



From DNA to Drama:

Exploring Science and Arts at Princeton STEAM Camp

by Gwen McNamara

The Pace Center for Civic Engagement makes service and civic engagement part of the Princeton student experience and helps students learn to do service well and have a positive impact in the community.



Photo courtesy Princeton University, Office of Communications



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Through sustained volunteering, community immersion, student advocacy and activism, summer internships and post-graduate fellowships, the Pace Center guides students as they learn to be well-prepared for service, to be intentional about the work they do, and to reflect thoughtfully about the service in which they engage.

Pace Center Strategic Plan

Service and civic engagement at Princeton is unique. It is driven by students and manifests itself in many ways across the University. It happens in the classroom, in athletics, in career exploration, and in student advising. It happens in identity exploration, in campus activism, and in the community. And it wouldn't happen without our many dedicated students, friends, colleagues and partners.

Both staff and students will use this plan to guide our efforts, to make decisions and to act. It will help us enhance and expand programs, better support students and advance partnerships with communities. We are energized and excited for what's ahead as we live "in the nation's service and the service of humanity."



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Princeton STEAM Camp

Channeling a little bit of Dr. Frankenstein, six middle school students are building monsters with Princeton University senior Tyisha Griffiths. With each flip of a coin they reveal which dominant or recessive traits their monster will have as part of a hands-on genetics lesson.

“Heads!” one student calls out. “OK so what genotype will that be?” Griffiths asks. “Allele 1, two small eyes,” a student replies. “Great! Let’s do the next one,” Griffiths responds. Soon a monster with red eyes, blue skin and a curly tail emerges. “This is going to look so gross!” another student exclaims.

Community House

Community House STEAM Camp is a free science and arts exploration summer camp open to underrepresented middle school students in the Princeton area. The long-running program is one of Community House’s 16 student-run projects with the Pace Center for Civic Engagement. Developed and facilitated by Princeton University undergraduate



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Photo by Mark Czajkowski

students, graduate students and alumni volunteers, STEAM Camp runs for six weeks, July 5-Aug. 3.

This year, 32 middle school campers are taking part, enjoying action-filled lessons, experiments, activities and field trips oriented around such themes as “an exploration of biology and performing arts” or “an exploration of chemistry and creative writing.”

“I like science because it teaches me about life,” said Joshua Raymond, a 12-year-old student from Princeton heading into the seventh grade at John Witherspoon Middle School. “So far my team has worked on building a boat out of cardboard and before that we made an egg project to see if we could build something to keep an egg from breaking. We’re even creating our own movie.”

Interactive, Hands-On Experiments and Projects

Lessons in everything from the periodic table to journalism and ecosystems seek to inspire a love of learning, strengthen students’ skills and prepare them for the coming school year. The middle school students learn through interactive

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and hands-on experiments and projects that build their teamwork skills.

“The activities we do are a fun way to learn,” said Lea-Jade Richards, a 12-year-old student heading into seventh grade at Princeton Day School. “Camp really helped last year when I was going into sixth grade. We learned about Punnett squares and DNA so I had a head start during the year.”

Founded by Princeton Undergrads in '69

Founded by Princeton University undergraduates in 1969, Community House works with families to support underrepresented youth. STEAM Camp supports Community House’s mission of providing tools for academic success and enhancing social and emotional literacy.

“At Community House we take a holistic approach to youth development work,” said Charlotte Collins, associate director at the Pace Center. “The goal is to provide programming rooted in experiential learning that supports academic readiness and building meaningful connections.”



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Benefits for Princeton Students

For the counselors, STEAM Camp offers a chance for them to share their passions for the subjects they're studying at college and gain new understanding and experience as they work with local youth.

"It's been really interesting to live from the teacher's perspective," said Sulnaan Shabazz, a Princeton sophomore studying operations research and financial engineering. "To see what it's like to give a lesson, lead a class, work with the kids and get the best out of them is really eye-opening and rewarding."

Ayesha Qureshi, a senior at Rider University studying elementary education, agrees. "I really like the connection you have with the kids," she said. "It's the best feeling in the world when they learn something and they repeat it back to you and it all comes together."

Generation One

Qureshi took part in Generation One, a Community House service project that helps students navigate the high school experience and prepare to launch into college. As a STEAM Camp

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counselor, she says her “Gen One” experience not only enabled her to be more successful as a first-generation college student, but also prepared her for the nuances of working with middle schoolers.

“I remember what it was like to be that younger kid, not always wanting to listen or pay attention,” she said. “And I remember how our Princeton University mentors worked with us. They really were good role models.”

Alex Pirola, a Princeton sophomore studying mechanical and aerospace engineering, loves that STEAM Camp combines the sciences and the arts.

“I’m an engineer, but I also love people and working with others,” he said. “(Camp) breaks some of the common misperceptions of scientists and engineers. I love that I can bring and share other parts of myself. I’m an engineer, but I also can write lyrics and make videos.”



Photo by Mark Czajkowski

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