



Netter Center  
for Community Partnerships  
*UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA*

Universities—Communities—Schools  
**Partners for Change**





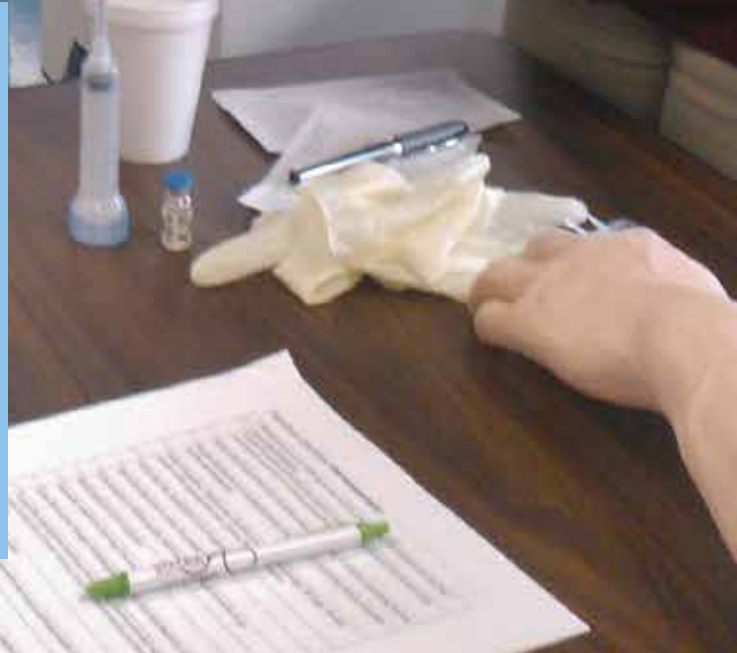
**Through an Academically Based Community Service course** on nutritional anthropology, students study problems of nutrition and nutrition-related disease. Netter Center staff member, Jarrett Stein, C'og, (center) leads Penn undergraduates and students at a local elementary school in exploring food cultures from around the world.

## ...on Campus and in the Community

A GREAT UNIVERSITY HAS A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY—one that the University of Pennsylvania’s founder, Benjamin Franklin, summed up with a famous query: “The noblest question in the world is, ‘What good may I do?’”

Since it was founded at Penn in 1992, the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships has sought to answer that question by bringing the University and its neighbors together. Thanks to a wide range of democratic partnerships—developed through innovative Netter Center programs—thousands of Penn students have worked in and with local institutions, including schools and health clinics, as part of their academic experience. Uniting with community members, they address real-world problems and produce positive change.

“These partnerships simultaneously improve both Penn and the community,” says Netter Center Director Dr. Ira Harkavy, C’70, GR’79. “That’s the core of the work.” And as the Center’s model continues to be replicated, nationally and globally, the good that Ben Franklin referred to is having a transformative effect, not just in West Philadelphia, but throughout the world.





# The Netter Center for Community Partnerships

**M**ore than a decade ago, a group of students taking part in Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses at the University of Pennsylvania set out to solve a seemingly intractable problem—lack of good affordable health care for residents of the economically disadvantaged neighborhoods of West Philadelphia that surround the Penn campus.

“We’d been trying to develop a university-assisted community health center for a long time,” recalls Dr. Ira Harkavy, director of the Netter Center for Community Partnerships. But plans for this much-needed resource had stalemated.

That is, until it became a focus of two ABCS seminars, with their emphasis on real-world community problem solving—a hallmark of the Netter Center’s approach. Students in the seminars recommended forming a partnership between a local public school and the University, and incorporating health issues into the curricula of both. “Penn undergraduates catalyzed the idea,” Dr. Harkavy says. “It took their involvement to move it forward.” Members of the community, as well as other Penn partners, joined in. The impressive result of all their efforts, the Dr. Bennett L. Johnson, Jr. Sayre Health Center, opened in 2007.

