The White Paper on Undergraduate Education 2009-2010

In the Classroom
Curriculum

General Education Requirements
Status Quo
Among Penn’s decentralized, school-dependent curricula, the College is most complexly organized. Because of the College’s size and centrality in undergraduate education, SCUE believes it is crucial to address its weaknesses.
In its aim of providing a well-rounded liberal arts education, the College curriculum must balance breadth with depth as it encourages exploration and commonality of experience. Through this lens, SCUE agrees with the motivations and purposes of the College curriculum. However, we believe there are disconnects between what the curriculum is designed to achieve in theory and what it achieves in practice.

Recommendations
Vision: Create More, Diverse Seminars
SCUE believes seminars are an ideal format for fulfillment of sector requirements because they typically allow greater student-faculty contact and more thorough analysis of topics. Aligning with the curriculum’s aim to encourage exploration, the format serves to maintain interest and confidence of students in unfamiliar fields.

The issue of burdensome requirements is especially a problem in the sciences, with relatively few courses counting toward Sectors V through VII. Although the bulk of these courses are larger lectures that accommodate more students, individual courses do not always address student scheduling concerns and non-majors’ intellectual strengths and interests. Non-majors should be given the option of exploring challenging, expansive science courses without facing curves set by those on science majors’ tracks.

Seminars provide unique opportunities for students to engage in scientific topics in new, relevant ways. Non-major seminars in particular would allow students to learn in a more intimate setting and experience a learning environment not widely available to students not specializing in those fields.

One potential means of seminar creation is through increased partnerships with professors in the medical school. Currently, there are a limited number of Freshman Seminars taught by medical school professors.
versity should champion ways for highly motivated students to explore, supplement, and challenge their notions of an education. SCUE recognizes such options would not be ideal for all Penn students; rather, we believe a select subset of students would benefit greatly from experiencing a unique four-year experience.

**Vision: Revitalize Ben Franklin Scholars Program**

Based on its history of collaboration with the Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships (CURF), SCUE identifies the Ben Franklin Scholars Program (BFS) as an opportunity to translate resources and administration not currently achieving what they could into an innovative complement to the standard curriculum.

Our vision for the BFS program mandates that its students “experience the excitement of exploring new intellectual territory.” In its current state, the BFS program augments, but does not define, the academic experiences of its Scholars. We hope that a revamped BFS program can change that.

SCUE believes BFS should be revitalized to focus on particular scholarly opportunities that could be unique to the program. In reforming the BFS program, the following priorities should be maintained: unified course components, interdisciplinary focus, discovery process, rigorous admissions, and strong advising.

We hope BFS will define a new content-based curriculum, unique to each member of the program. We envision this curriculum to be interdisciplinary in nature, enabling students to chart academic courses involving elements of multiple disciplines. In this respect, each student in the BFS program might have his or her major requirements waived in order to pursue a well-defined, interdisciplinary course of study not currently offered at Penn.

Because this vision of the program grants significant academic freedom to each Scholar, the admissions process must be sufficiently rigorous to ensure each Scholar’s course of study is properly defined. For this reason, we believe that the main criterion for admission should be a comprehensive proposal prepared by each prospective Scholar, defining a unique course of study. Scholars with successful proposals should then be subject to a rigorous interview, forcing them to defend their proposed course of study. In this way, BFS would be a program that students discover and take time to understand.

**Vision: Champion Alternative Credit Models**

SCUE recognizes the challenges of implementing new course models, including complications in the credit-counting process and a monopolization of departmental time and funding. However, SCUE believes the benefits of making available half-credit (.5-credit) and one-and-a-half-credit (1.5-credit) courses strongly outweigh the costs.

**Half-Semester Seminars**

Based upon the model that currently exists in the Marketing Department, SCUE proposes the creation of other courses worth .5 credits that meet for half of a semester. Students would be able to explore specialized topics either outside or within their majors. Because of the lowered .5-credit burden, students would be encouraged to explore unfamiliar and challenging topics without a large potential deficit to their GPAs. Additionally, students who intend to specialize in that area would reap the benefits of exploring a particular topic in depth.

**Mini-Research Seminars**

A second model for the .5-credit course is a research-based class meeting once a week for an entire semester. Such a course, similar to the year-long thesis course required for some majors, would allow underclassmen to explore the research process on a smaller-scale before engaging in a major research project.

