



## MINKYUNG (MICHELLE) CHO

In high school, while interning for the Children's Aid and Family Services in Paramus, New Jersey, Michelle founded a Youth Volunteer Corps which coordinated groups of local high school students to collect baby essentials and school supplies for disadvantaged children and families. She pursued her passion for reproductive justice by participating in phone banks as a member of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL). Upon arriving at Penn, Michelle began to work with 12 PLUS (12+), a nonprofit organization which focuses on inner city students of low-income background and supports them in attaining postsecondary education as a tool to break the cycle of poverty. As an intern for 12+, Michelle developed a series of workshops centered around study skills and social adjustment during the summer bridge program for recent high school graduates. On campus, she serves as the Co-President of the 12+ Penn Chapter and the President of the Asian Law and Politics Society. She also volunteers at Lea Elementary School as a Fruit Stand mentor with the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative to promote sustainable and healthy eating habits. Michelle hopes to continue her dedication to protecting the rights of children and families by pursuing a career in law.

## CAPSTONE PROJECT

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### INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAMS: STUDENT EXPERIENCES WITH 12 PLUS IN PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

*Faculty Advisor:*

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Since 2010, 12 PLUS (12+), a college access program that aims to increase educational equity by providing college information, various academic supports, and other counseling services, has served students in three different Philadelphia public high schools. This capstone examines the factors that influence low-income and minority students' decision to participate in college access programs. Data was collected from twenty students at Hill-Freedman World Academy through three separate focus groups. Analysis revealed four major themes: family involvement, peer influence, influence of school adults, and considerations of atmosphere and use of space. Students' real and meaningful relationships with the Fellows was found to be a critical factor in determining their level of use of the program and its services. Considering the number of students who were initially drawn to the program by their family and friends, it was concluded that consistent attempts at managing contact with families in conjunction with a robust peer leadership component can be critical to the program's success in building trust with the students. Key areas for further study are also discussed.