Located at Sayre High School, the health center is a full-service, primary care facility that provides clinical services to the community while also offering hands-on educational opportunities to a diverse range of participants—from students at the local high school who want to explore careers in health care, to professional students enrolled in

**Through local engagement, Netter Center programs bring the community and the academy together, to the mutual benefit of both.**

medical, nursing, dental, and social work programs at Penn.

The Netter Center has been fostering such unique and inspired partnerships since it was founded. Its programs largely owe their existence to two key concepts: ABCS courses, which bring Penn faculty and students into partnerships with local organizations to solve real-world problems; and University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS), public schools where Penn faculty, staff, students, and alumni help to develop neighborhood hubs of learning and community engagement. And more recently created concepts, such as University-Assisted Community Development, also increasingly animate the Netter Center’s work.

This deep, committed interdependence between the University and its community—the key to the Sayre Health Center’s success—characterizes all Netter Center programs. Engaging locally, nationally, and globally are priorities of President Amy Gutmann’s original Penn Compact, as well as her renewed vision outlined in Penn Compact 2020. Through local engagement, Netter Center programs bring the community and the academy together, to the mutual benefit of both. And the adaptation of the UACS model by other universities takes this impact across the country and around the globe.

**A Sayre High School student** learns how to administer shots to patients by working alongside Daniel Thomes-Klug (top left), a student in Penn’s College of Liberal and Professional Studies. Thomes-Klug volunteers through the SHIELD (Sayre Health Initiatives, Education, and Leadership Development) Program. Rowana Ahmed, ENG’14, GEN’14, (inset) mentors a local elementary school student through a Netter Center program.

## Problem: Need for Healthy Lifestyles

### Solution: Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative

**W**hat seems like just a vegetable to most of us—a lettuce leaf or a vine-ripe tomato—is, for Jarrett Stein, C'09, something more. “We use food as a vehicle of engagement and learning,” says Stein, Director of Academically Based Community Service Partnerships and Student Engagement for the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative (AUNI).

AUNI promotes health and wellness in the West Philadelphia community primarily through programs in University-Assisted Community Schools. Activities focus on healthy eating, fitness, and school-based gardens that are accessible to pupils at every level, from elementary to secondary schools, throughout local neighborhoods.

Stein first experienced AUNI as a Penn undergraduate through an Academically Based Community Service course in which he led family cooking workshops at Lea Elementary School. Now, as an alumnus and staff member, he’s the one bringing University students into local classrooms through courses, internships, and volunteer opportunities, to the benefit of all parties. Through AUNI, he says, “eyes are opened to the value of fresh and delicious produce and how easy it is to grow it yourself.”

George Walley-Sephes, 17, is an example of how well the program succeeds. When he was in the tenth grade at the High School of the Future, he signed up for an elective cooking class. Before long, after learning to both cook and garden, Walley-Sephes was transformed into a food activist. He now travels across the country, speaking at community conferences. He’s even taken his mission to the United

States Congress and helped to launch the Youth Food Bill of Rights.

Through gardening, West Philadelphia youth learn alongside Penn students about plant biology, environmental studies, and energy dependence. Walley-Sephes recalls with passion how half a dozen raised garden beds behind his school yielded strawberries, squash, potatoes, and more. He and some classmates sold produce at a farmers’ market, while others loaded the produce onto mobile food carts to sell in the neighborhood. All of them learned about entrepreneurship—and other skills like public speaking in the process. AUNI also provides paid opportunities for these students to maintain the garden beds after school and to serve as peer nutrition educators.

These outdoor classrooms are educational spaces that allow for hands-on learning. “We partner with teachers in the schools to bring alive the concepts they’re trying to teach,” Stein says. “You can sit at your desk and calculate an area, or you can go outside to measure your garden.”

Students don’t keep the lessons to themselves. After Walley-Sephes, for example, learned to make salmon cakes—complete with organic bread crumbs, onions, and green peppers—in his cooking class, he began whipping them up for his family and friends. Like the Penn students and other youth in the program, he became an agent of change, promoting the benefits of a healthy diet at home and in his school and community.