**1.5-Credit Courses**

Currently, the only models for 1.5-credit courses exist in the sciences. Translating a similar structure to fit each department, 1.5-credit courses would be made up of an introductory lecture combined with an additional half-credit, specialized recitation. Thus, students enrolled in a broad survey course would have the option of additionally enrolling in a supplementary, specialized recitation section simultaneously. This would work well in the largest and most popular lecture courses, such as Psychology 001 and Economics 001. Often, professors must be extremely selective in the material covered in broad survey courses. It is impossible for teachers of these courses to go into a large amount of depth on each topic. An additional .5-credit unit recitation would allow students who are interested in topics covered in the course to learn about one in great depth.
Problem-Solving Learning

Status Quo
Penn’s interdisciplinary and socially aware bent presents a unique opportunity for undergraduates to blend theory and practice within the classroom. Penn students are calling for a higher education experience that merges study with an understanding of its local and global relevance. Though not administratively recognized as such, many of Penn’s decentralized institutions have already integrated problem-solving learning into their programs and curricula. Thus, problem-solving learning has organically become part of the undergraduate experience, which may have gone unnoticed by the typical student. In order to develop this educational model further, however, problem-solving learning must be recognized by Penn’s administration and embraced as an integral aspect of Penn’s ideology and culture.

Recommendations
SCUE has for years endorsed Problem-Solving Learning (PSL) as an innovative technique of pedagogy, and believes problem solving can be Penn’s comparative advantage. While SCUE endorses the progress achieved through its work thus far, we seek a renewed commitment from Penn’s PSL stakeholders at all levels of the University to oversee the accomplishment of these and further PSL initiatives.

Vision: Create a PSL Consortium
SCUE calls upon the Provost’s Office to create a Problem-Solving Learning Consortium, whose participants can then drive this pedagogy forward. This consortium will stand as Penn’s first and only forum for critical debate, discussion, and course creation that catalyzes innovation in the classroom, mainly in the form of problem-solving learning. This formalized coalition will serve as a resource center for professors interested in taking their classroom experiences to the next level, as well as for students interested in engaging in new educational challenges. It will centralize PSL efforts and make it easy for students and professors to identify courses and co-curricular activities that support this type of learning experience. The consortium will foster a home for growth and development of these pedagogies, and will be the driving agent for continuing adaptation of the concept to emerging classes and programs.

This effort should be led by the Provost’s Office because it occupies the unique position to motivate such an effort, which would involve the coordination of various learning centers, including the Fox Leadership Program, The Netter Center for Community Partnerships, and the Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships, as well as professors and students collaborating on particular educational issues.

Vision: Champion OpenCourseWare
SCUE believes Penn should champion OpenCourseWare for both current students and the global community.

Recorded and posted lectures—such as those provided through MIT’s OpenCourseWare Program and websites including Academic Earth, iTunes U, and YouTube Edu—are well worth the acknowledged expense of administering such initiatives. Penn should invest in going the extra mile, connecting its strides in knowledge-creation to student and faculty ability to access and grow from that knowledge throughout and beyond their undergraduate education.

Access to lectures online would enable students to experience the advantages of Penn’s resources for their intellectual advancement and success. For example, those who want to learn more about a topic area in which they lack background could view other courses’ lectures as primers.

Beyond Penn, ITCs such as recorded lectures allow Penn to live up to its global commitments to knowledge creation and provision. SCUE rejects the idea that recorded lectures would cheapen the Penn education; the worldwide community would gain access to information, but would not earn diplomas or enjoy interaction with professors and students that the classroom offers.

Technology

Status Quo
As a leading institution in the creation and provision of knowledge, Penn should also be a leader in using innovative technologies to deliver this knowledge to its students. SCUE endorses the initiative taken by departments such as the Penn Libraries to allow video equipment to be checked out for use by professors or by the Provost’s Office to equip particular classrooms with voice or video recording equipment. However, these initiatives are currently not nearly expansive, encouraged, or publicized enough to have a significant impact on the way classrooms are currently run.

Recommendations
Recognizing the need to improve provisioning and utilization of technological resources by faculty at Penn, SCUE offers some strategies for helping professors and students get the most out of educational resources. Penn should adapt its provision of technological resources in order to better accommodate students’ preferred strategies for learning and professors’ innovative methods for delivering information.

