



Operation Understanding is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for high school juniors and we're looking for the 2012 class of OU Ambassadors.

Operation Understanding seeks students who possess the following characteristics:

- Strong sense of cultural and/or religious identity
- Clear verbal and written communication skills
- Interest in issues of diversity
- Demonstrate leadership ability or potential
- Intellectual curiosity
- Willingness to contribute, listen and learn

Successful candidates will also demonstrate initiative, maturity, a sense of responsibility, academic achievement, civic-mindedness, and an ability to collaborate with others.

Candidates must be juniors in high school, identify as African-American and/or Jewish, reside or go to high school in the City of Philadelphia or reside in school districts that directly border the city of Philadelphia.

Application deadline is January 6th, 2012 for the class of 2012.  
Recommendations are due January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012

*An OU alumni is:*

- *An Echoing Green Fellow and founder of charter schools in Brooklyn*
- *The founder of CHOSA (Children of South Africa)*
- *A former managing director of the City of Philadelphia and current Co-Executive Director of City Year of Greater Philadelphia*
- *A writer for TheRoot.com and ESSENCE magazine first ever White House correspondent*
- *A Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute on policy issues in Iraq, Iran and Turkey.*
- *The founder of The Rebecca Project for Human Rights*

*By inspiring compassionate, knowledgeable individuals who are ready to serve, prepared to lead and eager to make a difference our alumni are a committed network of professionals that are also prepared to 'give back' to our young students as they learn to see the world through OU eyes.*

### ***Where will OU take YOU?***

Visit [www.operationunderstanding.org](http://www.operationunderstanding.org) for more information and to download the application.

Allison Pokras, Executive Director || [director@operationunderstanding.org](mailto:director@operationunderstanding.org)  
215-665-8575 || [www.operationunderstanding.org](http://www.operationunderstanding.org)

# Operation Understanding Frequently Asked Questions

## **Why does Operation Understanding (OU) exist?**

Discrimination in all its forms, subtle and overt, continues to be one America's most insidious and pervasive problems. Operation Understanding strives to break down those boundaries created by misinformation, stereotypes and lack of communication. The foundation of Operation Understanding's work is based in education and dialogue, which leads to a change in behavior, and, ultimately, a change in attitude. Every effort is made to foster a safe environment through which students can explore their actions, beliefs, choices and attitudes. All of our programs, retreats, workshops and events are designed to encourage a dialogue that forces our students to consider their perspective of themselves, each other, and the world in which they live. The intense experiential learning that occurs during particular programs, especially the summer study journey, is the catalyst for considered conversation to turn into life-altering empathy, shifts in attitude and commitment to cross-cultural engagement.

## **Who can participate?**

Operation Understanding recruits African American and Jewish high school juniors from all over the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Students must have demonstrated leadership potential, curiosity, maturity, and commitment to their community, as well as excellent communications skills. Our students attend a variety of public and private schools in the greater Philadelphia area and come from a wide range of cultural, religious and economic backgrounds.

## **Why is the program only for African American and Jewish students?**

Operation Understanding uses a two-community model to give students the opportunity to explore African-American and Jewish cultures, religions and histories in-depth. By focusing on these two groups, who have had similar universal histories of oppression, fear and slander, our students graduate with a true understanding and appreciation of both communities and a greater respect for people of all backgrounds that face these issues. During their "senior year of study" participants work throughout the City of Philadelphia and beyond leading workshops with people of all ages and backgrounds promoting the notion of respect for and greater understanding of difference.

## **How many students are in each class?**

Operation Understanding accepts up to 16 students each year, equally divided between Blacks and Jews, males and females.

## **How long is the program?**

Operation Understanding is a year-plus long program. Students apply during their junior year of high school and those accepted participate as active members through June of their senior year.

## **What is Operation Understanding's impact?**

Thus far, more than 450 students and their families have directly participated in Operation Understanding. Through their formal (presentation and facilitation engagements) and informal outreach efforts, OU reaches over 2,000 students and adults each year participating in fulfilling our overall goal to promote the understanding of diversity and greater acceptance of difference.

Operation Understanding makes a difference...long-term. Students bring OU principles to college and alumni report heartfelt gratitude for their OU experience 20 and 25 before that changed their lives. They report deep long-standing relationships and share stories about how, years later, they credit OU as a major influence on the trajectory of their careers, their attitudes about how to operate in the world and their commitment to the community.

## **Where are OU alumni now?**

OU alumni Teach for America and toil in the Peace Corps. They are founders, doctors, lawyers and business people committed to their communities. The following alumni are a small part of a large cadre of leaders in their fields that credit Operation Understanding as a major positive long-term influence in their lives.

Cynthia Gordy OU '98 was ESSENCE magazine's first ever White House correspondent in DC and now writes for theRoot.com.