**The Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative** maintains school gardens that provide fruits and vegetables for community members while teaching students where their food comes from. Penn and high school students harvest produce from the Sayre High School garden to sell at local farmers’ markets (inset).







## Problem: Need for Hands-On STEM Learning

### Solution: Moelis Access Science

It is widely recognized that improving STEM (science/technology/engineering/mathematics) education is crucial for innovation, economic prosperity, and a decent quality of life, and that new ways for teaching and learning STEM are needed. However, financial constraints facing West Philadelphia schools—indeed public schools across the country—have negative impacts on STEM education. “We don’t have a lot of lab equipment here, so a lot of times we’re doing abstract things,” explains Christine Longhitano, a science teacher at a neighborhood high school.

For the most part, hands-on experiments—so critical to STEM learning—simply cannot take place. But things change when Penn students arrive in Longhitano’s introductory physics class, bringing along such equipment as a “ball popper-upper” for a projectile motion experiment. The Penn undergraduates use these materials to engage the high school students in hands-on laboratory exercises and classroom demonstrations.

Because several undergraduates take part in each class, students can be taught in smaller groups. Such personalized attention means that students “can be more focused,” Longhitano reports, and learning is enhanced. These interactions also encourage effective mentoring relationships between the Penn students and high school students, promoting awareness of careers in science, as well as college access and career readiness.

### “It’s learning science by teaching science.”

The Penn students come to Ms. Longhitano’s class via an Academically Based Community Service course called “Community Physics Initiative,” taught by Dr. Larry Gladney, Associate Dean for the Natural Sciences in the School of Arts and Sciences and immediate past chair of the Department of Physics and Astronomy. As part of the Netter Center’s Moelis Access Science program, courses like Professor Gladney’s improve STEM education for K-12 students while enriching the skills of the Penn undergraduate and graduate students who provide classroom support. The program also employs Penn students as classroom fellows who assist teachers with instruction, lesson planning, and professional development.

Moelis Access Science (MAS) exemplifies the reciprocal, democratic partnerships that Penn develops through University-Assisted Community Schools. The benefits of MAS classes at the high school level go beyond science. They provide “a semblance of what it’s like to be in a college classroom,” says Dr. Gladney. MAS, he emphasizes, equally benefits Penn student learning and development: “It’s learning science by teaching science. My students learn to think about physics and how to explain it. They also see the challenges of teaching.”

**Through Moelis Access Science**, Penn students enhance STEM education at local schools with hands-on activities, while improving their own understanding and public speaking skills. Peter Chansky, C’13, M’17, and Chrissy Liu, C’13, (inset) participate in Dr. Larry Gladney’s ABCS course, helping underserved high school students appreciate the impact of physics in their lives.







### STAYING INVOLVED

What happens to committed undergraduates once their time at Penn is over? “What are the pathways to advance this work naturally?” Dr. Harkavy asks.

At least part of the answer comes from a program that began in 2012, The Emerson Fellows of the Netter Center, which provides one- or two-year appointments to two outstanding graduating Penn seniors who have worked with the Netter Center.

The West Philadelphia Emerson Fellow works locally to advance the Netter Center’s University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS).

The National Policy Emerson Fellow works in Washington, D.C. on national issues impacting UACS. Both fellows engage in research, policy, and practice, assuming prominent roles in the field of university engagement.

## Problem: Need for Civic-Minded Leaders

### Solution: Community-Based Internships for Penn Students

**W**hen Rosaline Zhang, C'14, M'18, set out to research health issues as an intern in the Netter Center's Penn Program for Public Service (PPPS) Summer Internship, she didn't have to travel far to find them. Sayre High School, located just two miles from the Penn campus, was not performing well, and health issues such as obesity and diabetes were rife in its West Philadelphia neighborhood. "I was really interested in seeing how the University, Sayre Health Center, and the high school in which it's located, could work together to build stronger partnerships in the community," says Zhang.