Vision: Promote Information Communication Technologies
In a 21st-century workplace, graduates will require proficiency in skills such as technological literacy, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to work collaboratively. These skills can be conveyed without changing the curriculum, but by adapting the way content is delivered and understood by making use of information communication technologies (ICTs).

ICTs are an important but currently underutilized asset for enhancing learning techniques. They include tools that facilitate the creation, communication, dissemination, storage, and management of information, such as video recordings of lectures and interactive online class components. Among the most popular innovations are radio, television, blogs, wikis, and instant messaging. Although information communication technologies have begun to play a major role in social lives, Penn should incorporate these innovations in academic settings. While SCUE has suggested Penn follow the path of peer universities in adopting useful technologies others have already championed, we present an opportunity for the University to break new ground by becoming a leader in transforming these technologies into vehicles for education.

Supplemental learning materials such as self-study modules, interactive activities, and recorded lectures promote efficiency by increasing learning time without extending classroom hours. Professors who distribute video-taped lectures before class, for example, can dedicate their time with students to two-way conversation. Tools such as blogs strengthen student community and discussion by allowing students to interact with one another outside of the classroom. Another important ICT that SCUE believes greatly enhances the classroom experience are clickers. Using these devices in the classroom enables students to participate without pressure of performance in front of peers.

Technologies also provide value well beyond a single semester. For example, students can use them as reference materials when they move on to higher level courses. Students are already demonstrating interest in this strategy; one in four students in Penn’s Math Department, for instance, uses MIT’s Courseware recorded lectures as virtual “reference texts” for review of more basic material learned in previous classes at Penn.

Research

Status Quo
Currently, undergraduate students obtain research positions through several avenues. Some are able to obtain them through work-study funding. Others are members of research-specific programs, such as the University Scholars or the Vagelos Scholars Programs. Upperclassmen are often able to perform research in their major for credit through specific departments. The Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships continues to build its presence by connecting undergraduates to research and fellowship opportunities both on campus and abroad.

Recommendations
SCUE believes research should become accessible to every willing student in every course of study at Penn. This can be accomplished through an increase in resources, funding, and guidance from a centralized, accessible source. By introducing these visions, Penn would better engage undergraduates in the creation of knowledge and begin to remove the imposed bifurcation of teaching and research.

Campus Life

Research
Vision: Create Freshman Research Seminars
Freshman Research Seminars would be a supplement to the Freshman Seminar Program, and would introduce students to research early in their Penn careers, giving them the tools and confidence to engage in original research while an undergraduate. The current purpose of Freshmen Seminars is to acclimate students to the University’s academic environment, build student relationships with faculty members, and allow students to gain the confidence and study skills necessary to lead a successful college career. These are important missions, ones which can be mirrored in an additional Freshman Research Seminar program.

Many freshmen would like to become involved with research, but are intimidated by the process. Through Freshman Research Seminars, students will be introduced to the process of completing an original project, preparing them for more extensive research opportunities. These courses will teach students research techniques—such as presenting and analyzing data—and strategies to become involved with research projects. Seminar professors will also introduce the resources available on campus to assist students with their research and presentation, such as CURF, Communication Within the Curriculum (CWiC) and the Penn Library System. After this foundation is laid, students will apply their knowledge in a capstone research project.

Vision: Expand Commitment to PURM
The Provost’s Undergraduate Research Mentoring (PURM) provides selected freshman with a research mentor and summer project as well as $3,000 of funding. PURM was very selective for summer internships in 2009, as out of 170 applicants only 35 freshmen students were chosen. PURM had a fixed budget of only $160,000 and there were over 200 possible research assistantships. Hence, the resources, though present, are not adequate for the interested undergraduate population.

Vision: Analyze Undergraduate Research Accessibility
SCUE proposes the formation of an exploratory committee of both faculty and students to accurately and definitively gauge undergraduate research needs. A key purpose of such a committee would be to measure the accessibility of undergraduate research, pinpointing those groups on campus whose research needs are not currently being met. By surveying the student body, the proposed committee will attempt to answer questions including but not limited to the following: How well are students informed about research? How many students want to conduct independent research but cannot find adequate funding sources? How helpful are research experiences in life beyond Penn? The creation of such a body will greatly facilitate the process of making undergraduate research more accessible.

