



# UIC Neighborhoods *Initiative*

Building Partnerships for Stronger Communities and a Stronger University

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The University of Illinois at Chicago

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## Remaking Chicago: How Far Have We Come?

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Chicago: for years it was known as a transportation hub, the financial capital of the Midwest, a leading steel producer and industrial center. But, according to BusinessWeek's Oct. 16 issue, Chicago is fading as a business and financial capital.

"Other cities can claim dynamic sectors that drive them...but Chicago is still struggling to find the spark that will ignite it as a 21st century city. And, worryingly, two sectors --- finance and high-tech --- that should carry it forward are lagging badly," says the article.

But Mayor Richard Daley is quick to defend Chicago's position as a leader in the global economy, telling BusinessWeek that the city's diverse industry is its strong point.



So where does Chicago stand? One look at Chicago's booming housing market, improving schools and strong job market should indicate that Chicago has remade itself successfully in response to the information age. But what does the city need to do to ensure its success for the next century?

For one, Chicago Skvline

Chicago must reexamine its neighborhoods --- the way they're set up and how well they serve their residents, both blue- and white-collar.

"With Chicago becoming a city of information people, that means that neighborhoods have to change," asserts Nacho Gonzalez, UIC Neighborhoods Initiative coordinator. "Because they're built on a concept where, in the age of factories, the workers lived around the factories, cities now have to consider gentrification. So the question is, what about the people who service the lawyers, the accountants, the information people?"

These and other questions will be the topics of discussion at "Remaking Chicago," UIC's Eighth Annual Great Cities Winter Forum and Urban Universities Collaborative Biannual Conference on Chicago Research and Policy, November 30 and December 1. Panelists from the corporate, academic and nonprofit worlds will engage in lively discussions of their varied experiences "remaking" Chicago and the region. Breakout sessions will cover topics such as community development, economic development, education, health policy, housing, race relations and urban policies and politics. And a closing plenary will allow attendees and speakers to reflect on the information and ideas generated over the course of the conference.

"We're certain that participants will be inspired to think beyond the boundaries of their own areas of expertise and to identify opportunities for partnership building across disciplines and sectors," says David Perry, director of the Great Cities Institute.

UIC and the Great Cities Institute are delighted to have the opportunity to host Remaking Chicago and thank the conference's sponsors: Richard G. and Carole J. Cline Endowment, People's Energy, Bank One Corporation, Midwest Generation, Chicago Metropolis 2000 and members of the Urban Universities Collaborative.

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## **PALS Reaches Out to Inner-City Families**

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Poor inner-city families have only half as much access to mental health services for their children as the rest of the U.S. population. That discrepancy is especially profound in Chicago as compared with other major U.S. cities. But a program called PALS is working to change that.

PALS, which stands for Positive Attitudes for Learning in Schools, was founded in 1992 by UIC associate professor of psychology and current Great Cities Institute scholar Marc Atkins and his colleagues in UIC's Department of Psychiatry, who recognized schools as a viable avenue for implementing their project. (Atkins was then working in

Philadelphia; he brought the program to UIC in 1994.) The program works with schools in Chicago's Near West and South Side neighborhoods.

Why the focus on schools? Atkins cites several reasons. First, studies have shown that combining academic support with emotional support yields the most effective results. And, he adds, "mental health resources are scarce within inner-city communities and, when available, comprise a fragmented and ineffective means of serving children. Schools are available in all communities...and 75 percent of mental health services for kids are provided in schools, so why not work with them?"

In addition, Atkins points out that most urban schools don't have mental health professionals on staff. "Even those that bring in mental health clinics...aren't broad-based or comprehensive enough," he says. And large numbers of children who need mental health services aren't getting them. "Nationally, only sixteen percent of children received mental health services in 1995. And only half of those with the greatest need got care."

PALS approaches child mental health care from an ecological standpoint, which considers the context in which each child is immersed. Without this broad perspective, Atkins says, the care isn't effective. "You have to look at the multiple influences on a child's behavior. You need to consider the child's school life, family life, relationships. A previously aggressive child might show signs of being less aggressive after treatment, but how are his relationships with his parents? How is he doing in the classroom?"