Like Academically Based Community Service courses, Netter Center internships bring students into the neighborhoods around Penn to work in partnership with local institutions. The PPPS summer program is intense. Interns live together in Penn housing over a 12-week period, an arrangement that fosters strong friendships—and big ideas. "What is so powerful is that they're engaging in the program 24/7," explains Dr. Harkavy, whose weekly seminars for interns are a key part of PPPS. Throughout the summer, interns also conduct research on community-identified problems and write papers that propose concrete, actionable plans that might contribute to solving these problems.

That engagement and research bring innovation. Zhang, for example, helped to develop two programs: FLASH (Fitness Leadership at Sayre

**"It helped me see college as a crucial time for personal, moral, civic, and intellectual development."**

Health), which promotes healthier living in the community by providing free classes in fitness and healthy cooking; and SHIELD (Sayre Health Initiatives, Education, and Leadership Development), which familiarizes Sayre students with health professions.

After she completed the PPPS summer program, Zhang continued as a Civic Development Intern for the Netter Center, which enabled her to implement these innovative community programs throughout the academic year. For Zhang, the experience has been transformative: "It helped me see college as a crucial time for personal, moral, civic, and intellectual development."

Zhang's work through Netter Center-sponsored internships also led her to shift her focus, in both her academic and her professional goals: a medical career in community health is now her priority. It enabled her, she adds, "to pursue my education so I can learn how to solve complex problems and become an active participant in the community and the world."



## Problem: Need for Cross-Cultural Understanding

## Solution: Netter Center Arts and Culture Programs

Chantias Ford, C'14, didn't know much about West Philadelphia and its culture when she signed up for Dr. Carol A. Muller's gospel music course at Penn. But that soon changed. Before long this urban studies major was conducting ethnographic research on the Brockington Ensemble, a 40- to 50-member vocal group that, Ford discovered, was legendary: "It's a huge part of the culture of gospel music in Philadelphia."

Through Academically Based Community Service courses, students like Ford engage with arts and culture projects throughout the local community. The students conduct field research, recording and archiving the musical traditions around them. "We're building a web-based archive on gospel music in the neighborhood," says Dr. Muller, an ethnomusicologist who grew up in apartheid South Africa.

Interviewing members of the Brockington Ensemble led Ford and some of her classmates deep into a history—and a community—they knew little about. "A lot of us hadn't even been off campus before," she says. "This project gave us a chance to get to know the city and the rich history of the surrounding neighborhood."

Ford conducted video interviews for her research; other students take different approaches. In one of Dr. Muller's seminars, students produced a compact disc with extensive liner notes about contemporary gospel performance in the area.

Whatever form it takes, such research "debunks the myth that West Philadelphia is culturally impoverished with nothing to offer," Dr. Muller observes. "It also tells people in the community that their music matters in the academy."

**"Students and the community are in direct partnership, producing knowledge together."**

Gospel is just part of it. Dr. Muller and her colleague, Dr. Tim Rommen, have worked with other local musical traditions, including jazz and Qur'anic recitation. For one ongoing field project, 50 Penn students videotaped musicians in a local retirement home. By recording stories and music, the students help preserve them for future generations. "Students and the community are in direct partnership, producing knowledge together," Dr. Muller says.

A key issue for community members is access to the material compiled by Penn faculty and students—one that's been addressed by producing compact discs and videos, as well as a dynamic website called "West Philadelphia Music."

Students bring their research to the world in a dizzying number of ways—through blogs, YouTube, Flickr, and more. The community is able to weigh in, strengthening findings, and advancing Muller's research and her vision of "community through music."

The Penn students are rewarded by a heightened awareness of the musical culture around them, as well as a deeper appreciation of the history of the community that gave rise to it. Their work brings two disparate groups together. "We're breaking down the barriers between them one person at a time," Dr. Muller points out. "The worlds are a little more connected than we ever imagined."