Interdisciplinary Learning

Status Quo
Penn has long been a standard-bearer for interdisciplinary learning, now one of the three central tenets of the Penn Compact. From the moment Benjamin Franklin penned his plan for a school offering both practical and classical instruction to prepare students to tackle real-world problems, Penn has been a trailblazer. Franklin’s idea is the origin of Penn’s “One University” policy, which allows students to enroll in classes across the four undergraduate schools and many of its graduate programs, and underlies many programs that join departments or schools. The policy has become a powerful marketing strategy; it helps differentiate Penn from other Ivy League and peer-schools, branding the university as a destination for interdisciplinary studies at the undergraduate level.

Despite this tradition of interdisciplinary excellence, interdisciplinary learning and pedagogical tools are rarely utilized to their full potential. Penn’s commendable assets do not adequately encourage interdisciplinary experiences at the most fundamental level—the classroom. While undergraduates can gain a diverse skill set through Penn’s extensive resources, they are seldom challenged to apply varying pieces of this skill set to solve problems presented in a particular class.

Recommendations
In order to integrate interdisciplinary education into the classroom, SCUE believes that Penn should promote innovative educational strategies that minimize barriers between departments.

Vision: Create Collaborative Courses and Interdisciplinary Recitations
One solution for lack of interdisciplinary learning at the classroom level is creation of an interdisciplinary “recitation,” in which two distinct classes share a common recitation that enables students to apply their knowledge of diverse subjects to address a single problem.

We envision that an Interdisciplinary Thesis Capstone Program would allow inquisitive, highly-motivated students to enrich their learning experiences by giving them the ability to investigate different fields and explore the common threads between two disciplines. It would appeal specifically to students with more than one academic concentration interested in drawing from both areas.

The Thesis Capstone Project would provide students who wish to write an interdisciplinary thesis with the same structure and support available to students writing theses within individual majors or departments. These students typically receive, in addition to guidance from a knowledgeable faculty advisor, a support system in the form of other students. Students pursuing an interdisciplinary track, however, do not have this same opportunity for collaboration; consequently, many students have been discouraged from undertaking an interdisciplinary thesis. An interdisciplinary thesis program would provide interested students with the same structure, support network, and community as those students who complete a thesis in one department or program.

Vision: Connect Student Research to Interdisciplinary Programs and Centers
Few of Penn’s many interdisciplinary research centers and hubs are connected with classes or undergraduate programs, meaning students have trouble accessing learning opportunities housed there. By opening centers to the undergraduates, Penn will provide students with increased access to cutting-edge research and prepare them for graduate school study or post-graduate plans. The centers, in turn, gain from access to undergraduate capital.

Similarly, the PIK program could transcend endowed professorships by integrating scholars’ innovative focuses into the undergraduate curriculum, such as through PIK seminars. Such courses would be designed around particular PIK professors’ interests, providing students with a unique opportunity for close interaction with eminent researchers at the cutting edge of their fields.
Course Selection and Registration

Status Quo

Course selection is perhaps the time at which students most need resources that support informed decision-making. Although many undergraduates plan out their future courses far in advance, others prefer to make course registration decisions during the Add/Drop period, attending a wide variety of courses and selecting from among these. SCUE believes that Penn students should be encouraged to utilize the Add/Drop period to explore a range of unique courses.

Recommendations

Although an extended course-shopping period would be ideal, SCUE sees the potential for a video course-shopping period should a non-virtual one be infeasible. Students should be able to take courses that they find both intellectually stimulating and enjoyable. In order to do so, it is necessary that the University provide students with the resources necessary in order for them to be able to choose the right classes for themselves.

Vision: Create a virtual course-shopping program

A course shopping period would allow students to meet a professor, listen to his expectations for the class, and hear a sample lecture. Many students know after the first lecture whether or not they want to remain in the class. This is verified by the fact that closed classes inevitably open after the first or second lecture has taken place. With the current system, a student who is debating between two courses that take place during the same time slot is at a major disadvantage because he/she will inevitably miss out on the opportunity to sit in on both first lectures. Also, with the existing system, students are more likely to play it safe and take popular classes instead of trying new ones.

During a course shopping period, professors would present an abridged “first lecture” multiple times so that students could actually shop different classes before making any registration decisions. This shopping period could take place one or two days before classes begin in the Fall and Spring semesters, thereby not interrupting the regular rhythm of the start of first semester. Understandably, adding an actual course-shopping period would be difficult to implement. Obviously drawbacks also leave room for other solutions. For example, professors may find it monotonous and bothersome to give the same lecture multiple times. There is also no guarantee that students would take advantage of the opportunity to shop courses.

