

FOCUS TOPICS

Effective Student Mentoring

Most mentoring relationships develop in the informal environment of student faculty interaction. This is particularly true of the mentoring relationship between graduate students and their thesis/dissertation advisors. For the undergraduate student, formal mentoring is provided most often by the student support units whose programs are highlighted frequently in various reports on student services. For this reason, we have decided to highlight two programs designed to support graduate/professional students in this report.

College of Medicine (COM). Upon matriculation to the UIC College of Medicine, each entering medical student is matched with a college faculty member who serves as that student's academic advisor. The role of the student's advisor is to provide the student a personal and mentoring relationship, and to be the "first line of defense" for troubleshooting academic, logistical, and personal problems that may arise in the course of medical education. COM faculty advisors are responsible for signing off on students' senior curriculum and study plans, play a supportive role in career counseling and residency program consideration, and provide a model for professional development. The goal of this relationship is to help students adapt successfully to all aspects of the College of Medicine.

The Interdepartmental Concentration in Women Studies provides a mechanism by which graduate students are linked with a mentor who shares academic interests. This Concentration is open to graduate students from many disciplines who have an interest in women's issues. If a graduate student's request for participation in the Concentration is approved, a Women's Studies graduate faculty member, preferably within the department of the degree, becomes the student's mentor and Women's Studies advisor. This provides a mentor who is knowledgeable not only about the field of study but shares an interest in gender issues with the graduate student.

Serving Students with Disabilities: Thinking Small

The most obvious changes to improve access on the UIC campus are the many large scale physical projects such as modified entrances, elevators, modified restroom facilities, etc. However, some of the smaller changes and provisions radically improve the quality of the experience of students with disabilities. Among these small but meaningful changes is the inclusion of a hearing-assist system to all the multimedia systems installed in lecture halls. A student can check out headphones from the Office of Classroom Services for use in 16 lecture halls (18 in Fall 1998). These headphones do not require any physical connections in these lecture halls thus freeing the student to sit anywhere in the classroom.

One of the abiding problems for disabled access is science laboratory equipment and design. In many cases, it is not possible to reconfigure instructional labs to allow for full participation. In response, UIC has purchased mobile lab benches for use in Physics and Biological Sciences laboratories. Now a mobile lab bench can be rolled to the site where needed and connected to all utilities. Water is available from a tank internal to the mobile unit. These units have allowed for greater participation by disabled students in science laboratories.

In many classrooms a couple of permanent seats have been removed from lecture halls and classrooms to allow for wheelchair access. This modification allows access but does not provide a writing surface for a student in a wheelchair. In response, UIC has installed standalone tablet arms in small classrooms for the use of students with wheel chairs. In larger venues, tables or counters have been provided. In all cases, loose seating is available for use with these writing surfaces if no disabled student requires the space.

TTY lines are an integral part of the on-line registration system and the financial aid system at UIC. The Office of Admissions and Records also provides TTY lines for student callers.

One small programmatic initiative that has been very successful is a program to assist learning-disabled student athletes. UIC's Office of Disability Services has worked with the Academic Center for Excellence to design appropriate tutoring and home study plans for student athletes. These plans are unique since student athletes

are not able to access tutors when traveling to away games. Recent court decisions and changes in NCAA rules concerning disabled student athletes make this modified support plan for student athletes worth highlighting.

The IBHE has requested information on how campuses estimate the number of students with disabilities. To obtain service students must self-identify and be certified. A code is then entered in the UIC student data base. This allows us to track their numbers. We are well aware that this is an undercount but by using these as a basis for predicting service requests, we believe we are relying on figures that represent the population willing to self-identify. UIC currently has a relatively small number of students that self-identify as disabled. In Fall 1997 103 students at UIC identified themselves as disabled. In spring 1998 the number dropped to 96. We believe that the numbers will increase over the next decade as the public becomes increasingly aware of the physical accessibility of UIC. One of the tasks set for the newly hired Coordinator of Student Disability Services is to project and plan for future needs.

Programs Integral and Unique to Campus Mission

As stated in the scope and mission statement approved by the IBHE, the University of Illinois at Chicago's "mission comprises three traditional elements—teaching, research, and public service—each shaped by and relevant to its metropolitan setting as well as the University of Illinois' traditional pursuit of excellence." It is this urban focus which is unique to the UIC mission. In addition, the teaching mission of UIC includes the preparation of large numbers of health professionals. This focus on the health professions is also unique to UIC.

For many years, the College of Medicine has been a nationally recognized leader in providing medical education to students from ethnic/racial backgrounds underrepresented in the medical profession. The College has graduated more minority physicians than any other U.S. medical school, except Howard and Meharry. Currently UIC ranks second in the number of Hispanics awarded medical degrees in the continental U.S. Similarly, UIC graduates more Mexican-American physicians than any other U.S. institution except the University of Texas at Galveston. Much of this success is due to the *Urban Health Program* (UHP).

In 1978, UIC created the Urban Health Program to train a cadre of minority health professionals dedicated to improving the quality for health care among groups most in need of improved health services. Many predominantly minority urban neighborhoods lack adequate health care services. Blacks, Latinos, and American Indians are disproportionately affected by diseases such as cancer, tuberculosis, hypertension, and diabetes. Infant mortality in these communities is far greater than in the general population. Not only does the UHP represent an effort to fulfill our mission of training health care professionals but through this effort it fulfills UIC's commitment to service.

In addition to the Urban Health Program, there is a relatively new program that also exemplifies the UIC mission of training health care professionals -- the *Hispanic Center of Excellence*. The mission of the Hispanic Center of Excellence (HCOE) is to assist with matriculation and graduation of Latino/Hispanic physicians from the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine. The HCOE promotes and encourages these physicians to provide quality health care to the Latino community in Illinois once they have completed their medical education.

Both of these programs will be reviewed in detail in the section "Review of Formally Organized Units."

Another unit that epitomizes the UIC commitment to teaching, research, and service with an urban focus is the *Great Cities Institute*. The Great Cities Institute (GCI) was approved by the IBHE in January 1996. The mission of the GCI is to create, disseminate and apply interdisciplinary knowledge about urban affairs to improve the quality of life in metropolitan Chicago and other urban areas. The Great Cities Institute Scholars and Fellows are responsible for implementing this mission. Due to the concentration of underrepresented minorities in large urban areas, improvements to the quality of life in the city have a disproportionate impact on minority residents.

A selection of titles of research projects conducted by GCI Scholars and Fellows are presented below. These research projects epitomize the UIC commitment to the quality of life in urban areas, especially for underrepresented minorities.

- Development of a comprehensive community-based youth violence prevention program
- Decreasing racial and gender discrimination in the labor market
- Improving the quality of ESL classes in communities
- Assessing the influence of health care reforms on the health status of underprivileged women and children
- Resident initiatives to revitalize public housing
- Interpersonal violence: exploring the ethnicity, race and social class nexus
- Community factions and school reform: A case study of Roberto Clemente High School
- Expanding the Urban Youth Leader Project: A collaborative effort to build social responsibility through physical education with “at risk” youth
- Issues of immigration, race/ethnicity, and gender in urban communities
- Workforce development and partnership program: Conducting research and technical assistance on urban education and training
- Developing a series of projects that focus on the issues of substance abuse, crime, violence and health care needs.
- Developing New Models for Affordable Housing, Community-based Development, and Community Organizing.