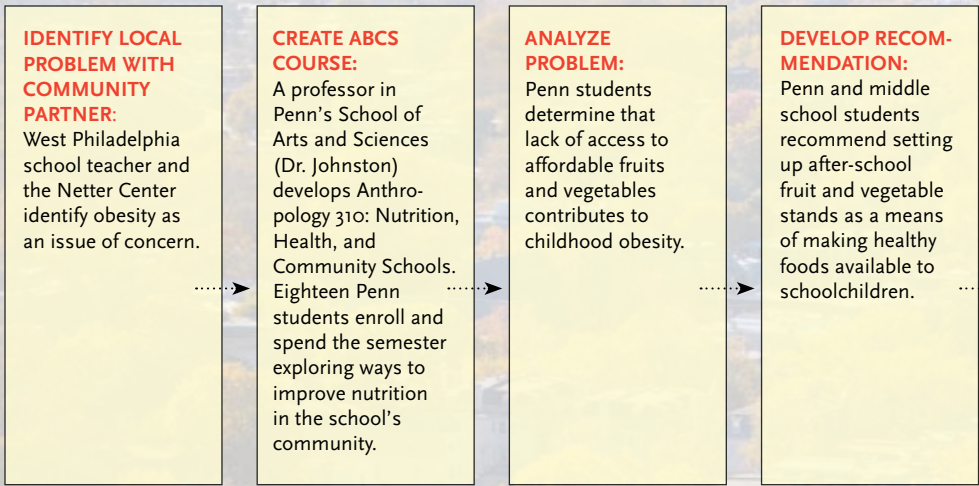
**Professor Carol Muller** (top right) helps Alicia Yang, C'16, edit a documentary examining the history of the Millennium Baptist Church in West Philadelphia. Students at Lea Elementary School learn how to play the violin and other musical instruments through after-school music programs coordinated by the Netter Center (inset).





