

# Bridging the Gaps



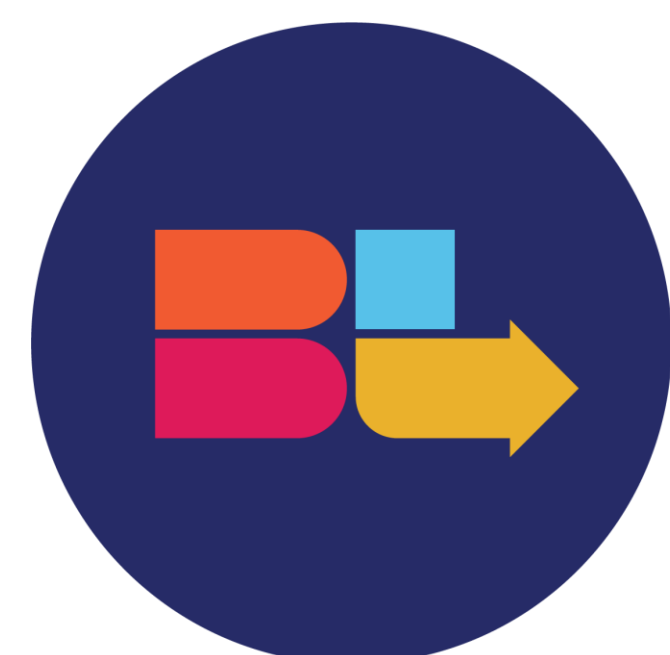
## Empowering through Education

Student Interns: **Hannah Baukert**, University of Pennsylvania, School of Veterinary Medicine & **Zhiyong (John) Xie**, University of Pennsylvania, School of Dental Medicine

Academic Preceptors: **Brittany Watson**, MS, VMD, PhD, DACVPM, University of Pennsylvania, School of Veterinary Medicine & **Joan I. Gluch**, PhD, RDH, PHDHP, University of Pennsylvania, School of Dental Medicine

Community Preceptors: **Mercy Howard**, BA, Student Support Coordinator, Beyond Literacy

### COMMUNITY PARTNER



## Beyond Literacy

Beyond Literacy (BeLit) is the largest literacy agency in Philadelphia, offering free, high-quality education to adults and families. By harnessing the power of literacy, they help learners improve their reading, writing, math, English language, digital literacy, and workplace skills. Through their transformative classes, Beyond Literacy empowers individuals to break the cycle of poverty and succeed as workers, parents, and neighbors, ultimately enabling them to live better lives.

<https://beyondliteracy.org/>

### BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

- In Philadelphia, a staggering 32% of adults lack basic literacy skills, while an additional 37% are only nearly proficient in reading, resulting in a significant population of 800,000 adults facing challenges with reading.
- Almost 1 million adult Philadelphians face challenges with math skills, with 49% lacking basic proficiency and an additional 29% not quite proficient, making it difficult for them to perform tasks requiring anything higher than basic level math.
- With the world's largest immigrant population, accounting for one-in-five of all immigrants, the U.S. sees a proficiency rate of only 53% among immigrants who are English speakers.
- Earning a GED results in a substantial average annual income increase of over \$8,000.

### TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

- Assisted in graduation ceremony preparation & support
- Engaged in new student intake process
- Provided support in various classes (ESL, digital literacy)
- Delivered diverse health presentations (oral health, cardiovascular health, smoking, veterinary care)
- Delivered oral health supplies to all campuses
- Provided resources for oral health, smoking cessation, veterinary care

### ACCOMPLISHMENTS/ CHALLENGES/ JOYS

- Attending BeLit's graduation, witnessing proud families celebrating their learners' achievements
- Delivering impactful health presentations on topics such as oral health, cardiovascular health, smoking, and preventative veterinary care
- Learners sharing their stories, opening up about their hardships and educational accomplishments
- Developing a deeper understanding of community engagement and healthcare disparities
- Feeling a sense of fulfillment and empowerment in making a difference in the lives of others

### REFLECTION

We learned so much from adult learners about their previous experiences that led to an interruption in their education, and how grateful so many were for the support and care given by Beyond Literacy to address their current barriers to achieving their education goals. We learned how an individualized approach and pairing each student with a student support coordinator is integral in students finishing classes and succeeding after their courses are completed.

We are so grateful for the openness of both the learners sharing their experiences with us, and for the teachers showing us how they approach teaching their free, high-quality courses.