It is perhaps more feasible that Penn adopt a system for virtual course shopping where professors videotape their first lecture or a mock introductory message that students can view online. These videos would allow students to virtually attend multiple first lectures whose time slots might interfere with one another. They could either be posted on a Pennkey-protected site or on iTunes U, where sixty-second lectures are currently accessible to everyone who knows where to find them. To start, every professor can post one video to represent the array of courses he teaches. Whether the sample video is the professor lecturing or an interview with that professor, these videos would introduce students to the professors and give them a taste for the professors’ styles and points of view. Such video clips, in conjunction with online syllabi, would give students a fuller picture of classes in which they are interested, allowing them to make more informed decisions when registering for courses.

Vision: Streamline Course Waitlist System

Harnessing the potential of technology can enable students to make more informed decisions related to their Penn educations. SCUE believes that certain technological advances could ease the inevitable burden associated with course registration by helping students overcome the perennial challenge of enrolling in closed courses.

Although students may not be admitted to their preferred classes during preliminary registration, seats frequently become available during the Add/Drop period. Students trying to enroll in a closed class are told to check Penn InTouch periodically; if a student happens to access the page at just the right time, he or she may claim an open spot. The current methodology is haphazard. This shortcoming is especially problematic for small seminars that benefit from a cohesive group of engaged students.

While manual waitlists provide a feasible short-term option for small seminars, they do not address the waitlist needs of larger classes for which managing a manual waitlist would be overwhelming for professors. Hence, in the long term, we recommend the Courses InTouch interface
provide professors with a centrally managed, transparent waitlist system, similar to that employed by Wharton’s finance department. We envision a system in which students have the option of enrolling on a waitlist for any class online, through Courses InTouch, and professors can exercise varying degrees of control over their waitlists by managing waitlists manually, coding their waitlist (for example, automatically placing upperclassmen or majors ahead of underclassmen and non-majors), or allowing their waitlist to operate on a default first-come, first-served basis.

Although there are several potential obstacles, especially those surrounding the technical challenges of creating a functional waitlist, the benefits of a standardized, online waitlist system are manifold. Most importantly, professors will enjoy the participation of passionate, committed students in their classes and students will be freed from the stresses that come with an irregular and confusing waitlist system.

**Intellectual Community**

**Residential Academic Life**

**Status Quo**

At the 10-year anniversary of the College House system, there is no better time to step back and evaluate the status of Penn’s Residential Programs, designed to bring together students who share a culture, lifestyle or academic interest. These 30 programs are structured differently — some have special amenities, some offer academic credit, some include only freshmen — but all have the same underlying characteristics: a designated section or floor, a central faculty advisor, and a range of related activities. Program themes range from Healthy Living to Film Culture to Study of Infectious Diseases.

SCUE is interested in assessing just those Residential Programs that are academic in focus, most of which currently fall far short of their potential as learning experiences. Academic Residential Programs are not considered serious endeavors by participating students. Underlying this lack of engagement is a minimally competitive application process that rewards ulterior motives. It turns residential programs into tools for getting into favored dorms, rather than chances for significant academic experiences. Once admitted, accountability is minimal. As students engage themselves in class work and other extracurricular activities, they rarely view College House programs as priorities. There are few repercussions for students who are uninvolved in their residential programs. Because the success of these programs is contingent upon student involvement, these unengaged students compromise the programs’ community-building and academic goals and reinforce their illegitimacy.

**Recommendations**

SCUE agrees that not all residential programs need an academic component. There is much value in having students with similar involvements live together, as effectively exemplified by Riepe College House’s mentoring program. There is also much to be gained by having accessible faculty members calling student dorms their home. Furthermore, SCUE appreciates that there are many students who do not want an academic component in their residence.

At the same time, however, there are many students who could benefit from learning outside of traditional classroom frameworks. The lack of student engagement in current programs reflects shortcomings that can be corrected to maximize and harness student interest. To this end, SCUE offers suggestions for improving the current function of the programs, as well as for creating innovative new options that fill unmet demand.

