

Netter Center for Community Partnerships Overview

MISSION

Founded in 1992, the Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships is the University's primary vehicle for advancing civic and community engagement at Penn. It brings together the resources and assets of both the University and the wider community to help solve universal problems such as poverty, health inequities, environmental sustainability, and inadequate, unequal education as they are manifested in the University's local geographic area of West Philadelphia and Philadelphia at large. The Netter Center develops and helps implement democratic, mutually transformative, place-based partnerships between Penn and West Philadelphia that advance research, teaching, learning, practice, and service and improve the quality of life on campus and in the community. Netter works with and serves as a model for other higher education institutions across the United States and around the world.

KEY STRATEGIES

Three key strategies underpin Netter's work:

- Academically Based Community Service (ABCS), service rooted in and intrinsically connected to research, teaching, and learning.
- University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS), which educate, engage, empower, and serve not only students, but also all other members of the community, providing an organizing framework for bringing Penn resources, including Netter programs such as ABCS courses, to West Philadelphia schools.
- Comprehensive, Democratic Anchor Institution Approach, in which ABCS and UACS are core components of Penn's efforts to engage its full range of resources in sustained, mutually beneficial partnerships with the West Philadelphia/Philadelphia community.

Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) & Penn Student Engagement

ABCS is a form of Community-Engaged Scholarship, bringing together academic expertise and the expertise of the community via mutually beneficial, mutually transformative democratic partnership. Well over 200 ABCS courses have been developed at Penn in a wide range of disciplines that work to improve the quality of life and learning in the community and the quality of learning and scholarship in the university through collaborative problem-solving. In the 2023-24 academic year, a total of 82 courses were taught across 11 Penn schools: Annenberg School for Communication, Arts & Sciences (27 departments), Carey Law School, Dental Medicine, Education, Engineering and Applied Science, Perelman School of Medicine, Nursing, Social Policy and Practice, Weitzman School of Design, and Wharton.

In addition to the approximately 1,950 undergraduate and graduate students in ABCS courses, in 2023-2024, the Netter Center employed 427 Penn students through paid work-study positions and academic internships and supported over 400 student volunteers.

ABCS-related initiatives include:

- Penn Program for Public Service (PPPS) Summer Internship involves ten to twelve outstanding undergraduates who participate in an ABCS research seminar with Netter's Director

on urban university-community relations, write a problem-solving learning research paper, live together, and work 30+ hours a week with a Netter program in West Philadelphia.

- **Civic Development Internship (CDI) program** provides an opportunity for the highest-performing PPPS students to implement the problem-solving work they began in the ABCS summer research seminar. CDI combines an informal seminar with an internship experience.
- **Provost's Graduate Academic Engagement Fellowship at the Netter Center (PGAEF@NC)** is a two-year Fellowship open to PhD students across all schools and fields at Penn. Fellows are outstanding students who are involved in community-engaged scholarship and related activities, including ABCS. As part of their fellowship, PGAEF either serve as instructors for ABCS seminars and/or work on community-engaged research in partnership with and focused on West Philadelphia/Philadelphia. The Fellowship also involves participation in a faculty-student seminar on community-engaged research and teaching, a research fund for each Fellow, support to attend and present at conferences, and full funding for one academic year..
- **Penn Graduate Community-Engaged Research Mentorship (PGCERM)** engages graduate students in community-engaged research with a faculty mentor experienced in ABCS, participatory action research, and other forms of community-engaged scholarship over a 10-week summer program in partnership with Netter. In addition, each senior faculty mentor identifies and supports a junior faculty member who also mentors a graduate student on a community-engaged project.
- **Provost's Faculty Fellows at the Netter Center** work closely with the Netter Center Director and other colleagues to develop and disseminate their own ABCS teaching and research, as well as work to increase Penn faculty involvement in ABCS teaching and related research projects.
- **Provost-Netter Center Faculty-Community Partnership Award** recognizes sustained and productive university/community partnership through an annual award of \$10,000 (\$5,000 to the faculty member, \$5,000 to the community partner) to develop or enhance ongoing work.
- *Additional Academic Internships, Fellowships, and Honors include:* **Emerson Fellowship at the Netter Center**, offering one graduating Penn senior an opportunity to work in community-engaged practice, research and policy through a one-year full-time appointment; **Shah Family Prize for Innovative Undergraduate Student Projects**, enabling Penn students to further develop, improve, and successfully implement projects that make a positive impact on campus and in the local community; **Shah Engaged Research Summer Internship**, supporting up to four undergraduate or graduate students in pursuing action-oriented, collaborative research projects; **Keller Award**, recognizing one graduating senior who has demonstrated a high level of commitment, exemplary work ethic, and positive overall contribution through Netter programs and ABCS courses.

