



UIC Neighborhoods *Initiative*

Building Partnerships for Stronger Communities and a Stronger University

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The University of Illinois at Chicago

Great Cities Institute

Chicago Rehab Network Helps Keep Affordable Housing a Reality

While affordable housing should be available to all who need it, that's not always the case. But organizations like the Chicago Rehab Network (CRN) are working to ensure that affordable housing is available and accessible across Chicago and throughout the state.

With the help of research assistants (RAs) provided by UIC's Neighborhoods Initiative program, CRN analyzes the work of the City of Chicago Department of Housing (DOH) and the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) in the area of affordable housing. CRN makes available its findings to its 43 network members, the Chicago City Council and organizations such as the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.

"Our hope is that DOH and IHDA gain a better understanding of their production ... to stimulate public policy discussion across the state," explains Joyce Probst, CRN's policy director.

One way RAs help CRN accomplish its mission is by analyzing housing reports. Most recently, RAs have studied DOH's and IHDA's progress in meeting their projections for the construction and rehabbing of affordable housing. The interns also have looked at property tax policies and their effects on trends such as gentrification and displacement.

Sometimes an RAs own urban planning and policy interests become CRN projects. Case in point: RA Beth Lieberman wanted to examine the degree to which community members are involved in housing redesign. She expressed her ideas to CRN and subsequently had a new project to research.

"I've looked at the numbers of residents involved, how they're involved and housing redesign's direction as a result," she says.

RAs also have enabled CRN to expand its work to the state level. RA Deepa Sanyal researched IHDA's use of state and federal money in six affordable housing projects throughout Illinois. "I looked at things such as the number of people served, income levels served and populations served, as well as whether funds were spent equally across the board," Sanyal explains. Her work helped uncover two major programs with funding surpluses, a critical finding, she says, because unused funds often are a bone of contention between housing authorities and developers and the community.

Probst says RAs have been crucial to CRN's work. "In the past, they sometimes have been the main staff of our policy and advocacy department," she explains. "We could not do what we've done without them."

Everyone At The Table

Since its inception in 1995, UIC's Great Cities Institute (GCI) has served as the university's hub of knowledge and information about urban affairs. As GCI gears up for the seventh annual

Winter Forum, which will focus on the growth and development of Midwestern cities, director David C. Perry reflects on partnership's crucial role in urban development and discusses GCI's upcoming endeavors.

"It is not only university researchers who give out a wealth of information," Perry explains. "Neighborhood residents have so much to give to the university, and we must graciously accept their insight and knowledge as equally valuable research in contributing to positively influencing the quality of urban life."

Perry said that the growth and development of GCI will advance via two main avenues in the near future: enhanced telecommunication through its new web site and the creation of a new international journal of urban studies. Perry hopes that the website will bring people in the community and the university closer together both locally and nationally. The journal will focus on interdisciplinary issues of urban life and will debut in January 2001.

For more information on GCI, call 312-996-8700. See this issue's "Upcoming Events" box for more information on the Winter Forum

UIC Students Prepare for Real World

Working in the field in which you are pursuing graduate studies is an opportunity that many students seek. The hands-on-experience they acquire through assistantships and internships not only gives them a head start in the working world, it's also attractive to prospective employers.

And while not always the case, that experience can lead to a full-time job, as was the case for Deena Al-Khatib, former UIC graduate research assistant (RA) at the Near West Side Commercial Development Corporation (NWSCDC). She took over as the organization's acting executive director immediately after earning her master's from UIC's Urban Planning and Policy program.

"It has definitely been a challenge for me transitioning from an RA to acting executive director, but extremely worthwhile," Al-Khatib said, adding that she acquired more hands-on experience because her position was off campus. "I did grant writing, financial planning, talked with home buyers and helped with 'New Homes for Chicago' applications," she explains.

Assistantships also give students new perspectives that they might not get in the classroom. Amanda Long, a master's candidate in UIC's College of Urban Planning

and Public Affairs, says her work as an RA with the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative (UICNI) has broadened her view of community development. "The most valuable part of my job at the UICNI is being able to research different university / community partnerships," said Long. "Watching what we do at the UICNI has helped me realize the value of research and collaboration."

Even if an assistantship entails working in an aspect of urban planning that isn't the student's primary interest, she still benefits. Deepa Sanyal, master's candidate in UIC's Urban Planning and Policy program, is focusing her studies on international development and would like to combine that interest with her work on UICNI's Neighborhood Network Net (an internet access/assistance program for community organizations). But the assistantship she completed with the Chicago Rehab Network was her first experience on the community level and with housing issues.

She says working with CRN piqued her interest in housing issues and showed her the connections among all areas of urban planning. "Even if a planner doesn't work directly with communities, they're at least somehow connected."

UICNI Receives National Attention

The University of Illinois at Chicago Neighborhoods Initiative was named one of the 100 Best Practices in the country for 1999 by HUD. HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo announced the awards in July. The designation recognizes UIC Neighborhoods-Initiative as an organization or project that made outstanding and innovative use of HUD assistance to better serve families and communities in Illinois.

The winners were chosen from among more than 3,000 candidates nationwide in six different categories: Fighting for Fair Housing; Increasing Affordable Housing and Homeownership; Reducing Homelessness, Promoting Jobs and Economic Opportunity; Empowering People and Communities; and Restoring Public Trust.

A HUD best practice is defined as a program or project, management tool, or technique that fulfills at least two of the following characteristics:

- Generates a significant positive impact on those it is intended to serve or manage.
- Can be replicated in other areas of the country, region, or local jurisdiction.
- Demonstrates the effective use of partnerships among government agencies, non-profit organizations, or private businesses.
- Displays creativity in addressing a problem, and demonstrates effective leveraging of resources.