



# UIC Neighborhoods *Initiative*

Building Partnerships for Stronger Communities and a Stronger University

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## What is Social Capital?

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According to Robert D. Putnam, one of the leading experts on civic engagement in the United States, social capital affects our well being and it is of concern to all of us. Putnam was the keynote speaker at this year's Great Cities annual Winter Forum, where he addressed his audience with a speech titled: "What's been happening to American community life and how do we begin to fix it?" A term such as social capital does not exactly compel the average American to engage in any further readings or investigation on the issue. The average American probably thinks that social capital is of minimal concern to them and that the issue belongs in a political science class.

Putnam, former consultant to President Clinton, author of multiple books and scholarly articles, and professor at Harvard University, argues differently.

"Social capital refers to the norms and networks of civil society that lubricate cooperative action among both citizens and their institutions, " said Putnam, "Without adequate supplies of social capital-that is, without civic engagement, healthy community institutions, norms of reciprocity, and trust-social institutions falter."

What does all this mean? Much research over the last several years has shown that social connectedness and civic engagement or social capital are prerequisites for better schools, safer neighborhoods, more jobs, more effective governments, and healthier lives. In other words, social capital increases our standard of living. Putnam's work demonstrates that there has been a great decline in social capital in all US states over the past decades.

"Americans have dramatically deserted the voting booth, the family dining table, the church pew, the union hall, the PTA assembly, and even the

bowling league and coffee klatch," said Putnam.

Putnam's research demonstrates that the vibrancy of American civil society has greatly plummeted in the past few years. His findings show that weekly churchgoing is down, union membership declined more than half since the mid-50s, PTA membership has fallen from 12 million to 7 million between 1964-1998, membership in the Boy Scouts is down 26%, and membership in the Red Cross is down 61%. Although Americans are increasingly joining support groups and mass membership organizations like the Sierra Club where the only requirement is to write a check and read a newsletter, they are not substitutes or aids for family and neighborhoods connectedness. Putnam states that we need more research on the dimensions of social capital, but the current research clearly proves that individualism is becoming a norm and relationships are on the decline.

How is social capital important to the immediate neighborhoods surrounding UIC? Tom Lenz, Fellow at the Great Cities Institute said that we must understand the local context of a neighborhood before outsiders can go in and help the community. The UIC Neighborhoods Initiative is particularly mindful of university-community relationships.

"We put community people first and we look for the interests and concerns that already exist in the community and work with that," said Lenz. "We must respect and try to understand the organizations and people in the community before we approach them with help. Only then can trusting relationships develop and increased social capital be sought."

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## Announcements

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\* **The Great Cities Institute and the Voorhees Center for Neighborhood Improvement** received \$70,000 from the Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA) for "Neighborhood Impact studies" in Pilsen and Lawndale. They will assess the impact of housing development and lending activity in the neighborhoods as well as other indicators of community health. This is part of a larger \$500,000 grant received by the City Design Center.

\* **Pat Wright**, Associate Director of the UIC Voorhees Neighborhood Center received a leadership award from the Chicago Rehab Network at their 20th anniversary benefit dinner on November 10, 1998.

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## Finding Identity in School

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If you have been told your whole life that you do not belong in college or that you are not capable of higher education then you will eventually start believing it as truth. This is reality for many students at Benito Juarez High School.

"The students at Juarez are approximately 98% Hispanic," said Connie Yowell, director of the UIC / Juarez Advisory Collaborative. "The communities that these students live in have very few college graduates. Consequently they have limited access to people whom they can talk to about their future, college, and higher education."

The UIC/Juarez Advisory Collaborative is a curriculum innovation for Juarez High School students that give them an opportunity to express their thoughts, concerns,

and questions about their future. The main objective of the program is to get students, specifically ninth graders, to reflect on their future goals through writing and classroom discussions. The program seeks to develop both writing skills in students and critical thinking and reflection about themselves.

"Most ninth graders don't know much about their future and rarely think much about what's beyond the weekend," said Yowell. "We're trying to get kids to think critically about their hopes and dreams for their future."

The UIC/Juarez Advisory Collaborative is an upgrade of the Great Cities/Great Careers program that was initiated in 1995 by Steve Tozer in the College of Education and Joan Fitzgerald in Urban Planning at UIC. The

collaborative is funded by the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative. The main purpose of Great Cities/Great Careers is to help high school students achieve their future aspirations. UIC/Juarez Advisory Collaborative seeks to accomplish this by working closely with English and writing skills teachers at Juarez so that students have opportunities to express their future aspirations by and through writing.

"The Great Cities/Great Careers program reached approximately 10-15 students at Juarez," said Yowell. "This new program reaches over 450 students and one of the major reasons for this increase is that we integrate and combine different disciplines. For example, the History and English departments are currently working closely together on an upcoming

History Fair. Through this approach, students learn both writing skills and acquire interdisciplinary content knowledge."

The vehicle for the program has been the new requirement of a composition class for all first-year students at Juarez. The school did not

have a separate writing skills curriculum last year and much of the writing was incorporated into general English classes.

"This program does not seek to change the current English curriculum, but rather it seeks to add to the program by collaborative efforts

between UIC and Juarez teachers through longitudinal work," said Yowell.

For more information on the program, please contact Connie Yowell at 312-996-7327.

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## Health Projects Benefit All

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UIC has a long tradition of upholding its urban commitment to surrounding communities. Responsive communication between the university and a community is crucial to insure both quality relationships and opportunities for growth. As Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Health Services, Cynthia Barnes-Boyd, PhD has worked to develop and sustain this tradition since she joined UIC in 1973. She is an expert on health related university-community partnerships.

"There are many collaborative projects between the various colleges at UIC and community partners," said Boyd. "Good communication is an essential component of these partnerships and it is critical to develop mutually beneficial relationships."

Prior to her 1997 appointment to the Office of the Vice Chancellor Boyd held several senior administrative positions at the UIC Medical Center over a 15 year period. In all roles she was involved in community projects and grants as either a program director or researcher. For six years she held the position of the first Executive Director for the new Mile Square Health Center, a collaborative program of the UIC and the Chicago Department of Public Health. Under her leadership, the Center was reopened in 1991 and expanded to include four sites serving the Near West Side communities. The facility is now fully managed by UIC faculty and staff.

Boyd has an established network of community and university people due to her history of commitment and involvement at UIC and its neighborhoods. Naturally, many people come to her for information about community organizations, contacts, policies, funding issues and other resources.



Cynthia Barnes-Boyd

"My role includes bringing people together and facilitating partnerships between the community and UIC," said Boyd. She also conducts presentations on what is happening around the community and what organizations are involved in community/UIC partnerships.

"To be successful, it is important to know the community first hand. I often tell UIC staff who are interested in developing community projects or partnerships that they need to have an intimate knowledge of the community they propose to work with," said Boyd. "The first step to understanding may be as basic as leaving a comfortable office and tour the neighborhood."

Boyd directs several health related projects including Project Tell, a high school peer mentoring and pregnancy prevention program; The UIC Empowerment Zone, a program that provides training and employment for Near West Side residents; Better Care for Youth Clinic, a school based clinic located in the Henry Suder Elementary School on the Near West Side; and project REACH, a case management and home care program for women and children.

"All of the programs in the division of community health focus on empowering community residents and their families to achieve personal health and well being," said Boyd. "This is UIC's commitment to improving the quality of life in a community. In my case, the approach is one of partnership."

If you have any questions about the various health projects, please contact Dr. Cynthia Barnes-Boyd at 312-996-4656 or e-mail [cboyd@uic.edu](mailto:cboyd@uic.edu).

