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Penn Teaches Resiliency: Proposal for a New Psychology-Based Academically Based Community Service Course

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Penn Teaches Resiliency: Proposal for a New Psychology-Based Academically Based Community Service Course

Abstract

The University of Pennsylvania has a long legacy of advocating teaching styles and philosophies that engender democratic citizenship and civic engagement. In line with these central views of the University we wish to propose the creation of a new psychology academically based community service course called Penn Teaches Resiliency. This course will utilize the principles of problem solving learning to directly tackle the issue of depression in the West Philadelphia community. The research literature clearly highlights the alarming rates of depression found in low socioeconomic status, minority urban dwellers and we believe that offering this course is a key means by which Penn can help to reverse this trend. Penn Teaches Resiliency will utilize R4Power, an online resiliency intervention developed by psychologists intimately associated with the Penn Resiliency Project. There is already substantial student interest in such a course and Penn Teaches Resiliency would have numerous benefits for both the Penn and West Philadelphia communities. Multiple steps have already been taken in the creation of this class and we recommend that the Undergraduate Psychology Department maintain continued close communication and monitor pre-existing pilot programs in order to facilitate the course's ultimate creation. We hope that creation of Penn Teaches Resiliency will prove to be a decisive first step in the improvement of mental health in the West Philadelphia community.

Keywords

Psychology, Resiliency, ABCS, Service Based Learning, Depression, West Philadelphia, Social Sciences, Psychology, Ira Harkavy, Harkavy, Ira

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19 December 2007

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Abstract:

The University of Pennsylvania has a long legacy of advocating teaching styles and philosophies that engender democratic citizenship and civic engagement. In line with these central views of the University we wish to propose the creation of a new psychology academically based community service course called *Penn Teaches Resiliency*. This course will utilize the principles of problem solving learning to directly tackle the issue of depression in the West Philadelphia community. The research literature clearly highlights the alarming rates of depression found in low socioeconomic status, minority urban dwellers and we believe that offering this course is a key means by which Penn can help to reverse this trend. *Penn Teaches Resiliency* will utilize R4Power, an online resiliency intervention developed by psychologists intimately associated with the Penn Resiliency Project. There is already substantial student interest in such a course and *Penn Teaches Resiliency* would have numerous benefits for both the Penn and West Philadelphia communities. Multiple steps have already been taken in the creation of this class and we recommend that the Undergraduate Psychology Department maintain continued close communication and monitor pre-existing pilot programs in order to facilitate the course's ultimate creation. We hope that creation of *Penn Teaches Resiliency* will prove to be a decisive first step in the improvement of mental health in the West Philadelphia community.

“An inclination join'd with an ability to serve mankind, one's country, friends and family...should be the great aim and end of all learning.”

--Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

“But I also believe that universities have a responsibility to use knowledge and serve humanity... Through our collaborative engagement with communities all over the world, Penn is poised to advance the central values of democracy: life, liberty, opportunity, and mutual respect.”

--President Amy Gutmann, “Presidential Inauguration: The Penn Compact,” 2004

Introduction and Problem Solving Learning:

The University of Pennsylvania was founded with a vision of greatness originally expounded by Benjamin Franklin and renewed as recently as 2004 by President Gutmann in her Penn Compact. In their view, Penn has the distinct responsibility as an agent of higher education to not just espouse learning for learning's sake, but rather to stress both the application of knowledge “locally and globally” as well as the development of the morality and motivation necessary to affect real and meaningful change in the world (Gutmann, 2004). This dynamic formula comprises the backbone for President Gutmann's plan to raise Penn from “excellence to eminence,” by embracing the heritage provided to us by Benjamin Franklin and making Penn a beacon of civic engagement and democratic citizenship within the academic community.

While we have not yet fully realized the hopes and dreams of Penn's past and present leaders, Franklin's vision has continued to develop. Namely, that dream has led to the incorporation of problem solving learning, or PSL, into the Penn curriculum. PSL is a dynamic teaching method that places great stress on both student involvement and the analysis of an “ill structured problem”, or a multifaceted problem to which there are no 100% correct answers (Gallagher, 1997). Incorporation of PSL into the curriculum has

helped to realize these goals by affecting a fundamental shift in the student culture at Penn, stressing those key values stressed by Franklin and Gutmann, such as democratic citizenship and local, community involvement (Patterson, nd).

