

Bridging the Gaps



Fostering Community through Academic Enrichment: Preparing Philadelphia High School Students for College and Beyond

Student Interns:

Hiba Chaudhry - Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health

Kevin Chao - Drexel University, College of Medicine

Khalil Taylor - Drexel University, College of Medicine

Academic Preceptor: Kristen Ryczak, MD, Drexel University College of Medicine, Family, Community & Preventative Medicine

Community Preceptors: Jonathan Edwards, Director of Academics & Shanise Redmon, MA, Academic Services Manager

COMMUNITY PARTNER



Philadelphia Futures is a nonprofit organization in Philadelphia that connects low-income, first-generation-to-college students to the tools, resources and opportunities needed for admission to and success in college. Their summer enrichment courses this year consisted of History and Human Behavior, Career Research and Exploration, and Environmental Science. <https://philadelphiafutures.org/>

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the percentage of low-income students across all public schools in Philadelphia is an average of 66%. Additionally, according to a Pell Institute study of students who first enrolled in fall 2003, only 11% of low-income, first-generation college students earned a college degree within six years of enrollment. With these staggering numbers, there exist numerous academic enrichment programs throughout Philadelphia for high school students that serve to bridge them closer to higher education. Philadelphia Futures is a non-profit organization that offers academic enrichment programs to high school students since its establishment in 1989, two of which include its Sponsor-a-Scholar and College Connection programs. In the Sponsor-a-Scholar program, students receive the support, resources, and opportunities they need to be admitted and graduate from college. In the College Connection program, college-ready students are prepared for the college application, admission, and financial aid processes that they otherwise would not be able to complete without the necessary support. In 2020, these programs drew in over 275 high school students across Philadelphia. 100% of students in the Sponsor-A-Scholar program graduated from high school, 100% of them were accepted into college, and 99% matriculated into college. In the College Connection program, 100% of all students graduated from high school, received an acceptance into college, and matriculated into college.

TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

The Bridging the Gaps student interns served as teaching assistants for two classes in the Philadelphia Futures summer curriculum: (1) Career Research and Exploration and (2) History and Human Behavior. In Career Research and Exploration, interns helped high school students develop skills for college and career readiness, such as how to write a resume, analyze different career industries and give a 30 second elevator pitch. In History and Human Behavior, the students learned about African American, Haitian, Native American and Middle Eastern history and movements and how they have shaped our present-day society. For a final project, the Bridging the Gaps student interns developed and hosted a jeopardy game about cardiovascular disease, oral health and smoking cessation for all students. Students increased their awareness of health disparities, acquired knowledge about effective preventive strategies and learned about additional resources through active participation and engagement.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Helped students develop a professional resume and their 30-second elevator pitches
- Assisted students in writing a college-level research paper about human right movements
- Hosted a Health Career Panel for students that outlined the journey to public health and medical school
- Organized a Jeopardy Game about Cardiovascular Disease, Oral Health, and Smoking Cessation for students

CHALLENGES

- Transitioning some students from in-person to virtual due to COVID compliance
- Engaging with students in a virtual classroom setting
- Integrating cardiovascular health, oral health, and smoking cessation lesson plans into a well-established curriculum
- Having students miss class because of a summer job or personal obligations
- Saying Goodbye

JOYS

- Working directly with students
- Learning about each student's passions and career goals
- Hosting a closing ceremony for all students
- Helping students reach their full potential

REFLECTION

Hiba Chaudhry: "For me, interning at Philadelphia Futures has been an incredible experience. I worked with high school students and seeing their dedication to come to class, even while having personal issues, amazed me. These students were given a platform to speak up and have their voices heard. Their experiences made me learn about the barriers these students face coming from disadvantaged communities, yet they are still making efforts to take advantage of the opportunities offered by Philadelphia Futures. Their resilience and passion was something that inspired me to take with me in the future. This experience made me realize why I wanted to work with students in the first place and being a first-generation student myself, gave me an opportunity to give back to the community".

Kevin Chao: "Working with Philadelphia Futures has been rapturous, sobering, and insightful. From my experience, I learned that social determinants of health have a detrimental impact for everyone, particularly in education access. Those who are disenfranchised miss out on equitable opportunities to enter various career fields and working professionals who have more privilege lose out on a necessary diversity that drives productivity and camaraderie. The students that I worked with exhibited a prodigious level of tenacity, curiosity, and resilience, which served as a personal reminder to cultivate those same qualities in my personal development. I am grateful for this opportunity and motivated to continue to bridge the gaps between communities in my professional career."

Khalil Taylor: "My time with Philadelphia Futures this summer has been beyond words. I came into this internship thinking I understood how to integrate passions, skills, and career aspirations. I quickly recognized the limitations of my perspective. Engaging with the students, instructors, and staff provided much needed insight into how I can better serve by combining my passions. This experience emphasized why mentorship and community service are essential and bidirectional. The boundless optimism, humor, and passion of each individual was refreshing and inspiring. Despite the struggles students experienced outside the classroom, the course provided a community for support and expression. As a product of Philadelphia, I am proud to know of and have the opportunity to experience Philadelphia Futures and a portion of the work they are doing with Philadelphia's youth. I leave this experience feeling appreciative and empowered. I carry with me an invigorated passion, new tools and resources, and wonderful memories."