4. Select tables DP-1, QT-H3 and QT-P11, along with any others that are of interest to you.
5. Print your results and attach them to your journal.

Take a look at the tables and describe the families who live in the neighborhood in which you are working. For example, looking at Table DP-1, what is the percentage of children in the population? What is the racial/ethnic makeup of the community? What percentage of households is occupied by “nuclear” families (married-couple families with own children)? What about single mothers? Individuals? What is the average family size? Looking at Table QT-H3, are married families more likely to rent or own their places of residence? What about single householders? The elderly? Looking at Table QT-P11, what percentage of households has grandparents living with grandchildren? How common are non-related households? Are elderly householders living alone more likely to be male or female?

Please note: You need not answer every one of these questions in your journal, but please take a look at the data in the tables. Focus your response on the findings that interest you most and describe why they are of interest, and answer the questions below.

How do the data compare with the population actually served by your site (i.e., compare the census data with your observations of the site from Week Two)? How do they compare with what you've learned in class and from the readings about the changing structure and composition of contemporary families?

WEEK FOUR – Family Experiences

What have you learned so far about the experiences of the families and individuals with whom you are working?

For students placed at agencies: What brought them (and/or their families) to the programs offered by your JEP site and what are they hoping to gain from participating? What are their short- and long-term goals and what do they think is necessary to accomplish these goals? Are their goals and plans the same as the agency's/site's plans?

For students placed at schools: What have you learned about the family background of the student(s) with whom you are working? Are they from an immigrant family and, if so, when did their family immigrate to the United States? What do the student(s)' parents do for a living? What are the student(s)' goals – for education, career, family, etc. – and what do they think is necessary to accomplish these goals?

NOTE: Please be respectful of people's privacy. If those with whom you are working have not offered personal information about their lives, do not probe for details. If you can't answer the specific questions in this week's assignment, focus your response on what you've learned in general about the children and families associated with your site. However you choose to respond, avoid revealing details and do not identify individuals (by name or otherwise) in your journal.

Additional resources: The websites for each of the agencies/school sites may have additional information to help you answer this question. See list for Week Two. For students working with CYFC, the Department of Children and Family Services (i.e., the department in charge of the Los Angeles County foster care program), has a website with information about the reasons children enter foster care: <http://dcfs.co.la.ca.us/> Click the "About Us" tab at the bottom of the main page. Click the "DCFS Fact Sheets" link in the list of resources on the left side of the page and select the most current set of data.

WEEK FIVE - Family Policy and Family Politics

Drawing from course materials and other resources, what are some of the important policies, laws and political debates related to the primary issues facing the families or individuals at your JEP site (e.g., domestic violence laws, child welfare/foster care policy, educational policy, welfare reform, the politics of family planning, etc.)? For example,

- what are the laws that govern some of the unique circumstances of the families at your site?
- what kinds of federal, state and/or private resources are available to support the families?
- what are the politics surrounding the use of public and/or private funds to address the particular problems faced by the families?

Focusing your response on one of these questions (i.e., one law, policy, resource or political issue), describe its potential impact (direct or indirect) of on the lives of those with whom you are working?

Additional resources: The Department of Health and Human Services (<http://www.hhs.gov/>) has links to many sites with information about various family policy and legal issues, including the Office of Family Assistance's Division of Tribal TANF Management: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/dts/>. For a sense of some of the

political debates surrounding family policy, check out some of the liberal, moderate and conservative organizations' perspectives on family issues, for example: the Heritage Foundation www.heritage.org, the Council for Contemporary Families <http://www.contemporaryfamilies.org/>, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities <http://www.cbpp.org/>, the Alternatives to Marriage Project <http://www.unmarried.org/>, the American Prospect magazine http://www.prospect.org/issue_pages/children/, Democratic Leadership Council http://www.ndol.org/ndol_ka.cfm?kaid=114, and the Republican National Committee <http://www.rnc.org>

WEEK SIX - Poverty, Work & Families

Go to the Census Bureau website to find out more about the occupations and income levels of the community residents with whom you are working.

1. Go to <http://factfinder.census.gov/>
2. Run your cursor over the "Data Sets" tab on the left-hand side toolbar and select "Decennial Census"
3. Select the "2000 Summary File 3 (SF-3) Sample Data" option
4. Click "Quick Tables" in the blue highlighted portion that appears to the right after you selected "Summary File 3"
5. On the new screen Select Geographical type: "Census Tract" (8th option from top)
6. Next select the following to specific your exact site geographic location:
 - ... for California
 - ... for Los Angeles County
 - ...for the Census tract in which your site is located. (Go back to your notes for Week Three. If necessary, go back to the American Factfinder main page and enter your site's address, per the instructions for Week Three.)
7. "Add" the census tract number to the box and click "Next."
8. Highlight the tables of interest to you (DP-2, 3, & 4 provide a nice overview of a variety of subjects), "Add" them to the box, and click "Show Table."
9. Print or save your results.