On the one hand, PSL is significant in that it enables students to “[learn] facts and skills more effectively” than traditional didactic classes, and also to develop a “good disposition toward learning” (Johnston, 2005). PSL strengthens student learning with respect to the immediate problem at hand, and it also leads to better integration of knowledge due to its innately multidisciplinary nature. Therefore, full incorporation of PSL into a curriculum, in effect, leads to the formation of “thematic clusters” that span many departments and strengthen majors and undergraduate education (Johnston, 2005).

Even more important than the academic virtues of PSL listed above, however, are the many traits that PSL helps to cultivate among its participants. These include acting morally, becoming a committed leader, developing a life philosophy, developing a greater concern for urban areas and volunteering in the community, and developing research skills. (Adelsberg et al. 2006). In this manner, development of a democratically and civically engaged student body will help to propel Penn to the forefront of national undergraduate education and to make it a paradigm for other universities to emulate.

ABCS Courses at Penn:

Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses are the foundation of problem-solving learning at Penn. ABCS is "service rooted in and intrinsically linked to teaching and/or research, and encompasses problem-oriented research and teaching, as well as service learning, emphasizing student and faculty reflection on the service experience" (Academically Based Community Service, 2007). In these courses, students apply the knowledge they learn in the classroom to a service component of the course in an effort to solve real-world problems in the community of West Philadelphia. Amy Guttman spoke highly of

such courses in her inaugural address, citing that, "We cherish our relations with our neighbors, relationships that have strengthened Penn academically and... have strengthened the vitality of West Philadelphia."

We therefore propose that the Psychology Department join in Penn's mission for eminence and expand the breadth of its curriculum by developing an ABCS course. There are now over 150 ABCS courses in multiple departments across Penn including Urban studies, Education, Anthropology, Classical Studies, Health and Societies, Biology, Political Science, Environmental Science, Folklore, History, Mathematics, Music, Linguistics, Fine Arts, as well as in the nursing, medical and dental schools. Each of these courses teaches students the skills and knowledge they need to engage in real world problem solving. For example, in the seminar component of the course Prevention of Tobacco Smoking (ENVS 407/HSOC 407) students learn about the history of tobacco advertising and legislation as well as the physiological impacts of smoking. They then translate this knowledge to the West Philadelphia community by conducting a weekly anti-tobacco program in the homeroom of several local schools. In this manner, Penn students are able to serve the West Philadelphia community in a way that is intrinsically linked to, and enhanced by, their studies at Penn. Similarly, the Urban Nutrition Initiative is a university-community partnership aimed at solving the real-world problem of community nutrition and wellness. Toward this end, Penn curriculum has been developed focusing on the implementation of programs to increase knowledge about nutrition and the availability of healthy foods and to encourage healthy lifestyles in West Philadelphia. Penn has also sought to improve healthcare in West Philadelphia through the development of the Sayre Community Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Center. Through this school-based center, many interdisciplinary programs and curricula from within Nursing, Dental, Medicine, Social Policy and Practice, Arts and Sciences, and Design work to solve community health issues. In many ways, these efforts can be seen collectively to "begin to form a framework for an integrated approach to improve the health of West Philadelphia." (Harkavy et al. 2006)

The Current Status of Mental Health in West Philadelphia:

Despite the fact that the university offers dozens of ABCS courses, to date, few efforts have been made to address issues of mental health in West Philadelphia. This deficit is not due to a lack of need for additional psychological resources in the West Philadelphia community. National trends indicate that the rates of depression are rapidly increasing. Those living in West Philadelphia are even more likely to suffer from, and less likely to seek treatment for, depression. The West Philadelphia environment is also hazardous in that it predisposes unaffected patients to later develop depression. Scientific literature elucidates this disproportionate burden on the West Philadelphia community.