Loree Jones OU '85 was the managing director for the City of Philadelphia, and is now Co-Executive Director of City Year of Greater Philadelphia.

David Lieberman OU '97 teaches people how to live, eat and entertain like royalty, even on a commoner's budget on Food Network's *Good Deal with Dave Lieberman*.

Rafiq Jeffries Kalam Id-Din, Esq. OU '91 is an Echoing Green Fellow and the founder and managing partner of Teaching Firms of America Charter Schools in Brooklyn.

Ellen Rosenberg OU '00 founded CHOSA (Children of South Africa), an organization that raises funds and awareness for orphans and other vulnerable children in South Africa.

Michael Rubin OU '89, a Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute on policy issues in Iraq, Iran and Turkey.

Malika Saada Saar OU '87 advocate, activist, DC insider and A-lister was recently profiled in the Washington Post for her work with The Rebecca Project for Human Rights.

By inspiring compassionate, knowledgeable individuals who are ready to serve, prepared to lead and eager to make a difference our alumni are a committed network of professionals that are also prepared to 'give back' to our young students as they learn to see the world through OU eyes.

### **How much are participants required to pay to join the program?**

While the cost for each student to participate in Operation Understanding for the duration of the commitment costs the organization approximately \$10,000, there is no charge for this program. Students are selected without regard to financial status.

### **Who funds the program?**

Funding comes from individuals, foundations, and corporations who share our vision.

### **Are contributions to Operation Understanding tax-deductible?**

Contributions made to Operation Understanding, a 501 (c) (3) organization, are fully tax-deductible as allowed by law.

### **Is Operation Understanding a member agency of the United Way ?**

Yes, our member number is: # 10161

### **How did the organization begin?**

In 1985 American Jewish Committee Director Murray Friedman mourned the decline in the relationship between the African American and Jewish communities and dreamed of a way to bring the two communities back together. He asked former United States Congressman William H. Gray, III and George M. Ross, Managing Partner of Goldman, Sachs and Company and former Chairman of the Board of the AJC, Philadelphia Chapter to champion the project of Operation Understanding. The three came together over mutual concerns about the strained relations and waning communications between the African American and Jewish communities nation-wide and in particular in Philadelphia. Joined by David Hyman Esq., George Burrell Esq., Ronald Kaiserman, and Irving and Elaine Broudy they joined the project because they felt strongly that their respective cultures and histories were a source of strength, and became convinced that exploring them together might begin a powerful, constructive dialogue. Together, they

conceived of a cross-cultural program intended to build bridges of understanding between the two communities.

This group led by Mr. Friedman, Congressman Gray and Mr. Ross believed that harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of young people was the place to start. As youths get to know one another, preconceptions and mistrust can be transformed into friendship and respect. Through exposure to, and education about, each other's cultures, they come to appreciate the differences and similarities between their backgrounds.

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In the United States, the history of Black-Jewish relations in the last century began as one of mutual cooperation toward common goals. African Americans and Jews worked together to establish the NAACP in 1909 and the Urban League in 1910, and struggled and suffered in the fight for voting and civil rights through the 1960s. On Capitol Hill, African American and Jewish Members of Congress have historically shared common voting behavior and co-sponsored legislation ranging from support of Israel, divestment from apartheid-era South Africa and equal housing opportunities.

However, the successful accomplishments of the formal Civil Rights movement, such as the Civil Rights and Voting Acts, brought the end of the common goals that united Blacks and Jews. Since the 1970s, there have been several challenges that have divided these two communities: separatist groups, neighborhood tensions and international issues. Because programs for youth can help to reduce this discord as they become tomorrow's leaders, Operation Understanding brings together high school students from both communities to engage each other in a sustained, year-long dialogue.

We believe the comprehensive education we provide enables our students to be effective ambassadors for all forms of diversity. Operation Understanding serves as a foundation and springboard for exploring other cultures.

### **What is an Operation Understanding facilitation or workshop?**

Operation Understanding empowers students to combat discrimination and promote respect through their actions by engaging in open, honest dialogue. OU members facilitate discussions and lead workshops to provide their peers, younger students and adults with the opportunity to discuss their fears, ask questions and share their experiences by using age- and group-appropriate exercises. Students are trained to maintain a neutral position on discussion content and to engage all participants in the conversation.

### **Is Operation Understanding a national organization?**

No, Operation Understanding is not part of an umbrella organization. However, the success of OU in Philadelphia has born several OU programs around the country based on the original Philadelphia model. Programs based on this model exist in Washington, DC, St. Louis Missouri, Hampton Roads, VA and more. Each organization strives to strengthen the relationship between the Black and Jewish communities through our young leaders, though we individually determine program curriculum, class size and admissions standards. In addition, each group has our own Board of Directors and is responsible for our own budget.