University-Assisted Community Schools

A major component of the Netter Center's work is mobilizing the vast resources of the University to help transform traditional public schools into innovative University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS). UACS educate, engage, empower, and serve not only students, but also all other members of the community in which the school is located. A mutually beneficial approach improves the quality of life and learning in the community while advancing the academic mission of the University.

Netter works with over **3400** K-12 students in schools in West and Southwest Philadelphia through its University-Assisted Community School (UACS) programs. The Netter Center's seven UACS are characterized as schools that have a full-time staff Site Director or Program Director and have comprehensive school day, afterschool, and summer programming: **Comegys School (K-8), Hamilton School (K-8), Lea School (K-8), Mastery Shoemaker Campus (7-12), Paul Robeson, Sayre, and West Philadelphia High Schools**. Additional partner schools (with more limited programming) include Global Leadership Academy Southwest, West Catholic High School, School of the Future, and John Bartram High School.

Programming occurs during the school day, after school, evenings, Saturdays, and summers. Penn students taking ABCS courses, work-study students, and volunteers provide vital support as tutors, mentors, classroom fellows, or activity and project leaders. Specific Netter UACS programs include:

- **Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative** (nutrition education, food access, and healthy lifestyles)
- **Arts, Culture, and Humanities Partnerships and Silverman Fellowship Program** (written, visual, and performing arts, as well as literacy and critical thinking skill-building with a focus on wellness)
- **College Access and Career Readiness** (mentorship, internships, college and career exposure and support)
- **Community School Student Partnerships** (undergraduate-led academic and cultural enrichment)
- **Environmental and Sustainability Education** (including environmental health and green infrastructure projects with Penn Sustainability, Weitzman, Annenberg, SAS, and other partners)
- **Extended Learning/ Out-of-School Time** (programs operate 3-6pm daily during academic year and 8am to 3pm during summer)
- **Health Sciences Educational Pipeline Program**, in partnership with Perelman School of Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, the Master of Public Health Program, and the Vagelos Program in Life Sciences & Management (mentorship and exposure to healthcare careers)
- **Moelis Access Science** (hands-on and inquiry-based STEM learning)
- **OurSpace** in collaboration with Penn LGBT Center (safe and inclusive space for queer youth and allies from Penn and high schools, including queer-inclusive sexual health education)
- **Penn Reading Initiative** (student-run, 1:1 literacy tutoring program)
- **Rebel Ventures** (youth-run healthy food business)
- **Social, Emotional and Mental Wellness**, in partnership with CHOP's Healthier Together Initiative, CHOP's Center for Violence Prevention, CHOP's Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, and the Uplift Center for Grieving Children
- **UACS Nights** (academic, cultural, recreational activities in evenings for community adults)
- **UACS Sports, Fitness, & Health** (after school and summer sports programs, sports-based leadership development for high school students, school-day physical education (PE) support, and school day health education)
 - **Penn West Philadelphia Basketball League** (before and after school practices and game days for middle school and high school students, with Penn students as coaches)
 - **Young Quakers Community Athletics**, in partnership with Penn Athletics (varsity athletic teams working with middle school students in lacrosse, track and field, and basketball)

Democratic Anchor Institution Strategy

The Netter Center works in close partnership with the Office of Executive Vice President on issues of community economic development that help Penn function as an anchor institution working democratically with its neighbors. Internship, employment, and training programs are a current focus.

MORE NETTER CENTER INITIATIVES

Penn Volunteers in Public Service (Penn VIPS) coordinates on-going service opportunities, events, and supply drives throughout the year that involve Penn staff, faculty and alumni working with the West Philadelphia community. Specific Penn VIPS projects include:

- **Marie K. Bogle Scholarship Program sponsored by Penn VIPS and Penn Business Services** provides scholarships annually to graduating seniors from seven West Philadelphia high schools. Recipients must have an interest in and history of performing community service.
- **Nonprofit Institute**, hosted biannually, provides free workshops for members of local nonprofits and faith-based communities. Penn staff and community leaders teach a series of courses over five days in nonprofit administration, evaluation, legal issues, grant writing, finances, human resource management, and publicity. **Nonprofit Connect** was first piloted in summer 2020 in response to nonprofit needs identified during the pandemic. Working with Wharton Student Life, the program mobilizes undergraduate and graduate students to offer general consulting, organizational, and administrative support to local nonprofits.