Current statistics indicate that approximately 11% of all African Americans suffer from depression and at least 25% of the Black urban community has suffered at least one major depressive episode in their lifetime (Cardemil et al. 2007, Repetto et al. 2004). However these numbers represent the nationwide African American statistics. The odds of developing major depressive disorder increase precipitously when one takes into account socioeconomic status and education level. For example, a typical person living below the poverty level with no college education is more than 8 times as likely to suffer from depression as a middle class college graduate (Kessler et al. 2003). This same study identified that adolescents are also significantly more likely to develop depression than are older demographics. A similar study also indicated that when an African American does suffer from depression, it is significantly more likely that it will become chronic, go untreated, and pose as a greater disability than if a White patient were affected (Williams et al. 2007)

This brings us to the second dimension of the problem of psychiatric health in the African American community: African Americans are significantly less likely to have access to or seek treatment for their disease. The National Institute for Mental Health reports that fewer than 40% of African American patients displaying depressive symptoms in poor urban communities have direct access to psychiatric care. This lack

of access is only compounded by the fact that overall health-insurance rates among low SES urban African Americans is substantially lower than the population at large (National Institute of Mental Health). With respect to school-aged adolescents, inner city public schools often lack the funds necessary to support adequate counseling or social workers in the school setting. For example, according to Alan Speed, director of the Sayre-Beacon program, William L. Sayre High School in West Philadelphia has a student body of over 700, and only three guidance counselors. Furthermore, these guidance counselors have many more responsibilities than providing psychological support for students. As a result, says Alan, students in general do not receive help unless they are showing severe signs of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (Speed, 2007). Youth who are experiencing painful symptoms of depression and anxiety do not receive adequate care.

Regardless of access to proper psychiatric care, clinical studies also indicate that African American patients are less likely than whites to even seek or heed treatment advice (Miranda et al. 2004). African American and Latino patients are less likely to return for follow up visits or take prescription medications than were their White counterparts. (Miranda et al. 2004). This is a particularly alarming trend and has also been the subject of ongoing research. To that end, recent studies have concluded that a potential cause for this behavior may be underlying socio-cultural taboos associated with obtaining psychiatric care for both depression and anxiety within these communities. For example, Blacks are less likely than whites to find taking antidepressants or participating in counseling socially acceptable, whereas Latinos only place a stigma upon antidepressant use (Cooper et al. 2003). The net result of these preconceived notions regarding treatment is manifold: those affected by depression and anxiety will be less likely to seek treatment, ashamed to address their illness with family or friends, and ultimately forced to internalize their feelings and potentially aggravate their symptoms.

A last factor affecting those in the West Philadelphia community is that the urban, low SES demographic is predisposed to develop depressive symptoms and anxiety. This problem is also dynamic,

resulting not only from heightened exposure to adverse factors on self-esteem and mental health, but also a lack of exposure to protective factors such as a positive individual, familial, or community environment. Negative factors include community violence, hassles, and poverty, all of which are inversely associated with adjustment and extroversion and positively linked with heightened anxiety, depressive symptoms, and internalization (Margolin and Gordis, 2000 and Tinsely et al. 2007). Conversely, the prevalence of single parent or alternative households limit adolescents from exposure to protective factors such as a positive family environment or a cohesive neighborhood environment that enhance self-esteem, adjustment, and self confidence (Li et al. 2007).

The lack of access to adequate healthcare prevents proper treatment and therefore leads to chronically elevated levels of depression and anxiety. Not only does this wreak havoc upon the collective psyche of the low SES, urban minority community, but it also predisposes these patients to a wide range of medical disorders such as asthma, obesity, acute coronary events, and diabetes (Price and Oh, 2006). This in turn places an increased financial burden upon patients that, in many cases, already cannot afford proper healthcare. Thus, it is clear, there is a pressing need to address the epidemic problem of mental health in the West Philadelphia community.

University of Pennsylvania's Psychology Department:

The website of the psychology department at the University of Pennsylvania proudly boasts that it has been "consistently ranked among the top psychology departments in the world". Penn has stood at the frontier of the development of the field of psychology throughout its rich history. In the late 1880's Penn was one of the first universities to develop a psychology department through the work of James McKeen Cattell, arguably the first professor of psychology in the United States. Later, Penn faculty continued to be instrumental in the establishment of the American Psychological Association, hosting its first meeting in

1892. Since then, Penn has been the home of many pioneering breakthroughs in the field of psychology; it was here that Lightner Witmer developed the field of Clinical Psychology and established the first psychological clinic in 1896, here that Morris Viteles founded the new field of industrial psychology, and here that Aaron Beck pioneered the radical new approach of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Furthermore, Penn currently serves as the home for the new field of Positive Psychology (History of Psychology At Penn). Our Psychology Department, it is clear, has never stood passively on the side while the field progressed. We therefore propose that the department continue its pioneering spirit by standing at the forefront of Penn's mission to rise from excellence to eminence through the development of PSL and ABCS courses.

Indeed PSL is in many ways already an integral part of the psychology curriculum. Psychology majors cannot graduate without taking at least one research experience course. These research courses offer students the opportunity to become an integral part of the production of knowledge. The addition of an ABCS course would not therefore be a radical change in the curriculum, but rather a logical continuation of the active hands-on approach to learning that already exists. However, what makes ABCS courses unique is that students not only discuss and research real problems, but they also engage with the community in an effort to solve them. This work in real-world settings facilitates the production of practical solutions to complex problems. By integrating rigorous academic education about current psychological concerns with active service to alleviate them in our community, both the education and the service benefit. The service benefits when it is grounded on a well researched understanding of the problem at hand. Instead of throwing well-intentioned volunteers into a problem with which they are unfamiliar, ABCS courses provide educated and prepared volunteers that are better equipped to effectively solve problems. At the same time, the academic experience benefits when it can be brought to life in real world situations. Work in the community can generate new knowledge that work in the laboratory cannot. By engaging directly with psychological problems, students will be stimulated to produce practical and effective new solutions.

Proposal for *Penn Teaches Resilience*:

The abundant benefits that an ABCS course would have on both Penn's psychology department as well as the West Philadelphia community lead us to propose the development of a Resilience-Intervention ABCS Course entitled "*Penn Teaches Resiliency*". We believe that such a course can have significant impact on the alarming mental health concerns in West Philadelphia while simultaneously strengthening the Penn curriculum.

In the service aspect of *Penn Teaches Resiliency*, undergraduates would each be matched with a West Philadelphia youth from the Sayre-Beacon after school program. Within the context of this mentor/mentee relationship Penn students would facilitate a computer-based resiliency intervention called R4power. Based on the research of the Penn Resiliency Project (PRP), this program is designed to teach resiliency and prevent depression and anxiety in children aged 12-15. The intervention, developed by scientists at the University of Pennsylvania, teaches basic coping strategies and effective explanatory styles, as well as assertiveness, problem-solving and decision-making strategies, in nine 45 minutes lessons. The classroom component of this course could focus on resiliency, depression and anxiety, positive psychology, or psychological interventions, depending on the professor's area of expertise.

R4Power lends itself to incorporation into our proposed course for a number of reasons. On the one hand, R4power is a computer program that was developed based on the research of the Penn Resiliency Project (PRP). The PRP is a school-based intervention that teaches cognitive-behavioral and social problem-solving skills based on the theories of Aaron T. Beck, Albert Ellis and Martin Seligman. The curriculum was designed by Jane Gillham, Ph.D., Lisa Jaycox, Ph.D., Karen Reivich, Ph.D., Martin Seligman, Ph.D. and Terry Silver at the Positive Psychology Center, which is located at the University of Pennsylvania. Thus, the intimate connection that we have as Penn students, faculty, and administrators to the leading researchers involved in the PRP gives us the unique opportunity to learn from and utilize their intellectual capital to

strengthen the scientific implementation of the proposed course.

Moreover, the underlying science behind R4Power and the PRP has been the subject of ample research supporting PRP's beneficial effects on program participants. Past research has shown that programs like the PRP can be *as* successful in relieving symptoms of depression as antidepressants, and that cognitive behavioral therapy provides marked relief in 70% of patients (Seligman, Schulman, and Tryon, 2007). Specifically, two complementary studies examining the effects of PRP demonstrated that both African American and Hispanic students showed reduced depressive symptoms (as assessed by Beck Depression and Anxiety Indices) immediately after PRP treatment and that these effects lasted over a two year follow up period (Gillham et al. 2007 and Cardemil et al. 2007). In addition, there were less diagnoses of depression in the experimental groups relative to control participants. These results were also significant in that the effects of PRP in reducing depressive symptoms were more marked in those students already at risk for depression at study outset. This finding was also noted in other studies on the PRP (Gillham, Reivich, Shatte, and Seligman, 2007) and is significant in that as demonstrated above, the West Philadelphia community is a population that, as a whole, is at higher risk for depression.

