

Problem-Solving Learning Courses That Advance Teaching and Learning K-16+ Through the Development of UACS

Cory Bowman

Director, University-Assisted Community
School (UACS) National Network
Associate Director, Netter Center
University of Pennsylvania

bowman@upenn.edu

Mya Gordon

Emerson Fellow, Netter Center for
Community Partnerships

myag@sas.upenn.edu

Naorah Rimkunas, PhD

Associate Director, UACS National
Network

Assistant Professor of Community Schools
Binghamton University–SUNY

rimkunas@binghamton.edu

Theresa Simmonds, EdD

Training and Technical Assistance
Coordinator for Post-Secondary Success
Programs, Netter Center for Community
Partnerships

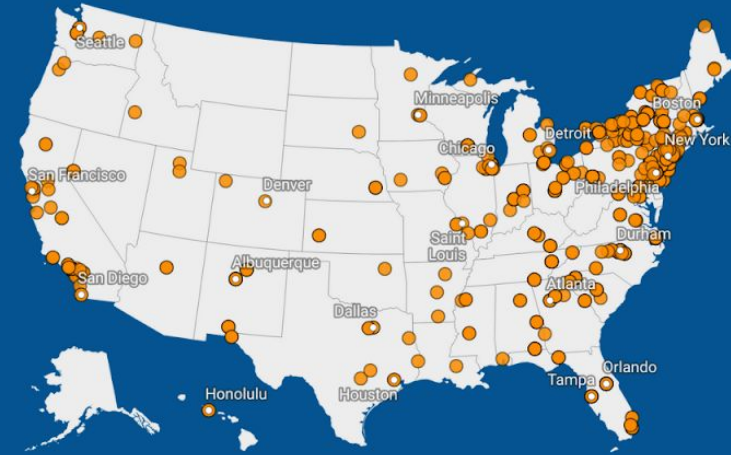
theresae@sas.upenn.edu

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[UACS National Network](#)



University- Assisted Community Schools National Network



1400+
Listserv
Members

275+
Higher Eds

100+
School
Districts

44
U.S. States

150+
Non-Profits

Welcome & Agenda

- Problem-Solving Learning and University-Assisted Community Schools
- Course Presentations
 - Theresa Simmonds, EdD
 - Naorah Rimkunas, PhD
- Student Perspective
 - Mya Gordon
- General Discussion
- Deeper Dive



Problem-Solving Learning & University-Assisted Community Schools

Purpose & Rationale

Historic Roots

“An *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family ... should indeed be the great *Aim* and *End* of all learning.”

- Benjamin Franklin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* (1749)

“To serve as the scientific basis of further study, and of practical reform”

- W. E. B. Du Bios, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899)



What is Community Engaged Scholarship?

“Community engaged scholarship entails working in partnership with the community in a relationship of transparency and trust in order to draw on the expertise of the partners to address a pressing real-world problem.”

“At its heart, community engaged scholarship entails **connecting scholarly expertise with the expertise of community members** outside the university in order to **resolve issues and challenges facing that community**. A central feature of this work is that it is **predicated on mutually beneficial partnerships**—both the university and the community partners benefit.”

- Report of the ad hoc Faculty Committee on Community Engaged Scholarship for the Provost of the University of Pennsylvania (2022)
<https://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/community-engaged-scholarship-report>

Academically Based Community Service (ABCS)

- Integrates service, research, teaching, and learning in credit-bearing courses
- Is a form of community engaged scholarship
- Brings together academic expertise and expertise of the community through mutually beneficial partnerships that help solve universal problems as they are manifested locally
- Designed to improve the quality of life in the community and the quality of learning and scholarship in the University
- Helps students to become active, creative, contributing citizens of a democratic society.



*80+ annual ABCS courses
enrolling 1800+
undergraduate and graduate
students in 40+ disciplines*



URBS1780: A Problem Solving Learning Course that Advances UACS



**URBS1780:
Faculty-Student
Collaborative Action
Seminar in Urban
University-Community
Relations: Penn and
West Philadelphia
as a Case Study
in Progress**



A Democratic Civic University: the main long-term goal of the seminar

A radically different university is needed – a democratic civic university – whose primary mission should be advancing democracy *democratically* on campus, in the community and across the wider society. Creating that university is one of the long-term goals of this course.



Short-term goal of the course

- To help students develop their interactive, democratic, empathetic, and altruistic values.
- *How does the course help students do this?*





How does the course work toward accomplishing these goals?

