

Innovative Newark

Creating Engaged Citizens in the Global City

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This primary form of this project is a website: innovativenewark.org.

A brief introduction, overview of the course, and research findings follow below. For more details and to connect with the project, please visit the website.

1. Introduction *Innovative Newark* is an interdisciplinary course that utilizes project-based learning, community engagement, and student original research, leading to a social innovation that will solve a problem in the greater Newark community. Students are introduced to the importance and challenges of global problem solving in local contexts and to their roles as Innovative Citizens in Newark. Students begin the course by studying the richness of the black experience in the city of Newark. This includes the following units: Black Power in 19th century Newark, the Newark Rebellion, 20th century Black and Brown Revolutions in Newark, and a unit on important innovators and citizens in the city today.

Using the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UN SDGs) as our guide, students work in groups to explore and come up with an innovative solution to a local problem. By doing so, students will engage with the local community as they conduct research on their specific issue/problem. In addition to working on project-based group work, students will improve upon individual and group presentation skills as they present their innovation/solution to professors and outside members of the community. Their solution/innovation for their chosen community problem will consist of a presentation to the greater Bard/Newark community.

This course is grounded in the pedagogical philosophy of the Bard College Institute for Writing and Thinking (IWT). IWT's approach centers writing-rich teaching practices in the classroom in order to provide an avenue for students to explore at depth course material in a way that promotes critical thinking. In particular, *Innovative Newark* uses the following IWT techniques: focused freewriting (Asraf et al.), dialectical notebook writing (kaufman), and process writing (Connolly) in an effort to create a collaborative learning environment.

Innovative citizenship requires students to challenge the status-quo by identifying social problems, mobilizing resources, and building networks as they work towards the social good. This course is designed for students to integrate knowledge from multiple fields in order to address the challenges surrounding UN SDGs explored in a

local Newark context. The goal of the course is to engage students to develop and polish their critical thinking, problem-solving, and writing skills so they can become Innovative Citizens in their greater city of Newark.

2. About Course

2.1 Background & History Bard Early College-Newark is a partnership between [Bard College](#) and [Newark Public Schools](#) that makes it possible for students to earn both a high school diploma and an Associate's Degree in four years for free. Bard Early College-Newark is not a charter school but a magnet public high school in Newark where students can earn up to 60 college credits from Bard College (D'Orio). In 2022, 97% of our students identify as being of color (NCES) (26% of our students identified as Hispanic, 69% identified as Black, 2% identified as Pacific Islander, Asian, and/or American Indian). About half of our students are either native-born Newarkers while the other half are recent migrants to the city of Newark.

This need for creating relevant and student-centered course material became apparent during and after the Covid-19 pandemic when issues of absenteeism and student engagement gripped many urban public schools (Vidal et al.) throughout the nation, impacting students of color the most. The Newark Public Schools remained closed for a longer duration of time (PBS) than most public schools in New Jersey and the United States. This decision was necessitated by the fact that 86% of Newark's population are Black and Latino residents (Butler)—and these residents were most susceptible to the dire health consequences of Covid-19.

As we returned to in-person learning in 2021, Dr. Puicón quickly realized that a different approach to writing, reading, and learning was needed in order to engage all students coming back to school, especially those who had struggled during virtual instruction. The best approach was to ask students straight up—what do you want to learn in history class and why?

The response - students expressed interest and yearned for a course on the history of the city of Newark. Many

were born and raised in the city or had recently migrated to the city but had very little prior knowledge of the great and complex history of Newark. So, Dr. Puicón took on the task of petitioning her school's administration, developing a course syllabus, and creating an original curriculum to put forth to Newark's Board of Education.

The course was unanimously approved.

Newark's Board of Education, near the time of course approval, had recently regained local control of its school after the state of New Jersey took over the district in 1995, and kept it for nearly 25 years.

One of the objectives of the newly empowered Newark Board of Education was to ensure the full implementation of the state's Amistad Curriculum in all of its schools, classrooms, and curriculum. Known colloquially in Newark as Amistad, this legislation passed in New Jersey in 2002, over 20 years ago, requiring all schools in the state to infuse their school curriculum (not just in social studies/history classes but all core classes including math and sciences) with African-American history and history of the African diaspora.

Innovative Newark and Dr. Puicón have received recognition from the Amistad Commission, the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey Historical Commission, the NAACP (Newark branch), and the New Jersey Academic Studies Alliance for creating a course that speaks to the current needs of students in Newark in an intellectually rigorous, culturally-relevant, and educationally innovative way.

2.2 Curriculum

2.2.1 Learning Goals

- To explore the black and brown history of Newark—including problems, individuals, solutions, and community groups past and present.
- Understand the relationship between previous social categories and systems of governance and present unequal relationships among different cultural, racial, and gender groups.
- Evaluate and analyze the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and what they mean in a local context.
- Constantly reflect upon and be engaged with material presented in class by collaborating and communicating with group members.
- Participate fully in intellectual discussions by asking relevant questions, presenting one's own ideas, and

listening thoughtfully to the questions and ideas of others.

- Engage with perspectives beyond one's own, including those beyond one's own cultural and historical circumstances.

2.2.2 Course Outline¹

- **Unit 1:** Introduction to Global Challenges in the 21st Century
- **Unit 2:** Black Power in 19th Century Newark
- **Unit 3:** Art & Muralism in Newark
- **Unit 4:** Newark Rebellion of 1967 & its Aftermath
- **Unit 5:** Local Newark Community Resources
- **Unit 6:** Group Research Project/Presentations

2.2.3 Reflections from Instructor While planning out the units for this course, it was important for me to be able to answer the following questions in every class session:

1. What will students actually be doing throughout the lesson? What will the proof of that learning and doing look like by the end of the lesson?
2. What actual skills will students walk away with upon successful completion of said activities? How are those skills relevant to their daily lives?
3. What is the purpose of the unit and/or lesson? What are the takeaways - large and small? How can I measure them?

When writing the course curriculum I followed the Understanding by Design framework (Bowen).

It's important as an educator to know where you want your students to end up. Thus, the final project achieves these goals as the ultimate test of understanding where students transfer knowledge and skills in the course to a real world situation - solving a problem in their local communities in Newark. Mastery of material - it's not about memorization or repetition but rather having students understand the why of the historical event, writing, moment.

Sample Unit - Black Power in 19th Century Newark

Students explored and analyzed primary sources from a multimedia virtual exhibit that highlights Newark's and New Jersey's courageous Black activists. The site, [Black](#)

¹ [Link to Syllabus](#)

Power in the 19th Century in Newark, NJ, includes performances by Newark artists, newspapers and photographs, and other Black history scholarship by Newark scholars. The curator and main researcher for the project, Ms. Nolle Lorraine Williams, Director of the African American History Program at the New Jersey Historical Commission, came to speak to students about her experience working on this project but also spoke about her experience as a Black woman historian in a mostly white field. Students prepared questions in advance of her visit.

Before her visit, students examined portions of the digital archive and produced posters displayed in the school that highlighted 5 -7 facts contained in the exhibit, half of which had to be uplifting or inspiring. This came from class discussions where students mentioned that often when learning about Black and Brown history, students were taught about oppression and loss and were not given the chance to celebrate and highlight the triumphs and wins in the Black community. In addition, the posters included written reflections from a series of focused freewrites (loops) that students had responded to in their notebooks in prior sessions that they edited together so that other students in the school could understand the significance of this exhibit.

The loops included - What can students and youth today take away from this exhibit? What part of this exhibit most resonated with you and why? What did you learn about Newark that you did not know before exploring this exhibit?

2.2.4 IWT Practices

- **Focused Freewriting/Loop Writing:** Where students write freely on a specific topic that is defined by the professor. Focused free writing can be shared with a larger group to initiate class discussion.
- **Writing in the Zones:** A way for students to connect abstract and concrete representations of concepts.
- **Process Writing:** The process of getting to the answer should be valued. There is value in exploration—create learners who understand that learning is a process and there are steps to be followed in the journey.
- **Reflective Writing:** Students are able to pause and digest what they've learned through reflective writing prompts. Reflective writing allows students to think critically about their learning, make connections to their everyday lives, and examine why the lesson material matters today.

3. Research

3.1 Research Plan *Innovative Newark* is part of Dr. Puicón's research project that revolves around the following questions:

4. What are the potential benefits of an Engaged Liberal Arts & Sciences education for under-represented, first-generation students?
5. How does this type of education benefit the community at large?
6. How can Dr. Puicón, as an educator, engage with students' lived experiences and harness that knowledge in the classroom?

Beginning in the Spring 2023 semester, students enrolled in the *Innovative Newark* course at Bard Early College - Newark agreed to the following:

At the beginning of the semester: (1) students will take an academic assessment to measure their prior knowledge and skills in writing and historical analysis; (2) students will take a survey to gauge their prior knowledge and familiarity with community-based groups in Newark.

By mid-semester: (1) students will take a mid-year academic assessment to measure their growth in writing and historical analysis; (2) students will partake in a short-term experiential learning opportunity with one of the three proposed community partners

By end of semester: (1) students will take a final academic assessment to measure their overall growth in writing and historical analysis; (2) students will present their final research projects related to their experiential learning opportunity with one of the three proposed community partners to a panel consisting of faculty, students, community members, and the City of Newark.

The goals of this research plan and course are to:

1. Research the potential benefits of an Engaged Liberal Arts & Sciences education for under-represented, first-generation students at Bard Early College - Newark through Dr. Puicón's *Innovative Newark* college elective.
2. Create long-term partnerships with the proposed community partners as sites for future experiential learning opportunities.
3. Provide an avenue for students to combine historical analytical skills learned in the course with their lived experience through successful completion of a final social innovation project.

In conclusion, the goal of the course and this research project is to engage students to develop and polish their critical thinking, problem-solving, and social skills so

they can become Innovative Citizens in their greater city of Newark. *Innovative Newark* is a course that requires students to engage with the larger Newark community. The goal is to unlock the potential benefits of an Engaged Liberal Arts & Sciences education through this course beyond the classroom at Bard Early College-Newark. The community will benefit by having the students involved in community building projects that solve an issue students feel passionate about.

Impacts will be measured by the following:

1. Student academic assessments to measure their growth in writing and historical analysis
2. Student daily attendance rates
3. Student surveys (pre and post course completion)

3.2 Pre-course Survey The pre-course survey was given during the first few days of the course, before the start of any of the units pertaining to the history of the city of Newark. Of the 32 students enrolled in the course, 29 students and their families completed, signed, and turned in the informed consent forms that allowed Dr. Puicón to use their responses for the purposes of this research project. Of those 29 students, only 26 completed the pre-survey.

The pre-survey consisted of a series of multiple choice and open-ended questions that gauged the following:

1. How much (or little) students knew of the major moments in black and brown history in the city of Newark
2. Their basic knowledge and analytical skills related to primary and secondary source analysis
3. Introduced the professor to their writing styles and strengths
4. How much (or little) students knew of community groups/projects going on in the city of Newark
5. Asked students to reflect upon their initial feelings and thoughts on what Newark meant to them

It is important to note that for the Spring 2023 *Innovative Newark* course, 100% of students enrolled were Year 2 students, or seniors (grade 12), and thus were on the verge of completing their fourth year at Bard Early College - Newark, and their second year of the Associate's Degree program. This means that students in the course were familiar with the basic IWT practices and techniques used during Language & Thinking but also dispensed by professors through the entire academic year.

3.2.1 Pre-course Survey Results Pre-survey results included the following observations:

76% of students responded that they knew only a few things about the city of Newark and 24% of students responded they knew almost nothing about the history of Newark. These were the two lowest choices possible of the 4 in terms of knowledge breadth (see image below) which means that 100% of students were not very familiar with the history of the city of Newark prior to enrolling in the course.

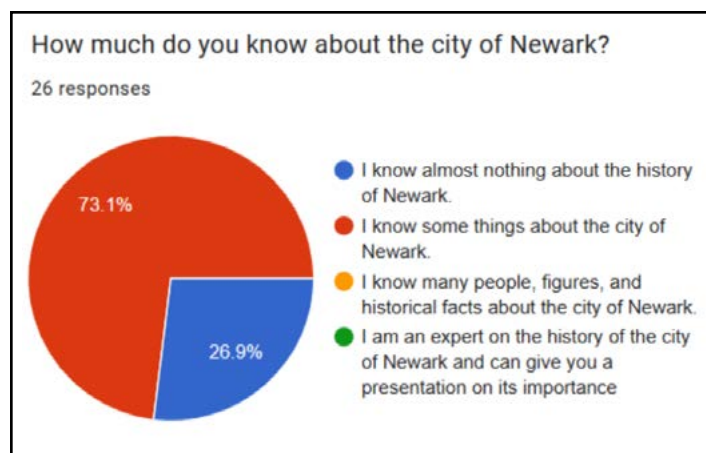


Figure 1. Pre-survey: How much do you know about the city of Newark?

In terms of demographics, a majority of students (81%) resided in the Central, South, and West Wards, which are closest to the Bard Early College - Newark campus but also historically some of the poorest wards in Newark.

- A little more than half of the students enrolled in the Spring 2023 had lived in Newark their entire lives (58%). The rest had migrated to the city sometime during their childhood.
- Only 6 students out of the 26 who responded could name an important figure in the history of the city of Newark, with students naming celebrities such as Shaquille O'Neil or Whitney Houston as the figures they could name. The rest of the students responded that "I do not know" any important figure in the history of the city of Newark nor what their contribution to the city's history had been.

Students' first focused freewrites related to Newark occurred during the pre-survey portion of the course. Students responded to the following prompts:

1. Fill in the blank: Newark is known for...
2. Do you see Newark as a city of promise? Why or why not?

3. Are you proud of the people from the city of Newark? Why or why not?

Newark is known for being a large trade hub with its port and airport.

Students responses to the first focused freewrite mainly revolved around students' feelings about Newark as they saw it and how they themselves perceived the city to be. They were not repeating stereotypes they had heard about the city as Dr. Puicón asked this specific question in class after viewing the responses. The pre survey (and post survey) provided students a chance to "keep it real" and offer their honest opinions and thoughts about Newark in a safe environment. The pre-survey was not graded in any way.

Despite the responses above, about half of the students maintained optimism about their city and whether or not Newark is a city of promise, the latter left to their interpretation. A majority of students believed in a positive future of the city, despite the circumstances around them. The other half did not see the city of Newark as anything with promise and instead expressed their intentions of leaving the city behind upon graduation.

Fill in the blank: Newark is known for...

Newark is known for a lot of violence, such as gun violence and robberies. Also known for our poor living environment.

pollution, the airport and angry people

Newark is known as brick street.

Being very urban and "ghetto". It's also known for the city life.

Newark is known for the gangs and some of the violence that have happened and also you hear a lot about the schools

I don't really know. It is mainly known as Brick City. I know there is lots of pollution especially in the Ironbound. Newark has lots of immigrant families.

Newark is known for the riots and for entertainment centers for people to perform.

Newark is known for being in New Jersey. It is also known for being ghetto as hell.

Home of the jersey club dancers

Newark is known for Stolen cars, robbery's, shooting, and gangs

Transportation and being ghetto.

Newark is mostly known for the rebellion/riot that has still been a debate on what side is right. Newark is also known for being predominantly white before the riot occurred and because of that a lot of business owners left newark.

I feel like Newark is known for crime in the city. We resemble a bad image more than a good one in my eye.

Do you see Newark as a city of promise? Why or why not?

Yes because Newark has a lot of people with idea that can change the day to day life. We show a lot with the work we do but are shutdown because we are from Newark.

I do see Newark as a city of promise. I do see potential in this city, if people were to invest time and money into it, it can be an amazing city. I already see improvement in the city each day and I root this city.

I dont know because theres so many gangs and violence but there is sunshine and rainbows somewhere so i dont know.

I dont know if i see a newark as a city of promise because i see some progress happening. There is always someone trying to make things better. It always doesnt seem things always work out.

All depends on how far your willing to go and see how much you willing to sacrifice for your best outcome of life

No, I do not see it as a city of promise. I see the city as more of a motivation to get out. Newark is more like as an example of what to get out of.

Yes I see Newark as a city of promise because anything can change over time. People but the time and effort to rebuild the city of Newark it can become a better place.

No, I feel like newark doesn't offer enough opportunities. I feel like it's more of a city of struggle.

No

Kinda, people here aren't as lovely as it is painted in movies. There is lots of homelessness and poverty. But Newark gives chances to everyone. They support homelessness by having drives for them and provide academic support to immigrants.

very little, with the amount of people that don't tend to try and help others prosper.

Nope, this city sucks.

It's half and half for me but i don't feel like newark is a place of promise for me

Yes, this is because Newark opens up a lot of opportunities for people especially young ones and if they give back and invest in newark it would be great.

No, I see only bad here in the city. Lies and deceptions.

I think Newark is in a very difficult situation. The city once to build itself up to increase it's value bus this makes the city become more coroprotized we see less personality, higher rents, and an increased migration of locals leaving.

I see newark as a city of promise because I can see that it is changing. Slowly but surely there are more upscale buildings and restaurants being built but I'm not sure if it's for the people who already live here. With this city's access to a airport and train station I think this city's future may belong to others outside of the current newark residents.

No I do not.

No because it doesn't promise any kind of success for the future generations. The previous generations already ruined it for us and now they want to blame everything on us.

Students' responses were also split down the middle regarding that statement "Are you proud of the people from the city of Newark? Why or why not?" Some students remarked on the people they knew personally in the city and the wonderful accomplishments they had achieved, while others did not see the people or products from Newark as a reason to celebrate, as evidenced in their responses below:

Are you proud of the people from the city of Newark? Why or why not?

Yes I know a lot of people here they are considered friends or family most of them are accomplishing there goals and dream.

I am not proud of the people from the city of Newark. This is because I feel like they can be doing more to advocate for their city or to take care of it. I see people littering all the time, not caring at all about the city they are from. The citizens of Newark need to step up.

Yes I am because there is a lot we have to endure living in this city and i feel like we can go places if we just put our minds to it. They have different big businesses in this city and people support them by buying food from it or clothes from them.

I am somewhat proud of the people of the city of Newark because i dont know some people who have done things for newark. There is always once in a while where i learn that someone did do something great for newark. I would like to learn more though.

No I feel as though the people of Newark of just too judging and always have something to say about the other instead of lifting each other up

Yes I am proud of the people from the city of Newark. Most of them give back to try and make it a better place. To give back to we're they came from they didn't just forget.

Yes, I'm proud of some of the people from Newark.

I dont know

Some people I am proud of. Not everyone makes a huge program and contributes to fighting Newark problems. I am proud of the people that make a difference.

some of them. The people of Newark aren't as supportive to each other.

Nope, these people suck.

Yes because people put newark on the map whether it's dancing ; comedy ; or sports. Newark Nasir New Jersey is a place im proud to call home

Majority of the people in newark I am proud of because there is many people that have gotten through the struggle and had made it out to a better life.

Yes. This is because they are out here doing great things. They are also helpers and are willing to go above and beyond to help alot of people.

Yes, I am. Newark is relatively safe and productive, also helpful to undocumented people.

No i'm not. I don't feel like theres nothing to be proud of.

Newark breeds a lot of promising people but a vast majority of these people leave to never return. This troubling since this siphons the promise out of the city and will only leave it in a never ending cycle.

I'm not sure because I don't know the feel history of newark. While I don't always hear great things about my city I can't base how proud I am of the city's people on one sided information. However I am proud of the small businesses being built here in newark

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yes because they made something of themselves

No because it's embarrassing to see people from Newark look so sad and depressed. It's like they don't even want to be here anymore. Only the media makes it seem like a wonderful city.

Attendance post-pandemic continues to be an issue the Newark Board of Education grapples with. Part of the goals of the course and research project are to see if by providing students with varied course selection based upon student need (see [Section 2. About Course—Background & History](#)), student attendance will improve. Studies proved that increased student attendance results in decreased poverty and reduced inequality. A school leadership goal at Bard Early College - Newark is to improve daily attendance among upperclassmen, who were deeply impacted by the pandemic in terms of attendance. After the height of the pandemic and with the return to in-person learning, student daily attendance rates dropped district-wide, especially among upperclassmen (Bonamo). Therefore, an internal goal for students in the course included for students to meet or beat Newark Public School district daily attendance average of 92%. 100% of students met that requirement in *Innovative Newark* in the Spring 2023.

In the pre-survey, students also responded to a series of focused freewrites related to attendance to gauge students' reasons for not coming to school. Students responded to the following prompts:

1. Does this course motivate you to come to school (BE HONEST)?

2. Do you feel like the course selections in the school make you motivated to come to school everyday? Why or why not?

3. What are incentives that the school could provide to improve your attendance in every class?

Students' responses to the fourth focused freewrite revealed that an overwhelming majority of students did not feel motivated to come to school everyday. Most did it because they had to, and felt that the school (Bard Early College-Newark and/or Newark Public Schools) could do better in providing a motivation for them to attend school - whether that was through rewards, better course selection, opportunities to venture out into the community, etc.

Do you feel like the course selections in the school make you motivated to come to school everyday? Why or why not?

Idk

Some do and some dont. The ones that I am interested to learn make me want to come, and the others just seem like a chore.

yes and no. There are some classes that I enjoy that makes me not want to stay home and there are courses that make me want to stay home really bad.

I feel like most of them do not motivate me to come to school everyday because a lot of classes are too much and they are just draining.

Not really but I am always willing to learn something new reason why I haven't dropped the course

Yes it makes me motivated to come to school every day because I can get to learn about the city I spent years in.

not really I'm coming to school because I have to choice basicailly

Nah Im just going to school to go at this point.

It gets draining coming to school everyday

some, it depends on what subjects I am in.

Honestly, I just show up to get my degree. The course selections are pretty alright, but the way I view it is I have to focus on these courses and try to like them.

Yes because it's important to know about the city you live in and the history.

No not really, none of the classes really teach me things that I'm interested in besides my social science class.

No.

No, a lot of classes don't take us outside our classroom and give us a community bonding experience.

not really. Some of the classes that i take have nothing to do with the profession that i want to pursue.

No, not really. It's not really the course selections but the work in them. It all feels so unsubstantial.

No im actually very drained from school and is honestly ready to graduate

Yea because I believe that what I am learning is important as well as interesting

Yess alot not just for the money but to know more about newark

Yes, because they keep me updated in the things that are around me and help in engage in good debates and seminar conversations.

Yes. Sometimes I don't wanna be as motivated because I get overwhelmed but i've been starting to just come to school so I can learn things I usually wouldn't, so yes it's motivating.

The course selection at bard is good but still a bit too confining it doesn't give enough room for students to explore interest.

Yes because I like all of me English classes. They are connected to my major and they interest me a lot

Yes and no because some of the history we learn I do not find interest in , some of the things we learn such as african american culture i am interested in.

Yes because I get to choose what I want to leave and that makes it more interesting.

Among the ideas students came up with in terms of how the school could motivate students to come to school included:

Do more fun activities, give us classes we are interested in, give us classes we asked for, not the ones we didn't want.

Classes that are more interactive than just work and lectures.

Field trips

More hands on and community building activities.

Try to make the course interesting and relate it to things we are familiar with today.

Overall, students' responses in the pre-survey shows apathy towards school and coursework in general, with students knowing very little about the history of Newark. Students were eager, however, to begin learning about the history of Newark while generally having mixed feelings towards their city. Only half of students responded with hope for the future of Newark while the other half did not.

3.3 Post-course Survey The post-course survey was given right before graduation and once final grades were turned in but not released to students. Unfortunately, only 9 of the 26 original respondents to the pre-course survey responded. The low participation rate could be due to graduation, family commitments, and/or other personal reasons. However, all 32 students enrolled in the course did complete one last focused freewrite that gauged their understanding of what Newark meant to them after the end of the course (see last focused freewrite section below). Regardless, the data extrapolated from the 9 respondents is analyzed below:

The post-survey was an exact replica of the pre-survey and consisted of a series of multiple choice and open-ended questions that gauged the following:

1. How much (or little) students knew of the major moments in black and brown history in the city of Newark
2. Their basic knowledge and analytical skills related to primary and secondary source analysis
3. Introduced the professor to their writing styles and strengths
4. How much (or little) students knew of community groups/projects going on in the city of Newark
5. Asked students to reflect upon their initial feelings and thoughts on what Newark meant to them

In contrast, 92% of students replied favorably to the question—does this course motivate you to come to school—53% of students responded that they felt that *Innovative Newark* seemed like a great course and a great opportunity with another 39% somewhat interested in the material listed in the syllabus.

3.3.1 Post-course Survey Results

Post-survey results included the following observations:

11% of students responded that they felt like experts on the history of the city of Newark and could give a presentation on its importance and 78% of students responded that they knew of many people, figures, and historical facts about the city of Newark after the end of the course. These were the two highest choices possible of the 4 in terms of knowledge breadth (see image below) which means that 100% of students who responded moved up at least two points in this category of knowledge.

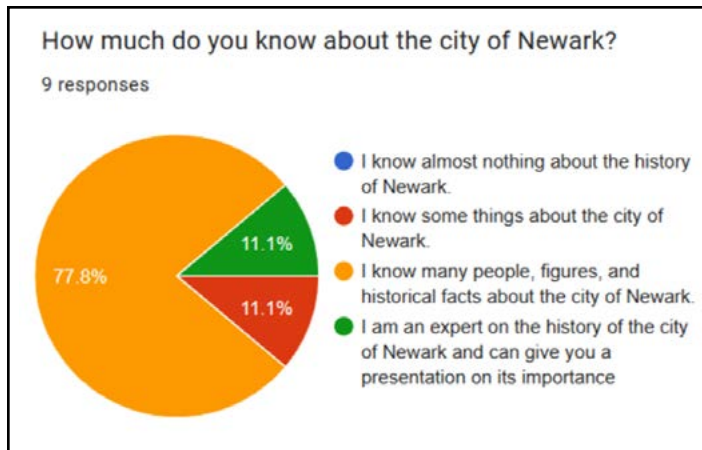


Figure 2. Post-survey: How much do you know about the city of Newark?

Students were also asked again, in the form of focused freewrites, to respond to the following prompts:

1. Fill in the blank: Newark is known for...
2. Do you see Newark as a city of promise? Why or why not?
3. Are you proud of the people from the city of Newark? Why or why not?

Results were completely different from pre-survey results, with students being able to name guest speakers who visited the course and their impact on the city of Newark. In particular, Mr. Larry Hamm of the People's Organization for Progress, Mr. Anthony Diaz of the Newark Water Coalition, and those from DownBottom Farms/ Ironbound Community Corporation seem to have the most impact on the students as they were mentioned often by those that responded.

Name an important figure in the history of the city of Newark and what their contribution to the city's history has been: (DO NOT GOOGLE - JUST BE HONEST from what we DID in the course - can be a guest speaker)

I forgot his name, but the last guest speaker we had in class who talked about what it was like witnessing the Newark riots.

Larry Hamm fought for student rights in Newark while serving on the school Board. He has fought his whole life for equality and freedom in Newark.

Amiri Baraka aka Ras Baraka's father. He was a civil rights activist for the city of Newark

Mr. Anthony Diaz is the executive director of the Newark water coalition.

Mr. Larry Hamm he explored the political and social issues in Newark.

Larry Hamm who was there during the Newark riots and told us his story about what it was like

Newark is known for: (1-2 sentences)

Newark is known for its creative and its strength. After having so many guest speakers it's made me realize has more culture than we thought.

its rich diversity and high commercial property value

The marches they have to get justice for the pocs in Newark. Newark is also known for its hip hop music and dancing

Newark is known for a bad reputation but now knowing some of history Newark is resilient and full of opportunities, programs, and organizations to help the community in the city of Newark.

Newark is a transportation centre and a major East Coast distributing point.

Newark is known for its resilient people of color as well as its rich history through politics, industrialization, and acts of rebellion against injustice.

Newark is known for improvement, love, hatred, crimes, and beautiful talent. People have different perspectives about Newark, but I feel like we can all say Newark is developing into something beautiful it has a lot of history.

Newark is known for being brick city. It's where a lot of people of color came to become free. They wanted better education and job opportunities.

Newark is known for opportunity and change.

What are some of the current initiatives going on in the city of Newark today that YOU have been in contact with or know about? (1-2 sentences) - you can use the guest speakers' talks for this information.

I know there's a group working on getting environmental justice in the Ironbound. We visited them and even helped them plant in their garden.

There are always food drives and clothes drives going on in the city of Newark. There are also community farms that support the community with food.

The water in Newark isn't as good as some people think it is. Thanks to Anthony we know that bard had some of the highest counts of lead in their water less than a few years ago. They also supply new water to folks who don't have good water. I picked this one because water is what we need to survive. It's more important

Mr. Anthony Diaz water correlation organization that helps with distributing clean water throughout the city of Newark.

One initiative that I have been in contact with is the petition for Newark's sanitation. I have worked with ICC in the past about this. We walked around protesting, spreading awareness, and taking things into our own charge.

The Newark's Water Correlation initiatives to make sure that the people of Newark, mainly the Ironbound have clean water due to the lead situation in Newark.

Recently at young man visited us with his clothing brand about Newark Nj. I frequently shop on his website, I think he is such an inspiration.

The garden we went to this year as a trip. They are planting fresh fruits and vegetables are the people in the community to have access to fresh foods.

Sometime in May/June our class went to a garden called Down Bottom Farms in Newark and we helped out the whole day. Before we started work in the garden, we took a tour bus around Newark and learned about the environment and things that harms the environment in Newark. Once we returned we planted plants, learned about the importance of having gardens and now they help the community, and we even learned about composting.

In addition, 100% of students responded with optimism about the future and/or promise that the city of Newark

holds. This was an almost 50% point change from the pre-survey results.

Do you see Newark as a city of promise? Why or why not? (3 -5 sentences minimum)

I do see it as a city of promise. Seeing so many Newark residents succeed and make change gives me the promise that I can succeed as well.

I do see Newark as a city of promise because I see that so many people are fighting for improvements in the city. I used to feel hopeless, and that the city will never excel because of all the wrong doings inside of it. I now see it as a place of potential, and

Yes. As of now the city of Newark is doing all they can to have the youth of Newark engaged in things that'll make them succeed rather than do violence. They are protecting their city and they protect the citizens.

Yes, Newark can be seen as a city of promise. Over the years, it has experienced significant revitalization efforts, with investments in infrastructure, education, and economic development. These efforts, combined with a rich cultural heritage and a resilient community, provide a foundation for the city's potential growth and transformation.

Yes, I do see Newark as a city of promise. Newark is often referred to as a city of promise due to its ongoing revitalization efforts and potential for growth. The city has made significant progress in areas such as economic development, education, and public safety. Investments in infrastructure, cultural institutions, and businesses have created opportunities for residents and fostered a sense of hope and optimism for the city's future.

Newark is a city of promise.

Yes, Newark is developing into something so real and full of help and history. Before this class I didn't know or an y thing about Newark really. But this class has helped me to understand and connect with Newark.

Yes I do see Newark as a city of promise. Over the years Newark has changed a lot and grown a lot. As many more years to come Newark will Continue to grow and change and become better.

Yes, Newark is developing into something so real and full of help and history. Before this class I didn't know or an y thing about Newark really. But this class has helped me to understand and connect with Newark.

Yes I do see Newark as a city of promise. Over the years Newark has changed a lot and grown a lot. As

many more years to come Newark will Continue to grow and change and become better.

I do see Newark as a city of promise. A city that will promise itself into change. Newark has a long way to go but came so far in its journey. It's successions, failures, strengths and weaknesses. Newark has so much in store for its future and the community will continue to remain strong and influence each other to do good and make change.

Attendance improvement to meet or surpass the Newark Board of Education district average was a goal of the course. Analysis of attendance data showed that 100% of students enrolled in the course met or surpassed the district average of 92% daily attendance.

As they did in the pre-survey, students responded to a series of focused freewrites related to attendance to gauge students' reasons for not coming to school. Students responded to the following prompts:

1. Does this course motivate you to come to school (BE HONEST)?
2. Do you feel like the course selections in the school make you motivated to come to school everyday? Why or why not?
3. What are incentives that the school could provide to improve your attendance in every class?

Students' responses in the post survey were in stark contrast to their pre-survey responses. Students, after reflecting on the course, felt motivated to come to class and spoke on the incentives provided for them to attend making a large influence (including guest speakers, trips to community partners outside of school, and a cash incentive upon successful completion of all of the academic and community requirements of the course).



Figure 3. Post-survey: Does this course motivate you to come to school? (BE HONEST)

Do you feel like the course selections in the school make you motivated to come to school everyday? Why or why not?

Yes it did make me motivated, the guest speakers played a big part in this motivation.

The course selections in the school did not make me motivated to come to school every day because they were not very engaging. This course, however, did make me want to come to school every day. We were actively out in the community helping and learning about our home, and it made me want to come to school

Yes and no. People can feel unmotivated to come to school from many different things. Some of my classes did motivate me to come to school due to the excitement of the class or just the comfort from the teacher themselves. I was motivated to attend every class

Yes I do feel like me being able to select the course I wanted, motivated me and made me feel exited to learn about something I initially wanted to learn about.

No, I only really looked forward to this class. Most teachers assigned too much work and didn't understand personal circumstances. I felt like I had no support from most of the staff and it made me less motivated.

I personally liked the class because everyone participated and we had a lot of interesting conversations.

Yes, this class out there of every other class made me want to come to school. Intrigue me to want to be motivated to participate in class. This class was extremely fun.

Yes I do because I feel like it's important to know the history of we're you live.

Honestly, it actually did. The year was extremely rough but our Innovative Newark class made me think and everyday our professor came and created a safe environment for us to learn and love. It was one of my favorite classes (shoutout to professor Puicon for her amazing work and the motivation she provided to all her students)

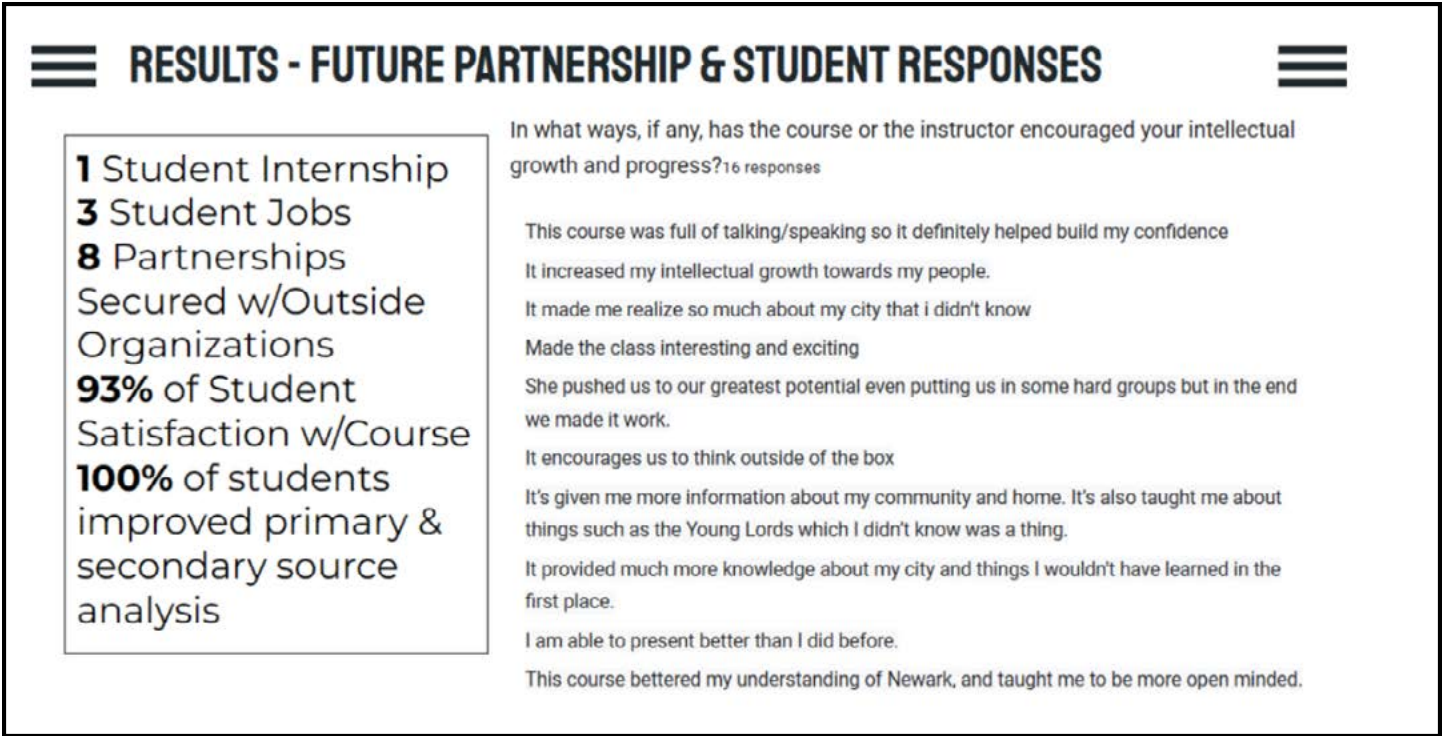


Figure 4. Results—Future Partnership & Student Responses.

What are incentives that the school could provide to improve your attendance in every class?

Things like more trips, more group activities, more creative activities.

They could offer more interactive classes with guest speakers, trips, and other ways to involve students in the learning, instead of a lecture

Informative activities, maybe more field trips based on the courses

Maybe better lunch, more celebrations, and more hands on learning.

Snacks, less pressure, no uniform, and support.

Breaks between classes, fun days, and mixed lessons

Have more class like Ms.Puicon class

I'll have to admit the whole concept of students being rewarded with a financial reward was a great incentive. Knowing that I was getting paid whilst also helping our community by doing research and a lot of hands on work, it was extra fuel and motivation for me to get up and get to class every day.

on student attendance and academic achievement. While the survey respondent number was low, the students' own reflections through these series of focused free-writes were very telling on the impact of the course.

3.4 Course Results This course proved more successful than I anticipated with the following results and achievements in the Spring 2023:

- 100% of students enrolled in the course improved and mastered primary and secondary source analysis
- 100% of students enrolled in the course improved daily attendance rate.
- 100% of students enrolled in the course graduated with both their HS and Associates Degree Diplomas
- 88% of students completed community service requirement for stipend.
- 8 partnerships secured with Newark organizations including: NAACP, Newark Water Coalition, Ironbound Community Corporation, DownBottom Farm, People's Organization for Progress, The Nork Project, BrownMill Company, NJ Historical Commission
- 3 student internship/job offers at a community partner site.
- 80% of student continuing to a Liberal Arts & Sciences higher education institution after graduation

Overall, students' responses in the post-survey shows the influence that course selection, tailoring courses to student need, and bringing in the community can have

- One academic article submitted, accepted, and published in George Mason University's World History Connected Journal. Link to the article: [View of Teaching the Truth Means Embracing the Community \(gmu.edu\)](#)

- 1 permanent community partnership secured with Newark NAACP – President Deborah Smith Gregory now part of Bard Early College-Newark School Leadership Council as Community Representative

- Puicon awarded 2023 Teaching Award by New Jersey Studies Academic Alliance.

Innovative Newark's approach as an interdisciplinary course that utilizes project-based learning, community engagement, and student original research achieved these results. The Bard College Institute for Writing and Thinking's (IWT) techniques allowed students to engage in critical thinking skills and safe avenue for students to explore at depth course material in a way that promoted reflection and analysis. In addition, Bard IWT techniques helped build a collaborative learning environment evidenced in students' responses and images.

The questions Dr. Puicón crafted enabled students to know that Dr. Puicón cares about their history and their identity as innovative citizens in the city of Newark. In Dr. Puicón's course and classes, they were able to share, reflect, and analyze those pieces of their identity even if they don't know them yet fully or were still working through pieces of them. The IWT techniques allowed students to think about the ways the past shapes the present. Ultimately, it's about the students seeing themselves not only in the content of the course but in the practices that they partake in as writers and thinkers.

Innovative Newark's success challenges our understanding of the Liberal Arts & Sciences in which we (black and brown folk) are not only capable of understanding, questioning, connecting, and analyzing texts, concepts, and ideas - but where students themselves are at the center of knowledge production, and how revolutionary and empowering this can be for first generation and/or under-represented students.

Dr. Puicón's classroom and coursework allow for a space and place to think. Creating such a place and space in

Newark transgressing traditional power structures and previous modes/places of knowledge production. In Dr. Puicón's classroom, Shakespeare, Locke, and Hobbes hold the same weight as Josselin, Oluwakayode, and Ahyanna. The latter are capable of understanding the former and surpassing them. Period.

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Appendix A. Student Feedback

In what ways, if any, has the course or the instructor encouraged your intellectual growth and progress?

Yes, I learned more about my city.

This course bettered my understanding of Newark, and taught me to be more open minded.

This course was full of talking/speaking so it definitely helped build my confidence

It increased my intellectual growth towards my people.

My instructor was able to encourage me to to presentations since I'm always nervous to do so.

Dr. Puicon always had a great attitude. She is so understanding of any issues and will always accommodate you. The fact that there aren't consequences for late work and that we can always catch up when need be is helpful.

It's given me more information about my community and my home. It's also taught me about things such as the Young Lords which I didn't know was a thing.

It provided much more knowledge about my city and things I wouldn't have learned in the first place.

It encourages us to think outside of the box

She pushed us to our greatest potential even putting us in some hard groups but in the end we made it work.

It made me realize so much about my city that i didn't know

I am able to present better than I did before.

By Dr. Puicon being there when you need assistance and helping me by giving constructive criticism allowed me to push my thought process and execute meaningful work.

This course and the instructor helped me challenge my mind and open it more to the things going on or that did go in in Newark.

The instructor has encouraged my growth by allowing me to find more of myself in my own work and assignments and really allow that side to thrive.

What did you learn about the history of the city of Newark in this course?

Newark has been through a lot, especially with it being the third oldest state. I learned the Newark was full of abolitionists and civil rights activists.

Newark had slaves.

The riot began when the police offers started to attack citizens first

That change is within our capability

I learned that the history of Newark has evolved into something great! From the buildings to the people, Newark has become something amazing!

newark has a large slave trade history, white police officers would get away with murder

The black church

I learned a lot more about the history of Africans Americans and their struggles in Newark. Also about what type of power each group had in Newark at one time (Italians, African Americans, Hebrews)

What was your favorite assignment in this course and why?

Newark riots

My favorite assignment in this course had to be the final presentation bc it was super interesting to try to create a program for my own city that would benefit our peko

The group project

My Favorite assignment was the Newark Riots.

Newark Rebellion, because it showed me the many hardships that Newark residents have went through, and are still going through.

my favorite assignment was the "my ancestor" assignment

My favorite assignment would easily be any presentations done in class where i was able to share my feedback on a topic verbally and show through posters or slides because I enjoy providing informational speeches.

I liked the presentation the most because we got to really put something together that we can do in real life.

Amiri Baraka

Our presentations

The Young Lord web chart to show what they did.

The Project Presentation because me and my group was able to come up with ideas on ways to help the community.

I liked making this presentation for the final. I was able to include things that I already use in my own therapy and things that I think I need more of. We were able to recognize and spread awareness on how much of a mental health crisis Newark has and hopefully people will listen and know that it's ok to get help.

The presentation

What are three things you learned in this course?

The riot, the history of some places in newark, the young lords

Young Lords, the different monuments and history held in Newark, and the riot that took place here.

About the riots, about protest, made up organizations in Newark

Breakfast program, black panther party, murals

I learned about the riots in Newark , the young lords and about Amiri Baraka and in the end how they all connected.

Learned about the young lords , felipe , and we learned about amiri barack's

The Young Lords, Amiri Baraka, and the Newark Riot.

-The different groups withing Newark(polish, Italian, German,etc) - How influential the Young Lords were - Black owned businesses in Newark

What was your favorite unit/reading in this course and why?

My favorite part was finding things based on Newark history of the riots

Black church

The reading about the young lords because it was really empowering and for a plus I'm Puerto Rican

Felipe

The young lords

Art in Newark was my favorite unit because it taught me about the many artists within Newark that made great contributions to society. I also liked the project Newark had to create Murals in the city.

My favorite reading was the young lords articles

My favorite reading thin this course would have to be the Rise Up readings about Amiri Baraka and his early life in Newark.

What did you like about your instructor (Dr. Puicon)?

I liked how she was always engaged and she was very lenient and understanding. She made me want to actually do good in her class instead of just passing.

Shes very energetic and considerate.

Everything

I liked her energy and understanding during all times while still having the demeanor of a teacher

I love how happy and encouraging she is, she's amazing in every way

I like tthe way she is energetic to teach us. I liked how during virtual she encouraged us to turn on our camera and talked to us. I like how she greets us every time we come into class. The room is just always filled with energy and learning.

How she was always so happy and gave us time to do things and was understanding.

How she cares, and her energy. Also her consideration for us (aka the pantry and the help with work)

Really good teacher knows how to entertain and teach her students

Very considerate

I like almost everything from the way she teaches to how down to earth she is and how she treats us like actual H uman and isn't so controlling and supports all of our ideas.

she's nice and was lenient with grading. and she's understanding

I like that Dr. Puicon was very attentive and I like the way she teaches.

I liked how personable, energetic, and inviting she is.

I liked that she is so nice and understanding. She takes late work and is lenient and open minded.

Dr.Puicon is extremely lenient and understanding towards all of her students.