Other studies show a series of other benefits attributed to the PRP. For example, one study (Gillham, Reivich, Shatte, and Seligman, 2007) shows that PRP's long-term effects on behavioral (externalizing) problems had significant preventive effects on disruptive behaviors 24 to 36 months after the intervention. In addition, yet another study shows that PRP is effective in preventing the co-occurrence of depression in those students that already have conduct disorder. This finding is also of particular interest within the context of our proposed program because many students that we have encountered at Sayre and other West Philadelphia schools are already affected by conduct disorder and are therefore predisposed to develop the underlying mental schema conducive to depression and anxiety disorder (Cutuli et al. 2006).

Lastly, another recent study shows that cognitive behavioral therapy interventions similar to the PRP

have drastic long-term impacts on program participants. Students that had participated in an elementary school level intervention were tracked for 19 years and several criteria were analyzed in the case of each student. This follow up showed drastic positive effects associated with the interventions, including higher rates of school completion, greater college attendance, and greater full-time employment (Reynolds et al, 2007). Though in this example the students targeted were younger than those middle-schoolers with which we would potentially be working, this study does provide us with a glimpse as to what some of the many benefits of a program such as that which we are proposing may be. In addition, any effects that the R4Power intervention might have on students may be synergistically enhanced by the full incorporation of this program into the Sayre-Beacon after school program.

Our choice to use the R4power intervention to address the problems of mental health in West Philadelphia is therefore well grounded in research that, overall, suggests that the PRP successfully prevents symptoms of depression. These effects, research shows, are long-lasting, often endure for two years or more, and are greatest in those students already at risk, such as the youth of West Philadelphia (Gillham, Reivich, Shatte, and Seligman, 2007).

Benefits of *Penn Teaches Resiliency*:

Benefits for Penn Resiliency Project:

However, while the Penn Resiliency Project has now been proven effective, it remains largely inaccessible to the general public. A meta-analytic study of PRP interventions has shown great variability in the efficacy of these interventions. (Gillham, Reivich, Shatte, and Seligman, 2007) This variability has been understood to be related to the level of training and supervision in each intervention. Thus, the intervention seems to be most effective only when group leaders are highly trained. For this reason, despite its efficacy, the PRP intervention has not been widely disseminated.

The development of R4power, a computer-based version of this intervention, has been one step towards increasing accessibility. Yet, according to Jane Gillham, co-director of the Penn Resiliency Project, it is still unclear if the computer program can be as effective if there is no one to bring these lessons to life for the youth (Interview, 2007). While R4power allows for wider dissemination by eliminating the need for highly trained specialists, it may lack the interpersonal connection necessary to truly teach these cognitive skills. It is in this regard that *Penn Teaches Resiliency* would be unique. In our intervention, West Philadelphia youth would not learn the lessons of R4power alone at a computer, but rather, together with a Penn mentor. This mentor/mentee relationship would provide an outlet for discussion of resilience skills and their application to the child's personal life. Penn undergraduates could prove to be the much needed link for West Philadelphia youth to these critical cognitive skills. According to Andrew Rosenthal, director of business development for R4power, if this program proves effective, it might serve as a model for the wider dissemination of this intervention using undergraduate volunteers (Interview, 2007).

Benefits for the West Philadelphia Community:

As described above, West Philadelphia does not have the adequate resources to deal with the alarming rates of depression and anxiety in its community. Furthermore, because of social stigma, those resources that are available are not often used. *Penn Teaches Resiliency* therefore would greatly benefit the community by providing free preventative care for these disorders. By teaching youth positive explanatory styles and effective coping skills this intervention is intended to buffer them against the effects of stress, and help prevent the development of depression. This program does not seek to eliminate one or all of the problems these youth will face, but rather to give them the psychological skills they need to successfully cope with all of life's challenges. The intervention can be particularly effective because it does not teach these cognitive skills in a clinical setting but rather is a school-based intervention. As a result, it is a psychological resource that might be more socially acceptable and therefore able to provide much needed relief for the West

Philadelphia community.

