



Sarah Cobbinah

Sarah graduates as a major in Urban Studies with a concentration in Social Impact and Responsibility in Wharton. During her time at Penn, Sarah's participation in the Women's Division I Volleyball Team has blossomed from being a walk-on her freshman year to serving as team captain during the 2011-2012 season. Even with the intense time commitment of Penn's championship volleyball team, Sarah remained determined to find a harmonious balance between academics, athletics and her other passions, including early childhood education. She has volunteered as a student-teacher at KIPP West Philadelphia Preparatory Charter School, a mentor in Big Brothers Big Sisters, a mentor in College Access and Career Readiness program at Sayre High School and a recess mentor through CSSP at Lea Elementary School. Additionally, Sarah is the historian and webmaster of the national Gamma Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and a member of Onyx Senior Honor Society. Sarah plans on pursuing a career in management consulting in order to learn how to develop an evidence-based, actionable framework on how to solve big business problems. In the future, she hopes to adapt this framework to solve the educational achievement gap plaguing America's school children.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

“Just Give Kids a Break...Not Just Any Break, a Quality One!”

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Molly McGlone, School of Arts and Sciences, Urban Studies Program

Recess, once a reliable part of American children’s daily life, now is absent or only an afterthought in many schools, especially urban public schools. In the aftermath of No Child Left Behind, every minute of the school day has been scrutinized for its instructional value—and recess, a break from academic instruction, often hasn’t survived the scrutiny. It is, by definition, a waste of time. This capstone project seeks to define “quality recess” in the 21st century, emphasize its burgeoning importance for urban public school students, and identify the human capital and financial resources necessary to achieve quality recess in urban public schools. I conducted this project using three approaches: a literature review, case studies and interviews. Each case study details the effects of school recess on the overall school environment at a low-income minority urban public school, located in West Philadelphia. In my research, I discovered two forms of recess that are prevalent in the recess literature and sought to find a third form of recess- called quality recess- that would be most adaptable to urban public school environments. My research and analysis resulted in three important findings. First, I have come to define quality recess as semi-structured recess in urban schools as a break during the school day where children are playing inclusive, interactive games in a safe, well managed environment and can return to the classroom re-energized and ready to learn. Secondly, Playworks, a national non-profit, offers a form of semi-structured recess that can work in urban schools and provide opportunities- to enhance academic learning, to develop integral social skills, and to engage in physical activity. Lastly, I offer policy recommendations on facilitating the implementation of semi-structured recess with collaborations between school districts, local universities and individual schools.