



SCUE

STUDENT COMMITTEE on
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

Increased interest in the study of international development among Penn undergraduates, faculty members, and administrators has led the Student Committee on Undergraduate Education to propose the creation of a Center for International Development in order to formalize the many existing resources the University has to offer. We believe that a Center for International Development and a well-conceived undergraduate program in international development would enable Penn students to engage with pressing issues and would further Penn's broader efforts in the research of and participation in development work worldwide. While the exact details of the Center and program remain to be determined, SCUE looks forward to working with administrators, faculty members, and other student groups to ensure that Penn becomes a place where undergraduates can study and partake in international development work. Making this a priority will certainly enhance Penn's status in the scholarly and activist community, but more importantly, by training today's students to think innovatively and complexly about real problems in international development, Penn will make a significant and important difference in the world for the foreseeable future. SCUE appreciates your taking the time to read this document. Please contact us to discuss this proposal in more depth. Thank you.

The Student Committee on Undergraduate Education

International Development Studies at Penn

Recently, students, faculty members, and administrators have expressed a growing interest in international development. President Gutmann's Penn Compact demonstrates a commitment to global engagement, and Provost Daniels has supported such efforts rhetorically and through the creation and fiscal support of related initiatives. At the Graduate School of Education, Professor Dan Wagner has launched the Penn Global Development Initiative, which brings faculty, administrators, and students together to create abroad opportunities and plan conferences to discuss international development theoretically and in practice on Penn's campus.

Faculty members continue to delve into cutting-edge research on all facets of international development, from politics, history, urban planning, and religion to civil engineering to global health to microfinance to literacy. Penn undergraduates and graduate students attend lectures, panels, and fairs on international development topics and opportunities, and students volunteer – through Penn programs and on their own – to do development work abroad during summer, spring, and winter vacations.

Engineering students can join the Penn chapter of Engineers without Borders; a student-run Microfinance Club supports initiatives around the world; pre-med and medical students can volunteer in AIDS-ridden Botswana; Penn International Business Volunteers sends interested students to do work abroad; the Penn Society for International Development runs programs and publishes a student research journal, *Siruis*, and these are just a limited sampling of the many ways students can become involved in such global engagement. Yet, despite the multitude of opportunities for students to participate in development work, the amount of related research at Penn, and the overwhelming interest in international development, all of this exists in an incredibly decentralized fashion.

If Penn wants to continue to be a leader in international development and to leverage its current resources to educate interested students in the intricacies of such work and research, Penn administrators must be committed to creating a Center for International Development which would be aware of and inform students about opportunities available to them in international development. The Student Committee on Undergraduate Education therefore recommends that the administration dedicate resources to such a Center so that students can study and partake in international development in an organized and consistent manner.

THE CENTER

Currently, if a student arrives at Penn and is interested in biology, for example, he can easily locate the list of biology courses, look up information about the major and minor, and determine who in the department does research he finds interesting. While there are countless resources and opportunities for students curious about international development at Penn, the lack of centralization means that it could take months of searching before students discover many such options. Though many research and study opportunities fit best where they are currently housed (civil engineering in the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, literacy studies and research in the Graduate School of Education, for examples), creating a Center for International Development would provide interested students with a clear place to visit to find out about the many ways for

them to get involved in studying, research, and engaging in international development. The Center would keep track of the various opportunities, advise students about involvement, and coordinate the academic, intellectual community, and action components of the program in international development at Penn.

THE PROGRAM

The program in international development would not necessarily be a department or a major, but would instead be a program comprised of academic, intellectual community, and action components. Students would be able to easily access information about all elements of the program because of the centralized coordination of it and would then be able to decide to what extent they would partake in the available opportunities.

ACADEMICS

The Center would maintain a list (both on paper and online) of all undergraduate and graduate courses related to international development studies. Classes on the list must deepen students' understanding of international affairs and of development work; courses would be divided into categories indicating whether they offer students a background on the subject or deal more specifically with a thematic or regional topic.

Students who take a certain number and range of classes from this list would be eligible for a capstone experience in the spring of their junior year or fall of their senior year. The capstone experience would bring engaged students together in groups of five or six; each student would have taken the requisite number of international development classes and would be completing a major in one of the four undergraduate schools. Groups would be comprised of students with different academic backgrounds and would be given a real-world problem, complete with preliminary research and data. (Please see the ACTION section of the proposal for more information on the envisioned capstone experience).

In addition to coordinating the capstone experience, the Center would be responsible for finding out which courses would be offered in the upcoming semester, collecting and publishing syllabi, and ensuring enough such classes are available each semester. If there seems to be a dearth of courses on a particular theme or region, students or faculty members would be able to work with the Center to create new classes. The Center would keep in close touch with departments and professors interested in international development and would be able to leverage these relationships to facilitate collaboration across disciplines in order to offer the most cutting-edge and innovative courses in international development studies at the undergraduate level. The Center would also look to other universities and programs as guides to the types of classes Penn might offer and would work to bring top researchers and teachers of international development to Penn on visiting professor appointments or to give lectures or pro-seminars.

INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY

The program would also foster intellectual community at Penn by bringing faculty members and students together to engage in research, real-world problem-solving, and learning for its own sake. The Center would work with CURF and interested

departments and programs to find and create opportunities for undergraduates to assist faculty members with international development research. By maintaining close working relations with regional and thematic research centers and departments across the university, the Center would be aware of research opportunities and would be able to inform students and CURF of such possibilities. Furthermore, the Center would find out about student research interest and let faculty members know about areas students would like to study. As much of the research would be centered on real-world, complex, unsolved problems, the more faculty members and students engage in such work together, the more Penn becomes a true research university. International development is a perfect concept on which to build this type of collaboration across experiential levels and disciplines. Today's undergraduates will be burdened with the problems of development in the future, and investing in student research opportunities will help put Penn at the forefront of such knowledge and help the world at large now and in the future.

In addition to research opportunities, students and faculty members would gather for weekly dinners or lunches to discuss topics in international development. This aspect of the program could follow many models; a group of ten to fifteen students and one to three faculty members could meet and talk about relevant scholarly or journalistic articles sent out by student participants or the professors. A professor could lecture to the group and then answer questions. Small groups of students could present articles to everyone else. Students and faculty members could share their research. Regardless of the exact format, this would provide students and faculty members with the chance to discuss important topics without the normal pressures of a course; depending upon the intensity of the meetings, students might receive one-half credit, but the objective would not be to earn credits or grades but rather to learn for learning's sake, to encourage student-faculty collaboration, to engage with some of the most pressing problems of our time, and to enable students who might not otherwise study such issues to learn about them in a casual but intellectually-rigorous manner. SCUE is confident that other half-credit opportunities would emerge out of this across the university and that the relationships formed in these discussions would lead to innovations in research, in the classroom, and in development work.

ACTION

Of course, studying, researching, and talking about international development would seem somewhat vacuous without opportunities for actual development work abroad. The most significant opportunity for action would appear in the form of the capstone experience, for which students who took the requisite number of courses would be eligible. A capstone group might be assigned to investigate the AIDS crisis in Botswana, development efforts in Rwanda post-genocide, or problems of illiteracy in the Peruvian highlands. They would be advised by a Penn professor whose research relates to the topic at hand, and, as a group, they would combine their varied academic backgrounds and common interests to devise a solution to the problem. In the summer between their junior and senior years or during winter break of their senior year, the groups would then travel to the regions they have studied and would work to implement their solutions. Undoubtedly, theory would not mesh perfectly with practice, and the groups would learn considerably from actually experiencing – rather than merely studying in the classroom – development work. The capstone would introduce groups to

the moral and ethical considerations at play as students try to find their place in the broader development world. In the fall or spring of their senior year, groups would present their theoretical and practical findings at a conference for the larger Penn community and would continue to be informed by their experiences throughout the remainder of their educations and careers. Students who complete a certain number of courses and the capstone experience would receive a certificate in international development studies or some other denotation of their achievement on their official transcripts.

The capstone experience would include significant development work, but students whose schedules do not allow them to participate in the capstone experience should still be able to engage in responsible and sustainable development work as Penn students. Rampant failure by countries and organizations to engage in ethical and lasting development work has led to many of our current problems; rather than continue to propagate such blundering errors, Penn has committed itself to following practices that take into account local needs and political realities to create enduring solutions to problems worldwide. Undergraduates who participate in Penn programs benefit tremendously; more students should be able to do development work and research abroad. This would inform their classroom studies and research at Penn and make them more knowledgeable and creative thinkers.

The Center would work with departments and the administration to seek out more opportunities for Penn to engage in development abroad and would provide students with a comprehensive list of such options available to them. Additionally, the Center would advocate for funding for students who would like to be involved in such work.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Student Committee on Undergraduate Education recommends that the central administration create and maintain a Center for International Development which would coordinate and make students aware of the various opportunities available to them at Penn to study, research, and engage in international development work. SCUE also recommends that the central administration demonstrate its continual commitment to international engagement by allocating significant resources for undergraduates to participate in development work abroad and to be involved in innovative research on this subject. SCUE asks that the administration emphasizes its belief in the importance of international development by encouraging faculty members rhetorically and through monetary and honorary incentives to involve undergraduates in their research, to teach undergraduate classes on this topic, and to engage undergraduates in their intellectual conversations on international development. Penn is already a leader in international development. By creating a Center for International Development to inform students of these opportunities and to manage the program in international development described above, Penn would leverage its current resources and become a leader in this field in the future as well.