Benefits for Penn students:

At the same, this intervention would be extraordinarily beneficial for Penn undergraduates by providing them with valuable exposure to psychological methods and interventions. Because of the nature of psychology, students must often go through years of schooling before they have sufficient training to administer an intervention. However, because R4power is itself an authorized program, students would not need to undergo long-term extensive training. The undergraduates would not be directly administering the intervention, but rather mentoring the child as they together learned the skills taught in the computer program. The program would serve as the central curriculum, around which undergraduates would foster discussion with their mentee about the application and relevance of these resilience skills. In this way, Penn undergraduates would benefit from intensive experience with a cognitive therapy intervention that might otherwise not be available to them without extensive training.

Also significant, is the benefit Penn students might gain themselves by learning these resilience skills. Depression is not a disorder specific to poor urban communities, nor are the cognitive skills taught by R4Power needed only by adolescents or youth. In fact, the rates of depression have skyrocketed among college students of all backgrounds. According to a national survey of 13,500 college students in 2005, 45% of undergraduates reported experiencing depression severe enough to impair their daily functioning. In response, Programs such as PennSTART (Successful Transition and Resilience Training) have begun to use these same positive psychology techniques to promote resiliency and mental health among Penn students (Gomez, 2007). Thus, Penn undergraduates would not only benefit from the opportunity to teach the resiliency skills outlined in R4power, but also from the opportunity to learn them themselves.

Survey of Psychology Student Attitudes Regarding a Psychology ABCS Course:

Though we perceive an apparent need for an ABCS course within the Psychology department, we recognize that there must be sufficient student interest for such a course to be successful. Therefore, in order to gauge student interest for such a course, we conducted a survey of 80 students that are currently enrolled in courses offered by the Psychology Department. The surveys were administered either in Psych 162, Abnormal Psychology (n=76) or by email (n=4). A copy of the survey is included in the appendix for review. Briefly, students were asked their choice of major, number of psychology courses taken, their experience with prior ABCS classes, and their desire to participate in a psychology based ABCS class.

The results were truly informative. As seen in figure 1 (next page), regardless of major, approximately 8% of all students currently enrolled in a psychology class have taken a prior ABCS course. The principle comments issued by participants with

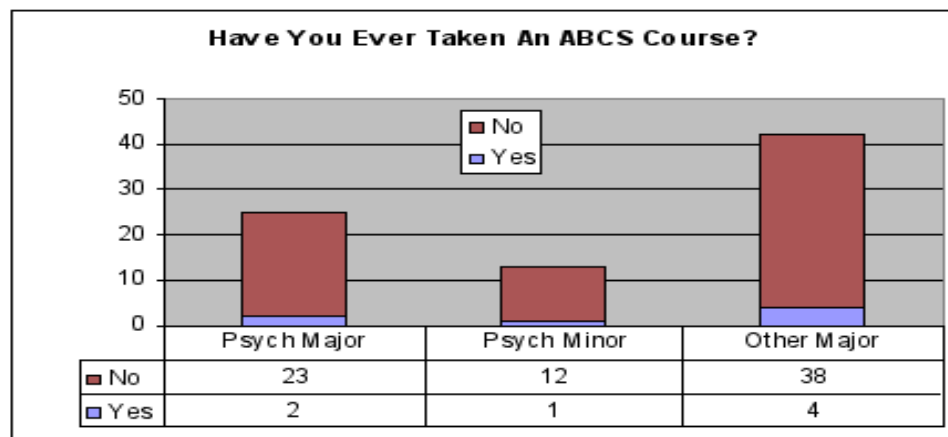


Figure 1: Prior ABCS Involvement in Psychology Students

respect to their previous lack of enrollment in ABCS courses were that they did not enroll due to a lack of time or the fact that none of the classes fulfilled either a general graduation or major requirement.

Despite this relatively low percentage, however, our data demonstrate that past participation is not indicative of future interest in participating in an ABCS class. As seen in figures 2 (next page), a great

majority (61%) of *non*-majors explicitly stated that they were interested in a psychology ABCS course. Psychology majors and minors expressed even more resolute support for such a class, with 88% and 77% interest, respectively. Some respondent comments cited the facts that they sought to “give back to the community” and to “apply [our] knowledge in psychology” beyond the boundaries of the classroom as reasons for their interest in a psychology ABCS course.

