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I am a joint-Ph.D. student in political science and education policy at the University of Pennsylvania studying civic education, political participation, political knowledge and socialization, and education governance and finance. Prior to graduate school, I served as an AmeriCorps volunteer and social studies teacher. I earned my MPA and M.S.Ed. from Penn and B.A. from Mount Holyoke College, and I am absolutely thrilled to join the second cohort of the Provost's Graduate Academic Engagement Fellowship at the Netter Center.

While still a thought experiment in progress, my aspiration would be to teach an ABCS course in my second year of the fellowship focused on political knowledge. Political knowledge, defined by Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (1996, 10), is considered an important indicator of a citizen's ability to effectively engage in her local and national political systems (Verba, Burns, and Scholzman, 1997). Political knowledge informs public opinion, which is central to a democratic society given evidence suggesting political leaders and policy makers respond to it (Lizotte and Sidman 2009; Zaller 1992), and is an important component of political behavior and engagement, whether measured through more traditional manifestations of citizenship duty such as voting, or citizen action such as participating in a protest (Dalton 2014). My interest in political knowledge is rooted in my belief that an informed citizenry is central to a functioning democracy (Dahl 1979). Converse (1964) suggests that political knowledge, which he calls political sophistication, refers to an individual's ability to think critically and thoughtfully about politics. He suggests there is a distinct difference between those citizens that are and are not knowledgeable (in a sophisticated way) about politics (Converse 1964). When citizens are sophisticated in their ability to think carefully about political topics, thus rendering them knowledgeable at least about the facts at hand if not also adept at describing the nuances of political material, they enjoy political “cognitive complexity” (Luskin 1987, 861) that empowers them to engage in society and, ostensibly, uphold democracy. If political knowledge is a resource needed to engage in democracy, then equitable access to it is crucial to genuinely representative governance.

It is this philosophy that motivates my proposed ABCS course. The broad goal would be for Penn students to (a) develop expertise in the literature on political knowledge and (b) engage thoughtfully with Philadelphia high school students to help them build their own expertise and create a survey on political knowledge to give to their high school peers, hopefully broadening the impact of our collaboration. Indeed, a significant component of this course would embrace ‘learning by teaching’, where Penn students would help facilitate learning for high school students, who in turn would foster the learning of their high school peers in related workshops about political knowledge and survey research. The results of our survey data could also providing another source for understanding what students at both the high school and college level know about politics and social science research.