**Vision:** Improve program accountability, administration and evaluation

First, College Houses and Academics (CHAS) must evaluate its programs to see what is working, dismantling what is not. Successful execution of these programs depends on effective planning and leadership by student coordinators, faculty and staff. In order to improve accountability, CHAS must articulate clear expectations, with continued funding contingent on adherence to these goals. Standardized CHAS benchmarks would clarify what participants are expected to contribute and gain from programs. For example, specifying the number of faculty fellow discussions to be held each month would set a standard for participation not currently in place.

Setting clear expectations would enable CHAS to impose sunset periods on residential programs. This is a necessary step to hold programs accountable and identify those that should be terminated, enabling scarce resources to better serve students and faculty through more productive channels. Sunset periods would also challenge CHAS to continually pay attention and innovate, instead of perpetuating unsuccessful programs.

**Vision:** Link residential programs to for-credit courses

In addition to improving the status quo, SCUE recommends CHAS develop new, innovative, academically-significant programming with mechanisms to encourage meaningful participation. Applying the lessons of successful academic residential programs at other institutions, Penn can build exemplary programs of its own that foster academic curiosity, engagement and faculty-student interaction.

One way of adding more meaningful academic dimensions to residential programs is to combine them with for-credit courses. These may be pre-existing courses for which residents are offered priority registration, or they could be new creations. A for-credit designation will ensure that applicants are committed and that program coordinators prioritize academic rigor. This should correspond with improvements to the application process, specifically more comprehensive material for evaluating interested students.

**Vision:** Design freshmen living-learning communities for immersion into intellectual pursuits

SCUE believes freshmen in particular need to be given greater opportunity for smaller, academically focused residential programs, such as through an “Experimental College” model. In this model, students with varied academic interests and backgrounds would be clustered together in different dorms or halls, taking some of the same requirement classes together and working collaboratively towards a culminating final research project. Basic skills, methods, and individual expertise from each discipline in which a student is involved can be utilized for the project.

Students in such a program would not simply attend weekly meetings, but would be given constant feedback from the live-in faculty masters of different dorms or halls, taking some of the same requirement classes together and working collaboratively towards a culminating final research project. Basic skills, methods, and individual expertise from each discipline in which a student is involved can be utilized for the project.

Students in such a program would not simply attend weekly meetings, but would be given constant feedback from the live-in faculty masters of different dorms or halls, taking some of the same requirement classes together and working collaboratively towards a culminating final research project. Basic skills, methods, and individual expertise from each discipline in which a student is involved can be utilized for the project.

**Collaborative Spaces**

**Status Quo**

SCUE believes that spaces for group work are essential to the intellectual community of a university. Collaborative learning is a tool that complements both in-class education and individual study. Whether through assigned group projects or informal exam study groups, collaborative work promotes team dynamics and prepares undergraduates for future interpersonal professional and academic interactions. Although individual learning is essential to knowledge acquisition, much can be gained from study in a team setting. However, there are limited collaborative spaces for such group learning at Penn, causing consistent high demand for the few spaces that do exist.

**Recommendations**

SCUE believes all four undergraduate schools can benefit from encouraging their students to collaborate, whether in a formalized, assignment-based way, or through the encouragement of group studying. Creating more group study locations will promote this type of learning. Perhaps the model that is best to replicate is that evidenced by Weigle Information Commons. Students are encouraged to engage in a formal way with their classmates, allowing for a less intense and less stressful experience. In addition, the technological capabilities — such as video recording systems, monitors, and laptops — allow for wider learning opportunities.

**Vision:** Create more group study locations

In encouraging Penn to prioritize the creation of new collaborative spaces, limited resources are a clear challenge. However, the university’s eastward expansion project represents a tremendous opportunity to rethink how campus space is used. For example, relocating the administrative offices housed in the Franklin Building would make this valuable, central space available for student benefit. The building could be trans-
formed into an academic hub that combines collaborative study spaces with seminar rooms. In addition, all rehabilitation and new construction projects should make student work space a priority, including group-oriented settings and technological capacity.

**Beyond Penn**

**Civic Engagement through Academic Partnerships**

**Status Quo**

Given the growing importance of theory-based learning in real world applications, SCUE perceives civic engagement as a vehicle to sensitize students to the value of education and to enable them to identify problems and implement sustainable solutions in the community. Beyond Penn, students can use the conceptual frameworks from class and the pragmatic tools acquired from civic experiences to make informed decisions, formulate and propose public policies, and establish rewarding partnerships. As best stated in President Amy Gutmann’s Penn Compact: Engaging Locally and Globally, all students and faculty should “share the fruits of our integrated knowledge wherever there is an opportunity for our students, faculty, and alumni to serve and to learn.”

