

## **GSWS 1550 Holding Space and Making Place: Creating Community in West Philadelphia Schools T/R 3:30-4:59 pm**

### **Course Description:**

In this ABCS course, students will work with faculty and [OurSpace](#), a student organization affiliated with the Netter Center, to create curriculum and programming for Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) in University Assisted Community Schools (UACS) in West Philadelphia. The objective of the programming is to foster consistent and accessible spaces for youth to express themselves, engage with other students, learn, and thrive. For Penn students, this course offers an opportunity to genuinely engage with youth in the West Philadelphia community; engagement in the context of this course is informed by social justice and restorative justice values, which prioritize bidirectional relationships, accountability, agency, and inclusivity. Previous experience with GSWS courses is helpful, but not necessary.

### **Course Outline & Goals:**

This course will have two components: the Penn student education and setup component and the GSA engagement component.

This project seeks to address community needs at both the local and national levels by targeting LGBTQ+ students, who are some of the most vulnerable youth groups. LGBTQ+ youths have higher rates of mental health challenges and experience disproportionate rates of both bullying and suicide (GLSEN, 2021). The Philadelphia School District, which is chronically underfunded, has historically had a difficult time supporting LGBTQ+ students despite good intentions and progressive policies (Graham, 2021). This project seeks to support LGBTQ+ students in three West Philadelphia area schools by mobilizing Penn students to help foster a safe environment within the schools where these students can thrive. Among other important skills: Penn students will: a) learn how to effectively and collaboratively develop curricula, b) build relationships with individuals and community partners, and c) contribute to the broader West Philadelphia community.

### **Course Values:**

This course is informed by the following core values. These foundational concepts will be the guiding force in all activities and will be revisited and revised regularly in conversation with all collaborators.

- **Community building and interconnectedness:** The central focus of this course is to aid Penn students in genuine engagement with the West Philadelphia community. Our community engagement is informed by the values of Restorative Justice, which prioritize horizontal and bidirectional relationships. We hope to create many opportunities for students to continue working with the students and school staff beyond the course through continuing their engagement with GSA sites or becoming an OurSpace intern.
- **Accountability and agency:** Mutual accountability is crucial in building good relationships with students of any grade level. Accountability generates a safe space for people to engage with each other honestly and gives everyone involved the power of self-determination. We prioritize high school students' agency to make their own decisions about what they learn and how they implement that during and outside of programming.

- **Inclusivity and belonging:** Fostering a safe environment for queer students requires a substantial understanding of intersectionality and multiplicity, especially in the context of West Philadelphia. Acknowledging differences and similarities within our lived experiences allows us to make deeper connections and understand one another.
- **Justice and equity:** Justice honors everyone's inherent worth, enacted through community relationships. Creating a just and equitable environment is mandatory for the success of any afterschool program, particularly within a GSA. We commit to providing a social justice framework to ensure that our values align with the student-led workshops happening during the second part of the course.

## **Part 1: Penn Student Education**

During the first component, Penn students will learn the content required to facilitate GSA spaces and develop curricula, gain training on how to do both these tasks, and practice. This portion is intended to last seven weeks. The collaborators will also be working to prepare the GSA sites and recruit additional students. This is an outline of the first portion of the course on a week-by-week basis:

*Week 1:* Introduction to the Course

*Weeks 2 to 4:* Establishing Academic and Content Background Among Penn Students; topics will include but are not limited to: intersectionality, histories of GSAs in United States and locally, restorative justice, social justice

*Weeks 5 and 6:* Training on How to Develop and Facilitate Curricula

*Week 7:* Practice

## **Part 2: Academically Based Community Service Component**

During the second component, students will develop tailored curricula based on the GSAs' interests and teach the curricula at the respective sites. Within the course, the students will be divided into groups of three to four students, and they will develop and teach the curricula on a rotation basis. On the day of class, when they are not at the GSA site, their “homework” will be to reflect on their engagement with the GSA site placement and/or post the workshops the students created on Canva for feedback (classmates and faculty will provide feedback).

*Week 8:* West Philadelphia GSA Site Placements, the Netter Center, and OurSpace; Community Bonding Between Penn Students and GSA Site Placement

*Week 9 to 15:* Developing and Implementing Lessons Based on the Students' Interests

*Week 16:* Wrap Up

## **Student Assessment:**

The assessment process for students will be cumulative, in that they will be expected to provide regular reflections on their learning process throughout the course (likely on a weekly basis). The instructor and teaching assistant will evaluate the GSA workshops developed by the Penn students, using a rubric that is developed at the start of the semester with students enrolled in the course. As an ABCS course, student participation will count for a high percentage of the course grade.

### **Reading List (subject to change):**

Abbot, Sophia Abbot. 2019. Feminist Community Engagement. [Blog Post]. Retrieved from <https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/feminist-community-engagement/>

Bocci, Melissa. 2015. "Service-learning and white normativity: Racial representation in service-learning's historical narrative." *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Fall, p. 5-17.  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1137412.pdf>

Campus Compact. n.d. "Facilitating reflection."  
<https://compact.org/global-sl/toolsandsyllabi/facilitating-reflection/>

Center for Engaged Learning. n.d. "Service-Learning"  
<https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/doing-engaged-learning/service-learning/>

Davis, B., Royne Stafford, M. B., & Pullig, C. (2014). How Gay–Straight Alliance Groups Mitigate the Relationship Between Gay-Bias Victimization and Adolescent Suicide Attempts. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 53(12), 1271-1278.e1.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2014.09.010>

GLSEN, 2021. GLSEN National School Climate Survey. Available online:  
<https://www.glsen.org/research/2021-national-school-climate-survey>

Graham, Kristen, 2021. "A Gender Neutral Restroom in Every School: Philly Plans Changes to Make Every Kid Feel Safe." *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Available online:  
<https://www.inquirer.com/education/gender-neutral-bathrooms-philadelphia-schools-lgbtq-students-20210712.html#loaded>

Kokozos, M., & Gonzalez, M. (2020). Critical inclusion: Disrupting LGBTQ normative frameworks in school contexts. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 53 (1–2), 151–164.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1764881>

Movement Advancement Project. LGBTQ Curricular Laws. Available online (accessed March 29, 2024):  
[https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/curricular\\_laws](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/curricular_laws)

Poteat, V. P., Calzo, J. P., Yoshikawa, H., Lipkin, A., Ceccolini, C. J., Rosenbach, S. B., O'Brien, M. D., Marx, R. A., Murchison, G. R., & Burson, E. (2020). Greater Engagement in Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) and GSA Characteristics Predict Youth Empowerment and Reduced Mental Health Concerns. *Child Development*, 91(5), 1509–1528. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13345>

Toomey, R. B., Ryan, C., Diaz, R. M., & Russell, S. T. (2011). High School Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Young Adult Well-Being: An Examination of GSA Presence, Participation, and Perceived

Effectiveness. *Applied Developmental Science*, 15(4), 175–185.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2011.607378>