# A Case Study:

## The Evolution of a Netter Center Program



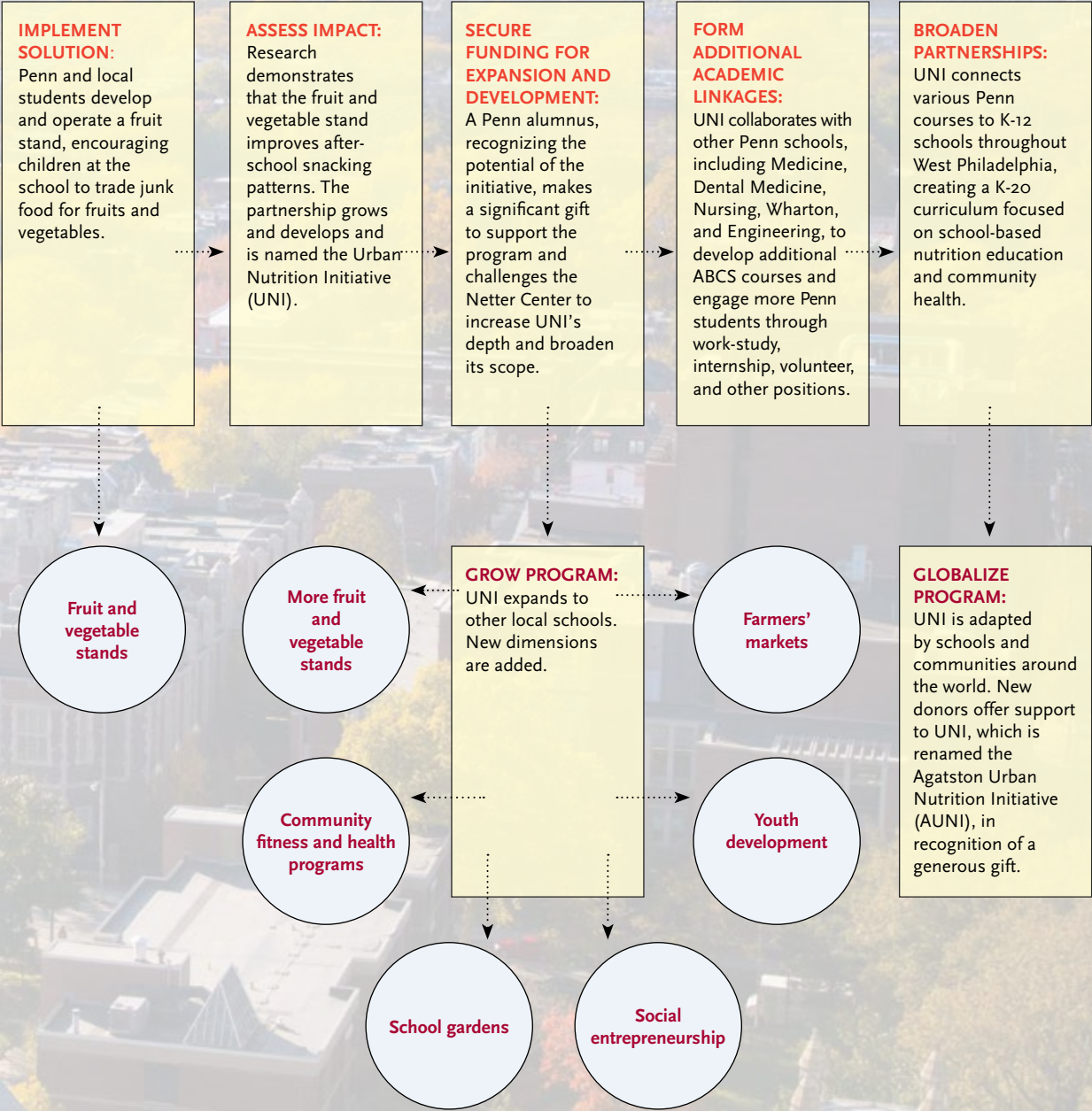
### THE AGATSTON URBAN NUTRITION INITIATIVE

“It all starts with a community-identified problem. The problem—in this case, poor nutrition in West Philadelphia—then becomes the vehicle for teaching.”

#### DR. FRANCIS JOHNSTON

*Co-Chair, Netter Center Faculty Advisory Board; Faculty Director, Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative; Professor Emeritus of Anthropology; One of the first ABCS instructors*









# Netter Center: Perspectives

## A PENN DEAN AND PROFESSOR...

“The Netter Center’s programs provide outstanding opportunities for members of the Penn community—students, faculty, and staff—to engage meaningfully in the West Philadelphia community and beyond. That the Netter Center enriches the community and the University goes almost without saying. It also provides powerful means for students to reinforce and expand their academic and intellectual pursuits while at Penn, and influences their lives in profound ways after they graduate.”

—DENNIS DETURCK

*Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences,  
Robert A. Fox Leadership Professor, Professor of Mathematics,  
and Faculty Advisor of Moelis Access Science*

## A COMMUNITY LEADER...

“To say that I am proud to be a part of the fabric of the Netter Center is a gross understatement. The Netter Center enables Penn and the community to get to know each other and work together in meaningful partnerships for the good of all. I think the Netter Center, and centers like it at other universities, are answers to the race relations problem in the U.S.”

—JETTIE D. NEWKIRK, ESQ.

*Netter Center Community Advisory Board Chair*

## A NATIONAL BOARD LEADER...

“The Netter Center makes a unique contribution. It helps people in universities and communities to collaborate and solve major problems. Through working together and successfully making a difference, all participants learn, feel a sense of accomplishment, and consequently develop their personal values and self-esteem, which are so necessary to live a fulfilling and productive life.”

—BARBARA NETTER, PAR’83

*Netter Center National Advisory Board Member*

## A PENN ALUMNUS...

“The Netter Center for Community Partnerships shaped my undergraduate career at Penn. Through the Center, I was able to find my passion for teaching urban youth. After Penn, I pursued a career in teaching for 9 years and am now the Vice-Principal of the East Palo Alto Academy, Stanford University’s assisted school. The internship opportunities and coursework that I had as an undergraduate provided me a foundation for success in urban education. My experiences at Penn and post graduation serve as living proof that undergraduates and universities can transform communities.”