The Netter Center’s Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) program stands as Penn’s predominant curricular outlet into local communities. Answering the President’s call for Local Engagement, ABCS follows a model of service learning, targeting problem-oriented research. ABCS courses equip students with the proper tools and skills to make successful and lasting change in local communities, directly interfacing with public schools and community organizations. Students can delve into issues ranging from urban nutrition to clinical psychology and develop innovative strategies that synthesize the information they have learned.

SCUE applauds the efforts by Penn faculty and administrators to facilitate civic engagement on campus. The success of these programs, however, comes despite a lack of curriculum integration. A student’s enrollment in an ABCS course is most likely a result of his or her self-motivation to seek out such opportunities. While this sort of participation must not be undervalued, SCUE feels that students should additionally be made aware of civic partnerships through College curriculum options. Students not already active in community service activities may have trouble identifying these opportunities and, more importantly, their academic relevance. Without the incentive of contributing to curricular requirements, ABCS doesn’t represent priorities in students’ busy schedules. An underlying barrier to wider embrace of ABCS is their perception of being academically soft.

**Recommendations**

SCUE believes that Penn should measure and enable undergraduates to engage civically through academic partnerships. In doing so, it will prepare students to serve a greater cause as global citizens.

**Vision: Integrate Civic Engagement Into Curriculum Requirements**

SCUE proposes that ABCS courses fulfill major and sector requirements, and that the breadth of this coursework expand to uncharted undergraduate departments. SCUE recommends the university allow students to count one or more ABCS courses in the form of major-related elective credit. To qualify, an ABCS course would either substantively complement a course required for the major or address central issues often considered in the field. Students would inform and clarify objectives learned in class by analyzing these critical issues under a civic lens. This policy would allow students who might not have freedom in their academic plan to incorporate community engagement into their time at Penn.

Similarly, ABCS Courses should be allowed to count for Sector Requirements. Considering their multidisciplinary nature, some ABCS courses ideally fit established sector goals, especially those of Society, Arts & Letters, and Humanities & Social Sciences.

**Vision: Ensure Rigor of ABCS Courses**

In advocating for an expanded role of ABCS in the curriculum, it is important to address the perception that ABCS courses are less academically rigorous than non-ABCS courses. SCUE believes ABCS must not only tie civic engagement to course credits, but should immerse students in challenging learning atmospheres that force them to think critically and hold them to suitable standards. Although some current offerings do provide this, the broader ABCS program is hindered by lack of a process to ensure all courses meet academic expectations agreed upon by all stakeholders. SCUE proposes a formalized structure for evaluating and maintaining ABCS academic rigor. Departments should work closely and regularly with the Netter Center to develop clear guidelines for what ABCS courses should achieve, as well as regular evaluation and review processes for concerns that arise.

**Study Abroad & Off-Campus Opportunities**

**Status Quo**

As a world-class university, Penn’s global engagement initiatives are central to the University’s academic and social missions. Penn strives to engage globally, but what should this mean in practice? Students’ ability to reap these benefits is hindered by barriers to participation and missed opportunities. Lack of cohesion and classroom connections mean undergraduates are not meaningfully linked to Penn’s array of global programs and research centers.

**Recommendations**

SCUE believes experiences abroad are significant intellectual opportunities that should be possible for all Penn students. Models range from traditional semester-long enrollment at foreign universities to innovative, flexible options like courses with abroad components or gap years. Such experiences provide students with unique understandings of other cultures, opportunities to integrate disciplines in new settings, and gain hands-on experience that enhances global-oriented academic programs. By promoting the academic benefits of abroad options and harnessing undergraduate capital on a global scale, Penn can better fulfill its commitment to global engagement while gaining untapped resources that advance its work.

**Vision: Expand Alternative Forms Models of Studying Abroad**

To accommodate diverse student schedules and needs, Penn should expand and innovate the types of study abroad experiences offered while prioritizing their intellectual benefits and ensuring their academic quality. A large portion of the student body is unable to study abroad because of existing major or general education requirements, financial concerns, or extra-curricular and leadership commitments. Summer opportunities are a useful alternative to semester-long study abroad, but similarly inaccessible for many students seeking internships or other employment.