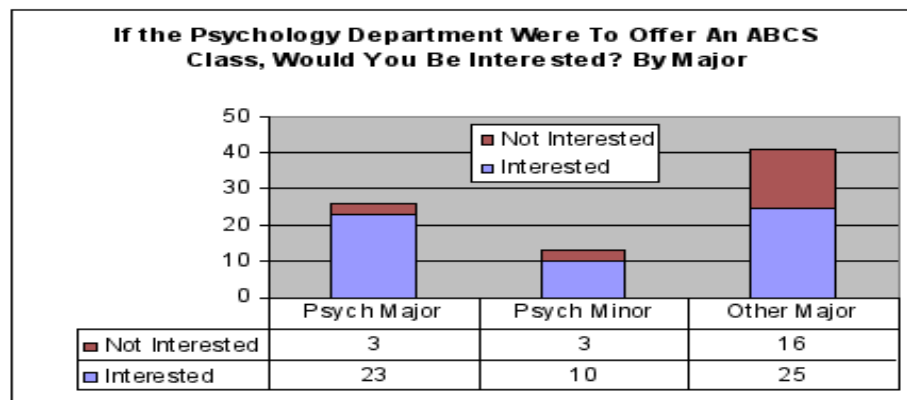


Figure 2: Support Among Psychology Majors, Minors, and Non-Majors For A Psychology ABCS Class

This data may be expressed differently, as in figure 3 (below), according to the degree of participation that a student has had in the Psychology Department. As seen in the graph, increased interest in psychology, as assessed by having taken a greater number of psychology courses, is correlated with an increased interest in pursuing a psychology ABCS option. Approximately 88% of students that have taken 3 or more psychology classes (range: 3-8 courses) expressed interest, as compared to 64% of students having taken 2 or less prior courses.

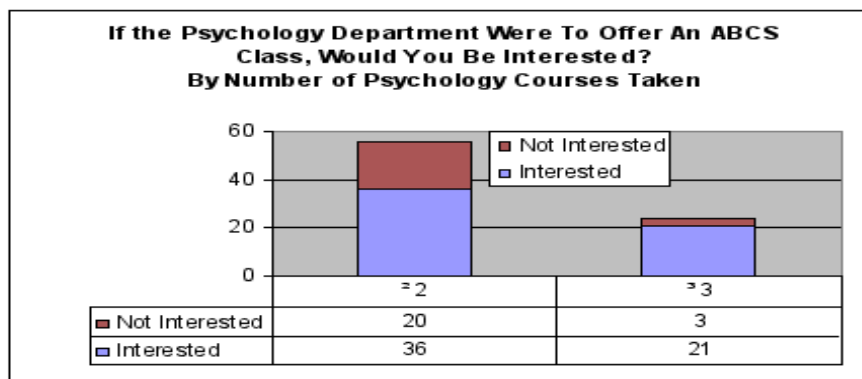


Figure 3: Support For A Psychology ABCS Class Organized by Past Enrollment in Psychology Classes

This data demonstrates clearly that there is an academic void that has yet to be filled. Only 8% of undergraduate students polled have taken ABCS courses though a vast majority of all groups have expressed interest in such a course. Moreover, the interest in an ABCS course was greatest among the most committed students of psychology, as determined by those students that have already declared their psychology major (88%) or have taken a significant number of psychology classes already (88%). Also, by offering an ABCS course that is fully integrated into the pre-existing psychology curriculum, the disincentive preventing those students that had never enrolled in an ABCS course due to the fact that it fulfilled no requirements will have been lifted. Therefore we believe that should the Psychology Department offer an ABCS course, it would not only draw immediate support from a pool of the most committed psychology students, but it would also permit a whole new crop of students to become engaged in an ABCS course when it had previously been impossible. The result would be a cadre of academically determined and open-minded students of various academic backgrounds expanding upon and reinforcing their knowledge of fundamental principles of experimental psychology in a setting that fosters critical thinking, civic engagements, and enhanced retention of material.