What are the employment and unemployment rates for individuals (16+ years old) living in the community in which you are working? (Look for the "unemployed" statistic, opposed to the "not in labor force" statistic, which excludes those actively seeking employment.) Are females 16 years+ more or less likely to be in the labor force than the general population? What percentage of families with young children (under 6) have all parents employed? How many people in the neighborhood rely on public transportation or walking to get to work? What is the median family income and, to get a general estimate of what this income supports, look back at table DP-1 from Week Three -- what is the average family size? What percentage of households receives public assistance and what is the average amount received? What is the rate of families living below the poverty level? (Note that the current official poverty level for a single-parent family with 2 children is \$14,824; a two-parent family with two children must earn less than \$18,660 to qualify as "poor.") How does the poverty rate vary based on family type (e.g., with related children under 18, female-headed households, etc.)? Which type has the highest rate of poverty?

Again, you need not answer every one of the above questions in your journal, but please take a look at the data in the tables. Focus your response on the findings that interest you most and describe why they are of interest. Please also answer the questions below.

Consider the circumstances of the people with whom you are working in light of these data and what you've learned about poor families from the readings and in-class discussions. What do you know about the employment status – either actual or prospective – of the individuals or families with whom you are working? What are some of the barriers to employment and/or escaping poverty faced by the families in the community? (You may need to talk to agency/site staff in order to compare and contrast the data with families' experiences.)

Additional resources:

“Poverty” <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty.html>

“The Changing Face of Child Poverty in California” http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_482.pdf

WEEK SEVEN - 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 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?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

AmeriStat (Population Reference Bureau) <http://www.prb.org/> : for U.S. population data and for timely and objective data on world population trends (including U.S.).

Annie E. Casey Foundation – Kids Count <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount> State and national indicators of the health, economic status, and educational level of children and families. This site (<http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart/index.htm>) provides text and data on childbirth and maternal/child health for cities and the nation as a whole.

Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/> employment and unemployment rates, wage information, labor force demographics

California Budget Project <http://www.cbp.org/> Reports and data on the working poor, cost of living in California

California Employment Development Department www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/ Unemployment rates and projections, wage information for California and Los Angeles County

Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families <http://casey.umd.edu/>
Subscription-based service that provides a “Weekly Summary” of news coverage of children and families.

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) <http://www.clasp.org/> Reports on welfare and other forms of economic support for families, child care, reproductive health and teen parenthood, marriage and family policy, employment policies

Child Trends <http://www.childtrends.org> General data on children and family structure in the US, plus more specific data on teen sexuality, single parenthood, child abuse, poverty, employment

Education Commission of the States <http://www.ecs.org/> Provides news and policy information about a wide range of education topics

The Alan Guttmacher Institute <http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/index.html> Research and analysis on all 50 states, covering abortion, pregnancy, parenthood, child abuse, poverty, and employment.

Kaiser Family Foundation www.statehealthfacts.org This resource contains the latest state-level data on demographics, health, and health policy, including health coverage, access, financing, and state legislation

Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/> Research on welfare, labor, foster children, domestic violence, health care for children and families

National Center for Children in Poverty (Columbia University) <http://www.nccp.org/> Fact sheets, research briefs, and an interactive database with information about family structure, income and employment, education

National Center for Health Statistics <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/> Data on a wide range of health issues, including data on birth and death rates, marriage and divorce

National Economic Development and Law Center <http://www.nedlc.org/> Information and resources on children, youth and families, especially child care and family support

National Low Income Housing Coalition <http://www.nlihc.org/> Activist organization with information about housing, homelessness, etc.

Public Health Institute <http://www.phi.org/> “Resource Library” with reports on teen parenthood, welfare, etc.

Urban Institute <http://www.urban.org/> Reports on welfare, immigration, at-risk teens, gay and lesbian families, social policies for the elderly (e.g., social security, Medicare)

United States Census Bureau <http://www.census.gov>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services <http://www.hhs.gov/> Links to resources on many topics related to children and families, including adoption, child abuse, domestic violence, infant health, teenagers, economic support for families, pregnancy

U.S. Department of Justice – Office on Violence Against Women <http://www.usdoj.gov/ovw>. The Office on Violence Against Women works with U.S. attorneys to ensure enforcement of federal criminal statutes. The site offers public information on the current activities of the office, model practices for state and local agencies, and links to related research and organizations at the DOJ.

Weingart Center – Institute for the Study of Homelessness and Poverty
<http://www.unitedwayla.org/getinformed/rr/research/Pages/default.aspx> Data and research (much of it Los Angeles-specific) on homelessness, poverty, and hunger, plus links to many other resources on these and related topics