SCUE proposes that Penn increase the number of one-credit study abroad programs offered during winter and spring breaks, which would provide similar benefits. The infrastructure is already in place for one-credit summer abroad programs, facilitating expansion of such offerings; the same procedures could be translated into winter opportunities as well. SCUE also encourages departments to offer courses that combine standard lecture or seminar structures with abroad components. New courses can be designed around specific off-campus experiences, or such experiences could be incorporated into already existing classes.

**Vision: Promote Academic Research in Study Abroad**

By immersing students in the culture, history, economics, and politics of their host country, study abroad serves as a catalyst for research by prompting questions about their first-hand experiences. Unfortunately, after returning to Penn, many students no longer have access to the rich primary sources on their subject, whether surveys, interview subjects, or national archives. While some students are able to secure coveted funding to return to their region of interest to collect data, many cannot.

SCUE believes Penn should emphasize research during study abroad preparations, as well as cultivate ways for students to create academic opportunities. Through proactive planning, students could better incorporate research into time abroad without extra costs or missed opportunities. This will involve increased commitment, coordination and collaboration among stakeholders including CURF, Penn Abroad, individual departments and academic advisors.

Aligning with our belief that students should be involved in research throughout their Penn careers, SCUE proposes all students planning to go abroad be advised to think about potential research topics and investigate the primary sources available in their host country. Advisors at all levels should ensure students are familiar with their options and equipped with the tools
for pursuing them. In addition to promoting awareness, Penn could provide incentives that encourage research abroad; for example, those who propose research designs before departure could be eligible for credit and priority access to departmental funds for expenses like travel and archival fees.

Vision: Engage Undergraduates in Penn’s Global Footprint

The current array of global engagement initiatives falls short as a cohesive strategy. Rather than a distinctive global identity, the status quo represents disjointed and scatter-shot projects that, while admittedly successful in and of themselves, poorly serve Penn as a whole.

At one end of the spectrum, isolated partnerships exist between faculty and their international colleagues, with undergraduates excluded from these fruitful collaborations. At the other end, President Amy Gutmann has announced prominent alliances with Tsinghua University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, but it has not yet been evident how these relationships will enrich the undergraduate experience locally and expand undergraduate opportunities globally. If the university claims these programs were initiated to enhance the academic experience Penn fosters, they need to be created and evolved with undergraduate students in mind.

SCUE believes Penn’s central leadership should consult more broadly with schools and research centers in constructing a global vision for Penn that serves all its stakeholders, and enhances Penn’s public profile. Just as Penn partners with West Philadelphia public schools through the Netter Center for Community Partnerships, merging the best of Penn’s intellectual capital with the creativity and service-oriented drive of its students, so too should a center for international partnerships serve as the clearinghouse and enabler of a series of rich, multidisciplinary, and accessible academic partnerships in the model of Botswana. From an undergraduate perspective, Penn would be the first university to meaningfully transcend the traditional study abroad experience, integrating research, service, and study at partner universities that have deep linkage with Penn through scholarship and exchange.

Student Committee on Undergraduate Education

Steering Committee
Alexandra Berger, Chair
Jessica Riegel, Vice Chair
Sarah Doherty, Treasurer
Monisha Chakravarthy, Secretary
Christopher Pynn, Member-At-Large
Lauren Springer, Member-At-Large

General Body
Arthur Argall
Genevieve Barnard
Benjamin Boden
Samantha Braun
Wendy Cai
Turja Chakrabarti
Courtney Charleston
Scott Dzialo
Matt Eldridge
Shreyans Goenka
Jonathan Gol
Charles Gray
Joyce Greenbaum
Julie Gutowski
Jaclyn Hall
Doug Hollin
Vikram Iyer
Casey Klyszeko
Harrison Lieberfarb
Rochelle Lipsky
Elena Madan
Mili Mehta
Rick Oxenhandler
Sam Pawliger
Michelle Perlin
Justin Rand
Sejal Shah
Alison Wand

Former SCUE Chairs
Zachary Fuchs, 2008
Elizabeth Slavitt, 2007
Gabe Kopin, 2006

 Contributing Alumni, Class of 2009
Ryan Benjamin
Elizabeth Elfman
Billy Goldberg
Michael Ishii
Isabelle Kenyon
Matthew Owens
Stephanie Simon
Kavita Vinekar
Aaron Werner
Jason Zolle