—JEFF CAMARILLO, C’01

*Vice Principal, East Palo Alto Academy*

## A UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT...

“When my team and I visited the Netter Center we found two things we needed—inspiration for the work we wanted to do as an anchor institution in Atlanta and a rich resource of technical assistance to help us maximize our impact. Our strategic plan is stronger, thanks to the work and spirit of collaboration embodied by Ira Harkavy and his staff!”

—BEVERLY DANIEL TATUM

*President, Spelman College*

## A NATIONAL LEADER IN THE FIELD...

“We cannot expect students to be responsible citizens of their communities unless their colleges and universities are as well. The Netter Center for Community Partnerships makes Penn a model of the engaged urban campus.”

—THOMAS EHRLICH

*Visiting Professor at the Stanford School of Education,  
President Emeritus of Indiana University,  
and former Penn Provost*



## Conclusion

**F**or more than twenty years, the Netter Center for Community Partnerships has been fostering relationships between Penn, public schools, and other organizations in its local community of West Philadelphia.

The Netter Center's University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) and Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses have produced positive, transformative change at every level, from institutions to individual lives.

Penn students, in particular, have profoundly benefited from these and other programs, which bring them into the community to work collaboratively with local groups. Many undergraduate and graduate students have reimagined their educational and career goals as a result.

In so doing, they—as Ben Franklin suggested more than 200 years ago—learn better what good they can do in the world. They live the principles that the University recommitted to in President Amy Gutmann's Penn Compact 2020: engaging locally, nationally, and globally; increasing access and diversity; and integrating knowledge across disciplines. Along the way, they reinforce Penn's stature as a civic leader in higher education.

“Why focus on local problems?” Dr. Harkavy asks. “Because they’re accessible, face to face. These aren’t West Philadelphia problems alone. These are universal problems, manifested locally.”

Similarly, local solutions can have universal applications. The Netter Center is known around the world for its UACS model. Replication of UACS was taken to a new level through the generous naming gift in 2007 from Barbara Netter, PAR’83, and her late husband, Edward Netter, C’53, PAR’83.

“Why focus on local problems?”

Dr. Harkavy asks. “Because they’re accessible, face to face. These aren’t West Philadelphia problems alone. These are universal problems, manifested locally.”

Regional training centers that have been developed in Tulsa and Indianapolis are effectively adapting the UACS model in their own communities, as well as engaging and training other colleges and universities in their immediate region and surrounding states. With the Netters’ gift, the Netter Center was also able to make a significant commitment to comprehensive evaluation of its work by hiring a full-time evaluator. Through ongoing assessment, the Netter Center can continually improve its practice on campus and in the community.

There are, of course, benefits to higher education itself. By working with communities to create UACS, colleges and universities advance teaching, research, learning, and service—and, crucially, encourage civic development in their students.

“Working in partnership with neighbors and local institutions, we can make a real difference on campus and in the community, and generate knowledge that is locally, regionally, and globally significant,” Dr. Harkavy emphasizes. As the Netter Center’s work, particularly its UACS model, continues to be replicated, the Center’s impact will doubtless increase, to the benefit of communities around the world.

## Netter Center Giving Opportunities

Netter Center Director, Dr. Ira Harkavy, C'70, GR'79

## Netter Center National Advisory Board



“For its focus on (and work with) the local community, for its university-wide approach engaging support and insights from across the institution, for the comprehensiveness of its efforts, for the close association of students, faculty and staff working as a coherent team, for its ability to address specific issues while at the same time advancing general knowledge, and most of all for the sheer audaciousness of its goals and mission and achievements—in all these respects the Netter Center is an ideal example of what makes Penn distinctive.”

PRESIDENT AMY GUTMANN





The Barbara and Edward Netter  
Center for Community Partnerships  
111 South 38th Street, Second Floor  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
[www.nettercenter.upenn.edu](http://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu)