PALS doesn't work with individual children. Instead, the program helps teachers and parents more effectively address child and adolescent mental health. For example, PALS might offer suggestions to a teacher for organizing classes to address a particular student's mental health needs. Or, a PALS provider might give a parent ideas on how to become more involved in their child's education while giving them social support, suggesting ways they can modify their parenting skills to address their child's mental health needs, and providing information on additional services if needed. "We want to increase the communication between teachers and parents, and destigmatize mental health care as well," Atkins adds.

As a GCI scholar, Atkins is currently working to expand PALS by establishing strong links with social service agencies. "Alternative models for mental health delivery are of high importance," Atkins says. "There is considerable evidence that...children's involvement in after-school programs and family involvement in socially supportive activities in the community is strongly associated with positive outcomes."

Atkins believes his work with Great Cities will greatly enhance PALS. "My main point is that mental health needs to be integrated into the ecology in which children and

families live. There are vibrant literatures in sociology, education, economics and anthropology that pursue this more broadly than the mental health literature. I am hopeful that my colleagues at GCI will be interested in exploring these issues with me.”

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## **Dean Chou Committed to Urban Education**

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As dean of UIC’s College of Education, Vicky Chou’s work is cut out for her. But that’s the reason she’s devoted her career to education.

“The challenges of urban teaching grabbed me. I’m 100 percent committed to it,” she says.

Those challenges include positioning UIC’s College of Education within the Chicago school system, the country’s third largest urban school district. That, along with fighting the ever-present battle of education funding shortages, along with developing diplomacy skills to effectively deal with the “jillion players” in the urban school environment, is what keeps Chou going.

Chou has spent more than 20 years at UIC. She began her career here as an assistant professor of education in 1978 and became a full professor of education in 1991. Along the way, she served as director of graduate studies and Ph.D. steering committee chair, associate dean for academic programs and student affairs, and associate dean for academic affairs. She has served as the College of Ed’s dean since 1997 (she was acting dean from 1996 to 1997).

One of Chou’s largest responsibilities is cultivating relationships with numerous Chicago public schools in regard to the college’s teacher preparation programs, as seen in the college’s numerous ongoing and potential projects in Chicago’s Pilsen and Near West Side neighborhoods. Chou adds that the partnership between the College of Ed and UICNI helps further foster these relationships. For example, a Great Cities Institute seed grant contributed to the Near West Side Academic Excellent Club, which pairs Crane students with UIC tutors.

Chou says the College of Ed is developing a number of new projects in Pilsen. “We have had projects and teacher education activities going on in Pilsen, Little Village and Back-of-the-Yards (two other predominantly Latino neighborhoods) for decades,” Chou explains. “We want to continue improving upon our record.”

In one example of that continuing focus, the College of Ed was recently appointed external partner with Pilsen’s Benito Juarez High School in an effort toward

removing the school's probation status. In addition, the College of Ed helped establish math and science academies at both Juarez and Crane.

Chou explains that such relationships help open the door for teaching candidates from UIC to gain required hands-on experience at these schools. "Existing teachers mentor teacher candidates during their observation and student teaching," she says, adding that she's hoping to add schools with a majority of African-American teachers to the roster.

"Given that 53% of Chicago's public schools have predominantly African-American student bodies, it makes sense that our teacher preparation programs reflect this reality. UIC and other universities have a way to go in this regard," Chou asserts.

## **New Organization Will Help Promote University-Community Partnerships**

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Anyone involved in university-community partnerships knows the challenges that come with the territory, from sustaining programs after a partnership ends, to dealing with bureaucracy and politics, to addressing race and diversity issues. Recognizing these difficulties, participants from a number of university and community partnerships created the Association for Community Higher Education Partnership (ACHEP).

While ACHEP was formed only a few months ago and is just getting off the ground, it aims to promote to government agencies, politicians and foundations an awareness of the importance of university-community partnerships. "We might work to develop partnerships with politicians, for example, so they're aware of what we do," explains UICNI coordinator Nacho Gonzalez, who was involved in ACHEP's creation. "Also important is informing funding agencies of the importance of university and community partnerships." Awareness is key, he adds, and will depend in large part on getting the word out through a website, publications, conferences and workshops.

ACHEP members will meet again in December 2000 to address fundraising and other key issues. For more information about ACHEP, contact David Cox of the University of Memphis ([davidcox@memphis.edu](mailto:davidcox@memphis.edu)).

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## **Attention, Nonprofit Practitioners!**

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