- Students work at a UACS site
- We bring Netter staff and Community Advisory Board members into seminar
- Students write a Problem Solving Learning paper (PSL)



The heart of the course: the PSL

- Focus on a problem at Penn or in West Philadelphia
- Not “pie in the sky”, full of pronouncements
- Most important criterion for the PSL: *implementability*
 - Implementability, not implementation
 - What about implementation?

University-Assisted Community School Program Areas: what students can focus on

- College Access and Career Readiness
- Environment and Sustainability
- Health and Wellness: Mental Health, Food, Nutrition, Sports, Fitness
- Humanities, Arts, Literacy
- Cultural Enrichment
- STEM
- Voter engagement, student government, civic education



Examples of UACS-focused PSLs

- SPARKLES: Student Performing Arts Reaching Kids in Local Elementary Schools: *After-School Performance Programming in K-8 University Assisted Community Schools on Early Dismissal Days*
- The Good Food Bags Expansion at West Philadelphia High School: A partnership between AUNI (Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative) and West Philadelphia High School (a University-Assisted Community School)
- Math and Munch: The Expansion and Development of the Hamilton After-School Math Club
- OurSpace's Sexual Health Education Program

How do students develop their proposals?

- The PSL Framework: 11 questions that they work through iteratively over multiple weeks, with feedback from the teaching team and Netter staff

Two key aspects of the PSL

- Aspect 1: Problem statement
 - Problem statement #1: Food insecurity, in part due to the inadequate access to fresh and healthy produce, poses obstacles to maintaining healthy lifestyles. Through the incorporation of the Good Food Bag program into the nutrition after-school curriculum at West Philadelphia High School, students and community members will be able to have easier access to fresh produce, thus having greater agency in leading a healthier, nutritious lifestyle.

- Problem statement #2: Performing arts in schools have been shown to positively affect the schoolwork and class participation of students. However, there is a lack of performing arts resources in local West Philadelphia elementary schools. This PSL aims to bring artistically-trained Penn student volunteers to schools to expose the elementary school students to the performing arts, while simultaneously filling gaps in after-school programs.

- Aspect 2: Working with Netter and school staff to develop their proposals

Impacts on students

“I feel more efficacious thanks to this seminar. Through the PSL process, I have become more confident in my ability to partner with community members and tangibly contribute to solving a social problem. The seminar has taught me that when Penn students dedicate themselves to the PSL process, integrate a variety of resources, work with others, seek feedback, and center the voices of community members, they can help advance a larger push for equity and justice.”

Revisiting the goals of URBS1780

- To help students develop their interactive, democratic, empathetic, and altruistic values
- To develop a democratic civic university

Contact Information

Theresa Simmonds

theresae@sas.upenn.edu

www.nettercenter.upenn.edu

EDUC - CCPA 360
REIMAGINING SCHOOLS:
An Emerging PSL Course

Naorah Rimkunas, PhD



Course Overview

- Existing course redeveloped as a PSL course
- 4-credit undergraduate course
- Capped at 25 students
- Designated *Community Engaged Learning Course (CEL)* through the Center for Civic Engagement
- Elective in the Education Minor
- Prior focus: Survey course of Community Schools theory and practice
- Current focus: Examine real issues facing local schools through a community schools lens and apply the problem-solving learning framework to develop solutions.

Course Objectives

- **Describe the community schools movement** and the role of University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) in promoting equity and democracy.
- **Examine local school and community contexts** to understand social, economic, and structural influences on well-being.
- **Apply the community schools approach and problem-solving learning (PSL) framework** to address school challenges.
- **Collaborate with peers and community partners**, providing near-peer mentorship to high school students.
- **Conduct and communicate research** using literature reviews and qualitative methods to inform action.

Syllabus Highlights

- Group work
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Guest Speakers:
 - UACS
 - Family Engagement
 - Local education systems
 - Research & Evaluation
- Issue Swaps
- Interviews with community members and faculty
- Place-based: social, economic, and geographic conditions

