

JEP Reflective Questions

Race and Ethnic Relations (SOCI 342)
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INTRODUCTION

As a JEP student, your work in the community is similar to that of a social 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 experiences 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 Race and Ethnic Relations course. Please read through all of the Reflective Questions prior to beginning your JEP 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.

Please feel free to go beyond the prompts and write about whatever seems important to you about your experience. Please note that your experiences in the community will provide you with a valuable opportunity to apply the theories you are learning about in class. Please be respectful of the community and the limits of your experience and knowledge. And please try to balance your enthusiasm for testing out theories with your responsibility as a mentor and tutor for children.

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 at 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? How do your experiences during Week One 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, as well as the age, sex, race, ethnicity, and any other significant characteristics of all those involved in your JEP assignment. Provide details about the size, space, decor, noise level, etc., of the classroom (or meeting room), building(s), and grounds. How does the site compare with the social and physical context of the USC campus and/or other school(s) or work places you have been before?

WEEK THREE - Discrimination and Social Characteristics

Sociologist Joe Feagin suggests that systemic racism (the ways in which major institutions have been thoroughly pervaded by racial stereotypes, ideas, images, emotions, and practices) continues to be a part of US society and is interwoven with a strong racist ideology. The central tenet of his argument is that race is a “social construction” (a concept people invented and that changes over time) rather than a purely biological (and fixed) concept. **How do you think the children with whom you are working at your JEP site perceive the concepts of “race” and “ethnicity”: (1) in general terms; (2) in terms of their own racial and/or ethnic identity; and (3) in terms of their perception of you and your racial/ethnic identity?** Illustrate your response with examples or anecdotes from your experiences in the community.

WEEK FOUR – Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Los Angeles

Sociology 342 examines racial and ethnic diversity in the United States. One way to examine ethnic diversity in a community is to look at the different languages that are spoken by its residents. Please visit http://www.mla.org/census_data and examine and compare the languages that are spoken in: (1) the entire US; (2) California; (3) Los Angeles; and (3) the neighborhood of your JEP site (use your JEP site's zip code for this). **Using examples from the website (e.g., languages spoken by age), discuss what this data suggests about ethnic diversity in Los Angeles and particularly the neighborhood of your JEP site. How is this linguistic diversity reflected (e.g., in the types of neighborhood stores, street signs, or the languages spoken at your JEP site)?** What does this diversity tell you about race and ethnic relations and, e.g., the “global society”?

WEEK FIVE - Youth and Education in LA

One of Sociology 342's goals is to expose the underlying issues that characterize the relations between and among different racial and ethnic groups in the United States. In 1992, the Rodney King Riots in Los Angeles exposed the tensions between Asian Americans and African Americans in a violent way (see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/2119943.stm>). More recently, media reports suggest that tensions and violent conflicts between Latino and African American high school students and gangs in Los Angeles have increased over the years (see: <http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/opinion/la-op-hernandez7jan07.1.414328.story?coll=la-news-comment>). **How can an understanding of the history of racial and ethnic conflict, as discussed in the first four weeks of your course, help combat ethnic and racial conflict in Los Angeles?** Use examples from the LA Times article, as well as your experiences at JEP to specifically illustrate how education and social awareness raising may help to ease racial/ethnic tensions between Latinos and African Americans.

WEEK SIX - Immigration

Unless the children and adults at your site are Native American, their ancestors and perhaps they themselves were born elsewhere. Discuss the factors that led to the immigration of one of the individuals (and/or her or his family) with whom you or the organization is working. **Describe who (e.g., the child, their parents, the entire family, grandparents, etc.) immigrated, from what country (or countries), and when they immigrated to the U.S. What were the circumstances or reasons influencing the decision to immigrate?** Try to relate these experiences to some key historical and/or political factors that might have shaped their immigration experience. Additionally, how does understanding individual migration experiences shape the ways in which we understand larger issues of race and ethnicity in America?

WEEK SEVEN - History of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination

Sociologists analyze the lasting impact of historical racial and ethnic discrimination in North America and its relationship to social inequality today. By now, this course has given you a chance to reflect on the histories of various ethnic and racial groups in the United States. **How does this history, both its lasting legacies and its continuing effects, affect the students with whom you are working?** In what ways has this history resulted in the discrimination your students may face? How has this history perpetuated their social, economic and political situation?

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?