What has already been accomplished to achieve this goal:

Many steps have already been taken towards the achievement of this vision. Both Dr. Brainard, Department Chair, as well as Dr. Seyfarth, Director of Undergraduate Studies, have responded positively and encouragingly to the proposal for this course. There has also been continued support from the Center for Community Partnerships (CCP). On November 16, 2007, a meeting was conducted between Dr. Ira Harkavy, president and founder of the CCP and Dr. Seyfarth in which the idea for this course was discussed. This meeting was an important first step in fostering a relationship between the Psychology department and the CCP. The CCP, whose mission is to "encourage new and creative initiatives linking Penn and the

community" has generously offered to aid in the funding of the first semester of this course (Academically Based Community Service).

Furthermore, attempts to find a professor for this course have produced extremely positive results. Our first thought was to approach a graduate student who might be interested. In this vein, we approached Acacia Parks, a graduate student who works in Martin Seligman's Center for Positive Psychology and has already taught several courses at Penn. Acacia was extremely interested in the possibility. On December 5, 2007 we spoke with Jane Gillham, co-director of the Penn Resiliency Project about our idea for the course. Jane not only expressed her belief that this might be an exciting new direction for the Penn Resiliency Project research, but also mentioned that she herself might be interested in teaching or co-teaching the course along with Karen Reivich, the other co-director of the Penn Resiliency Project.

Proposals for Future Implementation:

The psychology department at Penn offers a wide breadth of courses for students to choose from. Yet, the curriculum could be further enriched by the inclusion of an academically based community service course. We therefore propose that the psychology department continue to support and facilitate the development of an ABCS course such as *Penn Teaches Resiliency*. To that end, we recommend that an open line of communication be maintained between relevant and interested faculty within the department in order to provide an ongoing assessment of the course's standing and on the progress of the pilot volunteer program that will be in place at Sayre next semester. We encourage the department to take advantage of the momentum that has already been set in motion for this course among the faculty and student body as well as among the PRP research team. The pieces have all been put into place for the department to create a class for this coming year, fall 2008. As soon as the department gives its consent, steps can be taken to confirm the professor. It will then be possible to develop the classroom curriculum for the course using the \$4,000-\$5,000

funding promised from the CCP. In this manner, the department will be able to realize our combined goal and incorporate an ABCS course into the Psychology Department's curriculum.

Conclusion:

As students and faculty at the University of Pennsylvania, we have the unique opportunity to realize the centuries old vision of Ben Franklin by implementing change in our community and tackling the problem of mental health in West Philadelphia. Whether it be the academic expertise of the Psychology faculty or the enthusiasm of participating students to engage in the community, the mobilization of some of Penn's most valuable resources to create an ABCS course addressing the mental health of West Philadelphia will yield dynamic benefits for all parties involved. With respect to the West Philadelphia community, this class will help address the dire need for psychological resources needed to combat disproportionately high levels of depression by providing local students with free resiliency training. As for those Penn students interested in psychology, this class will provide them with an opportunity in applied psychology for which they have indicated an explicit interest. Moreover, participation in ABCS classes and use of the PSL framework has been proven to instill in students a greater appreciation for knowledge and a greater sense of democratic citizenship. In addition, the Psychology faculty, especially those involved in the creation of the PRP and R4Power, stand to gain much needed experimental data that may hopefully enable them to strengthen the PRP and ultimately aid in its dissemination to students across the country. Through the creation of such an ABCS course we can contribute to the many innovations that Penn has already offered to the international academic community and continue to truly fulfill Amy Guttmann's vision of rising "from excellence to eminence."

Appendix:

Psychology Student Survey Transcript:

Last 4 Digits of your Penn ID _____

Are you a: Psychology major _____ Psychology minor _____

Have you taken any psychology classes before? If yes, how many? _____

On a scale of 1-10 how satisfied are you with the breadth of courses currently offered by the psychology department at Penn? _____

Penn offers many Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses in several departments. These courses are service based classes in which students engage in classroom learning and then use the skills they have learned to address a real world problem.

Have you taken any ABCS courses? If yes, how many? If no, do you plan on it? Why or why not?

If the psychology department were to offer an ABCS course, would you be interested?

Additional Comments: _____

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