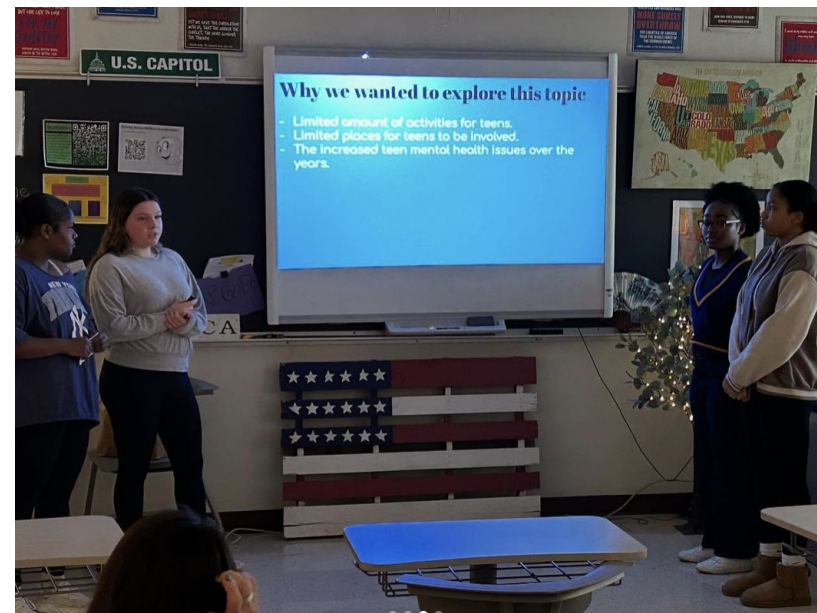
Example Assignments:

- Community Schools “case” presentations: *Community Schools Revolution*
- Educational Autobiography
- Windshield Assessment
- “Near-Peer” support and problem solving learning with high school students
- PSL Progress and Final PSL Paper

Citizens in Action class

Grades 11 or 12

- Yearlong, two-semester course
- Prepares students to earn the New York State Seal of Civic Readiness
- Students work collaboratively to investigate a civic issue of interest
- Develop and present a capstone action plan to inform or engage the community
- Builds research skills in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods while fostering key civic competencies



Example Problems and Proposed Solutions

- Sense of belonging for students with disabilities → Peer Buddy Program
- Chronic absenteeism → restorative practices and incentives
- Mental health and wellbeing resources → positive action curriculum
- Lack of rural transportation options
 - certify teachers as part-time bus drivers
 - establish school transportation fund and a volunteer driver corps

Current Problem Examples

Relmaging Schools

- Confusing of mandated reporter rules in schools
- Lack of menstrual hygiene supplies in schools
- Lack of transportation to extracurricular activities

Citizens in Action

- Lack of resources for unhoused students
- Disparities in funding for high school athletics
- Marijuana, vaping, tobacco use in schools

Growth Areas

- Learning curve for using PSL framework
- School partnership needs time to develop
- Flexibility about group work - contracts help!
- University students have great ideas for building rapport with high school students
- Build repository of high quality PSL papers
- Students asking for interdisciplinary collaboration opportunities through PSL
- Connecting directly to university resources (UACS)



Student Perspective on PSL Course Experience

Mya Gordon

Penn Program for Public Service

- 11-week summer program for Penn undergraduates
- Immerses 10-12 interns in real-world problem solving in which interns **collaborate** with community and/or Penn partners to **co-design solutions to an identified problem**

Program components:

- Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) seminar 2x a week
 - Culminates in Problem Solving Learning research paper
- Paid full-time internship (30-35 hrs a week)
- Housed together in living-learning community
- Social activities



Mya's Penn Program for Public Service Internship Experience

Previous Netter UACS engagement:

- Silverman Fellowship:
 - Robeson Writes
 - UACS Student and Family Newsletter



PPPS Work Placements:

- K-8 Summer Programming support
- Non-Profit Connect
- UACS Student and Family Newsletter



Problem-Solving Learning Paper

Addressing Low Academic Performance through Culturally Relevant Mentorship: A Cultural Enrichment After-School Program at Williams L. Sayre High School

Problem statement:

- Lack of space for students of color to engage with the racialized state of their educational experience, which contributes to poor academic performance
- Proposed mentorship program with Penn students that would provide culturally responsive care and racial-identity development to enhance academic motivation and performance.



Problem-Solving Learning Content

- How and why we selected this problem
- Overview of the program and its goals
- Research on similar models of programming
- Implementation process
 - Clarifying agenda and catalysts
- Plans for program sustainability
- Student engagement approach
- Program evaluation process
- Program partnerships
- Includes examples of the daily schedule and curriculum
- Reflection of our PSL journey

Beyond PPPS

- Netter Center Student Advisory Board member
- Civic Development Internships (CDI)
 - Dialogue Dinners for Community-Engaged Student Leaders (w/ SNF Paideia - civic dialogue and wellness)
- Netter Shah Engaged Research Intern, Andrea Mitchell Center for Democracy Fellow, Urban Studies Senior Thesis
 - Researched focused on understanding community engagement collaboration across the university to further conceptualize the democratic civic mission of higher ed institutions





THANK YOU! QUESTIONS ?

Reach out anytime: bowman@upenn.edu