Penn Leads the Vote (PLTV) is a student-run, non-partisan program that increases voter engagement and voting while advancing Penn's role of supporting the democratic and civic engagement of Penn students. PLTV was established in 2004 and operated by Fox Leadership until 2014. PLTV was reestablished in 2018 by the Netter Center, and it is housed at Netter. PLTV operates in collaboration with the Office of Government and Community Affairs. PLTV operates Penn's website vote.upenn.edu.

EVALUATION

Under the direction of Netter's Director of Evaluation, Netter conducts evaluation of ABCS courses and programs, carries out grant-required evaluation of community partnership programs (such as university-assisted community school programs), and supports faculty and students in developing research and evaluation projects connected to their community partnerships and ABCS courses.

REGIONAL, NATIONAL, & GLOBAL REACH

Since its founding, one purpose of the Netter Center was to serve as a model of democratic civic and community engagement for other universities. To help fulfill that purpose, Netter has cultivated regional, national, and international networks of higher education institutions committed to working collaboratively with their local schools and communities. In particular, Netter's UACS model has been adapted widely. Each year, the Netter Center hosts colleagues from around the country and globe who are interested in learning from and adapting Netter's work.

- **Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND)**
 - Begun in 1987, PHENND is a consortium of more than 25 colleges and universities in the greater Philadelphia area. PHENND works with its member institutions to develop sustained and mutually beneficial community-based service-learning partnerships. PHENND's K-16 Partnerships Network brings together higher education faculty and staff who work with public school partners, as well as with the School District of Philadelphia. PHENND and its staff are housed at the Netter Center. The Netter Center Director is co-founder and serves on the Steering Committee.
- **National Replication and Outreach of University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS)**
 - From 1994-2004, the Center received funding from foundations and the federal government to promote the replication of UACS; 23 higher educational institutions received funding and another 75 institutions were trained on the model.
 - Part of the Netter Center endowment is designated to fund regional training centers on university-assisted community schools on three-year cycles. Sites have included: University of Oklahoma-Tulsa (2008), IUPUI in Indianapolis (2011), University of Connecticut (2014), UCLA (2017), Binghamton University (2020), and the Southeast Regional Coalition for University-Assisted Community Schools (2023) that includes Duke University, North Carolina Central University, and East Carolina University.

- The Netter Center developed a University-Assisted Community Schools National Network in 2015 to share resources, best practices, and advance the work. Netter Associate Director Cory Bowman serves as director of this network, which has grown to nearly 1,000 members representing 259 higher education institutions, as well as numerous additional partners.
- **Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF)**
 - Formed in 2009 following submission of a report of a national task force chaired by Netter Director Ira Harkavy to HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan on the role of “eds and meds” in urban revitalization, the Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF) is an advocacy and movement building organization working to deepen and extend the democratic engagement of anchor institutions in their neighborhoods, cities, and regions. AITF has grown to 1,000 members representing anchor institutions from a range of fields including education, economic development, health, and arts among others. AITF is administered by Marga, Inc., with Harkavy serving as chair.
- **The International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy (IC) and the Global Cooperation for the Democratic Mission of Higher Education**
 - Netter houses the executive offices of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy (IC). Netter Director Ira Harkavy is the Chair and Associate Director Rita Hodges serves as Executive Secretary. Since 1999, the IC has worked with the Council of Europe to advance the contributions of higher education to democracy on college/university campuses, their local communities, and the wider society.
 - The IC is comprised of the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa, and the Magna Charta Observatory. The U.S. is represented by a Steering Committee from the American Association of Colleges and Universities, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Council on Education, Anchor Institutions Task Force, Campus Compact, Democracy Commitment, and NASPA-Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education.
 - The Organization of American States and the International Association of Universities joined the cooperation between the IC and Council of Europe, which was named the Global Cooperation for the Democratic Mission of Higher Education in 2021.
 - The cooperation has undertaken cross-national research projects and hosted seven global forums; the Council of Europe has published monographs on each of the conference themes.

STAFFING & GOVERNANCE

- The Netter Center employs a diverse team of **50** full-time staff that support its initiatives on campus and in the community. Staff are funded through a combination of government grants, private gifts, and university support.
- The Netter Center also hires over **125** part-time staff each year to work in its grant-funded after school and summer programs at university-assisted community schools, the majority of whom are from West Philadelphia.
- The Netter Center has four active advisory boards:
 - **Community Advisory Board** (distinguished leaders across West Philadelphia and city)
 - **Faculty Advisory Board** (faculty members across Penn committed to advancing ABCS)
 - **National Advisory Board** (business/nonprofit leaders across U.S., primarily Penn alum)
 - **Student Advisory Board** (Penn student leaders across Netter’s programs)