



JARED FENTON

At every stage of his life, Jared has tried to make the largest positive impact possible on his community. At the age of three, that meant walking the Race for the Cure with his mother. By age twelve, Jared was volunteering at Variety Club Camp and Developmental Center for children with disabilities, where he later served as a counselor. Jared also started a “campership” at Variety, which currently sponsors low-income campers to attend camp for free. In high school, Jared led an initiative to engage students in community service and received President Barack Obama’s Volunteer Service Award in recognition of his efforts. At Penn, Jared, a Political Science major and Spanish minor, turned his attention to mental health. To combat the phenomenon of “Penn Face”— a phenomenon that had made national news for its detrimental effect on the mental health of students – Jared used his personal resources to start Penn Reflect, a club that de-stigmatizes mental health and improves the mental health of Penn students by providing them a safe forum to engage in open and honest discussion about student life. Thanks to the support of friends, family, professors, administrators, and others, Penn Reflect has grown to a membership of over 400 students. Penn Reflect has won awards from organizations such as MindingYour Mind, and attracted the interest of schools such as Cornell University, La Salle University, and the University of Essex. After graduation, Jared, as Founder and President of the non-profit organization Reflect, has been presented with the opportunity to expand Penn Reflect to other colleges and universities across the nation.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

MASKING THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE: UNDERSTANDING PENN FACE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Faculty Advisor:

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This thesis seeks to further understand the phenomenon of Penn Face in students at the University of Pennsylvania. To do so, a series of quantitative and qualitative research methods are employed. Through a survey administered to over 100 Penn undergraduates, data was collected regarding the prevalence of Penn Face in different demographic groups at Penn. This data is the first of its kind. A test included in this survey – which quantifies how often a given respondent wears the Penn Face – is also the first of its kind. Qualitative data regarding the phenomenon of Penn Face is collected through a series of follow-up interviews with a select group of survey respondents, diversified across demographic categories. Most significantly, these interviews reveal reasons for why Penn students wear the Penn Face: to present themselves as superior to other students, to avoid embarrassment, to not “burden others with their problems,” and/or to avoid sticking out in a society where Penn Face is normalized. Based upon this qualitative and quantitative data, recommendations are made for how to decrease the prevalence of Penn Face, and thereby improve the mental health, of undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania.