

# Coaching for success

*Sports project transforms city teens into leaders and role models*



High school students, including Smith-bound Priscilla Morales, center front, come to campus to learn coaching skills at Monday Night Academy.

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By late afternoon on most days, the classrooms empty out on the third floor of Seelye Hall and quiet descends. Except, that is, when Monday Night Academy is in session.

At 4 p.m. on those days, more than 40 high-energy middle and high school students emerge from a bus from nearby Springfield, Massachusetts, to take part in the Smith-based portion of an ambitious youth sports initiative called **PROJECT COACH**, now in its 11th year of training teen coaches at the college. The young people are a select group

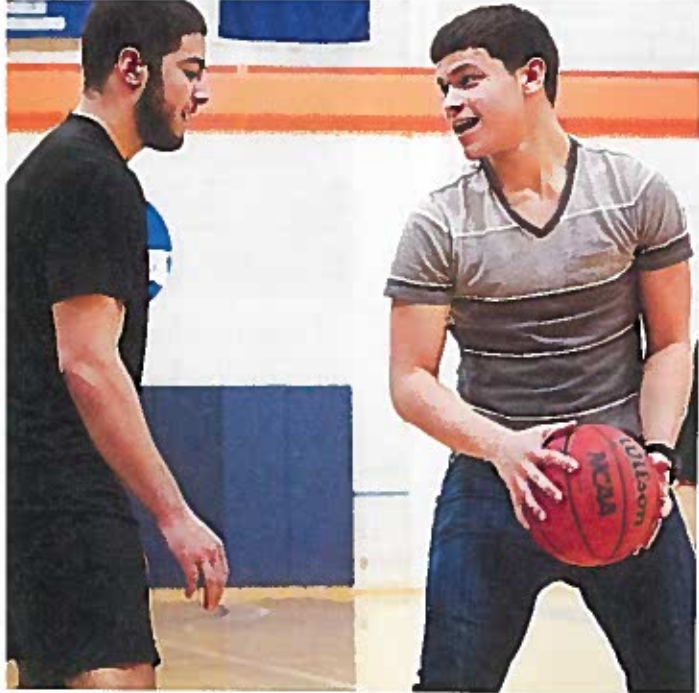
of students from urban schools across Springfield, and they're just getting started on the second half of their school day.

Spread out among Seelye's third-floor classrooms and in the hallway, the teens huddle with a near-equal number of Smith tutors, getting homework help with geometry lessons, vocabulary words and challenging reading assignments. Maintaining their grades is a requirement.

At 5 p.m., Project Coach director Jo Glading-DiLorenzo gathers the teens and tutors into one classroom for the day's version of Coaching for Change. "During this time, we focus on a skill that we think is impor-

High schoolers will use their coaching skills to lead afternoon sports and dance programs in elementary schools.





tant for success as a coach,” Glading-DiLorenzo says.

On this particular day, tutor Anna Hallman '14 leads off by reminding the group that those on an academic improvement plan must attend an additional Thursday tutoring session. If they don't, they face a cut in pay and will be put on probation. For these youngsters, the consequences are serious. Each teen member of Project Coach is paid for seven hours a week, and since the program has a waiting list more than 80 names long, no one wants to take the chance of losing this gig.

At 6 p.m., the group heads to Ainsworth gym for two hours to learn games, activities and salsa dancing, and most important, how to teach those skills to children. These coaching sessions are led primarily by graduate students in Smith's exercise and sport studies program. The next day, the newly trained teen coaches will teach those same games and activities to youngsters in after-school programs in three resource-hungry Springfield elementary schools. They will also serve as

valuable role models for children who desperately need them.

“Coaching is a metaphor for everything that we do,” Glading-DiLorenzo says. “The techniques and skills that we teach are applicable to all facets of life.”

Being a part of an aspirational partnership with Smith College has had an immediate effect on the lives of the teen coaches. For Madison McCarthy, it meant applying to the Smith Summer Science and Engineering Program. Priscilla Morales, a three-year Project Coach participant, set her college sights on Smith, where she applied early decision and was admitted to the class of 2018.

At 7:45 p.m., the entire group—Smith undergraduate and graduate students, high school and middle school students, Project Coach staff—get in a big circle where they single out their colleagues for praise and suggest ways to improve next time. Monday Night Academy ends with a huddle and a unison shout of “1-2-3 Project Coach!” By 8 p.m., they're on the bus back to Springfield.—EG

## Built on 'cascading apprenticeships'

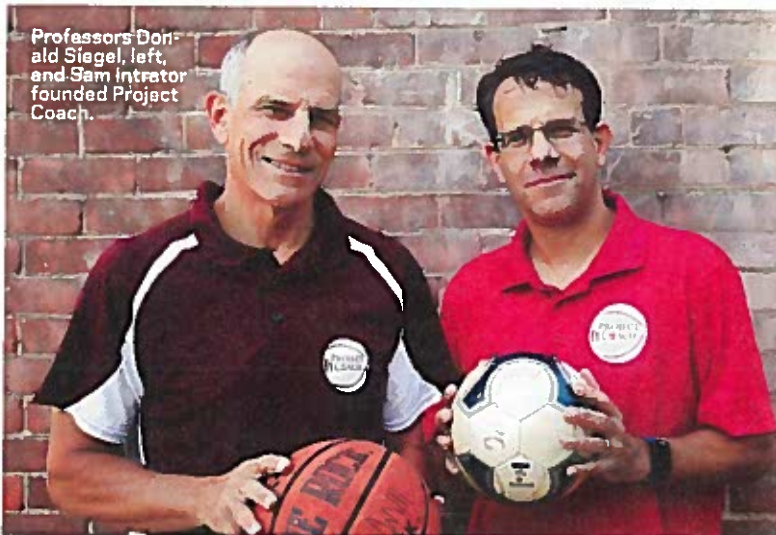
Project Coach grew out of a collaboration between Donald Siegel, professor of exercise and sport studies, and Sam Intrator, professor of education and child study. Siegel had developed several youth sports initiatives, and Intrator had previously begun an urban education initiative as a way to introduce Smith education students to what it means to teach in urban schools.

The two professors, along with a team of Smith students, sought to “imagine a program that would use sports as a way to achieve better academic results,” Intrator says. And they wanted to work in an under-resourced area where their help would make a real difference. They focused on elementary schools in Springfield's North End, where after-school options were severely limited and where the playing fields had been abandoned or were being used by more affluent towns. The area has high rates of incarceration and many single-parent families, so few adults have time to volunteer to coach youth sports teams.

Siegel and Intrator conceived an after-school sports program in which young people mentored each other in what Intrator calls “cascading apprenticeships.” “The basic kernel is that college students prepare high school students to work with elementary school children,” he says.

Middle and high school students apply to Project Coach much as they would to a job. In fact, they get paid for the hours they put in as coaches in after-school programs as well as for their training time during the Monday Night Academy. “Through the coaching,” Intrator says, “teens learn essential life leadership skills: communicating, resolving conflict, motivating others and thinking strategically.”

ONLINE: [smith.edu/education/project-coach.php](http://smith.edu/education/project-coach.php)



Professors Donald Siegel, left, and Sam Intrator founded Project Coach.

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